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Pd. 3

Mrs. Skivo

Essay # 1

There is no story better told of resilience and strength than Cane River by Lalita Tademy. It's inspiring and insightful, it tells of the terrible life the five African American women had to face. These incredible women had the courage and ambition to pursue their dreams to get what they needed in life. Their love and hope for their family, is what kept them striving for more. In hopes to create or mold a better future for their children, they would surpass any obstacle that came in their way, regardless of the risks. The story begins with Elisabeth and her daughter Suzette, who were slaves on a plantation in Louisiana, and follows their family down for three more generations, Philomene, Emily, and Angelite.

As the oldest of the ancestors, Elisabeth had no one to look to for advice, only hopes to look forward to in the future. She set these hopes in her daughters, and Suzette was ready for them, but she set her own standards as well. Suzette took risks to be able to accomplish things many people like her were unable to, like her making her first communion with Orelene and the other children. Despite the fact that she was so strong, this did not prepare or protect her from the pain or agony she would feel when she found out she was having an unwanted baby with Eugene Duarant, a white man. Sexual abuse was a common happening between white landowners and their African American slaves, and there was nothing to stop it. "This is what our life is, baby girl. It didn't stop me from loving those babies of mine in Virginia", was one of the few things Elisabeth could say to

provide any comfort for her daughter in her time of need. She soon learned how right her mother was, her love for her children was unconditional. In fact, she began to build hopes that her children's partial heritage would give them a step up.

So as time passed and Philomene grew, she showed signs of a bright future. She was confident, and strong, with not only hopes for the future but visions as well. She provided hope for her family, when they had little of their own, even when she felt at her worst. After losing her daughters and her husband in a short period of time, she thought things couldn't or wouldn't ever change, but she still knew it was up to her to keep the family together. She developed a plan to use and deceive Narcisse to obtain what she needed. "What am I to do with a white man's heart? I want his head, his mind." Philomene spoke of her plan to Emily, she knew exactly what she wanted, and would stop at nothing until she got it.

By the time Emily arrived Philomene had Narcisse right where she wanted him. Emily was given more opportunities than any of them. With her light skin and the first in her family to learn to read and go to school, she would no doubt make it through, and hopefully go further with her life. After Emily went against the family's wishes and went with Joseph Billes, they did not turn their backs on her, they supported her one hundred percent. Elisabeth had accepted Joseph most of all. It's shocking that after that and everything else Elisabeth had done, Emily could say she was ashamed of her for her dark skin. Emily said, "I want my children to become more than anything she could ever dream of, I want her to be proud of how far we can go." Without the little dreams Elisabeth had though, Emily's dreams wouldn't even be imaginable for her.

The women in the story were unbelievably strong and over came many things people couldn't today; it was their family that kept them hoping and searching for more. Like when Philomene lost her babies and husband, she was devastated, but after a while realized it was up to her to keep the rest of the family together. Nothing was ever just handed over to them like many people have today; they earned, and fought for everything. When Emily goes to town in the end and realizes nothing really has changed she didn't feel ashamed, she just said, "I'll never be hungry enough to go to someone's back door," She knew they were all better and worth more then that, and believed that people didn't give them enough credit. So despite all the challenges they faced and the hardships they were given, they realized it wasn't about everyone else, it's only about yourself, your goals, and your dreams. They knew everything they accomplished and overcame, and though it didn't really change anything then it is something that affects all of us today. Their lives are something everyone can look back on, and learn from, because those people fought for what they wanted and never gave up. The resilience and strength shown in this story will give people, not only girls, hope and courage to fight for what they want and believe in for their lives.