

RICHARD WRIGHT'S GLOBALISM

Abstract: This essay takes a long view of Wright's work, arguing that his racial consciousness always extended beyond national boundaries and was forged from a globalist perspective. This outlook is not, as some critics have maintained, a late-stage development in Wright's career, but rather the predominant theme that unites his *oeuvre* with a single continuous thread. Wright's work—including his fiction, essays, journalism, poetry, letters, and unpublished pieces spanning from the beginning of his career in the mid-1930s to his deathbed writings of 1960—crystallizes his globalist imagination even as it shifts registers: from an anti-fascist political solidarity framed by Marxist internationalism to an affective kinship among formerly colonized peoples expressed through existentialist proto-postcolonialism, and finally a transcendent poetics in search of universal humanism.

INTRODUCTION

In his now-classic—in some circles, infamous—study *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Paul Gilroy mobilizes a trenchant critique of the tendencies within Americanist literary criticism and cultural studies to “overshadow” the “range and diversity of [Richard] Wright's work” by placing “fortifications” between his American writings—namely, *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), *Native Son* (1940), and *Black Boy/American Hunger* (1945/1970)—and the works produced following the author's self-exile from the United States in 1946. From his newfound home base in Paris, Wright published a series of existentially-inflected novels often critiqued for being clumsy, stilted, and uninspired: *The Outsider* (1953), *Savage Holiday* (1954), and *The Long Dream* (1958). Perhaps the most significant and contentious works of his “post-American” era—indeed, the works on which most critical attention to his later writings has focused—were collections of travel writing and reportage: *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (1954), an ethnography of the Gold Coast on the eve of independence; *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung*

Conference (1956), on the 1955 meeting of political leaders from twenty-nine decolonizing nations across Africa and Asia in Bandung, Indonesia; and *Pagan Spain* (1957), an account of daily life under the strict Catholicism of Franco's regime.

Though aiming to demonstrate the continuities between Wright's so-called American works and the "supposedly inferior products of his European exile," namely *The Outsider*, Gilroy yet maintains that Wright's "mature position" diverged from an earlier "exclusive concern with American racial politics. . . ." ¹ In so doing, *The Black Atlantic* typifies a dilemma that has beset Wright scholarship for several decades: the division of his life and work into nationalist and internationalist phases. Critics continue to ask whether the relationship between Wright's earlier and later output is characterized by fracture or continuity. ² The year of the author's death, novelist and critic J. Saunders Redding offered this evaluation:

When Richard Wright died in Paris recently his reputation stood very high with Europeans, and especially with the French, among whom he had lived for a decade. Translated into the major European languages, three of his first four books had assured him large audiences for his lectures in Italy, Holland, Germany, the Scandinavian countries and, of course, in France. . . .

Because of these same qualities he was much less admired in his native land, where he was too frequently charged with sensationalism, which in America, and only in America, is almost exclusively associated with the emotionally cheap, the tawdry, and the pornographic. ³

Beyond noting the divergences in Wright's reception at home and abroad, Redding suggests that his sojourn overseas ultimately came at the expense of his literary art—thereby articulating, perhaps for the first time, an argument that has plagued Wright criticism since. Wright's own "emotions," which supplied the "power in the books for which he will be

remembered, *Uncle Tom's Children*, *Native Son*, and *Black Boy*,” Redding notes, “were the staple food of his childhood, youth and manhood, until he moved abroad.”⁴ And so if his move to Paris “in some ways completed him as a person,” Redding remarks that “what was good for him as a social being was bad for his work. He had taken his Negroness with him, but he could not take with him the America that bred and fed his consciousness of Negroness.”⁵ This geographical and thus psychological distance drained the author’s work of its power and literary lifeblood: “In going to live abroad, Dick Wright had cut the roots that once sustained him; the tight-wound emotional core had come unravelled [sic]; the creative center had dissolved; his memory of what Negro life in America was had lost its relevance to what Negro life in America is—or is becoming.”⁶

Whereas Redding established a particular critical template for further “evaluations” of Wright’s intellectual trajectory, others sought to prove that this very “emotional core” or “creative center” had not so much come undone or dissipated as simply evolved. Writing in 1968, Addison Gayle, Jr. remarked that Wright’s work—reflecting the dynamic state of African American psychic life writ large—always operated on two levels, the naturalistic or realistic and the existential. What we glimpse in the author’s later post-exile work, Gayle implies, is not a wholesale abandonment or reversal of his earlier preoccupations, but more crucially a gradual shift toward “transcendence” over “pragmatism,” the two forces that combine to produce the “schizophrenic quality” of Wright’s work.⁷ In Gayle’s conception, then, *Native Son* is not simply an indictment of American society, but rather—*pace* Baldwin—“Bigger Thomas serves as the Christ figure, the martyr to the hopes of desperate

men everywhere, the catalytic agent by which a society can be redeemed.”⁸ By suggesting that Cross Damon, the murderous protagonist of *The Outsider*, signifies an elaboration of qualities first seen in *Bigger Thomas*—and further, that the nihilism of that later novel is presaged in “Bright and Morning Star,” a story from Wright’s debut collection *Uncle Tom’s Children*—Gayle ultimately emphasizes the unity of Wright’s work. “His vision, though often varied, remained true to the theme of his earlier writings,” Gayle notes. Wright’s post-exile work, then, does not represent a fundamental change (or loss) of vision, but more accurately a projection of his vision “on the world arena,” thereby cementing the author’s belief in and commitment to what he termed the “community of man.”⁹

Gilroy’s analysis, then, seems to synthesize the opposing positions of Redding and Gayle, Jr. by suggesting that for Wright, “The image of the Negro and the idea of ‘race’ . . . are living components of a western sensibility that extends beyond national boundaries”—in other words, that we must understand Wright’s work on its own terms rather than “the same narrow definitions of racialised cultural expression that he struggled to overturn.” In this rendering, Wright’s post-exile work retains a peculiar racial consciousness abundant in his American work yet remains distinct from the narrower, nationalist scope thereof. My aim here is to further complicate this portrait of Wright’s lifelong intellectual trajectory, positing instead that Wright’s globalist imagination is not a late-stage development but rather the predominant theme that unites his *oeuvre* with a single continuous thread. This is not to uphold any rigid distinction between Wright’s “Americanist” and “internationalist” periods,

but more crucially to propose that his racial consciousness and globalist perspective were always already mutually constituted.

