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UNEVEN GROUND:

FIGURATIONS OF THE RURAL MODERN IN THE U.S. SOUTH, 1890-1945

A Dissertation
Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
For the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
In the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

BENJAMIN S. CHILD

MAY 2014

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ABSTRACT

New modernist studies has opened wide the discussion about what modernism means, when it begins, and, compellingly for the purposes of this project, where it occurs. Exploring intersections between modernization, modernism, labor, and segregation in the agricultural South, this dissertation demonstrates how the effects of nascent industrialization, emergent technologies, and "modern" thought are animated by figures and spaces associated with—or performing—versions of rurality. The project is divided into three major sections. In the first, I suggest that the contradictions of African American life in the post-Reconstruction world are parsed in the period's literature through the presence of a veiled georgic mode, a tendency I explore in the writing of W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Frances F. W. Harper. In the second section, I propose two categories of agrarians: "leisure agrarians" such as the Twelve Southerners and Helen and Scott Nearing, figures who stage their protests of industrialized capitalism in writing from positions of relative privilege, and "labor agrarians," who come from an agricultural underclass of sharecroppers and tenant farmers. These latter form a more diverse group—including women, people of color, and children—and their protests of the capitalist status quo take the form of uniquely embodied discourse. In the final section, I propose a category called "migratory modernism," and use it to theorize narratives of movement and migration in the early twentieth century. Throughout this section, I read work by Charlie Poole, Zora Neale Hurston, Rudolph Fisher, William

Faulkner, and Ellen Glasgow in order to evaluate the migrant's role as a useful metaphor for the modernist condition of the self-divided-against-the-self.

DEDICATION

For Katie

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the outset, I express endless appreciation and respect to my director Jay Watson, whose thoroughness and generosity, friendship and staggering intelligence have done so much to build this project. I'm sure I'll spend the rest of my career trying to measure up to Jay's models of professional and personal conduct. The same sort of sentiment is due to the other members of my committee: Leigh Anne Duck, who taught me new paradigms for evaluating both modernism and southern literature; Adam Gussow, who always refined my thinking with his peerless line-editing; and Deborah Barker, for the timely reminder to never bury the lede. Thanks also to Ted Ownby, whose knowledge of the New South and its contexts continually thickened the arguments here. I'm also grateful to Ivo Kamps and the College of Liberal Arts for the yearlong dissertation fellowship, which provided essential support at just the right time, and to the Graduate Student Council, for the research grant. Likewise for the efforts of the Graduate Studies Committee, particularly Peter Reed, Caroline Wigginton, and Lindy Brady.

Additionally, I need to thank George Handley for insights into ecocriticism (and much else), and for talking me off the ledge one afternoon. I'm also indebted to Linck Johnson, Lynn Staley, Michael Coyle, and Debra Rae Cohen for constructive responses to my work. I'd also like to thank the participants and organizers of conferences at which early versions of this material were presented: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha 2011, Society for the Study of Southern Literature 2012, Association for the Study of Literature and the

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My biggest debts are to family: much love and thanks to my parents and in-laws—as well as my siblings and siblings-in-law—for their continued love, support, and confidence. And to Hank, Louis, and Billie—for coming along and making so many things better, and for giving me opportunities to mull over the project at 3 AM. Most of all, love and gratitude to Katie for her patience, smarts, never-ending support, and willingness to serve as editor. She's a better best friend and co-conspirator than I've ever deserved. This, and all other work, is dedicated to her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT
…… ii

DEDICATION
…… iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
……. v

INTRODUCTION: "LIMNING THE LAND"
……. 1

CHAPTER ONE: "STRANGE VICISSITUDES: DIRT, PROGRESS, AND THE MODERN BLACK GEORGIC"
…… 49

CHAPTER TWO: "AGRARIANS AND OTHER AGRARIANS: LAND, LABOR, AND RURAL INSURGENCY"
……..121

CHAPTER THREE: "SOMEBODY ELSE'S LAND: MIGRATORY MODERNISM, NEW YORK CITY, AND THE PORTABLE SOUTH"
……..209

BIBLIOGRAPHY
………..……290

VITA
……..308

INTRODUCTION:

LIMNING THE LAND

> Rustic is not what it used to be.
>
> - Promotional materials for Emily Henson's 2013 design book *Modern Rustic*

> We are trying to pull ourselves into the twenty first century. I don't think the rest of the world understands there is a piece of the world here that is really challenged.
>
> - Sharon Jones in 2013, on the absence of technological connectivity in Coffeeville, Alabama

Emily Henson is a designer and stylist living in London and Los Angeles. She is, according to her website, responsible for the look of several Anthropologie stores, the upscale retailer anchoring shopping centers throughout the urban United States. With its spirit of calculated whimsy and eclecticism, Henson's work is typical of an interior design style called "modern rustic," a phrase adopted as the title of her book and fleshed out in a series of full-color photographic reproductions of interior domestic spaces. According to its promotional copy, "At its heart, the modern rustic look celebrates the fabric of a home," and the nod to fabrics, their surfaces and textures, feels accurate since the images are obsessed with evoking an atmospherics of oldness via the tactile: rooms are crowded with mid-century Danish Modern furniture propping up other aged ephemera, set-piece objects touched with a patina.

Sharon Jones is the co-owner of a small, privately run logging company in Coffeeville, Alabama. She came to the attention of the *New York Times* because of the frustrations she faces as a small-business owner whose only option for Internet connectivity is dial-up. Her cellphone reception is poor, and her house is so hemmed in by trees that a satellite dish isn't an option either. In a brief profile, Jones describes the restraints that technological isolation creates in her area: for her, as a businessperson who struggles to establish and maintain opportunities outside of her immediate area; for young people, many of whom can only access a computer through the single machine at the high school. Justin Bell, a 17-year-old student at Coffeeville High, puts it succinctly: "I'm missing a whole lot. I know that."[1]

My purpose in contrasting these figures isn't to raise fraught discussions about rural authenticity or about who has the *right* to claim rusticity. I'm more interested in who *does* claim rusticity—or at least the sign "rusticity"—and why. For Jones and Bell of Coffeeville, who face a true dilemma of (post)modern rusticity, it's extremely unlikely that the circumstances of their lives add up to anything like the Henson's "modern rustic." In short, their rusticity has next to nothing to do with hers. While it's true that these are obviously not parallel figures or parallel experiences, I think that their more perpendicular relationship is indicative of the diverse ways that we think, experience, and represent both the rural and the modern, and that it puts the material and the sociological into

[1] See Henson's book, *Modern Rustic* (London: Ryland, Peters, and Small, 2013), as well as her blog: http://www.lifeunstyledblog.com/. To read more about Jones and her community, see Kim Severson, "Digital Age Is Slow to Arrive in Rural America," *New York Times,* Feb 18 2011, A1.

conversation with the aesthetic in a way that will be essential to my thinking about cultural expression from the modernist period.[2]

So while in the early twenty first century, the combination of "rustic" and "modern" is likely to call up images of interior design and lifestyle brands, questions about exactly how the rustic and the modern intersect, as material realities and as matters of representation, remain largely unanswered. For example, where earlier generations of U.S. citizens in the countryside faced challenges procuring health care, so do today's; where connectivity via electrification and roadways were an impediment, so too with twenty-first-century equivalents of Internet and cellphone service; where formulations of rural identity signaled a distinct out-of-placeness in the early part of the twentieth century, they can easily mean the same today. That variously staged efforts to address versions of the "rural" remain a part of our contemporary moment is clear enough. Less obvious, perhaps, are the precise means through which these concepts of the modern and the rural reinforce, challenge, and even create one another. These dialogic relationships form the major impetus of this project.

By highlighting ways in which the city and the country—the North and the South of both the imagination and the "real world"—depend upon one another, particularly in the period of rapid transformation that followed Reconstruction, I hope to work out a more nuanced portrait of modernization's effects on the rural by using the U.S. South as a test case. In particular, I examine the existence and meanings of the modern as experienced and represented in figurations of the rural modern, a move that calls attention to the varied,

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[2] The chronological frame of my work matches what Mao and Walkowitz identify as literary modernism's "core period of about 1890 to 1945" (738).

and often innovative, representational grammars used to describe these spaces and their inhabitants.

More precisely, my readings of literature and cultural expression from the period spanning the late nineteenth century through the mid twentieth use examinations of the rural to refine our expanding sense of how, when, and—perhaps most compellingly—where the modern occurs. Rather than just a stagnant space mired in tradition, the U.S. South also appears as a site of unexpected fluidity, diffusion, and political unrest, and I highlight ways in which depictions of the rural intersect, as well as revise, standard notions of what constitutes both modernity and modernism.

For instance, the remarkable portability of the agricultural South's systems of labor and cultural capital calls attention to its participation in modern networks of both national and transnational exchange. And the texts I examine demonstrate how rural subjects respond to transformative technologies such as the railways and mechanized farming equipment, the camera, the radio, and the gramophone; these responses convey diverse and individuated desires for escape or entrenchment, often in the same conflicted voice. The result is multivalent performances of rurality that are, in their way, as thoroughly modern as those of more widely canonized urban figures. My goal is to trace out the winding path of a branch of modernism that registers the experience of subjects who fall outside of what is widely considered modernism's cosmopolitan purview.[3] It's worth

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[3] See Rebecca L. Walkowitz's *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) for a study that uses the experience and aesthetics of the urban to synthesize current conversations about modernism and transnationalism. Her argument, however necessary and well crafted, makes no room for the rural. Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999)

noting that my aim here is not to permanently bracket expressions of the rural modern as "rural modernism," a category always distinguishable from modernism writ large, but to correct a tendency to read images of the urban and metropolitan as definitive expressions of the modern.

In this regard, my project also represents an attempt to avoid any unnecessary smoothing of the modern's edges, by acknowledging its breadth and the unanticipated turns of its potential meanings. My visions of the modern work to assess Perry Anderson's contention that modernity is "neither economic process nor cultural vision but the *historical experience* mediating one to the other" (318). Focusing on rural spaces and figures, I argue that both "economic process" and "cultural vision" are essential to the kinds of "*historical experience*" that Anderson posits, and that these experiences and the multiplicities of meanings they produce are obviously not restricted to urban areas. In fact, the force of their mediating contrast may be more readily apparent in relatively underdeveloped rural spaces. So while critics such as Dilip Gaonkar and Andreas Huyssens discover alliances between the New Modernist Studies and postcolonial theory by uncovering forms of "alternative modernities" and modernisms along the margins of

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studies several of the major movers in canonical modernism—Eliot, Pound, Marinetti, H.D., and Joyce—and asserts that the movement, as they conceived it, was a deliberate withdrawal from public culture. And these withdrawals were always staged in urban settings. See also Desmond Harding's *Writing the City: Urban Visions and Literary Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), which, as the title indicates, makes the city the locus of the literary modern.

colonized and formerly colonized space, I look for them along the margins of the nation of the United States.[4]

In a similar vein, David Harvey parses the transformative, global effects of World War I in a manner that also applies to the rural peripheries of the long twentieth century: "the world's spaces were deterritorialized, stripped of their preceding significations, and then reterritorialized according to the convenience of colonial and imperial administration." Harvey's teleology of modernization presumes the existence of an originary culture undone by the global marketplace, one whose reconfiguration will show how "capitalism became embroiled in an incredible phase of massive long-term investments in the conquest of space" (264). These conquered spaces, I contend, include the rural regions of the postbellum South. The notion of a unified and "traditional"

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[4] See *Alternative Modernities,* ed. Dilip Gaonkar (Durham: Duke UP, 2001). For more recent work in this vein, see also *Geographies of Modernism,* ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (New York: Routledge, 2005); *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity,* ed. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel (Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 2005). For more on modernisms of the postcolonial margins, see *Modernism and Its Margins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain to Latin America,* ed. Anthony Geist and José B. Monléon (New York: Routledge, 1999) which provides explications of the diffuse meanings of modernism's Spanish-speaking iterations. In *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reads José Martí's "ruralist left-humanism" as a means of opening up "an internationalism that can . . . shelter planetarity" (92)—her alternative to designations such as "post-colonial" and "global." Although Chana Kronfeld's *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996) focuses exclusively on Hebrew and Yiddish writers, her call for a decentered evaluation of literary modernism provides a useful model for my focus on literatures of the rural margins.

southern culture irrevocably warped by Civil War and by the onset of industrial modernization is a trope that runs throughout literary productions of the South, from the full variety of plantation romances—Thomas Nelson Page's *Red Rock* (1899), on one end, and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1938), on the other—to the writings of the Nashville Agrarians. It's a powerful idea, and one that has contributed to the full force of southern conservatism and Lost Causism. While this particular version of the South is mostly fantasy, processes of industrial modernization have had transformational effects on the environmental profile of the region, on its social and political composition, and on its varied modes of cultural expression. In other words, you don't need to believe in the Lost Cause to recognize that modernization has changed the rural South. Those changes provide the animating impulses for this project's figurations of the rural modern. Although critics such as Jolene Hubbs, Leigh Anne Duck, and Maria Farland have all recently investigated models of the modern that acknowledge its engagement with the rural people and spaces of the U.S., there are no book-length studies that theorize the rural modern as such, and many of the category's basic assumptions and conclusions remain uninterrogated.[5]

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[5] See Jolene Hubbs, "William Faulkner's Rural Modernism," *Mississippi Quarterly,* (61.3) 2008: 461-75; Leigh Anne Duck, "Peripatetic Modernism, or, Joe Christmas' Father," *Philological Quarterly* 90.2-3 (2011): 255-80; Maria Farland, "Modernist Versions of Pastoral: Poetic Inspiration, Scientific Expertise, and the 'Degenerate' Farmer," *American Literary History* 19.4 (2007): 905-936. Florence Dore's contribution to *A Concise Companion to American Fiction, 1900-1950* (New York: Blackwell, 2005) is titled "The Modernism of Southern Literature," yet there is little about her analysis that engages the rural qua rural. Although he focuses on a different region, Mark Buechsel's *Sacred Land: Sherwood Anderson, Midwestern Modernism, and the Sacramental Vision of Nature* (Kent: Kent State UP, 2014) comes closer to my approach, with its attention to the aesthetic and

In calibrating expressions of rurality, I follow Rosi Braidotti's resourceful construction of a "*figuration*." While her use of the concept as "a style of thought that evokes or expresses ways out of the phallocentric vision of the subject" is well suited to her interest in new forms of feminism, I hew closer to her broader definition of "figuration" as "a politically informed account of an alternative subjectivity" (1). When critics privilege the urban and the industrial as the purest forms of the modern, rurality arrives as a kind of "alternative subjectivity," one with its own constellation of political concerns and responses. I also like the concept of a "figure" for the suggestive possibilities it creates in determining what can act as a figuration of the rural modern—a person with rustic associations, of course, but also thoughts, performances, and actions, objects and landscapes. This model allows for the creation of fresh interpretive categories, generating new and complex meanings in cultural zones that are often regarded as simple, static, and shallow.

While I don't plan to permanently dislodge the privileged position of the urban in studies of modernism, I do hope to call attention to the blind spots that accompany its scholarly treatment. In this way, my project thinks about the role that tensions between cultural core and periphery play in processes of literary periodization. And since I aim to elaborate and expand upon current models, my analysis requires a definition of terms. For instance, the "rural." Raymond Williams acknowledges that popular images of the country

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cultural sensibilities of a largely agricultural society in the modern period. Anne Fay Hirsch Moffitt's dissertation "Reviving the Rural: The Modernist Poetics of the 20th Century Rural Novel" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton U, 2012) includes penetrating readings of novels with a rural emphasis. Like Hubbs, her primary example of a U.S. writer synthesizing modernism and the rural is Faulkner.

signify "old ways, human ways, natural ways," while the city stands for "progress, modernisation, development." But he is likewise interested in how "we use the contrast of country and city to ratify an unresolved division and conflict of impulses" (297)—a conflict that is present at both sites, and across the geography of development more generally. Inasmuch as these images help manage a "division and conflict," they do the important cultural work of helping people code spaces with stable meanings in a world marked by disorienting fluidity. Yet an emphasis on "contrast" rather than points of contact can perpetuate a false sense of how and why these forms signify in the ways that they do, contributing to binary formations of modern/anti-modern that make it all too easy to ascribe signs of modernity to the metropolitan alone. It's a binary resting on an unsteady foundation, however. As Barbara Ching and Gerald Creed's theory of relative spatialization suggests, rurality is always a flexible condition: one person's backwater can be another person's metropolis, depending on that person's index of experiences and expectations. Or, in their own words, "almost any inhabited place can be experienced as either urban or rural" (13), a statement suggesting that categories of the urban and the rural are more contingent than is often recognized. I'm less concerned with demarcating rural spaces from urban ones, however, than I am in considering how people think about, experience, and represent their lived environments, how the fuzzy lines separating the country from the city are tied to capitalist development and the concentration of power that attends to the modern state, and how the arrivals of technological and industrial development affect the experience of the rural.

In addition to assessing the aesthetic qualities of rural modern texts, I also seek to engage the current dialogue about the hinge connecting the United States' most rapid

period of industrialization and modernization with the rise of modernism.[6] This is neither entirely uncharted nor uncontroversial territory. Patricia Chu, for instance, opposes the tendency to label "'modernist' any work written within a particular span of years," insisting that, above all else, "[m]odernism was an aesthetic commitment" (16). Chu's point about formal intentionality is nicely argued, but it's also worth noting that aesthetics is never cleanly divisible from history, from politics, from economics. What if the qualities that critics are quick to assess as strategies of "aesthetic commitment" are just the best, most immediate means by which a person can communicate her modern reality? If psychic fragmentation, for instance, is a basic fact of modernity, then won't it inevitably become a

[6] The scholarship attending to connections between modernization-via-industrialization-and-technology and modernism is deep and stimulating. See, for instance, Katherine Biers, *Virtual Modernism: Writing and Technology in the Progressive Era* (Minneapolis: Univeristy of Minnesota P, 2013); Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002); Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1998); Mark Selzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Martha Banta, *Taylored Lives: Narrative Productions in the Age of Talyor, Veblen, and Ford* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995); Cecelia Tichi's *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist American* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1987). Although he edges into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Alex Goody's *Technology, Literature, and Culture* (Malden, MA: Polity P, 2011) also offers a perceptive analysis of modern technology's transformative encounters with literature in the period covered in my project. For interdisciplinary histories of mechanization's effects on cultures of modernity in the United States, see Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); T. Jackson Lears, *No Place for Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981); Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966).

feature of art in the modern period? In other words, what do we do when something looks like a modernism but lacks a manifesto? Chu's well-reasoned critique of "common approaches" to delineating modernisms prompts a series of pressing questions: Can an artifact or a performance be unintentionally modernist? If modernism is the incorrect label for "the ways in which an author's work aesthetically resembles the work of authors whose place in the modernist canon is unchallenged" (17), where should we look for a better one? My work here may not definitively answer these questions, but I will try to present readings that evaluate the deep and tangled associations between processes of modernization and practices of modernism, and that contribute to the "rethinking of relations among the key terms *modernism*, *modernization*, and *modernity*" that Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz recognize as an important concern of the New Modernist Studies (738).

While the figurations of the rural modern I analyze might occasionally overlap with the work and thought of the modernist canon, they will also acknowledge that the rural modern maps a distinct range of responses to the onset of development. Again, a quick survey of the literature suggests a narrative about modernism as a series of manifestos by those self-consciously creating and performing the modern. But it is also a reflex enacted by those grappling with the onset of emergent conditions such as industrialism, market capitalism, modern secular thought (e.g. Darwinism, Marxism), mechanization, abstraction, standardization. Put bluntly, the modern is not always something you choose to embrace—sometimes you are interpellated by it—yet artistic and intellectual reactions to the emergence of modernity and industrial development constitute a form of modernism, even when that reaction may be a retreat to the provincial or to an imagined past.

In its attention to modernity's diffusions between and across spaces, this study must also account for the influence of technology in creating a modern culture. One of modernization's clear goals was to create more standardized national economies and infrastructures, a goal that was aided by innovations such as the newswire, the radio, telephones and telegraphs, trains and automobiles. When Ulysses S. Grant published the second installment of his memoirs in 1886, he reflected on the Civil War itself as a great modernizer, one that shifted its participants' horizons beyond the local through advances in cartography and transportation, and exposed them to an enlarged national landscape. For Grant, the war and its conclusions prepared the United States for the industrial age by unleashing a "spirit of independence and enterprise" and encouraging a "commingling of the people" that pushed the country towards "the eve of a new era" (639), one in which regional differences would encourage rather than impede economic and industrial development. Grant's optimism is unburdened by specifics but it does tap into late-century discourses about unity and progress that forward standardization as an inevitable outcome of modernization.[7] These are discourses that must necessarily include discussions of labor

[7] Standardization as an outcome of modernization is perhaps most influentially theorized by Max Weber, whose thinking about "bureaucracy" suggest that modernity creates uniform modes of behavior and communication that are both essential to the successful navigation of the modern world and debilitating to personal freedoms. For a succinct explanation of Weber's position, see Richard Swedberg, *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford UP, 2005), 18-21. The concept is originally introduced by Weber in *Economy and Society* (1922). Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer adapt Weber's notion of "rationalization" and its tendency to create bureaucracy in order to mount a critique of the Enlightenment's contributions to totalitarianism in the twentieth century. See *Dialect of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmidt

practices as well: take, for instance, the Fordist ethos of the assembly line, with its emphasis on specialization towards the goal of creating replaceable parts for every machine and a uniform set of practices for assembling it. The centripetal forces of modernization, then, begin at the nation and scale down to the consumer good.

This urge to create a more solid center, of course, also contributes to a more pronounced articulation of the margins. And in the late nineteenth century, when the frontier was officially deemed closed and the agricultural economy began a precipitous decline, the national margin looks more and more like the rural countryside. This wasn't always the case. While Jefferson's belief that the republic is best served by independent, farming landowners continues to hold sway in certain corners of the popular imagination, in the early decades of the nineteenth century it was an article of faith. Pedaling back to the late eighteenth century, Crevecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1778) configures rustic spaces on the American continent as a hotbed of modernity.[8] And not just because the influence of the church ("ecclesiastical dominion") and the throne was attenuated there: America was modern because it lacked the very signs so typically identified as modern—"no great manufactures employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury"

Noerr and trans. Edmund Jephcott (Redwood City, CA: Stanford UP, 2002), in particular the chapters "Excursis II: Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality" and "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," 63-136. For imaginative literature's response to an increasingly standardized world, see Banta, pp. 176-78.

[8] The concept of "modernity" is clearly a slippery one, with each period claiming its own iteration. It would obviously be inaccurate—and anachronistic—to conflate the attributes of twentieth-century modernity with the word's connotations in the eighteenth century. What interests me about Crevecoeur's account is its ability to provide a brief sketch of the concept's genealogy, particularly as it relates to rurality and the agricultural countryside.

(67). The proto-factories of Europe are, in Farmer James' view, already enervated, no longer on the vanguard and no longer classifiable as modern. "If you recede still farther from the sea," Farmer John records, "you will come into more modern settlements" (72): the inland farming frontier, in this text at least, stands as the location of modern culture.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, however, things had changed. H. L. Mencken's famous 1917 denunciation of the rural South as "the Sahara of the Bozarts" is just the most obvious expression of a widely held attitude that coded the rural—and the rural South in particular—an anti-urban, unsophisticated bastion of backwardness. While the agricultural South was constantly negotiating modernity vis-à-vis material and economic development, modernism as a matter of cultural communication and capital took on a persistently urban flavor.[9] Never mind the fact that many of its chief purveyors in the

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[9] The modernization of the regional economy is covered in C. Vann Woodward's classic study, *The Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1971). See also Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1971). The modernization of the rural South in particular is covered in Pete Daniel's, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures Since 1880* (Champaign: U of Illinois P, 1986), Jack Temple Kirby's *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1986), and Clyde Woods's innovative reading of the blues as a response to agricultural, economic, and social pressures of the Mississippi Delta in the early twentieth century, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso, 2000). Since the state of Georgia plays an important role in my readings of Du Bois, it's also worth mentioning Chad Morgan's *Planters' Progress: Modernizing Confederate Georgia* (Gainesville: U of Florida P, 2005). Tammy Ingram's *Dixie Highway: Road Building and the Making of the Modern South, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2014) provides a picture of the essential role that roadways played in the creation of the New

United States bore deep traces of the provincial: Ezra Pound, for instance, hailed from Hailey, Idaho and Zora Neale Hurston from Eatonville, Florida; Frost's New England was carefully and deliberately posed in contrast to the urban North, as was Faulkner's South. While it would be overly ambitious to theorize a definitive modernist spatiality, one feature that recurs in discourses of modernism is the dividing line between the country and the city. To reckon with the pattern, I propose a more locally conceived iteration of the divisions between core and periphery that are central to Immanuel Wallerstein's "modern-world systems." In Wallerstein's expansive model, developing countries act as peripheries to developed countries' core, with economic advantages continually flowing back to the

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South. For a brief, effective overview of the nexus of industrialization and labor in the post-Reconstruction South, see Daniel Letwin, "Labor Relations in the Industrializing South," *A Companion to the American South,* ed. John Boles (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 424-43. The urbanization of the South is the subject of James Cobb's *Industrialization and the Southern Society, 1877-1984* (Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 2004), as well as David Goldfield's *Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1997) and *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1982). For more on patterns of intellectual modernization in the South, see Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007); Daniel Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the U.S. South, 1919-1945* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1982), and Fred Hobson, *Tell About the South: The Southern Rage to Explain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1996). A comprehensive view of southern modernization through the prism of segregation is provided by Hale. For an alternate view of cultural modernization in the region, see Richard King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955* (New York: Oxford UP, 1982). Dewey Grantham's *South in Modern America: A Region at Odds* (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 2001) covers the totality of modernization in the South, with a special focus on electoral politics.

centralized powers.[10] I argue that a similar dynamic is at work within the borders of the United States, as urban spaces broadly serve as the core and the rural provinces become the periphery. In other words, the dividing line between the country and the city in the twentieth century does correlate to a hard reality—the rural South's position as a zone of underdevelopment serves as evidence, and as the "uneven ground" of this project's title. And yet that unevenness extends to the permeable border itself: while it's fair to say that the economic power and cultural capital are largely accumulated in the city, it is pocketed with spaces of underdevelopment and poverty, just as the impoverished countryside features sectors of vast wealth. Although this dividing line is grounded in the material, it is also, to invoke an infamously complex concept, cultural—the site of continual negotiations, exchanges, and performances of ideas, objects, and images.[11]

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[10] The core-periphery relationship is essential to Wallerstein's models of globalized economic dependency and common feature in his prodigious output. For a succinct overview, see Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004), 11-12 and 28-29. He introduced the idea in *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1974), 82-129.

[11] It may be superfluous at this point to call up Raymond Williams' famous contention that "culture" is "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language," but Williams' analysis of the word's lineage, from a "noun of process: the tending of something, basically crops or animals" to a sign that points out the "relations between general human development and a particular way of life," in particular the "works and practices of art and intelligence," seems relevant to this discussion of agricultural labor and its connections to aesthetics and the politics of representation (87, 91). *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, *Revised Edition* (New York: Oxford UP, 1983).

And while artists and writers may have helped to sketch out this line, other engineers of the culture industry—publishers and editors, critics and scholars—have carefully guarded it. In addition to Mencken, another example here is Harold Ross, who founded *The New Yorker* in 1925 with the avowed goal of keeping his publication's interests distant from the concerns of the "old lady in Dubuque," to say nothing of the sharecropper's wife in Turkey Scratch, Arkansas. It's surely significant, however, that Ross spent his formative years in western outposts, such as Silverton, Colorado and Salt Lake City, spaces that have at least as much in common with Dubuque as with New York. From this angle, it may be that Ross worked to created images of metropolitan modernity as a way of jettisoning his own provincialism. And yet Ross's *New Yorker*, with its finely wrought sensibilities of cosmopolitanism, went a long way towards creating twentieth-century archetypes of urban sophistication.

The use of the country as a source for images of the city extends beyond Ross himself. One of his greatest hires, Joseph Mitchell, crafted indelible portraits of the urban landscape that have created an enduring template for literary reportage. And yet they are perhaps as deeply indebted to Mitchell's upbringing in the rural South as they are to his experiences in New York City. (Mitchell was born and raised on a farm in Fairmont, North Carolina.) Take, for instance, Mitchell's profile of Rev. Mr. James Jefferson Davis Hall in "A Spism and a Spasm." It offers a portrait of a "garrulous old southerner" whose street preaching has roots in his evangelical upbringing (71). Indeed, the preacher's whole persona, as Mitchell frames it, is a product of his origins in the South: "He developed a quality of hysteria years ago in Alabama by going deep into a cypress swamp for an hour or so a day and screaming warnings of one kind or another at an imaginary crowd" (72). New

York City provided a new kind of crowd. "Hall's outlook on life is a product of the grayness of the Reconstruction period in the South" (83), Mitchell explains, and it's easy enough to see what he means: Hall belongs to another place, and to borrow Leigh Anne Duck's model, another temporality.[12] Elsewhere, Mitchell opens his profile of Charles Eugene Cassell, proprietor of Captain Charley's Private Museum for Intelligent People, with a flashback to a scene from his rural childhood in which the tackle used to hoist a soon-to-be-butchered cow collapses, with Mitchell at the bottom of the pile: "That is the way I feel after I have listened to Captain Charley for a little while. I feel as if I had been hit on the head with a cow" (41). This episode provides the story's title, "Hit on the Head with a Cow," but you also get the sense that it could double as a description for any number of characters and scenarios documented in Mitchell's dispatches from the city. In Mitchell's method of storytelling, the density of bodies and sensations swirling around the metropolis gain momentum and energy from their contrast with the relative quiet of the rural South. Mitchell's southernness thus allows him a rare authority as an observer and a reporter: as an outsider become insider, he is a consummate New Yorker, a modernist of the highest order, and a factual counterpart to a series of fictional figures analyzed at greater length in my final chapter.

The South is the great variable throughout so many of my readings and so it's important to clarify what we're talking about when we talk about the South in this project. Scholarly interest in traditionally configured notions of region is typically taken to be less

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[12] See Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2006), in particular her discussions of Erskine Caldwell and Zora Neale Hurston, 85-145.

productive than transnational and postnational approaches, and for good reason: critics note how older forms of southern studies have frequently tended to reproduce rather than challenge received images of the space and its culture. Yet scholars who have approached the South as a more subtle, more fluid construct have dramatically revised our sense of what and how the region means. In particular, it shows that the politics of the southern cultural landscape were always in flux, and that the untold histories of largely subaltern populations confound the region's supposedly stable geographies of place and culture. As Harilaos Stecopoulos recently notes, regionalism's "seemingly outmoded geographic fictions not only yield indispensible historical information . . . about power; they also offer us insight into the relationships that obtain between center and periphery" (7). Those relationships, within southern micro-regions and between the South as a whole and the cultural centers of the northeast, form a major dynamic of my analysis.

A flashpoint for these relationships is the region's painful histories of labor and race. Although both slavery and segregation are most accurately understood as national rather than strictly regional practices, it's plain to see that the physical landscape and the region's role as a source of raw materials contributed in essential ways to the power and persistence of these institutions. The viability of the agricultural South, in turn, depended upon vast tracts of land to produce industrial-scaled yields of cash crops such as cotton, rice, sugar, and tobacco. These were ideal conditions for slavery in the plantation system during the antebellum period, and for sharecropping and tenant farming after the war. And while sharecropping wasn't exclusive to the South—it was present throughout the lower Midwest as well—it lingers in the popular imagination as a primarily southern phenomenon. (The association was obviously solidified through a haunting string of images

of the rural South—and rural southern poverty—produced by Farm Security Administration photographers such as Walker Evans, Marion Post Wolcott, and Dorthea Lange during the Depression.) The South's nexus of labor and landscape creates a dense and peculiar history of modernization, marked by struggles for and against segregation and organized labor, by the disruptive arrivals of mechanization, and by steep patterns of uneven development. This is a history contingent upon other histories, driven by reactions and forces that transcend any single region, and yet traces of regional inscription remain; it's those traces that provide the outline for the texts that I read throughout this project.

One particular phenomenon upon which modernization and the South intersect is segregation. My 1963 paperback edition of Lillian Smith's memoir *Killers of the Dream* includes a dedication to the author's parents, who "valiantly tried to keep their nine children in touch with wholeness even though reared in a segregated culture" (n.p.). The dream of the book's title, it seems, is the achievement of a psychic and social wholeness, a goal made impossible in Smith's world by the presence of segregation—a "symbol and symptom of our modern, fragmented world" (10). The semantics of Smith's statement reveal a knotty ambiguity: Is segregation a consequence of modernity or is modernity itself a consequence of the logic of segregation? Can it be both at once? Her description contains some rich possibilities: the state of "fragmentation" that is so commonly recognized as the ontology and the most obvious point of overlap between twentieth-century modernity and modernism is offered as a source for segregation. It is also a "symbol" of an industrial impulse to categorize, order, and rank a world that increasingly verges towards uncontrollable exercises in diffusion and mixture. Making much the same point, Grace Elizabeth Hale highlights the collaboration between science, industrial modernity, and

systems of segregation, and exposes the deep-rooted problems that state-sponsored apartheid was designed to solve: "Hierarchical structures founded in the personalized social relations of specific localities lost their authority in an increasingly mobile and rapidly changing society. How would people know who they are within this spinning abstraction, the newly economically integrated, industrialized nation-state?" (6). Segregation is thus both a protection against modernity and an expression of its innovative forms of systems management—a symbolic reaction and a symptomatic defense.[13]

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[13] In addition to Wells' *Southern Horrors* and Smith's *Killers of the Dream*, accounts of Jim Crow segregation contemporary with this study's chronology include John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937), Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (1939), and Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944). Tellingly, Wells is the sole African American in this group, suggesting that the project of telling about the segregated South in print was considerably more difficult for African Americans. Even W.E.B. Du Bois' expansive *Reconstruction in America* (1935) is surprisingly circumspect on the subject. Hale's *Making Whiteness* shares a chronological bracket with my study—I follow her work in thinking about how the social and cultural dynamics of segregation are inseparable from more widely recognized expressions of the modern. For more on segregation's histories and legacies, see also K. Steven Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2014); Anne C. Rose, *Psychology and Selfhood in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2009); Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relationships in the South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford UP, 1984); Neil McMillan, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Champaign: U of Illinois P, 1990); Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon, 1877-1919* (New York: Norton, 1988); Mark Smith, *How Race is Made*: *Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2008); Elizabeth Abel, *Signs of the Times: The Visual Politics of Jim Crow* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2010).

In Ida B. Wells' accounts of the terrors of U.S. apartheid during the Jim Crow period, the milieu of the modern is unmistakable. This is particularly true in her text's representations of space, with their uneasy descriptions of regional mixture and exchange. For instance, according to Wells, the "mob spirit" that propels racial violence migrates inward from the rural margins: "It has left the out-of-the-way places, where ignorance prevails, has thrown off the mask and with this new cry stalks in broad daylight in the large cities, the centres of civilization" (62). The peripheries are contaminating the centers, and Wells' readiness to see violence as a portable problem with rural origins is a quality that, in one instance at least, the writer shares with her antagonists: in order to prove the deeply rooted racism of the southern media, Wells' *Southern Horrors* (1892) includes a story from the *Memphis Ledger* detailing a "miscegenation" case in which the reporter castigates a young white mother and her mixed-race child. Although the woman is a resident of Memphis, the article pointedly and repeatedly emphasizes her outsider status, underlining the fact that "[s]he is a country girl," fresh from "her father's farm" (56). Her position as a "country girl" is supposed to denote both the girl's ignorance and her deviance—a kind of deviance-through-ignorance of the strictures and behaviors so essential to the maintenance of a segregated society. In this gesture of identification, then, there exists a clear attempt to hold the woman apart according to both her uncomfortable congress with blackness and her spatial identity.

The ascription of other, then, is not simply an issue shaped by categories of race and blood lineage; it can be a matter of where one stands spatially in relation to the dominant culture, as a kind of geographic lineage. And the creation of otherness is brought to a head through the collision of the rural and the urban that is so typically recognized as a

characteristic of modernity in the industrial mode. For instance, the troubling mixtures represented by the girl's mixed-race child stand as quintessential expressions of the modern, and turn both her and her child into modernizing agents, up from the country. Likewise, the article's opprobrium for the violation of the color-line suggests that, in the case of Jim Crow Memphis at least, the city is buttressed *against* arrivals of the modern. These sorts of collisions, and their unwieldy consequences, are a major motif of this dissertation, and they arrive in many forms throughout the project, as I juxtapose the modernity of rusticity with the period's overlapping concerns with economies, ecologies, and race.

Inside the Outlines

"Uneven Ground" is divided into three major chapters. The first uses writing about black agricultural labor during the Nadir to address the unsettled future of African America at the opening of the twentieth century. Although recent trends in ecocriticism work to multiply the political meanings of black ecologies, this is an area of emphasis that, I argue, was always shaping black discourse from the period.[14] For instance, while scholars have

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[14] Paul Outka's *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) is a rich overview of complex ways in which realities and representations of race and nature intertwine across different periods. See also Kimberly K. Smith's *African American Environmental Thought* (Lawrence: U of Kansas P, 2007); Kimberly N. Ruffin, *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2010). Dianne D. Glave's *Rooted in the Earth: Reclaiming the African American Environmental Heritage* (Chicago: Chicago Review P, 2010) offers a historical overview of black engagement with environmental issues. For a persuasive anthology highlighting

vigorously analyzed the debate between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, one angle that often goes unnoticed is their disagreement about the relationship between nature and cultures of labor.[15] Responding to Margaret Ronda's recent readings, I evaluate this relationship by uncovering the veiled presence of a black southern georgic tradition that informed their work, as well as Frances E. W. Harper's novel *Iola Leroy* and the poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar. My findings here engage with bell hooks' recent arguments on behalf of the emancipatory potential of African American agrarianisms: in spite of farming's histories of violence and oppression via slavery and sharecropping, it also extends the promise of material autonomy upon a landscape dominated by a combination of commercially produced goods and white power.

The next chapter further complicates received notions of the "agrarian." When Michael Kreyling recast southern literature as a product of the Nashville Agrarians, he highlighted the extent to which they crafted the category to match their own image—white, male, "southern," elite, educated, and deeply invested in the entropy of tradition. As a practical matter, though, the conditions of agriculture in their place and time were

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African American writers' longstanding interest in nature and ecology, see *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2007).

[15] For a classic overview of African American literature from the period, with discussions of both Washington and Du Bois, see Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of the American Literature* (Cambridge: Belknap P, 1993). For a take on Washington and Du Bois's divergent educational philosophies, see Clarence L. Mohr, "Minds of the New South: Higher Education in Black and White," *Southern Quarterly* 46.4 (2009): 8-34. James Smethurst's *The African American Roots of Modernism: From Reconstruction to the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 2011) insightfully reads *Up from Slavery* and *The Souls of Black Folk*, as well as work by Chesnutt, Hopkins, Harper, and Dunbar.

abstracted beyond recognition: in *I'll Take My Stand*, farming acts above all else as a literary conceit.[16] My purpose in this section is to explore alternate modes of expression and signification that take into account the objective realities—and the wide range of voices—present in the rural farming world of the 1930s. I also analyze the version of agrarianism promoted by back-to-the-land advocates Helen and Scott Nearing, who made the decision in 1930 to leave New York City to establish a self-sufficient homestead in rural Vermont, recording their experience in *Living the Good Life* (1950). Although they occupy different ends of the political spectrum, I argue that the Nearings and the Agrarians both create idealistic visions of agricultural labor that ultimately derive from their positions of relative privilege.

A more radical mode of agrarian expression, however, can be found in an archive of texts heretofore neglected by literary critics: Louise Boyle's documentary photographs of Southern Tenant Farmers' Union member Myrtle Lawrence. In contrast to similar documentary projects from the ’30s and ’40s (*You Have Seen Their Faces, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, *Twelve Million Black Voices*), Boyle's pictures collapse the distance between the object of the photograph and the photographic subject: Lawrence herself participated actively in the creation of the images, relying on a mode of self-presentation that offers up her body in its physical environment as an act and text of protest against sharecropping's

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[16] In addition to Kreyling's *Inventing Southern Literature* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1998), see Paul C. Murphy's *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2000). The Agrarians' distance from the material realities of southern agriculture is a feature of W.J. Cash's critique of the group in *The Mind of the South* ([1941] New York: Vintage, 1991), 380-84, as well as Cobb's in *Away Down South,* 116-19.

perversities. The result is a project that allows viewers to *see* the subaltern "speaking" between the lines. Thus the opportunities presented by Lawrence and Boyle to consider the existence and character of other agrarianisms in the region invite us to theorize other Souths and new forms of rurality.

Alongside these readings, I also consider modes of embodied expression found in the letters that comprise the 1936 STFU tract *The Disinherited Speak,* as well as a collection of dispatches from rural children responding to the expanding sense of the "public" created by Eleanor Roosevelt's radio broadcasts. This is a move that offers insight into oft-overlooked perspectives (African Americans, women, young people), the politics of rural alterity, and the effects—both intended and unintended—that accompany the spread of technologies of representation out from the cultural centers to rural margins.

In the dissertation's final phase, I suggest that one way to sidestep the binary binding the city to modernity and the country to its opposite is to point up instances in both sociological data and artistic representation where elements of rurality appear in the city. Since one of modernism's recurring impulses is towards movement—towards the creation of contact zones through flows of bodies, ideas, and objects—when the tropes and figures typically identified with the southern countryside confront the metropolitan North, it becomes possible to adapt models of rural modernism to form a category that we might call migratory modernism and to establish the constitutive presence of the rural *within* the urban. This is a move that helps answer questions about whether the displaced people that populate these stories are typically rural or whether the act of migration, especially in the modern period, promotes a more acute performance of rurality—whether, in other words, the urban setting somehow makes rural migrants *hyperbolically* rustic. With that goal in

mind, the chapter will theorize migratory modernism vis-à-vis narratives that use New York City as geographic locus, and that model the overlap of cultural circuits occurring when the country and the city combine: short stories by Rudolph Fisher, Zora Neale Hurston, and William Faulkner, as well as Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground* (1925) and Charlie Poole's sound recording "A Trip to New York" (1929). These are narratives that underscore both the casualties and the beneficiaries of modernity's uneven mobilities, an unevenness reflected in both the texts' subject matter (material that Farah Jasmine Griffin evocatively calls "the South in the City") and their literary form.

Additionally, since the modern makeup of New York owes much of its existence to its role in the financial and transportation networks connecting cotton crops of the Mississippi Valley to transatlantic ports like Liverpool and to the industrial centers of the English midlands, the fictional figures I analyze serve as metaphors for a system of exchange and profitability that reaches back into the nineteenth century, a system that proves that the U.S. South was always-already internal to New York modernity.[17] Ultimately, I demonstrate how each of these narratives uses representations of migrants

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[17] There's a wealth of scholarship on the "cotton triangle" connecting the rural South with Europe via New York City. Although over half a century old, Robert Albion's account in *The Rise of New York Port* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1961) offers a clear, detailed account of the city's shipping interests. Mike Wallace and Edwin Burrows' *Gotham: A History of New York to 1898* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) provides a more contemporary perspective, with greater emphasis on the histories of exploitation that fueled the city's ascent. More recently, Walter Johnson's magisterial *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap P, 2012) explores these dynamics of exchange with an eye on the experience of southern planters, speculators, developers, and laborers.

and their interpenetrating movements to deterritorialize familiar notions of the country and the city.

Rustic Modernity and Counter-populism in *The Hamlet*

Movement between country and the city; the abstractions of modernity; interventions of technology and commerce; the spread of modern capitalism and consumerism—all of these themes recur throughout this dissertation. And they are all major features of William Faulkner's 1940 novel *The Hamlet.* Not always recognized as one of Faulkner's major works, it remains a product of his most celebrated period, a stretch bookended by *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *Go Down, Moses* (1942). While it lacks the tragic intensity of *Absalom, Absalom!* and the formal innovations of *As I Lay Dying*, it is a rich evocation of a pivotal moment in the late-nineteenth-century South, with modulations in tone and texture that set it apart in the Faulkner canon. As the first installment in the Snopes trilogy, the novel charts Flem Snopes' rise from clerk at the company store to its chief executive, from poor white trash to son-in-law of the community's reigning patriarch. Although the text's investment in tall tale and dialect signals a clear nod to the southwestern humor tradition, it is a thoroughgoing investigation of the modernity of rusticity in the rural South of the period, as it uncovers ways in which the modern makes itself apparent in places and experiences that at first glance seem far removed from modernity. It does this by vividly imagining a rural community beset by the effects of the modern marketplace, which include

increased abstraction, alienated labor, and the disturbing shadow of radical populist politics.

The major focus of my analysis will be the novel's post-Reconstruction meanings and I'll thicken the context by considering the 1939 story "Barn Burning" as a kind of companion piece, a source for essential information on Flem's backstory. There's a problem of chronology, however, that deserves notice: Citing a personal letter from Faulkner in 1939, Richard Gray has the action of *The Hamlet* beginning around 1887 and ending three years later. Since Flem appears in *The Hamlet* as Ab Snopes' son, and because Ab's reputation as a barn burner is a major topic in "Book One," the unnamed brother skirting the edges of "Barn Burning" is typically taken to be Flem. Yet in the opening scene of "Barn Burning," Ab is described as "walking a little stiffly from where a Confederate provost's man's musket ball had taken him in the heel on a stolen horse thirty years ago" (5). This would place the events of that story somewhere between 1891-95, making Flem's appearance an obvious anachronism. Perhaps it's best to not worry about these details. According to Gray, "Faulkner could be a little uncertain about dates. . . . [h]owever he was much more certain and clear when it came to the processes of historical change" (256). That uncertainty is, in fact, the substance of Faulkner's letter from which these dates emerge.[18] Since the varieties of "historical change" is exactly the topic I investigate here, I

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[18] In the letter, Faulkner alerted his editor to a potential problem of chronology, but he also indicated the inexact location of the text historically ("approximately"): "Book Four [of *The Hamlet*] happens in 1890, approximately. Hence Civil War ended 25 years ago. Have recollection of dating War somewhere in script as 40 years ago. Please watch for it." See *Selected Letters of William Faulkner,* ed. Joseph Blotner (New York: Random House, 1977), 115. For a reading of the novel that resists the impulse to historicize, see Donald

feel comfortable following critical consensus in assuming that Flem is the older brother in "Barn Burning," that he is a witness to, and a participant in, that story's action—that he is, in other words, just as much his father's son as is Sarty Snopes, and that he too grapples with that association. But where Sarty fled his father's irrepressible violence, Flem leverages it to get a job at Varner's store—and where Sarty rejected the life of a sharecropper by physically escaping it, Flem hurdles the agricultural class to work as a merchant.

In order to understand something of Ab's anger—and its animating powers on Flem—it's important to consider the politics and practices of Populism experienced by families like the Snopes in rural Mississippi of the late 1880s. Richard Godden, in his suggestive readings of *The Hamlet*, correctly notes the residues of late-nineteenth-century Populism that inform the novel's handling of labor and class. I make the related argument that the novel's Populist overtones offer one way to account for its counterintuitive readiness to attribute a modernizing influence to a backwoods clan like the Snopes. Citing the movement's interest in creating social and economic reform, as well as its attention to the political opportunities generated by new technologies such as the railroad, Charles Postel argues for a vision of Populism that complicates its reputation as a strictly conservative force: "Across much of America's rural territory, Populism formed a unique social movement that represent a distinctly modernizing impulse" (9). What I hope to suggest here, though, is that Flem's response to a particular form of populism acts as a

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Kartiganer, *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1979). According to Kartiganer, "it is in *The Hamlet* that Faulkner for the first time in his career turns to a genuine experiment with a *mythic* mode of writing" (109, emphasis mine).

differently directed expression of his father's politics of rage, and that it carries a modernizing charge which, given his background as a rural outlander, is a surprising reversal of the popular narrative of the urban-modern fanning outward into the provinces.[19]

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[19] Scholarship on rural Populism usually focuses on one of the two formal movements it created: the Farmers' Alliance, of the 1880s and 90s, and the People's Party (or Populist Party), active from 1891-1908. Robert C. McMath Jr.'s *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1977) is a largely sympathetic treatment of the organization that explores its inner workings and consequences but pays little attention to its racial politics. C. Vann Woodward's *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1963), however, makes race a more prominent feature of the movement, offering a probing portrait of Watson's transformation from Populist organizer to nativist demagogue. Michael Schwartz's *Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890* covers precisely the period addressed in "Barn Burning" and *The Hamlet*, with an emphasis on the workings of the Southern Farmers' Alliance as a precursor to the Populist party more broadly. Chapter 10 ("Populism") of Edward Ayers's *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998) contains a lengthy discussion of southern Populism, weaving its history into his larger synthesis of the post-Reconstruction South. For an account of the Colored Farmers' Alliance—an African American response to the Farmer's Alliance's implicit, and often explicit, white supremacy—see Omar H. Ali, "Black Populism: Agrarian Politics from the Colored Alliance to the People's Party," *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families since Reconstruction,* ed. Deborah A. Reid and Evan P. Bennett (Gainesville: U of Florida P, 2012) 109-31. Donna A. Barnes's *The Louisiana Populist Movement, 1881-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2011) is an expansive account of Populism in Louisiana that includes a perceptive take on the Colored Farmers' Alliance's activities in that state. A complex view of "Populism's biracial experiment" is provided by Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement: Ballots and Bigotry in the New South* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2005).

