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THE MYSTERY OF THE BODY:

EMBODIMENT IN THE NANCY DREW MYSTERY SERIES

by

KATIE STILL

Under the Direction of Dr. Megan Sinnott

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the ways in which ideas about class, gender, and race are produced and articulated through the body in the Nancy Drew Mystery series in the 1930s. Physical descriptions and bodily movements, as well as material surroundings, work together to reify and contradict dominant ideas of normalcy and deviance being located on the body.

INDEX WORDS: 1930, Adolescent, Body, Class, Gender, Literature, Nancy Drew, Race

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KATIE STILL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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2009

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EMBODIMENT IN THE NANCY DREW MYSTERY SERIES

by

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I investigate the ways in which ideas about class, gender, and race are produced and articulated through the body in the Nancy Drew Mystery series. I focus on four of the first books of the series, all published in 1930: *The Secret of the Old Clock; The Hidden Staircase; The Mystery at Lilac Inn;* and *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*. I have chosen these texts, not only because they are the first in the series, but also because their time of publication represents a crucial point in American history in terms of adolescence and regulation of the female body. Concepts of embodiment in these texts reflect contemporary lines of thought such as recapitulation theory and physiognomy. I argue that the writers of the Nancy Drew texts utilize theories of that period to reinforce white supremacy, "traditional" gender roles, and socioeconomic class hierarchies. While maintaining these dominant ideologies, the writers make the adolescent body of Nancy Drew a site through which these paradigms may be contested.

I chose to study this body of literature for several reasons. First, I have a personal attachment to the Nancy Drew series, as it was the first series of books with a female protagonist that I remember reading as a child. I was jealous of Nancy's freedom (and convertible!) and longed to uncover the clues of my own mysteries, which were terribly hard to come by in rural South Georgia. I realize such an experience was not mine alone; we all dream and hope that something exciting and mysterious could happen to *us*. Second, under initial study, I found that the Nancy Drew I loved is not all that I thought her to be – or rather, she is much more than I thought. Complexities abound in the series' numerous authors, its characters, its messages about society, and methods used to create the series. Having learned to investigate further the things we generally accept as truth, I also wanted to revisit the series and uncover what cultural ideals

were being established without my awareness. Third, I recognized that the series reached a wide range of girls in the 1930s and potentially influenced their perceptions as it did my own. The texts were initially published during a time when dominant cultural ideals about adolescence were changing and when new expectations of female sexual behaviors were deeply raced and classed. In this framework, the producers of the Nancy Drew series had the opportunity – and the responsibility – of conveying important cultural messages to the next generation.

Further analysis of Nancy Drew and her companions fills a void in the existing Nancy Drew research, first by recognizing the influence of literary texts as creators and purveyors of dominant discourses. Specifically, this thesis investigates how popular literary texts for adolescent girls produced and reproduced notions of class stratification, femininity and masculinity, racial purity and national identity. Second, this analysis does not participate in previous arguments of whether the character of Nancy Drew should be considered a role model or feminist icon; instead, it looks at what these texts do. Third, it demonstrates the value in interrogating the complex intersections of markers like class, gender, and race and their inscription on the body. An intersectional approach provides a much richer understanding of the texts than attempting to separate these markers.

Despite the abundant scholarship concerned with Nancy Drew, little has been written about the role of the body, specifically the female adolescent body, in the texts. The Nancy Drew Mystery series dominated the adolescent world in the 1930s, quickly becoming the number one selling series of adolescent literature and inspiring films and games. [1] Considering the high rate of consumption of Nancy Drew among young girls, along with her cultural status as a

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[1] Four movies were produced between 1935 and 1939, The Nancy Drew Mystery Series Detective Board game was released in 1959, and a television series aired from 1977-1979. Current video games include titles such as "Nancy Drew: Curse of Blackmoor Manor" for computer, Nintendo Wii, and Nintendo DS.

female role model, did Nancy Drew and her friends influenced the lives of these readers in concrete ways?

Research Questions

I seek to answer the following questions: In what ways do the texts in the Nancy Drew Mystery Series reflect the arguments surrounding the adolescent body in the early 1930s? How do the writers use physiognomy in the texts to alert readers to normalcy and deviance, as well as reinscribe dominant ideology? In what ways does the adolescent body act as a place where gender roles, racial and ethnic designations, and socioeconomic class markers are contested in the texts?

Literature Review

In the adolescent literary world, there is no more popular and enduring female role model than Nancy Drew. I argue that Nancy's role as "adolescent" has largely been subsumed under her role as "female sleuth," neglecting the particular importance of adolescence as a site for growth, anxiety, and societal change. "Born" on April 28, 1930, Nancy Drew began her career as a teenage sleuth, and the Nancy Drew Mystery Series remains the longest-running and best-selling children's mystery series.[2] Nancy Drew was the creation of Edward Stratemeyer, owner and manager of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, a writing production that has generated more children's series than any other publisher to date.[3] Stratemeyer outlined Nancy's character in a memo to publishing company Grossett and Dunlap:

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[2] Rehak p. 14

[3] The series literature produced by Stratemeyer and other mass publishers received intense criticism from librarians and experts on childhood reading. In general, series literature was

> Stella Strong, a girl of sixteen, is the daughter of a District Attorney of many years standing. He is a widower and often talks over his affairs with Stella and the girl was present during many interviews her father had with noted detectives and at the solving of many intricate mysteries. Then, quite unexpectedly, Stella plunged into some mysteries of her own and found herself wound up in a series of exciting situations. An up-to-date American girl at her best, bright, clever, resourceful and full of energy. [4]

Stratemeyer's description of what would become the character of Nancy Drew illustrates the critical time of change for adolescent girls as new ideas about femininity were being explored. Numerous scholars have devoted time and interest to the characters of the Nancy Drew Mystery series, and she has collected critics among her countless fans. Nancy Drew scholarship tends to fall into either of two groups: those who view Nancy Drew as a positive role model or feminist icon because of her independence; and those who criticize the series for promoting racist, classist, and misogynist lines of thought. Rather than arguing whether the Nancy Drew series is positive or negative, I will instead look at how the texts operate during a particular time frame. I have included the work of several scholars to showcase the research that the Nancy Drew series has inspired in recent years.

Carol Billman conducted the earliest study of Nancy Drew in *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate*. This text functions as more of a chronicling of the Stratemeyer Syndicate's creation and operation than as a critical argument; however, Billman's investigation into the success of Edward Stratemeyer and his series producing company reveals interesting details about the production process. Stratemeyer, his daughters Harriett and Edna, and the many ghost writers responsible for the production of the Nancy Drew series collectively reflected several of the controversies of the day, particularly the changing roles of women in the workplace and the general anxiety around female adolescence. Stratemeyer's opposition to

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considered intellectually numbing and experts argued that the texts encouraged inappropriate goals and behaviors. Kathleen Chamberlain provides an interesting analysis of this issue.

[4] Rehak p. 1

women in the workplace demonstrates this, as does the constant disagreement over Nancy Drew's character traits between Harriet Stratemeyer and Mildred Wirt Benson, the series ghost writer responsible for twenty-three of the first twenty-five original Nancy Drew texts. The ghost writing process, as well as the biographical histories of Stratemeyer, his daughters, and Benson provide us with historical insight that allows us to better understand the fluctuations in Nancy Drew's portrayal in the texts, as well as the textual representations of the other characters.

Billman chronicles Stratemeyer's early writing career, his writing inspirations, and his journey to creating the company that would eventually produce the majority of series literature for children and young adults in the 20th century. Stratemeyer developed a system of "ghost writers" who would write series' novels based on a set of characters and a basic storyline that was carefully outlined. Each writer received between fifty and one hundred and fifty dollars for each book, with the understanding that he or she had no rights to the finished project. Through this system, Stratemeyer was able to publish books in several series at once, often bringing readers from one series into another.[5] Edward's daughters, Harriett and Edna, oversaw the running of the syndicate after his death in 1930, "despite their father's belief that women did not belong in the office."[6] Edward's ideas about women and work seem particularly interesting, given Nancy Drew's involvement in her father's work.[7] After solving *The Mystery of the Old Clock*, Nancy often takes on her father's smaller cases, and the father and daughter frequently joke about their partnership. Mr. Drew, on numerous occasions, suggests that Nancy will run him out of business with her superior detective skills. This focus on their partnership may be the

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[5] Nancy Drew books would often include an ad for the newest Hardy Boys or Bobbsey Twins book in the back, and vice versa. The readerships for these series certainly overlapped, ensuring increased sales. Billman p. 44.
[6] Billman p. 23
[7] Carson Drew is described as a well-known and highly respected mystery and detection lawyer, as well as a retired judge.

mark of Benson, who wrote from 1929 to 1947. Deidre Johnson, an expert on the Stratemeyer Syndicate, lays out certain characteristics that demonstrate Mildred Benson's authorship of the original Nancy Drew stories, such as Nancy's outspoken nature with local law enforcement.[8] While Edward Stratemeyer and Harriet Stratemeyer Adams wrote the outlines for the stories, Benson's writing style shows through. Billman suggests that Benson may have been largely responsible for many of Nancy Drew's heralded characteristics, an argument that Melanie Rehak pursues further in her text.

In *Girl Sleuth: Nancy Drew and the Women Who Created Her*, Melanie Rehak explores the lives of Mildred Augustine Wirt Benson and Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, the two women responsible for the majority of the books in the Nancy Drew Mystery Series. She examines the ways these two women grew up and lived their lives, as well as how their similarities and differences shaped the character of Nancy Drew. Both women wanted Nancy to be charismatic, entertaining, and engaging. Benson's liberal education and career show through in her depiction of Nancy as independent and strong, while Nancy's softer, more feminine traits reflect Adams' traditional upbringing. Rehak explains that Mildred began her writing career early, writing and submitting stories to papers and magazines. Her first published story, "The Courtesy," appeared in *St. Nicholas* magazine in June 1919.[9] Harriet, Stratemeyer's older daughter, was also writing, but she wrote purely for pleasure; when she received a check for her first story in *The Globe*, she did not know what it was.[10] Thanks to the financially stable and cushioned life provided through her father's business, Harriet did not have to write for money. After graduation from Wellesley, Wellesley offered her a teaching job and the *Boston Globe* offered her a writing post. Her father

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[8] Johnson p. 35
[9] Rehak p. 43
[10] Rehak p. 62

refused, insisting that his daughter stay at home and wait to be married.[11] Mildred traveled through Europe after her graduation from University of Iowa, then returned to the school to enter the masters program in journalism. Here, Stratemeyer contacted her about writing the Ruth Fielding series.[12] The two women carried on correspondence in the years following Edward Stratemeyer's death, as Mildred wrote and Harriet revised the Nancy Drew stories. According to Rehak, Harriet's approach to the series' characters adhered to her father's template for creating a marketable text: she reduced each character to a few simple descriptive adjectives and frequently reminded Mildred to hold fast to the formula. Mildred, however, often made an effort to develop Nancy and the other characters further; her writing style reflected her training as a journalist, as well as her sense of independence. Harriet and Mildred's frequent disagreements over Nancy's personality reflect their own beliefs about gender roles, as well as the conflicting ideas about adolescence at the time. For Mildred, the most important of Nancy's traits were her independence and spunkiness; Harriet stressed Nancy's ability to remain ladylike, demure, and respectful to authority in all situations. These dissimilarities are reflective of the larger societal uncertainty about what young women should be.

Before 1990, the scholarship on Nancy Drew was limited and focused on the creation of the texts rather than the texts themselves. Scholarship on Nancy Drew peaked in the 1990s as fans celebrated the series' 65th anniversary, and writers began to focus on the material in the texts, as well as Nancy Drew as a character. A Nancy Drew Conference was held at the University of Iowa, April 16-18, 1993.[13] A resulting collection of essays, *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, was published in 1995. The majority of the essays (with the exception of Donnarae

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[11] Rehak p. 70
[12] Rehak p. 102
[13] The University of Iowa holds Mildred Wirt Benson's papers, including correspondence with Harriet Stratemeyer and notes on original drafts of the Nancy Drew texts.

MacCann's "Nancy Drew and the Myth of White Supremacy") hailed Nancy Drew as "a moment in feminist history," "a veritable Sir Lancelot of a girl, off on a quest to rescue the fair maiden, who is in this case her father, and to recapture the holy grail, which is in this case a silver spoon, a pocketbook, a diamond pin, and a couple of black silk dresses."[14] The collection focused on Nancy's role as a girl heroine and a reclaimed "feminist." Two years later, when Sherrie Inness published *Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series*, a few writers addressed some of the series' more negative aspects. In "The Secret of the Feminist Heroine: The Search for Values in Nancy Drew and Judy Bolton," Sally E. Parry looks at two very popular girls' series, the Nancy Drew Mystery series and the Judy Bolton series. She argues that the heroines had many things in common, including an ability to "empower" their young readers, but their approaches were different. Parry notes that Nancy tends to act alone, seeks out mysteries, and works to restore the status quo, while Judy often works with her friends and family and stumbles into mysteries rather than seeking them out.[15] More importantly, Nancy's jobs tend to focus on restoring legal order, often by returning wealth to the original owner. Judy, on the other hand, is more concerned with moral order and helping families, often middle- or working-class women.[16] Parry suggests that although Nancy and Judy have both served as role models, Judy provides a better example of a feminist heroine because of her ability to question social structures and her tendency to place value on personal relationships rather than only social systems.[17] Both collections of essays offer examples of the two camps of Nancy Drew scholarship – those who celebrate Nancy and those who are more critical.