I suggest, moreover, that the globalism evident in his later work was more or less present from the outset, though admittedly in different form. The idea that “the Negro is no longer just America’s metaphor but rather a central symbol in the psychological, cultural, and political systems of the West as a whole,” as Gilroy writes, might not simply reflect Wright’s “mature position,” but his immature position, too.¹⁰ Wright’s work—including his fiction, essays, journalism, poetry, letters, and unpublished pieces spanning from the beginning of his career in the mid-1930s to his deathbed writings of 1960—crystallizes his globalist imagination even as it shifts registers: from an anti-fascist political solidarity framed by Marxist internationalism to an affective kinship among formerly colonized peoples expressed through existentialist proto-postcolonialism, and finally a transcendent poetics in search of universal humanism.

MARXIST INTERNATIONALISM

In the summer of 1937, Wright began a stint reporting for the Communist Party’s official newspaper the *Daily Worker* in Harlem. Of the pieces he wrote for the paper between July and December of that year, many were dedicated to chronicling anti-fascist activity undertaken by the CP and other allied organizations.¹¹ Specifically, Wright covered African American involvement in the Loyalist cause against Franco during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) as well as boycotts and protests against the sale of Japanese goods by local shops

and retailers during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). For Wright as well as the Harlem branch of the Communist Party that he represented as a correspondent, the nationalist struggle against Jim Crow was indelibly linked to global anti-fascist movements.

Covering an interracial women's protest outside the Italian consulate in July 1937, Wright mentions the slogans chanted by picketers, including "Stop Fascist Destruction of Women and Children in Spain and Ethiopia" right alongside "Free the Scottsboro Boys."¹²—implying the simultaneity of these causes, their chants uttered in the same collective breath. Wright further suggests an almost metonymic relationship between anti-fascist work at home and abroad by interviewing a number of black Americans who had volunteered to serve in the Loyalist army in Spain, one of whom remarked that, "Here [in Spain] we have been able to strike back, in a way that hurts, at those who for years have pushed us from pillar to post. I mean this—actually strike back at the counterparts of those who have been grinding us down back home."¹³ The concentricity of these struggles—one against the American state, the other against Franco's regime—implies a substitutive logic: Since racial oppression in the United States is analogized to the Nationalist cause, "striking back" at one is also, in effect, striking back at both.

In another particularly telling piece from August of that year, Wright takes his reader inside "What Happens at a Communist Party Meeting in the Harlem Section":

Leaving the blare and glare of Lenox Avenue, you walk up one flight of stairs and enter an oblong room whose walls are covered with murals depicting the historical struggles of the Negro in America. This is the Nat Turner Branch of the Harlem Division of the Communist Party. It was so named in honor of a black slave who died struggling for freedom.

Before you have time to sit down, your eyes are drawn to a huge black placard.
“IN MEMORY OF OUR BELOVED BROTHER, ALONZO WATSON,
WHO DIED FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY IN SPAIN.”¹⁴

Here, in the layout of the meeting room as in Wright's prose, the “historical struggles of the Negro in America” become synecdoches for the global anti-fascist struggle, joined materially and permanently in the wounded body of the fallen “brother.” Later in the article, Wright narrates the progression of the meeting: “Petitions demanding of Congress and the state of Alabama the freedom of the five remaining innocent Scottsboro Boys are passed around. Comrades are urged to have them filled out as soon as possible. The meeting is going fast now; they want to get through as soon as they can in order to listen to an educational report on the situation in China.”¹⁵ Here again we find the immediate juxtaposition of nationalist and internationalist agendas, the Scottsboro trial linked to Japanese aggression in China.

After the “educational speech” by a white student on the Sino-Japanese conflict and its connection to developments in Spain and Ethiopia, Wright remarks: “These black people who meet here in Harlem are hungry more than in one sense. They love this Communist Party which is the only organization caring enough for them to give them this world-view of things,” enabling “men and women with guts and courage” to “take the world into their hands and mould it and in moulding [sic] it remake themselves.”¹⁶ In Wright's earliest professional writing, then, we glimpse how campaigns against the Scottsboro decision metonymize anti-fascist struggles in Spain, Ethiopia, Germany, and China. For Wright, this simultaneity of local matters with wartime developments on the European and Asian

continents gestures toward a greater collectivity, endowing those gathered with a heightened “world-view.”

Over a brief period of six months, Wright authored at least sixteen articles covering Harlem-based organizing against Franco’s campaign and Japan’s invasion of China, bearing titles like: “Big Harlem Rally for China Tonight,” which opens “With the rallying cry that neutrality aids invasion, thousands of Harlem workers, Negro, Chinese, and white, will gather tonight at 8 PM to protest Japan’s undeclared war against China”; or “Harlem Group Pushes Aid for China” in order “to build up solidarity between the people of Harlem and those of China”; or “Harlem Party to Protest Japan’s Action”; or “Negro Pastor Assails Tokyo Aggression” thereby “Reflecting the aroused moral conscience of the Negro church in Harlem.” Wright’s early Communist Party journalism produces a periscoping effect, signifying the dynamic relation or mutual embeddedness of nationalist and internationalist causes, finding political and moral leverage in the radical juxtaposition of distant struggles.

