Alice walker in search of our mothers gardens

**** Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" is a seminal essay exploring the hidden legacy of Black women. Discover its impact on feminist theory, African American studies, and personal narratives. Learn about its themes, literary style, and enduring relevance. AliceWalker MothersGardens FeministTheory BlackFeminism AfricanAmericanLiterature** Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens": A Legacy of Unsung Stories **Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," originally published in 1974, is more than just an essay; it's a powerful testament to the resilience, creativity, and often-unsung contributions of Black women throughout history. This seminal work transcends its time, continuing to resonate with readers across generations, prompting critical conversations about feminism, race, and the enduring power of the familial legacy.**

Walker's evocative prose weaves personal anecdotes with historical context, creating a richly textured exploration of identity, motherhood, and artistic expression. The Enduring Power of Walker's Prose The essay's strength lies not only in its poignant storytelling but also in its accessible and engaging style. Walker masterfully blends personal narratives with broader social and historical observations. She uses vivid imagery, drawing parallels between the nurturing gardens tended by Black women and the blossoming of their creative spirits, often stifled by societal constraints. The essay's structure, a blend of personal reflection, historical analysis, and literary criticism, ensures its appeal to a wide readership. Her ability to connect the seemingly disparate worlds of domestic life and artistic achievement is a testament to her skill as a writer. Key Themes Explored in "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" • The Hidden Legacy of Black Women: Walker argues powerfully that the contributions of Black women have been systematically overlooked and underestimated in historical accounts. She highlights the crucial role they played in preserving cultural heritage and fostering family resilience despite facing systemic oppression. • The Intertwining of Creativity and

Motherhood: The essay explores the complex relationship between motherhood and artistic expression, arguing that nurturing and creating are intrinsically linked. Walker suggests that the seemingly mundane tasks of Black women's lives – cooking, cleaning, gardening – were actually acts of creative resistance and survival. • The Impact of Systemic Oppression: **Walker powerfully illustrates how systemic racism and sexism have limited the opportunities and recognition afforded to Black women. This limitation has often forced them into roles that undervalue their capabilities and stifle their creative potential.** • The Importance of Reclamation and Recognition: *The essay is a call for acknowledging and celebrating the contributions of Black women, both past and present. Walker's work acts as a powerful tool for reclaiming their narratives and ensuring their rightful place in history.*

Related Topics: Expanding the Discussion

Alice Walker's Literary Contributions

Beyond "Mothers' Gardens"

Alice Walker is a prolific and influential writer, known for her novels like *The Color Purple*, which won the Pulitzer Prize, and her collection of short stories, *In Love & Trouble*. Her work consistently explores themes of race, gender, and sexuality within the context of the Black American experience. Her novels often feature strong, complex female characters who navigate the complexities of their lives with resilience and determination. Analyzing Walker's broader literary output provides a deeper understanding of the perspectives and themes presented in "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens."

The Influence of Black Feminist Thought

"In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" significantly contributed to the development of Black feminist thought. It challenged the dominant narratives of feminism, which often overlooked the experiences of Black women. The essay helped pave the way for a more inclusive and intersectional approach to feminist theory, emphasizing the importance of considering race, class, and gender simultaneously. It became foundational reading in Black Feminist

studies and continues to influence contemporary discussions about race, gender, and identity.

The Essay's Impact on Literary Criticism

The essay's impact extends to literary criticism itself. It's often studied in courses on African American literature, feminist literary theory, and creative non-fiction. Its innovative blending of personal narrative with historical analysis provides a model for future writers and scholars seeking to explore complex social issues through personal lenses. The essay's structure and style demonstrate the power of using personal experience to illuminate broader societal issues. Visual Representation of Themes: **| Theme | Description | Example from the Essay | |||| | Hidden Legacy | Unsung contributions of Black women throughout history. | Stories of mothers and grandmothers' artistic endeavors. | | Creativity & Motherhood | Interconnectedness of nurturing and artistic expression. | Parallels drawn between gardening and creative self-expression. | | Systemic Oppression | Limitations faced by Black women due to racism and sexism. | Descriptions of societal constraints and limited opportunities. | | Reclamation & Recognition |**