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[14] Romolav p. 209. This quotation refers specifically to Nancy's sleuthing activities in *The Hidden Staircase*.
[15] Parry p. 145
[16] Parry p. 147
[17] Parry p. 156

Some critics, despite finding fault with certain values promoted through the series, still confirm Nancy as a positive role model. In "Nancy Drew as New Girl Wonder: Solving It All for the 1930s," Deborah Siegel seeks to uncover how Nancy Drew grew as a popular figure in the 1930s. She suggests that mass art, such as girls' series books, "functions in a highly contradictory manner. Rather than assume that artifacts of popular culture function merely as transmitters of dominant ideology from 'the culture industry' down to 'the masses,' the reading offered here assumes that popular fiction forms most often articulate conflicting discourses."[18] She suggests that Nancy's world, based on "Truth, Sense, and Certainty," is a conservative, safe world that promises order.[19] Her upper crust existence in fairy-tale River Heights offered readers in the 1930s a haven of safety and stability that did not exist in the real world during the Depression. She writes, "Nancy functioned historically – and politically – as a liminal figure. Suspended on the threshold of childhood and adulthood, marrying the Victorian and the modern, Nancy's character bridged many worlds."[20] Siegel argues that Nancy "'solved' the contradiction of competing discourses about American womanhood by entertaining them all."[21] Siegel believes that Nancy exhibited a composite of several different scripts of womanhood; Nancy was able to inspire and intrigue young women into coming back for more. I agree with Siegel's argument that Nancy *exhibits* several scripts; however, I argue that the series also participates in *creating* scripts of femininity and adolescence.

One year later, Sherrie Inness published another collection of essays on girl culture, *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth Century American Girls' Cultures*. In "Fictions of Assimilation: Nancy Drew, Cultural Imperialism, and the Filipina/American Experience,"

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[18] Siegel p. 161
[19] Siegel p. 163
[20] Siegel p. 171
[21] Siegel p. 171

Melina L. de Jesus argues that Nancy Drew was one valuable component of an American educational system that imposed Americanization on Filipino culture.[22] Using the example of *The Clue in the Leaning Chimney*, Jesus demonstrates the negative portrayals of non-whites, particularly bi-racial non-whites, in the Nancy Drew series. She writes, "the lesson seems to be the following: the Carr/Manning brothers, suspect mixed bloods, try to confound systems of racial/cultural purity by taking advantage of their dual identities."[23] These depictions of racial and class lines made it virtually impossible for de Jesus and other girls of color to identify with those characters who looked familiar; instead, they were forced to identify with Nancy. Jesus critiques several other feminist scholars for collaborating in white hegemony, arguing that casual remarks about recognizing difference and embracing sisterhood only work to reinscribe American imperialism.[24] Jesus' critique provides an excellent example of the role of popular texts in indoctrinating their readers with hegemonic notions of race, class, and gender. I build on Jesus' arguments by illustrating how the her experience as a young girl reading the texts demonstrates the subtle and explicit ways popular literature contributes to maintaining systems of oppression through representation.

Possibly the most well-known and highly cited text on Nancy Drew is Bobby Ann Mason's *The Girl Sleuth*. Mason follows the progression of Nancy Drew's Stratemeyer predecessors like Honey Bunch, the Bobbsey Twins, and the Glamour Girls. She notes many similarities in the portrayals of gender, class, and racial stereotypes. She also notes the clear distinctions between good and bad poor people in many of the detective series: "the way you recognize the fallen poor is that even though they live in a run-down section of town their houses

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[22] Jesus p. 230
[23] Jesus p. 239
[24] Jesus p. 243

are clean and their lawns are neatly trimmed and their flowers are blooming. They wear clean, but faded, garments. Otherwise, poverty is a sure source of evil: this was so throughout the clean, well-lighted children's series books until the late 1950s."[25] Mason's evaluation of Nancy Drew is clear-cut: her popularity depended heavily upon her class and race status. She has the house, the car, the family, the boyfriend, the wardrobe, and the friends. Nancy has it all: "She gets to go anywhere in the world she wishes and she doesn't have to go to school. And for all her privileges, she is utterly unspoiled and charming. She is independent, brilliant, poised, courageous, kind, attractive, gracious, well-to-do – i.e., free, white, and sixteen."[26] Like Melina L. de Jesus, Mason suggests that racial minorities who read the series had only two options: either identify with the racialized "Other" as villain, or identify with Nancy and her white friends. I agree with Mason's argument, going further by illustrating the characterization of "Other" in the texts.

Mason notes the importance of coincidence in the Nancy Drew stories; Nancy often stumbles upon clues or happens upon a location at just the right time. She gives the example of Nancy's ability to always find footprints "freshly made," "like cookies," whenever she goes looking for them.[27] This characteristic of the mysteries, Mason argues, is important for young girl readers. She writes, "Little girls depend on coincidence. They learn to be passive, and wait for the day when they will coincidentally be in the same room with a handsome man who will coincidentally fall in love with them."[28] The stories also reinforce gender roles while contradicting them; "Nancy's daring exploits release readers from the abyss of sorority teas and

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[25] Mason p. 38
[26] Mason p. 50
[27] Mason p. 67
[28] Mason p. 57

sewing bees while at the same time celebrating that tea-party and sewing-basket world."[29] In the original books in the series, "Nancy's job is to preserve the class lines, and for her the defense of property and station are inextricably linked with purity and reputation. She defends beautiful objects, places, and treasures from violence – the sexual violence of nasty men who want to stifle her energy."[30] Another of Nancy's jobs, like other girl sleuths, is to dispel the mystery and return things to a normal balance, "brushing cobwebs and magic out of life."[31]

Several other authors offer interesting insights into Nancy Drew's character and the role of the Nancy Drew series in young girls' gender development. Billman observes how the confusion and ambiguity in the stories regarding gender roles reflects the tumultuous social context of the late 1920s and early 1930s. [32] She argues that many of the books, as well as many adult series books, portrayed the interesting conflict between traditional female roles and the new roles that were developing. The different portrayals of women within the stories reflect this confusion. As industrialization spread in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, young girls of all backgrounds were going to work, earning their own money, and exploring their sexuality outside of marriage. More and more, young people were marrying for love and engaging in premarital sexual activity with their "steadies." Unlike other girl's series heroines like Ruth Fielding, Nancy avoids the confrontation between career and family; she is forever a teenager and only remotely interested in Ned, her rarely present boyfriend.[33] Nancy demonstrates young girls' ability to

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[29] Mason p. 60
[30] Mason p. 73. One such example of the sexual danger occurs in *The Secret of the Old Clock*, where Nancy's capture by robbers reads much like an attempted rape scene. See pp. 130-131.
[31] Mason p. 100. In *The Hidden Staircase*, for example, Nancy seeks to prove that a real person, not a ghost, is responsible for the "ghostly" activity at the Turnbull mansion.
[32] Billman p. 76
[33] Billman p. 112

move about and explore in new ways, and her "work" (although not for money) earns her respect and freedom.

In reading each of these scholars' work, I found that no one had situated Nancy's position historically as an "adolescent" girl sleuth.[34] Considering that Nancy was "created" and first published during the development of adolescence as a life stage, as well as the fact that her readership was (and continues to be) comprised mostly of adolescent girls, I find this an important theme to consider. The idea of "adolescence" as an independent life stage from childhood and adulthood came into being in the early twentieth century, with the 1904 publication of G. Stanley Hall's *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*.[35] Influenced by the German Youth Movement, Freud, and other sexologists, Hall described adolescence as "as a turbulent period of physical, emotional, and sexual development during which youths needed to be shielded from adult duties and expectations."[36] Nancy Lesko writes:

> Adolescents were identified as having great potential but also as being liable to go astray, imagined as ships without stable moorings or rudders, sexually charged beings who needed to develop character, responsibility, manliness, and focus. The adolescent was a trope for turn-of-the-century worries about unknown futures, about ability to succeed and dominate in changing circumstances, about maintenance of gender and class hierarchy in changing social and cultural landscapes.[37]

Hall's theory of adolescence encouraged an extension of childhood through a period of dependence on parents and a postponing of "the pressures of adulthood."[38] His advice for parents included increased physical activity and sports for boys, rest and training for motherhood

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[34] In the original texts, Nancy (and presumably George and Bess) is sixteen. Later, her age is changed to eighteen to reflect legal driving age in all states. Siegel p. 159
[35] New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904. One might note that Hall seeks to cover a great deal of territory; a current reprinting of the text spans 620 pages!
[36] Hall p. 101
[37] Lesko p. 49-50
[38] Odem p. 101

and marriage for girls, and same-sex education.[39] Lesko notes that Hall and other adolescence scholars focused their studies on boys, advocating increased attention on boys' physical education to balance the "feminized" aspect of classroom education. Considering these recommendations by Hall and other "adolescent experts" were in full practice by 1930, I find it interesting that the creators of many adolescent books, particularly those produced by the Stratemeyer Syndicate, ignored this advice when writing for adolescent girls. Although Nancy and her girlfriends were not involved in organized sports like the Hardy Boys and other male characters, they certainly participated in physical activity on a regular basis! Nancy also avoids any "marriage and motherhood" training in the texts; however, her freedom from domestic affairs stems mostly from her class status.[40]

Hall encouraged parents to increase supervision and regulation of adolescents' activities and free time. His recommendations came at a curious time in the history of adolescent sexuality, which was the main target of state surveillance for adolescent girls.[41] The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a continuation of efforts to reform and protect young women from sexual imprudence, as well as a new focus on the state's response to "the problem." Reformers encouraged state officials to respond to perceived and real changes in girls' behaviors that accompanied rapid growth in urban and industrial fields.[42] With the spread of industrialization, working-class girls started working earlier and at a higher rate. Girls often went to work at an earlier age because their families needed the additional income; many were

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[39] Lesko p. 56-58
[40] Keene reminds the reader on several occasions that Nancy is adept at managing the affairs of the Drew household; however, Hannah Gruen is responsible for actually carrying out the work, leaving Nancy free to her sleuthing. See *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 12, for an excellent example.
[41] Lesko p. 82
[42] Odem p. 1

expected to contribute most -- if not all – of their earnings to the family. However, the need to work gave some young girls their own money, exposing them to new opportunities for independence.[43] Growing independence meant new activities for working-class and middle-class girls, with many girls going out without supervision to amusement parks, dance halls, and other places of recreation that targeted adolescents.[44] There was a noted shift in middle-class sexual behavior as well; girls began to engage in petting and premarital sex (albeit with a "steady") at a higher rate than ever before.[45] Many girls involved in courting and "treating" viewed their behavior as common and morally acceptable; they distinguished themselves from prostitutes in various subtle ways.[46] Again, Nancy and her friends provide a fascinating alternative to this backdrop of increased surveillance. The girls are free from both work *and* parental concern; neither Carson Drew nor Bess and George's parents ever seem overly concerned with their children's whereabouts or activities. Concurrently, they have nothing to worry about – Nancy, Bess, and George are too busy hunting down villains to have time for petting or sex.

Changing behaviors coupled with the new concept of adolescence as a period of tumultuous uncertainty, making parents and reformers fear for the future of their children and the nation. Teaming with middle-class parents' anxiety about their own children, the eugenics movement warned of the dangers of increased sexual activity among white working class, African American, and immigrant young women; "Americans soon came to perceive the sexuality of young, unmarried women as a major social problem that threatened society with

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[43] Odem p. 2
[44] Alexander p. 12
[45] Odem p. 189
[46] Elizabeth Alice Clement provides an excellent historical analysis of girls' behavior, as well as state surveillance, in *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945*.

vice, family breakdown, disease, and racial degeneration."[47] Although adults' concern with "reforming" adolescent girls who participated in sexual activity already existed in some form, the development of "adolescence" as a necessary stage of development coupled with concerns of racial and national purity to heighten anxieties. State agencies and reformatories were established to police girls' sexual activity. From 1900-1920, reformers and social workers moved from a model of female victimization to one of female delinquency. Girls were either seen as victims or as perpetrators, causing their own downfall. Anita Harris notes a continuance of these ideas currently: modern reformers view adolescent girls as "can-do" or "at-risk." She writes,

> The construction and separation of these two kinds of girlhood occurs around some key motifs. The 'girls with the world at their feet' are identifiable by their commitment to exceptional careers and career planning, their belief in their capacity to invent themselves and succeed, and their display of a consumer lifestyle […] The others are more likely to suffer from what youth researchers Barbara Schneider and David Stevenson describe in *The Ambitious Generation* as 'misaligned occupational ambitions,' a lack of a sense of power or opportunity, and inappropriate consumptions behaviors, for example, of drugs or alcohol. These young women are more likely to become pregnant at a young age.[48]

Much like "at-risk" girls today, delinquent girls were often seen as failures and were blamed for their own poor choices rather than being seen as victims of outside factors. This shift from victimization to delinquency had both positive and negative effects: reformers recognized female agency in sexual activity and widened female participation and inclusion in the justice system, but increased regulation and punishment.[49] Girls who were "caught" (and sometimes suspected of) engaging in sexual activity of any kind were arrested and sent to reformatories. Vagrancy, petty theft, and staying out late were also punishable offenses. Reformers looked to the home for clues to the girls' delinquency, and frequently insisted on the "incompatibility of motherhood

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[47] Odem p. 97
[48] Harris p. 14
[49] Odem p. 4, 96

and paid labor."[50] The absent or working mother was blamed for being unable or unwilling to monitor her daughter's activities.

Nancy's position both contradicts and reinforces this line of thought. Her mother died when she was a young child; in some texts, Keene tells the reader that Nancy's mother died when she was very young, around three or four years old. Other texts say that Nancy's mother's death occurred when she was ten. The missing mother is not uncommon in young adult fiction; Nancy's absent mother allows for a greater range of freedom in her travels and adventures. Hannah Gruen, the Drews' loyal live-in housekeeper, acts as a substitute mother in some ways, maintaining the house when Nancy is away. There are two important distinctions here. First, Nancy's mother *died*; her absence is permanent. We know that Nancy's mother is not absent because she works outside the home. Second, Mr. Drew supplants the necessary roles of the mother: he gives Nancy with love, affection, and advice, and through his employment of Hannah Gruen, he provides a safe, comfortable home. Therefore, the series emphasized the importance of the secure home life for young girls, while achieving it despite the absence of Nancy's mother.