That same year, Wright published his “Blueprint for Negro Writing” in *New Challenge*, famously lamenting the Black literary tradition while positioning himself as its unfortunate heir. “At best, Negro writing has been something external to the lives of educated Negroes themselves,”¹⁷ he writes. Accusing previous writers of abandoning the culture of the Negro masses (“unwritten and unrecognized”) for that of an itinerant Negro bourgeoisie (“parasitic and mannered”), Wright seeks to forge a new kind of expression founded upon, but never limited to, the nationalist tendencies inherent to Black culture. Wright understood the particular richness of Black life—as exemplified especially by its

folklore and the Church—as the product of particular historical processes rather than the expression of any essentialist racial ontology. Black nationalism, in other words, is “a product of history alone, the stunted growth of oppression, taking shape in the absence of any other outlet for agency,” writes Yogita Goyal.¹⁸ For Wright, nationalism is thus a necessary but “reflexive” reaction to the forces of racial-capitalist modernity: in the American context, slavery and Jim Crow.¹⁹ “The Negro people did not ask for this [way of life], and deep down, though they express themselves through their institutions and adhere to this special way of life, they do not want it now,” Wright continues. “This special existence was forced upon them from without by lynch rope, bayonet and mob rule. They accepted these negative conditions with the inevitability of a tree which must live or perish in whatever soil it finds itself.”²⁰ Black culture is “special” but endlessly contingent, forged only in the face of oppressive historical circumstance.

And it is precisely because of this seemingly “*unwanted* Black culture”²¹ that Wright implores Negro writers to “accept the nationalist implications of their lives, not in order to encourage them, but in order to change and transcend them. They must accept the concept of nationalism because, in order to transcend it, they must *possess* and *understand* it.”²² In this sense, cultural nationalism is not simply the result of broader historical processes but is *itself* an historical process, “a key to self-possession but as such only a stage in the realization of a political interdependence.”²³ Failing to achieve this transcendence, Wright cautions, might cause Negro writers to “alienate their possible allies in the struggle for freedom.”²⁴ Although seemingly a blueprint for “Negro writing,” Wright attunes his polemic to “world

movements,” remaining ever conscious of the broader implications of this work.²⁵ “A Negro writer must learn to view the life of the Negro living in New York’s Harlem or Chicago’s South Side with the consciousness that one-sixth of the earth surface belongs to the working class,” he writes. “Perspective for Negro writers will come when they have looked and brooded so hard and long upon the harsh lot of their race and compared it with the hopes and struggles of minority peoples everywhere that the cold facts have begun to tell them something.”²⁶ Building on his evident Marxist predilections, Wright articulates a daring concept of literary engagement, arguably rendering his text not only a “Blueprint for Negro Writing” but for global minoritarian discourse.

The “Blueprint” has provoked consternation—if not outright dismissal—from several critics since its publication. Harold Cruse lambasted Wright’s “faulty, if penetrating, critique” in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (1967).²⁷ Asserting that “Communist influence and Left literary values smother and choke black cultural expression,” Cruse takes Wright to task for failing to recognize that “the cultural and artistic originality of the American nation is founded, historically, on the ingredients of a black aesthetic and artistic base.”²⁸ Cruse continues:

Poor Richard Wright! He sincerely tried, but he never got much beyond that starting point that Marxism represented for him. Less than eight years after his article was written, he signed from the Communist Party and went into exile, never to return. He could not gather into himself all the ingredients of nationalism; to create values and mould [sic] concepts by which his race was to “struggle, live and die.”

It will never be known whether or not Wright ever grasped the extent to which vulgar Marxism had rendered him incapable of seeing unique developments of capitalism. Uncharted paths existed for the Negro creative intellectuals to explore, if only they could avoid being blinded by Communist Party propaganda.²⁹

Cruse may have had good reason to express skepticism towards Wright's outsized polemical vision—insisting “the Negro writer prepare himself for this world-shaking assignment,” in Cruse's summary—but he clearly underestimated the intellectual, ideological, political, and artistic elasticity of his subject.³⁰ If anything, “Poor Richard Wright” would spend the next two-and-a-half decades venturing far beyond the “starting point” of his so-called “vulgar Marxism,” exploring several “uncharted paths” in the further elaboration of his globalist vision..

AFFECTIVE KINSHIP

In his essay on the conception and composition of *Native Son*, “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born” (1940–42),³¹ Wright begins to merge the language of Marxist internationalism and his newfound preoccupation with the shared emotional and psychic dispossession of oppressed peoples. The essay vividly elaborates the globalist rhetoric presaged in his earliest reporting and criticism, though this time without toeing the Party line. The unifying thread in Wright's own account of the novel is an emphasis on protagonist Bigger Thomas as a multiple-character: that the internal psychological, emotional, social, and political struggles of that young man in Chicago's Black Belt can be multiplied almost infinitely out into the world; that his predicament is, necessarily, far from unique.

Wright suggests that the critique and insight at the heart of *Native Son* can best be glimpsed from a “world-view” (to return to his earlier phrase) that repositions the novel's

protagonist as a global type rather than simply a national figure of racial tension.³² Wright envisions his protagonist beyond the Jim Crow South, even beyond the Chicago Black Belt, by recalling an image of Maxim Gorky and Vladimir Lenin walking through the streets of London and being struck by their shared experience of exclusion and outsidership: “In both instances [that of Lenin/Gorky and Bigger Thomas] the deep sense of exclusion was identical. The feeling of looking at things with a painful and unwarrantable nakedness was an experience, I learned, that transcended national and racial boundaries.”³³ As Yun-Hsing Wu writes, Wright’s essay actually restages the act of literary comparison itself, oscillating constantly between the local and the global. “Wright’s essay conjures a peculiar existence for Thomas—one in which he shuttles between being a specific classification and a global type,” Wu notes.³⁴ “Without Bigger—the representative of the African American experience—as a point of comparison, the Bigger Everyman could not exist.”³⁵

Here, the process by which Bigger’s plight “transcends national and racial boundaries” is not so much metonymic or substitutive as it is replicative, as if *Native Son*’s central character were designed as a template to be adapted or modified to new environments. But with these additive permutations come certain dangers. Perhaps most controversially, Wright also likens Bigger’s political consciousness to contemporaneous developments in Nazi Germany. “And on innumerable occasions I was startled to detect [in Germany] . . . reactions, moods, phrases, attitudes that reminded me strongly of Bigger, that helped to bring out more clearly the shadowy outlines of the negative that lay in the back of my mind,” Wright recalls. “I read every account of the Fascist movement in