Importance of acknowledging and celebrating the contributions of Black women. | The act of writing and sharing the essay itself. | Conclusion: Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" remains a vital and relevant piece of literature. It compels us to reconsider historical narratives, recognize the overlooked contributions of Black women, and appreciate the intricate connections between personal experience and broader social realities. The essay's enduring power lies in its ability to both inspire and challenge readers, encouraging critical reflection on the past and a commitment to creating a more equitable future. Advanced FAQs: **1.** How does "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" relate to Walker's other works? The essay reflects themes present throughout Walker's oeuvre, particularly the exploration of Black female identity, resilience, and the impact of historical oppression. It acts as a prelude to the complex characterizations found in novels like *The Color Purple*. 2. What are the primary criticisms leveled against the essay? **Some critics argue that the essay generalizes the experiences of Black women, potentially overlooking class and regional differences. Others find its reliance on anecdotal evidence limiting for a rigorous historical analysis. 3.** How

has the essay influenced contemporary discussions on Black Feminism? **The essay helped to establish Black Feminist thought as a distinct field of study, challenging mainstream feminism's exclusion of Black women's experiences and perspectives. It continues to inform discussions about intersectionality and the complexities of identity. 4.** What is the significance of the "garden" metaphor in the essay? The garden serves as a potent metaphor for nurturing, creativity, and resilience. It represents the often-hidden spaces where Black women cultivate their talents and maintain cultural heritage amidst systemic oppression. 5. What makes "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" a significant contribution to creative non-fiction?** The essay's innovative blend of personal narrative, historical analysis, and literary criticism helped to redefine the possibilities of creative non-fiction. It demonstrates the power of personal storytelling to illuminate broader social and historical contexts.

Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens": A Tapestry of

Black Women's Creative Legacy

Alice Walker's seminal collection of essays, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose," published in 1983, is far more than just a book of writings. It's a profound exploration, a fervent reclamation, and a vital testament to the often-silenced creative spirit of Black women. Walker, a Nobel Prize laureate known for her unflinching gaze at the complexities of race, gender, and identity, offers readers a deeply personal yet universally resonant journey into the lives and artistic contributions of generations of Black women. This isn't just an academic exercise; it's a soulful excavation, a search for the roots of creativity that have been deliberately obscured by history and societal neglect. From its evocative title essay, which gives the collection its name, Walker embarks on a quest to uncover the buried artistry of Black women, particularly those of the past who, despite immense hardship, found ways to express themselves. She posits that these women, in their domestic labors and their quiet acts of creation, were engaged in a form of "mother-art," a potent force that sustained them and their communities. This collection is a powerful counter-narrative to the traditional literary canon, which has historically excluded or marginalized the

voices and experiences of Black women. It’s about more than just literature; it’s about the very essence of survival and the enduring power of human expression.

The Genesis of "Womanist Prose"

One of the most groundbreaking contributions of "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" is Walker's articulation of the term "womanist." She defines it as a Black feminist or feminist of color who is "committed to the liberation of all people." This definition is crucial because it acknowledges the unique intersectionality of race and gender that Black women navigate. It's a stance that embraces both feminine strength and a radical commitment to social justice for everyone, not just within a narrow feminist framework. Walker’s definition is a powerful tool for understanding the complexities of Black womanhood and her prose actively embodies this philosophy. Walker’s exploration of this concept is woven throughout the essays. She examines how Black women have historically been subjected to multiple forms of oppression – racism, sexism, and classism – and how their creativity has often been a means of resistance and survival. The book delves into the lives of writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, and

Richard Wright, but with a particular focus on the often-overlooked contributions of Black women within these literary movements. She argues that these women, often working in the shadows, were not just passive recipients of history but active creators who shaped their own narratives.