Although many reformers acknowledged that poverty forced working-class women into the labor force, they maintained that such obstacles must be overcome if young girls were to develop properly. In her study of reformatories in New York between 1900 and 1930, Ruth Alexander found that the majority of girls in reformatories were from homes and communities that lacked privilege – working class, immigrant, and African American homes.[51] Race and class became particularly salient factors under the influence of recapitulation theory on adolescent studies. Recapitulation theory claimed that the development of advanced human life passed through the adult stages of more primitive species, and was used to promote the supremacy of

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[50] Odem p. 107
[51] Alexander p. 4

the white European male. Since recapitulation theory equated children with adults in less advanced societies, adolescence became "a switching station in which talk of racial degeneration could easily be rerouted to issues of nation or gender."[52] With adolescents holding the future of the nation in their hands, "adolescent bodies became a terrain in which struggles over what would count as an adult, a woman, a man, rationality, proper sexuality, and orderly development were staged."[53] Nancy's body, along with those of her friends and adversaries, provide vital clues into these politics of class, gender, and race in the 1930s.

The concept of embodiment has many authors and critics, particularly in the world of feminist theory. A considerable portion of the literature on bodies focuses on the body as "a direct locus of social control."[54] Much of the current literature depends heavily on Michael Foucault's concept of the "docile body" put forth in *Discipline and Punish* in 1975. According to Foucault, cultures of self-surveillance and self-correction create docile bodies, which then reproduce and reinforce dominant power structures. Then, as Foucault argues, "there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself."[55] Historically, the cultural dialogue and the body's response have often reinforced each other, reproducing the cause and effect of bodily containment. In "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity," Bordo offers an example: the corset. In the nineteenth century, the corset sharply contrasted the female body against the male body by emphasizing the breasts and hips, and, at the same time, reflected the drastically different social and economic spheres that men and women inhabited.

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[52] Lesko p. 22
[53] Lesko p. 50
[54] Jaggar and Bordo p. 13
[55] Foucault p. 138

"At the same time, to achieve the specified look, a particular feminine *praxis* was required – straitlacing, minimal eating, reduced mobility – rendering the female body unfit to perform activities outside of its designated sphere."[56] As Bordo demonstrates, the cultural concept of body often forms the "useful body" or Foucault's "docile body" which conforms to the rules and regulations set forth by the cultural concept. The pervasiveness of this tactic is extraordinary; representations of "acceptable" bodies permeate society.

"Acceptable" bodies are made salient through the construction of deviant bodies. Deviance or difference is vital to the existence of the "normal" in several ways. First, the normalcy/deviance split exists within the Cartesian duality system that "establishes an unbridgeable gulf between mind and matter."[57] Dualism depends upon two supposedly opposing or mutually exclusive characteristics or ideas, one of which is subordinated to the other. The mind/matter or mind/body dualism repeats itself in other forms: culture/nature, white/black, male/female, rich/poor, adult/child, etc. Importantly, the supremacy of the dominant depends upon the suppression of the other; "the primary term defines itself by expelling its other and in this process establishes its own boundaries and borders to create an identity for itself."[58] In order to escape this dilemma, some scholars have begun to discuss bodies as contingent or "in-between" terms in dualities – "two-sides of the same coin."[59] Thinking of bodies as ambiguous, fluid, and constructed allows for an understanding of the relation between the essential and constructed as "both/and" rather than "either/or."[60] This type of mindset is particularly useful for feminist critics attempting to articulate the relationship between biological sex and gender

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[56] Jaggar and Bordo p. 36
[57] Grosz p. 7
[58] Grosz p. 3
[59] Grosz p. 11
[60] Bloodsworth-Lugo p. 4-5, 8.

without suggesting that they are completely dependent (essential) or arbitrary (simple social construction), as well as deconstruct hierarchical binaries.

A "both/and" approach is particularly helpful when considering how social constructions such as gender, class, and race are embodied in the Nancy Drew texts. Ignoring the connection between sex and gender, for example, allows us to assume that gender can be arbitrarily assigned to any sexed body. However, the issue lies in which assignments are socially accepted or legitimated and which are not; the association is not arbitrary.[61] A "myth of sameness" offers a false sense of equality by ignoring the connection between certain bodies and certain concepts or expectations. Ideas of whiteness mapped onto white bodies are different than ideas of whiteness mapped onto black bodies. Consider the similar color of light-skinned blacks and tanned whites, which garner different social responses and expectations; color is not entirely the issue, but it is also not irrelevant.[62] Such socially accepted "norms" change over time and location, illustrating that bodies are not simply "natural."

Several scholars provide excellent analyses of the social construction of bodies that are valuable to my study. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla argue that we can only know bodies through history and culture: "they are not in any simple way natural or ever free of relations of power." They discuss the role of the sciences and medicine in this process, which "have not merely observed and reported on bodies; they *construct* bodies through particular investigatory techniques and culturally lodged research goals."[63] Terry and Urla are interested in the scientific and social location of deviance within the body:

> The somatic territorializing of deviance, since the nineteenth century, has been part and parcel of a larger effort to organize social relations according to categories denoting

[61] Bloodsworth-Lugo p. 20
[62] Bloodsworth-Lugo p. 51
[63] Terry and Urla p. 3

> normality versus aberration, health versus pathology, and national security versus social danger.[64]

These efforts have a long history in Western thought and practice in the United States and overseas through colonialism; anyone from prostitutes to homosexuals "were believed to have bodily signs of deviance that could be made visible" through scientific classifications.[65] This regulation of deviance, particularly in regard to adolescent female sexuality, is recreated and reinforced through the characters' bodies in the Nancy Drew series.

Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues that scientific methods continue to be used today to establish social norms through the body; the medicalization of homosexuality, fatness, menopause, and dementia are a few examples. By creating definitions of disease and deviance that can be seen in or on the body, normal, "healthy" bodies are established. In *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, Thomson argues that because extraordinary bodies "are rare, unique, material, and confounding of cultural categories, they function as magnets to which culture secures its anxieties, questions, and needs at any given moment."[66] Thomson suggests that "freak shows" became so popular because of viewers' desire to be reassured of their normalcy, even as they secretly desire to be a "freak."[67] The labeling of certain bodies as "freakish" or "disabled" reinforces the idea of normalcy, even though no such thing as a normal body exists. As Thomson argues, "disability, then, is the attribution of corporeal deviance – *not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do.*"[68] (Emphasis added) Thomson uses the term "normate" to describe the figure who exists through the boundaries created by deviant others; "normate, then, is the

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[64] Terry and Urla p. 1
[65] Terry and Urla p. 10
[66] Thomson (1996) p. 2
[67] Thomson (1996) p. 10
[68] Thomson (1997) p. 6

constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them."[69] Normalcy and deviancy, like the physical bodies themselves, produce and reproduce the power systems that necessitate such terms by appearing natural.

The context of the embodiment of deviance and difference provides an excellent background for understanding bodies within the Nancy Drew texts. Since bodies are constantly in the process of *being* and *being made*, we need to examine what these bodies are doing. We need to question why certain bodies are acceptable and normal, which others are rejected and assigned to the margins. We should investigate how bodies are utilized to accord naturalness to identity categories, as well as what political stakes are involved in the naturalization process.[70] By looking at the identity categories marked upon the bodies in the Nancy Drew texts, we can understand how class, gender, race, and nationality intersect in the lived body as social constructions of deviancy, difference, and normalcy.

Methods

In this project, I am indebted to modes of literary criticism that stress the links between the work and the material conditions under which it was produced and into which it is inserted. Analyses such as "New Historicism," which also insist upon the importance of the political structures at play in aesthetic production, are perhaps closest to my approach.[71] I take a feminist perspective with an emphasis on class, gender, and race and their interconnections. The literary analysis conducted here engages with the idea that literary texts *do something*; they are not static objects.

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[69] Thomson (1997) p. 8
[70] LeBesco p. 7
[71] Murfin, R. & Ray, S. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. St. Martins: Bedford Books, 1998.

Texts are social constructions, and they are historically and politically situated. Literary texts invite evaluation through theory and criticism, and theorists and critics must engage with the political work of the text. I aim to continue this politicized work, which Terry Eagleton addresses in his critical summary of literary theory,

> Literary theories are not to be upbraided for being political, but for being on the whole covertly or unconsciously so – for the blindness with which they offer as a supposedly 'technical', 'self-evident', 'scientific' or 'universal' truth doctrines which with a little reflection can be seen to relate to and reinforce the particular interests of particular groups of people at particular times.[72]

Written within a particularly crucial point in literary criticism's history, Eagleton's evaluation still resonates. Political engagement with a text is not unusual; many theorists and critics view reflexivity as a necessary tool to illuminate their work further. Due to the "ghost writer" process used to produce the texts in the series, as well as its positioning as "low-brow" reading in the 1930s, I also engage with certain modes of analysis that address the series as popular culture.

I closely read four of the first books in the Nancy Drew Mystery series: *The Secret of the Old Clock; The Hidden Staircase; The Mystery at Lilac Inn;* and *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*. Because of the methods used to create the texts, I will move between texts when discussing themes and characters, rather than addressing each text individually.[73] I focus on the main actors in each text, including Nancy Drew, her best friends and co-detectives Bess Marvin and George Fayne, her father Carson Drew, her housekeeper Hannah Gruen, as well as various "villains" and "victims." I look at how the writer(s) avoid physical descriptions of bodies, particularly that of Nancy, but construct bodies through actions and language – bodies that are highly raced, classed,

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[72] Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 170

[73] Primarily "ghost writers" who followed an outline and used consistent language and characteristics, as mentioned before, wrote the Nancy Drew Mystery Series. Such guidelines included the number of pages, character traits, placing intensity at the end of the page to create a "page-turning" sensation, etc. Therefore, most of the texts are virtually identical in many ways.

and gendered. These analyses are situated within a historicized discussion of adolescence and the female adolescent body as a site of contestation in the early part of the 20th century.

CHAPTER 2.

SHARP, PIERCING EYES AND CLAWLIKE HANDS: THE PHYSICALITY OF DEVIANCE

> *Nancy Drew, an attractive girl of sixteen, was driving home along a country road in her new, dark-blue convertible. She had just delivered some legal papers for her father. 'It was sweet of Dad to give me this car for my birthday,' she thought. 'And it's fun to help him in his work.' Her father, Carson Drew, a well-known lawyer in their hometown of River Heights, frequently discussed puzzling aspects of cases with his blond, blue-eyed daughter.* --*The Secret of the Old Clock*

The early part of the twentieth century was a time of transformation and turmoil for young men and women in the United States, as the concept of adolescence took hold and spread. Scientists, social reformers, parents, and young people themselves were carefully constructing this life phase. Popular press and literature played no small role in this formation. Nancy Drew cruised onto the literary scene in 1930 with the publication of *The Secret of the Old Clock*, the first of fifty-six volumes in the mystery series. In the first few pages, Carolyn Keene introduces the reader to Nancy Drew and her trademark characteristics. The reader quickly learns several important things about Nancy: she` is "a girl," attractive, involved in her father's work, and sixteen years old. Keene defines Nancy's "attractiveness" further in describing her as "blond" and "blue-eyed." The description also establishes Nancy's class status: her father practices law in the suburban-sounding River Heights. Mr. Drew's success as a lawyer is suggested not only by his reputation, but also by Nancy's birthday gift: a brand-new convertible. Keene does not need to discuss Nancy's race explicitly; her hair and eye color, as well as her social standing and surname, make clear that she is white.[74] Nancy Drew may be the heroine of the adolescent

[74] The surname "Drew" originates from the English (Norman and Old Saxon) "(gi)drog." The name supposedly came from one of Charlemagne's sons. It is unclear whether the name was chosen for the series because of its strong English (i.e. "white") roots, or because of its meaning: "ghost" or "phantom." *Source:* Dictionary of American Family Names, Oxford Press (2003).

mystery world, but her status as "normal" or "ideal" depends heavily upon a stark contrast against the villains in the series.

Racial and ethnic minorities almost exclusively play the role of "Other" in the Nancy Drew stories, starring as villains or relegated to roles as menial laborers. The language of "otherness" has historically been (and continues to be) used by white supremacists to argue that African Americans and immigrants are inferior to whites and native-born Americans in many ways. To showcase Nancy's racial superiority, Keene emphasizes Nancy's freedom by juxtaposing it against characters that have less than full freedom or personhood. Interestingly, African Americans are not the main targets of ridicule in the Nancy Drew stories; most of the villains are Irish, Jewish, or Italian. This pattern reflects a period when certain immigrant groups were not considered "white." Numerous scholars have studied the development of the current color line in the United States. As Noel Ignatiev argues, "strong tendencies existed in antebellum America to consign the Irish, if not to the black race, then to an intermediate race located socially between black and white." [75] Nativism, one of the chief strands of political power in the United States in the late 19th century, argued that the Irish, along with other groups of immigrants, were culturally incapable of assimilation. These new groups worked diligently to "earn" their whiteness; they came ashore as "free white persons" according to naturalization laws, but their "racial credentials were not equivalent to those of the Anglo-Saxon 'old stock' who laid proprietary claim to the nation's founding documents and hence to its stewardship." [76] Many used the argument of "white slavery" to insist on better working conditions, while making clear distinctions between themselves and African Americans when seeking better living conditions and political power. Calls to end "white slavery" were in no way an "act of solidarity

[75] Ignatiev, p. 76
[76] Jacobson, p. 4

with the slave," but an insistence on ceasing the treatment of any "white" as a slave. [77] Ignatiev suggests that ethnic immigrant groups were eventually successful in achieving "white" status because of the further widening of the gap between "white" and "black": "Nativism lost out not to a vision of a nonracial society, but to a society polarized between black and white." [78] By the 1920s, "whiteness" was relatively consolidated and ethnicities subsumed; however, the hints of nativism continue later into the century, and are particularly evident in the treatment of ethnic working class characters in the Nancy Drew series.