Germany I could lay my hands on, and from page to page I encountered and recognized familiar emotional patterns.”³⁶ As Frank Mehring suggests, such an affective alliance—the cross-Atlantic identification between disenfranchised subjects in vaguely similar yet culturally distinct contexts—could yield disastrous consequences. “The highly ritualized and symbolized life which dominated the political rallies of the Nazis and which fetishized national belonging had the potential to persuade a certain group of African Americans to follow a similarly aggressive plan,” Mehring writes. “Wright’s protagonist Bigger could easily be blinded by a leader who might claim African American superiority similar to the way Hitler assured his Nazi followers that their vanity was justified due to the alleged ethnic supremacy of the Aryan race.”³⁷

Here, Wright’s profound skepticism toward cultural or ethnic nationalism—especially when founded on any concept of essential racial being—meets and then exceeds Marxist ideology, gesturing toward broader psychological and affective resonances. By embracing an avowedly Marxist framework, Wright envisions Bigger as conditioned not strictly by American race politics, but rather by global class oppression. He writes, “I made the discovery that Bigger Thomas was not black all the time; he was white, too, and there were literally millions of him, everywhere . . . I sensed, too, that the Southern scheme of oppression was but an appendage of a far vaster and in many respects more ruthless and impersonal commodity-profit machine.” He continues: “I approached all of these new revelations in the light of Bigger Thomas, his hopes, fears, and despairs; and I began to feel far-flung kinships, and sense, with fright and abashment, the possibilities of alliances between

the American Negro and other people possessing a kindred consciousness.”³⁸ With Wright’s early journalism in mind, we might say more precisely that he began to feel *again* the analogical relationships between structural racism in the United States and racial and class oppression elsewhere.

Wright’s commitment to the “possibilities of alliance” is not, by this point in his career, simply a matter of Communist Party policy (or doctrine, perhaps). Rather, it is suggestive of an active emotional engagement with questions of globality—not just in the sense of the “identical” feelings shared by Bigger Thomas’s infinite replications, but also in the sense that Wright’s globalist vision increasingly depends upon his emotional labor, as he himself begins to “feel far-flung kinships” the world over. “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born” shows in real time how Wright shifts rhetorical registers in the elaboration of his globalist perspective: rather than finding common ground strictly in the realm of political ideology, he just as crucially emphasizes the “deep sense of exclusion” and “feeling of looking at things with a painful and unwarrantable nakedness” shared by disenfranchised peoples worldwide. What joins Bigger’s “hopes, fears, and despairs” with those of the masses living under the Third Reich is not necessarily any shared political struggle, but instead a set of “reactions, moods, phrases, attitudes” and “familiar emotional patterns.” Wright’s essay thereby indexes most broadly the convergence of class struggle and affective dispossession in his rearticulation of the mutual constitution of racial and global, nationalist and internationalist alliances.

After Wright’s formal break with the Communist Party—which he announced in the 1944 *Atlantic Monthly* article “I Tried To Be a Communist,” but which had most likely

occurred several years prior—and subsequent exit from the American scene, he resumed the grappling search for commonality among “people possessing a kindred consciousness” by other means. That is, rather than seeking any political or ideological binding agent, Wright located the grounds of solidarity exclusively in the realm of affect—or, as he writes in *The Color Curtain*, in his “search for the emotional landscapes of Asia.”³⁹ Brian Russell Roberts and Keith Foulcher have recently shown how the meeting at Bandung has taken on an altogether “mythic dimension”⁴⁰ frequently at odds with “archivally verifiable history,”⁴¹ such that romanticized accounts of the event reify its position as an inaugural moment for Third World solidarity, the nonalignment movement, and Afro-Asian and postcolonial studies writ large. It not particularly difficult to glimpse how such historiographical romance might have been set in motion by Wright himself: “Here were class and racial and religious consciousness on a global scale. Who had thought of organizing such a meeting? And what had these nations in common? Nothing, it seemed to me, but what their past relationship to the Western world had made them feel.”⁴²

Rather than asserting positive linkages between dispossessed groups, Wright finds common ground in the collision of negative affect and a profound reduction of historical experience that seems to explode political affiliation altogether, writing that the meeting at Bandung “cut through the outer layers of disparate social and political and cultural facts down to the bare brute residues of human existence,” that “there was something extra-political, extra-social, almost extra-human about it; it smacked of tidal waves, of natural forces.”⁴³ If “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born” indexed the convergence of Marxist internationalism

with a burgeoning interest in emotional and psychological malaise, here the latter predominates. *The Color Curtain*—which, as Bill Mullen notes, cemented Wright's status as either the inventor or “at the very least a founding member”⁴⁴ of postcolonial studies—instead of relying upon processes of metonymy or replication, builds its globalist vision upon a profoundly reductionist gesture, “cutting” down to life's “bare brute residues,” a radical stripping-away of national, racial, and political affiliation—not periscoping, but actually telescoping the shared dispossession of the global South. In place of his earlier critique of Black cultural nationalism as an externally-produced reaction to the depredations of racial-capitalist modernity, here Wright stakes his claim for global solidarity precisely on the affective kinship glinting in the twilight of colonial domination.

In this way, Wright's postcolonialism *avant la lettre* converges with what Arna Bontemps disparagingly called in a review of *The Outsider* a “roll in the hay with the existentialism of Sartre.”⁴⁵ Though Wright's particular brand of nihilist existentialism was more indebted to Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard than either Sartre, Camus, or de Beauvoir, the writer shared with these French intellectuals a staunch anti-colonialism rooted in “a sense of commitment and human solidarity.”⁴⁶ If this putative Third World universalism foregrounds negative identification, it also shares a reductionist impulse with Wright's more philosophical fiction of the period, namely *The Outsider* and *The Long Dream*. The late novels and reportage both demonstrate an explicit disinterest in race-based identification, instead positing the shared dispossession of both modern man and the colonial subject as the ground for a renewed commitment to social and political connectedness.

