Sample Quote Analysis Ex Colored Man

*It is very likely that the Negroes of the United States have a fairly correct idea of what the white people of the country think of them, for that opinion has for a long time been and is still being constantly stated; but they are themselves more or less a sphinx to the whites. It is curiously interesting and even vitally important to know what are the thoughts of ten millions of them concerning the people among whom they live. In these pages it is as though a veil had been drawn aside: the reader is given a view of the inner life of the Negro in America, is initiated into the "freemasonry," as it were, of the race (*Johnson, “Preface,” vii).

In Johnson’s “Preface” to his fictive autobiography, he proclaims an authenticity in the portrait of African-Americans. In order to establish an authentic portraits, Johnson amplifies the dichotomy between the “constantly stated” opinions held by whites of African-Americans and the “sphinx”-like truth that the preface claims the “autobiography” will show (vii). This dichotomy emphasizes the need to move beyond what others say about the race towards providing declarations of self. He amplifies the need to give voice to “the thoughts of ten millions of them, concerning the people among whom they live” (Johnson, vii). Thus, the fictive “autobiography” becomes Johnson’s vehicle where he can move beyond the rigid structure of one person’s opinion towards providing a space where a multitude of voices can be heard. As the reader anticipates hearing other voices, while Johnson often keeps the novel couched in the first person, he sets up the expectation that the reader will find “a veil ha[s] been drawn aside” and the “inner life” of African-Americans can be explored (Johnson, vii). This “veil,” a reference to W.E.B. DuBois’ analogy for the truth beyond the stereotypes, retains a sense of a secret society, the “’freemasonry,’ as it were, of the race” that Johnson seeks to explore in the novel (vii). Thus, in this truth-telling, Johnson sets out to articulate a multiplicity of experiences.