With immigration a significant concern for many white Americans in the 1930s (not to mention today!), MacCann finds it "not surprising that children's books tended to reinforce the myth of inferiority and even criminality."[79] In the Nancy Drew stories, immigrants or individuals of foreign descent are portrayed as dangerous, suspicious, untrustworthy, uneducated, and criminal. Language often acts as an indicator of a character's status as white or non-white. Nash notes, "Keene uses dialogue to signal Otherness: non-whites and white ethnics usually speak in broad dialects, while Anglo villains reveal a contemptible lower-class status through their poor grammar."[80] The descriptions of villains reflect a technique used in some filmmaking, where the heroes and heroines are always attractive and the villain is identifiable by his or her ugliness or deformity. In *The Hidden Staircase*, the reader "knows" that Nathan Gombet is a villain because his description suggests that he is *not* a "good" character: he is "short, thin, and rather stooped" with a "shifty gaze."[81] This pattern seems particularly true for female characters, whose outward appearances are a clear depiction of their inner qualities. Aside from Nancy and

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[77] Roediger, p. 68
[78] Ignatiev, p. 76
[79] MacCann, p. 132
[80] Nash, p. 53
[81] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, pp. 2-3

her close friends, women in the series are relegated to menial work and are often poor, unattractive, and racialized.

Many scholars, in women's studies and other disciplines, carefully consider the ways in which classism, racism, and sexism are intricately woven together by what Patricia Hill Collins calls "the interlocking nature of oppressions."[82] hooks discusses how "racial solidarity, particularly the solidarity of whiteness, has historically always been used to obscure class, to make the white poor see their interests as one with the world of white privilege. Similarly, the black poor have always been told that class can never matter as much as race."[83] Dorothy Allison recalls that her family members, no matter how poor, "held that there were some forms of work, including maid's work, that were only for black people, not white."[84] Unfortunately, since class oppression often presents itself differently or in conjunction with racism, it can be difficult to identify. Considering race and class together allows for a more complex understanding of the faces of wealth and poverty in the Nancy Drew series.

In her introduction to *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, bell hooks begins, "Everywhere we turn in our daily lives in this nation we are confronted with the widening gap between rich and poor […] The rich are getting richer. And the poor are falling by the wayside. At times it seems no one cares."[85] Upon first glance, it appears that Nancy Drew cares; on a few occasions, the beneficiaries of her sleuthing services are poor. But what the reader may fail to notice immediately is that the poor consistently fall into two categories: the good poor and the bad poor. Dorothy Allison discusses the prevalence of this myth in America:

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[82] Collins, p. 160
[83] Hooks, p. 5
[84] Allison, p. 38
[85] Hooks, p. 1

> There was a myth of the poor in this country, but it did not include us, no matter how hard I tried to squeeze us in. There was an idea of the good poor – hard-working, ragged but clean, and intrinsically honorable. I understood that we were the bad poor: men who drank and couldn't keep a job; women, invariably pregnant before marriage, who quickly became worn, fat, and old from working too many hours and bearing too many children; and children with runny noses, watery eyes, and wrong attitudes […] We were not noble, not grateful, not even hopeful.[86]

Allison's description explicitly identifies the myth of poverty that lurks in Nancy Drew books. In the stories, the "good poor" are not actually poor – they are respectable, middle-class people of honorable backgrounds who have simply fallen on hard times. For example, in *The Secret of the Old Clock*, the Horner sisters whom Nancy assists have lost their inheritance to greedy, swindling cousins. We are frequently reminded that Nancy helps the Horner sisters because the money *is due to them*, not because they need it more than their greedy, wealthy cousins. For reasons like this, Ilana Nash disagrees with Deborah Siegel's assertion that Nancy was "a kind of Robin Hood for the 1930s." She writes, "Robin Hood took from the rich and gave to the poor; Nancy pledges her allegiance entirely to the moneyed classes […] Genuinely poor people tend to disgust her or arouse her suspicions."[87] Nancy is suspicious for a reason; in all of the first five books, the majority of the villains are described as dirty, loud, rude, and poor. Peter Stonely notes that while Nancy and her inner circle in River Heights appear unaffected by the Great Depression, "most of the Nancy Drew stories turn on lost or stolen fortunes. One might say that these are, however obliquely, Depression novels, in that they repeatedly ask the question: Where has all the money gone?"[88] While the reader wonders where the (missing) money has gone, he or she never doubts to whom the money belongs – the markers of wealth and poverty are clearly marked upon the characters' bodies.

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[86] Allison, p. 33
[87] Nash, p. 59
[88] Stonely, p. 122-123

The first book in the series, *The Secret in the Old Clock*, displays some important social attitudes toward class mobility. In the story, an older gentleman, Josiah Crowley, intends to pass his inheritance to the Horner sisters, mentioned above, and his cousins, Edna and Mary Turner. In a strange twist, he ends up leaving all of his money to another set of cousins, the Tophams, who live in River Heights. The Tophams have Josiah's will in their possession, and Nancy's detective efforts revolve around finding another will concerning Josiah's inheritance (which, as one might guess, she finds in an old clock). Both the Horners and the Turners ask for Nancy's assistance in recovering the missing will, and she promises to help them. In the end, the inheritance goes to the Horners and the Turners rather than the Tophams, representing a returning of money to its "deserving" owners.[89] The Turners and the Hoovers are only poor initially because of the Tophams' trickery and the Tophams quickly lose their money in the stock market and are forced to downgrade their lifestyle.

Wealth is monitored just as closely as poverty in the series. A clear preference for "old money" exists; those who possess "new money" are immediately suspected. Both Nancy and her father express dislike for the Tophams for their snooty and flippant attitudes. They represent the "new money" families that lack the "class" and respectability of old money. When Nancy enters the Tophams' home under pretenses of selling charity tickets, she seems appalled by their lack of designing taste: "'such an expensive hodge-podge!' Nancy observed to herself, sitting down. She glanced at the pink carpet – which to her clashed with the red window draperies – and at an indiscriminate assortment of period furniture mixed with modern."[90] Keene also notes that Mrs. Topham "was well known for her aspirations to be accepted by the best families in River

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[89] In the revised edition of *The Secret of the Old Clock*, the last name Horner is changed to Hoover. Several scholars have speculated that President Herbert Hoover influenced the change in some way.
[90] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 83

Heights."[91] The Tophams' "bizarre" décor and lack of grace suggest that they will never "fit in" in River Heights, despite their accumulated wealth.

Although these are mystery stories, the reader receives numerous clues to the eventual outcome through the descriptions of the various characters. We see through Nancy's eyes that Ada and Isabel, the Topham daughters, wear their negativity on their bodies:

> Ada tossed her head and her *dark* eyes flashed *angrily*. In spite of the expensive clothes she wore, she was *anything but attractive*, for she was tall and slender to the point of being termed "*skinny*." Now that her face was *distorted with anger*, she was positively *ugly*. Isabel, who was the pride of the Topham family, was rather pretty in a *vapid* sort of way, but Nancy Drew thought that her face *lacked character*. She had acquired an *artificial* manner of speaking which was both *irritating* and *amusing* […] the two sisters were older than Nancy, but had been in her class at school. She had found them *stupid*, as well as *arrogant*.[92] (Emphasis added)

We understand through Nancy's disapproval that we are not to identify positively with the Topham sisters. Their physical descriptions, however, speak loudly about their inferior social position. Ilana Nash notes, "Characters in the Nancy Drew series generally fall into one of four categories: Nancy and her inner circle, crime victims whom Nancy helps, villains whom she conquers, and incidental characters."[93] The Tophams are a rare breed in the Nancy Drew series; wealth generally suggests social standing, purity, and normalcy. In stark contrast to the "good poor" who appear rarely and as Nancy's friends or acquaintances, the "bad poor" occupy the role of villain.

Keene's description of the villains and the places they occupy echo the stereotypes in the American myth of the poor. Poor people who stay in "dingy" places, laugh loudly, and fail to mind their manners when eating are caricatured as villains, leading readers to transfer such assumptions to the "real poor." For some young readers, these warnings about behavior may

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[91] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 83
[92] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 15
[93] Nash, p. 53

have hit close to home. Dorothy Allison recalls her deep sense of shame about her family's condition; "The fact, the inescapable impact of being born in a condition of poverty that this society finds shameful, contemptible, and somehow deserved, has had dominion over me to such an extent that I have spent my life trying to overcome or deny it. I have learned with great difficulty that the vast majority of people believe that poverty is a voluntary condition."[94] The clear distinctions between the "good poor" and the "bad poor" in the Nancy Drew series provide its young readers with careful social guidelines about avoiding poverty (and its seemingly inherent criminalization), making Nancy's middle-class life even more desirable.

Aside from the Tophams, the other villains in *The Secret of the Old Clock* are working class men: the "bad poor," Dorothy Allison's kind, the dirty, dangerous kind of poor who lack the social standing and "good breeding" required to warrant Nancy Drew's sympathy or assistance. As Nancy searches for the old clock that she believes holds the missing will, robbers trap her in the Tophams' summer bungalow. As Nancy hides in the bedroom closet, "she saw a rough-looking man come into the bedroom. His face was cold and cruel."[95] When two other men enter the room, "from their appearance she knew that they must be members of the robber gang."[96] The men find her in the closet, "snarl" angry threats, bind her and leave her in the locked closet. After Nancy escapes and catches up to the men, she finds them "obviously engaged in a drinking orgy."[97] She stumbles upon the men in a roadhouse, a place "of disreputable appearance."[98] The men, as well as their truck and hiding place, are described as dark and dirty, suggesting their villainous tendencies.

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[94] Allison, p. 31
[95] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 127
[96] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 128
[97] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 154
[98] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 153

In the second book in the series, *The Hidden Staircase*, Nancy seeks to uncover a ghostly presence in the home of Rosemary and Floretta Turnbull. In the first chapter, we meet Nathan Gombet, who enters the Drew home looking for legal papers and threatens Nancy if she refuses to hand them over. His description tells us immediately that he is not to be trusted:

> He was unusually tall and thin with spindling legs which gave him the appearance of a towering scarecrow. The illusion was heightened by his clothing, which was ill-fitting and several seasons out of style. Nancy could not help but notice several grease spots on his coat. However, it was not the man's clothing or miserly appearance which repulsed her, but rather his unpleasant face. He had sharp, piercing eyes which seemed to bore into her.[99]

Nathan Gombet's body, clothing, and face all suggest that he has ill intentions. When Nancy refuses to cooperate, Nathan reacts strongly: "His face was distorted and he stood in a half-crouched position, like an animal about to pounce upon its prey."[100] Later, when Nathan returns and threatens Carson Drew, Nancy again notes, "that he looked like a wild animal making its last stand."[101] Keene's depiction of Nathan Gombet as animal-like reminds us of the somatic location of deviance and its association with eugenics in the early twentieth century; Gombet's physical description and movements suggest that he is more closely related to a dangerous animal than a human being. There are numerous innuendos of Gombet's animal-like nature: as Nancy sidesteps Nathan's "clawlike hands" and reaches the telephone, he makes a "vicious lunge" and lets out an "ugly snarl."[102]

Nathan Gombet's animal-like body and behaviors are closely tied to his status as working-class or poor. Nancy's close friend from *The Secret of the Old Clock*, Allie Horner, describes him as "a regular miser, if ever there was one […] You can't trust him out of your

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[99] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 2-3
[100] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 8
[101] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 29
[102] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 9

sight. One day after I had sold him five dozen eggs I turned my back for a minute and he tried to slip an extra dozen into the crate!"[103] Rosemary and Floretta Turnbull, the elderly sisters who own the supposedly haunted mansion in *The Hidden Staircase*, also insist that Gombet is an untrustworthy miser with whom they refused to do business. Floretta tells Nancy, "We wouldn't do business with him at any price, because we couldn't trust him. He would cheat us out of our eye teeth!" [104] Both Alice and Mr. Drew assure Nancy that Nathan Gombet's land, over which he feels he was cheated on price, is worthless; Mr. Drew tells Gombet, "If the railroad hadn't wanted your land you couldn't have sold it for a dime."[105] Mr. Drew continues to mock Nathan Gombet's lack of valuable resources:

> 'Well, ah – ' Nathan Gombet began to stammer. Then he thought of something. 'The trains scare my horses.'
> 'How many horses have you?' 'Why – er – one.'
> 'Oh! You have one horses?' Mr. Drew smiled broadly and Nancy could not hold back a giggle."[106]

The reader giggles along with Nancy at Mr. Drew's ridicule, because Nathan Gombet's status as working class makes him laughable. Furthermore, Gombet's desire to have more than he *deserves* makes him contemptible. The interaction between Mr. Drew and Nathan Gombet remind the reader that Gombet is more animal-like than man; Mr. Drew reinforces the wealthy white male as superior.