Ab's spatial identity (rural), his profession (farmer), the austerity of his manners and tastes (contrast Ab's conflagratory protests against his own private fire: "a small fire, neat, niggard almost, a shrewd fire" ("Barn Burning" 7)), and his attitudes towards authority all line up with the wave of Populist activity swirling around the rural South in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Indeed, Edward Ayers's description of the movement's core motivations could serve as a description of Ab himself: "Populism took its power . . . from anger and pride" (282). Yet during the precise period in which the Farmers' Alliance was reaching its stride in Mississippi, Ab is, in both "Barn Burning" and *The Hamlet*, forever appearing as a lone wolf: his feelings of insurgency are of a piece with the broader Populist movement but his actions are strictly atomized—and atomizing. He is a populist in spirit, if not a Populist in form. This turns out to be an important observation because it helps explain both the extent of Ab's alienation and the ways in which that alienation shapes Flem's actions in Frenchman's Bend.

When trying to draw out the novel's comments on the rural modern, it's important to consider how exactly rural P/populism functions as a reaction-formation to a rapidly industrialized, and capitalized, economy. Walter Benjamin's reflections on support for Fascism amongst the German working class in the 1930s might offer insights as to why rural Populists of the early industrial period felt their subaltern statues with such force:

> Nothing has corrupted the German working class so much as the notion that it was moving with the current. It regarded technological developments as the fall of the stream with which it thought it was moving. From there it was but a step to the

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illusion that the factory work which was supposed to tend toward technological progress constituted a political achievement. ("Theses" 258)

It's the association with the technologies of the factory that gives workers the false impression that they benefit from "progress," and since agricultural labor, particularly as it was performed in sharecropping or tenant farming arrangements, is largely void of "technological developments," then, according to Benjamin's model at least, farmers are more likely to recognize the ways in which economic development has left them behind. In short, with no intervening and distracting "technology" in the fields, farmers—especially croppers like Ab—could apprehend the truth of their position in the hierarchy without feeling that progress was carrying them to a new vista of "political achievement." Made to labor like factory workers but without the disorienting "newness" of the factory's technologies, farmers like Ab felt the unevenness of their modernity with a special intensity.

"Barn Burning" works this hinge connecting sharecroppers and the factory with its incessant descriptions of Ab's metallic aspect: in one of the story's most celebrated sketches, Ab has a "shape black, flat, and bloodless as though cut from tin . . . the voice harsh like tin and without heat like tin" (8); his figure "had . . . that impervious quality of something cut ruthlessly from tin, depthless, as though, sideways to the sun, it would cast no shadow" (10). It's probably worth noting the extent to which these descriptions of Ab achieve the "dreamt-of metallization of the human body" that form one of the dark fascinations of Futurist F.T. Marinetti (qtd. in Benjamin "Work of Art" 576). Ab is blank sheet of tin, a raw material of the sort processed by industrial manufacturing, and, in a

variation on the Little Tramp's trip through the assembly line in *Modern Times*, his rural body is set up to be used without remorse by the economies of sharecropping. "I reckon I'll have a word with the man that aims to begin tomorrow owning me body and soul for the next eight months" (9), Ab states, assuring his listeners that while Major de Spain might "aim" to own him, the very fact of his obstinacy, and his acts of vandalism, are designed to reassert his sovereignty. "[Y]ou never had one hundred dollars. You never will," de Spain tells Ab when confronting him about the cost of a rug he purposely damaged on his first trip to the major's mansion. "So I'm going to charge you twenty bushels of corn against your next crop" (16). Consciously or not, the planter has put his finger on the source of the problem: Ab and de Spain live, quite literally, in two different worlds, spaces that operate according to two different economies and currencies: de Spain is cash and Ab is corn. And his lack of access to cash means that, even when Ab is in open revolt, he will always be in de Spain's service. He is trapped on the inner valence of a concentric circle and, without cash, he is forever incapable of cracking into the larger world of the outer rings.

While Flem, alongside the rest of his family, is a product of "small farms and fields and houses" ("Barn Burning" 10), and while he suffers with them in the situation of the sharecropper, he is not a proper Populist, not even a properly residual one, but a kind of counter-populist who methodically directs his ambitions away from the farm—that ultimate locus of both Populist pride and conflict—and towards a career as a banker—that ultimate target of Populist rage and resentment. "Ain't no benefit in farming," Flem tells Varner when they first meet (*The Hamlet* 25), offering a statement that bears the unmistakable imprint of Ab's failures. At the 1891 Madison County Fair, in Canton, Mississippi, S.S. Calhoun, president of the state's 1890 constitutional convention, gave a

speech in which he admitted that although the farmers' anger at the economic and political elites was justified, "you would all like to be capitalists, and if you were, the great majority of you would do just what the capitalists are doing" (qtd. in Ayers 252). Calhoun gives voice to Flem's ambitions, about which he himself is mostly silent. And while there are exceptions (Mink, for instance), this is the story of the Snopes family at large: subversion and infiltration of the status quo through an embrace of the very economic and social systems that have disadvantaged them from the start.

What's so modern about a Snopes then? Or more exactly, what's so modern about Flem Snopes? The quickest answer pertains to Flem's economic practices. Although Varner has become fabulously rich off of the cycle of debts and obligations of landowning, Flem provides an amplification and an intensification—a modernization, in fact—of that model. Yet Godden is correct to warn against "the general drift of much Faulknerian scholarship in reading Flem too purely as capital's agent" (19-20): his business dealings are more efficient, more standardized, and more coldly calculated than Varner's but in this they also propose a consciously executed restructuring of the social and economic norms that supposedly provide the Bend its vaunted cohesion. Although the field is admittedly quite provincial, Flem beats the Bend's elites at their own game, out-moderning all of the novel's least-primitive figures, from Varner to V.K. Ratliff. In the figure of Flem, then, we get the surprising scenario of the modernizing figure coming into the rural world of Frenchman's Bend from even more rural spaces, so that the novel poses the country districts as *sources* of modernizing energies and not just as victims of those energies. Read alongside the eruption of Populism in the countryside, the novel suggests that the pressures of political and economic modernity are out in the offing, always ready to disrupt the imaginary idyll

of Frenchman's Bend. This disruption is a persistent source of friction in *The Hamlet* because, as Jay Watson reminds us, the Bend itself is "the primary subject of the novel as a whole" (47)—it's not concerned with any single person or event but to a *place*'s response to people and events. And while Watson explains how the troubling events that occur during Flem's absence in the "The Long Summer" section undo the narrator's story of "everything was fine until those Snopeses came" (51), their presence adds a particular wrinkle to an already unstable space. It's possible, I suggest, to avoid the false assertion that Frenchman's Bend is an untapped oasis and still recognize that Flem has somehow made it new(er).

It's also important to note that Flem does not achieve this transformation by his own efforts alone but by brokering the arrival of a parade of blood-related, opportunistic country people. As Martha Banta rightly acknowledges in her reading of the Snopes trilogy, the "very names of Flem's kin . . . trace the newest Yankee developments in early twentieth-century business history: IOU, Wallstreet Panic, Montgomery Ward, and Watkins Products" (311). These crossings thus become a matter of intra-regional as well as inter-regional penetration, with signifiers from the urban North landing atop human subjects in the South. If this observation suggests the exhaustive influence of northern capital in the rural South, it also reveals the degree to which rural subjects willingly latched onto the signs of northern commerce: some Snopes parent deliberately chose to make their child synonymous with Watkins Products. More broadly, however, Wallstreet Panic Snopes—Wall in the later installments—doesn't come down from the city, like the Panic itself, but up from the country, and his family's arrival from the rural districts precipitates a violent restructuring of Frenchman's Bend's economic and social balance, running exactly opposite

to Edward Said's description of imperialism's tendency to create economics of power in which the "metropolitan center . . . rul[es] a distant territory" (9). With Flem Snopes' introduction of a depersonalized arrangement of debt and payment, as well as his distinctly corporate approach to running the Varner's store, the familiar relationship between periphery and core is scrambled, with the margin suddenly and startlingly acting as the modernizing agent. In Banta's reading, the Snopes trilogy "allows a depiction of how the South is responding to the managerial methods stirring Yankee business and industry" (309), as she adds Snopesism to an unholy trilogy that includes Taylorism and Fordism. Yet *The Hamlet* is after more than just the managerial methods of the modern period. It is also deeply invested in considering how newly introduced notions of abstraction—abstractions of capital, labor, and violence—can unfasten the social and economic foundations of a community that *imagines* itself as existing outside of modernity in order to stave off modernity's continual arrivals.

The Hamlet thus begins by proposing a rural Mississippi landscape and economy driven by a rudimentary network of labor and exchange that centers on a single family (the Varners), their home, and their company store. Yet Flem's disturbing economic practices point towards a historically specific phenomenon emerging in the South of the late nineteenth century: the newly available mechanisms of credit that the merchant class was making available to landowners during this period, an occurrence that permanently shifted the balance of economic power in the region with its ability to create wide-reaching realities out of thin air.[20] The novel's penultimate episode, the salted goldmine con staged

[20] Gavin Wright's *New South, Old South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1997) provides an excellent overview of the

at the Old Frenchman's Place, is perhaps the clearest example of the disorienting peculiarities that adhere to capital's immateriality. Prompted by local lore about a cache of Confederate treasure buried on the grounds, V. K. Ratliff, the canny traveling salesman, and his friends Armstid and Bookwright seek to buy the property from Flem. They have sneaked in a diviner named Uncle Dick to evaluate the ground, and he has stoked their confidence by unearthing three small bags of money. After the deal is done, however, Ratliff realizes that the coins were minted after the Civil War, and is shocked to recognize that even he lacks immunity to Flem's techniques, techniques that place elements of modern marketing and advertising alongside more strictly economic arrangements. The news is not well received by Ratliff's compatriots, and the scene ends with a long shot of Armstid ferociously scraping at the soil, hoping to find some sort of salvation by digging in the earth. In his failure to extract life and value from the earth, Armstid and his actions provide a parodic shell of the basic logic of the rural. What he doesn't understand, of course, is that Flem's actions and the particular brand of modernity they embody have made ridiculous all attempts to make a living on the soil. For Flem, the key to greater prosperity and social advancement is less digging, more dealing. And any figure that can't adapt to this schema (Mink Snopes, again, is an example from Flem's own bloodline) deserves his obsolescence. "Get out of my hole," Armstid threatens when Ratliff tries to explain the situation, and the novel leaves him there, foundering in a ditch of his own design (401).

Occupying a middle space between Flem and the more deeply rooted citizens of Frenchman's Bend, Ratliff appears to many to be the novel's hero. He is figured as distinctly

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merchant-class credit system, particularly as it relates to the sharecropping/tenantry systems. See especially 97-103.

of the people—he is the great reporter and interpreter of their condition—but he is also an agent of gradualist change. If, on an urban-rural continuum, the villagers represent a not-so-modern position and Flem signs aggressive modernity, then Ratliff becomes the conflicted, shifting figure of the hesitating modern. Unlike Flem, whose course is plotted in one direction—towards Jefferson and greater prosperity—Ratliff has already been a resident of Jefferson (he lived with his sister); he has also been a neighbor to the Snopeses in the hinterlands, and he plies his trade by moving around and between spaces, by tending to the distance between urban manufacturers and financiers and the rural folk of places such as Frenchman's Bend. He has, the narrator tells us in a deeply suggestive phrase, "the ubiquity of a newspaper" (15): full of information, fluidly circulated, and—like a newspaper—issuing from a stationary base of operations in a city or town (in Ratliff's case, it's the Jefferson café owned with his cousin, Aaron Rideout).

Furthermore, the sewing machines that he sells from the back of his wagon arrive as small-scale instruments of industrial and economic modernity. Most of his customers buy on installment—although Mink Snopes trades a machine for an IOU note that puts Flem in a compromised position—and the mass-produced, vibrating-shuttle lockstitch machines that Ratliff would have likely sold in the 1880s have the potential to disrupt the rhythms and textures of rural life. By providing a steadier stitch with less energy, they initiate twentieth-century processes of putting timesaving devices to work on rural domestic problems. (In the later novels, Ratliff deals in more explicitly disruptive technologies, such as the radio and the television.) Yet even Ratliff is duped by Flem: the immateriality of the treasure matches the immateriality by which capital moves in the modern marketplace, and Ratliff learns the hard way that there is no obvious defense for an invisible enemy.

Invisibility is a defining characteristic of Flem's actions. For example, in the aftermath of the spotted horses episode of Book Four, Armstid brings suit against Flem for damages related to the sale of one of the dangerous animals and no one, including the judge, can determine who exactly owned the horses and how they were purchased: "Does anybody here know for sho who them horses belonged to? Anybody?" (359). Flem has learned something essential about the opacity of capital and its ability to create a buffer between personal responsibility and the misdeeds of the capitalist at large. Flem's venture, it seems, is so deeply ensconced in shadows that no one is sure whether to blame Flem himself or the Texan, his partner, or some larger principle that has legitimized such a swindle.

Just like the abstractions of capital that swirl through and around the network of debts and credits in Book One's baroque depictions of horse-trading, the details of Flem's maneuvers are notoriously difficult to sort out.[21] And the difficulty, the intentional obscurity of it all, seems to be the point as the novel imagines economic exchange as a game of interlocking projections and evaluations that constantly threaten to erode the value of its players' holdings, often without their knowing. Horsetrading is a shell game in which

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[21] By theorizing "capital in general form," Marx addresses the paradox through which capital can operate as both an immaterial abstraction and a shaping device in the material world: "capital in . . . general form, although belonging to individual capitalists, in its *elemental form* of capital, forms the capital which accumulates in the banks or is distributed through them . . . while the general is therefore on the one hand only a mental mark of distinction it is at the same time a particular real form alongside the form of the particular and individual" (499-500). Capital becomes, in short, a "mental mark of distinction" with distinct, measurable effects. *Grundrisse* ([1939] New York: Penguin, 1974).

someone must always lose and, as such, it stands as an effective example of aggressive capitalism in the early twentieth century. Again, in its deliberately provincial setting, *The Hamlet* presents a modern marketplace in which both values and commodities themselves are fungible, fluid, and dynamic. The spotted ponies offer a useful illustration of this principle as they seem to shape-shift into an altogether different species, "streak[ing] back and forth . . . like hysterical fish" (304), grouping together "like phantom fish" (331), constantly morphing in an unharnessable blur of sight and sound: "the horses huddled in mazy camouflage, or singly or in pairs rushed, fluid, phantom, and unceasing, to huddle again in mirage-like clumps from which came high abrupt squeals and the vicious thundering of hooves" (305). You can see them, smell them, hear them, and even touch them—but you can never contain them. In much the same way, capitalist exchange, as it appears in the novel, exerts an influence that is at once overwhelming and impossible to trace out definitively.

One of the novel's least-examined sections offers some of its most stringent critiques of the logic of the marketplace: the schoolteacher Labove's tenure as a football-playing student athlete at the University of Mississippi. In *The Hamlet*, contests of college football appear as bewildering abstractions of labor, capital, and violence, and a brief recap of the game's history illuminates the context of the text's critiques: in the decades following the Civil War, Ivy League schools in the northeast played intercollegiate games that resembled American football, but commentators typically identify an 1875 contest between Harvard and Tufts as the first college football game. It wasn't until 1906, though, that Teddy Roosevelt convened a meeting of thirteen prominent schools to form the organization we now recognize as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (N.C.A.A.).

Originally called the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States, the program was designed to make college football safer for its participants and, in this regard, it's of a piece with Roosevelt's larger agenda of progressive reform. The official name change occurred in 1910, and brought with it a series of rules and regulations designed to standardize and institutionalize the game's tendencies towards violence. *The Hamlet* foregrounds this sublimation of chaos, as Labove's coaches make clear that, in spite of the game's appeal to the baser instincts, "there were rules for violence" (120). But those rules can scarcely subsume the brutality lurking just below the surface. Varner's interview with Labove for his job at the Frenchman's Bend schoolhouse includes the following exchange:

> "That game," he said. "Do you like to play it?"
>
> "No," Labove said.
>
> "I hear it aint much different from actual fighting."
>
> "Yes," Labove said . . . (118)

The "actual fighting," however, is cleaned up and regulated so that it can be brought to market as a product made ready for consumption by an eager crowd. Thorstein Veblen's scathing assessment of the game is nearly contemporaneous with the action of the novel, and of a piece with Varner's queries: "[Football] is a rehabilitation of the early barbarian temperament, together with a suppression of those details of temperament, which, as seen from the standpoint of the social and economic exigencies, are the redeeming features of the savage character" (261). In its production of a spectacle that comprises what Hobbes famously described as the "war of all against all" of a laissez-faire politico-economic

system, the football game thus repackages and commodifies the market relations themselves.

Since they're clearly yoked together—by their rural pasts, by Eula, by their newcomer status in the Bend—it's important at this point to consider Labove's relation to Flem. While both come from obscure rural backgrounds, and both, as John T. Matthews writes, "step on escalators of social advancement" (192), the divergence of their courses deserves scrutiny: where Flem chooses "business" and finagles his way into the nearest opportunity, Labove sees enrollment in the state university as the conduit to a career in politics; where Flem's practices create a severe version of capitalist modernity that borders on the illicit (the spotted ponies, the "acquisition" of Eula), Labove's path is both more "legitimate" and more unnervingly circuitous. College is supposed to provide a way to break out of rural poverty and yet he simply transfers between "fields" of mutual exploitation—the farmer's tract of the country and the football stadium of the town.

As a schoolteacher and university student with ambitions to become governor, Labove makes an unlikely athlete: he is bookish with a "gaunt" body, and the novel repeatedly describes him as a monk, explaining that he handles the ball as if it were a "trivial contemptible obloid." And yet the text also notes that it may well be his "contempt" for the sport, matched with "his hard and Spartan heritage," that makes him such an effective player (121). The novel first introduces Labove-the-football-player from an oblique angle: when Varner is waylaid on a business trip in a "bleak puncheon-floored cabin on a barren little hill farm," the first thing he notices is that all of the cabin's occupants wear the same pair of athletic cleats (114). He learns that the family's oldest child plays football at the university in exchange for tuition, lodging, a pile of "football

shoes," and a "fine heavy warm dark blue sweater with a big red M on the front of it" (116). "So that's where he is now . . . playing the football," Varner muses, and the awkwardly placed article "the" both disrupts and defamiliarizes the action (116). Always slightly behind the curve, Varner hasn't yet mastered the logic whereby the players don't play the material object itself; they operate within an elaborate network of rules, systems, and boundaries that is *football*, not *the* football.

What is football, then, in the mind of the novel? Rhetoric about kinship and sportsmanship is entirely absent from its descriptions of the game, and football draws Varner-the-businessman's attention because it is, as Labove experiences it at least, a series of economic transactions: touchdowns and victories for shoes, tuition, and a place to stay (he lives in his coach's attic). A participant in a blunt arrangement of exchange, Labove performs a task and is compensated. That his compensation doesn't take the form of currency furthers the novel's critique of the abstractions of the modern marketplace, as both Labove and the reader are forced to recognize the absurdity of an economic event wherein the actual product is spectacle—emotional capital produced by the players but also, and most importantly, by the ticket-buying audience. Labove's unstable attachment to the game likewise points up the ways in which, as a worker, he is alienated from his labor: he and his teammates bear all of the risk in an arrangement through which violence is both the process and the product.[22] Unlike Flem here, Labove becomes an abused member of the

[22] This arrangement of student-athlete in highly profitable entertainment industry points up questions that have reached new levels of controversy in the early twenty first century. In March 2013, the football team at Northwestern became the first squad to join a union, boldfacing questions about amateurism, profits, and the philosophical purposes of college

rural class. In spite of his education and apparent mental gifts, both on the football field at (relatively) urban(e) Ole Miss and at the Bend's schoolhouse, Labove is most valuable as a body—either playing offense as a ball handler, or defense in warding off the school's unruly pupils.

It may sound like a stretch to note the correspondence between Labove's football playing and more routinized modes of labor but the novel's language draws out suggestive parallels between the football field and the factory, relying on a complex of signifiers that folds the farm, field, and factory into a common cluster of modern capitalist production. For instance, the team's coach acts as a kind of foreman, organizing Labove's time and energy in exchange for lodging and meals. And the echo of the factory routine is unmistakable when, rushing from Frenchman's Bend to Oxford to make it to a game on time, Labove must hurriedly "change into his uniform before the whistle blew" (123). For his part, Theodor Adorno makes explicit the smooth transmission between sports and work under abusive forms of capitalism when he notes, "by dint of physical exertion exacted by sport, by dint of the functionalization of the body in team-activity, which interestingly enough occurs in the most popular sports, people are unwittingly trained into modes of behaviour which, sublimated to a lesser or greater degree, are required of them by the work process" (194-95). Appropriately enough then, there is labor, and then there is reward. As he reflects on the university's willingness to provide scholarship funds and athletic supplies, Labove is haunted by unresolved questions about valuation—"What was a touchdown worth" (121)? What indeed? In episode after episode, the novel repeatedly asks a similar, if distinctly

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sports. For more on these issues in the contemporary moment, see historian Taylor Brach's article "The Shame of College Sports," *Atlantic,* (Oct. 2011), 80-110.

existential, question: What is anything worth? A horse, a plot of ground, a sack of Confederate treasure. A sewing machine, a shirt, a cow.

The Hamlet's interest in questions of valuation and its attention to labor thus forms its larger narrative arc. At its widest contours the novel is propelled by Flem's ability to drag himself—and certain amenable members of his extended family—up from the ground, literally, and install them in occupations that create distance from their land-bound associations with agriculture and its sclerotic inequities in the post-Reconstruction economy. Ironically enough, he is trying to reroute the Populist ambition to gain equal footing with the elites by undoing his family's long associations with the land, by bringing them up to speed and up to space. This is where Ab's destructive commitment to individualism—as a farmer, as a protester, as a father—provides Flem the equipment he needs to conquer the Bend: latching onto modern capitalism's fracturing effects, he uses the fissures as footholds in a lateral climb out of the rural provinces, towards affluence and social recognition.

Flem's final words in the novel, apparently directed at the mules that drive his team to Jefferson, thus land with multidirectional force: "Come up," he admonishes, speaking to himself, his rural relatives, his rural class, his rural region (406). It's altogether appropriate to ask, though, Come up to where? Is it the city of Jefferson, the story of *The Town*? A sense of prosperity, respectability, and security, a notion most fully explored in *The Mansion*? A "New South"? The novel's satiric denunciation of Flem—and the trilogy's tragic vision of his ultimate fate—aligns nicely with what Jay Parini considers Faulkner's "genuine conservatism," a sensibility that "includes a wish to keep modern life from encroaching" upon the natural world and the region's isolated communities (265); it is an

attempt to forestall the numbing direction of development that, to borrow a line attributed to Eula Varner, makes "one place like another anywhere and everywhere" (106). And yet, in spite of itself perhaps, *The Hamlet* betrays a backhanded admiration of Flem's savvy and his persistence. Vaulting the accumulated detritus of local history and culture described in the opening paragraphs, Flem brings a modern metabolism with him from the rural hinterlands. It's a genius for transformation that comes from the basic instability of the sharecropping class, and Flem's readiness to dismantle the patriarchal model of the planters is rooted in the suffering he has both observed and experienced firsthand as the son of an itinerant sharecropper. And so the margin restructures its center and then moves on, to the next biggest town and the next big opportunity. "Country" people are not simply being creatively destroyed by modernization in *The Hamlet* but are themselves bringing an incipient, vital, and forceful modernity to the urban. In this novel, anyway, they are the real modernizers.

The Hamlet is often read as one of Faulkner's great comic achievements. Cleanth Brooks, for instance, celebrates the novel's tone as a "compound of irony and wonder" (173); more recently, Brittany Powell reads the novel as a "Cervantine comedy."[23] This second assessment comes closer to accounting for the unmistakable ripple of melancholy that rises and falls throughout the novel, especially in its final acts. It is a melancholy that takes shape as the narrative fully inhabits the realization that the static, independent world it wants to imagine could never exist, in the present or the past: the Snopeses wouldn't

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[23] See Powell, "Don Quijote de Yoknapatawpha: Cervantine Comedy and the Bahktinian Grotesque in William Faulkner's *The Hamlet*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 43.4 (2006): 482-97.

have any local golden world of organic "community" to invade and disorder unless the villagers had already constructed one in response to a threat they perceived from "outside." As James Snead points out, the novel's pictures of the hamlet emerge through "a register of absences, contradictions, and discrepancies" (145). For example, with no clear referent to any knowable person, the town's name serves as the post for a mostly empty sign—a disappeared presence of phantasmal grandeur: "He had *quite possibly* been a foreigner, though not necessarily French" begins the uncertain history of Frenchman's Bend (2), and it only gets more conjectural from there. The larger, albeit less direct, point embedded in this gap-filled account may be that people who stay where they're from become obsolete. Regardless of their moral composition, it is the novel's most mobile figures that are best suited to the future, and to be an effective contributor to the modern world of the novel is to remain in motion. The complex task of tracing the consequences, conflicts, and contributions of these kinds of movements, in and across different spaces, and through distinct perspectives, is the work of this dissertation. And, in the texts I read, they'll lead us to some unexpected places.

CHAPTER ONE

STRANGE VICISSITUDES
DIRT, PROGRESS, AND THE MODERN BLACK GEORGIC

> Pigford v. Glickman has not resonated across the land like Brown v. Board of Education, but the very same history of crippling injustice is at its heart. . . . The class action suit detailed how eligible black farmers traditionally were denied loans by the agricultural agency while their white peers went to the head of the line for growing season wherewithal and homestead improvements.
>
> —"Pay Up," *New York Times* Op-Ed, February 8, 2010

> Through the pressure of the money-makers, the Negro is in danger of being reduced to semi-slavery, especially in the country districts.
>
> —W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of Booker T. Washington and Others," 1903

While over one hundred years separate Du Bois' statement from the *New York Times*'s assessment of the Pigford case, in each instance it's clear that in the battle for representation and recognition, black farmers still struggle for both literal and figurative capital. The difficulty of conjuring up a stable category for black farmers points out an uneven intersection of American mythologies and realities, underscoring the fact that, when compared to their white counterparts, black farmers occupy a far less prominent space in the American cultural imaginary. Yet black agrarianism signifies powerfully, particularly in the postbellum, postslavery South, where it looms in the shadows of

Jeffersonian ideals of democracy. Under this rubric, the varieties of African American agrarianism, especially those that appeared and endured in the wake of Reconstruction, are inherently linked to the South and to questions of what constitutes southernness during the Nadir and in the decades that followed.[24] So much so, in fact, that when critic Robert Palmer visited Muddy Waters' South Side Chicago home in the latter-half of the twentieth century, he made special note of the singer's garden, filled with "tomatoes, red and green chili peppers, okra, and turnip greens" (12), a gesture that deliberately recalls the southern histories of both the man and his cultural product, the blues.

To this end, questions about what black labor—agrarian labor in particular—could mean for African Americans throughout the twentieth century were taken up by many of the period's most prominent black voices, among them the subjects of this chapter: Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Frances E. W. Harper. Mindful of the extensive critical tradition that has compared Washington's *Up From Slavery* (1901) and Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), I will use their respective responses to elucidate the specific intersections between the modern and the agricultural. My purpose here is not so much to resolve the "conflict" between Washington and Du Bois—or, for that matter, to enter what James Smethurst calls the "old and complicated debate of whether

[24] It's worth noting here that critics and scholars deploy the term "agrarian" far more commonly towards white farmers. One notable exception is Kimberly K. Smith, whose analysis of race and environment includes a thorough survey of "postwar black agrarianism." See Smith, *African American Environmental Thought* (Lawrence: UP of Kansas), 77-87. Pete Daniel's recent study *Dispossessed: Discrimination against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2013) provides further background into the patterns of discrimination that necessitated the Pigford decision.

Washington was an accomodationist with or trickster guerilla against Jim Crow" (41)—but to reevaluate our sense of how and where these familiar figures engaged their modern world, how they wrote into existence a theory and an etiology of the land itself. To the familiar pair of texts, I add another: Dunbar's body of work from the period, the product of the era's most prominent African American poet, and Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892), one of the earliest and most celebrated novels by a black woman. Taken together, these texts offer a range of representational forms that stretch from poetry to essay to fiction, and by bringing them into dialogue with one another, my readings will provide a better sense of how issues of labor and landscape were differently calibrated in African American communities than in mainstream, white communities.

Since these texts appeared at the cusp of U.S. literary modernism, a large part of my attention will be trained on their relationship with modernity. In particular, I test how each works out its own particular approach to the modern, to progress, and to the environmental consequences of development, especially as they inflect upon the consequences and potentialities of African American encounters with the rural. In doing so, the image that presents itself over and over again—in iterations both obvious and subtle—is the plantation, and its connections to contemporary issues of labor, southern landscape, and the competing trajectories of African American modernity. In black writing of the Nadir, the plantation manifests variously: it is deconstructed and reconstructed, evacuated and reoccupied; it is remembered, repudiated, sublimated, and ironized, often in the same text.

This chapter will thus use the perspectives of each writer to work the ground connecting an unlikely constellation of subjects: dirt, progress, and the modern.

Specifically, what I want to emphasize are the ways in which questions about agricultural labor in the new century distill a more fundamental disagreement about the way forward for African America in the post-Reconstruction world of the Nadir: conditional integration into the nation's elite spheres of education and politics, as Du Bois promotes it; or segregation into more locally sustained, self-governing communities based upon hands-on labor, such as we find in Washington.

According to Lawrence Buell, any discussion that considers "an ethos of rurality or nature or wilderness over against an ethos of metropolitanism" tends towards the pastoral (439). Yet, as critics such as Raymond Williams, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, William Conlogue, Lewis Simpson, and Paul Outka have shown, the pastoral's reliance on bucolic, idealized landscapes performs an elision that obscures the empirical realities of both labor and scarcity attending to cultures of agriculture.[25] Better suited to my task is the georgic mode, which runs in the opposite direction. The essence of the georgic is perhaps best provided by an oft-cited passage from Virgil's *Georgics*, of the first century: "Toil subdued the earth / Relentless toil, and the prick of dearth in hardship" (1.145-46). Translator Kimberly Johnson notes of the *Georgics*' role as an agricultural manual that it "emphasizes

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[25] See Williams, pp. 13-34. For Williams, the difference between pastoral and what he calls the "counter-pastoral" was the difference between "true and false ways of writing" (13), between methods of representation that obscure the past and those that seek to confront and engage it. See also Conlogue and Simpson. Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan evaluates the pastoral presence in the Lost Cause discourse of turn-of-the-century plantation romances in *The Dream of Arcady: Place and Time in Southern Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1980). More recently, in a perceptive synthesis of critical race studies and ecocriticism, Paul Outka theorizes a variety of pastorals, including the "degraded pastoral of slavery." See Outka, 27-49.

variegation and experimentation . . . promoting ambiguity and uncertainty in place of didactic conviction" (xv). Unlike the pastoral, which presents an agricultural tableau scrubbed of signs of human exertion, the georgic foregrounds work, striking an ambivalent balance between the knowledge and power that labor imparts, and the physical and mental tolls that it takes. Margaret Ronda's recent investigation into the georgic and labor in the post-Reconstruction South includes innovative readings of Dunbar, which I hope to expand upon below, specifically arguing that Dunbar's georgics "examine . . . a struggle that necessarily ends in disappointed failure" (865). And though I agree with Ronda's contention that the disappointments and disparities of the Nadir make it an ideal period in which to think about the georgic, I hope to explore the georgic's wider expressive contours—to think about its philosophical disposition as one in which pessimism is tempered by optimism—and to see that disposition in texts that span an ideological spectrum. In this regard I follow Christine Perkell's expansive reading of the tradition to theorize a black georgic that captures the contradictions, conflicts, and comforts of African American life on the land during the Nadir.[26] The disruptive ambiguity of the georgic makes it a productive rubric by which to measure the unstable politics of African American agricultural labor during the Nadir, and since these texts' pictures of the land are regionally coded "southern," the modern black georgic also offers a concrete vocabulary through

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[26] Commenting on the debate about whether *Georgics* proposes a fundamentally positive sensibility towards its subjects or a negative one, Perkell proposes "a more balanced, inclusive view of the poem, not because balance is inherently admirable or virtuous but because, as I believe, it is truer to the poem and, not incidentally, to life. As life has joy and grief, so this poem reflects the real tensions of most human experience" (17). *The Poet's Truth: A Study of the Poet in Virgil's* Georgics (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989).

which we can address questions about the meanings of both African American rurality *and* southernness.

While Patricia Yaeger famously reads the significance of dirt's polluting powers in southern women's writing as a means of transgressing the culture's masculinist oppressions and obsession with whiteness, my thinking about dirt will emphasize its simultaneous abilities to entomb and regenerate. Accepting Yaeger's claim that "[d]irt is a community creator" (271), I uncover the varieties of dirt-bound communities present in African American writing during the Nadir. In response to Reconstruction's broken promises, these texts' attitudes towards agriculture and rural identities both reflect and help to shape the two sides of a debate about how to best achieve collective independence and cohesion, and I focus on points where contesting thematics of constraint and emancipation intersect with tropes of farming and the natural world. From a slightly different angle, I also consider how the presentation of landscape as a sociological and cultural concern offers opportunities to think about issues of environmental sustainability and human intervention during a period of intense industrial development. As Jack Temple Kirby has recently argued, the industrialization of farming is "one of the most important subjects an ecological scholar might address today" (xix), so I seek out its roots—in Tuskegee, in abandoned plantations, in sharecropping tracts—and consider how its branches continue to reach into the contemporary moment, particularly in light of the Pigford case.

"A New Earth":

Washington's Farm

Perhaps owing to the powerful legacies of Du Bois and to the echoes of the Atlanta Exposition Address in the Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson*, separate-but-equal decision, Booker T. Washington has earned his reputation as a well meaning, if misguided, accommodationist.[27] This reading mostly centers on his relationship with white culture and capital, his work at the Tuskegee Institute, and his promotion of the concept of "industrial education." To speak of Washington in my analysis is, above all else, to reference the sign "Washington" as it is developed in *Up from Slavery*. That's not to say that the material, historical presence of Washington—or that of Tuskegee—is inconsequential but to acknowledge that the autobiography is a rhetorical performance through which a textual persona, and a philosophy of progress, emerge. In other words, my purpose here isn't to rehabilitate Washington's reputation as a historical figure but to consider the polyvalent representations of post-Reconstruction race and space that pervade *Up from Slavery*.[28] Unpacking the discourse of industrial education, we see that foremost among the

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[27] In the Address, Washington (in)famously made the case to his white audience, "In all things social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress" (100). Even at the time, however, Washington denied the simile's application to a segregationist agenda, as evidenced in a private letter sent less than a month after the speech: "If anybody understands me as meaning that riding in the same railroad car or sitting in the same room at a railroad station is social intercourse they certainly got the wrong idea of my position." See "Booker T. Washington to Edna Dow Littlehale Cheney, 15 October 1895," *Booker T. Washington Papers, Vol. 4,* ed. Louis R. Harlan (Champaign: U of Illinois P, 1978. 56-57).

[28] The performative language of *Up from Slavery* is particularly important to one of Washington's most perceptive critics, Houston A. Baker, Jr. Baker's depiction of Washington as a prototypical black modernist in *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (1987) explored the self-consciousness with which *Up from Slavery* conflated competing

projects it encapsulates is agriculture—the institute's nickname, "the farm," indicates as much, and farming at Tuskegee is both embraced *as* "industry" and *for* its industrial potential. But when it takes its place alongside other, more obviously industrial expressions of modernity like the factory and the mill, the position of the farm as a throwback to traditional culture is severely complicated.[29] Joel Williamson puts an interesting frame around this discussion when he opines, "Washington's program was designed for the agrarian order of the nineteenth-century" (63). This may be true but, as I

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discursive registers as it deftly negotiated the "*sounds* of the minstrel mask" (29). Baker revised his reading in 2001's *Turning South Again: Re-Reading Modernism/Re-Thinking Booker T.* In the later work, Baker reconfigures black modernism as a category that, over any aesthetic or rhetorical distinction, "signifies the achievement of a life-enhancing and empowering public sphere mobility and the economic solvency of the black majority . . . coextensive with a black citizenship that entails documented mobility" (33-4). The result is a model that emphatically excludes Washington. Baker's readings will come in for analysis later. One of the most compelling recent interpretations of Washington's work comes from Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010). Zimmerman examines Washington's role as a model for German colonialists seeking to replicate Tuskegee-style industrial education in colonial Togo. For a sense of the range of responses that Washington's legacy engendered among African Americans from a variety of professional backgrounds, see *Uncle Tom or New Negro?: African Americans Reflect on Booker T. Washington and* Up from Slavery*, One Hundred Years Later,* ed. Rebecca Carroll (New York: Broadway Books, 2006).

[29] For more on plantation agriculture's responses to an industrializing New South, see Cobb's chapter "New South Plantation Kingdom" in *The Most Southern Place on Earth*, 98-124.

hope to show, it is an "agrarian order" designed to meet the distinct challenges facing turn-of-the-century African America.

Contrary to its reputation for unreasonable optimism, *Up from Slavery*'s view of the African American position in the post-Reconstruction world is startlingly realistic. Andrew Zimmerman succinctly captures the popular sentiment regarding industrial education when he holds that Tuskegee "represented an attempt to redirect African American efforts at self-education into channels supportive of the political and economic status quo" (22). Donald Spivey's assessment is considerably harsher, and as plain as the title of his 1978 study—*Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1868-1915*. Yet in its representations of their opportunities and to their relationship to the dominant culture, African Americans in *Up from Slavery* appear as colonized subjects: their most welcome contribution to the presiding power is their labor, and they struggle to carve out sovereign spaces and practices without attracting the attention of white authorities, whose propensity for violence is both well documented and readily internalized. In post-Reconstruction Alabama, to maintain all appearances of the status quo is essential to survival—a fact that lingers quietly beneath the surface of *Up from Slavery*.

While Washington's implicit stress on the possibility of land and labor to provide autonomy grasps on to Jeffersonian ideals of agrarian republicanism, it might also prefigure a set of problems that Frantz Fanon would examine, sixty years later, in spaces of decolonization—a world that bears striking resemblance to the conditions in post-Reconstruction Alabama. It's useful here to note the multiple histories of colonization and decolonization that pertain to the U.S. South: as in other parts of the continent, the South was originally colonized by white settlers who squeezed out the native populations but it

also features the moveable colonization of enslaved peoples pulled from their homes, the occupation and colonization of Reconstruction, and the colonization of black bodies during the Nadir, in which white supremacy was codified as public policy. Without extending undue sympathy to the planter class, it's clear that the region plays host to a variety of both colonizing agents and colonized subjects. So when Fanon explains that "[f]or colonized people, the most essential value . . . is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity" (9), he is speaking of concepts that carry weight for a range of prominent southern figures—both real and imagined, from Scarlett O'Hara and John Crowe Ransom to Booker T. Washington. Additionally, it's possible to configure colonized spaces as sites wherein violence is the most powerful currency for maintaining the existent power structures.[30] *Up from Slavery*'s peculiar response to this turbulence is to erase it, to disarm terrorism by refusing to acknowledge it.

The conjunctions of labor and violence exposed in *Up from Slavery*, however, recall Alexandre Kójeve's famous reading of the master-slave dialectic. According to Kójeve, "The whole machinery of slavery was constructed so as to cause labour, as a rule, to be looked upon as a badge of degradation, of inferiority" (14). Yet Washington's overriding goal in *Up*

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[30] In spite of their similarities, *Up from Slavery*'s deflective attitude towards violence is its most obvious point of contrast with Fanon's work, particularly in *The Wretched of the Earth.* Fanon's belief that, "[f]or the colonized, life can only materialize from the rotting cadaver of the colonist" rests uneasily against Washington's incessant—and perhaps disingenuous—claims that African Americans harbor no "bitterness" towards their former oppressors (50). In a further illustration of Washington's postcolonial resonance, look to Gayatri Spivak's discussion of José Martí as a "planetary" artist, which makes direct comparison between "[h]is ideas of the education of the rural population" and those of Washington (94).

from Slavery is to wrench labor away from that machinery by reappropriating and valorizing it. To reinscribe work, in other words, with the "dignity of labor" (37).[31] This might be read as an act of appeasement but it may also stand as a marker pointing out the practical value of independent labor. For all his talk in the Atlanta Address about the natural contributions of black labor to white capital, the Tuskegee of Washington's autobiography discreetly highlights means by which white capital can fund opportunities for black autonomy via agriculture. The complicated rhetorical stances of *Up from Slavery*, then—the twoness that is so frequently read as its distinguishing tonal feature—derive from Washington's attempts to both reassure his white readers—he carefully warns of the disadvantages of "leav[ing] the farm," for instance—and to claim, subtly, labor's potential to grant sovereignty to his black audience and community.

It's not simply Washington's interest in agricultural labor that finds an analogue in Fanon: the later writer also shares Washington's appreciation of the distance between rural spaces and consumer/official culture, a distance that threatens to collapse in the modern era. A stated aim of Washington's education project, for example, is "to be careful not to educate our students out of sympathy with agricultural life, so that they would be attracted to the cities, and yield to the temptations of trying to live by their wits" (60). In picturing a grassroots organization of the de/colonized, Fanon similarly fears a scenario where the "towns and villages are deserted, the unaided, uneducated and untrained rural

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[31] Washington elaborates on his theories regarding the natural alliance between farming and former slaves in *My Larger Education* (1911): Citing one man's story of local uplift via agriculture, Washington claims boldly and without the necessary exposition, he "had solved the race problem" (72).

masses turn their backs on an unrewarding soil and set off for the urban periphery" (129). Thus, the collective "should reside in the rural areas" so that resistance might "be decentralized to the limit" (128). The best way to scramble the impulses of capitalist colonization, according to Fanon, is to embrace decentralization by reversing the existing power structures, and by establishing a community beyond the purview of the city and its officiating logic.

According to the defensive spatial economies of both Fanon and Washington, then, the fields and farms become the cultural center; the city is the marginalized—and marginalizing—periphery. It's here, in its celebrations of the rural, that *Up from Slavery*'s georgic tendencies assert themselves. In book two, Virgil denounces the violence of the city, while extolling the virtues of the agrarian: "O blessed farmers! doubly blessed if the should recognize / their blessings!" (2.458-59). In a similar sort of gesture, Washington draws a bright line drawn between the rural and the urban, as we see in the account of his first visit to a city—Richmond, Virginia:

> When I reached there, tired, hungry, and dirty, it was late in the night. I had never been in a large city, and this rather added to my misery. When I reached Richmond, I was completely out of money. I had not a single acquaintance in the place, and being unused to city ways, I did not know where to go. I applied at several places for lodging, but they all wanted money, and that was what I did not have. (27)

The "city ways" that proved so disorienting to Washington are a function of the money economy: he is adrift within a system in which his own preference for the hands-on, for the

materially "grounded," is unfastened from its foundations. The final condition of modern capitalism, as Marx and Engel describe it, is one in which "all that is solid melts into air" (38), and in the midst of just such a free fall, Washington seeks to reattach himself to the ground: he curls up and sleeps on the dirt beneath the sidewalk, the safest—Washington might say the realest—available option. Seen from a postcolonial perspective, it's clear that both Washington and Fanon view the colonists' yearning to inhabit the centers of modernity as a barrier to progress and the establishment of a sovereign society. Better instead to build resistance up from the earth.

It's not necessary, then, to guess at the significance of Richmond as a site of triumph in *Up from Slavery*—Washington makes it plain at the book's conclusion, when he marvels to find himself an invited speaker in a city that not only treated him harshly at his first visit but "which only a few decades ago was the capital of the Southern Confederacy" (145). If the topos of the book self-consciously moves towards resolution and reconciliation, *Up from Slavery* is also clearly interested in positioning Washington as kind of conqueror. And, through Washington's savvy intervention, it's not just the country districts but also the capitals of southern history and identity that are altered by his crusading visions of postslavery blackness.

To get a sense of the shadow Washington's appearances cast, it's worth pausing here to consider a version of Booker T. Washington that appears in popular expression of the succeeding decades. I'm thinking specifically of Gus Cannon's string-band performance of "Can You Blame the Colored Man?," released in 1927 under the name Banjo Joe. The song describes Washington's celebrated dinner with Teddy Roosevelt—an event that occurred in October of 1901, the same year that *Up from Slavery* was published. In combination with

Cannon's bright, descending banjo lines, "Can You Blame the Colored Man?" portrays Washington as a mindful minstrel, whose bulging eyes and barrelhouse laugh veil a deeper, more profoundly uncertain reaction to the situation: arriving at the door, the singer records, "He almost changed his color / when Roosevelt said to come in." Though it's hard to tell whether this statement is meant as an indictment of Washington's reputation as an accomodationist (a *shade*-shifter) or an acknowledgement of the improbability of an African American being hosted by the President, this line encapsulates the ambivalence of the song's narrative. Carrying all the weight of slavery's history and the federal government's complicity in Jim Crow, blackness—"his color"—necessarily wavers as it crosses the front door of the White House.

After imagining Washington, "drunk on wine," taking in a late-night, post-dinner carriage tour of the Capital, the song's chorus probes its protagonist's behavior with a provocative question, directed at the listener: "Could you blame the colored man for making them goo-goo eyes?" How else, the song asks, should a conspicuously black, ex-slave process the absurdity of such a visit during the Nadir's deepest trough? In "Can You Blame the Colored Man?," it's not simply Washington's words but his very body, with its "goo-goo eyes," that expresses itself through strategies of double-voiced discourse. He's not just sounding the minstrel mask; he's wearing it—and to great effect. Thus as Washington again infiltrates the nation's centers of culture, he is able to claim a sly, provisional form of ownership.[32]

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[32] Although we read the song at adjacent angles, I'm indebted to Dom Flemons's excellent unpacking of "Can You Blame the Colored Man?" See Flemons, "Can You Blame Gus Cannon?," *Oxford American,* Dec. 2013 (128-37). It's also important to note that the song's

Throughout *Up from Slavery*, in fact, the cultural centers slip out of place and are made to signify in unanticipated ways. For instance, when Washington first went to Europe he couldn't stop looking at cows: "the thing that impressed me most in Holland was the thoroughness of the agriculture and the excellence of the Holstein cattle. . . . It was worth the trip to Holland just to get a sight of three or four hundred fine Holstein cows grazing in one of the those intensely green fields" (126). Washington is less interested in the Old World cradles of civilization than in the cultivation of the Dutch landscape. Yet his attention to the culture of agriculture over and above more celebrated expression of culture shouldn't be seen as the anti-intellectual posture so much as an acknowledgement of farming's role in the creation of a durable nation.

If the practice of agriculture represents a rare opportunity for self-preservation, Washington's program in *Up from Slavery* readily extends that opportunity to women: "we now train a number of girls in agriculture each year," he writes, describing how "[t]hese girls are taught gardening, fruit-growing, dairying, bee-culture, and poultry-raising" (142). This statement likewise suggests that contrary to its label, models of agriculture in Washington's industrial education do not simply result in the mass production and reproduction of a single commercial crop but in a more carefully constructed, biodiverse—and gender diverse—approach to farming. In its history of Tuskegee, *Up from Slavery* notes the difference between the privation of the school's early days, when residents depended on the "merchants in town" to provide their food on credit, and its present state of relative

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interest in food—"they're eating lamb, ham, veal, and goat / chicken, turkey, bread, and toast"—aligns with *Up from Slavery*'s broader preoccupation with food, which I discuss below.

prosperity, when the institute hosts alumni dinners featuring "tempting, well-cooked food—largely grown by the students themselves"(75). And this transition from reliance on outside sources to internal modes of food production is rightly presented as a sign of Tuskegee's success.

It's worth considering at this point one of the most disheartening details of Washington's first trip to Richmond: the inaccessibility of food-as-commodity. "I passed by many foodstands where fried chickens and half-moon pies were piled high and made to present a most tempting appearance" (27), Washington writes. These "tempting" items remain out of reach because, for a young black man and a former slave, cash is nearly impossible to come by. The text thus narrates the insidious immobility built into a structure that restricts participation in the broader economy by controlling cash flow: money is both the means and the mode of mobility in the city, and it only trickles down to black subjects at the will of white authority. At this early stage in the narrative, Washington is constantly reaching for but never possessing the objects of modernity. By the end, however, when Tuskegee finally appears as a fully functioning source of strength in African America, the text redeploys the signifier "tempting," making it hover, triumphantly, over the "well-cooked" products of black labor at the alumni dinner.

Representations of food serve multiple purposes in the text: for instance, Washington repeatedly underlines the use of food as a social marker, and he decries the diet of fatback, cornbread, and black-eyed peas so common in postbellum African America. He sees both corporate malevolence and a disposition of wastefulness in ex-slaves who buy high-priced foods from stores in town when "the land all about the cabin homes could easily have been made to produce nearly every kind of garden vegetable that is raised

anywhere in the country." Writing of the planters, Washington claims that "[t]heir one object seemed to be to plant nothing but cotton; and in many cases cotton was planted up to the very door of the cabin" (54). The draw of cotton as a cash crop crowds out all other considerations, stripping the ground itself of alternative uses and deepening its black inhabitants' reliance on less accessible food sources. For Washington, food sovereignty *is* sovereignty.

Washington's denunciation of the excesses of the cotton trade complies with his larger ecological and economic vision for Tuskegee: a cotton monoculture, notorious for depleting the southern soils in the plantation and sharecropping systems, is dangerously counterproductive to his proposed community, one that favors self-sufficiency over participation in a cash crop economy. In this regard, Tuskegee more closely resembles a large-scale subsistence farm than an agricultural factory. And as it declines to abstract food crops into commodities on the national marketplace, Tuskegee participates in what David Nicholls calls a form of "political modernity": "To those seeking autonomy through agricultural production, subsistence farming was seen as a workable option and not simply a return to an idyllic past. This fact elaborates the transition narrative of modernization by showing that supposedly superseded modes of production may yet yield political modernity" (11). Succinctly, the "new earth" of Washington's imagination might turn out to be a product of the old ways.