The Title Essay: A Luminous Metaphor

The titular essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," is arguably the most potent and memorable piece in the collection. Here, Walker introduces the concept of the "mother-garden" as a metaphor for the creative spirit of Black women. She imagines these women, like her own grandmother, who found solace and expression in tending to their gardens, creating beauty and sustenance amidst the harsh realities of their lives. These gardens, both literal and metaphorical, represent the spaces where their artistic impulses could flourish, even if their work was never formally recognized or published. Walker paints vivid pictures of these women – their resilience, their ingenuity, and their deep-seated need to create. She connects the act of gardening to the act of writing, seeing both as forms of nurturing, cultivating, and bringing forth life. This essay is a powerful call to recognize and honor the creativity

that exists in all forms, especially those that have been historically devalued. It encourages readers to look beyond traditional definitions of art and to find the artistic legacy within their own families and communities. The search for these "mothers' gardens" is, in essence, a search for identity and for the unacknowledged power that has shaped generations.

Unearthing Literary Ancestors

A significant portion of "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" is dedicated to Walker's passionate reclamation of literary figures, particularly Black women writers who have been marginalized or forgotten. She shines a spotlight on authors like Zora Neale Hurston, whose vibrant prose and anthropological insights were often dismissed by male critics of her time. Walker’s essays breathe new life into Hurston’s work, revealing her as a pioneering voice who captured the richness and complexity of Black Southern culture with unparalleled authenticity. Walker’s deep admiration for Hurston is palpable. She sees in Hurston’s storytelling a reflection of the very "mother-art" she is searching for – art born from lived experience, from a profound understanding of community, and from an

unwavering commitment to truth. She also examines the work of lesser-known figures, women who may have left behind only fragments of their creative output but whose spirit of innovation and resilience resonates powerfully. This act of literary archaeology is crucial for Black women writers and readers alike, offering a lineage of artistic courage to draw upon.

Beyond Literature: The Breadth of Creative Expression

While literature is a central focus, Walker’s concept of creativity extends far beyond the written word. In "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," she celebrates the artistic expressions found in quilting, storytelling, cooking, and even in the quiet act of survival itself. She argues that these everyday acts of creation are as vital and as artistically significant as any gallery exhibit or published novel. The resilience and beauty found in a hand-stitched quilt, or the ancestral wisdom passed down through oral tradition, are all part of the rich tapestry of Black women’s artistic heritage. This broader definition of art is a powerful antidote to the elitism that can sometimes permeate artistic discourse. Walker reminds us that creativity is not confined to formal institutions or recognized disciplines. It is a fundamental human impulse, a way

of making sense of the world and of leaving a mark upon it. Her essays invite us to recognize the artistry in the everyday, in the domestic sphere, and in the quiet acts of resistance that have sustained Black women for centuries. It’s about finding the beauty and the genius in places often overlooked.

Walker's Personal Voice and the Power of Testimony

What makes "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" so compelling is Alice Walker's deeply personal and authentic voice. These essays are not dry academic treatises; they are infused with her own experiences, her own struggles, and her own profound love for the women who have come before her. She shares intimate anecdotes, reflections on her childhood, and her evolving understanding of her own artistic journey. This personal testimony is what makes the collection so relatable and so emotionally resonant. Walker's willingness to be vulnerable and to share her own search for meaning is what gives the book its power. She doesn’t claim to have all the answers; instead, she invites the reader to join her on this ongoing quest. This conversational and engaging tone is a hallmark of her writing, making complex ideas accessible and deeply moving. Her prose is lyrical,

insightful, and often infused with a quiet rage against the injustices that have silenced so many creative voices.

The Enduring Relevance of "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"

Decades after its initial publication, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" remains a vital and essential text for understanding the history and the ongoing evolution of Black women's creativity. Its exploration of womanism, its reclamation of forgotten artists, and its expansive definition of art continue to resonate with readers and writers alike. The book serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of acknowledging and celebrating the contributions of all voices, particularly those that have been marginalized. In a world still grappling with issues of race, gender, and representation, Walker’s work offers a crucial lens through which to examine these complexities. It encourages us to look for the "mother-gardens" in our own lives, to unearth the buried talents and traditions within our own families and communities. It’s a call to action, an invitation to participate in the ongoing project of reclaiming and celebrating the rich, multifaceted creative legacy of Black women. The search continues, and Walker’s

work provides us with the map and the inspiration to keep digging. The book's impact on feminist theory, literary criticism, and the broader understanding of Black culture is undeniable, cementing its place as a landmark work of the 20th century. It’s a testament to the enduring power of words to illuminate, to heal, and to inspire.