Considering the later fiction and travel writings in tandem thus helps safeguard against superficial readings of both—whereby Wright’s alternating interest in either radical solitude or radical solidarity seems, at best, incongruous. But as George Cotkin notes, even *White Man, Listen!* (1957) retains a certain “underground mentality” found in Wright’s novels of the same decade—not to mention his earlier novella “The Man Who Lived Underground” (1944)—while his supposedly existentialist writings frequently critique philosophical self-determination in favor of reparative sociality.⁴⁷

Indeed, several aspects of Wright’s writings in exile have posed considerable difficulties for his interpreters. In Kwame Anthony Appiah’s diagnosis, the “defensive condescension” and “frank paranoia” of *Black Power*, for example, are symptomatic of Wright’s concurrent sympathies with the oppressed masses of the Third World and with colonialist discourses of industrialization and Western modernity.⁴⁸ This conflict between disdainful contempt for and sympathetic identification with victims of Western colonial domination in Africa and Asia is perhaps nowhere better expressed than in “Tradition and Industrialization: The Historic Meaning of the Plight of the Tragic Elite in Asia and Africa,” collected with additional essays in *White Man, Listen!*⁴⁹ “Indeed, the teeming religions gripping the minds and consciousness of Asians and Africans offend me,” Wright asserts. “I can conceive of no identification with such mystical visions of life that freeze millions in static degradation, no matter how emotionally satisfying such degradation seems to those who wallow in it.”⁵⁰ This impasse, produced by his “split”⁵¹ position as simultaneously a “product of Western civilization” and “inevitably critical of the West”⁵² as a Black man,

leads Wright to articulate an ambivalent alliance with formerly colonized peoples couched in reductionist terms: “I stand, therefore, mentally and emotionally looking in both directions, being claimed by a *negative identification* on one side, and being excluded by a feeling of repulsion on the other” [emphasis added].⁵³

It is in the same collection of essays, this time in his piece on “The Psychological Reactions of Oppressed People,” that Wright gestures toward “the remarkable and growing body of evidence of the basic emotional kinship, empirically established[,] of all men and of all races.”⁵⁴ Although the author himself expressed palpable doubt as to the viability and exigency of such perspective, conceding that “this as yet budding sense of ‘the unity of man’ is confined to a minority of minorities,”⁵⁵ Wright still maintains that “despite the fragility of this universal outlook, it indicates a political vista that needs must be mentioned here.”⁵⁶ Here is the paradox, or at least the difficulty, of Wright’s writing in exile: Though propounding explicitly scientific and militaristic programs for postcolonial self-determination (in Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s account, his belief that “colonialism was the best thing that had ever befallen the continent of Africa” for its destruction of religious primitivism and political tribalism) Wright’s elitism never precludes hope for the eventual unity of man.⁵⁷ In his final writings, he would not just imagine this “universal outlook,” but actually attempt to bring it into being.

UNIVERSAL (NON)HUMANISM

If Wright sought to document the shared affective responses among those trampled by Western imperialism throughout Africa and Asia—as first hinted in his remark that Bigger Thomas’s “hopes, fears, and despairs” might be dispersed and distributed across a “far vaster” global plane—his final works suggest a transcendence not just of political and racial affiliation, but even of the “bare brute residues of human existence,” existential reduction superseded by poetic reduction. As his health deteriorated in the last eighteen months of his life, Wright’s increasingly imminent death inspired him to compose Japanese haiku exclusively. He produced over four thousand poems, readying 817 for publication in the posthumously published collection *This Other World* (1998).⁵⁸ As Sandy Alexandre notes, Wright assumes through this body of haiku a “subjunctive mood” through which “he is empowered to divest himself of the weight of his socio-historical and racial circumstance,” producing a formal, poetic Afro-Asian futurity that “exhibit[s] an aspiration to global literature and introduce[s] possibilities for universal humanism and ecological holism.”⁵⁹ Where *The Color Curtain* sought “a universal humanism” that might “bind men together in common unity,”⁶⁰ Wright’s haiku perhaps imagines and brings into being, at least textually, the horizon of possibility for such relationality.⁶¹ As Alexandre shows, through an emphasis on the harmonic integration of human and nonhuman (“I am paying rent / For the lice in my cold room / And the moonlight too”), the elevated consciousness that comes with death’s imminence (“Leaving the doctor / The whole world looks different / This autumn morning”), a disaffiliation from oneself and accompanying suppression of subjectivity (“I am nobody: / A red sinking autumn sun / Took my name away”), and an emptying-out of

explicitly racial ideologies and themes, Wright's consolatory haiku gesture toward a future space and time whereby "the notion of belonging (and by extension citizenship) [becomes] more virtuosic and certainly more worldly than the nation-state's limited and localized definition of it," thereby "mak[ing] world citizens of its readers."⁶²

Counterintuitively, we might wonder whether this moribund corpus truly departs from the precedent set forth by Wright's earliest writing—that is, whether this glimpse of "the whole world" signals a vision altogether different from his budding "world-view." In the second section of *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* (1941), for example, Wright describes the plight of the sharecropper—the inheritor of slavery—in the land of "Queen Cotton." An atmosphere of never-ending war pervades this Southern scene, where "Lords of the Land" reign over the plantation system, pitting poor white laborers against the black underclass. "When we feel self-disgust at our bare lot, when we contemplate our lack of courage in the face of daily force," Wright reflects, "we are seized with a desire to escape our shameful identification . . . we seek to become protectively merged with the least-known and farthest removed race of men we know." Here, with a "snicker of self-deprecation," Wright inserts a short proverb:

*White folks is evil
And niggers is too
So glad I'm a Chinaman
I don't know what to do*⁶³

Wright makes no further comment, leaving the reader to consider this surprising gesture toward escapism, cross-racial identification in the quatrain's third line: Why, one wonders,

would a black sharecropper invoke the “farthest removed race of men” amidst his toil? What would it mean to be “protectively merged” with the figure of the “Chinaman”? How does Wright’s “self-deprecating” recitation belie, or perhaps buttress, its speaker’s apparent “gladness”?