Tuskegee's thrust for more sustainable modes of farming is most prominently evident in the work of George Washington Carver, one of its most notable faculty members. Carver's experiments in agriculture represent an attempt to align the economic needs of the South's farmers with the region's own ecological needs. In his recent "environmental

biography," Mark D. Hersey accurately lauds Carver as "a prophet of sustainable agriculture" (2), and shows that it was precisely this concern for the local environment that led Washington to aggressively recruit Carver to Tuskegee. These facts rest uneasily against Scott Hicks's recent contention that Washington's work, particularly in the Atlanta Compromise speech, simply "celebrates environmental degradation and exploitation past and present" (205). Although Hicks's reading contains insightful readings of Richard Wright's ethics of ecology, his take on Washington and Du Bois too closely resembles a familiar critical reflex in which Washington serves as Du Bois's less canny, less benevolent foil. When stacked against his peers in the Progressive Era—John Muir, Teddy Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot—Washington may not qualify as a thoroughgoing conservationist but in *Up from Slavery* he writes himself as, above all else, a utilitarian and a pragmatist, and his agricultural program represents a full expression of these characteristics. In other words, farming at Tuskegee is a practical imperative: "We began farming, because we wanted something to eat" (65).

It's also clear, however, that the independent production of food provides his community an opportunity to step outside the circuits laid down by the dominant culture. As Wendell Berry has it, "food is a cultural product" (43), and its cultivation at Tuskegee contributes to the establishment of a distinct sense of *African American* culture at a point in history when the very existence of such a thing was continually under attack. It also offers participants in Washington's Tuskegee Institute a chance to absent themselves from an

American mainstream increasingly guided by adherence to national codes of consumption.[33]

There exists, then, a tight bond between space and its functional capabilities in Washington's economy. In trying to elaborate his spatial values, we might graft Washington's anxieties about the city onto Ian Baucom's discussion of the connections between colonial desire and modernity. Desire, Baucom argues, is "predicated . . . on lack, or the perception of lack, on what is denied or unheld, on what is not here, but there . . . beyond the color line, on the horizon, in the brightly lit colonist's cities: modernity, or at least the illusion of modernity" (233). Washington's suspicions about urbanity's tendency to promote consumption over production underlie his larger projects of postbellum African American self-sufficiency. It appears, then, that the Tuskegee of *Up from Slavery* isn't so much anti-modern as it is differently modern; in other words, its patterns of resisting the desire for modernity provide opportunities for attempting, and daring, to desire it differently. Reading Baucom against *Up from Slavery*, we also get hints of what the specter of modernity might mean for the objectives of Tuskegee, creating space to discuss Washington's relationship towards the modern and modernism.

The most famous reading of Washington's engagement with the modern belongs, of course, to Houston A. Baker Jr. According to Baker, the Washington of *Up from Slavery* inhabits a mode of modernism that "blend[s] . . . class and mass—*poetic* mastery discovered as a function of deformative *folk* sound—[which] constitutes the essence of

[33] For more on mass consumption from the period and white anxieties about its ability to erase lines of racial division, see Hale, pp. 121-97. See also Ted Ownby, *American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, and Culture, 1830-1998* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

black discursive modernism" (*Modernism* 93). In other words, Washington's voice contains multiple valences, each of which is artful enough to signify differently to different audiences. In spite of his clearly Victorian tendencies—the multiple passages emphasizing the importance of hygiene and cleanliness provide one obvious example—we recognize a twinge of the modern in Washington's attitudes towards a world undergoing swift and wrenching transformations. As Baker elsewhere describes, it was "*change* . . . in what could be taken as unquestionable assumptions about the meaning of human life" that prompted the shift into modernity and modernism (*Modernism* 5, italics in original), changes that Washington at once welcomes and resists.

For instance, *Up from Slavery* goes to great lengths to emphasize the usefulness of certain technologies: large chunks of Washington's narrative depend upon his experiences with train travel, and the toothbrush—an item that entered mass production just six years before the book was published—commands special attention throughout. Yet the text also reveals a deep unease with much of industrial society, a characteristic that places it squarely within the modernism of mixed responses limned by Marshall Berman: "[a]ll forms of modernist art and thought . . . are at once expressions of and protests against the process of modernization" (235). Hence Washington's wish that he "might remove the great bulk of these people into the country districts and plant them upon the soil . . . where all nations and races that have ever succeeded have gotten their start,—a start that is at first slow and toilsome, but one that nevertheless is real" (45). Real in that it addresses the immediate needs of a community in crisis, and real in that it forces an engagement with the biological realities of survival via food production. In its theory that farming forces a recognition of one's deeply rooted ties to the natural world—both human and non-

human—*Up from Slavery*'s Washington would appear to agree with Aldo Leopold: "[T]here is value in any experience that reminds us of our dependency on the soil-plant-animal-man food chain" (178). More pointedly, Washington's prescriptions for black community describe a form of agrarian nationalism that is positioned away from the temptations of the city and the oppressive power structures it represents. The country districts might lack certain amenities but they can also provide a space apart from white supervision, a site where the landscape of the plantation can be remade—reconstructed even—in the image of black sovereignty.

With all this in mind, it's possible to recognize that Washington used the Tuskegee Institute itself as a means of materializing these principles of black autonomy. Kenrick Grandison examines the specific ways that Washington used space to establish a compound beyond the scope of white surveillance by building the Tuskegee campus on the site of a former plantation, accessible by a single, barely passable road. Even the placement and function of the campus buildings, Grandison shows, made the institution a real and practical bulwark against outside invasion. Women, for instance, occupied the barracks on the interior, while the male students were housed around the perimeter, "where they could potentially serve as a first line of defense in the case of hostile intrusion" (362). As a reversal of the racist southern rape myth, Tuskegee stands as an arrangement for safeguarding black family structures as well as black economic prospects. And in Washington's view, the country districts provide not only the best working conditions but also the safest place to dig in.

Similarly, at several turns in the text Washington's interest in agriculture allows the ground itself to become an almost preternaturally regenerative force. The source of this

regeneration is physical interaction with the land, a trope that recurs consistently throughout *Up from Slavery*. Expanding on the connections between persons and spaces, the text probes a thin line separating people from the places they inhabit. The term "Black Belt" for instance, common to both *Up from Slavery* and *The Souls of Black*, points up a nexus of group identity, space, and the soil itself. Although it originated as a description of the dark fertile soils of middle Alabama and northeast Mississippi, by the time Washington writes *Up from Slavery* it has come to "designate the counties where the black people outnumber the white" (52), a rhetorical shift that points up the ways in which southern discourse so easily reduces African Americans to their environment. The shifting significance of "black" is intriguing here as the distance between landscape, labor, and perceptions of the black subject's body and "place" gives way. The sign "black" thus functions as a meeting point for all three: bodies, soil, farm labor. This is a principle fleshed out by the figure of Washington presented in *Up from Slavery.* As Peter Coclanis puts it, "Whether one points to the earthen kitchen floor he slept on as a slave boy or his squalid Malden house, the stench and filth of the salt furnaces and coal mines, or his legendary night under the sidewalk in Richmond, Booker was one with dirt" (89).

What's notable here is how *soil* acts as an ennobling, enriching locus of blackness at the same time that *dirt* so often serves as an impediment to bodily and domestic cleanliness; it is a contaminant that must be dispatched with a thoroughness that borders on the obsessive. In one memorable passage, Washington insists upon the necessity of "absolute cleanliness" in the project of racial uplift (80). And the same chapter (Chapter III, "The Struggle for an Education") that contains the Richmond sidewalk scene also includes the famous vignette in which Washington painstakingly sweeps the Hampton Institute

recitation room, resulting in one of Washington's most pointed lectures on cleanliness: "I sometimes feel that almost the most valuable lesson I got at the Hampton Institute was in the use and value of the bath" (31). At the same time that Washington stands as a former slave refusing the role of the black beast by compounding civilization with near-sterility, he is also fundamentally invested in dirt-bound labor. While the paradox is, perhaps, irresolvable, it's consistent with the contradictory impulses of the georgic mode and altogether appropriate for a signing figure whose rhetoric is distinctly, and consistently, doubled.

Later in the narrative, while taxed by public engagements, administrative business, and fundraising efforts, Washington explains his practice of seeking solace by working the ground:

> When I can leave my office in time so that I can spend thirty or forty minutes in spading the ground, in planting seeds, in digging about the plants, I feel that I am coming into contact with something that is giving me strength for the many duties and hard places that await me out in the big world. (121)

While Washington's physical attachment to the land both foreshadow and parallel Heideggerian notions of autochthony, the rootedness that Washington envisions arrives less as the result of a generation-spanning national identity than as a way of claiming ground for oneself in the present. He becomes an Antaeus of the industrial era, one whose strength derives from contact with the soil, specifically the southern soil of the Black Belt. Washington's georgic, then, is one wherein labor is synonymous with progress: you get to

the end of the line by guiding the plow, however rocky the soil. And as a complement to the emphasis on "routes" embedded in Paul Gilroy's model of black modernism, Washington proposes an African American encounter with the modern hinging upon manufactured roots and rootedness. From this perspective, the ground becomes the material out of which a self-determined history and a productive present are imagined—it comes to represent the precise spot where, as Washington promises in the Atlanta Exposition Address, the South itself will be infused with a "new heaven and the new earth" (102).

"Shadow of a Marvelous Dream":

Du Bois's Tenant Tract

If Washington recognizes agriculture and the development of a distinctly black formation of agrarianism as a way forward for African Americans, Du Bois is more skeptical. Throughout *The Souls of Black Folk* there exists an acute anxiety about African American occupations and how they might modulate the meanings of racial progress, a sign of the burden placed on black labor when it's forced to act as a symbol of the race's potential. As with Washington, Du Bois' questions about what progress means for both African America and for the nation at large depend upon the shape and character of black labor. Yet for Du Bois, agriculture doesn't offer the same redemptive opportunities that Washington finds. Indeed, in a particularly poignant chapter titled "Of the Meaning of Progress," Du Bois uncovers explicit connections between agriculture, landscape, and a case of tragic retrogression. An account of Du Bois' days as a schoolteacher in the "hills of Tennessee . . . beyond the veil" (46), the chapter includes the portrait of a twenty-year-old girl, Josie, and

her family's struggle to scrape out a living in an inclement environment: "it was a hard thing to dig a living out of a rocky hill-side" (47).

Revisiting the area a decade later, Du Bois learns of Josie's death—"We've had a heap of trouble since you've been away," her mother explains—and the family's move from the farm on the hillside to a location "nearer the town" (51). The text also presents Doc Burkes, a black farmer who works ceaselessly to purchase the "seventy-five acres of hill and dale where he lived." However noble this project might appear, it prompts doubt in both Burkes' neighbors and in the author himself: "people said that he would surely fail, and the 'white folks would get it all' " (49). Additionally, Du Bois notes students pulled away from their studies by the cycles of the growing season and the demands of the landowners; he describes men and woman wasting away under the weight of their troubles and the very same categories of labor extolled by Washington. Contra Washington, the soil's demands halt time, history, "progress," and education, and we're introduced to Du Bois' vision of black agrarianism: a battle against both the natural world and the white world that too frequently threatens to collapse into something uncomfortably close to slavery.

Du Bois reaches for just this sort of language in his assessment of the Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction-era politics in *Souls*' second chapter, "Of the Dawning of Freedom." Former slaveholders, according to Du Bois, were "determined to perpetuate slavery under another name" (28), and his analysis of Reconstruction turns on familiar metaphors of dirt and cultivation, as well as probing questions about the material realities of postslavery labor and land-use. In its brief history of the War's aftermath, *Souls* figures the ever-present "problem of the color-line" as a native, organic feature of the southern

ground itself: "No sooner had Northern armies touched Southern soil than this old question, newly guised, sprang from the earth,—What shall be done with Negroes?" (17). It takes nothing more than physical contact with the "soil" to churn up the inescapable dilemma of what it means to grant freedom to a formerly enslaved people.

The government's solution, of course, came in 1865, in a branch of the War Department called the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Typically shortened to Freedmen's Bureau, the longer, official title indicates a greater measure of the organization's strategy and its philosophy. There was, in the opening stages of Reconstruction, a convenient and instant link between the "abandoned lands" of the slaveholding plantations and the scores of freedmen in the South, most of whom, it was assumed, were well trained and eager to assume the role of independent farmer. Many were—and many, as Paul Cimbala's description of former slaves in Ogeechee, Georgia attests, were ready to embrace less individualistic approaches to agricultural production: "They continued to farm the land productively 'in concert' instead of working on the individual plots to which they were entitled. That productivity and the communal approach to labor reflected the freedpeople's sense of proprietorship" (169).[34]

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[34] Originally issued in 1978, Claude Oubre's *Forty Acres and a Mule: The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Land Ownership* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2012) is a comprehensive assessment of the Bureau's successes and failures. Eric Foner's standard *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988) expertly contextualizes the Bureau alongside other features of the Reconstruction. More recently, Mary Farmer-Kaiser's *Freewomen and the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Fordham UP, 2010) offers a corrective to histories of the Bureau that exclude the experience of women.

Du Bois himself highlights a positive development whereby "large quantities of land were leased in the Mississippi Valley, and many Negroes were employed," but notes that these "new regulations were suspended for reasons of 'public policy'" (21). In 1870, five years into the project, Freedmen's Bureau commissioner O. O. Howard wrote a letter to Congress, lamenting the obstacles facing freedmen engaged in farming:[35]

> Many were afraid to remain on the same soil that they had tilled as slaves, lest by some trick they might find themselves again in bondage. Others supposed that the government would either take the entire supervision of their labor and support, or divide among them the lands of conquered rebels, and furnish them with all that might be necessary to begin life as independent farmers. (5)

Just as contact with the southern soil instantly dredged up visions of slavery for Union troops, so too for former slaves, who fear that "some trick"—perhaps something about the practice of agriculture itself, perhaps something inherent to physical and emotional investment in that tainted ground—might reinstall slavery and strip them of their newfound freedoms. Howard's letter confirms Du Bois' basic argument as it pertains to both farming and the southern landscape: there is no coherent way for emancipated slaves to interact with the spaces and the modes of labor so strongly associated with their erstwhile bondage.

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[35] In "Of the Dawn of Freedom," Du Bois calls Howard "[a]n honest man, with too much faith in human nature, little aptitude for business and intricate detail" (23)—an evaluation that might apply to his appraisal the Freedmen's Bureau more broadly.

That's not to say that Du Bois doesn't appreciate the "vision of 'forty acres and a mule'" or "the righteous and the reasonable ambition to become a landholder" (28). But the abandoned lands of the Bureau's original mission rarely fell into the possession of former slaves and, as Howard's letter indicates, the promise that they might inhabit the "lands of conquered rebels" was, in Du Bois' words, "destined to bitter disappointment" (28). One obvious source of friction was an unresolved animosity between blacks and whites in the South, and the Bureau's inability to manage it. Eric Foner argues that northerners associated with the Freedmen's Bureau mistakenly considered the hostility between free blacks and white planters on the plantations "an irrational legacy of slavery that would disappear as soon as planters and freedmen absorbed free labor principles" (170). This kind of optimism toward free labor and its contributions to the free market calls up the larger question about what the sign "free" might mean in Reconstruction discourse. Inhabiting a large, and unruly, semantic field, "free" indicates freedom from physical and mental bondage at the same time that it suggests the acquisition of something without paying for it. In Du Bois' assessment of Reconstruction, "free labor" too often means something close to *free labor* for the white planter class. Better than the promise of "free land" or a vague hope in the redeeming power of free labor, then, is the "planting of the *free school* among the Negroes" (28, emphasis mine). Note the verb: it's not crops but schools that should take root and enrich the southern environment, and the inevitable interactions of the schoolhouse and the field is a motif that recurs throughout the text, particularly in "On the Meaning of Progress."

The problem of the color-line in farming the South remained visible after Reconstruction. Through the 1880s and 90s, a movement to reestablish agriculture as the

province of white Americans appeared, coalescing in that precursor of the national Populist Party, the Farmers' Alliance.[36] According to Theodore R. Mitchell, the Alliance's intention to bring together farmers from the South and the North was undone by the persistence of racism: "the race question proved the greatest ideological hurdle of all, and it proved ultimately insurmountable" (76). In Joel Williamson's view, the depression of 1892-93 acted as the flashpoint, sparking action by white farmers in the Black Belt against black sharecroppers. The best lands, he explains, were "most often tenanted by the freedmen and their descendents." Williamson further suggests that, with less to lose and infinitely more to gain, postslavery African Americans thrust themselves into farming with vigor and determination: "there are suggestions in agricultural statistics that black farmers, so recently out of slavery and beginning almost literally with nothing but the clothes on their backs, farmed their lands . . . more intensively than their white contemporaries" (82). And thus organizations like the Whitecaps were created by disgruntled whites seeking to "terrorize Negroes off farms rented from landlords and country merchants" (81).

Black farmers also felt the pinch born of an economy under transformation, as a shift from agriculture to industry took shape in the decades following Henry Grady's 1886 New South speech. As James Cobb reports, business and political interests were determined to thwart any cross-racial alliance between white and black farmers who might feel mutually disenchanted by emergent industrialism. Particularly in Georgia, the southern state that Du Bois spends the most energy exploring, Cobb explains that "New South leaders proved especially effective in fusing the goals of white supremacy and industrial development with the ideals of the Lost Cause and presenting themselves as the champions

[36] For scholarship on the Populist movement, see Introduction, note 17.

of all three" (*Away Down South* 84), a configuration that conspicuously excludes African Americans who work the land. In a New South ideology that uneasily merges progress and nostalgia, black farmers were forced both out of place and out of time.

Given all of this white hostility to African American farming, it's easy to understand some of *The Souls of Black Folk*'s anxieties about the black agrarian. As a student of Hegel, Du Bois recognizes that the way forward depends upon change and exchange, creation and destruction.[37] To the extent that synthesis yields newness, of course, it also creates obsolescence, an undercurrent that occasionally swells to the surface in Du Bois' text. Returning to "Of the Meaning of Progress," the site of the writer's former employment works as a powerful illustration: "My log schoolhouse was gone. In its place stood Progress; and Progress is necessarily ugly." The schoolmaster's cabin is absent but its foundation stones remain; the "blackboard had grown by about two feet" but the "seats were still without backs." Du Bois' ironic evocations of "Progress" here suggest that the education of southern blacks is somehow an obstruction; its pursuits of efficiency and newness are far less concerned with widening opportunities than they are with deepening the holdings of those already in control. Observing the cast-off detritus of forward motion—broken windowpanes, chunks of a broken stove—that litters the scene, Du Bois reports that "[a]s I . . . looked on the Old and the New I felt glad, very glad, and yet—" (52). One way to account for the note of uneasiness that registers in Du Bois' voice here is that it signals an awareness of the casualties of progress and all the contradictory contours it follows. The

[37] Although the triad "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" is frequently attributed to Hegel's work in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), that exact formulation never appears in the book. He does, however, present a variety of triads that function in this way. For example, "abstract-negative-concrete." I proceed with "synthesis" because of its common usage.

dash indicates an aporia, a gap between progress's legacies as a conceit of the Enlightenment—wherein it represents ever-increasing acquisitions of growth, wellness, and truth—and its darker affiliations with creative destruction. The author's expression of gladness, in other words, cannot proceed without qualification. As Du Bois himself puts it earlier in the text, there is a "curious double movement where real progress may be a negative and actual advance be relative retrogression" (37). In keeping with his broader reading of Washington's project, Du Bois never doubts the motive driving the Tuskegee mode of education; he is concerned with its broader transformative capabilities. Using the abandoned schoolhouse as a case in point, *The Souls of Black Folk* argues that "Progress" has converted the world of small, independent farms into a landscape of ruin and deprivation. Correspondingly, the text never denies the important role that agriculture has played in African American cultural history; it just never allows it the elevated position that it holds in Washington's economy.

Perhaps the most sustained examination of black agriculture and rural life comes from "Of the Quest of the Golden Fleece," in which Du Bois zeroes in on the material conditions created by a southern cotton economy in Dougherty County, Georgia. This is not, the author is quick to point out, the Cotton Kingdom of the antebellum South but a ramped-up, industrialized zone that is, in some key ways, even more efficient in its brutality than the pre-Emancipation system it displaced. Its actualization of an intensive, rationalized theory of monocrop cultivation, with an unswerving emphasis on profitability and efficiency, represents a startling southern face of modernization. And the cotton industry's basic disregard for the conditions of both workers and the landscape finds a clear analogue in the steel factories and oil fields of turn-of-the-century industrial America.

Although Sherman's Orders extended a guarantee of land and livestock to freed slaves after the war, Andrew Johnson quickly revoked the policy and the scales of slavery were largely reinstated via a sharecropping and tenant farming system that, as Du Bois highlights, held the labor force in place through debt. The promise thus unfulfilled, black farmers experienced a scheme wherein "the crop-lien system, the deterioration of the land, and the slavery of debt" assures that the "position of the metayers has sunk to a dead level of practically unrewarded toil" (101). In Du Bois' analysis, then, the realities of black agriculture are reducible to an unbroken cycle of rents and obligations, exploited labor and inhospitable conditions. It stands as the opposite of sovereignty, a system of utter dependence.

The southern landscape paid a steep price as well. Decades after the publication of *Souls*, in 1938, the U.S. Department of Agriculture commissioned a study seeking out the causes of soil exhaustion, and concluded that generations of contracts upholding the tenant system "were developed during a period when the soil was exploited as a matter of course" and thus they "naturally reflect a policy of ignoring, in large measure, the growing problem of soil maintenance and restoration" (151). More broadly, the authors argue that a fundamental disregard for the future of the land on the part of both tenants and landowners promotes these abusive practices:

> The uncertainties of his occupancy and the requirements of his lease dictate quite definitely what crops he can grow and what livestock he can keep to advantage. Hence he is largely a producer of cash crops such as cotton, tobacco, corn, and small grain, and he is not concerned that these crops are hard on most soils. (153)

Yet it was cotton, the very crop produced in the sharecropping outfits Du Bois covers, that gave the South entrée into the international industrial economy and orchestrated an economic, if not a racial and social, integration of the country's two halves.[38] This is an integration achieved, however, through the development of a crop that placed stringent demands on both the land and its laborers.

Even as Du Bois signals an awareness of the issues surrounding the African American agrarian, his involvement is always mediated by distance in the text. For better or worse, through all of his impassioned critique there remains a gulf between Du Bois, an African American sociologist who has already transitioned to an information/service economy, and the labor of his rural subjects. Commenting on the overpopulation of sharecroppers' living quarters, Du Bois writes, "We have come to associate crowding with homes in cities almost exclusively. This is primarily because we have so little accurate knowledge of country life" (91). The pronoun "we" is curious here as it implies an absence amongst the text's readers of anyone with an intimate "knowledge of country life," this in spite of the fact that, in the turn-of-the-century South, "country life" is already largely urbanized via modernity. One way to account for the differences between Du Bois and Washington in regards to African American agriculture, then, is to recognize Du Bois as a dismayed outsider looking in—looking in to the rural and, perhaps more distressingly, to the race itself. Andrew Scheiber makes the point that because of Du Bois' education and

[38] For a thorough account of southern cotton's participation in antebellum global networks of trade and industrial manufacturing, see Brain Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of Union: Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009). See also Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams.*

background, "the South comprised something like a foreign country" to him and, although he understands the region as the locus of black expressive culture, the "location of his own soul's voice in the collective expression of these southern 'black folk' " is a problem that threatens to undermine his entire project (253). We don't have to subscribe wholly to Scheiber's reading to recognize that when it comes to agricultural labor, Du Bois is speaking from an observational position rather than an experiential one, and that he is confronted with an unnerving socio-cultural paradox whereby the sites of the most material misery also provide the most aesthetic beauty and the greatest cultural value. This is the shadow side of *Souls*' position as what Gayatri Spivak calls the "prototype . . . vision of metropolitan Cultural Studies" (97): in its assumptions of urban authority, and contrary to its best intentions, there exist forms of knowledge and power undergirding this text that may well be complicit with the very patterns of colonization and imperialism that it seeks to unravel.

And so for all the diverse contexts in which images of dirt, clay, and soil occur, Du Bois's approach to the subject is fairly consistent. In his chapter "Of the Black Belt," Du Bois holds that the "Negro problem [lies] in its naked *dirt* and penury" (80, emphasis mine); in the fictional chapter, "Of the Coming of John," John is figured as a character who, visiting a concert hall, is swept up by a "deep longing that swelled in all his heart to rise with that clear music out of the *dirt* and *dust* of that low life that held him prisoned and befouled" (147, emphasis mine). Elsewhere, we read a sardonic voice pointing out "the scarred and wretched *land*; the ruined mansions, the worn-out *soil* and mortgaged acres . . . This is Negro freedom!" (100, emphasis mine). The text further describes the fall of Atlanta during the Civil War as a "vision of empire fade[d] to real ashes and *dirt*" (55, emphasis mine), and,

in the its famous final chapter, the singer of sorrow songs is a "*toiler*" out "transfigur[ing] his fatalism . . . amid the *dust* and *dirt*" (161, emphasis mine). In each of these examples dirt is the element of enforced humility and degradation, and, in stark contrast with its role as a source of power in *Up from Slavery*, it stands as something to be transcended in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Although the text works out an admirable ecological ethic, these images of dirt are emphatically not ecological because they are manifestly disconnected with the living process—they offer all decay and no regeneration.

But in accordance with the "neo-Hegelian dialectic" that Stanley Brodwin recognizes as essential to the text's patterns of meaning-making (306), southern dirt is synthesized into something new towards the conclusion of *Souls*. In the final paragraphs of the last chapter, Du Bois sits in his office listening to the sounds of the Fisk University Singers, "fresh young voices welling up to me from the caverns of brick and mortar below" (163). Du Bois's elevated station—literally, as an academic with an office in a lofty tower—is upheld, according to his own metaphor, by bricks crafted from the very dirt and clay that is metonymically linked to southern histories of slavery and violence. This isn't just true of Du Bois alone, of course. The infrastructure of modern America, particularly in the South, owes itself to the labor of African Americans and the suffering bound up in the southern soil. Tropes of bricks and brickmaking figure prominently in discourse about Reconstruction, as evidenced in Albion W. Tourgée's 1880 novel *Bricks without Straw* and, compellingly for this chapter, *Up from Slavery,* which includes a detailed explanation of Tuskegee's history of

brickmaking and the role of the brick-as-commodity in Washington's racial economy.[39] According to the text, brickmaking was second only to farming in Tuskegee's priorities of labor, and it served a double purpose: "We needed these [bricks] for use in connection with the erection of our own buildings; but . . . [t]here was no brickyard in town, and in addition to our own needs there was a demand for brick in the general market" (71).

For Washington, the bricks come to represent a medium of productive exchange between "the two races of the South," and a means by which hostile whites came to seek out the products of black labor. The result, according to *Up from Slavery*, are communities integrated in terms material, economic, and social: "As the people of the neighbourhood came to us to buy bricks, we got acquainted with them; they traded with us and we with them. Our business interests became intermingled" (71). *Souls*' investment in the future of African America and, more specifically, its investment in the construction of the black academy and intellectual class—a group for whom Du Bois was the most prominent and gifted spokesperson—depends upon a differently motivated double infrastructure: the material and economic, on one hand, metaphorized in the bricks and the mortar; and the cultural and aesthetic on the other, encapsulated in the "sorrow songs," performance wherein "soul" becomes the most promising token of cultural capital.

The synthesis the text reaches for at its conclusion is a hallmark of its innovations in both content and form. For instance, critics such as Brodwin argue that *The Souls of Black Folk*'s position as an expression of modernism is tied to its interest in, and incorporation of,

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[39] It also includes a variation on the title Tourgée's novel: *Up from Slavery*'s chapter that includes the brickmaking passages, chapter 10, is titled, "A Harder Task Than Making Bricks without Straw."

Hegel, and so in addition to underscoring the author's staggering sophistication, this quality might also account for certain of the text's formal features. Highlighting its "self-consciously polyphonic form," Gilroy posits that the text "inaugurated . . . [t]he genre of black modernist writing" in a heterogeneous mélange that "supplement[ed] recognizably sociological writing with personal and public history, fiction, autobiography, ethnography, and poetry" (115). The tendency towards hybridity but also dividedness results in an asymmetrical series of unresolved formal and thematic tensions, which include *Souls*' ultimate uncertainty about the meanings and possibilities of the rural South, and its ambivalent stance towards southern dirt.

Thus the text's georgic undercurrents. Working to use Raymond Williams's "structures of feeling" to arrive at a optic of "presentness" through which to perceive unheralded—or invisible—histories, Kevis Goodman draws readers' attentions to the "immanent, collective perception of any moment as a seething mix of unsettled elements." She specifically aims to imagine the georgic as a lens through which to read history's claims on the present, underscoring ways in which "historical presentness is often 'turned up' by georgic as *unpleasureable* feeling: as sensory discomfort, as disturbance in affect and related phenomena that we variously term perceptive, sensorial, or affective" (4). Returning to the description of the Burkes' farm in "Of the Meaning of Progress," it's clear that descriptions of suffering and privation unearth both the ground and farm labor's persistent connections to slavery. Most obviously, the girl Josie is dead. But the chapter also pays attention to the discomfort of laboring black bodies: the "gaunt father who toiled night and day. . . . [H]is massive frame . . . showing decline"; the mother, whose "lion-like physique of other days was broken." In a move of distinctly georgic ambivalence, Du Bois

notes, "The farm was fat with growing crop," but the valley is shadowed by a "strange stillness"—death. Even when the farm is productive, *Souls* can't help but notice that the same ground that brings a bountiful harvest also holds the body of young Josie: "How shall man measure Progress there where the dark-faced Josie lies? How many heartfuls of sorrow shall balance a bushel of wheat?" (53). Although Du Bois puts a sharp point on the matter, this is a figure played on repeat throughout black writing in the Nadir: the southern soil's famous fertility owes itself to the suffering—and, sometimes, to the physical decomposition—of black bodies.

Yet the text appears to be asking an adjoining question as well: Does the rural South simply crystallize the problem of the color-line or does it contain the seeds of a solution? According to Harilaos Stecopolous' reading of Du Bois' career after *Souls*, particularly his 1911 novel *The Quest for the Silver Fleece*, Du Bois is often given to "pastoral excesses" when considering the role of the rural South in the cultural economy of black Americans (80). The roots of this tendency are visible in *Souls* when Du Bois argues that the soul of African America is itself a product of the rural South and its "folk" culture. In other words, the expressive output Du Bois so admires is nourished in the same soil that smothers "Progress" in the form of political, social, and economic advancements. Owing perhaps to the text's function as a direct response to Washingtonian notions of black labor and education, however, *Souls* is less openly optimistic about opportunities for black advancement in the country districts. Yet the text's overarching investment in the region's fertile cultural practices creates an internal dialogue that is, appropriately enough, divided against itself, as "two warring ideals in one dark body" (11).

According to scholars such as Gilroy and Smethurst, this articulation of African American psychological dualism is another sign of *Soul*'s intricate modernism. If, however, we follow the suggestions of Houston Baker and try to configure black modernism along more sociological lines, we see that Du Bois' text is responsive to that variety as well. Black modernism, Baker explains, "signifies the achievement of a life-enhancing and empowering public sphere mobility and the economic solvency of the black majority . . . coextensive with a black citizenship that entails documented mobility" (*Turning South* 33-4). Likewise for Du Bois, whose problem of the color-line can only be remediated by greater, and more varied, opportunities for African Americans as full citizens. It demands, foremost, the recognition of blacks as citizens and democratic subjects free to follow any channel that the modern world provides. Thus, modernity, modernism, and all the social values they represent are intrinsically tied to African American labor, an enterprise that, in turn-of-the-century America, retains its deep roots.

"Plant of Freedom Upward Sprung": Dunbar's Plantation

Of all the public appearances and celebrity encounters recorded in *Up from Slavery*, the most suggestive may be an event organized by "[s]ome good ladies in Boston" and held at the Hollis Street Theater in early 1899. As Washington describes it, he made an address, Du Bois "read an original sketch," and Dunbar recited some poetry (123). But in addition to charting the confluence of three of the era's most prominent African Americans—in the wake of Frederick Douglass's death in 1895, perhaps *the* three most prominent African Americans—the occasion for the meeting is itself deeply significant: to celebrate and

evaluate the efforts of Tuskegee, the most conspicuous symbol of Washington's approach to education, and the system that would emerge as a major point of contention between Du Bois and Washington. For my purpose, however, the most instructive presence here might be Dunbar. While Du Bois and Washington were each famous for their activism, their work as educators, and for their personal investment in public policy, Dunbar stands as something of an odd man out—he is exclusively known for his literary output, as both a poet and a novelist. Yet as he uses imaginative literature to engage many of the same subjects broached by his peers, Dunbar is well positioned to navigate the ground stretched out along the Washington-Du Bois continuum. Although *Up from Slavery* fails to record which poems Dunbar read at the meeting, there are any number that can serve as either meaningful critiques or celebrations of Washingtonian sensibilities. (The explicit tribute, "To Booker T. Washington," debuted a year later, on January 26, 1900 at the Denver Minister's Alliance (323)).

Dunbar's is an especially helpful voice here because his approach to the issues of southern land and labor that I've raised in both *Up from Slavery* and *The Souls of Black Folk* is less consistent, perhaps less governed by an overtly sociological perspective. If the positions of Washington and Du Bois signal an impasse in turn-of-the-century black thought, it may be that the best way to imagine a resolution is through literature—fiction and poetry. What I suggest here is that Dunbar's poetry—as well as Harper's fiction in *Iola Leroy*—both anticipates and arbitrates these contending positions through tropes and images most immediately associated with the georgic mode.

For Dunbar especially, questions about how the land signifies and what black agrarianism can mean are deeply ambiguous. And whereas both Du Bois and Washington

have received prominent attention for their role as modernists, readers often see Dunbar as a residual figure from the pre-modernist tradition of dialect poetry. For example, although Geoffrey Jacques promotes more expansive definitions of African American modernism and recognizes Dunbar as "an important modernizer of American lyric language" (23), he stops short of classifying the poet as a modernist. Smethurst's recent thinking about Dunbar highlights the modern qualities of the poet's output but he is, by his own admission, pushing back against a sense that "Dunbar and his work have been generally very poorly treated by scholarship" (26)—which is another way of saying that he has been tied to aesthetic practices perceived as less than modern and, perhaps, less than serious. Yet if we follow Susan Stanford Friedman's generous definition of modernism as "the loosely affiliated movements and individuals in the arts and literature that reflect and contribute to the conditions and consciousness of modernity" (501), it's hard to deny that Dunbar's work both "reflect[s] and contribute[s]" to the conditions of African American modernity. In this sense, to theorize a modernism for Dunbar is to inevitably describe a modernism of ambiguity, a modernism that sides more comfortably with the "alternative modernities" proposed by Dilip Gaonkar. As Gaonkar explains, "everywhere, at every national/cultural site, modernity is not one but many; modernity is not new but old and familiar; modernity is incomplete and necessarily so" (23, italics removed). Appropriately, then, Dunbar's catalog of rustic images never adds up to a single position but is best understood in terms of gaps, overlaps, incompletion, and contradiction. Like Du Bois, his work is infinitely richer for its willingness to allow for the multiplicities of African American pasts and presents; unlike Du Bois, he is unburdened of the mantle of polemicist.

While Du Bois's interest in Hegel is duly noted both here and elsewhere, Dunbar's poetry, like moments in Washington's prose, models an unconscious response to the master-slave dialectic explored in Kojéve's famous lecture on Hegel. As Kojéve has it, "Man achieves his true autonomy, his authentic freedom, only after passing through Slavery, after surmounting the fear of death by work performed in the service of another . . . Work that frees man is hence necessarily, in the beginning, the forced work of a Slave" (27). This passage and its location of the slave's achievement of "authentic freedom" in a conflict with the master and his overriding power applies to several of Dunbar's poems: those which picture slaves conditioning themselves through labor while the master rests (as in "A Corn Song" (59)); those that represent former slaves who both physically and psychically occupy the spaces abandoned by their masters (as in "The Deserted Plantation" (67-68)); those that depict black soldiers who, in spite of prejudice, faced down "fear of death by work" on the way to eradicating slavery and restoring the Union ("When Dey 'Listed Colored Soldiers" (182-84), "The Unsung Heroes" (196-98)).

For Dunbar, a native Ohioan whose parents were both escaped slaves from Kentucky, the ground in southern agrarian spaces is fertilized with "blood and tears," "groaning" under the weight of its embattled histories ("To the South - On Its New Slavery" (218)). Unlike Washington's, however, Dunbar's vision of black agrarianism is rarely distinguishable from memories of the plantation. While many critics have puzzled at the seeming nostalgia for plantation pasts that seeps into many of Dunbar's black voices, by reading the meaning of the land in the poems we can come to see this apparent yearning for the plantation as a means of reclaiming the past and asserting a kind of imaginative ownership over the plantation spaces themselves. Here is a reconstruction of the plantation

and its community that reimagines both its historical significance and its meanings in the contemporary moment. In these poems, the plantation itself is frequently subject to a kind of black appropriation: as a site of contended meanings and histories, it becomes a poetic evocation of what Booker T. Washington was aiming for, and with, Tuskegee—the plantation's transformation into an alternate "institute" and an alternate institution. If, as the Marxist tradition is quick to remind us, working the land grants one greater claim to ownership than tradition or a legal deed, all these nostalgic former slaves might be staking out a place in the public imaginary, rewriting plantation history by placing the labor of African Americans and their relationship to the land squarely in the center of the narrative.

Dunbar thus offers a rubric for remembering that identifies the undeniable relationships between the southern soil, slavery, and freedom, effectively asking the question: When a former slave weeps because his former master's plantation is in ruins, does he revise his position in the historical narrative? Does she conjure up a differently signifying version of memory? It might be tempting to dismiss these moves as historical misreadings or outright erasures, but they might also stand as a way to work a degree of parity into a steeply uneven arrangement of power. And, appearing within the vicinity of what George Handley calls the New World's "poetics of oblivion," we sense Dunbar's acknowledgment that, when representing histories, "language of necessity fails but this is not a cause for lamentation"—it is "rather an opportunity to pay homage to those histories that can never be summed up" ("New World Poetics" 28). The poems also offer the deserted plantation as a *geography* of oblivion, a site in which the silences of the historical record are bourn out in figurative evocations of the antebellum landscape, a figuration that

generates opportunities for new, less oppressive meanings.[40] As Handley's model suggests, Dunbar's tactics of poetic communication can access corners of expression largely inaccessible to his counterparts. For example, Dunbar's language provide him the ability to try out different voices, to wear not just *the* mask but a bold assortment of masks: the slave, the former slave, the nostalgic old man, and the versifying Romantic among them. A version of Keatsian negative capability, this stance creates opportunities to inhabit other subjectivities, other historical indices, and other historical possibilities "without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats 60). While it's a move that complicates the project of sorting out readers' expectations about where the values and loyalties of an ex-slave should lie, in some larger sense, the ambiguity seems to be the point. As figures representing practical models of blackness, neither Du Bois nor Washington ventures too far afield of their ideology, even in textual performance. What you read is supposed to be, more or less, what you get. Dunbar is under no such obligation—he ranges freely. And so an inability to fix final meanings seems to be more easily related via poetry than the prose of either *Up from Slavery* or *The Souls of Black Folk.*

The difficulty of establishing absolute characteristics of rural blackness in relation to slavery and labor, as well as the mixed signals emanating up from the landscape itself, corresponds with what Riché Richardson identifies as rural studies' recent willingness to adopt the conceptual language of poststructuralism in reevaluating the "rural" as a cultural construct (132-33). Generations in advance of poststructuralism's arrival, however, it seems as if Dunbar were already there, acknowledging that discourses about the shape of

[40] Dunbar's explorations of the plantation aren't restricted to poetry alone: *In Old Plantation Days* (1903) is a collection of short stories in dialect.

the country and its effects on rural African Americans' sense of self and history are always contingent upon their contrastive elements—whiteness and urbanity. As evidenced below, Dunbar achieves this by deflecting and fashioning encounters with plantation histories in the minds and mouths of his rural speakers, forcing a fresh engagement with southern geographies, with agricultural labor, and with identities tied to the countryside.

The signs of the black georgic in "Ode to Ethiopia," for example, zero in on a crossroads of race, land, and labor. A celebration of African American heritage through and beyond slavery, the poem trades in metaphors of dirt and work. During slavery, the poem notes, the "plant of freedom" sent out its "fruitful seed / Of better times" and, ironically enough in the post-Reconstruction age of the Nadir, "Its blossoms now are blowing." The poem continually measures the worth of African Americans according to the work they do: "The forests flee before their stroke, / Their hammers ring, their forges smoke,— / They stir in honest labor. / They tread the fields where honor calls." This is a dire vision of sustainability, however, implying that black sovereignty is achieved at the expense of the environment and through the devastation of war, for in a telling conceptual conflation "field" in this poem seems to briefly signal both the agricultural space and the battlefield. Leaning towards Washington, work—especially work that involves an intimate, and transformative, interaction with the land—is both ennobling and empowering; it simultaneously demonstrates both merit and a measure of sovereignty. The deforestation that the poem celebrates, in this poem at least, records a landscape sacrificed to the higher cause of black participation in modern projects of industrial excavation. And while the poem's speaker celebrates the fact that "No other race . . . forgot the past and proved them

men / So noble in forgiving" (16), several of Dunbar's other speakers, as I'll show below, seem to be wholly preoccupied with remembering.

Like Du Bois, Dunbar never turns a blind eye to the difficulties of a life on the land. "Disappointed," for instance, documents the frustrations of an old man whose future is tied to the success of an orchard that is devastatingly "[s]wept o'er" and "left . . . bare" by an unforgiving rainstorm (60). But like Washington, he sees labor as a means of linking humans to their landscape. "In Summer" offers up the evocative image of a young boy and "young blades" of grass swaying together under beneficent breezes:

> I envy the farmer's boy
>   Who sings as he follows the
>   plow;
> While the shining green of the
>   young blades lean
> To the breezes that cool his
>   brow. (91)

The plow, digging at the ground and conveying the boy, creates a connective apparatus of human-tool-soil that prepares the landscape for production. It's not just the plow though—the weather itself unites the farmer boy with the landscape: the line begins with the "shining green" of the grass and, at the same time as the print descends the page, the poem's descriptive focus glides upward, to the boy's forehead, as the selfsame breeze that bends the leaves of grass cools the boy's brow. With the introduction of the wind, the

poem's conceptual frame slips, ever so slightly, away from epistemologies of anthropocentrism, and the human figure is imbricated in a larger matrix of being that includes non-human actors such as the poem's "young blades" of grass. "In Summer" thus complicates, and even overturns, the blankly anti-conservationist bent of "Ode to Ethiopia" by underscoring points of contact between the human and the non-human.

"The Haunted Oak" goes a step further, dramatizing a dialogue between a tree that has recently served as the site of a lynching and a credulous observer, while making the tree itself a victim of the horror: "why, when I go through the shade you throw, / Runs a shudder over me?," the passerby asks. The tree answers by related the harrowing details of the event to which it—the tree—had a distinctly sensory reaction: It "*saw* . . . [a] guiltless victim's pains" and it "*hear[d]* his sigh" (emphasis mine). And although time has passed, the haunting physical presence of the lynching victim continues to inscribe the "body" of the tree in the present tense:

> I feel the rope against my bark,
>
> And the weight of him in my grain,
>
> I feel in the throe of his final woe
>
> The touch of my own last pain. (220)

Both the pain of the victim and his death are shared by the tree in a remonstrance of mob violence that solidifies a bond, forged through suffering, between the human and the non-human: the tree is a ghost, a haunted oak, killed by the "curse of a guiltless man" and forced to bear his weight forever as it remembers the prominent people who carried out the

deed—the judge, the doctor, the minister and his son—and as it watches them enjoy their freedom. In Dunbar's ironic poetic economy, the tree—an object without language—must act as a ghostly witness to the crime because, unlike black subjects in the Nadir, its testimony of the terrors of white violence doesn't carry the threat of retaliation. The tree can speak in this poem because the real victims can't.

Ultimately for Dunbar, tropes of the land serve as a cipher through which the contradictions of historical memory are processed. On one hand, it's obvious that African American labor—both during and after slavery—is worthy of recognition: "Upon thy brow the cross was laid, / And labour's painful sweat-beads made / A consecrating chrism" ("Ode to Ethiopia" 16). On the other hand, questions about associations between the southern soil and African Americans demand a confrontation with legacies of violence, coercion, and dissociation. Thus, for all his optimism about agrarian labor, descriptions of soil, dirt, and clay in Dunbar's poems approach the subject with an impulse that feels much like Du Boisian twoness. In "To the South – On Its New Slavery," a meditation on debt slavery and the convict lease system, we see "cold unam'rous sod," and Dunbar flirts with the image of the black rapist ("Our fathers left to till th' reluctant field, / To rape the soil for what she would not yield" (216-17)) to make a statement about the effects that a kind of perverse agriculture has on both the land and its workers.[41] The ground can be forced to produce, through violence, but the long-term effects of these actions cannot be contained. To rape the land is to betray its bid for futurity, and the new slavery of the poem's title

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[41] For a trenchant critique of the convict lease system, see Douglas Blackmon's *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War until World War II* (New York: Anchor, 2008).

finds multiple applications, referring to both the human bodies forced into labor and the ground itself, which is figured as a "groaning land." The attribution of this combination of tropes—reluctance, rape, verbal protest—to the soil grants the natural world a measure of subjectivity that is mostly absent in both Washington and Du Bois. And yet it is a subjectivity that is meted out through victimization: as in "The Haunted Oak," the natural landscape in these poems is never so alive as when it's being abused or when it is absorbing the abuse of others.

In this same vein, the Civil War rumination "The Colored Soldiers" offers the ground as a site of enduring miscegenation, as the black speaker indicates to his white listener the spot where "their blood with yours commingling / Has enriched the Southern soil" (51). Dunbar's poems about the soil carry multiple messages but, in the main, they metaphorize a paradoxical relationship between dirt's regenerative property and its function—its ability to absorb life's material remainders and to create new life—by linking these to the combination of hope and hopelessness that marks the experiences of African Americans during the Nadir. This is perhaps Dunbar's most open evocation of the classical georgic.

Virgil's *Georgics* presents itself as a poetic agricultural manual but, arriving as it did after the 15 years of Roman civil war that followed the assassination of Caesar and at the dawn of a new empire led by Octavian, it also serves as a meditation of the effects of war and the failures of the republic. In one of *Georgic*'s most celebrated passages, the poet observes a powerful storm and recalls the tumult of war, as "Roman troops / clash[ed] sword with fellow sword among themselves" (1.489). Yet he casts a hopeful view to the future:

Surely time will come when in those fields
the farmer drudging soil with his curved plough
will turn up scabrous spears corroded by rust
or with his heavy hoe strike empty helmets
and gape at massive bones in upturned graves. (1.493-97)

Violence, and the casualties of violence, run in sedimentary layers throughout the ground upon which a new world will be constructed. The soil is striated with the material remains and implements of war and, in Dunbar's poem, it's permanently stained by mixtures of blood. Just as Virgil looked to agriculture and the signifying potential of the natural world in his post-civil war moment, so did Dunbar; just as Virgil's poem signals uncertainty by using the soil to model what Richard Slotkin famously called "regeneration through violence," so does Dunbar's.[42]

For all this unease about the soil, however, in 1904's "Tuskegee Song" the land signs benevolently, as it bends back towards its black workers: "The fields smile to greet us," the poet explains. An unabashed endorsement of Washington's agricultural project, the poem

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[42] It's worth noting here that the georgic revival of post-Restoration England ushered in by Dryden's translation of *Georgics* in 1697 offers another instance in which the literary mode both reflected and shaped a culture coming to terms with the turmoil of extended civil war (The Wars of the Three Kingdoms), political uncertainty (the Interregnum), and the reestablishment of a strong central governing body (Charles II). Recently, Frans de Bruyn shows how Virgil's agricultural manual served as a broader template for projects of land use and development in Restoration England. See de Bruyn, "From Georgic Poetry to Statistics and Graphs: Eighteenth-Century Representations and the 'State' of British Society," *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 17.1 (Spring 2004): 107–139.

arrived a year earlier than more pessimistic visions of the land found in 1903's *Lyrics of Love and Laughter* (which contains both "The Haunted Oak" and "To the South") and 1895's *Lyrics of Lowly Life*.[43] And in an echo of both Du Bois and Washington, it understands progress as a movement that goes "onward and upward," while also recognizing Tuskegee's efforts to strike a balance whereby labor displays the "worth of our minds *and* our hands" (333, emphasis mine). An unaffiliated, poetic evaluation coming a year after *The Souls of Black Folk*'s public criticisms of Washington and Tuskegee, "Tuskegee Song" rejects the either/or logic that codes Washington as southern black body, Du Bois as northern black mind. More broadly, Dunbar's poetry argues that progress may well be configured as "upward" movement, but it also depends upon the reoccupation—and possible usurpation—of dominant narratives that lump together the South, rurality, and the plantation.