While all non-white characters are working class in the stories, the depictions of racialized characters vary based on their gender. The two African American characters in the beginning of the series offer an interesting insight into the gendering of race. In *The Secret of the Old Clock*, an old African American man named Jeff Tucker plays a minor role as the drunk,

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[103] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase,* p. 18
[104] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 100
[105] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 26
[106] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 27

lazy caretaker of the Tophams' summer cottage at the lake. Jeff represents many of the stereotypes associated with black behavior and character. He stumbles upon Nancy, locked in the closet, and asks her what has happened to the place. It is clear that Jeff is intoxicated, and he shows little concern that his employers' residence has been vandalized under his watch. When Nancy questions him "indulgently" and "gently" as though she is speaking to a child, he expresses remorse:

> I was just all fed up bein' a caih-taker and takin' caih o- all dis truck from mornin' till night. It ain't such an excitin' life, Miss, and while I's done sowed all mah wild oats, I still sows a little rye now and den. […] I reckon you's right, Miss. Ole Jeff done gone and made a food of himself. I realize dat whatever I gets, I's got it a-comin'.[107]

Although Nancy deals with Jeff somewhat kindly, she clearly views him as a child, one incapable of taking care of himself and his family, much less valuable property. Jeff's dialect indicates that he lacks intelligence and practicality; his age and employment remove any threat to Nancy, and she engages with him as she would a wayward child. This depiction supports the premises of recapitulation theory, which suggested that African American adults were equal in mental development to white children. Although the scene was clearly included for humor, the representation is nevertheless negative. Donnarae MacCann writes, "The author presents [Jeff Tucker] as a drunkard, a liar, a person who has constant run-ins with the police, an unreliable employee, and a fool […] Every detail in the scenes with Jeff points to blacks as unruly, untrustworthy, dissipated, and mentally deficient."[108] The treatment of Jeff Tucker also reflects the arguments of many who worked to disenfranchise African American men in the years after the Fifteenth Amendment until the Voting Rights Act of 1965, when African Americans were considered hampered by enslavement and permanently unfit to participate fully as citizens.

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[107] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 141, 143
[108] MacCann, p. 132-133

We meet the second African American character in *The Hidden Staircase.* We learn that Nathan Gombet employs an African American woman as housekeeper or servant. As Gombet leads Carson Drew into his home, they pass through the kitchen where a fat, slovenly looking "colored woman" is working over the stove.[109] Rosemary and Floretta, the elderly sisters whom Nancy helps in the story, offer an interesting description:

> 'Nathan has always been queer,' Floretta remarked. 'As long as we can remember he has lived alone.' 'Not exactly alone,' Rosemary broke in. 'He keeps a servant. A colored woman who looks as though she were an ogre.' 'And birds,' Floretta added. 'His house fairly swarms with them.'[110]

Gombet, who has already been described in animalistic terms, "keeps" a woman just as he keeps birds. When Nancy sees the woman in Gombet's house, she thinks, "I never saw a more surly-looking creature. She looks positively vicious!"[111] Nancy expresses concern that the woman's presence makes her journey into Gombet's home "very dangerous." Keene describes the woman further as old, fat, and awkward.[112] She possesses many of the stereotypical black traits that we see in Jeff Tucker, particularly the broken dialect. Unlike Jeff Tucker, Keene portrays the "old negress," as Nancy continually refers to her, as dangerous and violent. When Nancy and the local law officers arrive at Gombet's to arrest him, she meets them with a sawed off shotgun, angrily threatening to "fill yo' system full of lead."[113] She repeatedly warns the officers that she will fire, and only succumbs when Nancy and the sheriff surprise her from behind. Keene depicts both Jeff Tucker and the African American servant as uneducated, unkempt, and disorderly. However, I find it important to note the very different ways they are represented. Jeff, as an older servant, behaves childishly and intends no harm, like the "Sambo" imagery

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[109] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 108
[110] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 123
[111] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 132
[112] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 144
[113] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 185

made popular in the 1930s and 1940s. The female servant in *The Hidden Staircase*, however, is ruthless, vicious, and belligerent – the "angry black woman" so often depicted in literature as a danger to society.

The Mystery at Lilac Inn offers another example of the conflation of difference markers, this time between gender and class. A teenage girl, her brother, and his friend play the villainous roles in this story. Mary Mason, her brother Bud, and Tom Tozzle are all working-class petty thieves responsible for the disappearance of "family jewels" belonging to a friend of Nancy's.[114] Nancy first suspects Mary of shady dealings after a brief encounter with her in the Drew home. Nancy, in an attempt to find a temporary substitute for Hannah Gruen, their housekeeper, calls the employment agency and requests help. Nancy opens the door, and "beheld a tall, wiry, dark-complexioned girl who obviously was the one sent out from the agency. She had dark piercing eyes and stared at Nancy almost imprudently."[115] Nancy instantly feels uncomfortable, "for the girl had a harsh face and a bold manner," but she accepts Mary's references and offers her employment. However, upon realizing that Nancy's father is Carson Drew, who specializes in criminal and mystery cases," Mary declines the offer and rushes out.[116]

Here again, Mary Mason displays several telltale signs of deviance; she is wiry and dark skinned, with dark eyes and a harsh face. Her refusal to defer to Nancy intensifies her deviance; she clearly does not know her place. This truculence is demonstrated again later, as Nancy and Mary encounter one another in an expensive dress shop:

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[114] Mary Mason and Tom Tozzle are two examples of another tactic Keene uses to alert readers to deviance – alliterative first and last names. This pattern also occurs in *The Bungalow Mystery*, as well as numerous other books through the remainder of the series. Other names, like Nathan Gombet or Stumpy Dowd, the lead robber in *The Mystery of the Old Clock*, suggest that they are "bad guys."
[115] Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 18
[116] Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 22

> For a moment Nancy was so taken aback that she could only stare, but, recovering quickly, she smiled pleasantly. 'I didn't expect to meet you here,' she said graciously. Mary Mason regarded Nancy with a cold stare. Then, without responding, she gave an impudent toss of her head and turned aside. 'Such insolence!' Nancy thought a trifle angrily. 'One would think she was an heiress instead of a kitchen girl! It was lucky I didn't engage her.'[117]

Mary repulses and angers Nancy with her refusal to acknowledge Nancy's superior class status; Nancy is further disturbed by Mary's intentions to purchase a gown in the exclusive shop. Nancy recalls that Mary "had been rather shabbily dressed" when she interviewed at the Drew home and finds Mary's newly acquired supply of money suspicious. Nancy becomes more skeptical when she finds Mary living in a destitute part of town, and again wonders how Mary can afford to dress nicely on hired help wages. As with the Tophams, Nancy finds Mary Mason suspicious and offensive because she steps outside the attitudes and behaviors acceptable for her class. Clearly, class mobility is not encouraged! Mary also subtly reminds the readers of what could happen if Nancy did not have her father's support and discipline; Mary's lack of supervision leaves her free to engage in criminal activity. As with Nathan Gombet, Mary's deviant behavior is depicted as a function of her working class background rather than of her needs.

In the case of Mary Mason we already find both racial and class-based associations with deviance; as with Jeff Tucker in *The Secret of the Old Clock* and the African American woman in *The Hidden Staircase*, we again see that these correlations are gendered as well. Nancy discovers Mary's involvement in the jewelry theft by following Mary to her home in Dockville, where Mary, Bud, and Tom catch her snooping and tie her up. Although Bud ties Nancy up and interrogates her, Mary is certainly depicted as more vicious and evil than her male counterparts. Mary tells her brother that they "must get rid of" Nancy and demands that they "leave her here

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[117] Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 76-77

and let her starve."[118] As the thieves agree to take Nancy on their getaway boat, Nancy pleads to not be gagged: " 'Oh, please don't put that thing in my mouth again,' Nancy pleaded. 'I promise I won't cry out for help.' 'Gag her,' the girl repeated coldly, paying not the slightest attention to Nancy's plea.'"[119] Mary regards Nancy with "undisguised hatred" and yells at her brother for making Nancy more comfortable inside the boat. Finally, as the boat strikes another boat in the dark and begins to sink, Mary convinces Bud to abandon Nancy on the boat, leaving her to drown.[120] Bud and his friend Tom are older and both bear the signs "of a hardened criminal," but Mary steals the jewels, plans the escape, and leaves Nancy to die. Mary Mason represents the dangers of the adolescent female without close supervision and discipline.

Another dangerous female villain appears in *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*. Nancy goes on vacation with George, Bess, and their cousin Alice to a ranch that their uncle has inherited. Nancy solves two mysteries in this story: she discovers the true identity of Lucy Brown, a young girl living near the ranch, and helps "find" Alice's long-lost father. Martha Frank is an elderly woman, a "squatter" who lives in a shack in the woods near Shadow Ranch. Keene describes her as "an old woman with wispy gray hair and sharp, black eyes."[121] Alice, one of Nancy's companions, calls Martha's eyes "cruel."[122] Lucy, the young girl who lives with Martha, tells Nancy and her friends that Martha hits her regularly.[123] Nancy becomes interested in the young girl and determines that she will rescue her from Martha. When the group returns much later to get Lucy, they find Martha Frank chasing Lucy with a big stick and trying to capture her. In her

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[118] Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 157
[119] Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 160
[120] Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 172
[121] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 46
[122] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 47
[123] This is the first book in the series that includes Bess and George, Nancy's faithful companions throughout the remainder of the series. Alice Regor, a cousin of Bess and George, also accompanies them at Shadow Ranch.

attempt to get away, Lucy tumbles over a cliff and injures herself. Martha, who "would have rushed out and snatched Lucy from them had not David Glaston, who had hurried up with Bess and the other members of the party, restrained her by physical force," screams that she will hurt the girl further.[124] Martha shares a certain violent streak with Mary Mason from *The Secret of Lilac Inn*; however, like the female servant in *The Hidden Staircase*, Martha Frank is not the ringleader of the operation. Responsibility lies with her brother, Zany Shaw, who kidnapped Lucy, forced Martha to move, and threatens her to keep Lucy in the house and away from other people. Although the few female villains in the series are often more ruthless as their (raced and working-class) male counterparts, they are rarely credited with any planning or creation of the crime. These depictions reinforce the stereotypes of all women as dangerous while denying them agency. Mary Mason specifically represents contemporary competing discourses of the working class girl as both victim and perpetrator.

Lucy Brown, the young girl in *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* who Nancy discovers was kidnapped, provides another telling example of physiognomy in the series. Keene provides a detailed description of the child upon Nancy's first encounter at Martha Frank's cabin:

> As [Nancy] watched, the crack widened, and then to her astonishment a girl of perhaps eleven or twelve stepped out into the room. Though dressed in the ugliest rags possible, the child was unusually pretty; she had almost perfect features and her curly golden hair would have been lovely had it been properly washed. The girl's face was thin and she looked undernourished. Nancy's heart went out to her at once, for it seemed a pity that such an attractive child must live in such wretched circumstances.[125]

Nancy learns from one of the ranch hands that Lucy no longer attended school due to a lack of resources, but "was as bright as any of them."[126] Even with this meager information, Nancy "felt

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[124] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch,* p. 165
[125] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 48
[126] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 51

certain that Lucy Brown came of far better stock than squatter quality."[127] Nancy becomes more suspicious when Lucy shows her the contents of a trunk that she is forbidden to open. Inside are little girls' clothing, a beautifully dressed doll, and tiny jewelry. Nancy's suspicions are confirmed when she discovers that Lucy Brown is actually Louise Bowen, a child kidnapped at the age of three from Philadelphia. Most important, Nancy learns that Louise's parents died, leaving her a large fortune. Nancy and the others are thrilled with their discovery: " 'What a wonderful thing for Lucy!' Nancy declared, after Martha was out of sight. 'To think that she really is Louise Bowen. With the fortune which has been left in her name, she'll be able to have all the things she needs – clothes, an education, and good times.'"[128] As with many of the mysteries, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* ends with a fortune being returned to its rightful owner, Louise Bowen, who we can identify as good through her appearance and behavior. Louise's intelligence, manners, pretty face, and golden hair are all clear indicators that she does indeed come from "far better stock" than her circumstances initially suggested. Keene intensifies this clear association with attractiveness and proper behavior with whiteness and wealth through a clear contrast between Louise Bowen and her kidnappers Martha Frank and Zany Shaw.

Earlier I discussed Jeff Tucker and Nathan Gombet's servant, two African American characters that play substantial roles in the first two stories. A third African American appears in the third story, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*. Although brief, this appearance cements the typical depiction of people of color in the series. Before Nancy interviews Mary Mason for the housekeeping position, she receives three other references from the employment agency. The first is an African American woman:

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[127] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 53
[128] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 197

> As [Nancy] opened the door her heart sank within her. It was indeed the colored woman sent by the employment agency, but a more unlikely housekeeper Nancy had never seen. She was dirty and slovenly in appearance and had an unpleasant way of shuffling her feet when she walked. Inviting her into the house, Nancy asked a few questions which the woman answered in unsatisfactory manner. She was unable to produce references of any description.[129]

As with the servant in *The Hidden Staircase*, we are not given a name for the woman, only a description of her unkempt appearance and unpleasant demeanor. Notably, the woman does not have proper references from prior employment, suggesting that she has failed to perform properly for other privileged white employers. Although the woman only occupies a brief space in the story, her negative description and Nancy's dismissal of her reinforces the suggestion that all African Americans with whom Nancy comes into contact with are inferior, dirty, poor, often rude, and sometimes dangerous.

The two other women whom Nancy interviews for the housekeeping position reflect common treatment of other non-white characters in the series. Nancy tells her father of her disappointment with "the colored woman" and promises she will find a replacement before the weekend, as Mr. Drew is expecting an important guest. She relates her troubles over dinner:

> 'This morning the agency sent me an Irish woman, but she was even worse than the one that came yesterday. She was the most unreasonable housekeeper I ever interviewed […] After the Irish woman left I called another agency and they sent me a Scotch lassie. She looked promising, but I found she hadn't had a particle of experience and knew little about cooking. I'm completely discouraged.'[130]

Finding a replacement for Hannah Gruen proves particularly difficult, as a necessary balance of respectability and deference is needed. An African American woman who appears dirty and untrustworthy will never do. The Irish woman seems "unreasonable," and the Scottish woman lacks competence. Nancy finds her satisfactory housekeeper in Mrs. Sadie Carter, "an elderly

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[129] Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 16
[130] Keene, *The Mystery of Lilac Inn*, p. 17

woman who suited her in every way. Mrs. Carter was neat in appearance and thoroughly experienced. *Her references were of the best* and her demands not at all unreasonable."[131] (Emphasis added) Mrs. Carter's references seem particularly important; Keene's wording indicates that Mrs. Carter has worked for *the best*, presumably other white, wealthy River Heights residents. Mrs. Carter's name also suggests that she is not an immigrant or the child of immigrant parents. These valuable references, along with Mrs. Carter's appearance, assure Nancy that she has found a suitable housekeeper. Hannah Gruen and her temporary replacement, Mrs. Sadie Carter, exhibit all of the characteristics and behaviors of respectable, middle class white people, and they must do so in order to be employed in the Drew household. Only miserable misers like Nathan Gombet would employ the sort of women Nancy turns away. Although the potential housekeepers in *The Mystery at Lilac Inn* are not necessarily villains, they fall into the same category of "bad poor" – untrustworthy and dirty people who are pushed outside of Nancy's inner circle. The existence of the characters discussed in this chapter work to maintain Nancy's superior existence, as well as to reinforce popular notions about poor immigrant and African American people.