That Wright’s deathbed consolations might find their curious antecedent in the sharecropper’s aphorism only further suggests how his late work returned to—or elaborated, with increasing sophistication—a set of themes, images, and strategies apparent even in his earliest books. Indeed, Michel Fabre calls the prose of *12 Million Black Voices* “deliberately poetic,”⁶⁴ while Eugene Miller posits that Wright recognized the “functional similarity between the haiku form and the lyrics of the folk blues.”⁶⁵ Traditionally a poetic form dedicated to the observation and appreciation of the natural world, animate and inanimate, these haiku also recall striking moments from Wright’s early fiction. In the opening story from *Uncle Tom’s Children*, “Big Boy Leaves Home,” the four boys swim in a nearby creek and lay out in the sun to dry off:

They grew pensive. A black winged butterfly hovered at the water’s edge. A bee droned. From somewhere came the sweet scent of honeysuckles. Dimly they could hear sparrows twittering in the woods. They rolled from side to side, letting sunshine dry their skins and warm their blood. They plucked blades of grass and chewed them.⁶⁶

In this idyllic scene, the boys’ closeness to nature, and to each other, is registered all at once by sight, scent, sound, touch, and taste. This playful innocence throws into stark relief the story’s ensuing violence, as Big Boy, Bobo, Lester, and Buck must face and then flee a fatal encounter with a white woman and her husband.

While making his escape, the titular character “slowed to a walk, looking back and ahead. A light wind skipped over the grass. A beetle lit on his cheek and he brushed it off. Behind the dark pines hung a red sun. Two bats flapped against the sun. He shivered, for he was growing cold; the sweat on his body was drying.”⁶⁷ This recycling of natural imagery—characteristic of what Fabre calls Wright’s “truly elemental imagination”—suggests not the joy of youthful abandonment, but rather the profound breach between that former peace and this current chaos.⁶⁸ Toward the story’s conclusion, Big Boy finds himself pursued by a white mob and a pack of dogs. When one of them finds his hiding place, Big Boy is forced to fight for his life:

With strength flowing from fear, he closed his fingers, pushing his full weight on the dog’s throat. The dog heaved again, and lay still . . . Big Boy heard the sound of his own breathing filling the hole, and heard shouts and footsteps above him going past.

For a long, long time he held the dog, held it long after the last footstep had died out, long after the rain had stopped.⁶⁹

Big Boy’s breath replaces, and thus seems to continue, the dog’s final “heave.” Both ultimately victims of horrid violence, their bodies remain tightly wound in a chilling image of negative identification.⁷⁰

This thematic preoccupation with humanity’s relation to the natural world—whether characterized by awe, appreciation, terror, or sympathy—recurs frequently throughout *Uncle Tom’s Children*: the epic flood of “Down by the Riverside”; the chirping crickets and floating fields of “Long Black Song”; the sloping hills and bright moonlight of “Fire and Cloud”; and the rainfall that frames the first and final scenes of “Bright and

Morning Star.” And if we could say that Wright’s late style has its antecedents anywhere in his *oeuvre*, we might also turn to the series of impressionistic catalogues appended to the author’s earliest childhood recollections in *Black Boy*:

There was the vague sense of the infinite as I looked down upon the yellow, dreaming waters of the Mississippi River from the verdant bluffs of Natchez. . . .

There was the yearning for identification loosed in me by the sight of a solitary ant carrying a burden upon a mysterious journey. . . .

There was the hint of cosmic cruelty that I felt when I saw the curved timbers of a wooden shack that had been warped in the summer sun. . . .

And there was the quiet terror that suffused my senses when vast hazes of gold washed earthward from star-heavy skies on silent nights.⁷¹

“Yearning for identification”: This phrase perhaps best captures Wright’s lifelong intellectual trajectory, itself a kind of “mysterious journey,” and indeed the various modes of inquiry deployed in its pursuit. That such an image should be conjured by the “sight of a solitary ant” should not come as much of a surprise—at least not when glimpsed from the bird’s-eye view of Wright’s career.⁷²

CONCLUSION

We might conclude by returning briefly to Wright’s earliest criticism. At the tender age of twenty-seven, Wright began what may have been his first attempt to delineate an original aesthetic program. In an unpublished essay from circa 1935 entitled “Notes on ‘Personalism,’” Wright describes the *petite bourgeoisie* as “a dream-like domain where theories sprout like mushrooms. It is a ground strewn with statues, human statues striking unusual and outlandish poses . . . It is a bog of quicksand with no bottom . . . In its diffuseness it

transcends petty national boundaries.” Here, Wright—still three years away from publishing his debut collection—stakes his claim: “It is on the basis of this restless class of non-class that I [seek] to formulate an aesthetic theory. It is a theory of extreme individualism, or better, personalism.” “Personalism,” Wright remarks in prose equally vague and grandiose, “will foster expression of protest in terms as individual and personal as possible,” he writes, concluding in a dramatic flourish: “The personalist who becomes a perfect personalist ceases to be a personalist, and becomes an artist writing for and speaking to mankind.” In perfecting “personalism,” then, the artist’s “extreme individualism” becomes self-obsolete in a transcendent, worldly gesture. Not simply a piece of juvenilia, the essay outlines in broad strokes several of the key tenets of the artistic and political program Wright would pursue over the next two-and-a-half decades, claiming the outward resonances of a singular action, the dramatic interplay between the individual and all mankind, its scope “transcend[ing] petty national boundaries.”

To be sure, there are clear distinctions to be upheld between Wright’s youthful polemic in the “Notes on ‘Personalism’” and the author’s mature work—from *Native Son* to *The Color Curtain* and *This Other World*.⁷³ But their profound resonances compel us to conceptualize Wright’s development as characterized by continuity rather than fracture. In this sense, attending to the globalist vision explicit in Wright’s work throughout his earliest essays, journalism, and fiction, as well as his later expatriate writing, is not simply an anachronistic projection of current critical preoccupations. Rather, it reveals how Wright was already concerned with the possibility of global struggle, solidarity, or kinship based

upon a shared humanity—as well as a profound ecological awareness of man's intimate connection to the natural world—well before the latter-day onset of globalization.

This attempt to recuperate his earliest and latest globalist imperatives ultimately works to counteract the consolidation of figures like Wright within Americanist canons such that the ways in which their political and literary imaginations transcended the nation-state and its racial signifiers might otherwise be obscured. “Wright’s reach . . . can be said to be much longer than that implied by the terms employed by many of his American critics. He was never merely a ‘racial novelist,’ a ‘protest writer,’ or a ‘literary rebel,’” Cedric Robinson notes in his famed study *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983). “His work . . . constituted an inquiry.”⁷⁴ As such, no single ideology, intellectual tradition, political critique, or literary form could ever fully subsume the depth and range of his work or the expansiveness of his vision.