This impulse towards reoccupation is captured poignantly in a trilogy of poems about a kind of southern homesickness: "To the Eastern Shore" (1903), "The Deserted Plantation" (1895), and "Goin' Back" (1893). Each locates the spiritual heart of African American life in the rural South, the site of the historical tragedy of slavery and the triumphs of emancipation. Ostensibly a dismissal of the industrial and commercial centers

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[43] Ronda submits, "Dunbar's georgics offer portraits in negative of Washington's industrial-agricultural training regime with its capitalist model of progress-oriented labor" (869). This may be true but it's not the whole truth: Washington's industrial-agricultural regime did align itself with "progress-oriented labor" yet, as I hope to have shown, it represented a defensive tactic for self-preservation in an environment of deadly hostility. "Tuskegee Song," as well as "To Booker T. Washington," suggests that Dunbar recognized the value of such tactics.

of the northern seaboard, "To the Eastern Shore" channels the voice of a speaker disillusioned by the effects of northern migration and life in the city; he perceives that "de ol' plantation's callin' / to me, Come, come back" (202). Presenting a spatial economy that overlaps Washington's, the speaker casts back to a past represented by the rural South: "'Fu my sandy roads is gleamin' w'ile de city ways is black" (203). "[B]lack" is obviously a loaded sign here that can refer, all at once, to the blackness of a paved road against a "sandy" rural one, to the city's racial composition, and—most damningly—to its moral composition. While the topography of "To the Eastern Shore" is markedly different from the cotton and rice tracts of the Black Belt addressed in *Up from Slavery* and *Souls*, its evocations of the plantation highlight a shared network of labor practices that folds the distinct micro-regions under the single sign "South."

Although the quality of Dunbar's output is famously uneven, he assayed an impressive range of topics and voices. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. was an early advocate for Dunbar's reappraisal: while conceding the mixed quality of his work, Gates celebrates the rhetorical nimbleness with which the poet carefully "[s]ignified upon the received white racist textual tradition and posited in its stead a black poetic diction" (176). This is a racist textual tradition that includes, of course, expressions of the minstrel show such as Stephen Foster's ubiquitous "My Old Kentucky Home" (1853).[44] With its crudely drawn racial

[44] For a suggestive, if unfortunately brief, examination of Dunbar's relation to the signifying practices of the minstrel stage, see Elston L. Carr, Jr., "Minstrelsy and the Dialect Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar," *We Wear the Mask: Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Politics of Representative Reality* (Kent: Kent State UP, 2010), 49-58. In addition to his perceptive readings of Dunbar's black dialect poems, Gavin Jones's analysis of the "vaudeville dialects" mentions Dunbar's attempts at Irish dialect writing: "Like that of many of his contemporary

tropes and a heavy dose of Victorian sentimentalism, Foster's lyric mourned the absence of a plantation's black workers—their actions, their bodies, their voices:

> They hunt no more for the 'possum and the coon,
>
> On meadow, the hill and the shore,
>
> They sing no more by the glimmer of the moon,
>
> On the bench by that old cabin door.

And yet the song never reveals the exact source of the absence. It's easy to presume that the speaker refers to separations caused by the slave trade ("The time has come when the darkies have to part / Then my old Kentucky home, good night"), but that doesn't do much

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black vaudevillians, Dunbar's dialect work trod a fine line between racial representation and the perpetration of racist conventions. The space where these African American artists could perform was narrow, making their subtle subversions more remarkable still" (181). See Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1999). The politics of Foster's dialect lyrics have been subject to several revisions. Critic Ken Emerson's generous biography of Foster and his work argues that "the kernel of social philosophy that . . . gave popular voice to a growing segment of Northerners uncomfortable with slavery" (146-47), a claim rejected by Steven Saunders' recent contention that "Foster's plantation melodies embody his own conventional, Democratic, middle-class values more than any progressive, utopian views about the politics of race" (286). See Emerson, *Doo-Dah: Stephen Foster and the Rise of American Popular Culture* (New York: Da Capo P, 1998) and Saunders, "The Social Agenda of Stephen Foster's Plantation Melodies," *American Music* 30.3 (Fall 2012: 275-89). For an earlier set of black revisions of Foster's plantation songs, see Martin Delany's unfinished novel *Blake, Or the Huts of America* (New York: Beacon, 1971).

to explain why an entire antebellum plantation seems to be emptied of its slaves. The absent referent in Foster's song, in other words, is not the laboring black bodies but the cause of their absence. Eric Lott, in his discussion of Foster's plantation songs on the minstrel stage, suggests that these songs' persistent interest in the separations, deaths, and disappearances of black bodies "supervised the elimination of black characters" such that "what was being symbolically eliminated and put to rest was the whole lamented business of slavery in the United States, by means of the elimination of black people themselves" (*Love and Theft* 189). The plantation idyll is thus disrupted but also disappeared, along with the peculiar institution and the slaves that provide its peculiarity. In other words, the vagaries of the plantation past—which was emphatically *not* past in Foster's 1853—are not so much enshrined as they are absorbed in melancholy's numbing embrace.

At the center of Ronda's analysis of Dunbar's georgics, there's an extended—and illuminating—reading of "The Deserted Plantation," a piece that Ronda calls "the most controversial poem in Dunbar's oeuvre" (870). While she convincingly argues that that text's participation in the georgic mode consists of a "diagnostic frame" that is "ultimately tragic rather than accommodationist or subversive" in its depictions of a plantation in decline (871), it's possible to recognize the poem's rhetorical strategies as directly confronting—and overturning—the pastoral conventions of the plantation melodies of minstrelsy.[45] Indeed, the poem consciously reverses the tropes of the minstrel ballad so thoroughly that it becomes a kind of anti-plantation melody, unstitching the seams that

[45] I follow Saunders here in using the term "plantation melodies" since it points to pieces, such as "My Old Kentucky Home," that "straddle the line between parlor song and minstrel song" (282).

give the form its distinct shape. While "My Old Kentucky Home" depicts a pastoral plantation scene in which "the corn top's ripe and the meadow's in the bloom" and where "the birds make music all the day," "The Deserted Plantation" reverses the scenario, all in the kind of dialect that formed minstrelsy's common currency: "In de furrers whah de co'n was allus wavin' / Now de weeds is growin' green an' rank an' tall." All possibilities for activity are stilled: the hoe is "a-rustin' in de co'nah," the plow is "a-tumblin' down in de fiel'," and—in the poem's most direct engagement with the signs and sounds of minstrelsy—"de banjo's voice is silent in de qua'ters" (67). Of course, the central conceit of "My Old Kentucky Home" is that the plantation's slaves are, mysteriously, no longer present. But Dunbar's decision to revive, and revise, that scenario in a post-Emancipation context offers a peculiar instance in which the sole inhabitant of the decaying plantation space is a (former) slave. Where the plantation of Foster's imagination was curiously drained of blackness, Dunbar's lacks any defined trace of white influence. So much so in fact, that the narrator redirects his attention and loyalty to "de othah Mastah"—God, whose presence is somehow more material than that of the old plantation master (68).

Two years before he arrived at its conceptual counterpart "The Deserted Plantation," and 40 years after "My Old Kentucky Home" first appeared, Dunbar published "Goin' Back" (1893), a poem that explicitly signifies on Foster's work by reimagining the overdetermined picture of a fecund southland with its "bluegrass medders an' fiel's o' co'n" through the prism of a past focused on Emancipation. As a rumination on the significance of the plantation to the history of a single African American, it draws on the wide vein of melancholy produced in Foster's song but relocates its sources and its tension so that the vague yearning of minstrelsy's plantation fictions are refined and articulated with greater

clarity and purpose. Dunbar writes the black bodies back into the scenario and picks up the story from their position, imagining an old man reminiscing on his time at a plantation, while "standing beside the station rail" in a major city, preparing to board a train that will take him "Back to my ol' Kaintucky home, / Back to the ol' Kaintucky sight." He has been in the city for thirty years, having presumably fled the South during the Civil War ("I caught the fever that ruled the day") and although he admits that "[t]har was lots of things in the North to admire," the poem is an extended recollection of the joys of his youth on the plantation and the drawbacks of life in the city:

> They said that things was better North,
> An' a man was held at his honest worth.
> Well, it may be so, but I have some doubt,
> An' thirty years ain't wiped it out. (317)

The poem also offers a glimpse into the moment just before the empty plantation of Foster's imagination, with its weeping mothers, "hard times," and empty cabin doors, is about to reanimated by an emancipated slave—but then, unlike "The Deserted Plantation," it pulls away. Deferring the triumph of the actual reoccupation, "Goin' Back" maps the geography of oblivion onto the old plantation, at the same time as it implicates the North in not just the suffering of ex-slaves but also in the constricting discursive practices of the minstrel stage. By using black dialect to rewrite—and thereby reclaim—Foster's chorus as "My ol' Kaintucky home," the poem underscores Dunbar's larger ability to show that if there is any sort of poetic ownership at stake in representations of these spaces, then they more legitimately belong to the black southerners who endured slavery and benefitted by

emancipation, and whose labor provided them a more intimate relation to southern ground.

"The True Reconstruction of the Country": Frances Harper's Garden

Our glimpses into the breadth and depth of African American agrarianism during the Nadir have largely focused on the experience and thinking of black men. There are practical explanations for this imbalance: while Booker T. Washington is arguably an exception, agriculture is too often represented as a mostly masculine affair, and African American women's writing from the period is typically more interested in models of ascendance up from, rather than to, the farm. The significance of Harper's *Iola Leroy*—published a decade before Du Bois publically responded to Washington—is not just a matter of its status as one of the earliest novels by an African American woman but also its varied representations of black women's experiences in the postbellum period. These are representations that include encounters with the agricultural, and *Iola Leroy*'s fleeting depictions of black women's ties to the land and farming allow us to begin to untangle the role that rural spaces and identities play in Harper's imagined solutions for the future of her race and for a burgeoning black middle class.

Iola Leroy details the title character's attempts to redeem the injustices of slavery through the restoration of a family fractured by war, racial categories, and both spatial and psychic dislocation. A light-skinned young woman of mixed lineage, Iola begins her life as the privileged member of a Mississippi plantation household but when her white father dies of yellow fever, she is snatched into slavery. During the war Iola regains her freedom

in the post-Emancipation North, but she refuses to pass as white, declining the relative comforts of marriage to a northern physician in favor of a tortuous quest to search out lost relatives, to reclaim and carefully define her own blackness, and to improve the conditions of her native South and her people. Iola's personal reconstruction thus runs alongside the larger Reconstruction of the region. In the end, she marries Dr. Latimer, a light-skinned African American who likewise refuses to pass, and moves to North Carolina, along with her brother, Harry, and her uncle, Robert Johnson, to serve the community as an educator.

Although the geographic scope of the novel is wide, stretching South, North, and then South again, it insists that the greatest opportunities for educated African Americans like Iola and her family exist within the borders of the former Confederacy. In spite of the pain and oppression wrapped up in the region's recent past, as well as its Jim Crow present, the novel argues that the race's future is written upon the southern landscape itself, a fact that comes clear in a poignant scene wherein the slave Tom Anderson learns the alphabet by tracing out letters in the bark of his plantation's trees and on the banks of its streams. As readers, we receive this information through Robert Johnson's conversation with a white army officer, in which he disputes the officer's stereotypes of African American laziness using the example of Tom and his assiduousness. But while Robert admires Tom's diligence, he can't really recommend his method: "[He] never got very far with his learning" (45). The ambivalence here points up the text's larger ambiguity about a life on the land in conflict with the uplift narrative's essential commitments to education and literacy. It also offers a less hopeful revision of a famous scene from the urtext of uplift, Frederick Douglass's *Autobiography.* Having learned to read, Douglass comes to understand that further possibilities for securing mobility and freedom come through the production of

texts: "I wished to learn how to write, as I might have occasion to write my own pass" (48), he relates, detailing the steps he took to learn writing. Like Tom, Douglass uses his local environment as a tablet; unlike Tom, however, Douglass's environment is Baltimore, a distinctly urban space: "my copy-book was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk" (49). Reading these account across one another, the message may well be that the very texture and topography of rural spaces impedes literacy.

Still, much like *The Souls of Black Folk*, Harper's text argues that the purest expressions of black culture arise from the remains of slavery and within its territory; there is, it seems, no path forward for black Americans that doesn't lead through the rural South. And so, paradoxically, when Iola speaks of moving up from slavery, her geographic orientation points down. Nevertheless, these interpenetrating movements create a pattern that agrees with the novel's larger themes of reconciliation and restitution. Considering the text's explorations of bloodlines and genealogies scrambled by slavery, Handley notes that the novel's sense of "national unity" is "accomplished through metaphors that forge competing and overlapping imagined communities" (*Postslavery Literatures* 101). As readers seeking out the text's positions on African American agrarianism, we must work out the consequences and stakes of its elaborate pictures of imagined communities destabilized by war and Reconstruction, of spaces and cultures shaped by contradictory forces seeking to both wear down and shore up existing banks of power.

The text's most vital statements on the meanings of African American agrarianism occur at the edges of the proscenium. Its opening scenes show a wartime meeting of slaves, gathered in a wooded hiding place and considering their next move as a vanguard of Union troops draws near. Most eagerly anticipate the break to freedom, but Uncle Daniel, an

elderly member of the group, declines, choosing to stay behind and tend his master's farm. Although Uncle Daniel may appear unduly submissive, his decision to remain on the plantation provides him a rare opportunity to work the land away from the constant gaze of white authority, a desire that aligns with Washington's emphasis on the value of the rural "districts" as sites of strategic inaccessibility. Following Lawrence Levine, we recognize Daniel's choice as a chance to materialize the "necessary space" created by slaves' folk practices into an actual plot of ground (80). While the novel declines to condemn Daniel's decision, it's of two minds about farming: on one hand, the text's standard-English speaking characters—Iola, Dr. Latimer, Robert Johnson—have access to middle-class employment options that disrupt the notion that the only labor black subjects can sell on the modern free market is agricultural; on the other hand, the text performs a series of maneuvers meant to wrest agricultural labor from the stranglehold of white control, as we see in Uncle Daniel and Aunt Linda, whom we'll meet shortly. While *Iola Leroy* never insists, as Washington does, that a life in the "country districts" is the surest way to establish a vibrant future, neither does it argue, alongside Du Bois, that farming in the South earns its reputation for oppression. Its georgic visions are necessarily doubled; its affirmative tendencies at cross-purposes.

More broadly, in fact, the divisions of labor worked out in the text prefigure Du Bois's later conception of a "talented tenth," albeit one that incorporates age into the equation. And, perhaps understandably, farming misses the cutoff for desirable professions. One of the novel's black rustic heroes, Tom, appears to speak for the text as a whole when he connects Iola's refinement and her elemental appeal with her aversion to manual labor: "Her han's look ez ef she neber did a day's work in her life," he comments

approvingly (41). Likewise at the novel's highly idealized conclusion, we see Robert Johnson creating an agricultural utopia in which he resembles nothing so much as a wealthy patron to worthy former slaves:

> He bought a large plantation . . . which he divided into small homesteads, and sold to poor but thrifty laborers, and his heart has been gladdened by their increased prosperity and progress. He has seen the one-roomed cabins change to comfortable cottages, in which cleanliness and order have supplanted the prolific causes of disease and death. (280)

The diction here is worth noticing: the novel poses concepts like "comfort," "cleanliness," and "order" over against scare words such as "death" and "disease," all at the site of slavery's most common dispossessions. This is perhaps where Houston Baker's dismissal of the novel as a "mulatto utopia" feels most appropriate (*Workings* 31): Robert has remade the plantation but upheld its basic architecture, retaining the hard line that separates the "poor . . . laborers" from a light-skinned managing class, and framing the whole system with a genteel ethos of racial uplift.[46]

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[46] It's also important to note that this sort of land reform is precisely what the white hero of Albion W. Tourgée's novel *A Fool's Errand* tried to enact. Unlike Robert, he failed, and the difference in outcome may tell us something essential about how differently raced imaginations conceive of Reconstructed spaces. See Tourgée, *A Fool's Errand: By One of the Fools* (1879).

The novel offers a more radical version of this scenario, however, in the figure of Aunt Linda. One of its most lively and effusive characters, Linda is part of a former generation but she is marked by a rough-hewn feminism and a fearless independence. When Robert and Iola meet up with her, Linda has bought a plot of land on her old plantation from an interloping Jewish investor. (The novel makes conspicuous mention of that fact that the area's original white residents have steadfastly refused to sell to ex-slaves.) As Robert revisits the site of his former slavery, his erstwhile mistress describes "the great changes" that have occurred in the area, how the prominent plantation owner Mr. Gundover died an ignominious death, and how "a number of colored men banded together, bought his plantation, and divided it among themselves" (152). Among those colored men is Aunt Linda. As Robert and Iola visit the new settlement, they note that "the gloomy silence" of the old plantation grounds "was broken by the hum of industry," they see that "the school-house had taken the place of the slave-pen and auction block," and encounter a formerly desolate landscape renewed by "a garden filled with beautiful flowers, clambering vines, and rustic adornments" (153). Aunt Linda tends the garden.

Although the novel celebrates her newfound freedom and "industry" (a key concept that functions as both a material description and the sign of a valorous, thrifty disposition), it also works hard to underscore Linda's ignorance by animating her with a thick dialect, her illiteracy becoming, in her own rendering, a function of the agricultural life: "'sence freedom's com'd I'se bin scratchin' too hard to get a libin' to put my head down to de book" (156). If Aunt Linda's words veer uncomfortably close to the minstrel stage, her actions represent the novel's most fully realized attempt to upend the old order, to unwrite the

conventions of the plantation romance by allowing an elderly black woman—a former slave, in fact—to assume the responsibilities of a plantation master.

While the farm can stand as a source of strength for certain African Americans, it's important to recognize the colorist associations between rurality and darker, seemingly unmixed forms of blackness. This connection may well extend to the discussions of Washington and Du Bois, wherein Washington's affinity for the country contrasts with the lighter-skinned Du Bois's skepticism. And on some level, *Iola Leroy* threatens to portray the farm as a kind of "reservation" for working-class darker-skinned African Americans. If farm labor fails to find unqualified favor in the text, then, it's worth considering how and why exactly *Iola Leroy* insists upon endorsing the rural South as the way forward. For one thing, the text works hard to map spaces of black liberty back onto the region, disrupting late-nineteenth-century schemes of national reconciliation that allowed northern and southern whites to reunite through the mutual suppression of emancipated African Americans. To reclaim the South, as Harper's black characters do, is to destabilize a national economy of space and power deliberately tilted in favor of whites.

In the novel's final scenes, the contours of a black georgic arise, presenting the rural South as a series of spaces and economies that allow for African American independence and self-sufficiency free from the pressing weight of white supervision and control, although not necessarily from the restrictions of class control. So although Harper's optimism occasionally clashes with the contemporary realities of Jim Crow, her fiction suggests that there may be reason to believe that rural black southernness offers the most viable options for provisional collective African American autonomy. Edward Ayers's account of the Atlanta Riot of 1906, for example, holds that one precipitating factor in the

conflict was anxiety about the influx of African Americans from the rural districts: "'Bad niggers,' were supposedly flowing in from the countryside, their past crimes unknown, their proclivities towards vice unchecked" (436). It's possible, of course, that the impression of country people as dangerously unrestrained was nothing more than a product of Jim Crow paranoia. But it's also possible to read between the lines of Ayers's analysis and see the signs towards which both Washington and Harper gesture: although the city is commonly figured as the most promising space for post-Emancipation African Americans, during the Nadir, it might be easier to imagine black sovereign spaces along the rural peripheries than in the cultural centers, where the standardization of modernization makes both surveillance and segregation increasingly possible.

For his part, Peter Schmidt notices the novel's interest in the "indispensible role a new educational system for blacks must play to prepare [them] to resist the depredations of Jim Crow and build protective communities" (65). In much the same way, *Iola Leroy* considers the geographic potential of the South, taking advantage of rural marginality in order build just such a protective community in the region's underdeveloped spaces. Hazel Carby makes a similar observation: "The overall structure of *Iola Leroy* progressed increasingly toward a complete separation of the black community from the white world and thus implicitly accepted the failure of Reconstruction" (93). To the extent that the machinations of Jim Crow seek to behave as sovereign power, however, it's possible to fit models of independent production on the rural margins in Harper—and in *Up from Slavery*'s Tuskegee—into what Foucault identifies as a tactic for abjuring the influence of the dominant culture: "if economic practice or economic activity, if the set of processes of production and exchange elude the sovereign geographically, so to speak, [they] fix a sort

of frontier to the exercise of his power" (293). It's a matter of space, and the frontier here is located, intriguingly, on abandoned plantations; independence does not, as Du Bois reminds us, exist in the sharecropping arrangement but, as Dunbar demonstrates, in the act of expropriating the potential meanings of the plantation. In this vision of the black future, it's as if the countryside, with its disconnection from the modern techniques of standardization, represents a hidden bastion of independence. To adapt a contemporary phrase, the further off the grid one ventures, the easier it becomes to elude containment.

Harper seems to be taking a cue here from Washington and his decision to present Tuskegee as a fortress and a training ground for Jim Crow-era African Americans. Yet unlike Washington, the community Harper envisions centers around the work and virtue of a young, black, and ambitiously middle-class woman. Still, according to the standards of Victorian femininity, the nature of Iola's womanhood is curiously mixed: on the one hand, she meets expectations in her generosity of spirit, her conspicuous modesty, and her unceasing willingness to submit and serve; on the other hand, however, those standards contend with an intense loyalty to her race that sends her down the social scale rather than upwards towards white gentility. Although the novel strains to synthesize these oppositional elements at its tidy conclusion, they refuse, leaving the text with an untamed, unresolved sense of hybridity.

As mentioned above, Paul Gilroy makes the case that in 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk*, "inaugurated . . . [t]he genre of black modernist writing. . . . [with its] self-consciously polyphonic form." It's possible, however, to look at an earlier text like *Iola Leroy*, from 1892, and hear a slightly different kind of modern music, less self-conscious perhaps, but no less committed to braiding together disparate melodies: dialect and standard English,

for instance. The text also includes poems, lectures, and sermons, all within the body of a single novel. These formal concerns are matched by the psychological dualism that infuses the novel's content, a dualism that is taken to be the de facto position of African Americans in the Nadir.

It's the ontological condition of the self-divided-against-the-self that causes James Smethurst to identify post-Reconstruction African Americans as the first true modernists, and it's a condition that manifests throughout *Iola Leroy*. Take, for instance, the episode in which Iola denies the advances of her white northern suitor Dr. Gresham by explaining that she has "no home but this in the South." This is a notion complicated by the adjoining sentence, in which Iola states, "I am homeless and alone" (60). She has no home but her home in the South, and yet she remains homeless. The contradiction here is symptomatic of the modernist motif of an individual's inability to achieve psychic stability: we see the subject ever reaching for but never grasping a lasting sense of belonging and homeland. Still, *Iola Leroy* aims to fill this gap with a distinctly, if differently, romanticized iteration of the South. Contrary to the resolutely white supremacist messages shaping the fiction of her contemporaries who treated the region, Harper presents a version of the plantation romance that emphasizes the positive products of black and white intimacy, as well as the pleasures and profits of exclusively black communities.

One way to account for the novel's idealization of the rural South is to view its representations of the region through the matrix of national reconciliation presented by historian Nina Silber. In theorizing a "romance of reunion," Silber considers the ways in which whites of the middle and upper classes—northerners in particular—sought to reestablish national unity through the production of "metaphors and cultural images of

reconciliation [that have] less to say about the real-life South and more to say about the ideal and desired South" (2). The desires revealed by Harper's narrative are obviously configured along a different axis, one that emphasizes the reconstitution of ex-slave families and the reoccupation of their ancestral spaces in the New World.[47] But the impulse to romanticize southern spaces is strikingly similar. So while the text's optimism might resonate uneasily against the objective realities of Jim Crow, it offers a romance of intraracial, intergenerational, cross-class *black* "reunion(s)" that play a key role in generating the kinds of counterpublics and metaphors of alternate social reality necessary to the sovereign future of African America in the South.

Black Georgic and the Rural Future

In some way or another, each of the texts above accesses concepts of rurality and agricultural labor by recalibrating the legacies of the plantation spaces, frequently by allowing for the plantation presence of unconstrained, independent black subjects. Yet the image of a plantation reclaimed by the very bodies it was designed to repress wasn't a motif addressed by black writers alone. In the decades that followed, it was of serious interest to at least two of the region's most prominent white writers, Margaret Mitchell and William Faulkner. 1936 saw the publication of two texts that signal opposite edges of the

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[47]The novel's representations of movement between and across regions match Eric Foner's description of post-Reconstruction black mobility: "Of all the motivations for black mobility, none was more poignant than the effort to reunite families separated during slavery" (82).

southern literary imagination: *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Gone with the Wind.*[48] In *Absalom*, Faulkner's most sustained exploration of the destructive consequences of the plantation and its legacies, Sutpen's Hundred is ultimately possessed by one of Thomas Sutpen's "black" descendants—Jim Bond, the mentally disabled grandson of Sutpen's son Charles Bond. Violent, tangled histories of incest, fear, internecine contention and fratricide: such is the resonance of the plantation in Yoknapatawpha County. Although Mitchell's plantation drama lacks some of the psychological density of Faulkner's, the destabilizing effects of black bodies occupying formerly white plantation spaces nevertheless compel *Gone with the Wind*. When Scarlett O'Hara returns to Tara after a long tenure in Atlanta, for instance, she takes great interest in the "County news," particularly as it relates to Reconstruction's reversals of antebellum conventions of race and space: "[T]here were negroes living in the old Calvert house! Swarms of them and they actually owned it! They'd bought it at the sheriff's sale. The place was dilapidated and it made you cry to look at it" (1357). The disbelief is obvious: white spaces are now black spaces; the long-established, intricately maintained sense of order is unraveled through, of all things, the legal process ("the sheriff's sale").

While the plantation's meanings multiply across culture and time, it appears in black texts of the Nadir as an inescapable feature of the present moment, not just a shaping device that casts a troubling shadow over contemporary concerns. An unavoidable feature of the material world of pre-Emancipation African Americans, the plantation remains an

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[48] I'm indebted here to Carolyn Porter's pairing of these texts in "*Gone with the Wind* and *Absalom, Absalom!*," *A New Literary History of America,* ed. Werner Sollors and Greil Marcus (Cambridge: Belknap P, 2012), 705-710.

inescapable presence in the post-Emancipation African American imagination, standing as an invocation of what Paul Outka calls the "traumatic pastoral" of slavery's residues (33). In this same vain, Lewis Simpson's reading of William Gilmore Simms shows that when the pastoral runs up against "modern history," it reveals the extent to which "African chattel had come into the Southern garden of paradise as an intruder, dispossessing the garden of the Western pastoral imagination, transforming it into a garden of chattel, and threatening to transform the South into an image of a completely nonpastoral character" (61).

Michael Bennett further argues that "a main current within African American culture has . . . expressed a profound antipathy toward the ecological niches usually focused on in ecocriticism: pastoral space and wilderness" (208), asserting that an African American version of the pastoral is best expressed as "anti-pastoral." This may be true in a broad sense—anti-pastoral tendencies definitely appear throughout *The Souls of Black Folk*, for instance—but exceptions like *Up from Slavery* and *Iola Leroy* deserve a different designation. The presence of African American histories of slavery and anguished black bodies undermines the southern pastoral, and if the georgic offers a more functional and generative conceptual optic in this context, I also recognize that any coherent theory of a black georgic will need to account for those same tortured histories and those same black bodies—and from a more fully felt, more deeply disrupted subject position that encompasses the full range of possibilities tied to black farming in the post-Reconstruction South. To theorize a New World black georgic, then, is to rewrite European conventions according to the distinct rhythms of the African American experience; it is to hear black voices signifyin' on a whole series of familiar images and tropes. Sometimes those voices

sign darkly, other times hopefully, but always with full and wary consciousness of the unruly consequences of blackness.

Although contemporary critics, following the lead of Michael Kreyling, have successfully made the case that the category "southern literature" owes itself to the political interests of the Southern Agrarians, the realities of the early-twentieth-century black agrarian present a peculiar wrinkle. While the variety of agrarianism forwarded in *I'll Take My Stand* is almost always coded white, the Agrarians' yeoman farmer ideal could never be enacted without deliberately ignoring the vestiges of black southern agriculture. Using farming as a fulcrum to access the Agrarians' own definitions, then, we see that the cultural heritage of the South can only ever be a racially mixed proposition—and the canons of its literature necessarily broader than any of the Twelve Southerners originally suggested.

The tensions that emerge around these issues of representation, however, are not just posed between black and white but also between competing registers of blackness. From Du Bois to the Harlem Renaissance on, commentators and observers have most readily associated African American modernism and modernity with urban life—a strain of thinking that Riché Richardson discovers within both academic and popular culture. As Richardson posits, "urban-centered epistemologies of blackness belie the continuing significance of the U.S. South and its rural contexts as factors in shaping black identity" (127). In this light, the specific challenges facing black farmers threaten to take a backseat when their conditions are filtered through a cultural calculus that equates authentic black life with the young and the urban.

So is the rural South the ground upon which to build a productive black future? The fact that the conversation stretches from the postbellum period into the present day suggests something of the question's potency, as well as its controversy. It's the potency of the question, measured against a heightened environmental awareness, that causes critic bell hooks in 2008 to sound a lot like Booker T. Washington in 1901: "Collective black self-recovery takes place when we begin to renew our relationship to the earth" (40). As hooks further explains, "it has been easy for folks to forget that black people were first and foremost a people of the land, farmers. . . . that at the first part of the twentieth century, the vast majority of black folks in the United States lived in the agrarian South" (36). The question of exactly what kind of difference this observation can—or should—make to contemporary African Americans is one that I'll leave to somebody else.

But, using the Pigford case as an end point, it's obvious that the issues surrounding African American rurality in these texts from the early modernist period use the same assemblage of images to describe twenty-first-century conditions. In a recent interview, for example, Virginia farmer and plaintiff in the class action suit, John Boyd, bluntly calls the United States Department of Agriculture "the last plantation" (Bresler, "The Pigford Case"), making explicit the conjunction between his experience and that of his African American predecessors. And in spite of a cultural iconography that frequently elides rural southern blackness, Dunbar's depictions of turn-of-the-century reverse migration and its twenty-first-century echo prove that the realities of black life in the country and the city are always-already inseparably connected. More broadly, we can understand that the black body's relationship to the southern landscape is still an inescapable feature of the history of African America.

If there's any one point that all four of our subjects agree upon, it's that African American progress is bound up in a need to move through these spaces somehow and to rewrite the narratives they represent. Although each represents a distinct ideological position, post-Reconstruction African America in these texts is not created out of whole cloth but is, instead, an uneven patchwork of existing cultural materials, practices, and performances. In this sense, the "true reconstruction of the country" that *Iola Leroy* proposes towards its conclusion may have far less to do with the nation-state than with the rural, and the regional, environment; it may signal a subnational engagement with the past and a productive encounter with what Ernst Bloch provocatively calls the "unfinished world" (223). To redeem a painful history, in other words, is to imaginatively embrace its original conditions and, in that process of embrace, to transform them. And in a twenty-first-century moment when black farmers again seek parity against the backdrop of an inequitable history, we see that the fight for self-determination via agricultural labor is at once as old as the dust and as new as the news.

CHAPTER TWO

AGRARIANS AND OTHER AGRARIANS:

LAND, LABOR, AND RURAL INSURGENCY

In response to the ecological and sociological effects of a rapidly globalizing economy, the first decade of the twenty-first century saw a renewed interest in the local, the homegrown, and the handmade. Seeking a more "grounded" reality in the face of destabilizing technologies, the contemporary localist movement predictably lacks an official politics but its values—the hope to create a sustainable economy and agricultural ecostructure, and to recover the textures of regional distinction in the face of an increasingly globalized world—are typically assumed to have drifted in from some leftward quarter. Threaded throughout this collection of voices, however, we hear of echoes of agrarian movements from the early twentieth century, such that we might recognize this latest variant as a postmodern manifestation of a distinctly modern phenomenon. And as Kelefa Sanneh perceptively recognizes in a review of Matthew Crawford's 2008 ode to the hands-on work ethic, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, there exists a loose allegiance between the localist movement and a brand of individualist conservatism. "Agrarianism, like environmentalism, hasn't always been considered a progressive cause"

(85), Sanneh writes, in a statement that seems abundantly obvious to students of southern literature.[49]

To that end, it's easy enough to locate the reactionary instincts of the Twelve Southerners' 1930 manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*. Michael Kreyling famously presents the Agrarians as crafting a version of the South built "out of strategies for seizing and retaining power (cultural, political, sexual, economic, and so on) that are then reproduced as 'natural'" (6). In Kreyling's analysis, and contrary to the text's own protests, *I'll Take My Stand* is not simply a defensive reaction to modernity but an aggressively conservative one. And, as a polemic document, it has exhibited an outsized influence on both the construction of a regional identity as well as the shape of American literature and criticism.[50] A

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[49] In addition to Crawford's book, some prominent titles associated with the movement include Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (New York: Penguin, 2006), Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007), Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), and Joan Dye Gussow, *This Organic Life: Confessions of a Suburban Homesteader* (New York: Chelsea Green, 2002). In a more whimsical vein is Kurt B. Reighley, *United States of Americana: Backyard Chickens, Burlesque Beauties, and Handmade Bitters* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010). The political ambiguities of localism extend to the related New Domesticity movement, which embraces a set of values that at once protest contemporary culture and restage certain practices consistent with an earlier era of rigid gender roles. Commentators are at odds about whether this is an inevitable step in the evolution of Third Wave feminism or a retreat.

[50] To combine the overlapping interests of the Fugitives, the Agrarians, and the New Critics is to encounter a steep shadow indeed. Kreyling's take on the Agrarians is a touchstone in southern literary studies, setting the stage for "postsouthern" readings of the region's literature and culture. For more in this direction, see Martyn Bone, *Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2005). Bone effectively

compelling counterpoint to the Twelve Southerners' version of agrarianism is Helen and Scott Nearings' *Living the Good Life*, a text that exhaustively documents the couple's choice, in 1932, to leave New York City for life on a self-sustaining homestead in the wilds of

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reframes readings of the Agrarians by deconstructing one of southern literature's most durable tropes: the sense of place. If, as the Agrarians argued, the South's histories of distinctiveness derive from an intimate relationship with the land via agriculture that is absent elsewhere in the nation, what happens when agricultural labor becomes the anomaly rather than the standard? For more on the historical profile of the Agrarians, see Paul Conkin's *The Southern Agrarians* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee, 1988), a breezy, narrative-driven account of the movement that is useful for its proximity to the action—Conkin was a Vanderbilt History professor whose tenure closely followed that of Donald Davidson—but its sympathetic treatment of the material occasionally flirts with apologia. Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2001) offers an ambitious reassessment of the Agrarian movement emphasizing its critiques of American capitalism as well as its enduring influence on the development of twentieth-century conservatism. Murphy traces the Agrarian impulses up to the end of the century, unsorting the political profiles of "neo-agrarian" thinkers such as Wendell Berry and Eugene Genovese. Genovese's own *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of American Conservatism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996) includes a generous treatment of southern history that also tracks the author's transition from Marxist to conservative in the Agrarian mode. The basis of Genovese's analysis is that socialism's failures in the twentieth century make "southern" conservatism's emphasis on the individual's responsibilities to his community preferable to the alienating effects of the unrestrained capitalism protested in *I'll Take My Stand.* One doesn't have to agree with Genovese's position to recognize the ways in which his intellectual journey underscores the movement's points of contact with twentieth-century socialist protest. None of these sources dwells on the coexistent realities of abusive sharecropping in the Agrarian's own historical moment.

Vermont. While the Nearings' devout pacifism and socialism represent a strain of agrarianism that travels in a different direction politically, each group's decision to enact a deliberate rusticity amongst the ascendance of modernization springs from a common impulse and carries a profoundly modernist resonance.

This chapter's first movement will reassess the Southern Agrarians in the context of the period's other agrarian protests by reading their manifestos alongside the account of the Nearings' experience as back-to-the-land pioneers. Putting these texts into dialogue with one another will reveal points of political convergence and divergence, as well as highlight their various messages about agriculture and capitalism, the construction of regionalisms, and modern inflections of time and space during the period of the Great Depression. An important similarity here is each group's heavy emphasis on an agrarian society's purported ability to increase opportunities for leisure, creating a category I call "leisure agrarianism." The second phase of the chapter will consider modes of expression tied to "labor agrarianisms" associated with the sharecropping and tenant farming systems in the South.[51] Specifically, I will discuss what looks like an agrarianism of relative privilege (exemplified in the texts and actions of both the Agrarians and the Nearings) alongside versions of the subaltern agrarian—African American and poor white agricultural workers enmeshed in a mode of personally and ecologically destructive production and exchange. In

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[51] I make the distinction between labor and leisure here because both the Nashville Agrarians and the Nearings are primarily interested in promoting cultures of agriculture that promise increased leisure time, as well as the enhanced development of their society's aesthetic and intellectual spheres. Agrarianisms of labor place the emphasis on improving one's material conditions, on securing basic rights to work and necessities like food, clothing, and shelter.

doing so, I highlight the generic differences between leisure and labor agrarianisms by exploring alternate modes of expression on display in texts by labor agrarians, modes of expression that take into account the material realities—and the wide range of voices—present in the farming South of the 1930s. Both leisure and labor agrarianisms comprise protests against the present version of capitalist agriculture ad modern capitalism at large, ultimately articulating of a kind of insurgent rurality. But where forms of the agrarian associated with the Twelve Southerners and Helen and Scott Nearing create versions of the rural that require agricultural labor and the environment itself to act as screens upon which to project their theories of rural life and political ideals, expressions of labor agrarianism represent lived experience—a fact that reveals itself in practices of meaning-making that highlight the body, either through uniquely embodied discourse or by presenting physical bodies as protest texts via photographic images. Specifically, I will focus on the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union tract *The Disinherited Speak*, on a series of letters sent by rural southern children to Eleanor Roosevelt, and on a variety of photographic documentaries of 1930s sharecroppers. By considering the politics of expression guiding these different versions of the agrarian, we gain a more complete, if more complicated, picture of what was at stake in representations and theories of rural life in the South during the 1930s.[52]

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[52] It's probably worth lingering over the term "agrarian" here: The *OED* traces its etymology back to the Classical Latin *agrārius*, "of or relating to land," and the definitions that follow uncover the multiple political orbits in which the concept has traveled. In a broad sense "agrarian" is defined as "[o]f, relating to, or concerned with landed property and the rights and issues associated with it, as its allocation, ownership, distribution, enclosure, etc." This would seem to apply to both those privileged and those disadvantaged

I. Leisure Agrarians

A/agrarianism as Modernism

As in chapter one, it's important to consider the meanings and manifestations of the various strains of anti-development modernism that emerge throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. More specifically, we might further connect Gaonkar's attention to the unexpectedly plural modernity of settler colonies—"not one but many . . . not new but old and familiar" (23)—along the (post)colonial margins with Patricia Chu's interest in the "'anti-colonialist' regionalist rhetoric" of the Agrarians, which resulted in a "masculine, agrarian, and 'high' or New Critical modernism" (117).

So while critics often recognize the city as the locus of high modernism, making processes of modernization synonymous with urbanization, the Nearings and the Agrarians each find the most viable future in the provinces. And like other rural subjects, their response to the overwhelming presence of modern development through industrial capitalism constitutes a particularly modern mode of protest. Still, the relative absence, in both *I'll Take My Stand* and *Living the Good Life*, of qualities typically associated with aesthetic modernism encourages the question: How should we understand their function

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by conventions of landowning. The term also represents people and culture directly engaged in agriculture: "Of or relating to cultivated land or the cultivation of land; based on or engaged in the cultivation of land; (esp. of a society, community, etc.) agricultural, farming." And, as early as the late eighteenth century, it additionally signifies resistance to abusive practices of landowning: "A person who advocates a redistribution of landed property. Often in *pl.*, denoting any of various groups or parties engaged in this." In this sense, the label applies with as much force to the STFU as it does the Twelve Southerners.

as modernist texts? Seth Moglen's configuration of "two modernisms" provides a useful model. According to Moglen, the most readily canonized of the modernists "produced literary works that are structured by the presumption that collective resistance to the damaging forces of modernization is impossible." Conversely, the other major strand of modernists held that the "most corrosive forces at work in American life might be altered and ameliorated, and that the human capacities that seemed most constrained might somehow be enabled to flourish in the future" (7-8). The split thus arises between those who believe that the experience of modernity is irredeemable and those who hold to the possibility of redemption. And, as I consider both the limits and the potential of collectivity in this chapter, it's also important to consider how this split follows a rift dividing those who subscribe to classical liberal models of selfhood, that emphasize individual modes of agency and subjectivity, and those who stress collective forms of identity, personality, and action. Although his analysis is primarily interested in the cultural work done by narrative fiction, Moglen's belief that certain American modernists might be able to "bring into being a social order in which the human potentialities imperiled by modernization might be revived or made anew" matches the stated aims of both our bodies of agrarians (25). While fiction writers and poets, guided by Ezra Pound's famous exhortation to "make it new," experimented with literary forms, the Agrarians theorized alternative modes of living and economies, while the Nearings performed them as a lived reality.

Calling for the return of a disappeared—or disappearing—agriculturally driven South, *I'll Take My Stand* is a proudly conservative attempt to refute the spread of modernity by articulating the nation's future in crudely binary terms: North or South, industrialism or agriculture, progress or tradition. Despite this reductive framework, *I'll*

Take My Stand is a tangled text with multiple authors and an irregular sense of its own message—it's an anthology that openly performs modernity's unevenness. And in terms of forwarding a consistent political philosophy, the text's multiplicity brings the Agrarians up short. But its internal disagreements might also register as a kind of modernist multivocality, resulting in a text that presents a skein of unresolved fragments appealing beneath and beyond rationality, towards the kind of mythopoeic pastoral of T. S. Eliot and James Frazer. To this end, its more doctrinaire contributors, Donald Davidson in particular, were often unnerved by the divergence of the text's messages. They recognized in part what is fully clear to contemporary readers: as a coherent manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand* is fundamentally flawed. Its flaws, however, highlight the diversity of responses forced by the onset of modernity. Even within a narrowly selected group of participants—it's hard to imagine a more evenly peopled group: all white, southern men of a shared ideological bent and, for the most part, a shared class background and professional orientation—we see that it's virtually impossible to apprehend the full meanings of modernity without having one's vision refracted by its epistemological diffusions.

For their part, the Nearings' protests arrive from a distinctly different political angle. Scott Nearing, an original leader of the People's Council for Peace and Democracy, was called before a grand jury in 1917 for obstructing the peace with the publication of his book *The Great Madness*, which "analyz[ed] the basic causes and aims of the war as commercial, not idealistic" (*Loving and Leaving* 21). For the Nearings, an agricultural existence was a principled break from a world that "had rejected in practice and in principle our pacifism, our vegetarianism, and our collectivism" (*Living* 3). Within *Living the Good Life*'s careful enumeration of the couple's beliefs, we read that they sought to "share in salvaging what

was still usable from the wreckage of the decaying social order . . . [and] to have a part in formulating principles and practices of an alternative social system" (4).

As a written artifact, *Living the Good Life* functions as a combination of farmer's almanac and personal history, centered specifically on the Nearings' Vermont project. It is also a text that consciously performs its own literariness. For example, each chapter places itself within a historical continuum by offering up thick sediments of quotations from a variety of sources. In addition to predictable entries from Thoreau and Jefferson, the text also offers citations from a range of more obscure texts and a range of periods, from Gervase Markham's *The Countrey Farme* (1616) to Rider Haggard's *A Farmer's Year* (1899) to Julian Huxley's *Essays of a Biologist* (1923). Much as *The Good Life* understands itself to be intervening in a specifically modern set of problems—Great Depression, World War, the inequities of an industrial economy—the text is always mindful of its precedents, offering a genealogy of ecologically minded appreciators of the soil made accessible through writing. In contrast to the Agrarians' southernness, the Nearings' ambition to enact a wide-scale pastoral community takes them to rural Vermont, and rather than drawing inspiration from an imagined past, they step directly into the stream of history, creating a rural alternative to the excesses of industrialism and urbanism.

Susan Stanford Friedman's incisive deconstruction of the terms "modern" and "modernism" concedes that whatever else modernism might represent, it is undoubtedly concerned with the turbulence of cultural rupture. Yet, as responses to this turbulence are translated into manifestos, they project their own kind of authority, against which future innovators must rebel: "The impulse to order is the product of chaos" (510), she explains of modernism's uncanny ability to extinguish and reinvent itself through modernity's

capitalism-fueled cycles of creative destruction. *Living the Good Life* thus stands as a series of persistent attempts to create a unique logic, to make the authors' own lifestyle accessible to others with all the patience and scrupulousness of a how-to manual. As it narrates the process of turning of flinty Vermont soil into fruitful loam, the Nearings' text seeks to organize the "chaos" of a life lived against the grain of American capitalism, in resistance to what Warren Susman identifies as a unique product of the 1930s—the "American Way of Life" (202). Similarly, the Nearings' attempt to fashion a wholesale alternative lifestyle is itself an effort to create an adjacent "culture" at a time when, according to Susan Hegeman, that concept had an especially poignant meaning. According to Hegeman's model, then, the Nearings' invention of new kind of agrarian culture might serve to "answe[r] a particular descriptive need in the modernist moment, when older conceptions of history and temporality had begun to seem, for various reasons, no longer adequate to explaining the specific experiences of alienation and difference Americans felt from others in their communities, their nation, the world" (4).

By recognizing these divergent strands of agrarianism as clearly intentioned alternatives to American capitalism, we might recognize them as expressions of what Scott Herring theorized as the regional modernist drive towards the "subnational" (4), a classification describing the self-conscious reassertion of a group's sovereignty via its establishment of an autonomous economic, cultural, and even political, identity. Thus, while it's not uncommon to configure the Nashville Agrarians within the context of literary modernism, we should notice the wide range of meanings derived from the agrarian instinct, and what this range indicates about the complex politics of rural American modernism across different regions.

Land and Progress

In their own way, the authors of both *I'll Take My Stand* and *Living the Good Life* are each after what Marx, perhaps dismissively, calls the "idiocy of rural life" (65). While Edward Soja explains the adjective's use with reference to its Greek root, *idios*, meaning "one's own, private, separate, set apart" (206), it's clear that Marx sees rural life as encouraging disengagement of all varieties, including political, and that he remains uneasy about its revolutionary potential. Yet this kind of disengagement from the culture at large is precisely the point for both the Nearings and the Agrarians, and considering their theories about the soil and the concept of "progress" will help us to better understand their distinct—but often complementary—ideas about the intersections of land, revolution, and the shape of an ideal future.

Agrarianism in the style of both the Agrarians and the Nearings offers an engagement with the material world vis-à-vis literary representation of the soil as the most effective way to reconnect with a sense of self and community decentered by modern capital. Throughout *I'll Take My Stand*, however, this tendency is forcefully regionalized, as the various essayists extol the virtues of the soil, which frequently comes to serve as a metonym for the South at large. Within this regional frame, John Crowe Ransom marvels that "out of so simple a thing as respect for the physical earth and its teeming life comes a primary joy, which is an inexhaustible source of arts and religions and philosophies" (9), while Frank Owsley uses the dirt to invoke myths of autochthony that trace the contours of a triumphal southern history: "Each word, name, sound, had grown from the soil and had behind it sweet memory, sitting adventure, and ofttimes stark tragedy. Thoughts, words,

ideas, concepts, life itself, grew from the soil" (69). Elsewhere, Herman Nixon confidently remarks on a "critical sophistication that is native to Southern soil" (199).[53]

More circumspectly perhaps, the text's introduction proclaims that the "theory of agrarianism is that the culture of the soil is the best and most sensitive of vocations, and that therefore it should have the economic preference and enlist the maximum number of workers" (xlvii), a particularly telling statement when you realize that the reference to "workers" is designed to occlude its authors. This reading rests more comfortably alongside what we encounter in *Living the Good Life*, where the dirt, especially the dirt experienced by the Nearings as workers in Vermont, is simultaneously a host to the noblest of professions and a problem to be overcome.

To harness the earth's potential and to provide sovereignty through work becomes one of *Living the Good Life*'s most prominent motifs. Indeed, by their own account, one of the Nearings' major accomplishments on their Vermont homestead was achieved when a "piece of eroded and depleted mountain land was restored to fertility, and produced fine crops of high quality vegetables, fruits and flowers" (6). Nadivah Greenberg's history of "green conservatism" helps us locate a vital point of contact for both *I'll Take My Stand* and *Living the Good Life*: a respect for the more deliberate pace of rural life and its activities, as well as a reverence for the soil's material and metaphorical meanings. For Greenberg, the

[53] Not surprisingly, W. J. Cash has a less enthusiastic reading of the influence of the southern landscape on its inhabitants. He describes the "wide fields and blue woods and flooding yellow sunlight" as creating a "world . . . in which not a single factor operated to break up the old pattern of outdoor activity laid down on the frontier," tying it to the region's perceived shortcomings in art and intellect: it is "a world in which horses, dogs, guns, not books, and ideas and art" prevailed (96).

Agrarians' stance is less an "outlying anomaly" than the reprise of an "earlier American conservatism" (90), one that urged a responsible marshalling of natural resources and moderation in consumption. Similarly, the Nearings recognize themselves as members of a "dying social order" seeking to "live frugally and decently" amidst the overwhelming onslaught of industrialism (4), a project that includes a calculated effort to absent themselves from the money economy in favor of a *use economy* where everything produced is cycled back into the local (household) system.

Thus, while the latent power of the Agrarians' southern soil rises up to meet its inhabitants, the Nearings' Vermont dirt needs attention, labor, and reform. Theirs is not a narrative of restoration; it's about crafting a durable future from the materials of the present. To put a sharper point on this observation, it's worth considering how these texts conceptualize time and how such conceptualizations shape their proposals. In both cases, there exists a calculated resistance to what Martha Banta calls, in a nod to Frederick Winslow Taylor's scientific approach to systems management, "Taylored time," wherein "time is both the greatest enemy of efficient work and the instrument with which to master effective production" (6). This industrialized approach to time management insures that time itself is met(er)ed out and measured as never before, by the addition of devices such as factory whistles and punch clocks. And yet it's precisely this sense of time over-regulated that creates a situation in which it is constantly in danger of slipping out of place. In an increasingly standardized world with an increasingly standardized sense of temporal distance and pacing, subjects who find themselves at odds with time's flow feel their difference with new acuity. To return to Leigh Anne Duck again, modernity's uneven development has a temporal dimension.