Overall, the conflation of racial minorities and working class individuals with deviance in the Nancy Drew series emphasizes the most important characteristic of the villains – they are dangerous. The threat of harm, particularly to the adolescent Nancy, enthralls young readers while frequently reminding them that being an adolescent – specifically an adolescent female – is a treacherous venture. Nancy's physical body and sexual virtue are constantly under threat of attack, and her narrow escapes and near-failures act as a warning to young readers. Further, Nancy's sleuthing and character traits also represent fears about adolescents as a potential

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[131] Keene, *The Mystery of Lilac Inn*, p. 24

menace to society themselves. Nancy frequently ventures into places she, as a white upper class girl from a respectable family, should not be. Nancy's ease in moving between safe, acceptable spot and unfavorable locations is equally unsettling; she often lacks the supervision required to keep adolescents in their prescribed place. The threat, then, lies not only in the shadowy villains, but also in Nancy's constant contact with them. Her risky interactions with treacherous villains and questionable characters also reflect the authors' anxiety concerning race and class mixing, a certain danger to society if adolescents are left to their own will.

CHAPTER 3.

NANCY AND FRIENDS: THE "GOOD" ADOLESCENTS

> *Nancy was desperate. Suddenly, utilizing every ounce of her strength, she gave her imprisoned wrists a quick upward jerk. As the action tore her hands free, she darted for the door. With a cry of rage, the robber was after her. Almost in one long leap he overtook her, caught her roughly by the arm, and forced her against the wall. 'Not much you don't!" he snarled. Nancy Drew struggled this way and that. She twisted and squirmed. She kicked and clawed. But she was powerless in the grip of the man.*[132]

Most of Nancy's close friends share her middle class status, and those who are not as well off as Nancy prove their worth in other ways. Like the villains in the series, the reader can frequently identify Nancy's friends by their physiognomy. Before discussing Nancy's friends and recipients of her charitable detective work, I would like to briefly address the role of Carson Drew, Nancy's father. Mr. Drew, as a single father and prominent attorney, strikes an interesting balance between omnipotent, loving, involved parent and cash ticket.[133] The descriptions of Mr. Drew occur with relative infrequency, but they seem important in establishing his role in Nancy's life and in the mysteries she solves. Keene frequently reminds the reader that Nancy respects her father's authority, often asks for his guidance and assistance, and dotes on him. Mr. Drew's respected position in the Nancy Drew series works to reinforce the reader's acceptance of the wealthy heterosexual white male as authority figure.

Carson Drew appears in the first few pages of the series and is usually present only in the beginning and ending of the stories. Our first encounter with Nancy is a conversation with her father in *The Secret of the Old Clock*:

> Carson Drew, a noted criminal and mystery-case lawyer, known far and wide for his work as a former district attorney, looked up from his evening paper and smiled indulgently upon his only daughter. Now, as he gave her his respectful attention, he was

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[132] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p.131

[133] Keene refers to Nancy's father as Carson Drew and Mr. Drew interchangeably; I will do the same.

> not particularly concerned with the Richard Topham family but rather with the rich glow of the lamp upon Nancy's curly golden bob […] removing his horn-rimmed spectacles and carefully folding the paper, Carson Drew regarded his daughter meditatively.[134]

Mr. Drew's interactions with his daughter form the majority of his appearances in the series, and Keene lets the reader know that Mr. Drew adores Nancy and values her opinion. A line in *The Hidden Staircase* sums up their relationship: "It was characteristic of Carson Drew to think of his daughter's safety before his own. She was always first."[135] In the scene above, Mr. Drew discusses the case of Josiah Crowley's will with Nancy, listening carefully to her comments and agreeing wholeheartedly with her. Rarely, if ever, do Nancy and Carson disagree.

Carson Drew serves the primary role as the provider of material wealth and security for Nancy, allowing her to roam about in search of mysteries to solve or on vacations with friends. The Drews' wealth is frequently noted throughout the stories; they are not exceedingly rich, but they are certainly "comfortable." The reader's first introduction to the family home highlights their financial situation**:** "Five minutes later, Nancy pulled into the double garage and hurried across the lawn to the kitchen door of the Drews' large red-brick house. The building stood well back from the street, and was surrounded by tall, beautiful trees."[136] Even for middle-class girls, Nancy's secure financial situation was something to admire during the Great Depression and the years following. While many middle-class families were barely getting by, Nancy can simply stop by her father's office, request some cash, and go shopping for a new dress to wear to the dance at the country club. Nancy's excursions are never hampered by concern about money for food or gas, and her father never has to wait for work. Although the Drews are *presented* as middle-class, their level of wealth certainly surpasses that of the "average" reader. For young

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[134] Keene, *The Mystery of the Old Clock*, p. 1-2
[135] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 113
[136] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 31

girls who were watching their fathers search desperately for work or struggle to keep the family business afloat during tough times, Nancy's financial situation was enviable and encouraging.

Perhaps the greatest perk of being well off appears at the door to greet Nancy immediately after the reader is introduced to the Drew home. The Drew's financial situation enables them to employ a live-in housekeeper, the lovable Hannah Gruen, "who had helped rear Nancy since the death of the girl's own mother many years ago."[137] Hannah's presence releases Nancy from household responsibilities – something virtually all young girls in the 1930s surely dreamed of – and allows her the freedom to pursue her own interests. Unlike the heroines in other girl series, Nancy's mystery-solving adventures always take place in the summer, free from the demands of school and home.[138] Nancy's financial security and her lack of household duties guarantee her independence, and her ability to move about as she pleases – represented by her always-dependable blue convertible – illuminates the possibilities for the New American Girl. Several critics note Nancy's convertible as an emblem of her freedom and independence. In "Nancy Drew: a Moment in Feminist History," Carolyn Heilburn states that Nancy's blue convertible is of the utmost importance: "She can not only back it up out of tight places, she can get into it and go any time she wants. She has freedom and the means to exercise it. That blue roadster was certainly for me, in my childhood, the mark of independence and autonomy: the means to get up and go."[139] Certainly, Heilburn is not the first – or the last – to envy Nancy's car and the autonomy it represents. Mr. Drew's work makes all of this possible.

Although Carson rarely, if ever, tells Nancy no, she still asks for permission to go on a trip, to get involved in a mystery, and to go shopping for a new dress. The reader knows that Mr.

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[137] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 13
[138] Siegel, p. 165
[139] Heilburn, p. 65

Drew will give in and allow Nancy whatever she asks. In *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, Nancy's friends Bess and George invite her to accompany them to Shadow Ranch for the summer. Nancy says that she will ask her father:

> 'What's that you want to talk to Dad about?' a deep voice demanded.
> Of one accord the three girls turned and saw Carson Drew standing in the doorway. Nancy sprang up from the davenport, and running over to him, caught him eagerly by the arm.
> 'Oh, Dad, Bess and George want me to go to Arizona for the summer. Their uncle owns a ranch out there.'[140]

Nancy, Bess, and George convince Mr. Drew of the security of their guardianship on the trip, and declare that they'll have the best time. Nancy, however, worries that her father will need her:

> 'I always need you,' her father replied gravely, but with a twinkle in his eye. 'However, as it happens, I've been called to the state capital on business and I'm apt to be there for several weeks. Would you rather go there or to Arizona?'
> 'Arizona!' Nancy replied, but with a guilty look.
> Mr. Drew laughed outright.
> 'That's all right. I'd rather go there by myself. I'll manage to get along without you for a few weeks if you'll promise not to get into any mischief.'[141]

Nancy promises solemnly, and the trip is settled, just that easily. Nancy, George, and Bess engage in "an orgy of feverish preparation," including shopping sprees for new clothing, shoes, and luggage. Carson accompanies Nancy to the train station to see her off, and they go their separate ways for the summer. The money necessary for shopping or the trip is never mentioned.

The physical descriptions of Mr. Drew reinforce his role as regulator and provider. These portrayals are often related to Mr. Drew's voice and movements rather than his body. Keene describes Mr. Drew's voice as warm, tender, and deep when speaking to Nancy, clear and calm when discussing legal matters with clients, and severe when dealing with villains like Nathan

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[140] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 7
[141] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 8

Gombet. *The Hidden Staircase* provides a telling example. Mr. Drew arrives home on the evening train, drops his briefcase on the table, and listens "gravely" as Nancy tells him about her afternoon encounter with Nathan Gombet in their home.[142] When they both hear a knock at the door, Mr. Drew walks "resolutely" to answer it, and demands that Nathan Gombet explain his presence.[143]

> Mr. Drew permitted the man to enter, but did not offer him a chair. He looked Nathan Gombet straight in the face, but the man could not return the straightforward gaze. Involuntarily, he lowered his eyes.
> 'Tell me what you mean by coming here and bothering my daughter? Mr. Drew asked curtly.
> 'I came after my just due.'
> 'Let me tell you something. If you bother Nancy again I'll turn you over to the police. Get that straight!'[144]

The men argue for several minutes over the land deal Nathan Gombet received, and Mr. Drew insists that he leave. "Nathan Gombet faced Carson Drew with clenched fists and his features were distorted by rage. Nancy, who stood a short distance away, was fearful lest he attack her father. But Mr. Drew showed no signs of flinching."[145] We understand Mr. Drew's body through his movements; Keene gives the reader no clear description of Mr. Drew's height, hair color, eye color, build, skin tone, etc.[146] We are only given clues of what his body can *do*: when Nathan Gombet tricks Carson Drew into following him to his home and locks him in a room, Carson "jerked at the door, but it would not give. He kicked at it savagely, but after a few minutes was convinced that it could not be broken down even with a ram, for it was made of

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[142] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 23
[143] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 25
[144] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 26
[145] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 28
[146] The revised versions of the texts include many more physical descriptions of all of the characters, including Carson Drew. In the revised version of *The Secret of the Old Clock*, Keene calls Carson "tall and handsome."

extra heavy wood."[147] We are reassured of Mr. Drew's strength, even after Gombet ties him up and leaves him without food and water. Carson quickly regains his potency upon rescue by Nancy and the police, and "after a good night's rest he appeared at the breakfast table and announced that he felt able to travel."[148] Mr. Drew's active role in *The Hidden Staircase* is unusual; he rarely participates in Nancy's mysteries, other than financing the operation. However, Nancy's deference to his parental guidance and legal expertise remind the reader that Mr. Drew holds a great deal of influence, not only in Nancy's life, but in the lives of many of the citizens of River Heights. His social status and political power add to Nancy's role as the ideal girl, while reinforcing white heterosexual male power as the norm.

Nancy's friends play a much greater role in the series than Mr. Drew, and their physical characteristics further complicate the discussion on race, class, and gender roles. In *The Secret of the Old Clock*, Nancy's first encounter with Allie and Grace Horner lets the reader know immediately that they fall into the "good poor" category, those whom Nancy is willing to assist. As Nancy drives about in search of a farm, a rainstorm comes up. She drives quickly into a barn, which turns out to belong to the farm for which she is searching. One of the owners of the farm, Allie Horner, greets Nancy warmly and invites her into "the rundown farmhouse" and "cheerful kitchen."[149] Nancy "studies" Allie when they meet in the barn: "[Nancy] had been impressed with her cultured voice and manner, and now she noted that her clothing, while not expensive, was neat and well made. The girl did not appear to be the daughter of a farmer who would live on this poor land."[150] Allie takes Nancy inside to meet her sister, Grace, who greets Nancy with a "warm smile": "She was tall and slender, as was her sister, with dark hair and thoughtful brown

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[147] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 111
[148] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 202
[149] Keene, *The Mystery of the Old Clock*, p. 41
[150] Keene, *The Mystery of the Old Clock*, p. 31

eyes."[151] The girls' names, particularly Grace, also suggest goodness. In case the reader does not catch the hint that Allie and Grace Horner are "good" characters, Keene makes clear that Nancy is immediately attracted to the girls. Nancy also instantly notes that the girls lack the financial resources befitting their "goodness." As a further indication of the girls' unfortunate situation, Keene describes the living room of the house:

> Although it was comfortable, the room did not contain much furniture. The floor had been painted and was scantily covered with handmade rag rugs. With the exception of an old-fashioned sofa, an inexpensive table, a few straight-backed chairs and an old wood stove which furnished heat, there was little in the room. However, dainty white curtains covered the windows, and Nancy realized that although the Horner girls were poor, they had tried hard to make their home attractive.[152]

The reader knows by the girls' friendliness, attractiveness, and cleanliness that they are trustworthy, positive characters deserving of Nancy's assistance. Their physical descriptions also reveal certain subtle hints: Grace and Allie are described as "slender," as is Nancy in *The Hidden Staircase* and *The Mystery at Lilac Inn.* "Slender" is different from the descriptions of villainous female characters as "wiry" or "skinny," suggesting grace and an elegance of movement.