And while recent reappraisals of Wright’s unheralded writings shine new and necessary light on his “post-exile” reportage and essays, this work does not always avoid the pitfall of suggesting (whether implicitly or explicitly) what could be salvaged in its likeness to his earlier output, before “he turned away from the American scene to the global one.”⁷⁵ Assuming the obverse perspective, I have attempted to glance backward at Wright’s career from its premature demise. Rather than positioning his later expatriate works as marking a deviation from the specifically American race consciousness of his earlier output, then, I propose that we begin to reconsider how each successive text further elaborates a globalist critique of power that was present from the outset. In that sense, tracing the increasingly

sophisticated articulation of this globalist perspective means taking seriously C. L. R. James's recollection of a visit to the author's home, where Wright showed James his volumes of Kierkegaard and remarked, "I want to tell you something. Everything that he writes in those books, I knew before I had them."⁷⁶

¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 155–61.

² This question becomes especially complex when critical efforts to emphasize one interpretation inadvertently suggest the other. In one volume, Robert Bone argues that "Wright's work is readily divided into two periods," but also that his later works demonstrate a "continuity of theme and image" through the "polar concepts" of "tradition and industrialization" that link his American and French periods, and a nihilism that "always haunted Wright's imagination." See Robert Bone, *Richard Wright* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), 13, 32, 37, 39.

³ J. Saunders Redding, "Richard Wright: An Evaluation," in Faith Berry, ed., *A Scholar's Conscience: Selected Writings of J. Saunders Redding, 1942–1977* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992), 155.

⁴ Redding, 156.

⁵ Redding, 159.

⁶ Redding, 160. See also J. Saunders Redding, "The Way It Was," *New York Times Book Review* October 26, 1958, reprinted in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah, eds., *Richard Wright: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (New York: Amistad, 1993), 36. Redding had this to say about Wright's last novel: "'The Long Dream' proves that Wright has been away too long. . . . Come back, Dick Wright, to life again!"

⁷ Addison Gayle, Jr., "Richard Wright: Beyond Nihilism," in Nathaniel Norment, Jr., ed., *The Addison Gayle Jr. Reader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 208.

⁸ Gayle, 209.

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⁹ Gayle, 211. Steven Marcus, too, made this remark about Wright's second novel: "In essence, *The Outsider* is really another *Native Son*, and Cross Damon another Bigger Thomas, no more." See Steven Marcus, "The American Negro in Search of Identity," *Commentary*, November 1, 1953, reprinted in Gates, Jr. and Appiah, eds., *Richard Wright: Critical Perspectives Past and Presents*, 36.

¹⁰ Gilroy, 159.

¹¹ On Wright's involvement with the Communist Party and its influence on his writing, see Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929–1941* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Bill V. Mullen, *Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics, 1935–46* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999). On Wright's early poetry written for official Communist Party publications, see Keneth Kinnamon, "Richard Wright: Proletarian Poet," in Yoshinobu Hakutani, ed., *Critical Essays on Richard Wright* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), 243–251; and James Edward Smethurst, *The New Red Negro: The Literary Left and African American Poetry, 1930–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹² Earle V. Bryant, ed., *Byline, Richard Wright: Articles from the DAILY WORKER and NEW MASSES* (Columbia: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 96.

¹³ Quoted in Bryant, 106.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁷ Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing," *The New Challenge* 2, no. 2 (1937): 53.

¹⁸ Yogita Goyal, *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 151.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” 57.

²¹ Anthony Dawahare, *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature Between the Wars: A New Pandora's Box* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 113.

²² Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” 58.

²³ C. W. E. Bigsby, “Richard Wright and His Blueprint for Negro Writing,” *PN Review* 7, no. 5 (1980): 54.

²⁴ Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” 59.

²⁵ Wright, 61.

²⁶ Wright, 62.

²⁷ Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (New York: New York Review Books, 2005), 182.

²⁸ Cruse, 188–89.

²⁹ Cruse, 188.

³⁰ Cruse, 185.

³¹ The essay was based on a lecture delivered on several occasions in New York City and again in Chicago and Durham throughout 1940, and subsequently published in the *Saturday Review* and *Negro Digest*, then as a pamphlet of its own, and finally as a preface to a 1942 reprint of *Native Son*.

³² On Wright's revision of the *Native Son* manuscript and the novel's status as world literature, see Nicholas T Rinehart, “Native Sons; or, How ‘Bigger’ Was Born Again,” *Journal of American Studies* 52, no. 1 (2018), 164–192.

³³ Richard Wright, *Early Works* (New York: Library of America, 1991), 863.

³⁴ Yung-Hsing Wu, “Native Sons and Native Speakers: On the Eth(n)ics of Comparison,” *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (2006), 1465.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1467.

³⁶ Wright, *Early Works*, 864.

³⁷ Frank Mehring, “‘Bigger in Nazi Germany’: Transcultural Confrontations of Richard Wright and Hans Jurgen Massaquoi,” *The Black Scholar* 39, no. 1/2 (2009), 65–66.

³⁸ Wright, *Early Works*, 860–1.

³⁹ Richard Wright, *Black Power: Three Books from Exile* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 453.

⁴⁰ Brian Russell Roberts and Keith Foulcher, eds., *Indonesian Notebook: A Sourcebook on Richard Wright and the Bandung Conference* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 2

⁴¹ Roberts and Foulcher, 4.

⁴² Wright, *Black Power*, 438.

⁴³ Wright, *Black Power*, 439.

⁴⁴ Bill V. Mullen, “Discovering Postcolonialism,” *American Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2002), 701.

⁴⁵ Arna Bontemps, “Three Portraits of the Negro,” *The Saturday Review*, March 28, 1953, reprinted in Robert J. Butler, ed., *The Critical Response to Richard Wright* (Westport: Greenwood, 1995), 106.

⁴⁶ George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 166. See also Michel Fabre, “Richard Wright and the French Existentialists,” *MELUS* 5, no. 2 (1978): 39–51.