In other words, people and places out of pace with the contemporary world lapse out of time, which actually represents something like a goal for both the Nearings and the Agrarians. Bergson's conceptualization of time as an entity that exists beyond scientific measurements, in the consciousness of human subjects bears repeating here: both groups seek to make time work for them rather than working for time. Hence attempts by both the Nearings and the Agrarians to emphasize leisure over and above production stands as a rejection of the ethos of early-twentieth-century capitalism. "Things were moving fast—perhaps too fast" (29), the Nearings write, and their project explicitly tries to recast time, to loosen the grip of clock time, by highlighting the importance of *free* time. The Agrarian difference is subtle, but important: they are trying to step off the track of industrialized time by moving backwards—not, as the Nearings, sideways. At the risk of simplifying their relative positions, it's fair to suggest that the Nearings' project exists in "progressive" time: it seeks to enter the stream of history, engaging time as it unfolds in the present. The Agrarians, on the other hand, work to make the stream change its entire course, using tradition and the mythos of a disappeared past to imagine a premodern, preindustrial society.

In the eyes of the Agrarians, to be industrialized is to be stripped of a vital connection to one's own place and, consequently, one's own sense of history; to become, in the words of Lyle Lanier, "unattached to that tremendous social anchor"(150). For Lanier, "progress," especially as exemplified by Dewey-style pragmatism, is a catalyst for existential disconnection. This is not too far removed from the thinking of the Nearings except that Lanier's solution represents a more fully formed retreat into the past, and one that requires a good deal of obfuscation and deliberate forgetting. So, for instance, when

Lanier pines for the "restoration of the balance of economic forces" that existed in antebellum America, he neglects to recall that such a balance—if it ever really existed, a doubtful proposition given the instability of the global markets in which the planter class participated—was in large measure made possible by the availability of slave labor. "Progress is a comparatively modern idea," Lanier assures us, as if that fact alone were enough to discredit it, and we realize that the problem with using the sign of "modernity" as a straw man is that it's a portable battle line, continually accommodating and reaccommodating itself to the needs of its philosophers. In his attempt to wrest "progress" out of a linear narrative, then, to replace one teleology with another, Lanier is himself participating in what we might recognize as a complexly modern trick of manufacturing myth and history.[54]

Thus, the two texts' different attitudes about the meanings of progress indicate a fundamental difference within their political orientation. For the Nearings, the attempts to create progress should be rerouted away from modern forms of "exploitation," which include "the plunder of the planet; the slavery of man and beast; the slaughter of men in war, and of animals for food" towards the creation of a sustainable future marked by "serenity, purpose, and at-one-ness" (5-6). And it can be achieved, the Nearings argue, by revitalizing the pockets of rural, land-based culture still uncompromised by modern development. For the Agrarians, the very specter of "progress" is inseparable from

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[54] Lanier may be correct to argue that "progress usually turns out to mean business" (123), but in the analysis of W.J. Cash, a southern modernist of a different ideological cast, whatever else industrial development might have done, "Progress . . . was the father of the forces" that precipitated the decline of southern lynching (305-6).

industrialism, which the South, as Andrew Lytle declaims, "should dread . . . like a pizen snake" (234).

Although they arrive from different ends of the political spectrum, both the Agrarians and the Nearings exhibit concerns about the effects of "industrial capitalism"—a phrase they share with one another, and with Marx. In point of fact, Marx's description of the effects of "industrial capitalism" is of a piece with what we find in both *I'll Take My Stand* and *Living the Good Life*:

> Modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. . . . [T]hey are enslaved by the machine, by the foreman, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. (70)

While the specific marker "bourgeois" is only deployed once, by Herman Nixon in "Whither Southern Economy?," the concept of enslaving machinery and concerns about industrial capitalism are central to the Agrarian project, and carry echoes of Marx's classification of the class system.[55] In his account of a year spent as Andrew Lytle's live-in assistant late in the author's life, John Jeremiah Sullivan recalls Lytle's admonition to "beware the machinations of the enemy." When asked to identify the enemy, Lytle was quick to respond:

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[55] It's worth remembering that Nixon's left-leaning politics likely guided his diction. To this end, it's also important to remember that he was the group's political outlier. Bingham and Underwood label him a "New Deal liberal in the company of classical conservatives" (7).

"'Why, boy . . . the *bourgeoisie*!" (63). And yet the specific terms in which the Agrarians articulate their complaint about modern America has a distinctly bourgeois ring to it. *I'll Take My Stand* worries about an absence of leisure, about the disappearance of tradition, and about the poverty of classically defined aesthetic and intellectual qualities in their region. It's important to remember that those values are very much the superstructural equivalent of a bourgeois division of labor that separates out mental and manual work, and thereby facilitates the elevation of art as an autonomous realm of creative activity. While the Twelve Southerners would likely resist any characterization that tied their model to Veblen's formulations of leisure, the conspicuous pursuit of "non-productive consumption of time" is a major aspiration of Agrarianism and one that is, unconsciously perhaps, in constant competition with its celebrations of labor (43).

In another echo of Marxism, both *I'll Take My Stand* and *The Good Life* concern themselves with the deleterious effects of "abstract labor": the fear that as labor is converted into an exchange value, it becomes another commodity made subject to the demands of the market and that, consequently, the laborers themselves become commodities. Additionally, as laborers' skills are devalued and undermined by machinery, such as the industrial factory that looms so large in the imagination of both the Nearings and the Agrarians, Marx predicts that a barrier will arise between the laborer and his labor, resulting in an epidemic of psychic alienation. Yet within the economies of both the Nearings and the Agrarians, the truest antidote is an agrarianism that brings the subject into direct contact with the soil, helping the individual gain a more intimate relationship with his own work.

Yet telling differences emerge as well. Early in the text, the Nearings write of the hope to find a community in which to put their philosophies of work and economy into practice. Since that community had yet to emerge, they embraced a more individuated model of labor, embarking on "a personal search for a simple, satisfying life on the land, to be devoted to mutual aid and harmlessness, with an ample margin of leisure in which to do personally constructive and creative work." Notions of labor in the text follow capitalism's larger tendency to organize and conceptualize labor—and thus meaningful change—as a single "unit," one person or one farm at a time. In the same passage, the Nearings explain their desire to work the land as an attempt at "entering a pre-industrial, rural community" (3). This is less about inserting oneself into an imagined past, á la the Agrarians, than it is about "entering" a community left behind by the uneven movements of industrial development. Leisure is obviously a primary objective for the Nearings in their creation of an agrarian "good life" but this notion of leisure is, in several key ways, indivisible from their political goals. Writing about their reasons for homesteading in Vermont, the authors explain that they seek "leisure during a considerable portion of each day, month or year" which might include "avocational pursuits" but also "individual and group efforts directed toward social improvement" (14-15)—a suggestive parallel to Marx's contention that, under socialism, work could be restored to its fundamental capacity for joyfulness, creativity, and fulfillment. Yet while this is all another way of talking about progress, it is progress in a largely bourgeois framework that still reflects the division of labor under capitalism in which work time is supplemented or compensated for by leisure.[56] As

[56] To get a better idea of how the text theorizes this division, it's worth considering its inscription of the balance between the "bread labor" (working "in the garden, in the woods,

Theodor Adorno pointedly addresses it, the partition that supposedly distinguishes labor and leisure is just another contributing feature of a capitalist economy—"Free time is shackled to its opposite" (187).

Although limited in scope, the Nearings' version of agrarian labor represents a more coherent break with industrial capitalism and its effects; *I'll Take My Stand*, on the other hand, is of at least two minds about what agrarian labor ought to be. This is most clear in the unresolved tension between the text's competing models of practical agrarianism: the yeoman farmer and the gentleman planter (or, as the text frequently prefers, the "squireocracy"). For Mary Weaks-Baxter, this disagreement of "yeoman versus cavalier" comprises the text's deep and irresolvable contradiction, and the primary reason that it "remains an enigma" (40).

It is, however, an enigma that reveals as much about Agrarian politics as it conceals. For instance, In "Not in Memoriam, But in Defense," Stark Young insists that the planter model and its emphasis on leisure-class privilege promises to make labor the purest kind of abstraction by implying, in spite of itself perhaps, the bodily presence of tenant farmers or slaves. When Frank Owsley, on the other hand, states that "the life of the South was leisurely and unhurried for the planter, the yeoman, and the landless tenant" (71), it's important to remember that, among the categories of class experience to which Owsley refers, we're dealing with fundamentally different modes and manners of leisure. As Richard Gray further explains, the voices bound together in *I'll Take My Stand* occasionally

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on construction, in the shop, at sugarmaking or packing") and "personally directed" time in which "[o]ne might read, write, sit in the sun, walk in the woods, play music, go to town." Ideally, the ratio comes close to 1:1—"We earned four hours of leisure by our four hours of labor" (51).

make the mistake of assuming that that "values by which [the planter and the yeoman classes] live are somehow reconcilable or interchangeable" (135), of assuming, in other words, that leisure for some isn't boredom or desperate unemployment for others. In the final analysis, however, the two forms cannot ultimately be severed and the Twelve Southerners vary in the degree to which they recognize the simultaneous difference and co-dependence of these classes.

Similarly, W. J. Cash approaches John Crowe Ransom's vision of a southern squireocracy with skepticism. According to Cash, "the squire's agrarianism was a highly formalized and artificial thing . . . a tradition with a great deal more of the salon than of the earth in it" (30). Moreover, the promotion of a planter class squireocracy introduces a debilitating fracture in *I'll Take My Stand*'s protests about the money economy since the planter, with his vast inventories and trade routes, is (and was) essentially just another player in the complex web of global capital exchange.[57] For instance, the South's cotton interests participated in, and continued to be influenced by, the world cotton market, which, in the 1930s, exploded in Japan and Brazil, making it practically impossible for the Agrarian fear of foreign influence on the regional markets and the realities of the planter class to share a common idealism. More pointedly, Jack Temple Kirby explains that the "[e]xpansion of plantation production areas within [the South] . . . always amounted to an expansion of 'modernity' and the end of an isolated, 'premodern' rural life in southern

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[57] For more on the complexity of these networks, the density of their mathematical logic, and the ways that such complexity filtered through literary productions of both elite and marginal southerners, see Melanie Benson Taylor, *Disturbing Calculations: The Economics of Identity in Postcolonial Southern Literature, 1912-2002* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2008).

subregions where the plantations and staple culture spread" (*Rural Worlds* 27).[58] When they exist on the large scales promoted by the planter system, it's thus clear that agricultural projects of the Cotton Belt South were always-already immersed in the methods and modes of modernity.

Alternately, as Lytle theorizes in "The Hind Tit," "the farming South, the yeoman South, that great body of free men, had hardly anything to do with the capitalists and their merchandise" (208). The ability to circumvent the flows of labor and goods of modern capital thus creates as an exemplary alternative to the American mainstream. In his way, though, Lytle is as romantic as Young: he unduly emphasizes the men's freedom—their whiteness is a given—and his yeoman farmer has a unique bond with the natural world, with leisure that accentuates the farmer's essential "rootedness," as he attends ice-cream socials and lends his voice to the Sacred Harp choir—activities that "bring the neighborhood together in a social way [that is] unlike the 'society' of industrialism" (231). The corrupting power of machines is predictable enough, but Lytle's decision to locate the true power of Agrarian ideology within the class of poor whites betrays a willingness to upend the dominance of the planter class from the bottom up. The text's recurrent celebration of the yeoman farmer, therefore, hints at an unsettled vision of the rural power matrix, and its invocations of the value of the individual laborer offer a glimpse of the latent labor activism inherent to the volume.

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[58] The global agricultural market's ability to expand modernity through nominally isolated areas is a specialty of Pete Daniel. See *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Champaign: U of Illinois P, 1986) and *Standing at the Crossroads: Southern Life in the Twentieth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996).

Dewey Grantham makes much the same point when he notes that Agrarian efforts to exalt the yeoman farmer are undercut by the realities of poor white farming in the South: "The agrarian myth that celebrated a rural America of sturdy and independent yeomen reached the limits of credibility when it came to the southern sharecropper" (viii). The very existence, then, of the southern sharecropper threatens to render any belief in the redemptive powers of the land impossible, and makes both Agrarian models—the yeoman and the planter—incompatible with their basic idealism.[59] More broadly, any theory of agricultural labor that fails to work through the connections between rural poverty, dispossession, and agriculture that prevailed throughout the sharecropping South is incomplete. And so in spite of the utopian impulses that inform the projects of both the Twelve Southerners and the Nearings, their visions fail to offer a workable solution to the basic problems of the agricultural economy's participation in the larger industrial economy. Since this is a historical development that can't really be undone, the question becomes what's to be done with it? As political activists in the 1930s, the Nearings sought to provide an answer and yet they were constrained by their own geography. For example, there's no doubt that the Nearings were aware of the deprivations of sharecropping in the South—and yet the region is conspicuously absent from their discourse on agriculture and

[59] This problem was apparent to perspicacious contemporaries of the Twelve Southerners. In *Killers of the Dream*, Lillian Smith contends that "the basic weakness of the Fugitives' stand, as I see it, lay in their failure to recognize the massive dehumanization which had resulted from slavery and its progeny, sharecropping and segregation, and the values that permitted these brutalities of spirit. They did not see that the dehumanization they feared the machine and science would bring was *fait accompli* in their own agrarian region. They knew of the dual system of sharecropping and segregation, but something had blunted their imaginations for they had only a contactless association with it" (225).

labor. This is a South-shaped hole that haunts the text, recasting their project as, at best, a local solution, and at worst, an unmoored idealism. While the authors of *I'll Take My Stand* sought to make their version of Agrarianism the de facto image of southern culture, they also performed a series of silent elisions in the construction of their South: as Kreyling contends, the Agrarians "knew full well there were other 'Souths' than the one they touted" (xii). Even within the very patch of ground so carefully tended by *I'll Take My Stand*, there exist texts produced by other agrarians that offer prisms through which to glimpse these other Souths.

II. Labor Agrarians

Bodies in the Mail

> Primary on the 25th
> And the "rednecks" will be there.
> And the "Yaller-heels" will be there, also.
> And the "hayseeds" and the "gray-dillers," they'll be there, too.
> And the "subordinates" and "subalterns" will be there to rebuke their slanderers and traducers.
>
> -*Pontotoc Democrat,* 1891

The roots of rural insurgency in the South, and the beginnings of an expressive strain of labor agrarianism, are perhaps most directly traced to the Populist movement of the 1880s and 90s, when rural subjects embraced their marginal status in order to protest what they saw as a lack of representation in American political, economic, and cultural institutions. As Edward Ayers explains of the movement, "Farmers were not afraid of modern America, but

they were angry that national progress seemed to be built on their backs" (266). The epigraph above makes clear that just as the Populists ironically accepted their subordinate status, they also intended to make their physical presence function as a means of dissent. It wasn't just a matter of casting a ballot but of being there, of affirming one's existence in the face of hostility such that the subaltern body itself becomes the most poignant text of protest available. As the decades progressed and economic opportunities for small-scale farmers further receded, the anger Ayers mentions often found new channels in organized labor or in radical politics. These movements materialized in a number of forms, including, for instance, the Alabama Communists of the 1930s and the freshly revitalized Socialist Party of Oklahoma of the same period. Perhaps the most prominent group, however, was the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union (STFU), a collective of tenant farmers and sharecroppers formed in 1934, with branches stretching throughout the agricultural South.[60]

The STFU's legacy is most famously marked by an earnest attempt to promote interracial cooperation via performative means, seeking an alternative to the abuses of the

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[60] For an elegant treatment of the Alabama Communist Party, see Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists in the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1990). The Oklahoma movement is explored in Jim Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1904-1920* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1999), while the most comprehensive examination of the STFU remains Donald Grubbs, *Cry from the Cotton: The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the New Deal* (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas, 2000). See also Theordore Rosengarten's *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (New York: Vintage, 1974), which won the National Book Award in 1975 for its first-person autobiographical account of Nate Shaw, an African American who was a member of the Alabama Sharecroppers' Union in the 1930s and 40s.

sharecropping system that elevated the entire sharecropping class together. And although the dream of a definitive rebuke to abusive landowners never fully materialized, the movement does represent a coordinated effort to establish a more sustainable future for labor agrarians; it also presents a version of agrarianism that clashes loudly with the positions of the Twelve Southerners and, in its broad-based recruiting efforts and sweeping vision of transformative action, the left-leaning Nearings as well. One of the movement's most vibrant artifacts is a collection of letters sent to STFU secretary H.L. Mitchell, bound together as *The Disinherited Speak: Letters from Sharecroppers* and published by the Worker's Defense Fund in 1937. By considering this text's messages about the state of labor agrarians in the South, as well as its participation in the establishment of a rural southern identity that reaches beyond the hegemon of the white male, we gain a more complete picture of the period's "other agrarians" and the period's "other Souths." To this end, I will also analyze selections from *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression*, a collection of letters sent to Eleanor Roosevelt and recently edited by Robert Cohen, paying special attention to writers originating in the farming/sharecropping South.

The alterity of southern tenant farmers and sharecroppers in the 1930s is well recorded: some of the period's most celebrated documentary projects, including the extensive photographic archives created by the WPA, feature rural southern subjects. Yet the question of self-representation in these texts remains unresolved, prompting a variation on Gayatri Spivak's famous question, Can the *rural* subaltern speak? And it's a problem that is arguably compounded in the photograph—where performance, unlike speech per se, can be represented as the crystallization of a specific moment. Although

these letters vary widely in terms of both style and substance, they represent a concentrated effort to answer my version of Spivak's question in the affirmative. And, in contrast to the writerly efforts of the Twelve Southerners and the Nearings, their version of agrarianism foregrounds the bodiness of the body. It's a subtle but essential distinction: where leisure agrarians emphasize the body in contact with the *earth*, labor agrarians highlight the *body* in contact with the earth. Jay Watson notes the ways in which artists and thinkers from the South responded to complaints about the region's intellectual paucity by seeking to emphasize the "reconstruct[ion of] a regional 'mind'—a coherent intellectual history and continuous intellectual tradition" instead of highlighting the essential roles played by the body in the region's histories, for "if southern ways of life have been built upon particular guiding ideas and visions, they have in an even more profound way been built upon, and by, southern bodies" (21). While these letters reveal the centrality of bodies in the southern economic and cultural landscape, they also present a fascinating form of embodied discourse—one that allows rural subjects a chance at *being there*, like the Populist agitators of the epigraph, in writing. This is especially true of *Disinherited,* which was released with the unequivocal intent of drumming up support for the union. As an activist tool, the collection's primary technique is to make the world of the sharecropper legible to the outside by making the voices both *sound* and *look* as ''authentic'' as possible, a quality the text aims to achieve by getting as close to its subjects and their bodily condition as it can.

The construction of authenticity, however, is a condition that can only be achieved by giving form to abstraction through a focus on the individual. In the first place, then, the most direct topic of each letter is the individuated experience of the sender—we cannot

apprehend anything about the "state of the sharecropper" or "rural southern alterity" without first confronting the specific cluster of concerns addressed in the individual letter. And, fittingly, the most frequently recurring concern is the state of the body itself. In the hardscrabble world revealed through the words of the writers, there's muted concern with intellectual or spiritual matters but an unceasing interest in food, clothing, shelter, and the opportunity to translate physical labor into these commodities.

Representations of the body in *Disinherited* must ultimately also come to terms with the threat of violence. To write the body from the sharecropper's position is to conjure up a world shadowed by the prospect of physical force that cannot be retaliated against. For example, Lester Robinson's letter from Proctor, Arkansas tells of landowner Henry Craft's attempts to purge his tracts of the union through intimidation: "he also raided the home of Nathan Peoples Negro here own this place, threaten to kill him and drew their guns own hom because of they thought he was and my sister was a union member" (13). There's no mention of how Nathan Peoples reacted, and it goes without saying that any physical resistance would be an excuse for escalation and the consummation of physical threats. The text's silence in this regard reinforces the extent to which both law and custom collude to render sharecropping bodies—particularly those belonging to African Americans and/or union members—passive. Anxieties about violence are further signaled by an awareness of the ways in which guns interact with sharecropping bodies, effectively acting as extensions of landowning bodies: D. Gatewood relates an incident in which the local "Boss" and "Book Keeper" "Came down on the farm one night drunk and went in a widow woman house and truied to make her tell something about this union and also cocked a Revolver in a man stomach" (15). The gun is cocked "in" the man's stomach; there is a puncture, an invasion,

and an intimation of rape, all sparked by the prodding pistol. And the sovereignty of the individual body is violated in a gesture that reveals the severity of the stakes of the situation: in an economy of values that permanently links ground and body, to own one is to own the other, with all of the control that ownership implies.

The letters' interests in the body proceed beyond content into form: one of the ways in which the physical corpus reveals itself in these texts is by preserving their non-standard orthographic features. Frequent instances of irregular grammar, spelling, and punctuation do more than indicate the literacy of the writer; they point towards a synthesis of text and voice, albeit a voice consciously reaching for the register of a "writer." It's possible, then, to find application in *Disinherited* to Walter Benjamin's argument that the modern media of the newspaper grants ordinary citizens access to increased authorship via venues such as the letter to the editor. Thus the non-standard modes of communication on display in the pamphlet match Benjamin's description of the newspaper: "it is at the scene of the limitless debasement of the word . . . that its salvation is being prepared" ("Newspaper" 742). It's unclear whether the antecedent here is "the newspaper" or, more provocatively, "the word," but the larger point is plain enough: the excavation of often invisible subjectivities through print media has a rich emancipatory potential.

These textual irregularities likewise emphasize the texts' origins in the physical world: with the individual writer's orthographic tendencies left intact, it is easier to appreciate the materiality of both the letter and the author. In other words, the fastening of the artifact and the body's participation in the event of writing becomes clearer. Consequently, the body of the author lingers above these texts as an inescapable, signing presence to an even greater degree than writing matched to the demands of editorial style

guides. Michel de Certeau theorizes some of the consequences of this dynamic when he considers the relationship between technologies of writing and the body itself: "Between the tool and the flesh, there is thus an interaction that shows itself . . . by the cry, which shrieks an inarticulable pain and constitutes the unthought part of the bodily difference" (145). It's not simply the text, then, but the production of the text—preserved in the letters' orthographic quirks—that represents an unconscious drive to overcome the fundamental divisions that obtain between embodied persons, a drive that is always undermined by the limitations of expression via language. Yet although what Certeau calls "bodily difference" may be impossible to bridge definitively, its effects can be alleviated, in starts and stops, through language.

Of *Disinherited*'s authors' difficulties representing and theorizing their experiences, William Stott suggests that "[m]any of them were so innocent, so inexperienced, that they did not really conceive the otherness of others" (209). It is impossible to know if—or, better yet, how—they "conceive[d]" the other, but this isn't a problem unique to this group of writers alone. And it's hard to understand, in Stott's mind at least, what qualifies as experience and how the contributors to *Disinherited* could possibly appear as innocents. What we can determine is that if, as I've argued above, the presence of the physical body is among the most effective means of protest available to rural subalterns, then the editorial decision—made by both Mitchell and *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt*'s editor, Robert Cohen—to present this material in its original orthographic form gives the letters a sharper political edge, a more refined message in self-representation made ready-to-hand.

In addition to their significance as indexes of social conflict, these texts also reveal themselves as participants in the period's outpouring of modernist expression. As they

respond to the conditions of a modernizing region—greater presence of technologies, the abstractions of market capitalism, increased influence of the nation-state—they take their place alongside *I'll Take My Stand* and *The Good Life* as typically modern responses to modernity as the ascendance of American capitalism. Even on the formal level, however, *The Disinherited Speak* presents a resonant countertext to *I'll Take My Stand*. As mentioned above, in ways both large and small, the Agrarians' messages are often divided against themselves. In the most obvious sense, this is due to the text's incorporation of multiple authors. But it is also a product of the instability of language and the presence of diverging subjectivities' interpretations of history. If modernism is a matter of multiplicity and multivocality, an aesthetic acknowledgement of the fragmentation wrought by rapid industrialization, world war, and twentieth-century capitalism's transformation of cultural practices and institutions, then *I'll Take My Stand*'s unsettled agenda points up its status as a collection of disparate voices contending for ascendance under a nominally unified front. Likewise, *The Disinherited Speak* stands as a collection of distinct voices loosely grouped according to a series of shared concerns. But the separate interests and histories of the individual letter writers frequently rise to the top. As a practical matter, however, these letters work to construct a viable union community through writing. Letter after letter speaks to and through Mitchell to write a community into existence while simultaneously highlighting the impossibilities of growing a labor union in a world carefully structured to resist collectivity. To make a union out of language, to conjure up and conjoin the bodies and spaces such an organization requires, is not so different, perhaps, from Eliot's impulse to "shore up" the fragments of a fractured mythos. But unlike Eliot's highly intellectualized exercise in reconstructing a centered sense of history and culture, the efforts of the writers

of the *Disinherited* letters are tied to—and, to some extent, circumscribed by—the material necessities of the sharecropping South.

Of course, the most obvious difference between *I'll Take My Stand* and *Disinherited* consists of the sharecroppers' experience working the soil over above the Agrarians' essayist abstractions. More pointedly, the STFU letters uncover a desperate and unrelenting interest in the material concerns of sharecropping life: goods, services, contracts; meals and dues and spare change; the nuts and bolts of rural survival. This is especially clear in the contributions from women. A letter from Marie Pierce, for instance, outlines the difficulties of securing basic sustenance for her family (6). We get the sense, from Pierce and from other women members of the STFU represented here, that they labor with a centripetal force that works to keep families intact, while juggling domestic realities that constantly threaten to spin the world apart.[61] These are, we come to understand, conditions so dire that only whisper-thin margins separate the living and the dead. In Pierce's letter, a $0.35 can of *Eagle Brand* milk is the last hope for a sick baby, and yet it is an expense that tips a family into insolvency. Whatever else it might mean, the beneficent presence here of a mass-produced commodity makes Lyle Lanier's complaint, in "The Philosophy of Progress," about the "liberatory" failures of the Detroit-made bag of potato chips feel like a bourgeoisie potshot (145). At the very least, the comparison reveals a differently calibrated system of values: aesthetics on the part of Agrarians like Lanier; survival on the part of writers like Pierce.

[61] For more on the challenges of domesticity among the sharecropping class, see Margaret Jarman Hagood's 1939 study *Mothers of the South: Portraiture of the White Tenant Farm Woman* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1996).

The texts' competing values systems reveal themselves in a more fundamental way: while the Agrarianism of *I'll Take My Stand* is, by and large, committed to some form of segregation, the STFU is famous for its commitment to biracial collaboration. To this end, *Disinherited* makes no clear editorial distinction between black and white voices. Yet the presence of African American concerns seeps through. An unsigned letter from Marked Tree, Arkansas explains: "i am tired of working for nothing it is worser now than it was Slavery—thy woad give us clse an foad but know thy just give us a hard way to go an till lies to keep enyone else from helping the poar" (7). While it remains unclear whether the labor agrarianisms of the STFU absorb or deflect the effects of Jim Crow, the movement does prove that coordinated effort is possible, even when it remains shadowed by segregation and the enduring legacies of slavery. It accepts the impossibility of uniformity in order to pursue a politics of unity, over against the realities of difference. Still and all the logic of slavery and segregation depends, above all else, on a particular way of apprehending the human body: the most immediate way of determining blackness is, of course, visually. In the deeply embodied mode of expression created by these letters, then, it's no surprise that bodies associated with blackness express a different set of concerns about the conflicts of sharecropping.

In spite of the tensions attending to a biracial organization in the Jim Crow South, *Disinherited* uncovers the degree to which women and people of color hold positions of power in the STFU. Indeed, by the account of these letters, they appear to be the union's most committed members. Lester Robinson discusses the problem: "We have most of the negroes but havent got any White labors in" (21). Luella McDonald, who identifies herself as a secretary, reveals her place in the organization: "Now I am a woman but as I

understand we are to go on equal footing with the men" (17); while L---M---, a leader in Turrell, Arkansas, writes of Ellen Franch, explaining that "she will doo all She can to get members for our local" (23). Another letter, by member Lula Parchman, contains the following exhortation: "Regardless of color or creed, and Pray to god for the continue growth and Strength of The Southern Tenant Farmers Union and want to do every Thing I can do to help make The union Strong" (27). The female authors of these letters are not only quick to identify themselves as women but to recognize their own importance in the organization and the relative shortcomings of the union's white male members. Thus the version of the STFU written by the letters is one of provisional female—and black—autonomy, a fact that clashes harshly with the realities of the white-controlled world of the landowners.

One of the most obvious signs of that control is space. As Robin Kelley tells it, the question of how much "private" space tenants could maintain on the land provided a flashpoint of conflict between landowners and their tenants. For instance, in Kelley's account of the violent encounter between the Alabama Share Croppers' Union and the white mob in Camp Hill, Alabama, we learn that one of the major issues precipitating the incident was a disagreement about whether or not tenants ought to have access to private gardens on their contracted land. The key question is one of stewardship: Is there any line distinguishing private space from space controlled by owners? In an environment where occupying land and working land are indistinguishable parts of the selfsame system, the landowners' leverage is immense. Landowner Henry Craft, one letter tell us, "Swares that a union man cant Stay on his place" (14), a poignant reminder of the stakes of union membership and the disadvantages of a scenario in which private ownership of the land

remains, for all intents and purposes, untenable for farmers in the sharecropping position. A person's ability to survive depends upon her ability to labor, which requires an opportunity to occupy a space, which itself depends upon her willingness to appease the landowner. This concatenation of obligations and rewards, all determined from outside the self, reveals the union members' basic vulnerability, as well as the impossibility of self-determination, which the letters seek to redress, in part, *textually*, via voice and discourse. This is a primary source for the overwhelming antagonism through which all of the authors' words are strained.

"L.," from the Twist farm in Arkansas, offers a succinct summary of his complaint as a cropper: "This country is supposed to be owned By the people and Ruled By the People But instead of that it is owned by few Planters and Ruled by mr. Hood and mr. Preacher" (9).[62] We don't get any further details on Mr. Hood or Mr. Preacher, nor does L. elaborate on his collectivist sensibility, but the letter reveals a deep-rooted disagreement about how landownership is configured. It's possible, though, to allow "L."'s "country" to stand at once for the rural landscape and the nation at large, making the letter a complaint against both a country and a Country that have betrayed him: betrayed him, in the first case, with an inexplicable physical inhospitality and a willingness to submit to "mr. Hood and mr. Preacher"; in the second case, betrayed him in its inability to realize Lincoln's promises of a nation crafted of the people, by the people, and for the people. The letter's echo of the Gettysburg Address is unmistakable, and in spite of its obvious frustration, the

[62] Although the text offers no further evidence, it's altogether possible that the author is making a metonymic connection between "Mr. Hood" and landowners' alliance with the Ku Klux Klan.

revolutionary possibilities of both the landscape and the nation of the Great Emancipator resonate loudly.

Additionally, the letters examine the practices of controlling space by unveiling the contours of resistance and the consequences of the landowners' tactics. Specifically, they respond to landowners' attempts to discourage collusion between croppers by locating tenant cabins at wide removes: one way to undo the distance, it seems, is through a reliance on the mail, making the postal routes and mailboxes important, and rare, spaces of federally protected rights to privacy. And so breaches in that privacy become acutely painful. A letter from "F_____" of Parkin, Arkansas, complains that his "Mail was tampered with," imploring Mitchell to make his communications as anonymous as possible: "So when you send me any thing have it fix that no one can see where it come from or where or who it is" (8). The mail's ability to create communities across space and time is obviously not lost on either the union members or their enemies—and as a federal installment, it's a resource associated with the *nation* rather than with centers of regional authority or power. But it's also true that the possibility of subversion is not simply restricted to postal communications between STFU headquarters and the union's outer branches: language itself becomes the great uncontainable source of unrest. One of the overriding messages of *Disinherited*, then, is that even non-standard literacies can germinate the seeds of transformative action.

Not surprisingly, then, the letters that comprise *Disinherited* touch time and again on issues of literacy and the functionality of texts. John Carlos Rowe's assessment of Muriel Rukeyser's poem *The Book of the Dead* (1938)—a document roughly contemporaneous with *Disinherited* and stemming from a similar concern about the conditions facing rural

southern workers—feels appropriate here. Although they occupy separate genres, both "call attention to the textualist conditions of everyday life" (138). For Rukeyser, this means the direct incorporation of medical reports, media accounts, and personal testimonies into her poem; for *Disinherited*, it manifests as an acute awareness of—and occasional anxiety about—the work done by letters, magazines (*The Voice*, *The Black Man,* and *The Negro World* figure prominently), ledger sheets. In order to critique the economic structures responsible for the suffering at the center of each of these texts, both *Disinherited* and *The Book of the Dead* depend upon the exposure of submerged perspectives via texts, and thus both reveal a fundamental trust in the power of language to create and recreate the worlds we inhabit. This isn't, however, a model of expression with predictable consequences: one of the most potentially provocative acts of signification performed in *Disinherited* involves the seemingly innocuous act of wearing a union button: "I want to wear my button," writes E. B. McKenney, "but my members kicked so and said That we was to week, and said That I would get beat up" (28). The combination of text and body here is deeply disruptive: one can be a union member and still pass as a benign worker but the signs associated with the button marks the body in a way that definitively answers the question of the union ballad, Which side are you on? Language and body bound together, then, *create* membership and identity in a way that fuses abstraction and materiality—the word made flesh, the flesh made word.

These bodies make themselves visible in unpredictable ways. Robert Cohen's compilation of letters written by children to Eleanor Roosevelt during the Depression, *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt* (2002), highlights a vivid epistolary embodiment achieved by young people reaching out to the first lady in writing. Unintentionally perhaps, the collection also

uncovers an intriguing form of wireless embodiment as it presents these letters as one half of a dialogue between a vividly imagined Roosevelt and a crowd of anxious, underrepresented listeners. In his discussion of radio's ability to produce newly wrought "intimate publics," Jason Loviglio correctly argues that, in contrast to her husband's Fireside Chats, Eleanor's "nearly forgotten radio career demonstrate[s] how radio could be used to negotiate women's tenuous access to public life and the power to define where public and private begin, end, and blur together" (6). If we broaden Loviglio's analysis to include a less visible public—young, impoverished people of all gender and racial positions, mostly from the rural South—we can read these young people's responses to Roosevelt's radio presence as attempts to assert themselves as citizens and as listening subjects in a world in which their basic mobility was continually contained.

It's worth pausing briefly to unpack Eleanor Roosevelt's relation to the radio as a medium, as well as radio's intersections with the modern. Roosevelt had a long history as a broadcaster: she worked in radio in New York throughout the 1920s and continued to appear on the airwaves intermittently until the early 1950s. As the first lady, she acted as a voice for the Administration from the preinaugural period until the sudden end of FDR's tenure. These were commercial jobs, sponsored by companies such as Pond's, Simmons Mattresses, Selby Shoes, and Sweetheart Soaps, and they paid well, a source of minor controversy for the first lady's critics. They were also, in the main, designed to give listeners a carefully arbitrated taste of life in the White House and, as the announcer for *Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt's Own Program* puts it in the 1940 pilot broadcast, to discuss "topics of a special interest to American women." Although at least one program was devoted to "Youth and Youth Organizations," Roosevelt's imagined audience was potential voters, the

adult world, and most particularly women who had access to midday broadcasts.[63] Yet the radio functions as a strange disseminator of culture, one whose signifying capabilities are not circumscribed by any intended demographic target; it demonstrates, as Todd Avery argues, a basic "unwield[iness]" (38), yielding a range that is frequently uncontrollable.

More broadly, as a medium of representation, radio offers new ways to recount and experience a world mediated by technology. It's tempting to conceive of radio's grammars of expression through the contemporary classification "virtual reality," but that phrase implies an interaction with a visual interface that these broadcasts conspicuously lack. For the purposes of this chapter I'll venture a related term, "static reality," for its ability to capture a sense of the uncanny aural to which the Roosevelt letters respond. James A. Connor's investigation of radio as a source for *Finnegan's Wake* emphasizes the medium's untamed multivocality—a function of the early technology's unreliable transmissions and its lack of adjustable frequency stabilizers. To make his case, Connor outlines two related characteristics of static: it is both "generic radio interference, including words and unintelligible sounds" and "that hissing sibilant white noise, close to pure chaos" (20). Radio fills the void between sign and signified with shards and scraps of noise that can become nearly palpable in their density, and slippage is so irreversibly threaded through

[63] Roosevelt's support for youth groups such as the American Youth Congress and the American Student Union during the 1930s attracted plenty of controversy, particularly as the AYC began criticizing the New Deal from the left in the mid-30s. She also played an important role in publicizing and defending the National Youth Administration, a branch of the WPA devoted to helping high school and college students find work during the Depression. The first lady's broadcast on "Youth and Youth Organizations" was an installment in *Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt's Own Program,* which began its run in 1940 and thus postdates the vast majority of the letters in Cohen's anthology.

the process of radio listening that any response to the messages of a radio broadcast requires a parsing of the intrusions of sound and snippet that disrupt its notionally linear lines of discourse. Radio listeners, in other words, must become modernist readers.

So radio's potential to conjure up a series of visual cues to complement its aural ones may depend upon its fundamental fuzziness—a fuzziness that provides the broad outlines of the speaker's body and allows listeners to supply the rest. In *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt*, letter after letter turns on the interpretation of Roosevelt's imagined corpus, and "corpus" may be a key term here since it minds the gap between a subject's physical body and a body of writing, of words. Delivered through an invisible signal, both bodies become manifestly intimate, and radio's opacities, both discursive and sonic, provide a scaffold upon which to hang the letter writers' imaginative misreadings. These are misreadings both comic and tragic: take, for instance, the Texas teenager who implores Roosevelt to send him the products of her "big machine [that] make[s] money" (28). The letters suggest that from the immaterial substance of noise, listeners construct a dialogic relationship with a disembodied voice towards which they write themselves and their audience into being, drawing images from the air. And throughout the collection, these images are processed, via language, into the text of the letter.

Writing letters to the first lady is, of course, a fairly standard practice, and it was especially common for working-class men and women to directly address this particular first lady. (Woody Guthrie's ballad "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt" showcases this relationship between Roosevelt and the working class.) What's significant about these particular letters, though, is the demographic profile of the authors—children and teenagers of uneven levels of literacy—and their interaction with modern technologies of communication. More

specifically, these letters' very existence, and their diverse geographic origins, highlight the wide scope of the radio's discursive purview, as well as its ability to make a distant figure of authority—such as Eleanor Roosevelt—appear familiar and accessible.[64] ("After listening to you over the radio . . ." (204), begins one letter; "I've been reading a great deal of your activities on the radio and heard you on the radio" (119), starts another.)

Indeed, the characteristics and preoccupations of these letters, the strange paths that they traveled, serve to complicate Michael Warner's famous theories about publics, since a public created by the radio becomes an increasingly unchecked phenomenon, as radio transmissions reach around the edges of the public's spherical shape to include, perhaps unintentionally, subaltern voices such as those belonging to poor rural children. Although they range broadly in terms of locale and tone, the basic thematic unity of all of these letters attests to the creation of a sort of "unpublic" taking shape in the cracks unattended to by public discourses generated by the media.[65] They also highlight the

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[64] Roosevelt's widely syndicated newspaper column "My Day" was produced with similar intent. But on the evidence of *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt*, the radio shows seem to have found a broader audience.

[65] I'm tempted to avail myself of Nancy Fraser's "subaltern counterpublics," a designation of the "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (67). But these letters are, by all appearances, discrete events, not part of a coordinated effort; the "counterdiscourses" they "circulate" seem to go in one direction only, and to issue from discrete points of departure: from their varied locations in the rural provinces to the First Lady's mailing address. See Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25.26 (1990): 56-80.

medium's ability to bridge distances—and not just physical, spatial distances but also temporal, class, and cultural ones.

More specifically, the letters unveil a segment of the national populace not fully addressed as members of a public, and not cohering as what Warner calls a "counterpublic," since there is no indication that these letter-sending children ever put pen to paper with knowledge of one another's actions. In other words, this group of letters depends upon a series of discrete events, all moving in a similar direction, and frequently catalyzed by the transmissive—and image-generating—power of a radio broadcast. These broadcasts typically began, unsurprisingly, with the conventional phrase "Ladies and gentleman," and although Roosevelt repeatedly shows interest in the plight of children during her programs, her immediate audience is the adult sphere, the most commonly addressed public in the contemporary media. That Roosevelt's radio broadcasts magnetized multiple demographics, that they simultaneously called to action existing social worlds and helped construct new ones, points up the complex networks of communities both wittingly and unwittingly present in public addresses. As Warner theorizes it,

> when people address publics, they engage in struggles—at varying levels of salience to consciousness, from calculated tactic to mute cognitive noise—over the conditions that bring them together as a public. The making of publics is the metapragmatic work newly taken up by every text at every reading. What kind of public is this? How is it being addressed? These questions and their answers are not always explicit—and cannot possibly be fully explicit, ever—but they have fateful

> consequences for the kind of social world to which we belong and for the kinds of actions and subjects that are possible in it. (12)

There is, as Warner suggests, no way to control the consequences when one speaks into the void of a listening public, especially if a technology as expansive as the radio is involved. The function of these letters, addressed specifically to the first lady and making use of her ties to national/federal power, ultimately poses some important questions: Can a person, particularly a person who comes in below the baseline requirements for active citizenship and hails from the nation's most abject region, force his or her way into the imagined community conjured by the radio broadcasts? Do textual performances in the form of letters make such a thing possible? Can you write a neglected body into a more prominent existence?

To answer these questions, the letters seek to create a dialogic relationship with the platforms of power represented by the radio program. Although Bakhtin's thinking about the dialogics of textual performance centered on the novel, these letters broadly fulfill the qualifications he established for the chronotope: they exist as artifacts built upon the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships." We are never allowed to forget that the letters' subjects emerge from a matrix of space and time, concepts twisted into new shapes by modern technologies such as the radio and the telephone. While they're not self-consciously crafted as art objects, the letters, to borrow Bakhtin's phrase, "make time artistically visible" (84). In calling for aid by relating the urgent needs of a particular moment in time, the letters both create and represent time-bound events, underscoring with distinctive heftiness their position in temporal orbits. Miss M. C., of Epps, Louisiana,

for example, asks Roosevelt to send winter clothes for herself and her five siblings: "We are just like orphans as our dad is sick all time and mother can't work and earn living for eight people. Although we farm we didn't make much cotton due to land acreage cut short." She ends with the following, "You can spare a little money for a coat for a poor girl who wants to finish school and look decent as the other girls. Maybe you have an old coat you could send me or some old clothes" (58-59).[66] Time is thus made visible on several fronts: seasonal time (it's November; the weather is changing), historical time (the AAA's crop quotas have made it more common for landowners to restrict production), the timeline of personal milestones (the author's mention of high school).[67] By plugging her letter into a national network of postal exchange, the author uncovers an awareness of the basic *timeliness* of the entire practice of letter-sending, with its acutely felt recognition of the temporal gap between sending and receiving: "Please try to please me by sending a package by Thanksgiving. . . . If you send me this you will be doing your deed for one *time*, I know" (59, emphasis mine). Time, the letters imply, is both a series of discrete events and a tightly woven tapestry of past, present, and future events constantly flowing into one another.

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[66] In *Capital*, Marx establishes the coat as an ur-commodity. See Marx, *Capital: A Critique of the Political Economy, vol. 1* (New York: Modern Library, 1901), 48-54.

[67] The quotas, a key feature of 1933's Agricultural Adjustment Act, were designed to cut surpluses and raise prices in order to bolster the agricultural industry at large. The result was a windfall for landowners, who simply scaled back production and effectively stranded many of their sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Pete Daniel calls this condition the "southern enclosure." See Daniel, *Breaking the Land,* chapter 8.

By contrast, the radio broadcasts were enmeshed directly within a capitalist system of communicative exchange, with the privately owned broadcast networks, by the thirties, grudgingly donating airtime to the President and his administration. Writing of the radio's ability to provide women a larger stake in public culture, Michelle Hilmes explains, "Both radio's capacity to blur the basic distinctions of gender identity and its potential for allowing the private voices of women access to the public airwaves represented threats to established order that had to be contained" (133). Using these letters as proof, it's possible to see something similar happening for disfranchised young people—the radio affords a rare chance at limited participation, across space and time, in public discourse.

It's not time alone then: the letters work to make space more "visible" as well. This is especially clear in those that make explicit reference to the writer's spatial positions. One dispatch, from E. B. of Double Springs, Alabama, reveals a highly fraught sense of place: "I live in Ala. on a farm, and it seem mighty hard for us. we have so much sickness in our home We have a farm. But it seems if there isn't something done we will lose it" (49). The author places herself on a farm twice within the space of two sentences. And what might be the redundancy of an unlettered writer may also reveal a combination of pride of ownership (the pronoun is tellingly capitalized in the statement "We have a farm") and sensitivity about perceptions of the rural: the author lives on a farm, her family seems to own a farm, she is, in a profoundly existential sense, *of* the farm; she is also keenly aware of the distinctions that obtain between herself and her intended audience. According to a cultural logic that associates rurality with abjection, to be of the farm is to be permanently marginalized. And yet, as an issue of both material and psychic survival, it's the only thing to which the author can lay claim.

While each letter writer locates herself according to a specific geographic coordinate, the most productive work these letters do is to write both the sender and the receiver into being, to work, much like the radio broadcast itself, to bring abstraction and materiality into a productive fusion. One of the most intriguing wrinkles in this configuration rises from the very fact of Eleanor Roosevelt's prominence, her physical inaccessibility matched with the saturating influence of her symbolic accessibility. Again and again, the letters' authors appeal to Roosevelt as an individual, as the most visibly wealthy person in their world, and as if radio were still a two-way medium capable of transmission as well as reception. In some sense, then, the letters attempt to compensate for this lost two-way capacity, for radio's "fall" into a broadcast-only medium by the 1920s and 1930s. Through the broadcasts, however, Roosevelt visibility is solely apprehended as an auditory quality, as a sound. And so she emerges from the disembodied space of the radio as an open container to carry listeners'—particularly young listeners'—projections. The voice without a body is recognized as a common occurrence in twentieth-century life: the radio, the phonograph, the telephone—all of which require listeners to fill the void with images. And it's an occurrence in which these letters participate fully. Like abstract modes of visual and literary representation, these radio texts sign most powerfully through suggestion, outline, texture, glimpse. Charles Altieri's classic account of abstract art's relation to modernist poetry asserts that "abstraction is less a means of dissemination than an exemplary level of concentration, allowing one to compose livable orders out of . . . multiplicity" (14). The qualities of multiplicity that adhere to radio's representational imprint mark it an unsettled blend of the "abstract" and the material, particularly when it engages a person so prominently figured as Eleanor Roosevelt.

Thus, although images of the first lady would be easy enough to come by, their stillness would need to meet the dynamics of a transmitted voice in order to be animated into what Steven Connor calls the "vocalic body." Connor explains, "Voices are produced by bodies but can also themselves produce bodies" (80). The radio obviously serves as an ideal means of conjuring up vocalic bodies, and these letters to Mrs. Roosevelt provide insight into the particular version fleshed out by her broadcasts: her pinched northeastern accent and polite speech—distinct from the aural world of her young southern listeners—unveil a vocalic body dressed up by wealth and privilege.

It may be obvious enough at this point but the dialogic qualities on display in the letters emerge as a single strand in a tangle of responses to a world in flux. They signal the difficulties of assigning ultimate meaning amidst a dense fog of disparate voices, made present in fractured form. Certeau is again useful here for his descriptions of a strikingly modern dynamic in which a "user" relates to the technologies surrounding him. For instance, the television threatens to turn its viewers into "pure receiver[s]," just as radio, which had been previously been a two-way method of communication, had already largely done by the 1930s. Yet the child's penchant for illicitly drawing on his schoolbooks creates a measure of autonomy since "he has made a space for himself and signs his existence as an author of it" (31). It's clear that one cannot doodle atop the invisible transmissions of a radio broadcast, cannot "sign" it in any physical sense, but these letters, so often sent below the radar of parental or adult supervision, do represent an attempt to talk back to the radio. (One letter includes a telling detail about its production: "I am writing this letter in school and have one eye on the teacher so I am not Writing as nice as I can . . ." (49).)

And, as with *Disinherited*, the editor carefully determines that the voice that talks back both sounds and looks authentic. While the letters don't completely undo the categorical differences between written and spoken language, they frequently blur the line, featuring written voices that *sound* with the textures and rhythms of orality. Signs of the texts' embodied discourse likewise appear in their representations of, and overall interest in, bodies in duress. For instance, the requests for clothing, shelter, and health care that characterize the Roosevelt letters highlight the consequences of scarcity and material degradation on the body itself.

Several letters, however, contain a curious double-movement in that they call attention to an authors' bodily needs while simultaneously veiling their identities. Take, for instance, W. S., from Stillmore, Georgia, who confesses to a deep antipathy to her family and their condition while imploring Roosevelt, "please do not ever mention this to any one. I trusted that you wouldn't ever tell this, so please destroy this letter" (70). The difficulties of navigating the demands of the private and the public are especially apparent in letters addressing issues related to food and clothing: the private space of the letter is crowded with anxieties about public manifestations of bodily needs, as in the multiple teens who write about a kind of social immobility that attends to their poor wardrobe—"I can't go to Church or Sunday school any more for need of clothes" (56). What Roosevelt can provide, they hope, are the material markers of middle-classness that she is imagined to possess in excess: new shoes, a radio, a store-bought coat. "The main reason for my writing this letter," one child bluntly reports, "is to ask you what you do with your old clothes" (48).

