

When William Faulkner declares as he did in the eulogy he delivered at her funeral that his black mammy was a “fount of authority over my conduct and of security for my physical welfare, and of active and constant affection and love,” and that she was also “an active and constant precept for decent behavior, from her I learned to tell the truth, to refrain from waste, to be considerate of the weak and respectful of age,” you don’t doubt that he was deeply moved as he spoke or was moved again every time he remembered what he said, but being one of black mammy’s taffy- and chocolate-colored boys you could not only tell him a few things, you could also ask him a hell of a lot of pretty embarrassing questions, beginning, for instance, with: “Damn man, if the mammyness of blackness or the blackness of mammyness was so magnificent and of such crucial significance as you now claim, how come you let other white folks disrespect and segregate her like that? How come you didn’t put yourself out just a little bit more to please her? How can fellows like you be so enthusiastic about her and yet so ambivalent and hesitant about her brothers and sisters? Man, do you really think that your reciprocation was adequate?”