⁴⁷ Critics continue to debate whether *The Outsider*, especially, should be understood as an existentialist *roman à thèse* or as a full-throated critique of existentialism’s limitations. See Amritjit Singh, “Richard Wright’s *The Outsider*: Existential Exemplar or Critique?,” *CLA Journal* 27, no. 4 (1984): 357–70; and Jeffrey Atteberry, “Entering the Politics of the Outside: Richard Wright’s Critique of Marxism and Existentialism,” *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 51, no. 4 (2005): 873–895. For a critique of Wright’s existentialist universalism, and particularly its consequences for women in the late novels, see Stephanie Li, *Playing in the White: Black Writers, White Subjects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 61–93. For an analysis of Wright’s depiction of Paris as a colorblind utopia in the late fiction, including his final unfinished novel *Island of Hallucination*, see Laila Amine, “The Paris Paradox: Colorblindness and Colonialism in African American Expatriate Fiction,” *American Literature* 87, no. 4 (2015), 739–768. For a reevaluation of race and *The Outsider*, see Tommie Shelby’s essay in this volume.

⁴⁸ Kwame Anthony Appiah, “A Long Way from Home: Richard Wright on the Gold Coast,” in Arnold Rampersad, ed., *Richard Wright: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 199.

⁴⁹ On this essay and Wright’s seeming endorsement of totalitarianism, see Vaughn Rasberry, *Race and the Totalitarian Century: Geopolitics in the Black Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 305–54.

⁵⁰ Richard Wright, *Black Power*, 706.

⁵¹ Wright, *Black Power*, 704.

⁵² Wright, *Black Power*, 705.

⁵³ Wright, *Black Power*, 707.

⁵⁴ Wright, *Black Power*, 679.

⁵⁵ Wright, *Black Power*, *Ibid.*, p. 680.

⁵⁶ Wright, *Black Power*, 680. . Here we might glimpse what Alexa Weik considers Wright’s “cosmopolitanism in process,” a striving toward the ideal of human solidarity in the face of its necessary failure. See Alexa Weik, “‘The Uses and Hazards of Expatriation’: Richard Wright’s Cosmopolitanism in Process,” *African American Review* 41, no. 3 (2007): 459–475.

⁵⁷ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Third World of Theory: Enlightenment’s Esau,” *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 5 (2008), 195. Bone similarly writes that “No writer of the present century has celebrated the values of the Enlightenment on such a global scale.” See Bone, *Richard Wright*, 37.

⁵⁸ Little scholarly attention has been paid to these last works of Wright’s life, with the exception of Yoshinobu Hakutani, *Richard Wright and Haiku* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2014); Jianqing Zheng, ed., *The Other World of Richard Wright: Perspectives on His Haiku* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2011); Eugene E. Miller, *Voice of a Native Son: The Poetics of Richard Wright* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1990); and Michel Fabre, *The World of Richard Wright* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1985).

⁵⁹ Sandy Alexandre, “Culmination in Miniature: Late Style and the Essence of Richard Wright’s Haiku,” in Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow, eds., *Richard Wright in a Post-Racial Imaginary* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 246–7. For the influence of Wilhelm Reich’s “orgone” theory—a cosmic life energy uniting all matter of the universe—on Wright’s burgeoning universalism, see Miller, *Voice of a Native Son*, xx–xx; and Stephan Kuhl’s essay in this volume.

⁶⁰ Wright, *Black Power*, 448.

⁶¹ Joshua Bennett argues to the contrary that the presence of particular “pests” in Wright’s haiku suggests a “generative *disunity*,” whereby “various kinds of conflict and fissure . . . emerge from sharing space with unexpected visitors that have no intention of leaving.” See Joshua Bennett, “Being Property Once Myself: In Pursuit of the Animal in 20th-Century African American Literature” (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2016), 55.

⁶² Alexandre, “Culmination in Miniature,” 249.

⁶³ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Viking Press, 1941), 47.

⁶⁴ Michel Fabre, “The Poetry of Richard Wright,” in Yoshinobu Hakutani, ed., *Critical Essays on Richard Wright*, 252

⁶⁵ Eugene E. Miller, *Voice of a Native Son*, 239.

⁶⁶ Richard Wright, *Uncle Tom’s Children* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 28–9.

⁶⁷ Wright, *Uncle Tom’s Children*, 46.

⁶⁸ Fabre, “The Poetry of Richard Wright,” 257.

⁶⁹ Wright, *Uncle Tom’s Children*, 59.

⁷⁰ Bennett similarly considers how the opening scene of *Native Son* renders Bigger Thomas “not as the savage destroyer of animal life, but as the very animal life in question, as the pest which the exterminating forces in the book seek to uncover and destroy.” The rat in that novel thus signifies a model of improvisatory persistence and fugitive living amidst the environmental conditions of antiblackness. See Joshua Bennett, “Being Property Once Myself,” 35–6.

⁷¹ Wright, *Early Works*, 9–10. See also Eugene Miller, *Voice of a Native Son*, 248.

⁷² Robert Tener similarly notes that, “The evidence of Wright’s identification with nature and his use of its motifs stretches from ‘Big Boy leaves Home,’ with its rural events around the swimming hole, to *Black Boy* and culminates in the haiku.” See Robert Tener, “The Where, the When, the What: A Study of Richard Wright’s Haiku,” in Hakutani, ed., *Critical Essays on Richard Wright*, 275

⁷³ Wright’s “Notes on ‘Personalism’” has received scant critical attention. For a brief summary of the essay, see Jerry Ward and Robert Butler, eds., *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008), 301–2. For brief mentions of “personalism,” see Miller, *Voice of a Native Son*, xv–xix; Michel Fabre, *The World of Richard Wright*, 14; and Gilroy, who identifies Wright’s “aesthetics of personalism” in Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative* and other writings of ex-slaves, *The Black Atlantic*, 69.

⁷⁴ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 290.

⁷⁵ Goyal, *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature*, 153.

⁷⁶ C. L. R. James, “Black Studies and the Contemporary Student,” in Anna Grimshaw, ed., *The C.L.R. James Reader* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992), 399.