The mutually reinforcing impulse to simultaneously conceal and disclose is tightly related to the impulse to at once ask for help and to decline it. Miss M. N. B. from Vinemont,

Alabama, a 13-year-old girl suffering from an abscessing kidney with parents in debt on a 25-acre mortgage, solicits monetary assistance with this caveat: "Please, Mrs. Roosevelt, dont try to put us on relief for we dont like it" (63). The acceptability of a person-to-person form of assistance rather than a faceless federal one points up the extent to which these letters seem to reject the abstract ("relief") while clinging to the concrete ("Mrs. Roosevelt"); it also reveals the ways in which acceptable levels of charity appear as personal largesse rather than the systemic change that would provide structural redistribution of wealth. In this sense, Roosevelt serves as not only a symbolic extension of federal power but as a bridge between the national government and the resistant corners of its constituency. And thus the static reality that emerges around her radio broadcasts has no coherent politics, no stable sense of iconography, no hard boundary dividing the ethereal and the earthly.

In the opening of *Resisting Representation,* Elaine Scarry notes a division between the "problematically abstract" and the "problematically concrete," positioning language's "immateriality" as insufficient to the task of communicating "truth and cognition," while holding the "materiality . . . [of] phenomena such as physical pain and physical labor" outside the boundaries of language. This tension has, in several key ways, been my subject throughout this analysis of *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt*: How can language's reliance on symbolization and abstraction ever be up to the task of telegraphing the urgencies of life as a young, unvoiced subaltern? The short answer, of course, is that it can't. But the particularized fusion of language and body, of abstraction and materiality, that recurs throughout these letters comes across as an effective means of writing the unspeakable hardships of Depression-era poverty into being. According to Scarry, a "given subject

resists representation," and so "[i]n order to overcome that resistance, the artist bends the sentence into a particular shape" (3). What, however, of the writer whose subject, whose text is, in fact, herself? Or whose message is, inversely, bent by language itself? Or, since this chapter contains so many rural objects—or perhaps even abjects—struggling to become subjects, what of the artist who is preeminently the subject of representation? The documents comprising *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt* and *The Disinherited Speak* stand as proof that the most effective means of representation sometimes exist outside of artistry, in the simple act of being there—if only through a letter.

Pictures from Life's Other Side

In contrast with epistolary modes of expression, photographs allow their subjects to speak between the lines with a different representational grammar. The exact range of this allowance, however, is a subject of considerable debate. Who speaks through photographs and how? When human figures appear, are they static or active participants? The answers are always contingent, especially in this period's representations of rural subjects. My purpose here is to evaluate these contingencies by considering how images of labor agrarianism in the rural South of the 1930s respond to the thinking of prominent contemporaneous theorists of photography, and how they allow—or disallow—their subjects to speak. In doing so, I'll uncover extraliterary strategies for representing perspectives that remain invisible in the more theory-bound agrarianisms of the Twelve Southerners and the Nearings. These strategies, like those developed in the letters discussed above, draw upon the signifying potential of the body itself and the graspable

substance of the material world, a phenomenon that Roland Barthes recognizes as essential to the photographic medium writ large:

> the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency . . . in short, what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression. (4)

In the elusive language of his late style, Barthes explores the work done by images designed to disrupt viewers' sense of the world, theorizing a quality of somatic response in the viewer that he labels "punctum": "*punctum* is . . . [to] sting, speck, cut, little hole. . . . A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (27). Collapsing boundaries between bodies, punctum conjures up a bodily response that makes a version of the photographed subject's wounds felt by the viewer. It's an effect that is achieved variously but always with a language that is not language. In this sense, Barthes's evocation of the Real becomes appropriate since, in his rendering, the photographic image makes possible body-to-body communication, absent words and absent the physical presence of the other, recalling early fantasies of the photograph as an unmediated indexical sign. As Allan Sekula explains it, "Photography [comes] to establish and delimit the terrain of the *other*" (345, italics in original).

Yet photography's ability to "delimit" the other causes concern among other commentators. For her part, Susan Sontag worries about the link between the inescapable presence of photographic images in the twentieth century and the photograph's capacities as a surveillance tool. This is a function achieved through its contributions to a practice of

record keeping that "fragments continuities and feeds the pieces into an interminable dossier, thereby providing possibilities of control that could not even be dreamed of under the earlier system of recording information: writing" (156). The demarcation from writing is significant here since it gives a practical application to the commonplace notion that visual representations offer more immediate access to their subjects; they are understood as products of sheer "light-writing," with no human mediating in the production of the image. Also, at first glance at least, they are more easily processed and catalogued than written accounts. Yet, as readers of images, it behooves us to approach photography's documentary function with a degree of suspicion, since our familiar methods of reading aren't necessarily up to the task, a fact that is clear enough to Michael North, who describes the medium's "mode of representation" as "neither linguistic nor pictorial but hovering in a kind of utopian space between, where the informational utility of writing meets the immediacy of sight" (4). A picture may be worth a thousand words—but from a poststructuralist perspective that just increases the likelihood of a misreading. And since these misreadings deal directly with actual human *subjects* made to operate as *objects* in the photographer's mise-en-scène, we must be especially careful.

In other words, when human figures are involved the photographic subject's ineffable—and obscurable—subjectness is always central to the picture's capacities for meaning-making; its message collapses into the medium, as the body on display in the photograph literally becomes the physical substance of the photograph itself. Tracing that phrase back to its origins, we see that in the technological determinism of Marshall McLuhan, the camera "tend[s] to turn people into things" as "the photograph extends and multiplies the human image to the proportions of mass-produced merchandise" (189). It's

undoubtedly true that the photo makes the human figure both more ubiquitous and more digestible. For the purposes of my argument, however, McLuhan's definition of "people" is a bit shapeless. A person is, after all, already a thing of a certain sort, and if the photograph serves to destabilize the human's position as a "thinking reed," for instance, it might also work to emphasize and recontextualize the reediness of that reed. This is all a way of saying that, for better or worse, photographic presentations of the body contain the potential to shape our sense of what bodies outside of the self can be and should do. This is not simply a matter of aesthetic defamiliarization: as a tool used to communicate the textures and forms of the material world, the photograph occupies a special niche—and contains a unique opportunity for mutual identification, for a glimpse of one's own body in the presentation of another's. Walter Benjamin famously theorizes the benefits of photography's powers of representation, claiming that they lack the exclusionary "aura" of a painting ("Mechanical Reproduction" 223-24). But its consequences of representation are uniquely calibrated: with uncanny abilities to promote a strain of sympathy grounded in the body itself, the photograph offers enormous potential as a text of protest—an observation backed by centuries of actual political use.

Yet when photographs of humans become texts of protest, texts whose content is the body itself, it's worth considering how—and by whom—its meaning is being constructed. Again, who's the author? The simplest answer, of course, is the person operating the camera. But, when the subjects of the images avail themselves of what we might call the rhetoric of posture—when the presence, and the presentation, of their bodies contributes to the text's affective consequences—they become, at very least, co-authors, co-creators who participate in the construction of meaning. Here too, Barthes's

reference to the Lacanian Real is useful. Photographic subjects practicing representational agency work to express the self not through language, nor through any particular reference to the embodied self, as in the Lacanian imaginary—which reveals a consciousness of the self's bodily form reflected back at itself. The camera's lens, we understand, does not behave like a mirror. In other words, to create a signifying pose in the present moment—particularly a pose that attempts to prick viewers into reformative action—is to reproduce the shape one has seen in the mind's eye or in the bodies of others, to compose oneself as (if) reflected without the advantage of self-reflection vis-à-vis the reflective glass. To the extent that such a thing is possible, self-fashioning via the photograph offers an attempt to recover the signifying tactics of the preverbal stage. And, for Barthes at least, this is the source of the medium's great power.

In the field of documentary photography, which often claims to participate in direct, unmediated representation, the question of the subject's agency remains a knotty one. How does a documentarian strike a balance between her own vision and the visions of her subjects? One way to avoid the problem of competing subjectivities, of course, is to avoid other people altogether. An appropriate example here might be Dorthea Lange's 1937 series exploring the STFU's Delta and Providence Cooperative Farms at Hillhouse, Mississippi. Although Lange's most iconic images involve human figures, and while Lange's work as a WPA photographer was deeply informed by politics that were sympathetic to the union, the individuated human presence is dim in her work at Hillhouse. When the images do feature people, they are close portraits of children or anonymous farm workers bearing the austere label "member." Far more prominent are pictures of the fields, the farming implements, houses, and outbuildings. Lange's series offers a incisive glimpse into the

texture and tenor of life at the farm but it is only ever a glimpse, and Lange's photos make far greater use of the physical landscape than the human inhabitants, drawing viewers' attention to the exterior life of the farm's inhabitants while eliding the interior. The vision that prevails, then, is that of Lange herself, resulting in an configuration of documentarian as auteur, with the unpleasant result that the subject's agency is dissolved into an atmosphere of authority created by the documentarian's camera. The subaltern gets a fine portrait in these images but never speaks.

"Member of the Delta cooperative farm at Hillhouse, Mississippi," Dorthea Lange, 1937

"The poultry unit of the Delta cooperative farm. Hillhouse, Mississippi," Dorthea Lange, 1937

An exaggerated version of this dynamic appears 1937's *You Have Seen Their Faces,* a collection of Margaret Bourke-White images that paired images of dispossessed rural southerners with captions by Erskine Caldwell.[68] Viewers might see "their" faces but we cannot escape the suspicion that these

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e Seen Their Faces is broad. William Stott ultimately well-intentioned attempt to force ore recently, Jeff Allred seeks to deconstruct this nentary projects, *Faces* included, by exposing on-era alterity that are too diffuse and uncontainable to cohere as a uniform statement. See Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986) and Allred, *American Modernism and Depression Documentary* (New York: Oxford UP, 2010). See also Joseph B. Entin, *Sensational Modernism: Experimental Fiction and Photography in Thirties America* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2007).

faces, bodies, and words have been manipulated to emphasize spectatorship, as all the information seems constructed to appeal to expectations—and, more luridly, the fascinations—of the viewer. This is the unintentional resonance of Bourke-White's title: a face already "seen," pre-viewed in this way, both evokes a stereotype and panders to it, since you already know what you are going to "have seen." By attempting to represent both the photographic subjects' external and internal worlds, the collection uses the lives, bodies, and environments of its human figures to foreground the concerns of its authors. In the image below, Caldwell's statement is not attributed to a specific individual but to a pair of faces and the caption "Yazoo City, Mississippi," presumably placing the "I" in the mouth of one the two subjects: "I think it's only right that the government ought to be run with people like us in mind." Yet the "us" in this statement clashes loudly with the "their" of the project's title, severing the viewer and photographic subjects in a way that ultimately deepens the divide between us—the viewers—and them.

By way of loud and deliberate contrast, James Agee and Walker Evans's 1941 project *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* understands itself as a corrective to the work of Caldwell and Bourke-White. (For one thing, it pointedly includes reprinted material from a pair of newspaper articles emphasizing Bourke-White's celebrity.) Unlike the WPA projects of Lange and the carefully constructed images of *You Have Seen Their Faces*, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* assiduously tries to build its portraits of sharecroppers from the ground up—it works exhaustively to present more fully modeled impressions while simultaneously unwriting the conventions of the documentaries that flourished throughout the 1930s. In spite of its own best efforts, though, the text's innovative modes of representation ultimately run up against the aporia of representing the other. According to

Susan Hegeman, the book "suggests that the project of detailing the lives of others for the purpose of cultural comparison, of knowing the details of how others negotiate the necessities of 'food, shelter, and clothing,' is the wrong project, is somehow obsolete" (179). In the mind of *Praise*, then, the presumption that a person can ever know the experience of a life other than one's own is fundamentally flawed. In the most basic terms, how can you ever be sure that your "knowledge" lines up with the experience of the documentary subject's?

One of the book's central tensions arises with the very problems of looking at and explaining anything outside of the self, which amounts to a conflicted level of political quietism, of leaving "them" alone out of principle while still grappling with the inadequacies of inaction. It's a tension that helps explain the contradictions, anxieties, and traces of self-loathing that characterize Agee's prose:

> It seems to me curious, not to say obscene and thoroughly terrifying, that it could occur to an association of human beings drawn together through need and chance and for profit into a company, an organ of journalism, to pry intimately into the lives of an undefended and appallingly damaged group of human beings, an ignorant and helpless rural family . . . (5)

And so on: the passage expands on that idea for some time. But these insecurities also render the text strangely apolitical. According to Hegeman, when faced with "the impossibility and immorality of representing" the sharecropping other, Agee reaches for a new "task, which is ultimately one of self-representation" (191). *Praises*' most pressing

questions, then, concern the nature of representation and the limits of sympathy, not the correction of a system disadvantaging its subjects.[69]

If the projects discussed above underscore the difficulties of allowing for the agency of documentary subjects, and if this is especially true of photo-based documentaries, a compelling counterpoint arrives in the life and work of Arkansas sharecropper and STFU member Myrtle Lawrence. Lawrence, a sharecropper and union activist from Arkansas, is largely invisible today, but her role as a face of the STFU was significant. She remains accessible to us primarily through the efforts of historian Elizabeth Payne, whose work on Lawrence's life and its meanings in the history of labor in the South and poor white identity provides the best point of entry into a captivating life.

In one particularly telling anecdote, Payne recounts Lawrence's performance at a New York City gala held at Mecca Temple during National Sharecropper's Week in 1937. H. L. Mitchell, the STFU secretary who compiled *Disinherited*, describes the public reaction to the woman's conspicuous use of a "'spit can' covered with bright pink paper": Lawrence's faux pas made her the "center of attention," and seemed to offer the crowd of mostly urban supporters a living picture of life on Tobacco Road. Not coincidentally, perhaps, Jack Kirkland's dramatization of Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* was a sensation in New York City at the time—in the midst of an eight-year run on Broadway—and what Lawrence provided, to the chagrin of Mitchell and many other STFU members present at the Meccca Temple that night, was direct contact with an unvarnished member of the sharecropper class. In Payne's

[69] A more linear and forthrightly political account of *Praise*'s subject, the actual manuscript of the *Praise*-originating article commissioned by *Fortune*, was rediscovered and published in 2013 as *Cotton Tenants: Three Families* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2013).

telling, this becomes a turning point in Lawrence's career, a career marked by self-conscious presentation of the "sharecropper" milieu as a means of generating support for the cause.

As a representative of a movement famously committed to interracial action, Lawrence's self-representations nevertheless contend with a nationalized system of closely guarded racial categories. In her description of the events, Payne makes special mention of the negative response of African American members of the union who, like Mitchell, recognized the need to adopt the manners of the middle class in order to attract outside support. For Payne, the combination of disdain and fascination that greeted Lawrence's actions acts as proof that poor whites occupy a marginal space in the early-twentieth-century liberal imagination. But it might also be the case that Lawrence's whiteness—abject though it may be—provides her an increased measure of cover, and flexibility, in relation to her black counterparts: in spite of regional and class differences, the positive reception to her transgressive performance amongst an urban white audience implies a level of mutual identification that cordons itself off along racial lines, as poor whites like Lawrence are allowed to go off script in ways that remain impossible for their African American counterparts.

Lawrence's talent for self-fashioning became especially useful during her training at YWCA's Summer School for Women Workers in Industry at Black Mountain, North Carolina. Payne makes particular mention of Lawrence's eagerness to serve as a photographic subject in materials aimed at increasing national awareness of the sharecropper's plight and garnering financial support for the union. In a series of photographs taken by Louise Boyle, Lawrence's own body and her interactions with her

environment create the material from which both an act and a text of protest are crafted. And as in the sharecropping letters, the presentation of the sharecropping body becomes the clearest means of describing the situation: this is a project that allows viewers the rare opportunity to *see* the subaltern "speaking" between the lines. While Lawrence is obviously not engaging tropes of blackface minstrelsy, she does make use of popular expectations concerning poor rural whites in such a way that her exercises in self-presentation look something like a variation on Houston Baker's vision of Booker T. Washington's signifying techniques. In Baker's original reading of *Up from Slavery*, Washington's rhetoric pushed against the grain of a dominant culture whose sense of blackness was trained by the minstrel show.[70] Specifically, in *Up from Slavery*, Washington carefully exploited the prejudices of his white audience, "chang[ing] the minstrel joke by stepping inside the white world's nonsense syllables with oratorical mastery" (25). Lawrence's legacy doesn't depend on her oratorical skills exactly but, in the Louise Boyle photographs, she does reveal a mastery of the embodied rhetoric of visual self-presentation. Her ability to step into and control the terms in which her own poor whiteness appeared gave her a degree of agency largely absent in representations of her counterparts. The "mastery of form" that Baker theorized for Dunbar and Du Bois is rerouted in this instance, so that the form becomes a version of (poor-)whiteface (49).

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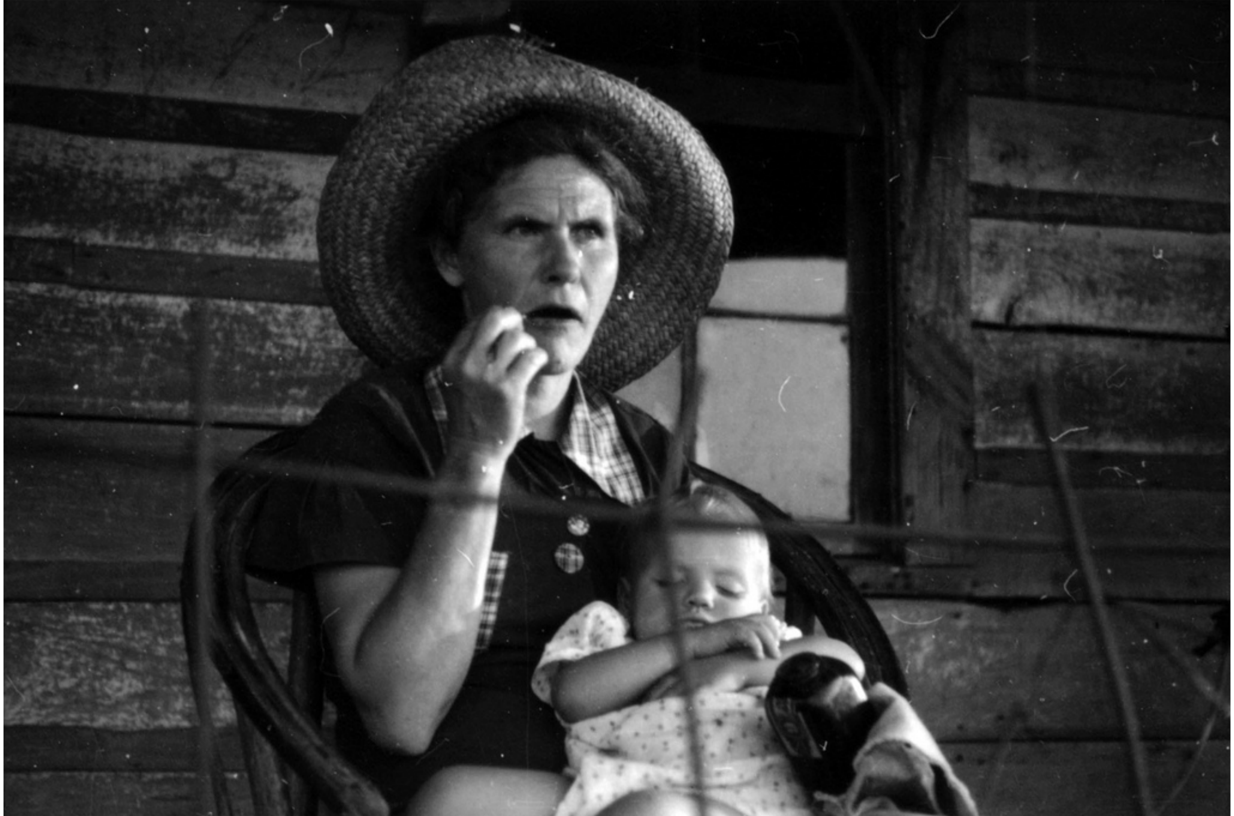
[70] As mentioned before, In 2001's *Looking South Again* Baker performed an about-face in regards to Washington, adopting the more common position that the Tuskegee model of industrial education depended too heavily on plantation traditions. See *Turning South Again: Re-thinking Modernism/Re-reading Booker T.* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001).


"Myrtle Lawrence sits on her porch holding a sleeping baby," Louise Boyle, 1937

Take, for instance, Lawrence's pose in "Myrtle Lawrence sits on her porch." With a baby in tow and straw hat drawn back to uncover a tightly drawn face and furrowed brow, Lawrence squints into the horizon with an expression that suggests a combination of foreboding, perseverance, and matronly responsibility. As a self-conscious posture, the image overlays an ordinary act with a heavily freighted one: this is another 1930s portrait of rural domesticity highlighting the gulf dividing the privileged and the disinherited, the expanse between living conditions on a sharecropper's tract and those of middle-class Americans; it is also a deliberate recreation of that familiar scene, staged with an understanding of the power of images to generate sympathy. More pointedly, the picture's combination of dispossessed mother and waifish child is Boyle and Lawrence's riff on the

tableau informing Lange's famed "Migrant Mother" (1936), albeit one in which the photograph's subject gets to play along with the photographer. (The identity of Lange's subject, Florence Owens Thompson, was famously obscured until the 1970s.) If, as Agee and Evans seem to argue, the experience of the sharecropping other remains unknowable in any kind of linear, rational way, Lawrence trades upon this lacuna, filling that gap with the materials of self-conscious demonstration of what the sharecropping life looks and, importantly, feels like. And as a rhetorical tactic, her presentations' aims are clear: aid the collective by personalizing the individual.

Like Lawrence's conspicuous snuff-dipping, this picture creates unresolved layers of interpretation, producing an excess of meaning that remains uncontained by both northern sympathies and her fellow union members. As it is presented in Payne's work, Lawrence's persona is less an expression of some authentic rural self than the result of a tactful deployment of a series of tropes tied to rurality as it appears in the early twentieth century: the hayseed adrift in the big city, the brash country wife, the weary and virtuous earth mother.[71] In Joseph Roach's model, "Performance . . . stands in for an elusive entity that it *is not* but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace" (3, emphasis mine). Yet Myrtle Lawrence both *is not*—and *is*—the selfsame person that she portrays: the stage in

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[71] For the "adrift hayseed," see Caroline Meeber of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900). The "earth mother" is embodied in Cather's Alexandra Bergson of *O Pioneers!* (1913) and Àntonia Shimerda of *My Àntonia* (1918). Alternately, Thea Kronburg of *The Song of the Lark* (1915) stands as a rural woman who finds her greatest success as an opera singer when she moves to Chicago. In a different register, look to Mammy Yokum from Al Capp's *Li'l Abner* comic strip (1934-1977) for a prominent image of the "brash country wife." These examples are obviously not exhaustive.

these pictures is her home, her union rally, her field; and the person she plays is, by all accounts, an adjacent version of herself or someone like her. And yet, to return to Roach's discussion, she fully embodies these images in a way that undoes any firm distinction between reality and performance.

Boyle's images depicting Lawrence's domestic labor both draw upon and confront viewers' expectations. While Boyle's STFU series contains pictures that scan more immediately as "sharecropping"—one pair of photos offers a scene of Lawrence's sons weighing their cotton sacks and loading them in a wagon—they consistently underscore gendered divisions of labor. Boyle's larger project of showing the day-to-day existence of woman activist in a sharecropping economy is achieved in images that detail the kinds of labor that are complementary to the cultivation of cash crops: we see Lawrence shelling peas, surrounded by her children; see her churning butter on the front porch. Tellingly, in an age of aggressive mechanization, the farming tools are all hand-powered, and, as the title of the pea-shelling photo tells us, the practice of sharecropping labor bleeds into and shapes the domestic space ("the family dining room"). Bachelard's phenomenologist reading of the house theorizes its "chief benefits" as a place that "shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (6). While the photographs only hint at the psychic realities of their subjects, they are pitched at an angle that suggests the degree to which sharecropping labor strips the home space of this "primitive" function. Peace, it seems, is precisely the promise extended by the union; its absence is the truth of the individualist status quo. All of which implies that, contra classical liberal ideology, "peace" cannot be attained individually but only through the efforts of the collective.

"Myrtle Lawrence churning butter on her front porch," Louise Boyle, 1937

The difficulty of securing peace in the sharecropping environment, especially for a woman, is the precise topic of Edith Summers Kelly's 1923 novel *Weeds*, a devastating fictional counterpart to Boyle's STFU photos. As it details the slow decline of a woman on a Kentucky tenant farm, the novel describes Judith Pippinger's struggle against an oppressive physical environment, stifling social conventions, and the destructive sharecropping economy—and at every turn the novel bears out the deadening effects of labor agrarianism. Read against "Myrtle Lawrence churning butter," this passage helps to recast a nominally mundane chore as another burdensome layer in a never-ending series of tasks:

> [Judith] grew more and more shiftless and slatternly about the house. More and more mechanically she dragged through the days. As she hung over the washtub or plunged the dasher up and down in the ancient oaken churn or stood by the stove

> frying three times a day the endlessly recurring corn cakes, her body moved with the dead automatic rhythm of old habit. Her face was habitually sullen and heavy, her eyes glazed and turned inward or looking out upon vacancy with an abstracted stare. (246)

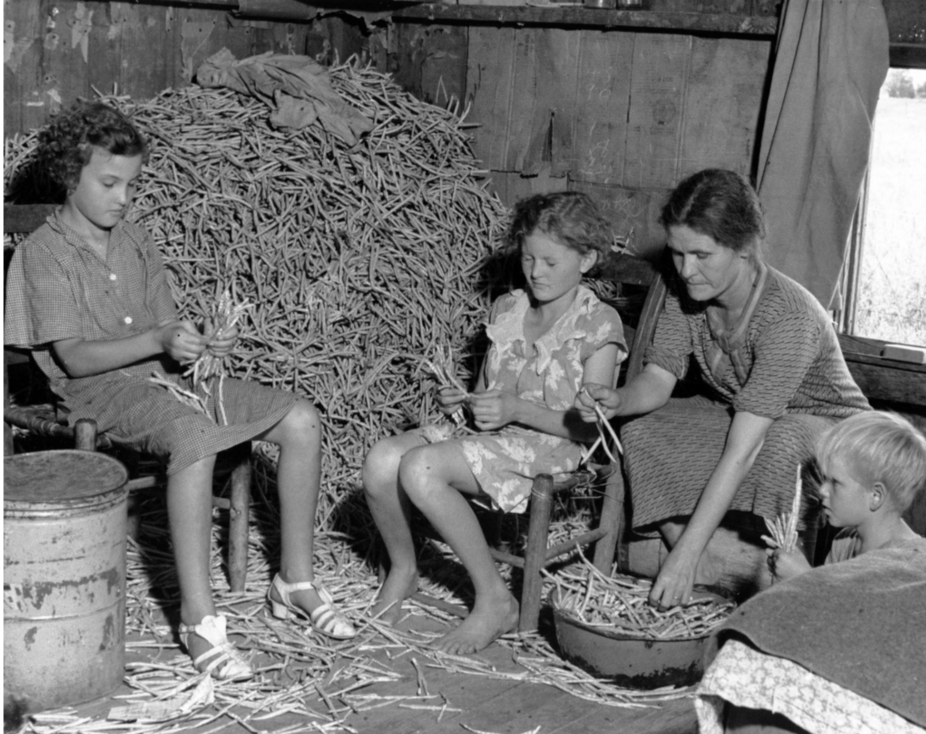
The "abstracted stare" of the novel matches the blank expression on Lawrence's face: a stoic mask riven with weariness, this is a presentation of affect that threads a line of discontent across an otherwise innocent scenario. The rocking chair on the front porch is perhaps the loudest, most obvious evocation of rural leisure, and in this image it is inhabited and transformed by Lawrence's body, as her distant gaze refers the viewer to some threatening offstage presence that may well be the land itself.

Throughout Boyle's photographs of Lawrence, there is no escape from the demands of the land. Or, perhaps more completely, there is no escape from demands placed on the land and its stewards by a turn in U.S. capitalism that exploits both the farmers and the landscape they depend upon. These photos flatly undermine the theory, held by both the Nashville Agrarians and the Nearings, that increased leisure is a natural byproduct of a society centered upon agrarian life. One needs only compare what we see in these images with the Agrarians' activities at Allen Tate's "farm" Benfolly—a gift from his brother and the site of countless parties and retreats—or the Nearings' seminars in music appreciation or skiing to understand how different modes of agrarianism create different opportunities for leisure. One party's leisure, in other words, is another party's labor. To the Nashville group, for instance, shelling peas would no doubt count as leisure; to the Nearings, whose theory of work often splits the difference between leisure and labor, pea shelling is a

source of pleasure. Indeed, *Living the Good Life* contains a lengthy passage describing the Nearings's experience with the crop, summarized in a single sentence here: "Our chief delight was growing, picking, and giving away sweet peas" (34). Whatever else this Boyle photo might depict, delight has no part of it. Although other photos in the series suggest that cotton was the cash crop produced on the Lawrence tract, the pea of "Shelling Peas in the Family Dining Room" is perhaps the truest symptom of their farm: in addition to its role as an unmanageable source of sustenance, the immensity of its presence in the photograph becomes a telling metaphor of the organic-turned-industrial effort of farming via sharecropping. It's at once too much to process by hand and too valuable to discard. And although in a different context this scene could stand as the depiction of an intergenerational harvest ritual, here it becomes something like an ominous prediction of a repetition, as the participating children are folded into the monotony of a seemingly bottomless job, now and forevermore. The photo thus provides an aperture through which to view the absurdly proportioned conditions of domestic labor on a sharecropping tract.

In fact, the grotesquerie and surrealism of the photo insures that it cannot be dismissed sentimentally or romantically as leisure. Instead, the image's excess helps us see how the abundance of capitalist production can alienate the worker, become her burden. Jospeh Entin's recent configuration of "sensational modernism" proposes an "aesthetic of social extremity that pushes . . . beyond the bounds of conventional modes and registers" in both fiction and photography. There is a distinct brand of sensationalism on display in the image, with its absurdly large harvest spilling out across the living room, all of which is purposed towards what Entin describes as "an effort to confront and convey the sharpening social inequality brought about by the Great Depression" (4).

Thus while pea-shelling on the front porch is precisely the sort of bucolic scene celebrated in *I'll Take My Stand*, what this image emphasizes is the point where leisure gives way to labor, where the extremity of the task transforms the activity into a new category. Again, the sheer volume of peas here suggests the impossibility of sharecropping labor, since the pile reaches higher than any human figure and is uncontained by the photo's borders, and the hint of surrealism that haunts the edges of this scene calls up Walter Benjamin's conceptualization of the "optical unconscious" at work in early photography ("Little History" 512): to drown in a pile of peas, it seems, is the sublimated reality of the sharecropping mind; it is, to return to Bachelard, a bad dream, with a clear lack of peace. The larger point here is that agricultural labor in the sharecropping system absorbs everything, fills every space and spare moment. But, in a bitter irony, it's better than the alternative, a threatening specter made real by the passage of the AAA: fewer opportunities to turn out crops, and less income.



"Lucille Kimbrell, Icy Jewel Lawrence, Myrtle Lawrence and Elroe Kimbrell shelling peas in the family dining room," Louise Boyle, 1937

In these photographic depictions of labor, Lawrence actively makes her private life an artifact for public consideration, effectively socializing the sharecropping life in order to draw out the contrast between herself and her audience, as well as to highlight her audience's complicity in her condition—to bring into view the invisible logic holding these individuals in their place. This double movement is designed, of course, as a means of drumming up support for her union, but it also represents a curiously sophisticated signifying practice. If meaning-via-language adheres in the space between the sign and signified, its visual counterpoint depends upon the space between object and viewer—and, again, when the object is actually a human *subject* suspended in a field that can be traced

back to precise coordinates in space and time, distance dissolves and the shock of recognition takes on a particularly poignant cast. In other words, the synchronic moment captured in the image flows into a diachronic exploration of the relationships between labor, landscape, and the capitalist substructures that create and maintain those relationships.

These photos, like their epistolary counterparts, make time "visible." Damian Sutton provides a useful model when he applies Deleuze's "crystal image"—a concept most typically associated with cinema—to describe photographic events in which "[t]ime splits . . . not into the abstract notion of narrative ellipsis but into a pure image of time. . . . The past of the image is constituted simultaneously with the present, and each is launched into a time image" (157). One function of the "pure image of time" is to force viewers to engage with the material realities represented in the photo: in "Shelling Peas," which shows each of the photo's human subjects—from the adult on to the youngest child—handling the crops, the urgency of the task and the burden of the looming pile of peas is not sloughed off to a distant past, neither is it rerouted to some future, nor is it absorbed—and perhaps absolved—by a larger narrative. The burden is the photo's singular reality. To return to Barthes, it is the photo's punctum—the agent that "bruises" and creates a somatic response in the viewer. The half-circle formed by the human figures in this tableau is then completed by the viewer, who is made a witness to the scene but also an entangled contributor to the conditions of the sharecropping poor more broadly, for, as Peggy Phelan reminds us, the "relationship between the looker and the given to be seen . . . is a version of the relation between self and other" (3). By looking at alterity, viewers help to bring it into existence—

just as by participating in an economy that allows for the existence of an abusive labor practice like sharecropping, they unconsciously maintain it.

If the Agrarians attempt to locate the future in the past, and the Nearings want to enter the stream of history, these photographs seem to understand themselves as direct representations of—or interventions into—the stream itself, the *present*. And to the extent that they highlight the dialectical connection linking privilege to poverty under the sign of the single nation, they conjure up a dynamic that Slavoj Žižek calls the "proximity of the Neighbour" (45). Although he is specifically interested in the psychologies of twenty-first-century torture, Žižek's phrase gets at the pressures existing between a person's Judeo-Christian obligation to the sufferer and his unwitting benefit from that suffering, a message that resonates loudly during the capitalist crisis of the Great Depression.

The reasons for the STFU's ultimate failure remain unclear. In Payne's reading, the union could never resolve the tensions between the collective and the individual, specifically as it revolves around the question of landownership.[72] The photographs themselves depend upon this tension: the focus on Lawrence the individual in the Boyle photos points up a conflict between the individual and the collective that troubled not just the STFU's strategies of representation but its character as a whole. Much as the union flirted with the theoretical impulses of socialism, it could not shake the dreams of private ownership so central to the American middle class. Just as many of the Agrarians ultimately espoused a form of Distributism and the avowedly socialist Nearings depended heavily on

[72] Payne originally made this point in a 2006 address, "The Fighting Sharecropper as Icon: Myrtle Terry Lawrence and the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union," Organization of American Historians and National Council on Public History, Washington, D.C. April 20, 2006.

the availability of private property, the STFU struggled to keep its feet amidst a swirl of contradictory currents.

These tensions were felt widely: In 2013, the lost manuscript of a 1947 novel by Woody Guthrie was published as *House of Earth.* It tells of a couple in the hardscrabble Dust Bowl of the Texas Panhandle, and their struggle to carve out a space of their own against a harsh physical environment and the suffocating interests of invasive corporations. In 1944, Guthrie finished his classic ballad of communal ownership "This Land Is Your Land"; three years later, he composed a book-length narrative extolling the virtues of self-determination via private land ownership.[73] The contradictions here are less crushing than they might appear: in either case, the basis of the protest is tethered to a search for individual dignity and survival in the face of a world warped by rapid transformations. It may well be, in the final analysis, that Guthrie's description of his own political sensibilities could be adopted by each of this chapter's subjects: "Left wing, right wing, chicken wing—it's the same thing to me" (qtd. in Jackson 216).

In *On Photography*, Sontag's anxieties about the medium stem from her fear that the ubiquity of images depicting inexpressible horror might somehow strip away that horror, make it commonplace. The inverse, however, may be that photographs presenting more subtle modes of suffering can make commonplace horrors inhabitable: they allow viewers a chance to recognize the inequities and casualties stalking around their own backyards.

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[73] A famous alternate verse of the song confirms its collectivist bent: "There was a big high wall there that tried to stop me / Sign was painted, it said "Private Property" / But on the back side it didn't say nothing: / This land was made for you and me." See Woody Guthrie, *This Land Is Your Land: The Asch Recordings, Vol. 1*. Smithsonian Folkways Records, 1997.

For the purposes of this project, the backyard in question becomes the rural South—specifically the vast network of sharecropping tracts stretching out across the mid-South—and images detailing the privations of such labor arrangements don't inure viewers to sufferings but instead make them more legible. Boyle's photos of Myrtle Lawrence, like *The Disinherited Speak* and the *Mrs. Roosevelt* letters, point out the unfulfilled promises of Jeffersonian America by grounding the abstractions of theoretical agrarianism in the grit and toil of rural bodies and landscapes locked into the sharecropping system.

III. Unsorting the Politics of Insurgent Rurality

Whatever their differences, the authors of each of the texts I've discussed were writing to push back against a world that, in their own minds at least, was holding them at arm's length: for the leisure agrarians, this is a matter of psychic and cultural alienation among the elite class, a familiar thought in traditional accounts of modernism; for the labor agrarians, it's a more directly material issue, in which sharecropping-as-modern-capitalism poses a direct bodily threat. It's obvious enough at this point that as the Great Depression exposed the failures of early-twentieth-century market capitalism, it created room for the emergence of alternative political, economic, and social systems. And the chief appeal of agrarianism writ large is its insistence that economic development ground itself in the land and agriculture—a system that is nominally more scrutable than capitalism, and at very least more familiar. Skepticism about the increased abstraction of the modern economy persisted into the next decade and beyond, and asserted itself as part of a kind of geographic identity, as a 1945 comment by Harry Truman concerning Keyensian economics suggests: "Nobody can ever convince me that Government can spend a dollar

that it's not got. I'm just a country boy" (qtd. in Wapshott 231). Truman references a set of cultural codes that both leisure and labor agrarians leaned upon: in this arrangement, distrust of abstraction and theory, of the same kind of deficit used to pull the nation out of economic free-fall in the Depression, stands as a "country" virtue, even when, as with the Twelve Southerners, their own solutions to the capitalist crisis are rife with abstractions and projections.

It's clear, however, that certain of the Agrarians were aware of the practical shortcomings of their original manifesto. As Martyn Bone reminds us, only in later publications—such as John Crowe Ransom's 1932 *Harper's* article "Land! A Solution to the Unemployment Problem" and the group-authored *Who Owns America?: A New Declaration of Independence* in 1936—did the Agrarians "develop a much more stringent critique of monopoly-and finance-capitalism" by exploring specific policies and economic arrangements (13-14). To that end, Ransom was the member of the original group that tried hardest to convert the spirit of Agrarianism into a feasible set of economic solutions that would actually change the course of the American future. In spite of his nominally radical proposals, however, Ransom never abandoned capitalism outright, as evidenced in his contribution to *Who Owns America?*, "What Does the South Want?" But in doing his best to pull off the trick of critiquing American capitalism without sounding like a radical critic of American capitalism, Ransom reverts to a familiar strategy—he looks back at an orthodoxy that never existed. "Orthodox capitalism," as he calls it, sounds an awful lot like social capitalism, a philosophy and a practice that will buttress the interests of the South

through an "economy with a wide distribution of the tangible capital properties" (181).[74] As a politico-economic system, of course, Ransom's never gained enough purchase to become a transformative alternative to investment capital and industrialism. And since it fails on a pragmatic level, Nashville Agrarianism registers most profoundly as a kind of poetic exploration of the intersections of an idealized vision of southern history, the landscape itself, and the direction of the southern future. On the practical realities of achieving a vibrant class of independent, yeoman farmers—or of making the privileges of the planter class more widely accessible—the text is infamously fuzzy. The necessary thing was to make land more widely accessible, even if this meant embracing Distributism. "[T]hey have never got around to telling us precisely how the redistribution of the land is to be brought about," W. J. Cash writes in 1941. "[T]hough that is not to be held too much against them, since the problem is obviously one of staggering difficulties" (384).

If the Twelve Southerners' vision of the rural South provided ammunition to cultural commentators like H. L. Mencken and Edmund Wilson, who famously criticized rural life in the 1920s and 30s for its debilitating conservatism, the existence of enthusiastic labor organizations such as the STFU, the Alabama CP, the Indiahoma Farmers' Union, and the Socialist Party of Oklahoma complicate this caricature.[75] According to Jim Bissett, the

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[74] As Conkin tells it, when Ransom came to recognize the practical blind spots of *I'll Take My Stand*, he tried to reeducate himself as a "lay economist, giving himself as fully to his new mistress as he had given himself to poetry in the early twenties" (101).

[75] Fred Hobson's *Serpent in Eden* details Mencken's criticisms of the South at large and the Agrarians in particular; it also focuses on southerner Gerald Johnson's heralded criticisms of the movement. See Hobson, *Serpent in Eden: H.L. Mencken and the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1974). Wilson's take on the Agrarians appears in "Tennessee

Socialist movement took root in the southwest because of—not in spite of—a constellation of regional traditions that valued a "Jeffersonian emphasis on the common man, the dignity of labor, and the importance of the land," as well as a Depression-inspired "indictment of capitalism" and a virulent strain of evangelical Protestantism that took seriously the social consequences of the Gospels' moral imperatives (7).[76] It is against this backdrop of southwestern agrarian Socialism, which had effectively run its course by 1920, that the Twelve Southerners crafted a version of agrarianism that made explicit its disapproval of "Cooperationists," "Socialists," "Sovietists," and "Communists" (xli). Yet the Agrarian politico-economic project—what Cash understands to be the "redistribution of land"—runs perilously close to socialism. This is especially true in the more practically minded *Who Owns America?* Take, for instance, John C. Rawe's contribution "Agriculture and the Property State," which promotes the "widespread ownership and co-operation under a general freehold tenure of property" as an essential "*return to the Jeffersonian concept of the Constitution*" (50, italics in original). As Agrarianism developed through the decade of the 1930s, it became clear that the problems of rural inequality could only be solved through a fundamental reordering of the situation of ownership and tenancy. This is what

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Agrarians" from *The American Earthquake: A Documentary of the Twenties and Thirties*, ([1958] New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979), 328-33.

[76] Although the contrast between the STFU's evangelical flavor and the Agrarians'—particularly Allen Tate's—High Church aspirations falls outside the range of this project, it is a promising topic for future studies. For more on the southern evangelical presence in organized labor during the Depression, see Erik S. Gellman and Jared Roll, *The Gospel of the Working Class: Labor's Southern Prophets in New Deal America*. (Champaign: U of Illinois P, 2011). Both Murphy's *Rebuke of History* and Genovese's *The Southern Tradition* contain lengthy discussions of Agrarianism's relationship with Christianity.

Paul Murphy is getting at in his configuration of the movement's "radical conservatism," but his analysis fails to elaborate on the points of contact between Agrarianism and socialism. It's clear, though, that in attempting to triangulate their position in relation to American Capitalism and Soviet Communism, the Southern Agrarians rely on an overdetermined sense of difference that continually threatens to collapse.

The importance of difference here becomes significant from another angle when one considers the extent to which white Agrarian paranoia about blackness flows into a more generalized fear of communism. According to Paul Conkin, Donald Davidson—Agrarianism's most virulent racist—participated in a radio program in the 1930s in which he directly equated communism with blackness, an intriguing comment that underscores an important dynamic in Nashville Agrarianism; it also historicizes his geographic moment, given Nashville's close proximity to Birmingham, Alabama, a hotbed of CP radicalism in the late 1920s and early 1930s. (Although it's tempting to dismiss Donaldson as an outlier, Murphy claims that one product of his outsized influence in the southern academy is that his thinking has reverberated in the politics of the twentieth century at a higher frequency than his peers in the movement: "It was Davidson . . . who was crucial to transforming Agrarianism into a form of traditionalist conservatism after World War II" (8).) This link between communism and blackness is a line of inquiry deserving of investigation not simply as an example of Davidson's misguided theories about race—he remained an active segregationist well into the 1960s—but also because it reveals connections between the racial and political subtexts of a collection of essays alternately titled "Tracts Against Communism." There was reluctance on the part of Agrarians such as Tate to condemn the brands of socialism embraced by certain of their friends in the literary and intellectual

world. If, however, communism could be imprinted with the specter of blackness, then the results might resonate along two overlapping axes of abjection. However ill intended Davidson's remarks were though, they seem at least partially founded in sociological fact: as Robin Kelley explains, the Alabama arm of the SPA (Socialist Party of America) was a "white man's party" (7), leaving the Communist Party the last best option for African American agricultural workers hoping to organize in that state. James Lorence recently considers efforts made by the CPUSA to recruit unemployed Atlantans during the Great Depression, a project that included a special emphasis on African American recruits. He quotes a former African American party activist R. C. Miller's testimony to a House Special Investigating Committee looking into the CPUSA's activities: "might near every colored man you met was a sympathizer when he read those [Communist] pamphlets" (qtd. in Lorence 60). While the CPUSA found a tenuous foothold in Atlanta—and feinted towards an integrated structure—it's clear that conditions in the southern city, especially the New South paragon Atlanta, are not the same as those in the country, where opportunities for transformative revolution appeared even greater: in the sharecropping districts, weary tenants outnumbered the wary landowners, a fact that helps explain the urgency of Davidson's insistence upon the construction of a defiantly white rural South. The region must present itself as a bulwark against the dangerous fusion of blackness and Communism.

Glenda Gilmore's *Defying Dixie*, an expansive treatment of the relationship between radical politics and the civil rights movement, describes the Bolsheviks' recognition in the 1910s and 1920s that African Americans in the rural South presented one of Communism's great untapped resources:

> Because the South represented the least industrialized and least unionized part of the United States, the region weighed heavily on Communist minds. In 1920, 9 million African Americans lived within the confines of the Old Confederacy, the border states of Kentucky and Oklahoma, and the mid-Atlantic states of Maryland and Delaware. Only 1.5 million African Americans lived outside these bounds. If southern African Americans became Communists, they could lead the revolution in their region. (30)

In reconstructing Soviet efforts to catalyze a southern revolution, Gilmore tells the fascinating story of Lovett Fort-Whiteman, whose journey took him from rural Alabama and the Tuskegee Institute to the podium of 1924's Fifth World Congress of the Third International in Moscow, where his audience included Stalin and Ho Chi Minh. According to Gilmore, Fort-Whiteman "advised the Party to move into the South and 'exploit' rising dissatisfaction among sharecroppers" (43). With this declaration, the Soviet Communist Party essentially endorsed the "imperium in imperio" argument pursued decades earlier by black intellectuals such as Sutton Griggs and Martin Delany, formally recognizing African America as an oppressed nation.[77] That the powder was already in the keg must surely have been clear to advocates of a white southern future such as Davidson, and it helps explain the extent to which organized labor in the rural South was framed as an expression

[77] See Griggs's 1899 novel *Imperium in Imperio: A Study of the Negro Race Problem* and Delany's tract on black separatism *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered* (1852).

of blackness, even when its participants were non-African Americans. It also explains the active efforts, exhaustively chronicled in *Disinherited*, to suppress any and all alliances amongst workers.[78]

The exact political legacies of A/agrarianism, however, remain nebulous. If the Nearings recognized their experiment as an expression of radical leftism and the Agrarians represent radical conservatism, it's clear from a contemporary perspective that in their separate responses to the demands of a society molded by the movements of the market, the critiques of capitalism that emerge feel like a form of nascent neoliberalism. For, as David Harvey reminds us, "Neoliberals are particularly assiduous in seeking the privitization of assets" (65), a practice of which is central to the Agrarians' yeoman farmer model and one that even the avowedly socialist Nearings celebrate. If we allow an adaptation of Bourdieu's famous description of the situation, for instance, it's possible to recognize that his arguments about the "defense of the old order" apply with equal force to the leisure agrarians in their moment:

> But those same forces of conservation, which it is too easy to treat as conservative, are also, from another point of view, forces of *resistance* to the establishment of the new order and can become subversive forces. If there is still some cause for hope, it

[78] Suspicions about communism, interracial alliances, and agricultural community in the South came to a head in the succeeding decades when the state of Georgia launched investigations into alleged communist activities at Koinonia Farm, a utopian agricultural commune launched by biblical scholar and Christian activist Clarence Jordan outside of Americus, Georgia. For more on Koinonia's continuing ministry, see http://www.koinoniapartners.org.

> is that forces still exist, both in state institutions and in the orientations of social actors . . . that, under the appearance of simply defending an order that disappeared and its corresponding privileges (which is what they will be immediately accused of), it will be able to resist the challenge only by working to invent and construct a new social order. ("The Essence of Neoliberalism")

For both the Agrarians, in 1930, and the Nearings, in 1932, the prospect of replacing the new order of industrial capitalism with an alternate, invented, social order is a key objective. But for the Agrarians the terms of resistance that appear in *I'll Take My Stand* are often too vague—and too heavily burdened by the racial attitudes of the Old South—to materialize as practical realities. Absent racial politics, however, it may be possible to imagine Agrarian sympathies aligning with agricultural unions like the STFU since, as Payne reminds us, members of such groups often simply wanted a chance at becoming land-owning yeoman farmers. Paradoxically, then, it seems as if the only practical way to accomplish the Agrarian dream of a new agricultural society would be to include African Americans into the fold.