The Enduring Legacy of Alice Walker and Her Literary Journey

Alice Walker, a towering figure in American literature, extends far beyond her acclaimed novel *The Color Purple*. One of her most profound and deeply resonant works is *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Storytales*, a collection that weaves together poetry, essays, and personal reflection to honor the wisdom, resilience, and creativity of Black women across generations. This seminal text invites readers into a rich tapestry of cultural memory, redefining how we understand womanist thought and the quiet power embedded in everyday life.

A Living Tapestry of Womanist Philosophy

At its core, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* articulates the concept of "womanist," a term Walker herself popularized to emphasize a black feminist ethic rooted in care, solidarity, and ancestral reverence. Through evocative storytelling, Walker explores how Black women have cultivated gardens of identity, creativity, and resistance—often in the margins of a society that sought to silence them. These gardens, metaphorical and literal, represent not just physical spaces of growth but also the inner landscapes where dreams, traditions, and healing flourish. The book challenges readers to recognize the profound intellectual and emotional labor women have performed, often unseen, across time.

Applications Beyond the Page: Empowerment in Practice

The insights in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* transcend academic discourse, offering tangible applications in education, community building, and personal empowerment. Educators draw from Walker's work to foster inclusive curricula that validate diverse voices and experiences, nurturing

empathy and critical thinking. Community organizers use her themes to inspire projects centered on intergenerational storytelling, where elders share wisdom with younger generations, strengthening cultural continuity. On an individual level, readers find guidance in embracing their own creative potential and reclaiming agency, transforming personal struggles into acts of resilience and self-expression.

Cultivating Legacy and Future Possibilities

As society continues to grapple with issues of race, gender, and equity, Alice Walker’s work remains remarkably relevant. *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* invites ongoing dialogue about the role of art and narrative in social change, reminding us that stories are both mirrors and blueprints—reflecting lived realities while shaping future possibilities. Looking ahead, the book’s themes are poised to inspire new waves of creative expression, advocacy, and scholarship, especially among emerging voices committed to expanding the frontiers of womanist thought. Its enduring message—that every search for roots is an act of resistance and renewal—continues to illuminate paths toward justice, healing, and

collective empowerment.

Embracing the Garden Within: A Call to Remember and Grow

Alice Walker’s *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* is more than a literary work; it is a living testament to the quiet strength and boundless creativity of Black women. By honoring the gardens our mothers—our ancestors—nurtured, Walker invites us to cultivate our own gardens of purpose, resilience, and connection. In an ever-changing world, her words remain a compass, guiding us to remember, restore, and reimagine what is possible when we listen deeply, honor our roots, and nurture the land of our shared humanity.

Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens": A Tapestry of Black Women's Creativity and Resilience

Alice Walker's seminal essay collection, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, published in 1983, is far more than a literary landmark; it is a

profound excavation of the unspoken, the unacknowledged, and the deeply buried heritage of Black women in America. Through a powerful fusion of memoir, literary criticism, historical research, and passionate feminist advocacy, Walker crafts a compelling argument for the existence and importance of a distinct Black female artistic tradition. This work, which popularized the term "womanism," has become an indispensable text for understanding Black feminist thought, literary history, and the enduring spirit of creativity and resilience in the face of oppression.

Walker's own experiences as a Black woman, growing up in the Jim Crow South and navigating the complexities of race, gender, and class, are intricately woven into the fabric of her prose. She doesn't just analyze the works of other Black women; she invites readers into her own intellectual and emotional journey of discovery. This personal touch, coupled with rigorous analysis, makes *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* a deeply resonant and transformative read. The book’s enduring legacy lies in its ability to illuminate the often-overlooked contributions of Black women writers, artists, and thinkers, offering them their rightful place in the broader narrative of American culture.

