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The Unsung Feminist Heroine: Jessie Redmon Fauset-- Liberator, Educator, and Female Emancipator

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THE UNSUNG FEMINIST HEROINE: JESSIE REDMON FAUSET—
LIBERATOR, EDUCATOR, AND FEMALE EMANCIPATOR

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: The Unsung Feminist Heroine: Jessie Redmon Fauset—Liberator, Educator,
and Female Emancipator

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During the Harlem Renaissance, art, music, and literature flourished. One woman responsible for the success of many black writers during the period of 1920-1933 was the exceptionally talented Jessie Redmon Fauset. Not only was she an important writer, but an astute scholar as well.

This dissertation explores the role of marriage versus female autonomy in Jessie Redmon Fauset's four novels. During the early twentieth century, it was unheard of for black women to aspire to a life where sovereignty and freedom existed without the pursuit of or attachment to a husband. This dissertation argues that Fauset uses the ideology of marriage to examine how black female characters remain strong and empowered regardless if they choose to marry.

Chapter One of the dissertation examines the traditional roles and expectations of women in marriage and demonstrates how these roles have evolved throughout time. In her novels, Fauset chose to challenge the stereotypical roles pertaining to women in marriage. Chapter One further emphasizes Fauset's background and her numerous contributions, not only significant to both male and female writers during the Renaissance, but to the larger society as well.

Chapter Two explores the novels *There Is Confusion* and *Plum Bun*. These novels conclude with one protagonist marrying and the other envisaging marriage. This chapter

examines the protagonists' changes in social conformity within intimate relations. The analysis demonstrates a loss of empowerment when the protagonists relinquish their singlehood.

Chapter Three focuses on the novels *The Chinaberry Tree* and *Comedy: American Style* and investigates the inter-locking connections between marriage, societal acceptance, and race.

Chapter Four proposes that an examination and appreciation of the literary works by Jessie Redmon Fauset are essential in order for literary studies to progress toward a more inclusive, comprehensive, and accurate picture of the Harlem Renaissance. Fauset, as an African American feminist woman writer, provides a vital contribution to American Literature.