As it is though, the Agrarian movement could only ever rise to the level of fantasia. And, as fantasies often do, this one makes its deepest impressions through images. In this way, the dangers of a rapidly modernizing South are most vividly framed in aesthetic terms. As *I'll Take My Stand*'s introduction explains, under the sway of industrial progress the region threatens to become an "undistinguished replica" of the country at large (xxxix), the literal opposite of which is, of course, a distinguished original. For Rupert Vance, a member of the Chapel Hill Regionalist movement and thus one of the "modernists" decried in Ransom's "What Does the South Want?," the Agrarian program of sociological reform

misses the mark, failing to present a model of agricultural sustainability that can accommodate the demand of the region's population. Yet, tellingly, Vance's takedown of Agrarianism doesn't find fault with the Agrarians' aesthetic project, describing their "rightful task" as the "formulation of the culture and social values of an agricultural people" (57). The sociologist can't pass off on the numbers but the regionalist can't disown the appeal of the cultural image.

This point raises a relevant question: Are we to understand Agrarianism as primarily concerned about a kind of artistic affect? Robert Dorman's take on the rise of regionalisms during this period provides a partial answer. According to Dorman, the regionalists that sprang up between 1920 and 1945, including the Nashville Agrarians, were bound by a shared belief in the "importance of the *aesthetic* dimension of experience as a basis for social order" (4, italics in original). Additionally, Dorman identifies the various groups that constitute that regionalist movement—a conglomerate into which the Nearings also fit comfortably—as "engaged in the modernist quest for a reconstructed, *integrated* culture, all of them seeking the alternative values and principles with which to heal the voids and dysfunctions of modern life" (2-3, italics in original). For the Twelve Southerners, this aesthetic dimension reveals itself in the movement's commitment, above all else, to establishing an inhabitable picture, an impression, of the region. How does the picture look? Not unlike a carefully staged plantation romance in which whiteness prevails, class and racial positions are stable, and benevolent gentleman scholars head society. It is, unsurprisingly, a vision of whiteness.

One of the reasons the STFU, a biracial organization with highly visible women at the helm, would present such problems for the Agrarians is that it disturbs this image,

confounding their theory of southern history and destiny. If poor white women like Myrtle Lawrence are explicitly absent in *I'll Take My Stand*—and *Who Owns America?*, for that matter—it's not because the authors weren't aware of their existence. In this regard, it's not simply blackness but competing versions of whiteness that undo the Agrarian model. And while the aesthetic preoccupations of Agrarianism emerge from a decidedly classed, raced, and gendered position that depends upon abstractions such as Tradition, Family, Community, and Religion, labor agrarianism forwards an aesthetic sensibility trained by the body's interactions with the landscape. Instead of turning inward and developing a self-conscious process of internal, imaginative responses to the surroundings, labor agrarians push outward, presenting pieces of their own lives—and, as we've seen, bodies—as the text itself, allowing viewers and readers to assess the significance of those lives and construct a "microhistory" of their class as a whole. Jill Lepore's definition of the category is helpful here: "however singular a person's life may be, the value of examining it lies not in its uniqueness, but in its exemplariness, in how that individual's life serves as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole" (133). This is happening not just with Boyle's photographs that turn Lawrence into the exemplary sharecropping woman but also with the letters of the STFU members and the rural southern children: as examinations of the "issues affecting the culture as a whole," the view they provide into a life of the sharecropping South is as finely rendered as any novel or painting could ever achieve.

Although the Nearings are less obviously concerned with the aesthetic dimensions of agrarianism, they do specifically highlight the importance of achieving symmetry of

sensibilities.[79] It's clear in *Living the Good Life*'s introduction, for instance, that the efficacy of the "good life" as a transformative movement—its ability to move beyond the local and realize the promise of a "pre-industrial community"—depends upon the formation of a group of "like-minded people" who share their political and economic values. In a chapter titled "Living in a Community," the couple discloses their concerns about the "animosities, family feuds, and ideological antagonisms threaded through the entire life of the community," conceding that their experience doesn't do much to "offer hope to the many individuals and groups that have been looking and working the establishment in North America of cooperative communes or intentional communities of work" (180-81). For this reason, then, when the Nearings consider their project within the context of other American utopian communities, they are forced to admit that their "experiment was a failure because the social set-up doomed such an experiment before it was born," and perhaps their "set-up" wasn't ever all that socialist, or even collectivist, but instead only personal (204-5). Either way, according to the Nearings, the level of unity their experiment demands is simply unachievable in the Vermont countryside. Geography, they concede, may well make something like destiny.

Despite their high esteem for the farmer's independence, a similar reliance on notions of unity is essential to the Agrarians as well. Writing about the political theories undergirding the Agrarian movement, Christopher Duncan uses strikingly familiar language to describe the importance of "communitism": a community such as the one

[79] That's not to say that they're uninterested though. One major argument for their agrarian lifestyle is that it allows them to "enjoy the procession of the seasons . . . *[a]esthetically*" (15, italics in original).

imagined by the Agrarians requires "solidarity, fraternity, and fellowship within an expanded non-familial association of *like-minded* individuals" (2, emphasis mine). As *Living the Good Life* proves, translating idealism into political reality requires the force of cohesion, of similarity. Yet in the South of the 1930s, the parameters of similarity are determined by a dubious set of criteria. This is another reason why blackness creates such a problem for the Agrarians—to admit the aligning economic interests that exist between the white yeoman farmer and his African American counterpart is to take a truly radical stand, to predict, for instance, the rise of the STFU in 1934. Robert Penn Warren's "The Briar Patch" acknowledges this tension when he explains that the southern white farmer, "conceive[s] of his own culture as finally rooted in the soil" and "desire[s] . . . to preserve its essential structure intact." And because white yeoman "culture" fundamentally relies on the backdrop of blackness to provide its meaning, there can be no alliance. Although Warren is at pains to highlight the human dignity—and even provisional equality—of southern blacks, the Agrarian message to African Americans in the South remains an easily recognizable one: "Let the negro sit beneath his own vine and fig tree" (264).

For the Nearings, the question of inclusion/exclusion hinges on the issue of ideological sameness, an obstacle they can't overcome in their rural Vermont neighborhood. At the book's conclusion, the Nearings admit to their project's primary shortcoming: they failed to cultivate the necessary kinship with their neighbors that would make the cooperative community of their ideals possible. This is, as the text frames it, a problem of modernity's centrifugal powers—the center cannot hold: the "absence of group spirit and neighborhood discipline, the chaos and confusion of perpetual movement to and from work, to and from school, to and from the shows and the dances, has destroyed the

remnants of rural solidarity and left a shattered, purposeless, functionless, ineffective, unworkable community" (204). This is, ironically enough, a situation that sounds an awful lot like the "modernity" of the city they had been fleeing all along. Something different is happening with the Agrarians: no level of philosophical agreement can change the vital difference of blackness written on the body, differences that rigidly dictate each subject's fixed relationship to structures of power. It is marginalizing blackness, in other words, that brings forth the centripetal energies of whiteness.

As its uneasy response to the southern racial problem confirms, *I'll Take My Stand* is unintentionally staging an argument that occasionally privileges the very ideology it is at pains to disavow, for in its readiness to criticize industrial capitalism, and in its intermittent celebration of the yeoman class, the text shares a political valence with the Nearings's utopian agrarian socialism. And in their common tendency to locate models for a idealized future in the past, both the Agrarians and the Nearings realize the observations of Walter Benjamin, who explains in a 1935 entry from his *Arcades Project,* "The utopian images which accompany the emergence of the new always, at the same time, reach back to the primal past" (893)—but never *only* towards the primal past, as the Agrarians seem to do. When thinking about the relationship between leisure agrarianisms and labor agrarianism—about their distinct orientations to the notions of time and history—it begins to look as if the backward glance is an indulgence allowed to those with the time and resources to take it. While the Agrarians and the Nearings both try hard to recreate or reinhabit some version of an increasingly obsolete agri-culture in order to exit themselves from the American mainstream, the marginalized figures associated with labor agrarianism are doing their best to break into the American mainstream, or at least gain access to the

benefits so often ascribed to the American mainstream: self-determination, land ownership, a stable income, and opportunities for social advancement. The letters to Mrs. Roosevelt make this abundantly clear, as the overriding thread that binds the texts together is a hope that Roosevelt could somehow pull the authors up into the middle class, or at least lend them some kind of material signifier of middle-class comfort (a coat, medicine, store-bought food). And here is the paradox: they reach for the same America that is immiserating them because it is also the America that holds out the promise of prosperity.

By way of contrast, the utopian impulses of the STFU—on display in *Disinherited* and worn on the body of Myrtle Lawrence—still invite attention: the union was never so narrowly tied to a particular formulation of history and culture, or to a single definition of the "South," as to become entirely obsolete, and the underutilized alliance between white and black members of the working class still offers opportunities for reformative action. If, like the leisure agrarians, internal disagreements prevented movements among the labor agrarians from achieving their full potential, their work—and the world they imagined—remains unfinished.

Although all of the texts I've considered are bound by a common between-the-wars protest against the excesses of American culture, when succeeding generations have looked for models of alternative-culture agrarianism, they have reached for *Living the Good Life* and, to a lesser extent, *I'll Take My Stand* over *The Disinherited Speak* or the photographic archives of the STFU. It's a testament to the slipperiness of the Agrarians' thinking, and to the mutability of twentieth-century political identities, that, as a self-consciously "conservative" movement, its residue still coats strains of countercultural thinking. Expressions of labor agrarianism, on the other hand, remain less visible. First-person

accounts and fictional representations of conditions in the industrial cotton outfits in the contemporary Delta regions, for instance, rarely surface. This is, as activists such as Myrtle Lawrence and H. L. Mitchell surely understood, the result of structures designed to keep the faces of labor out of view. With apologies to Bourke-White and Caldwell, you simply haven't seen their faces. That's just one reason, it seems, that the demographic profile of US agricultural labor—both within the South and beyond—is in a state of continual transformation, always ready to incorporate the next group that lacks the means of making its voices heard: from poor whites and African Americans in the early twentieth century to Latin American migrant workers in the present day. In the end, then, it's difficult to evaluate the meanings of insurgent rurality in the early twentieth century without realizing the irony that, like the agrarians in the 1930s, popular progressivism in contemporary America is so often embodied in a backward glance, one that fails to recognize the full measure of suffering on active display within the country's borders.

If the Agrarians have, once again, played an outsized role in the construction of my argument, that hasn't been because they belong at the center of the frame; their prolificity—and the amount of critical attention they garnered in their own moment and beyond—simply means that they left more material to grapple with than their peers in the STFU. My hope, in fact, is that the alternate modes of agrarian expression on display in these texts have not just nudged the Twelve Southerners out of the center of the frame but have showed that there was no center to begin with. As Jonathan Daniels wrote in his 1938 travelogue, *A Southerner Discovers the South*, "There are as many Souths, perhaps, as there

are people living in it" (9).[80] The task of theorizing other Souths is widely framed as a means of destabilizing popular configurations of the region by uncovering the global or hemispheric dimensions of its complex identity. But there is a sense in which the seeds of the Agrarian South's deconstruction lie even closer at hand: in the very landscape and labor practices they celebrated, a powerfully vibrant, and deeply disruptive, collection of voices hovers.

[80] Daniels's book includes a visit to Nashville and a mixed review of the Agrarian movement that deeply unnerved Donald Davidson. Davidson calls Daniels a "speed artist," among other things, in his *Southern Review* response to *A Southerner Discovers the South*. See Davidson's "The Class Approach to Southern Problems" in *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal* ed. Emily S. Bingham and Thomas A. Underwood (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2001), 132-46.

CHAPTER THREE:

"SOMEBODY ELSE'S LAND": MIGRATORY MODERNISM, NEW YORK CITY, AND THE PORTABLE SOUTH

The Jalopy Theater, perched on the edge of the Battery Tunnel in Red Hook, Brooklyn fills a curious role in a city full of curiosities. Housing a network committed to an assortment of old-timey accoutrements, the building alternately functions as a performance space, a bar, an instrument repair shop, and a music school specializing in "old-time music, bluegrass, country, gypsy, and jazz." It has become a hub for twenty-first-century New York City folk music—a strain of expressive culture that funnels an aesthetic most readily tied to the rural South of the Depression era into the United States' most cosmopolitan city. Inside the Jalopy, for instance, you'll find an abundance of beards, coveralls, banjos, and weathered church benches.[81] And while it wouldn't be incorrect to understand these performances of rusticity as exercises in postmodern historical reenactment, it's also important to recognize how the decision to stage a pronounced version of the rural in the city lines up with an older dynamic in which the urban North,

[81] For more on the Jalopy Theater, see their website: http://www.jalopy.biz. See also Sara Beck, "Jubilation Amid Banjoes and Harmonies," *New York Times* 8 March 2012. MB3.

New York City in particular, served as a nexus in the creation of the market for both "hillbilly" and "race" records—the urtexts for folk revivals like the current one.[82]

In some sense, then, the contemporary proponents of New York City folk music are simply hunting out a well-trod path that has continually brought performers—and their individuated productions of regional expression—from the southern states into the city. The Carter Family, Charley Patton, Amédé Ardoin, and Fiddlin' John Carson are just a few of the figures who left their native South in the 1920s and 30s to translate their performances into commodities via New York recording studios. And not surprisingly perhaps, the performances themselves frequently work to negotiate a cultural distance between the

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[82] As Patrick Huber claims, "Most of the earliest hillbilly recordings were made in New York City" (26). This is a trend that continued beyond the hillbilly era: the most vibrant template for the urban folk revival of the 1950s and 60s, the six-volume *Anthology of American Folk Music* compiled by Harry Smith in a West Forty-Seventh Street apartment circled like a talisman throughout Greenwich Village. See Jon Pankake, "The Brotherhood of the Anthology," *Anthology of American Folk Music* (Smithsonian Folkways Records, 1997). For more on Smith's high art ambitions with the *Anthology,* see Andrew Perhuck and Rani Singh, *Harry Smith: The Avant-garde in the American Vernacular* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010). In his autobiography, Woody Guthrie tells of how he balked at the wardrobe department's attempts to dress him up in "French peasant garb" or as a "Louisiana swamp dweller" when he was invited to perform at Rockefeller Center's Rainbow Room in 1940 (294). Guthrie, it seems, wasn't willing to cede control of his rural image. See *Bound for Glory* (New York: Plume, 1983). Collector Ian Nagoski's *To What Strange Place: The Music of the Ottoman-American Diaspora, 1916-1929* (Tompkins Square Records) works even harder to complicate the picture: focusing on recordings made by Eastern European immigrants in New York City of 1910s and 20s, Nagoski's goal is to show how American folk music is a more varied, more obviously global affair than it is typically taken to be.

country and the city as they signify in the early twentieth century, between the underdevelopment of their home region and the advancements of New York. In this sense, Joel Dinerstein's appraisal of the signifying power of pre-bop jazz artists might also apply to other popular musicians from the early decades of the twentieth century: "they created a genuine popular art that mediated the need for both accommodation and resistance to the technological society" (18).

If, as Edward Comentale recently argues, modernism is the best template by which to evaluate the commercial emergence of regional musics in the period, then it's possible to place the New York City experiences of these old-time musicians alongside the era's more widely canonized arts of migration. Comentale rightly encourages readers to "explore [their] inherent modernism," a move that allows for recognition of the "vast and varied aesthetic experience of modern life that . . . sustained a vital forum of exchange and transformation for those otherwise excluded from traditional forms of power and prestige" (7). Instead of cordoning the vernacular and the folk off from the canons of modernism, then, we ought to consider the ways that they address a common set of conditions. I hope to survey a similarly expansive terrain: a focus on movements between and across spaces in the texts I consider, as well as their ability to draw on discourses of both the "folk" and the "modern," makes it possible to theorize a form of "migratory modernism" that becomes, in its constituent parts, an alternative modernism that earns its place alongside other expressions of the modern from the period.

In its broadest dimensions, this chapter seeks to make the connection between narratives of migration and theories of modernism and modernity. Perhaps the most obvious way to uncover this link is to focus on the proliferation of work by African

American writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance that narrate the experience of the Great Migration. While both Farah Jasmine Griffin and Lawrence Rodgers use a wide spread of African American texts to provide important insights into the cultural meanings of migration, I cover some of the same ground with different points of emphasis.[83] Specifically, I will bring models of modernism generated by the new modernist studies to bear on less frequently studied texts—the sound recordings of Charlie Poole, Rudolph Fisher's "City of Refuge" (1925), "The South Lingers On" (1925), and "The Promised Land" (1927), as well as Zora Neale Hurston's "Story in Harlem Slang" (1941) and "Now You Cookin' with Gas" (unpublished until 1995)—making them speak to a fresh and enlarged network of concerns. I also extend the conversation by reorienting it around both white and black subjects on the move, and by considering representations of terminal migrations from the South to the North alongside those of migration with less linearity. My texts in this section are Ellen Glasgow's novel *Barren Ground* (1925) and Faulkner's short story "Pennsylvania Station" (1934). For all their focus on dislocation, alienation, and discontinuity, my readings also reveal the pleasures and profits of mobility and migration, revealing a larger spectrum of experience from figures who both embody and reflect the

[83] The standard examination of migration narratives in literary studies remains Griffin's *Who Set You Flowin'?: The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996). Griffin's expansive study includes perceptive readings of canonical writers (Ellison, Wright, Toomer) as well as non-literary sources such as the hip-hop group Arrested Development and visual artist Jacob Lawrence. A less celebrated but similarly valuable resource is Rodgers's *Canaan Bound: The African-American Great Migration Novel* (Champaign: U of Illinois P, 1997). Rodgers's analysis may not be as adventurous as Griffin's but his readings of unheralded migration texts such as William Attaway's *Blood on the Forge* (1919) and Dorothy West's *The Living Is Easy* (1948) are a major contribution.

tensions that arise between the urban and the rural, the North and the South. To this end, I also uncover means through which rusticity as an identity marker is manipulated and deflected, embraced and escaped.

It's important at the outset to define my keywords, particularly as they relate to heavily freighted discourses of the modern. Postcolonial critics have led the conversation about the kinds of alternative modernities that spring up along the edges of the dominant culture, often as a means of explaining the strange simultaneity of the modern and the antimodern, the familiar and the foreign, in the colonial margins. My notion of "migratory modernism" continues in this direction: I look for ways in which rural modernity is already inside, and contributing to, expressions of the urban modern, and I seek out a point of contact between content and form by exploring narratives that take on movement as a subject at the same time as they offer representational strategies crafted to reflect the jagged range of interior responses to migration. Frederic Jameson's thinking about the psychological products of modernity is especially useful in this regard: Jameson holds that modernist art depends upon the tension between a "longing for . . . monadic closure" and the modern world's inability to provide it (163). As both a sociological subject and as a kind of embodied metaphor, then, the migrant is a productive figure since he or she navigates a newly uprooted world, often driven by paradoxical impulses towards connection via disconnection and guided by aesthetic tactics that make it possible to dramatize the knotty psychological effects of relocation and adaptation.

Each of the texts I consider is engaged in the process of coming to terms with a version of modernity that arrives and rearrives with the spread of free-market economics, and that imprints itself in the minds of its participants—both willing and unwilling—

through the cavalcade of sensations generated by new technologies and landscapes moving at the speed and scale of industrialization. With its ability to showcase sites where the boundaries between regions and cultural forms are crossed and demarcating lines dissolve, migratory modernism offers an optic through which to view the essential contradictions that give modernity its shape.

Obviously I can't claim migration as a distinctly U.S. or "southern" concern, or as an exclusively modern one. The recorded history of the North American continent alone is endlessly marked by movements: Native Americans along ancient game and trade routes; the Mormon and Oregon Trails that took settlers to the West; the massive relocation of Natives along the Trail of Tears; the African American "Exodusters" who went west to Kansas immediately following the end of Reconstruction; the waves of immigrants who arrived on both coasts and took up residence there, or fanned out throughout the country; the immigrants from Central and South America who continue to travel across the southern border in our own days. What I hope to underscore, however, are the manifold ways in which emergent technologies and thought of the modernist period meditate the experience of movement during the period between the 1890s and the 1940s, and how the cultural products of collision enabled by migrations intersect with material, aesthetic, and philosophical manifestations of the modern.

Prelude:

Charlie Poole Sounds Out Migration

An early example of migratory modernism's signifying possibilities arrives in the work of Charlie Poole, a rambunctious banjo player from the Piedmont region of North Carolina.

Poole started adulthood as a textile millworker but soon gained enough attention with his group the North Carolina Ramblers to secure a contract with Columbia Records. Thus his first trip to New York City, to record, in 1925; he returned again the next year. Poole's encounter with the city is predictable enough, given New York's role as a center of North American cultural production. Yet Poole's public persona remained tied to his home region. While his music emerged from a milieu of industrial development, Patrick Huber has recently shown that it was deliberately constructed so as to "seem . . . anachronistic": Poole's recordings, and those of his peers in the old-time movement of the 1920s and 30s, "offered comforting reassurances that authentic traditional music and joyous preindustrial pastimes could survive in a modern, urban-industrial America" (131). In short, they were always-already designed to act as an aural equivalent of lost time. This is precisely Richard Middleton's point when discussing the popular music of the period: it draws upon a "nostalgia that is actually emblematic of modernity" (51).[84] The modernity of these art objects consists in the careful conjuration of an aesthetic threatened by modernity's tendency towards a world of standardized parts, mass culture, and the rapid expansion of urbanity.

For the purpose of this chapter, Poole's most provocative song is "A Trip to New York, Parts I, II, III, and IV," a 1929 record made with a one-off group called the Highlanders. Although Poole's recordings with the Ramblers featured a trio of guitar, banjo,

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[84] For more on nostalgia as a symptom of modernity and modernism, see *Modernism and Nostalgia: Bodies, Locations, Aesthetics,* ed. Tammy Clewell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013). In a similar vein, Sanja Bahun's *Modernism and Melancholia: Writing as Countermourning* (New York: Oxford UP, 2013) explores the simultaneous emergence of new clinical conceptualizations of melancholia and the experiments of literary modernism.

and fiddle, he had toured with a five-piece outfit augmented by twin fiddles and a piano. Columbia Records A&R representative Frank Walker balked at the idea of recording this group, so Poole, somewhat surreptitiously, sought out a contract with Paramount/Brunswick Records as a member of the Highlanders/the Allegheny Highlanders, and the group made their only recordings in 1929, at New York Recording Laboratories.[85]

"A Trip to New York" is, strictly speaking, more a sonic play than a song, and its autobiographical resonances are unmistakable: stretching across four 78-RPM disc sides, the performance maps the movement of a band of rural musicians from their origins in the Gobbler's Knob, North Carolina all the way to New York City, plugging the gaps between songs with sound effects and narration belonging to a character who fills the role of the rural hayseed heading to the big town armed with a knowing combination of irony and urgency. The musical breaks, however, conjure up the sound of the past, with their incorporation of fiddle tunes (such as "Richmond" and "New River Train") and songs associated with the minstrel shows ("Turkey in the Straw"), while the sound effects—which include aural approximations of mules hooves and a train whistle—argue that the band's old-time instruments and their expressive bodies carry all the power needed to

[85] See Kinney Rorrer's liner notes to Charlie Poole, *Charlie Poole with the Highlanders: The Complete Paramount and Brunswick Recordings, 1929* (Tompkins Square Records, 2013). In another turn towards the city, it's no stretch to imagine that Poole, a baseball aficionado whose distinctive three-finger banjo style famously evolved from an injury sustained in a fastball accident, named his group after the New York Highlanders, predecessors of the modern-day Yankees. The Scots-Irish connection to the Piedmont region is another possibility.

recreate and process means of transportation both agricultural and industrial. And the paradox in which songs pointing towards the past are nevertheless named after cities ("Richmond") and modern technologies (the train) further invites listeners to recognize the deep investment of newness in expressions of the old-time.

The band begins its train tour of the upper Alleghenies with a pass through Washington D.C., which, when narrated by the singer, functions as a kind of audio postcard. Tellingly, this was a period when the expressive potential of the physical postcard was peaking: according to one account, it was in the early decades of the twentieth century that "the postcard emerge[d] as a mediator of modernity, a means to identify and possess the totality of the city at a time when it was in fact fragmenting physically and socially" (Mendelson and Prochaska xii). Poole's reduction of Washington D.C. to a single landmark, the Washington Monument, ventures to make the social and physical complexities of the urban landscape more easily comprehensible by offering subjects in—or from—rural outposts such as Gobbler's Knob a glimpse, however obscured, of what the city *looks* like from an appropriately safe distance. It also provides occasion for a hackneyed joke: spotting the Monument, Poole explains, "[Washington] was the father of our country." A band mate's response: "I'll bet they had big families in those days." The exchange thus presents a postcard vision of history: truncated, anecdotal, smothered with irony—all stuffed into a package tight enough to fit the frame provided by a train window.

As the recording continues, it becomes clear that Poole is not just the text's narrator but also its navigator: modernity must be mediated, and the singer stands ready to do it, a matter that makes his performance of rural naïveté all the more curious. For instance, when the band encounters the representative of an urban record company, the singer asks

the city man how much he charges to make a record, expressing befuddlement at his explanation that the record company pays its performers: "Oh no, we don't want nothing out of it—no money, nothing. We never thought of that." Padding out his position, the singer describes the group as existing outside of a cash economy: they were paid five dollars for a big wedding once, he explains, but mostly they just barter—"We usually get paid in corn, buckwheat flour, cane molasses. Just anything." This is not true, of course: the Highlanders' whole existence owes itself to a contract dispute. But Charlie Poole-the-businessman's relative savvy about contracts and compensation can't be allowed to interfere with Charlie Poole-the-character's performance of the rural rube.

This performance continues as the singer marvels at the size of the city's train depot, making loud comparison to its counterpart in Gobbler's Knob, and as the band crosses Broadway, the singer signals the perils of modern technology, decrying the dangers of both the automobile ("Better watch out for those automobiles. They don't slow down for ya.") and the recording studio's elevator ("I hate to ride these things."). Upon arriving in the Brunswick studio, the song the group ultimately performs is "No Room for a Tramp," and it becomes difficult not to notice the parallels between our hapless train riders and the out-of-place tramp—an observation that raises an important question: Why emphasize your out-of-placeness? If the nation's rush towards modernization determines that rurality is increasingly another mode of marginality, why court devaluation by embracing it?

The most obvious response might be that performances of regional distinction provide a backhanded way of emphasizing your relative autonomy vis-à-vis the standardization associated with urbanization. It is also a means of courting two audiences: curious urbanites and fellow country people, while accruing "prestige from below" by

wearing rusticity as a badge of honor.[86] This performance of rurality—the conscious adoption of a "poor white" mask—might also allow its participants a chance to control the terms through by which they are apprehended in a new environment: to present oneself as a rustic in the city is to signal an awareness of the very cultural vocabulary responsible for categories such as "rustic" and "urbane." Poole's strategy of representation is designed to moderate the chaos that adheres to relocation and travel. It also provides a stable lens through which to apprehend the self: you show who you are to those around you *and* to yourself by speaking, dressing, and gesticulating in a recognizable way. This dynamic is especially acute when the contrasts are as dramatically pitched as they are in "A Trip to New York" (Gobbler's Knob vs. New York City). And when the dominating space (New York) is emblematic of the future, the conflict signals a key tension underpinning the emergence of both modernization and modernism: the rural backwater signing in the shadow of the big city.

Also, the group's deliberate association with the tramp via "No Room for a Tramp" places them in the company of other prototypically modern figures who wander the city, such as Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp and the flâneur illuminated in Walter Benjamin's readings of Baudelaire.[87] Their rurality, and the inter-regional arc of their wandering, is simply another thread in an already tangled skein of wobbly—and unpredictably modern—identity markers. The recording never tells us whether Poole and his troupe ever

[86] I'm indebted to Charles D. Gerard for this concept. See *Jazz in Black and White: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Jazz Community* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 102-03.
[87] See Benjamin's *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2006), specifically "The Flâneur" and "Modernity" in "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," 66-133.

made it back to Gobbler's Knob but it doesn't seem to matter much since the most useful part of the story exists in those initial forays into a contact zone where, to adapt Mary Louise Pratt's famous model, distinct strands of the cultures of the rural South and the urban North "meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (34). That New York City is both the subject of the song and the launching pad for its circulation indicates the extent to which the "South" is always-already inside the city's culture industry of record labels and recording studios. In a roundabout way, it also highlights the role that the metropolis plays in the production of literary texts—via publishing houses and periodicals—such as those discussed below. As I hope to demonstrate, what Griffin calls the "South in the City" is perhaps a stranger and more varied phenomenon than even she recognized, with roots and braches that spread out in all sorts of surprising ways.

I. Away Up South:
Harlem as Dixie in the Great Migration

"In no case should our people attempt to go North until they know where they are going."

-*Southwestern Christian Advocate*, "Read This Before You Move North," April 5, 1917

Historians typically take the "Great Migration" of African Americans out of the South up to the industrial North to consist of two distinct waves: the first coincides with the outbreak of World War I and a series of agricultural setbacks in the South, and continues until the Great Depression; the second stretches from the end of World War II until the early 1970s. Yet even within each distinct wave, migration proceeded in stages. Eric Arnesen offers this

consensus of the first wave: "Most historians believe that roughly 450,000 to 500,000 black southerners relocated to the North between 1915 and 1918, and following a brief but severe economic depression shortly after the end of World War I, at least another 700,000 southern blacks made their way north during the 1920s" (1). Journalist Nicholas Lemann, who wrote a stirring account of postwar migrations from Mississippi to Chicago, quotes figures that estimate a movement of five million African Americans from 1940 to 1970. Other historians push that number up above six million.[88] The narratives considered in this chapter predate postwar migrations; they concern themselves with the cluster of issues affecting the first wave of northbound migrants. Where Lemann and others see Chicago as the geographic core of midcentury black migrations, each of the African American migration narratives I analyze centers on New York, Harlem specifically. And while each is widely recognized as a product of the Harlem Renaissance, they all have, at very least, an ambiguous relationship with the place. There are no simple celebrations of Harlem's great promise in these fictions, and readers are consistently reminded of the difficulties facing

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[88] See Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Knopf, 1991). A more recent addition to the conversation is journalist Isabel Wilkerson's acclaimed *The Warmth of Other Suns* (2010). Like Lemann, Wilkerson relies more heavily on personal interviews than existing scholarship but the sweep of her analysis is vast, taking in the multiple stages and geographic loci of the Great Migration from the 1910s into the 1970s. See Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010). For an account of African American migration to the cities of the Bay Area on the West Coast, see Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990).

African Americans from the rural South who seek to integrate the "city within a city" that was Harlem in the early decades of the twentieth century.[89]

The marginality of rural southerners isn't simply a feature of the era's fiction. Take, for instance, James Weldon Johnson's *Black Manhattan* (1930), which betrays a strong preference for Harlem-bound migrants from the West Indies and the "cities and towns of the Atlantic seaboard states" above those from the rural South. According to Johnson, it was the unfortunate cities of the industrial Midwest that "received migrants from the mills of the lower Mississippi Valley, from the rural, even backwoods, districts, Negroes who were unused to city life or anything bearing a resemblance to modern industry" (152-53).[90]

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[89] Cheryl Lynn Greenberg's *"Or Does It Explode?": Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) offers insights into Harlem's shifting demographics and political tension during the Depression. See also Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), which covers Harlem's transformation from quiet uptown enclave to an urban "slum." Jervis Anderson offers a cultural history of the artists, musicians, religious leaders, and intellectuals who shaped Harlem in the first half of the twentieth century in *This Was Harlem: A Cultural Portrait, 1900-1950* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982). Marcy S. Sacks' *Before Harlem: The Black Experience in New York City Before WWI* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006) considers the cultural profile of Harlem before it became the epicenter of U.S.—and perhaps hemispheric—blackness.

[90] Albert Murray, in *The Omni-Americans*, sees the issue in an altogether different light: "[S]omeday students of machine-age culture in the United States may find that Negro slaves in the cotton field had already begun confronting and evolving esthetic solutions for the problems of assembly line regimentation, depersonalization, and collectivization" (63). In Murray's view, the labor conditions of the rural South and their proximity to the legacies of slavery create subjects who are uniquely prepared to confront the challenges of industrial

African American migrants from the rural South, it seems, can never shake the disadvantages of their abject blackness—even in the training ground of the New Negro. In her recent work on black masculinity and southernness, Riché Richardson makes an association between the enduring image of Uncle Tom and a cultural logic that codes black men from the rural South "apolitical and counterinsurgent" (15). While this isn't Johnson's point exactly, it does seem like an unspoken current shaping his opinions: by accident of birth and by dint of association with a system of longstanding exploitation, black people from the rural South have been deemed unfit to confront the economic and political demands that face the New Negro in the North, and they remain unprepared to capitalize on any opportunities for advancement that the period might provide.

Locke himself puts a slightly different, though perhaps no less troubling, spin on the issue in "Harlem," his contribution to the 1925 issue of the *Survey Graphic*. The outmigration of blacks from the South to the urban north is "a deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from mediaeval America to modern" (qtd. in Arnesen 80). This opportunity for relocation is colored in nearly numinous shades: "A railroad ticket and a suitcase, like a Baghdad carpet, transport the Negro peasant from the cotton-field and farm to the heart of the most complex urban civilization" (qtd. in Arnesen 81). It's not just about jumping out of space but across time, across centuries even—and these aren't just people from another part of the same country but from a whole different epoch. Charles S. Johnson's contribution to *The New Negro* takes a more measured stance, conceding that in spite of their "vagrant desires and impulses," southern migrants are "becoming a part of . . .

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modernity with grace and with a distinctive sense of style. See *The Omni-Americans: Black Experience and American Culture* (New York: Da Capo, 1970).

the cities' life and growth." Still, it remains a matter of evolution from low forms to high, from rural to "city Negro" (294). And it's clear in each of these examples that the project of making the familiar foreign, of marking individuals according to their place of origin, runs dangerously close to the logic of segregation. One of the most trenchant entries in Zora Neale Hurston's "Glossary of Harlem Slang," for instance, is "Russian," meaning "a Southern Negro up north. 'Rushed up here,' hence a Russian" (137). Southern migrants thus remain marked off—and held under a suspicious eye—as the most abject other in a population consistently othered by U.S. legal and cultural practices.

In the short stories I focus on below, it's clear that the shadow of rurality remains tied to the southern migrant. First I read Rudolph Fisher's "City of Refuge," a contribution to Locke's *New Negro* that is, in spite of its inclusion in the canons of Harlem Renaissance literature, a stunning denunciation of Harlem's imperfections. As a complement, I briefly consider two other stories from Fisher's series on South-North migration, "The South Lingers On" and "The Promised Land," paying special attention to the ways in which these narratives offer portraits of the freshly minted migrant in Harlem and the psychic dislocation of that experience. I also read a similarly themed story by Zora Neale Hurston, "Story in Harlem Slang" and its unedited counterpart "Now You Cookin' with Gas." The Harlem imagined in each is a space in which black southern migrants bring the conflicts of the South up North with them. Hard as it may be to make the case that the difficulties southern migrants faced in Harlem were on par with the oppressions of the Jim Crow South, fiction is under no obligation to offer an unbending reflection of sociological realities. It can, however, provide opportunities to examine the multiple angles of an issue, including the range of psychic responses to migration—alienation, freedom, confusion,

clarity. To this end, both Fisher and Hurston ironize the Promised Land narrative of African American redemption in the North in a way that forces a reevaluation of formulations of the "South," the "rural," and the links between expressive culture and modern subjectivity.

Moving Up:

Rudolph Fisher's Migratory Modernism

Although Fisher is not typically identified as a southerner—he was born and raised in that border space Washington D.C.—in "City of Refuge" and several of his less visible stories, his work displays a keen sense of how a southern identity is inhabited and an awareness of its increased fragility in the modern era. "City of Refuge" is widely anthologized, and while enthusiasm for Fisher's fiction—particularly his 1932 detective novel *The Conjure Man Dies*—seems to be on the upswing, he has generally attracted less scholarly attention than many of his Harlem Renaissance peers. (In 2008, *Callaloo* announced plans to fill this gap with a special issue focused on Fisher but, as of April 2014, it has yet to appear.) One explanation for this odd blend of prominence and relative lack of commentary is that while Fisher's alliances with Alain Locke's anthology suggest a basic optimism about the projects of the New Negro, his unflattering depictions of Harlem and its uneasy relationship with southern emigrants help to throw *The New Negro* into conflict with itself. He is, in point of fact, a kind of literary migrant, drifting between Locke's positions and those found in *Fire!!* (1926), the more radically adventurous attempt at a Harlem Renaissance manifesto engineered by luminaries such as Wallace Thurman and Hurston.

The narrative shape of "City of Refuge" proceeds along a common contour—an African American leaves the rural South for Harlem, the center of African American culture

in the industrial North. Yet unlike most participants in the Great Migrations of the early twentieth century, when the story's chief protagonist King Solomon Gillis makes it from Penn Station to Harlem, he is escaping the law in North Carolina, having killed an antagonistic white man. Throughout the story, the text signals Gillis's disorientation by incorporating what I describe as a phenomenology of place, a method of highlighting the links between sharp sensory experiences of a space and the psychological absorption of a place.[91] In Gillis's case, we read that

> [t]here had been strange and terrible sounds. . . . Shuffle of a thousand heels, innumerable echoes. Cracking rifle shots—no, snapping turnstiles. . . . Distant

[91] Art historian W. Arthur Mehroff uses this exact phrase as the title of an article about the "human intentionality" of landmark architecture. Our subjects don't overlap much but I do agree with his contention that "understanding of place as a total phenomenon necessarily encompasses the highly subjective dimensions of human cognition" (11). I take this as another way of stating an important, if obvious, fact: human sensory response to a place plays a determining role in our experience of that place. See Mehroff, "The Phenomenology of Place," *Humanities Education* (June 1990): 9-14. More celebrated discussions about space and phenomenology belong to philosophers such Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward S. Casey. Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1977) is a granular examination of the ways in which human subjects orient themselves, both physically and psychically, using the senses and their relationship to emotion and thought. For Casey, the phenomenology of the external world is most significant for its role in the creation of imaginative "world-frames," a concept that will inform the discussion that follows below. See Casey, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1976). In a slightly different vein, Christopher Tilley's *Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Moments* (New York: Bloomsbury P, 1997) considers the effects of landscape on early human consciousness by analyzing prehistoric archaeological sites.

> thunder, nearing. The screeching onslaught of the fiery hosts of hell, headlong, breathtaking. (35)

Gillis's tendency to misread the landscape, his inability to distinguish between gunfire and turnstiles, colors his entire experience in Harlem and predicts the story's ironic turns: as Gillis hears the subway his sensorium calls up the signs of a lynching. The city, as apprehended by Gillis, frequently registers as a series of disorienting, abrasive sounds that lead him, roughly, from one compromising situation to another.

For example, he is disturbed by, and ultimately forced into, the mechanized ethos of the urban landscape in a turn signaled by the story's opening paragraph:

> the railroad station, the long, white-walled corridor, the impassable slot-machine, the terrifying subway train he felt as if he had been caught up in the jaws of a steam-shovel, jammed together with other helpless lumps of dirt, swept blindly along for a time, and at last abruptly dumped. (35)

Dumped, like the materials from which steam-powered machines craft the modern world. In these opening paragraphs, descriptions of hell, rifle fire, and Jonah struggling in the belly of the whale combine to welcome Gillis to his new home. The suggestion that, on levels both economic and material, Manhattan modernity is a product of southern human raw material is a perceptive one: eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slavery played a large, direct, and intimate part in the city's rise to global prominence and prosperity, and its reliance on cotton to grow the shipping trade is also well documented.

It's worth pausing here to note, then, that any discussion of interchange between the rural South and New York City, particularly a discussion with interest in race and labor, should also explore the city's long history of entanglement with slavery and with the cotton trade. Thanks to its geographic centrality (farther south than Boston and more easily accessed than Philadelphia), its large river (the Hudson), and the advantageous structure of its harbor (deep, and largely free from ice drifts), the city became fabulously rich—largely because of its role as a key node in the "cotton triangle" promoting flow of raw goods from southern ports to European harbors in Liverpool and Havre, and bringing European imports and manufactured goods to the South, creating what Edward Glaeser describes as an exemplary "hub-and-spoke transportation network" (12). Yet even before the cotton gin heightened the stakes of this fluid trade system, New York served as an essential destination for incoming shipments of slaves. Present-day Wall Street, for instance, served as the site of a bustling slave market and Moses Taylor, a founder of what would become Citibank, was a chief financier of the slave trade. According to Philip Foner, in fact, the city remained an active participant in the illegal slave trade well into the 1860s.[92] When the abolishment of the slave trade in 1799 threatened to cut off a vital source of the city's wealth by disconnecting one of the spokes from its hub, Glaeser argues that the cotton trade conveniently "solved this problem" (13). Thus began a pattern of exchange in which,

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[92] Philip Foner, *Business and Slavery, The New York Merchants and the Irrepressible Conflict* (NY: Russell and Russell, 1941). Alan J. Singer's *New York and Slavery: Time to Teach the Truth* (Albany: State U of New York P, 2008) is designed as a corrective to incomplete state history curricula and, in spite of its less-than-formal tone, it contains well-documented, essential information, such as the Moses Taylor connection above. See page 31.

as Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace point out, New York shipping interests brokered the flow of goods, "ringing up, at every turn, substantial profits in sales, freight charges, and commissions" (336).

It's perhaps this method of profit-making that causes Robert Albion to assert that the city's involvement was of direct benefit only to itself, since the South "needed . . . [no] such northern interference" in their business—they could have shipped directly to Europe and imported their own goods. In Albion's reading, it was because of the efforts of "Yankee representatives of New York concerns, backed with adequate capital to make loans, [who] swarmed into the southern ports and . . . absorb[ed] the lion's share of the business" (96-97). Yet Albion may underestimate the power of capital: the North brought to the South the credit that it needed to complete its link in the chain, and, as Walter Johnson points out, a more expeditious means of transporting their goods. And it's the wealth and authority created through credits and debts that translates the raw materials of southern labor—foremost among these being cotton—into the structural wealth of the modern city, for, as Burrows and Wallace remind us, "Eventually, New York superintended so great a share of the South's output that forty cents of every dollar paid for southern cotton allegedly wound up in the pockets of city merchants" (336).

Although New York City's position as an "urban colossus" (to borrow Glaeser's term) was established through more than just the cotton trade—the ability to transfer goods across the Great Lakes to the American heartland through the Erie Canal was another essential development—it's impossible to deny that the city's ascendance as a global center of finance and industry was funded in large part by its relationship with the South, a relationship that stretches from the twentieth-century moment of Fisher's stories

back to the eighteenth century. In looking for manifestations of the "South in the City" in the early twentieth century, then, it becomes clear that, in some deep-seated and undeniable ways, the South has been in the city from the beginning, as an enriching—if often unseen—presence. This history thus forwards a variation on Eric Hobsbwam's famous contention that, in Britain, "Whoever says Industrial Revolution says cotton" (34). It's also possible to make the claim that whoever says cotton says modernization, and—more pointedly perhaps—whoever says modern New York says cotton, says exploitative labor, says South.

That these histories of exploitation and complicity reemerge, with a shuffled set of variable, in narratives of twentieth-century African American migration isn't so remarkable then. Take, for instance, "City of Refuge"'s attitudes towards blackness and labor. As he moves through the streets of Harlem, Gillis's rural southern blackness makes him an easy mark: early on, he sidles up to Mouse Uggam, a character who uses a shared southernness—they both come from North Carolina—to gain Gillis's trust and then cons him into unwittingly fulfilling the distribution end of a drug ring. Unsurprisingly, the most "southern" body in this arrangement is saddled with the most dangerous, degraded task. When authorities break up the operation, Gillis ferociously resists arrest but is dumbfounded and stilled by the presence of a black detective. The narrative's brief, parting glance at Gillis's interior is telling: "Harlem. Land of plenty. City of refuge – city of refuge. If you live long enough . . ." (47). According to "City of Refuge," Harlem and the Jim Crow South stand toe-to-toe as exemplary modes of a sadly familiar form of American cynicism. Gillis may marvel at the possibilities of his new home but, in Uggam's eyes, he remains "a baby jess in from the land o cotton and so dumb he think antebellum's an old woman" (35),

an infantilized man with a comically distorted sense of history. The reference to cotton, of course, points to the deep ruts of the New York-South past, ruts that prove effective in tripping a twentieth-century black southerner like Gillis. In Rudolph Fisher's Harlem, it seems, the disadvantages of rural southern blackness either migrate along with the migrants, or they are discovered anew in a city that has always profited by them.

Walter White's essay "The Paradox of Color," a piece that appears alongside "City of Refuge" in *The New Negro*, explains that even though New York presents itself "as nearly an ideal place for colored people as exists in America," the city is still rife with "Southern whites who brought North with them their hatreds" and, even more pervasively, with oppressive attitudes about a "Negro who is either buffoon or a degenerate beast or a subservient lackey."[93] In White's eyes, the result is a defensive redoubt—the "definitely bounded city within a city" that is Harlem (364). But, according to Fisher, Harlem itself is not nearly impervious enough. As the narrator relates in a subtle shift into double-voiced discourse at the story's opening, "In Harlem, black was white." Black may be white, but the experience of King Solomon Gillis suggests that, in a system which mimics the hierarchical arrangement of the dominant culture, somebody still needs to be black—a fact that the story's persistent interest in the degrees of blackness makes clear: Uggam is described as a

[93] Although the exact number of white southern migrants in New York City during the period is difficult to gauge, James Gregory notes an even more revealing cultural marker—membership in the Daughters of the Confederacy. According to data compiled at the 1932 *Annual Convention of the Daughters of the Confederacy Incorporated*, New York had the third most members of any non-southern state, surpassed only by border-state Missouri and California (158). See United Daughters of the Confederacy, *Minutes of the Fiftieth Annual Convention of the Daughters of the Confederacy Incorporated Held in Memphis, Tennessee, November 15-19, 1932,* 333, 312.

"little yellow man" whose blackness, and southernness, fades as his authority seems to rise; the West Indian whom Gillis replaces as a grocery worker is "nigger" and "monkey chaser."

As it points out the impossibilities of arriving at a firm sense of what and how blackness signifies in this new urban/rural context, the story effectively deessentializes race in a way that is nearly Foucauldian in its acknowledgement of the connections between discourse and power: "black" becomes another technique, another microchannel in a flowing web of power. From this perspective at least, "City of Refuge" acts as a disruptive addition to the canons of the Harlem Renaissance: it's not a celebration of blackness; it's an evacuation of "blackness" as a unifying mechanism. The story's depiction of blackness as a "floating signifier" thus matches Stuart Hall's depiction of race as a category that operates much like language: it is most often learned and deployed somewhere below consciousness, and is easily slotted into hierarchical modes of thinking and difference-making. And while its meanings are always contestable, it is nevertheless capable of determining one's social reality. In this sense, beneath all of the story's talk of "refuge" and all of its images of black authority there ripple swift currents of raw power, political technologies waiting to be appropriated by the most resourceful subjects or groups.

As I mentioned before, Fisher's use of Harlem as a staging ground for the struggles of southern migrants isn't restricted to "City of Refuge" alone. Between 1925 and 1933, the author published a clutch of stories devoted to the experience of the new migrant in Harlem: "Ringtail" (1925), "The South Lingers On" (1925), "The Promised Land" (1927), "Ezekiel" (1932), and "Ezekiel Learns" (1933). Of these, "The Promised Land" and "The South Lingers On" join "City of Refuge" to forge a loose triptych of narratives that directly

confront the disillusionment and disenchantment that greeted many southern migrants upon their arrival in Harlem.

"The South Lingers On," a story altered slightly and retitled "Vestiges" for inclusion in *The New Negro*, offers subtle variations on the above-stated same themes. The narrative depicts the disorientation of a rural southern preacher, Ezekiel Taylor, adrift in Harlem, where his charismatic religiosity becomes a metonym for the back-home South at large. Like his biblical namesake, Taylor is exiled from his homeland and wandering, "walking slowly along 133rd Street, conspicuously alien." When "City of Refuge" makes use of Harlem's ability to impart prestige and authority to black subjects, like the traffic cop or the detectives that apprehend Gillis, "The South Lingers On" runs that same scenario backwards: Taylor, a respected religious authority back home, is recast as a comic figure of scorn and embarrassment, "the colored Santa Claus" (60). The preacher himself refutes any typology that would present the urban North as a Canaan: "The kingdom of Harlem. Children turned into mockers. Satan in the hearts of infants. Harlem—city of the devil—outpost of hell" (60). It would be easy to dismiss these as the musings of fusty old man if the story didn't provide a fully modeled demon to populate Taylor's hell: Reverend Shackleton Ealey operates as this text's Mouse Uggam-figure, the sharpie clergyman who fills his collection plate by camping out at Penn Station and ushering incoming migrants into his church.

For Ealey, Taylor represents "fertile soil," and in order to thicken his own flock, he provides the preacher a pulpit. It's a scheme that seems to be working, as Taylor's revival pulls the crowds to Ealey's church. When Lucky, a self-styled cynic who is himself the son of a southern preacher, runs with a group of young men bent on upstaging Taylor's revival, he

is startled at his response to the proceedings: "Dam' 'f I know what it is—maybe because it makes me think of the old folks or somethin' . . . it just sorter—gets me" (37). The South clearly does linger on, particularly in that most intimate of all "Souths," the individual consciousness. Yet, above all else, this is an argument based upon phenomenological accounts of place—the South lingers on not simply in the consciousness, then, but more specifically in affect, in an emotional register that is, as Lucky describes it, just beyond the reach of reason. The region—and its associations with the people and places of the past—becomes intelligible to Lucky only through accessing a kind of memory of feelings, feelings that he never knew he had.