Defining Womanism: Beyond Feminism

Central to Walker's thesis is her articulation of "womanism." While often discussed in relation to feminism, Walker’s definition expands upon it, embracing a more inclusive and interconnected understanding of womanhood. For Walker, a womanist is not simply a feminist who is also Black. Rather, she is a woman who is "committed to the liberation of all people, but especially to women and women of color." This framework acknowledges the unique struggles faced by Black women, which are compounded by both racism and sexism. Womanism, therefore, is inherently intersectional, recognizing that the fight for liberation cannot be fragmented. It emphasizes a holistic approach that values the wisdom, strength, and creativity of Black women, often in contexts where their voices have been systematically silenced or marginalized.

Walker argues that historical narratives have often failed to capture the full spectrum of Black women's experiences and contributions. Mainstream feminism, she suggests, has sometimes overlooked the specific challenges faced by women of color, while Black liberation movements have, at times, sidelined the concerns of Black women. Womanism, in this context,

emerges as a necessary corrective, a space where the multifaceted identities and struggles of Black women can be fully recognized and celebrated. This foundational concept is crucial for understanding the entire collection and its impact on subsequent generations of scholars and activists.

The "Mothers' Gardens": Unearthing Lost Legacies

The title essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," is a cornerstone of the collection and encapsulates Walker's central metaphor. It is here that she introduces the concept of the "maternal heritage" of Black women, a heritage often expressed through art and creativity, even when formal education and recognition were denied. Walker poignantly describes her search for the artistic lineage of Black women, drawing a parallel between the nurturing of a garden and the cultivation of artistic talent. She speaks of the "spirit of the creative force" that resides within Black women, a force that, despite immense adversity, found ways to bloom.

She famously recounts the story of an aunt who, despite her limited circumstances and lack of formal artistic training, would "plant something everyday, if

it was just a weed." This act of cultivation, even in the most humble forms, represents for Walker the innate drive of Black women to create and express themselves. This concept extends to the literary realm, where Walker seeks out the "hidden" writers – women like Phillis Wheatley, Zora Neale Hurston, and Nella Larsen – whose voices have been obscured by the prevailing historical and literary narratives. Her quest is not merely academic; it is a deeply personal and political act of reclamation, a vital step in understanding her own artistic inheritance and the broader story of Black women.

Beyond the Canon: Reclaiming Literary Ancestors

A significant portion of *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* is dedicated to literary criticism, with Walker re-examining and re-contextualizing the works of Black women writers. She challenges existing literary canons that have, for too long, excluded or marginalized these voices. Her essays on authors like Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Jean Toomer demonstrate a deep understanding of their craft while simultaneously highlighting the specific dimensions of their work that speak to the Black female experience. Walker's analysis is not simply about adding names to

a list; it is about revealing the richness, complexity, and innovative spirit of Black women's literary contributions.

Walker is particularly adept at dissecting how Black women writers navigated societal constraints to express their truths. She celebrates their ability to find artistic expression in the face of slavery, Jim Crow, and pervasive sexism. Her essay on Hurston, for instance, underscores the author's anthropological work and her literary brilliance in capturing the vernacular and cultural richness of Black Southern life. By bringing these writers into the light, Walker compels readers to reconsider the traditional literary landscape and recognize the profound impact of Black women on American literature. This act of literary archaeology is crucial for any study of Black literary history and feminist literary theory.

The "Creative Spirit": Resilience in the Face of Trauma

Throughout the collection, Walker consistently emphasizes the resilience and indomitable spirit of Black women. She explores how, even in the harshest conditions, the creative impulse persisted. This is not

to romanticize suffering, but rather to acknowledge the extraordinary strength and ingenuity required to survive and create. The essays delve into the psychological and emotional toll of racism and sexism, but they always pivot towards the ways in which Black women found solace, expression, and resistance through their art, their communities, and their inner lives. This exploration of the "creative spirit" is a testament to the enduring power of the human will to thrive against overwhelming odds.