Keene also describes Rosemary Turnbull, the elderly woman in *The Hidden Staircase,* as "tall and a trifle too thin, but *not at all severe-looking*."[153] Rosemary also has a kind face, and Nancy is "instantly attracted to her," just as she is to Grace and Allie Horner in *The Secret of the Old Clock*. Floretta Turnbull's appearance gives the reader an immediate clue to her character – she "lacked her sister's firm chin."[154] Floretta enters the story in a flurry, "so agitated that she

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[151] Keene, *The Mystery of the Old Clock,* p. 35
[152] Keene, *The Mystery of the Old Clock*, p. 37
[153] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 34
[154] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 44

failed to note the presence of a visitor [Nancy]."[155] At one point, Floretta is so distraught by the occurrences in the mansion that she retreats to her bedroom, lacking strength to even leave her bed. Thanks to physical descriptions, the reader knows upon introduction that Rosemary is the stronger, more composed of the two sisters. In this story, Keene plays up the contrast between the elderly sisters and young Nancy often, as Rosemary and Floretta lack Nancy's courage and physical strength. This emphasizes the importance of the adolescent girl as a protector of the older generation and the key to the future. Floretta appears greatly comforted by Nancy's presence, and the two sisters insist that they will not stay in their home any longer unless Nancy stays as well. In several instances, Nancy leads the way when investigating strange noises in the home, and Rosemary and Floretta lean both literally and figuratively on Nancy for support. [156] The future of the Turnbull estate depends upon Nancy's success; indeed, this text represents many of the fears expressed during the early 20th century surrounding the future of the "white" money-holding class and the younger generations' ability to protect and restore "old money." Nancy's ability to recover misplaced wealth and defend existing property reassures the readership that the status quo remains intact.

Not all of the younger generation appears as capable of protecting wealth as Nancy, however. Another of Nancy's friends, Emily Crandall from *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, has her fortune stolen and depends upon Nancy to recover it. Emily also provides one more example of physiognomy in the series, as well as Nancy's friendships with high-class, respectable, *attractive* people. Keene writes,

> It was not difficult to smile upon Emily Crandall, for her candid blue eyes, delicate coloring, and almost classical features gave her a beauty which was the envy of her friends. Though she lacked Nancy Drew's poise and keen mind, she did possess an

[155] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 44
[156] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 47

> unusually sunny disposition and had a way of accepting life as she found it. Since the death of her mother many years before, she had been under the guardianship of Mrs. Jane Willoughby, a young widow. Unfortunately, Emily Crandall had never had a great deal of money; but the lack of it did not appear to trouble her.[157]

Although Emily seems unconcerned with her lack of money, it becomes the subject of the story, for Emily shares with Nancy that she will inherit the Crandall family jewels upon her eighteenth birthday in a few weeks, "valued at not less than forty thousand dollars."[158] Although Emily's newly discovered fortune comes as a surprise, her respectable background and family name are predicted by her appearance. Not only is Emily beautiful, she has "classical features," blue eyes and "delicate coloring" which identify her as an American-born white woman. Keene's description of Emily assures the reader of her goodness, while cementing the racial superiority of those who look like her.

Nancy's own body seems fairly insignificant in the first several stories of the series; Nancy's focus – and therefore the reader's – is always on the mystery. However, the introduction of George Fayne and Bess Marvin in book five, *The Secret of Shadow Ranch*, marks a turning point in the perception of bodies and their corresponding characters. The cousins, close friends of Nancy's in River Heights, often accompany Nancy on trips and take her along on visits to relatives, where they inevitably encounter some sort of mystery. While Bobbie Ann Mason asserts that George and Bess are the two competing sides of Nancy's personality, a closer evaluation would suggest that the two girls provide a buffer for Nancy's normalcy, each representing what might happen if the New American Girl fails to get things quite right.[159]

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[157] Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 2-3
[158] Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 6
[159] Mason, p. 53

George Fayne enters the Nancy Drew scene on page one of *The Secret of Shadow Ranch*, in typical fashion: "Think of all the fun we'll have on a real western ranch!"[160] Compared to the descriptions of Nancy and Bess, George lacks luster in the looks department. George has a "straight brown bob" in *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, but her hair gets progressively shorter in the series and is soon a boyish pixie cut. She shows little genuine concern for her lack of beauty:

> 'Alice is as pretty as a picture,' George supplied. 'not homely like me.'
> 'Why, you're not a bit homely,' Nancy assured her promptly. 'I think you're quite distinctive looking myself.'
> 'You base flatterer! Look at this straight hair and my pug nose! And everyone says I'm irresponsible and terribly boyish.'
> 'Well, you sort of pride yourself on being boyish, don't you? Your personality fits in with your name, you will admit.'
> 'I do like my name,' George admitted, 'but I get tired of explaining to folks that it isn't short for Georgia. Bess doesn't have half the trouble I do.'[161]

George's proclamation that "everyone" describes her as "terribly boyish" seems especially telling. The portrayal suggests a definite repugnance of George's "boyish" behavior; the word choice encourages the reader to take note of George's behavior and find it equally distasteful. In addition to being described repeatedly as "tomboyish" and "tough," George always seeks action. More often than not, Nancy has to curb George's enthusiasm and hastiness to avoid unnecessary trouble. George has an affinity for the gruesome and constantly makes fun of Bess for her appetite and girlish ways. George maintains enough feminine traits to stay out of the butch lesbian trap – she has a steady boyfriend and (occasionally) wears dresses. However, compared to her cousin, Bess, and even to Nancy, George lacks grace and refinement, living up to her

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[160] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 1
[161] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 3-4

name. Although George insists that she likes her name, it receives almost as much criticism in the series as her behavior.[162]

Elizabeth Marvin, George's cousin and opposite, "was noted for always doing the correct thing at the correct time. Though she lacked the dash and vivacity of her cousin, she was better looking and dressed with more care and taste."[163] Bess, who possesses a very popular feminine name, provides a clear contrast to her cousin, George. Slightly overweight and highly emotional, Bess's eating habits are her signature characteristic.[164] On one picnic outing, the girls sit down for luncheon:

> 'I'm getting fatter every day of my life," Bess complained as she munched a sandwich. 'This is my third.'
> 'Fifth you mean,' George corrected her brutally.[165]

Later, when the girls get lost in the mountains, Bess declares herself "hungry enough to eat a fried rock."[166] Bess laments, "Just think what we must have missed at the ranch. Maybe baked ham or steak and hot biscuits, coffee – "[167] Bess's melodramatic outlook and voracious appetite set her apart from Nancy and George, and she frequently acts as the butt of George's jokes about eating, laziness, and obsession with boys. Referring to Bess's role for young girls in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Brumberg notes, "Popular serial fiction for younger girls, such as Grace Harlow and Nancy Drew, now had a fat character who served as a humorous foil to the well-

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[162] In *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, the head foreman's name is also George. He refuses to call George by her name, instead referring to her as "Ms. Faye" throughout the book.
[163] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 4
[164] Elizabeth was the 15th most popular name for baby girls in 1930; Nancy ranked at 24th. George was number eight on the list of popular names for boys in 1930. Information provided by the Social Security Administration.
[165] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 78
[166] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 146
[167] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 137

liked, smart protagonist, who was always slim."[168] While Bess's weight and eating habits are scrutinized and criticized to a greater degree – and on a more serious note – in later books in the series, even the first description of Bess in *The Secret of Shadow Ranch* mentions her heavier body type and highlights her eating behaviors.[169]

George and Bess enter as Nancy's friends and frequent partners in mystery solving very early in the series, and they are present in every story after *The Secret of Shadow Ranch.* The trio of girls dance on a balancing scale, each girl representing particular traits and images. Each girl's body type corresponds to a stereotypical personality. Keene describes George as tall, athletically built, and wearing her hair short with minimal attention to dress or makeup. George charges ahead, often foolishly, without second thought to danger or consequences; she lacks sympathy and tact, and she teases her cousin heartlessly. On one of numerous occasions, George scolds Bess for her fearfulness as the girls explore deserted cabins in the mountains. Bess squeals as a rat scurries by, and George responds coldly, "'Really, Bess,' George said in disgust, 'you're hopeless. That was only a pack rat.'"[170] Despite her unkind words to her cousin, George can always be counted on in a pinch, and she often supplies the "man-power" necessary on different missions when no male characters are available. George actually exhibits much of the same behavior as Nancy, but George's spontaneity and lack of refinement set her apart from Bess *and* Nancy, and her body translates stereotypically into her personality. The correspondence is not coincidental; George acts the way she does *because* she is athletically built

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[168] Brumberg, p. 99

[169] In later books in the series, particularly in the revised versions, Bess is highly scrutinized for her eating habits. She is frequently described as plump, slightly overweight, heavy, etc. In a later addition to the series, *The Nancy Drew Files*, which chronicles Nancy's adventures in college, Bess develops bulimia.

[170] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch,* p. 55

and has short hair – for Carolyn Keene and her readers, George's personality and physical attributes are intricately connected and dependent upon one another.

Bess possesses all of the graces that George lacks, but she leans too far on the other side of the weighing scales, both literally and figuratively. While George lacks emotion and frequently lacks sympathy, Bess appears as an emotional basket case, always on the verge of a perpetual meltdown. Bess's response to nearly every minor mishap is dramatic; while Nancy and George assess the situation calmly, Bess flusters about, expecting a major catastrophe. Bess's responses to food occur just as often as her emotional outbursts, and are sometimes just as dramatic. When the girls are out and about or just around the house, Bess always focuses on the next meal or the one at hand. While her responses to food in the earlier texts are not as problematic as those in later stories, Keene significantly reminds the reader that only the "plump" girl concerns herself with eating. In "Nancy Drew and the Clue in the Chubby Chum," Mary Linehan points out that Bess's preoccupation with food and weight occurs in the later stories, after the hunger and deprivation of the Great Depression.[171] But even in these early books, Linehan notes, "Nancy does not hunger. She is very different from the fleshy Bess. The girl sleuth cannot be burdened with an appetite, much less a vulnerability to rich and fattening foods. Such human frailties would interfere with Nancy's detecting."[172] Bess, despite her involvement in Nancy's excursions, never contributes as much as George and sometimes gets in the way. Although her failures are not always linked directly to food, the reader understands that Bess is slow, lazy, and uncomfortable in many situations because of her weight; her body renders her unable to compete with Nancy and George. Bess's eating issues, along with her exaggerated

[171] Linehan, p. 180
[172] Linehan, p. 181

femininity, may also reflect stereotypes of the Victorian hysteric or invalid, equally unable to participate fully in normal activity.

As George dangles off one side of the measuring scale for the ideal girl heroine, barely avoiding a tumble into the lesbian abyss below, Bess sits lazily with cheesecake in hand on the other, trying not to be an overly sensitive wimp. Nancy, of course, stands solidly in the middle, her position of leadership and mask of perfection unquestioned. With Bess and George on each side, she easily manages a precise balance of bravery and delicacy. A minute scene in which the girls are learning to ride horses in *The Secret of Shadow Ranch* describes this equilibrium completely:

> Nancy vaulted lightly into the saddle, and the foreman nodded in approval as he saw that she was well able to take care of herself. Bess next tried to mount the pony which had been turned over to her but at her first attempt, the animal shied away.
> 'Say, didn't no one ever tell you to git on a hoss from the left side?' Mr. Miller berated her […] Rescued from this predicament, she insisted upon backing the horse up to the fence and mounting from there. Alice followed her example, but George, though somewhat lacking in grace, managed to vault into the saddle without assistance […]
> 'I guess we'll have to let Nancy take all the honors,' George sighed. 'She's a regular whiz at it.'
> While Nancy Drew had never taken many riding lessons, it was true that she sat her horse well and rode with confidence and ease. The cowboys had watched admiringly as she galloped about the field.[173]

Nancy, always graceful and athletic, has no problem riding a spirited pony. She also wields the pistol lent to her by George, the ranch foreman, during the girls' encounter with a wild mountain lion, despite having rarely fired a weapon before. Without George and Bess to balance her behavior and appearance, Nancy would have a much harder time maintaining such an air of normalcy. Bess represents the extremes of traditional feminine behavior in many ways – she is fearful, often immobile, and childlike. Many of Nancy's behaviors push the boundaries of acceptable behavior for a white elite female in the 1930s; however, the authors remind the reader

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[173] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 34-35

often enough that Nancy maintains a certain degree of traditional femininity. Nancy's femininity is further contrasted with George, who lacks virtually any degree of femininity. The greatest difference between Nancy and George lies not in their behaviors, but their *performances* of gender normativity. Although their behaviors are comparable in many cases, Nancy maintains a certain air of femininity, while George consistently shrugs off any attempt at traditional femininity. Nancy's careful balance offers an interesting set of contradictions, as she simultaneously engages in "new" behaviors and maintains traditional expectations of femininity.

As young girls read the Nancy Drew series and celebrate her smarts and physical strength, they are also frequently reminded of her physical attractiveness. Every book begins with an introduction similar to her initial description in *The Secret of the Old Clock*. In *The Hidden Staircase*, Keene describes Nancy as "an unusually pretty girl, fair of skin with friendly blue eyes and golden curly hair."[174] The first pages of *The Mystery at Lilac Inn* offer a description of Nancy's car – "a bright blue roadster, low-swung and smart" – and Nancy: "The driver, a pretty girl of perhaps sixteen, attractive in a frock which either by accident or design exactly matched the blue of the automobile, smiled whimsically."[175] *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* gives a brief, interesting description; Nancy has sparkling blue eyes and, "though she could not be termed beautiful, her face was more interesting than that of either of her companions."[176] Nancy's degree of physical beauty varies with the stories, but her sparkling blue eyes and friendly nature are consistent throughout. Such an introduction begins each story, and other physical descriptions are scattered throughout. Keene always mentions Nancy's eye color (blue), describes her hair as "blonde," "titian," "strawberry blonde," or "golden," and her

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[174] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p.11
[175] Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 1
[176] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 1, 4.

skin as "fair" or "lightly tanned." She is also "naturally athletic" and has little problem changing a tire on her roadster.[177] Interspersed with these descriptions are brief reminders that Nancy, above all, is clever, helpful, honest, and modest. Nancy's friends, Bess and George, though not described in as much detail (and usually by adjectives that are less flattering or positive as Nancy), also appear as fair-skinned and light-eyed. Nancy's boyfriend Ned, who appears later in the series, is simply a male reflection of her. Nancy's education, style of dress, and manner of speaking all exemplify middle-class status in a certain way; for Nancy and her creators, middle-class meant white.

But Nancy's freedom and her daring escapades are carefully balanced by her feminine demeanor and close adherence to middle-class norms. Unlike the Hardy Boys, who earn money from their detective work, Nancy refuses payment. Ilana Nash points out that when Nancy accepts personal gifts in return for her help, "Nancy treasures them for their sentimental, not financial, value; she is too genteel a lady to sully her altruism with paid labor."[178] In every single book, Keene reminds the reader that Nancy is an amateur; her "work" cannot be considered work, keeping Nancy well within the confines of middle-class leisure. She also suggests that Nancy's refusal to earn money solidifies her father's role as sole breadwinner, an important concept during the 1930s when so many American men faced job insecurity.[179] Nancy, despite her apparent freedoms, is entirely dependent upon her father/patriarchy for financial support. In "No Place for a Girl Dick," Julia Gardner notes, "Nancy is exceptional among teenagers in her extensive travels and exposure to danger, but she never compromises her position as a proper

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[177] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 52, 107.
[178] Nash, p. 59
[179] Nash, p. 91

middle-class girl."[180] Blurring the lines of what is acceptable for young women, Nancy captures the ideal of the New American Girl as active; nearly all of the verbs used in reference to Nancy in the first chapter of *The Secret of the Old Clock* are action verbs. She drives, delivers, "vigorously" sounds the horn, slams on the brakes, leaps from the car, and climbs down a steep slope. Performed without Nancy's perfect balance of class status and whiteness, these actions would most likely be condemned as trampy, reckless, and irresponsible. Luckily for Nancy, she has her father's good name and money to back her up.

Nancy's mystery stories are flooded with adventure and action, as well as danger, as illustrated in the quotation opening this chapter. What does danger mean in these detective stories written for adolescents? How does Nancy's body act as the site in which law, order, and cultural norms are contested and reinforced? In each book, some sort of critical scene occurs in which Nancy faces grave danger. In several instances, Nancy's assumed purity is also in danger. In the first book, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, Nancy finds herself hiding in a closet in the Tophams' summer home, peeping out through a crack in the door as robbers strip the cottage of its furniture. Nancy's femininity comes to light as she hides in the closet, disgusted by the dust, dirt, and unknown objects touching her in the dark. Upon discovery, Nancy attempts an escape, but the lead robber quickly overtakes her and pins her against the wall. Keene tells us that Nancy is "powerless in the grip of the man."[181] The man throws Nancy into the closet and locks the door, leaving her to starve. Nancy panics and tries to force the door open, but to no avail: "At last, exhausted by her efforts to force the door open, she fell down upon the floor, a dejected, crushed little figure."[182] As Nancy struggles to escape from the locked closet, Jeff Tucker holds

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[180] Gardner, p. 249
[181] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 131
[182] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 133

the door closed, thinking her one of the robbers. To prove that she is no robber, Nancy "let go her longest and loudest feminine scream."[183] Interestingly, Keene uses this scene to intensify the reader's awareness of Nancy as "girl." Keene refers to Nancy as "the girl" three times in the scene; nowhere else in *The Secret of the Old Clock* is she referred to as such.[184] Keene contrasts Nancy as "girl" to the robber "men" in the scene; Nancy's strength fails against them, and she is rendered "powerless." The emphasis on Nancy's femininity against the rough, dangerous masculinity of the robbers in the scene suggests the potential for sexual assault, and the reader is half-relieved when the robber flings her into the closet to starve. Nancy's sexuality appears threatened by Nathan Gombet as well, in the first scene in *The Hidden Staircase*. Gombet viciously lunges at Nancy, grasping at her with "his clawlike hands."[185] Nancy sidesteps Gombet's advances, and threatens to call the police if he refuses to leave. Later, safe with her father in the room, Nancy feels free to mock Gombet and defy him openly.

The real danger scene in *The Hidden Staircase* occurs much later in the text, when Nancy discovers the hidden passageway between Nathan Gombet's home and the Turnbull mansion. First, Nancy narrowly escapes discovery by Gombet's servant, the "surly" African American woman discussed previously. Nancy automatically assumes that the woman must be "vicious," making her mission "a very dangerous one."[186] As Nancy pushes a knob in a hidden closet in Gombet's home, the closet wall moves:

> Nancy struggled to maintain her balance, but could not. She toppled forward and fell headlong down a steep flight of stone steps.
> A low cry of pain escaped her, and then she lay still.
> After Nancy Drew had plunged through the opening into the dark abyss, the closet wall clapped back into place. She did not hear the spring click, for before she reached the

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[183] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 138
[184] Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, p. 127, 129, 135
[185] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 9
[186] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 132

> bottom of a long flight of stone stairs her head struck a hard object and she lost consciousness.
> For several minutes she remained in a limp little heap at the bottom of the stairs. When at last she opened her eyes, she gave a little moan of pain, and tried to recollect what had happened.[187]

This will certainly not be the last time Nancy is knocked unconscious; critics joke about Nancy's multiple head injuries throughout the series. In this scene, Keene provides a few mentions of Nancy's physical body – "a big bump over her left eye" and bruised limbs, but "no bones were broken."[188] We find that "her head ached from the injury she had received, and she was tired from nervous strain."[189] Nancy's body, a "limp little heap," "a dejected, crushed little figure," seems in great danger throughout the series. Many times, Nancy's body triumphs over adversity and she arises to whatever physical challenge she faces. However, as evidenced here, Nancy's body cannot always perform the tasks needed to escape the danger.

The Mystery at Lilac Inn provides another example of Nancy's body failing her in the danger scene. Nancy sneaks in a window of Mary Mason's home, hiding to overhear Mary's conversation with Bud and Tom Tozzle. Unfortunately, lightning flashes at just the right moment, and Nancy's hiding place is illuminated:

> Panic took possession of Nancy. For a moment she could not move, so great was her fright. Then, with the speed born of desperation, she bolted for the window. Reaching the ledge, she swung herself upward, but a rough hand grasped her from behind.
> 'Oh, no you don't, young lady!' a harsh voice hissed into her ear.
> Before she could cry out for help, her arms were caught in a viselike grip and jerked behind her back. A handkerchief was stuffed into her mouth. She struggled frantically, kicking viciously at her captor, but it availed her nothing.[190]

Nancy breaks free and attempts once more to escape, but again she fails. Nancy's captors tie her and take her along on their getaway boat. Nancy is rescued when the boat strikes another in the

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[187] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 150-151
[188] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 152
[189] Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, p. 155
[190] Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 153

storm, and the Coast Guard apprehends the villains and discovers Nancy bound in the cabin.[191] The cabin also holds the Crandall jewels, the focus of Nancy's search. Nancy's body acts both as rescuer and rescued in this scene; Mary Mason and her accomplices take Nancy as part of the loot, but upon rescue, Nancy's quick actions ensure the safety of the jewels. Nancy returns the jewels to her friend Emily Crandall, the "rightful" owner of the wealth, and the working-class thieves are imprisoned.

Wealth and proper identity are at risk in *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* as well, but again, Nancy succeeds in uncovering Lucy Brown's "true" identity and assuring that she receives her rightful inheritance. In this story, Nancy faces several brief instances of danger, but unlike the previous stories, she has company. In *The Secret of the Old Clock*, *The Hidden Staircase*, and *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, Nancy does her detective work alone. With George, Bess, and Alice along for the ride in *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, Nancy's dangerous encounters appear much less stressful, particularly because Nancy plays the part of chaperone. When the girls get lost in the mountains, for example, Nancy takes the lead:

> Sensing that the morale of the group was about to break, Nancy Drew knew that she must assume definite leadership. Though her own courage was at low ebb, she must not disclose by word or action that she feared the worst.
> 'At least we have the revolver and plenty of ammunition,' she observed as cheerfully as possible. 'We'll be safe from wild animals.'[192]

While Alice and Bess moan and fret about their predicament, George makes jokes and Nancy decides what to do. With other characters to play the part of victim, Nancy becomes more capable and determined. Between Bess, Alice, and George, Nancy maintains the perfect balance of action, caution, and sensibility.

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[191] Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, p. 174
[192] Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, p. 136

Throughout the series, Nancy and her friends present a complicated picture of female adolescence. One might note that several of the stories discussed above are concerned with the future of young girls: Allie and Grace Horner in *The Secret of the Old Clock*; Mary Mason and Emily Crandall in *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*; and Alice Regor and Lucy Brown in *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*. Rarely does Nancy's work involve assisting boys or men, whom we assume are capable of solving their own mysteries or protecting their property from theft in the first place. Part of Nancy's detective work involves defending the "right" kind of adolescent: white, from a good background, modest, gracious, and grateful, like Allie and Grace Horner. Nancy is also responsible for uncovering and prosecuting the "wrong" kind of adolescent, like Mary Mason, who attempts to rise above her class station and refuses to recognize and accept her second-class status. All of these delineations are positioned in such a way that the reader never questions the designations of poor and rich, good and bad, attractive and ugly. The reader always sides with Nancy, who is responsible for maintaining order and balance in River Heights, USA. If the future of the nation depends upon adolescents growing into fruitful citizens, Nancy must police her friends and foes to ensure that the wealth and power of the nation, or at least River Heights, is in the right hands.

Nancy as the representative adolescent must reassure the older generations of her ability to protect the interests of white elites, while also illustrating "forward progress" as the new generation. To capture this contradiction, Keene complicates Nancy's role as an enforcer of norms through her own behavior. Although the writers of the series closely police Nancy's actions, she possesses more freedom than most characters, and certainly more than her readers. Nancy Drew teems with contradictions, embodying the confusion around the period of adolescence in the early 20th century. Nancy, in many ways, defies the either/or binaries she

works to reinforce. She is brave and frightened, weak and strong. She asks for permission, but she exercises her own will. She leads the way and follows, asks for direction and thinks for herself. She works alone and with others. She wears lipstick and trousers, dances and shoots revolvers. She is ladylike and brazen, bold and demure. In reality, Nancy Drew's behaviors are surprisingly unpredictable, although the outcome of the story never is. Nancy's fluctuations demonstrate the anxiety parents, reformers, and experts expressed about adolescence in the 1930s – teenagers were capable of anything, and without close supervision, they could easily choose the wrong route. Nancy assuages these fears throughout the series; no matter what her behavior, Nancy ends each story by solving the mystery, refusing compensation for her work, and returning to her father's house to await her next adventure.

CHAPTER 4.

CONCLUSIONS

Through a close examination of the four texts in the Nancy Drew Mystery Series, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, *The Hidden Staircase*, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, and *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*, I have demonstrated how the writers utilize physiognomy to alert the reader to characters' "true nature," whether good or bad. Using theories such recapitulation theory, which connected physical features with behaviors and attitudes, the writers reinforce the belief that deviance and goodness are located in and on the physical body. These arguments, along with nativism, were used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to strengthen the superior status of Anglo Saxon whites and deny equal social status to non-white immigrants and African Americans. The designation of these poor, working-class, immigrant, and African American characters as villains in the texts reflects lingering concern over the assimilation of these groups into American society and strengthens dominant ideologies. This pattern of negative identification is demonstrated through Jeff Tucker and the robbers in *The Secret of the Old Clock*, Nathan Gombet and the female African American servant in *The Hidden Staircase*, Mary Mason, Bud Mason, Tom Tozzle, and the housekeeping applicants in *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, and Martha Frank and Zany Shaw in *The Secret at Shadow Ranch.* Each of these characters lacks the ability to participate properly in mainstream American society. Since these villains are portrayed as a danger to society that must be controlled and punished, the stories suggest to the reader that racial and ethnic minorities, as well as the "bad poor," are hazardous to the American social order as well.

On the other hand, the writers portray Nancy Drew and her friends as overwhelmingly positive. Nancy, her father Carson Drew, and her friends and colleagues are honest,

hardworking, gracious, law-abiding, properly consuming citizens who strengthen the fabric of American society. These are the type of individuals who can be trusted with the nation's political power, social standing, and wealth. Their positive characteristics are also identified and supported by their physical bodies; Nancy and Carson Drew in each story, Allie and Grace Horner in *The Secret of the Old Clock*, Rosemary and Floretta Turnbull in *The Hidden Staircase*, Emily Crandall in *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*, and Bess Marvin, George Fayne, Alice Regor, and Lucy Brown in *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* all illustrate this association of positive traits with attractiveness. This group of "good" individuals is almost exclusively white, American-born, and middle to upper class. In conjunction with the raced, classed, and gender-based associations of the villains with deviance, the portrayals of the "good" characters in the Nancy Drew series work to fortify prevailing beliefs about gender roles and racial and class structures. The "good" characters are juxtaposed against the villains, strengthening the association of a very specific construction of attractiveness (i.e. Anglo-Saxon "white" moneyed) with goodness, while ensuring that the reader will conflate immigrant or African American and working class with ugliness, deviance, and criminality.

The texts also represent a crucial time in the development of adolescence as a life stage, particularly as a time during which female adolescents must be closely supervised. Nancy's attitude and behavior reflects the conflicting ideas about how adolescent girls should behave. Nancy's fictional adolescent body, much like the bodies of adolescent girls who came under great scrutiny in the early 20th century, became a site where acceptable conduct and ways of thinking were examined and contested. By creating a balance between her friends, Bess and George particularly, Nancy pushes the boundaries of acceptable female behavior. Nancy's very pursuit of detective work, let alone her bold behavior in each adventure, threatens the rigid

delineations between acceptable roles for girls and boys in the 1930s. At the same time, she works to strengthen the same ideological tenets that her behavior threatens by maintaining a certain degree of traditional femininity through her appearance, dress, and mannerisms. In many ways, the Nancy Drew Mystery series seeks to capture the case of the altering adolescent in early 1930sAmerica.

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