Walker's essays often touch upon themes of ancestral memory and the transmission of wisdom and creativity across generations. She suggests that the creative spirit is not necessarily inherited in a biological sense but is a cultural and spiritual inheritance, passed down through stories, practices, and shared experiences. This idea resonates deeply within the Black community, where oral traditions and communal storytelling have historically played a vital role in preserving identity and heritage. The book's exploration of this theme makes it a valuable resource for understanding Black cultural heritage and the concept of intergenerational resilience.

Womanist Prose: A Style and a Stance

The term "womanist prose" itself, coined by Walker, signifies not just a particular set of themes but also a distinctive style of writing. It is prose that is passionate, personal, and unafraid to tackle difficult truths. It is prose that draws on the rhythms and vernacular of Black speech, that embraces metaphor and imagery, and that often blurs the lines between the personal and the political. Walker's own writing exemplifies this, with its lyrical beauty, its emotional honesty, and its unwavering commitment to social justice. She writes with a fire and conviction that compels readers to engage with her ideas on a visceral level.

This stylistic approach is crucial because it allows Walker to convey the depth and complexity of Black women’s experiences in a way that academic or purely analytical writing might not. Her use of anecdote, personal reflection, and vivid description draws the reader in, making the abstract concepts of racism, sexism, and artistic expression feel immediate and real. The collection, therefore, serves as both a theoretical treatise and a literary work in its own right, offering a model for how to write about marginalized experiences with both intellectual rigor

and artistic grace.

Enduring Relevance and Legacy

Decades after its publication, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* remains a vital and relevant text. Its exploration of intersectionality, its championing of marginalized voices, and its celebration of resilience continue to resonate with new generations of readers and scholars. The book has profoundly influenced feminist theory, Black studies, and literary criticism, providing a framework for understanding the contributions of Black women and other marginalized groups. Its impact can be seen in the work of countless writers, activists, and academics who have built upon Walker's foundational ideas.

The ongoing dialogue around issues of race, gender, and representation in literature and society underscores the enduring importance of Walker's work. As discussions about cultural appropriation, diverse narratives, and equitable representation continue, the principles of womanism and the literary reclamation championed in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* offer crucial insights and a powerful roadmap. Alice Walker's collection is more than a book; it is a manifesto for a more inclusive and just understanding of creativity, heritage, and the

indomitable spirit of Black women.

Choosing to explore *Alice Walker In Search Of Our Mothers Gardens* often starts with curiosity. Sometimes the goal is clear, sometimes it is simply a desire to understand something better. Having the option to download the book in PDF format makes that first step easier and less intimidating.

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Questions & Answers About alice walker in search of our mothers gardens

No	Question	Answer
1	What is Alice Walker's central argument in 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens'?	Walker argues that many talented Black women throughout history have been denied the opportunity to express their creativity due to societal oppression, leading to a suppressed artistic legacy that needs to be rediscovered and celebrated.
2	How does Walker define 'womanist' in the context of her essay?	Womanist is a term Walker uses to describe Black women who are both feminist and deeply connected to their communities and culture, advocating for the empowerment of Black women while also embracing their specific experiences and heritage.

3	What role does the concept of a 'garden' play in the essay?	The 'garden' is a powerful metaphor for the creative and nurturing spaces that Black women, despite immense hardship, cultivated. It represents their artistry, their resilience, and the legacy of self-expression they passed down through generations, often in non-traditional forms.
4	Why does Walker feel it's important to 'search' for her mothers' gardens?	She searches to unearth the hidden contributions and silenced voices of Black women artists and writers who, due to slavery, racism, and sexism, were unable to pursue their creative passions openly. This search is an act of reclaiming and honoring their existence and artistry.
5	How does 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens' resonate with contemporary audiences?	The essay remains highly relevant for its exploration of intersectional identity, the importance of acknowledging marginalized histories, and the ongoing struggle for creative liberation. It continues to inspire individuals to seek out and celebrate the often-overlooked contributions of women and people of color.

Alice Walker in search of our mothers gardens analysis, Alice Walker cultural heritage search, Alice

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