Like "City of Refuge," "The Promised Land" works to ironize the notion of Harlem as a sanctuary for African Americans disfranchised by Jim Crow in the South by highlighting the conflicts that greet three different kinds of southern migrants, all bound by blood and a shared apartment: Mammy, the pious old grandmother who is convinced of Harlem's essential sinfulness; her grandson, Sam, who is an able mechanic and makes a steady living in Harlem; her other grandson, Wesley, Sam's less capable cousin who struggles to find work.[94] The two young men compete for a woman named Ellie, who is this story's hardened Mouse Uggam, and its major movement is catalyzed when, through her window,

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[94] The biblical resonance of these stories is difficult to miss: "City of Refuge" alludes to the six cities in the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel that extended asylum to people—like *King Solomon* Gillis—who had committed manslaughter. Of course, Gillis may be off the hook for killing a southern policeman but he's saddled with a whole other set of problems in the urban North. And the Promised Land offered as a home to Israel in exile becomes a narrow space of confinement, unrest, and violence for African American exiles in Fisher's "The Promised Land."

Mammy spies Wesley and Sam fighting over Ellie at a rent party. She intervenes by throwing her Bible through the neighboring window. In contrast to "City of Refuge," the latent psychic violence of migration is actualized in "The Promised Land," and Harlem itself arrives as the corrupting influence: "the city had done something to Wesley and Sam" (80), the text warns. If the character of the city itself is a corrupter, then Ellie is corruption's purest embodiment. When Mammy urges Ellie to choose between Wesley and Sam, Ellie's response uncovers something of the rift that divides recent migrants and more established Harlemites: "D' you s'pose I'm chasin' after your farmer boys? . . . Pity you old handkerchief heads would n' stay down South where you belong" (84). Towards the end of the exchange, the narrator reveals Ellie's motivations: "Both the bumpkins spent on her. Why reduce her chances for a good time by making a betraying choice?" (83). This scene offers another variation on Fisher's common theme: for Harlem veterans like Ellie, newcomers from the South are only worthwhile to the extent that they are exploitable, and capable of granting her access to the city's consumptive wonders. For unsuspecting subjects like Wesley and Sam, though, there's no clear path to stability and acceptance.

The story's narrative succinctness is matched by its thematic interest in limited opportunities, as well as its tight geographic scope: the whole of the action occurs within the family's cramped apartment and so every corner of the space becomes an essential variable in the text's economy of action. Unsurprisingly, then, the most prominent feature of the apartment—an airshaft—ends up with a major role at the story's climax when the cousins come to blows and Wesley is pushed across its threshold and down to his death.

Given its portentous function in "The Promised Land, " it's worthwhile to consider the multiple meanings bound up in the Harlem airshaft. According to Luc Sante's survey of

life along the margins in early-twentieth-century New York, most airshafts ventilating the tenement apartments that sprung up in Harlem of the 1920s were barely adequate to their task, and often posed more problems than they solved, blocking light and serving as convenient dumping grounds (40). Yet in Fisher's mind, the airshaft provided a sensory link to the sounds and smells of the larger community. It acts as a portal syncing the inhabitants of individual apartments to the pulse of the larger community, in all its diversity; it's the stream that carries the sonic and olfactory detritus of the neighborhood, as we see in his 1919 speech "The Emancipation of Science":

> Come into one of the old apartment houses and you will observe all the hubbub of a Harlem airshaft—three player pianos and six radios out-crying each other, liver and onions sputtering, cabbage and chitterlings bubbling and smelling, a couple exchanging compliments, a neglected baby wailing, blues-hymns—a girl weeping heartbrokenly. (330)

This tapestry of smells and sounds, the sensory footprint of Harlem, becomes indivisible from its larger political and social goals of unity through diversity. It points up the free and open exchange present in a patchwork collective of black subjects occupying their most celebrated environment. In the sensoriums of its inhabitants, the vibrant phenomenology of this place is thus indistinguishable from its social and cultural purposes.

Another Harlem modernist of great sophistication, Duke Ellington, extolled the airshaft in one his most noted compositions, the aptly titled "Harlem Air Shaft" (1940). In 1944, for an extensive profile in the *New Yorker*, Ellington presents his song as an example

of program music that reveals the texture and tone of life in African America, offering an account of the airshaft's significance that is strikingly similar to Fisher's in its focus on sights, sounds, and smells:

> So much goes on in a Harlem air shaft. You get the full essence of Harlem in an air shaft. You hear fights, you smell dinner, you hear people making love. You hear intimate gossip floating down. You hear the radio. An air shaft is one great big loudspeaker. You see your neighbor's laundry. . . . An air shaft has got every contrast. . . .You hear people praying, fighting, snoring. (qtd. in Boyer 34)

What Fisher labels the community's "hubbub," Ellington calls the "full essence of Harlem."[95] But the account in "The Emancipation of Science" hits so many of the same notes as Ellington that we might use Ellington's language to reimagine Wesley's fate, such that it's easy enough to see him as a country boy who is, quite literally, swallowed whole by the essence of Harlem.

In the story's final scene, the text completes its revision of the airshaft's function as community conduit with a parting vignette that concludes the story where it began, with Mammy staring out the window holding a Bible in her lap, ruminating on her new world:

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[95] According to Tuan, the whole concern of phenomenology is this very idea of "essences." See Tuan, "Geography, Phenomenology, and the Study of Human Nature." *Canadian Geographer.* 15.3 (1971): 181-92.

> Out of the airshaft sounds came to her, sounds of the land of promise. Noise of a rent party somewhere below. . . . Noise of a money quarrel somewhere above, charges, taunts, disputes—fruit of a land where sudden wide differences in work and pay summoned disaster. Noise of sinful singing and dancing, pastime of Ellie's generation, breed of a city where children cursed and threatened the old and went free. (88)

The airshaft may well be the most immediate gateway to the sounds and smells of the neighborhood, but in places such as Mammy's Harlem, all it brings is "charges, taunts, disputes," unwanted noise and painful reminders of the consequences of a system that "quickly estranged" her two grandsons "simply by paying the one twice as much as the other" (81). While Fisher's speech in 1919 embraced the unfiltered environment provided by the airshaft, his fiction of 1927 becomes decidedly more skeptical. The story's final chord lays a melancholy overtone atop Fisher's earlier celebration of the airshaft and Harlem's potential as a closely quartered, tight-knit community. Intimacy has collapsed into claustrophobia; the smells and sounds of the neighborhood now signal suffocation. And the story reveals a situation in which a character like Mammy can inhabit the cultural center and still be left behind. Where the labor systems of the rural South were obviously perverse, Mammy's Harlem follows the hard line of U.S. capitalism by using compensation and reward as a subtler—if no less damaging—fulcrum for segregating its inhabitants. Patricia Yaeger's interest in the "throwaway bodies whose loss hovers in the margins of pre- and post- World War II American culture" provides a useful model here for analyzing the effects of a strictly market-oriented capitalist regime in which anyone who is underpaid becomes a "nobody," a disposable person who doesn't matter enough to be abject, to carry

a social or cultural charge (63). This is an accurate description of Mammy, of course, but it applies with special force to Wesley, who is literally thrown into the airshaft trash heap.

In each of these stories, Fisher's harsh portrait of Harlem offers an uncertain configuration of the meanings of the New Negro, since his sense of the new is indebted to the fundamental violence undergirding Hegel's notion of synthesis: the process of creating requires that something already in existence must be destroyed.[96] In some sense, Fisher's work seeks to answer an existential question famously posed by Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Although Rushdie's novel arrived more than a half century after Fisher's work, and is more specifically interested in the experience of transplanted Indians in England, its concern for the dislocation and violence of creation feels appropriate to Fisher's migration stories.

How does newness come into the world? How is it born?

[96] Joseph Tschumpeter coined the phrase "creative destruction" as an extrapolation of Marx's interest in capitalism's tendency to manufacture obsolescence as it creates new markets. See Tschumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* ([1950] New York: Harper Perennial, 2008). A variety of thinkers have since adapted Tschumpeter's model. For David Harvey and Marshall Berman, this account of economic history offers an important optic for reading twentieth-century capitalism's uneven developments and its economic casualties. See Harvey's discussion of Tschumpeter in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 16-18, and Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1992), 98-104. Manuel Castells considers how the concept adjusts to the rise of a society and an economy dependent on "informational networks." See, for instance, his account of the financial crisis faced by the electronics industry in the 1980s in *The Informational City: Economic Restructuring and Urban Development* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), 120-21.

Of what fusions, translations, conjoining is it made?

How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is? (8)

In representing the process by which the New Negro comes into being, Fisher highlights the turbulence, and the causalities, that accompany these New York "translations": Ezekiel, Wesley, Mammy, King Solomon Gillis—all undone, and recycled, by the forces that breed newness. Specifically, Wesley's transformation into refuse, via his fatal trip through the airshaft, seems to complete a circuit that begins in "City of Refuge," when Gillis feels "dumped" into Harlem along with the other raw materials from which the city is endlessly remade, and these tropes of dumping, salvage, and regeneration direct us to the human infrastructure of urban modernity. The "City of Refuge" thus doubles as a city of refuse.

In her account of African American narratives of migration and travel, Toni Morrison writes convincingly of the trope of the ancestor. These figures are, in Morrison's words, "sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom" (343). Griffin makes Morrison's ancestors a central feature of her analysis, and expands the concept to include forms of expression associated with black vernacular culture, such as cooking, music, and dance. In these fictions of Fisher's, however, the support network that is supposed to extend out from the "ancestor" break down. The ancestors are obsolescents: they are mocked and manipulated, like Ezekiel; ignored and scorned, like Mammy. For Griffin, the ancestors work to "soften the impact of urbanization" (5). No such luck in Fisher. The "new negro" in this fiction must pass through a bumpy channel shaped by an unresolved series of tensions—urban, rural, northern, southern, traditional, modern, religious, impious. And his

guide to the new environment and to a more fully realized sense of blackness is more likely a con artist than a concerned compatriot.

Quoting Morrison, Rodgers makes a similar point about the tragic absence of ancestors in his reading of "City of Refuge" but he is less interested in what their absent presence in the text means for its representations of Harlem or its role in the formation of the New Negro. Rodgers's concern would be even better directed at "The Promised Land" and "The South Lingers On," where all traces of the old are discarded, and the characters that fail to adapt to the ethos of the city are simply overrun. Wesley of "The Promised Land" is just the most obvious example: the story makes clear that, unlike his cousin Sam, Wesley is not an efficient contributor to the networks of consumption and production essential to the urban experience. Where Sam is good with his hands, draws a salary, and cycles more capital back into the economy, Wesley skirts along the edges of penury. It's not necessarily the case that Sam has more skillfully adopted the cultural codes of Harlem—both cousins seem well-versed in the hip patois of their new neighborhood; it's that he has figured out a clearer path towards "productivity." Fisher's take on migration thus stands as a clear-eyed recognition of the consequences of the attitudes expressed in Johnson's *Black Manhattan*: the most desirable migrants are those that have made themselves amenable to capitalism and, in doing so, have created greater distance between themselves and slavery. In others words, the satire of Fisher's stories is aimed at a system that reserves its rewards for those who can contribute to the modern economy, an economy that exists as both the ethos and the logic of the city. That's not to say that the rural South exists outside the realm of capitalism's influence; it's simply an acknowledgement that the freedoms Harlem extends are all contingent, and one of the chief determinants of that contingency is the kind of labor

one performs. Mammy's services as a caretaker are outmoded; Ezekiel's preaching provides the regional magnet for homesick migrants but he is unknowingly aligned with a corrupt church; Gillis makes a good drug mule in Harlem and not much else; Wesley is clumsy with his hands and can't secure a permanent position.

Jolene Hubbs' thinking about the "rural modernism" of Faulkner's fiction offers a strategy for reading Fisher's characters' inability to adapt to their new urban environment. Writing about *As I Lay Dying*, Hubbs describes a "perennial obsolescence: a theory that poor whites are seen not in terms of certain practices and objects that might be outmoded but rather as uniformly and perpetually archaic" (464); they demonstrate a strangely ontological obsolescence. Although her analysis focuses exclusively on the experience of poor white southerners, it's a short step to apply it to rural blacks in the city as well. Mouse Uggam, for example, is also a southern migrant to New York but his experience with Gillis suggests that the space itself grants a kind of provisional authority to the most thoroughly urbanized, the most fully assimilated to the attitudes and standards of capitalism-as-modernity. As a reflection of—and, perhaps, a contributor to—the effects of modernity, Fisher's take on a violently divisive Harlem uncovers the paradox whereby discourses of New Negro newness emerge as differently veiled versions of the same old story.

Speaking Up South:

Zora Neale Hurston and the Language of the Urban Folk

Hurston's "Story in Harlem Slang" is, as the title suggests, transparently about language: its explorations of dialect provide a plank upon which the frictions of migration and expressions of migratory modernism are staged. And it's this emphasis on language,

perhaps, that compels the arc of the story to remain fairly low: the main character, Jelly, is a recent transplant from Alabama; he's drifting in Harlem, often hungry, and lonely. After meeting up with a friend, Sweet Back, he plays a round of the dozens before trying to pick up a woman. Rejected and dejected, the story ends by taking us into Jelly's head for a nostalgic reverie: "Jelly's thoughts were far away. He was remembering those full, hot meals he had left back in Alabama to seek wealth and splendor in Harlem without working. He had even forgotten to look cocky and rich" (133). Somehow in this performance the message becomes the medium, as the story's representations of black vernacular's intricacies acts as another way of highlighting both language's slipperiness and its essential role in the formation of identity.

It's also difficult not to see Hurston's training as an anthropologist in the story's ethnographic interests: there's a sense in which these performances of dialect, appearing in the high-minded *American Mercury* of the early 1940s, are designed as an insider's glimpse into an African American subculture. More specifically, the story stages experiments in Harlem jive, an argot invented by Harlem's zoot-suiters and beboppers, at the same time as its glossary participates in an impulse to provide jive a meaningful, and perhaps legitimizing, lexicography. (This is, coincidentally, the same impulse that guided Cab Calloway's *Hepster's Dictionary: Language of Jive* (1939) and Dan Burley's *Original Handbook of Harlem Jive* (1944).)

I argue that the "Story in Harlem Slang" is also a story of South-North migration that uses Harlem slang to dramatize the emotional and psychological effects of relocation. In the story, jive becomes an appropriate reflection of the divided interiors of the story's characters, often by drawing out the presence of rurality in their highly stylized "urban"

modes of expression. As if to emphasize the divisiveness of these interior divisions, "Harlem Slang" never offers any substantive example of successful communication-via-language: language, even when celebrated as a ritual of African American sovereignty, does little to alleviate the overwhelming mood of alienation that pervades the narrative. And yet, when considering the ways in which the story models larger patterns of rural-urban/South-North migration, it's clear that language is the current that carries the two opposing charges—urban and rural—providing a venue for incidents of collision, of dialogue, of synthesis.

Never published commercially until the release of Hurston's *Complete Stories* in 1995, "Now You Cookin' with Gas" is essentially the same story with a few minor, but telling, differences. For one thing, "Harlem Slang" suggests that Jelly migrated out of ambition, to style himself as a New Negro and to get a new line of work. According to Jelly, he had to leave to get away from wiles of southern white women: "I had to leave from down south 'cause Miss Anne used to worry me so bad to go with me" (130). "Now You Cookin' with Gas," however, sharpens the critique, by making plain the links between the attention of white women and violence only hinted at in "Harlem Slang": "Mister Charlie down there plays too rough to suit me," Jelly explains. "I ain't none of them cowards like them shines down in Bam. I'm *mean!* . . . I just come on off to keep from killing somebody" (238). To emphasize the point, we learn in "Cookin'" that Jelly's counterpart Sweet Back has actually killed somebody, a white police officer in Georgia. In "Story in Harlem Slang," the threat of black-on-white violence is less pronounced, eliding an idea that both "City of Refuge" and "Now You Cookin' with Gas" rely upon: the creation of a sovereign identity depends upon violent encounter. And as in Fisher, the creation of something new is only accomplished

through the destruction of something else, a form of murder as ontogenesis. But the story is also deeply concerned with what happens when the residue of the destroyed element—in this case, the trappings and shadings of Jelly's rural past—can't be scrubbed out, when newness is made old again, or when oldness is revealed to be intrinsic and internal to the new.

In contrast to "City of Refuge," "Cookin'" relays the information about Sweet Back's violence through the mouth of its characters, not the voice of the narrator. In other words, Sweet Back receives no corroboration from either the narrator or any of the story's other characters. This is not to call into question his account, exactly, but it does present a picture of the essential role that language plays in the construction of a public self and a public history, especially in a social milieu characterized by mobility. Lacking *author*itative confirmation from a narrator, it seems as if language's most important function is as a means of establishing identity, of writing into existence one's own history, of performing a newly formed self.

These new selves, of course, are not simply formed. Practices of self-fashioning in these urban-based stories intersect in intriguing ways with their evocations of the folk, and with the stories' larger attempts to locate the expressive grammar of a kind of urban folklore. At the outset here, it's necessary to recognize that "folk" is most frequently a categorical imposition, foisted on subjects, situations, and performances from the outside, and that it is routinely associated with rurality.[97] As Kenneth Warren and Adolph Reed

[97] For instance, Hazel Carby's seminal *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) frequently makes "folk"

remind us, the whole concept of the "folk" and its relation to the experiences of black subjects "emerged within the elite discourse that evolved between the second half of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth" (viii). When discussing African Americans from the rural South during the New Negro period, it's plain that the "folk" acts as an effective—and interrelated—construct in that it points out a subject's orientation to modern projects of standardization and categorization.[98] Yet to the anthropological mind at least, once something is self-consciously presented as "folk" it is no longer authentic. The result is a peculiar double-bind for African American subjects: you can't really embrace the folk, and neither can you avoid its force, a force that is, not surprisingly, exercised by arbiters of cultural capital. Walter Benn Michaels gets at this problem in his discussion of the nativist/pluralist paradox: When speaking of national identity, it's clear that there is a "disconnection of one's culture from one's actual beliefs and practices. Pluralism makes this disconnection possible by *deriving* one's beliefs and practices *from* one's cultural identity instead of *equating* one's beliefs and practices *with* one's cultural identity" (15). In other words, this issue of the folk highlights the need to aspire to *have* a culture that is already supposed to be a fundamental element of your ethnic *identity*. And intentionally or

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synonymous with rural. See especially her discussion of Hurston and Nella Larsen in the chapter titled "The Quicksand of Representation," 163-76.

[98] Relating the arrival of "folk" to discourses of the modern, Robin Kelley forcefully claims that "'folk' has no meaning without 'modern.' Unless we deconstruct the terms 'folk' and 'authentic' . . . and see 'modern' and 'traditional' as mutually constitutive and constituting, we will miss the dynamic process by which culture is created" (1402). Robin D. G. Kelley, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Folk,'" *American Historical Review* 97.5 (December 1992): 1400-1408.

not, the restricting power that the folk can create provides a mechanism for limiting mobility, for circumscribing the parameters of acceptable expression.

Hurston seems to understand precisely how complicated these issues of insider/outsider can be. As a member of the literary and the anthropological elite and as an African American who migrated to Harlem from rural Florida, Hurston positions herself carefully both *as* a writer and *through* her writing, and she sought out fiction as a space in which to explore her insider status. This is one explanation for why "Harlem Slang" aims for complete fusion of the written and oral, refusing to bracket off its transcriptions of slang's non-standard English to the characters alone: the narrator itself speaks a version of black vernacular—"Wait till I light up my coalpot and I'll *tell* you about Zigaboo called Jelly" (127, emphasis mine). It's a situation of total saturation, as every textual utterance—those of the narrator and each of the individual characters—is made in Harlem slang.

While the exact terms of their dissent are mostly unstated, all of the voices present in "Harlem Slang" pursue distinctive modes of expression to distinguish themselves from the world outside of Harlem, a world that includes not just dominant forces of whiteness but also versions of rural southern blackness as well. Eric Lott makes the case that bebop jargon "bucked the conventions of articulateness" ("Double V" 245), and it's clear from Hurston's fictions that the speakers of Harlem slang were working to "make it new" at the level of diction, syntax, and grammar—they inhabit the sound of their new environment as an essential opportunity to self-consciously perform the urban modern.

Both stories emphasize the role of language in strategies of selfhood of the kind utilized by rural migrants struggling to establish themselves in the new environment of the urban North. If language serves as the most prominent means of lining up a subject's

interior world with the world outside the self, it also promises access to the slippage between outward selves and inward selves. Although both stories are related through an omniscient, third-person narrator, the sustained exploration of free indirect discourse in "Cookin'" provides deeper penetration into the mind of the story's subject and underscores the ways in which the text's spoken language engages with Jelly's internal dialogue. The presence of this narrative technique in the stories matches a series of observations made by Henry Louis Gates Jr. about Hurston's narration in *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* In addition to asserting that Hurston is responsible for "introduc[ing] free indirect discourse into Afro-American narration," Gates sees Hurston's use of the narratological style as a "third or mediating term between narrative commentary and direct discourse," a move that renders the novel capable of "resolv[ing] that implicit tension between standard English and black dialect" (191-92).

It also points out the unsteady relationship between the narrator's language and the internal divide of Jelly's public voice over against his private one as these stories foreground the psychological turbulence of the recently arrived migrant. For instance, the narrator's evocation of rustic images such as "branch water" and "[g]ood Southern cornbread" move in opposition to Jelly's continual efforts to distance himself from his southern roots (128, 129). And it's not just the narrator: "Oh, don't try to make out youse no northerner, you! Youse from right down in 'Bam your ownself" (132), the girl tells Jelly when he seems to be putting on urban airs. In a similar way, Sweet Back's final shot at the girl directly alludes to familiar figures and forms of rurality: "I'll tell you like the farmer told the potato—plant you now and dig you later" (133).

In the glossary of "Harlem Slang," we find further examples of how different phrases and words create new meanings when read, misread or translated across regions: "*Boogie-woogie*," for instance, is defined as "a type of dancing and rhythm" but "[f]or years, in the South," the glossary explains, "it meant secondary syphilis" (134)—the "South" here acts as the signal of a more conservative sensibility that draws out the perceived ties between lasciviousness and dancing, and those meanings are an essential entry in the word's semantic genealogy. Consciously or not, then, at some level you can't boogie-woogie without calling up the nimbus of secondary syphilis. Similarly, the glossary explains "*Sugar Hill*" as a reference to the hightoned "northwest sector of Harlem" but also notes that the "expression has been distorted in the South to mean a Negro red light district" (137). Distortions and deferred meanings are thus a key feature of "Harlem Slangs"'s archaeology of Harlem slang.

While this technique of using words to unintentionally sign the rural South pulls some attention away from the expressive distinctiveness of Harlem slang, it does a better job of highlighting the psychic dimensions of the migrant's experience of crafting a new identity. Again, readers are allowed to test the correspondence between the voice inside and the voice outside, uncovering a paradox whereby language is both an immediate and an unreliable means of means of constructing the self. Just like projections of identity made through clothing or physical gesture, language is frequently intractable: a speaker is always in danger of unintentionally betraying herself, of pushing up against the boundaries of selfhood, both those imposed from within and those imposed from the outside—as Jelly provocatively warns Sweet Back, "You fixing to *talk out of place*" (130, emphasis mine).

Yet what is this story if not an exploration of the thrills and conflicts that attend to the practice of "talking out of place"? Jelly and Sweetback's whole experiment with language is an attempt to "talk" themselves out of the rural South, using language as a protean tool for becoming someone, and inhabiting someplace, new. As William Labov's study of "black English vernacular" of the inner cities shows, however, these new language-formed personae will inevitably stand as strange blends of the familiar and the unfamiliar: "Almost every feature of BEV can be found among white speakers in the South" (8). And so it's not just traces of the South or of the rural but also whiteness that characterize the speech of the New Negro, an elaboration on W. J. Cash's famous statement, made a year after the publication of "Harlem Slang," on the interdependence of an (often unconsciously) shared expressive culture: "Negro entered white man as profoundly as white man entered into Negro—subtly influencing every gesture, every word, every emotion and idea, every attitude" (49-50). In Huston's stories, instances of cross-regional, cross-racial contact remain as immediate—and as intimate—as a person's diction and syntax.

The jive argot bears a halo of transgression, and yet, in "Harlem Slang" at least, its innovations can never equal transformation. Still, it's worth a try. For instance, language's role in the creative destruction of the personal identity is made obvious in the story's description of Jelly's name-changing episode: "His mama named him Marvel, but after a month on Lennox Avenue, he changed all that to Jelly"(127). Changed "all that"? The story goes to great lengths to show how inconsequential Jelly's changes have been: he has picked up some new patterns of speech, some new clothes, and a new vocabulary of gestures (the "pimps' salute" ("Cookin'" 241), but the linguistic sign of his proper name is only a "serviceable 'metonymic contraction,'" to cite Gayatri Spivak's gloss of Derrida (liv). Where

his former name, Marvel, pointed towards something reverent and vaguely spiritual, his new name is frankly vulgar: Hurston's glossary presents "jelly" as a euphemism for sex. This act of adopting another name offers a glimpse of the creative destruction of newness: the new name is installed over the erasure of the old one. But this is a decidedly incomplete exercise of destruction: Jelly can change his name, and by doing so he can make minor adjustments to the terms in which he perceived, but the language in his mind shows us that he has simply discovered a new way to talk about the same old problems—loneliness, isolation, material deprivation.

When Jelly's thoughts drift to the South at the story's conclusion, with a homesick reminiscence over "those full, hot meals he had left back in Alabama," the narrator points out a crack in the composition of his carefully groomed identity, a disparity between his public performance and some inner connection to the spaces and histories he came North to escape: "[h]e had even forgotten to *look* cocky and rich" (133, emphasis mine). The importance of looking cocky and rich takes its place alongside sounding cocky and rich as a key component in Jelly's creation of a new northern self. But there's always the disruptive trace of a suppressed history lingering just beneath the surface.

Jelly's reverie takes him out of the temporality of the city, back in both place and time, calling attention to what Leigh Anne Duck, writing of Hurston, calls the "paradoxical nature of modern time," an experience of time that "may be understood to be uniform across space, [though] not all subjects in all spaces are understood to participate in it uniformly." Duck's larger point relates to ways in which the South of the New Negro period seems to exist in both a "different developmental era and a different experiential temporality" (117). In the context of these stories, it's also important to consider how these

alternate, seemingly antimodern temporalities stand as internal to "modern" time's structure and functioning. This is why the intrusions of a suppressed history can never be escaped for Huston's characters, and it also acts a partial explanation for modernity's uneven developments.

While "Harlem Slang" ends with the line about forgetting to look "cocky and rich," "Cookin'" pushes further into Jelly's mind, representing a second sound to Jelly's voice. The dialogue flutters between the narrator's observations and direct access to Jelly's thoughts: "[T]hese Harlem landladies! They didn't want a thing out of you but your rent," Jelly grumbles, to himself, in a series of complaints that includes reference to the strictness of northern whites and the coldness of northern women. Although there's indication that Jelly would actually trade his current position for his former one, the story's deep ambiguity about both Harlem and the South presents a more resonant representation of the deeply planted problems of black migration in the modern era. While Michael North's reading of Hurston scrutinizes the tensions between "folk" language and the discourses of modernism, his analysis applies with equal force to the "divisions" between urbanity and rurality that manifest in these stories' language: "Hurston does not reconcile or celebrate the divisions within her text or within the African American folk texts she found in her travels. Instead she utterly redefines these divisions" (185). In both "Cookin'" and "Harlem Slang," Hurston redefines divisions between rural southern blacks and those from the north by showing the extent to which the dialogue between the rural South and the urban North is played out in a common vernacular, the insider's jargon of urban jive. And, tellingly, this is a dialogue that is internal to, and constitutive of, the migrant subject—and the modern urban world itself.

One way to configure the confluence of urban and rural discourses on display in these stories is to notice the overlap between Hurston's Harlem slang and what Debra DeSalvo calls the "language of the blues," since the blues, even the deepest country blues, bears the influence of cultural collaboration between the country and the city.[99] It is a form of expression rooted in the material struggles of African Americans in the South, and raised up by a spirit of resistance and relocation. Although his book *A World Elsewhere* mostly covers American writers from the late nineteenth century, Richard Poirier frames his conversation according to a "modernist impulse" whereby his subjects "resist . . . the forces of environment that otherwise dominate their world" (5). In other words, this search for a place to escape to, a world elsewhere or a world else*when,* is a typically modernist gesture, and one that is everywhere present in the blues. In drawing attention to the modern individual's resistance of the dominant culture, Poirier helps to chart the development of a fractured, alienated aesthetic so commonly recognized in modern artists and subjects—but it's a chart with wide applications. Writing specifically of blues artists and the worlds they represent, Paul Oliver makes a similar point when he configures the blues as an idiom

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[99] See DeSalvo, *The Language of the Blues: From Alcorub to Zuzu* (New York: Billboard Books, 2006). For more on idioms of African American speech, see Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin' and Testifyin': The Language of Black America* (Detroit: Wayne State U, 1986). The most penetrating reading of Hurston and the blues comes from Adam Gussow's *Seems Like Murder Here*. But Gussow's focus is mostly trained on Hurston's encounters with "blues culture" in the U.S. South and beyond. I'm more concerned with the points of linguistic contact that exist between blues idioms and the vernacular of Hurston's imagined Harlem. See Gussow, *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002).

driven by a "dream of escape" (45). More specifically, the blues' interests in traveling, in going home or missing it, in escape or confinement, operate as both response and fulfillment of this tendency.

In a similar vein, Leroi Jones identifies the Great Migration, a uniquely African American search for the "Promised Land, another Jordan," as a key determinant in the shape and character of the music. "It was the same kind of human 'movement' that made jazz and classic blues possible" (96), Jones explains. For Griffin, the issue is even clearer: "The blues provides an excellent metaphor for what happens to the migrants when they arrive in the city" (52). Movement, particularly along an axis binding the country and the city, stands as a key component of both African American history and, consequently, the history of the blues. The music, much like Hurston's Harlem slang, metaphorizes the dislocation of the migrant experience just as its metaphors image a world in which the rural and the urban endlessly collide.

The circuits cross naturally then. When Sweet Back taunts Jelly with the question, "What you doing cold in hand?" (129), he's referencing a figure of speech immortalized in a recording made famous by an earlier pair of southern transplants. In 1925, Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong entered a New York City studio to record "Cold in Hand Blues," a weary lament of both economic and sexual impotence. Elsewhere, the reference to the mythic "suburb of Hell" Diddy-Wah-Diddy recalls Blind Blake's 1928 recording, "Diddie Wa Diddie," which wonders aloud about the inexpressible essence that is "diddie wa diddie": "I wish somebody'd tell me what Diddie Wa Diddie means." The stream of images flows into the future as well: in the opening paragraph, the narrator describes Jelly as "solid built for speed" (127), a phrase leveraged by Willie Dixon in his 1959 piece "Built for Comfort." My

purpose in noting these parallels is to show that while the stories make the claim that there are modes of discourse coded urban, it also shows how the language of the city is pocketed with rural figures and images. The two forms are invisibly braided together, and Harlem slang, it turns out, is always-already infused with the sounds of the South and, inevitably, the sounds of the country.

In her response to Hurston's work, Hazel Carby prominently argues that scholarly interest in Hurston's representations of African American rurality threatens to construe expressions of the "folk" as the most representative mode of blackness. As Carby describes it, prevailing wisdom about the Harlem Renaissance tells of how "black intellectuals assertively established a folk heritage as the source of, and inspiration for, authentic African American art forms" (30). This becomes a problem when the centering of rural-based epistemologies offers critics and thinkers a convenient opportunity to sidestep the vexing sociological problems of black urban life in the present day. With its New York City setting and commitment to investigating the material conflicts of that space, "Story in Harlem Slang" complicates Carby's analysis by relocating folk tropes to an urban environment. And, through the prism of "Harlem Slang" and "Cookin'" at least, Hurston's evocations of the folk seem more pliant, more flexibly planted in southern regionalisms than many critics have recognized. For in addition to her interest in the cultures of the rural South, Hurston is also committed to the documenting iterations of the *urban* folk, suggesting that the urban is always in part constituted by the rural: rural subject, signifiers, affects, intensities, and histories are all on display in the bodies and words of the stories' migrants. Hurston thus provides an uneasy synthesis that troubles the automatic and ironclad associations of "the South" and "the folk." While "Harlem Slang" and "Cookin'" are

at odds with the suggestion that the simplest way to signal one's identity as a New Negro is to adopt the patterns of its "official" language, they both understand the interdependence of signifiers that migration creates between the North and the South, a dialogue that echoes in the minds of its participants.

To say that these stories simply celebrate the rural South at their conclusions is to miss their plain evocations of the region's violence and oppression. Hurston's oft vaunted optimism, on display both here and elsewhere in her oeuvre, is duly noted. But beneath this story's slightly whimsical tone, there stirs a nagging problem: Jelly is hungry, and there's no clear path forward that promises a lasting solution. These stories' willingness to implicate both North and South in this pattern pushes the story out beyond any regional frame; they sign most prominently as a condemnation of a national paradox: if you're black in America, you can't go home again but neither can you go away. In other words, you're *always* "home," it's just that home is a hostile rather than nurturing environment.

My model of migratory modernism suggests that acts of dislocation and relocation, and the figures that engage in these acts, serve as useful metaphors for the modern more broadly since they give body to the modernist notion of the self out of place. Ultimately, when migratory modernism as a matter of figurative representation crosses paths with historical realities of the Great Migration, we're forced to consider how African American migrants in the period balanced the meanings and associations of opposing spaces and opposing identities, in particular the rural South alongside the urban North. To be perceived as black in America is to struggle with—or against—an inheritance of rural southern blackness, just as to speak in Harlem slang is to sound with the voice of the blues, since Harlem slang, like the style of Harlem living adopted by southern migrants, is shaped

and shaded by the histories of African America in the South. And it signals the ways in which the blues, as a genre and as a commodity, was always a collaboration between rural expressive traditions and urban capital and technology. While there's no escaping the southern cadences creeping around the edges of Hurston's Harlem slang, this is more broadly true even for black subjects lacking a concrete connection to the U.S. South since one outcome of the cultural project of displacing national racism on the South alone has been to force all "black" people in the U.S. to answer to the call of southern histories of racial violence and oppression. If migration to the North is at once a symbolic and an embodied rejection of the southern horrors of Jim Crow apartheid and slavery, it's understandable that African Americans in the North might exhibit an aversion to things southern and rural. Yet, as each of these stories displays, what amounts to a rejection of a national history of racial oppression also results in further marginalization of black persons born in the South.

In the end, to consider figurations of the rural modern via migratory modernism is to confront ways of formulating African American mobility, which turns out to be an essential problem in the Jim Crow era and beyond—from Homer Plessy's 1892 trip in the whites-only passenger car of the East Louisiana Railroad on to Rosa Parks's efforts to scramble Montgomery's strictly segregated buses on to present practices of racial profiling and mandatory minimum sentencing. (Perhaps it's no coincidence that Plessy's trip occurred in 1892, two years past the starting line for this study, and Parks made her first attempt in 1943, two years in advance of its finish line.) Still, for African Americans in the Jim Crow South, mobility and the ability to search out a world elsewhere is often elusive, as familiar white discourse about keeping African Americans "in their place" reveals the

dominant culture's anxieties over losing a cheap, and often disposable, labor source. David Harvey's thinking about the effects of immobility offers some insight into what's at stake in the transformative movements of the migrant: "Once intergenerational mobility is limited, social distinctions become relatively fixed features of the social landscape and provide the possibility for the crystallization of social differentiation within the population as a whole" (117). Yet while it's easy to simplistically associate the folk with immobility ("rootedness"), as with an authentic linguistic/vernacular stability, fluidity in each domain (spatial mobility, linguistic slipperiness) actually functions as a "modern" asset that the folk already possess. So both the mobility *and* the comprehensive attempt to fix mobility act as modern phenomena, revealing the same tangle of contradictions and mixtures that characterize the experiences of the migrants in Hurston's stories and their innovative language.

II. Old is New Again:

White Migration Narratives, New York, and the New South

In tracking literary representations of the Great Migration, it's possible to wonder how and why only African American subjects come under scrutiny. The relative scarcity of interest in the experience of white subjects leaving the rural South promotes a mistaken belief that African Americans were the only ones making their way North in significant numbers. In his recent work, James Gregory is at pains to show that this simply isn't the case, as white migration in the period poses a widely underrepresented aspect of a broad movement that he calls the "southern diaspora." According to Gregory, even during "the Great Migration era of the early twentieth century, when African Americans moved North for the first time

in large numbers and established much-noticed communities in the major cities, less-noticed white southerners actually outnumbered them roughly two to one" (16).[100]

The question, then, is why the uneven proportion of fictions addressing these migrations? African American literature is filled with accounts of southern migrants moving to the industrial North but a broader survey of the literature from the period reveal relatively few texts that describe white subjects' experience with relocation. One obvious reason is that black migrants leaving the South were cutting themselves loose from the homeland of slavery and Jim Crow, an experience that heightens the stakes considerably. Rural white southerners certainly had hardships and prejudices to flee but the crushing networks of discrimination and exploitation simply weren't as dramatic. Likewise, another possibility is that there's no white parallel for the formation of a liberated black intelligentsia seeking to represent the complex drama of a race's urban transformation. Also, black subjects arriving in northern cities—even cities featuring greater diversity than

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[100] When considering the sweep of the entire twentieth century, the proportions are even more lopsided: "close to 8 million black southerners, nearly 20 million white southerners, and more than 1 million southern-born Latino southerners participated in the diaspora" (16). On a more micro level, James Cobb discusses a similar, if less dramatic, demographic shift in his study of the Mississippi Delta: "In eleven Delta-area counties, estimated white out-migration between 1955 and 1960 (27,441) nearly equaled the estimated total for blacks (27,939)" (207). Although these rates are roughly even, this is a telling statistic since the Delta of the pre-Civil Rights era was widely recognized as perhaps the cruelest environment for African Americans in the country. If whites and blacks were leaving at the same rates, then white migration out of the South must be a trend that deserves greater attention. See Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth.* Berry's *Southern Migrant, Northern Exile* (Champaign: U of Illinois P, 2000) offers a rich exploration of white migrations that occur between the Appalachian regions of the South and the Midwestern industrial centers.

those in the South—would make a more conspicuous presence than white migrants. Their communities would become, as Gregory puts it, "much-noticed" amid the swelling ranks of European immigrants and Anglo inhabitants.

Yet if the subject of white folks moving out of the South lacks some of the drama of narratives describing the Great Migration, another possibility for their absence in the literature is that, unlike their black counterparts, white migrants more rarely stayed put. Even when poor whites shared a social and economic station with black migrants, they were less like to permanently relocate in the North. As Gregory demonstrates, "[f]ewer than half of the nearly 20 million whites who left the South [during the twentieth century] actually left for good," so that the "white diaspora is best understood as a circulation, not as a one-way population transfer" (17). Southern employers certainly missed the cheap labor that black—and poor white—bodies provided and contemporary newspapers were full of ads designed to scare would-be migrants and to lure their predecessors back South—but it's safe to assume that the great majority of these ads went unanswered by relocated African Americans. White migrants, it seems, were more easily drawn back South—by work, by family, by culture—just as they were more easily drawn westward.[101] What I explore in this section is how this process of horseshoe-shaped migration appears in narrative fiction from the period: I will read Ellen Glasgow's 1925 novel *Barren Ground* and William Faulkner's 1934 short story "Pennsylvania Station" as texts that uncover the consequences and dilemmas of white migrations, paying special attention to ways in which

[101] Gregory's earlier exploration of southern migration, *American Exodus*, is a probing examination of the ways in which southern/southwestern culture spread west with the dustbowl migration of the 1930s. See *American Exodus: The Dustbowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991).

mobility is configured along racial lines, and how the varying depictions of labor and regional identification affect the narrative's strategies of representation. While accounts of white movement from South to North during the period of the Great Migration are ostensibly harder to plug into a larger story about exodus and redemption, they do carry profound messages about the relationships between the people, places, and the politics of migration.

Sensing a New South in Glasgow's *Barren Ground*

The representations of movement and bodies in Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground* work hard to confront migration's multiplicities. Glasgow considered the novel, published in 1925, her greatest personal achievement for its portrayal of an independent, industrious woman who bucks the patriarchal system of the agricultural South. Glasgow's heroine, Dorinda Oakley, begins the novel as the child of a poor dirt farmer in southern Virginia whose land is choked by an untrammeled growth of broomsedge grass. Dissatisfied with her life and prospects for the future, teenage Dorinda is swept up by the attentions of Jason Greylock, the son of the local doctor, who seduces and abandons her. When Dorinda learns that she is pregnant, she take the train to New York, where she passes out in the street, is struck by a streetcar, and loses the baby. Recuperating in the hospital, Dorinda comes under the care of Dr. Faraday, who nurses her back to health, provides her with employment, and introduces her to a new world of ideas and metropolitan comforts. Among all the lectures and books to which she is exposed, Dorinda encounters fresh theories of land cultivation and scientific approaches to agriculture.

Just before her father dies, Dorinda returns home and takes over operation of the farm, applying newly theorized methods of fertilization and crop rotation to revitalize the barren ground. She also starts an industrial-style dairy that uses the railways to provide butter to Washington D.C. hotels and restaurants.[102] While Dorinda never finds the romantic fulfillment she seeks at the novel's beginning, her operation becomes the most admired in her region and her story is a stirring revision of turn-of-the-century tropes of southern womanhood, as well as a bold endorsement of "modern" farming techniques. Addressing this last point, William Conlogue convincingly demonstrates that, contrary to past critics' interpretations, *Barren Ground* charts a pivot away from the pastoral mode towards a celebration of rural industrialization in its "promot[ion of] a farm economy built on market speculation, rapid technological change, strict divisions of labor, and dependence on university experts" (83).[103]

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[102] It's important to note how frequently Washington D.C. has figured in this discussion: as a landmark in Charlie Poole's tourist fantasy, as the birthplace of both Fisher and Duke Ellington, as the destination for Dorinda's agricultural outputs. One obvious reason is the space's liminality—and nationality. Geographically, it is suspended between the South and the North, and partakes of both identities, often at once: the city is a bastion of American freedoms but it was also segregated by Woodrow Wilson in the 1910s; as a metaphor for the vagaries of the U.S. political processes, it exists on a strip that simultaneously fulfills and fails its own ideals.

[103] Mary Weaks-Baxter is less convinced that Dorinda represents a radical revision of agricultural labor. For Weaks-Baxter, Dorinda most fully inhabits the yeoman ideal, albeit a model of yeomanry that is headed by a woman and that "carries the mark of outside influence" (21). Weaks-Baxter, *Reclaiming the American Farmer: The Reinvention of a Regional Mythology in Twentieth-century Southern Writing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2006).

While on one hand *Barren Ground* appears as a conventional story of a transplanted southerner answering the call of blood and native soil, on the other, it contains a more disruptive narrative about modernity's relationships to both the city and the country. Specifically, it highlights modernity's associations with science and technological innovation since the "country" (the South) Dorinda revitalizes is actually an urban construction that depends upon market capitalism's powers to transform people, their practices, and their environments. In addition to all of this, the novel contains a resonant migration narrative. Although less than ten percent of the text is devoted to Dorinda's time in New York, it is the novel's essential hinge, as the experiences and information she collects in the city inform all of her succeeding actions, and Dorinda's migrations—from Virginia to New York and then back again—offer the text's most revealing encounters with the signifying powers of migratory modernism.

In the novel's larger economy, the New York scenes set the stage for Dorinda's transition from young woman of longing and romance to accomplished entrepreneur and agricultural innovator. They achieve this shift by tracking an evolution that proceeds with concomitant emotional and perceptual signals. All of which is to say that the text represents Dorinda's development by recording her sensory responses to the world around her: when she loses consciousness in the street and falls beneath the wheels of a car, Dorinda is literally stripped of both feeling and language (she is twice described as "stone"; once as "dead" (202, 222)), and the remainder of her time in New York is devoted to recuperating her emotional, physical, and mental capabilities. While the modern city is typically associated with sensory overload, in Dorinda's case it provides the necessary corrective to the sensory barrenness that she brings up from the country. Throughout her

time in the city, she is reassembled and recreated as a human subject, in an environment and by institutions that are, to all appearances, diametrically opposed to those of her home at Pedlar's Mill. She is, in some strange sense, the product of a kind of creative destruction: just as she is broken down by emotional trauma, Dorinda is reengineered with a sensibility and system of values better suited to the demands of the marketplace.

At the same time that Dorinda progresses through emotional numbness, she also struggles to move past a sort of preverbal state: "Don't try to talk," Dr. Farady warns her, and it is only towards the end of her stay in the hospital that "[w]ords" begin "dribbling back into her mind" (218). Yet the text continually characterizes Dorinda as less a creature of language than one of instinct and sensory response: she speaks in starts and stops throughout her time in New York, and usually to describe a *feeling* she had. In a startling turn, the shock of the new—that ultimate signpost of the modern—that numbs Dorinda isn't an urban phenomenon but the product of a relatively underdeveloped geography and a series of rural, small-town relations. The fact that the novel locates this symptom of modernity in Pedlar's Mill, not New York City, provides a sense of the complicated geography that it negotiates: the modern is never a wholly urban modality, and neither is the rural a reliably anti-modern one.

While the emotional numbness that has allowed Dorinda to endure the trauma of her experience with Jason also translates into a physical numbness, her senses are often erratically sharp. So much so, in fact, that Dorinda's time in New York might be nothing so much as it is a catalog of sensations, a move that returns us to the phenomenology of place—the strategy of meaning-making that takes the measure of a person's experience of a place by emphasizing her subjective sensory reactions to that place. The most reliable

way to apprehend one's surroundings, it seems, is to use the body to process its physical qualities. This may sound overly skeptical of language but, as I've suggested above, the novel itself doesn't exhibit much trust in language—or at least it doesn't trust Dorinda with language.

There are points in the narrative, then, where Dorinda's sensory experience with the city is presented as the sum and substance of the place itself: "it seemed to her that New York would live in her recollection not as a place but as an odour" (202). It's difficult to miss the irony, for instance, when Dorinda wakes up from her first night out of the hospital and, commenting on her emaciated face, states, "I'm all eyes" (225). She is, at several points in the text, most readily engaged with her environment through sensation and nothing else, vacillating dramatically between sense and senselessness. ("If somebody were to stick a pin in me, I shouldn't feel it," she reflects at one point (226)). Yet Dorinda's ability to begin to interact with the material substance of the world around her becomes a benchmark in her emotional recovery: in the very moment in which Dorinda makes the crucial decision to move beyond the pains in her past, she *hears* a "hissing gas-jet," *sees* an "ink splotch" on the carpet, *smells* the "stale ashes of a cigar," *feels* "the sharp ridge down the middle of the bed on which she was lying" (228).

Dorinda is stone but all around, even in the city, the sensational presence of growing, organic life is impossible to escape, and her senses have been socialized to associate the signs of nature with her originary "natural" place—a logic severely disordered by the city's omnipresent mixtures of the organic and the industrial. Hence Dorinda's inability to elude ties to her past and her home on the farm in Virginia. For example, although she dismisses the Park as "merely an imitation of the country" (201), its

imitative qualities behave in unpredictable ways, and the novel closely anticipates Gilles Deleuze's contention, contra Baudrillard, that "by simulacrum we should not understand a simple imitation but rather the act by which the very idea of a model or privileged position is challenged and overturned," such that "all resemblance [is] abolished so that one can no longer point to the existence of an original and a copy" (69). As Dorinda navigates the built environment of New York, she continually bumps up against expressions of the "natural world," encasements of organic life scattered amid the industrialized landscape that thrust her mind back to the rural South and revise imaginary distinctions between the built and the natural environment.

These blurred distinctions constitute the very substance of Dorinda's encounters with the natural world of the novel. As Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar explain in their history of Central Park, the early twentieth century of Glasgow's narrative represents an especially fraught period in which the park's role as a "designed natural space" created for purposes of "pure preservation" was threatened by a strong development ethos (10).[104] Yet while the park is an industrial-scale installment that required an industrial-strength realignment of the city's topography, it still reliably performs the "nature" function. "There were moments," the narrator explains, "when she missed Old Farm, vivid moments when she smelt growing things in the Park, when she longed with all her heart for a sigh of the April fields and the pear orchard in bloom and the big pine where birds were singing" (232). Later, when walking past the park, Dorinda notes, "This smells like November at Old

[104] The brightest flashpoint in this debate centered upon the reclamation effort tied to the draining of the Lower Reservoir, which lasted through the early decades of the twentieth century. The reservoir was finally drained, to eventually make way for the Great Lawn, in 1930—although it briefly served as a makeshift Hooverville during the Depression.

Farm. . . . Whenever I smell the country, I want to go home" (241). Elsewhere, as Dorinda passes a man preparing window decorations, the novel shows us how "a whiff of wet earth penetrated her thoughts, and immediately, in a miracle of recollection, she was back at Five Oaks. . . She had been dragged back by the wind, by an odour, into the suffocating atmosphere of the past" (211). Dorinda could never mistake Central Park for Old Farm or the window boxes filled with evergreens for the pines for Five Oaks but, in her sensory mind, she cannot make the separation.

In other words, what seem like imitations of the country marooned in the city only sharpen Dorinda's sense of "country" realities, of their role in shaping her image of herself and the (re)construction of her personal history. The copy, with its obvious differences, paradoxically defamiliarizes and enhances the original; it folds the cognitive map up on itself and erases the distance between the two spaces. As Deleuze has it, the "difference of difference [becomes] its immediate effect" (69). Difference not only makes the real more real but it also throws into question the entire nature of what and how the real signifies.

The shock of recognition stirred by the senses recurs throughout the New York section. For example, when Dorinda determines to improve Old Farm through new understanding of the "chemistry of agriculture" (242), she has a vivid dream in which she is plowing one of the family's old fields and the first association she makes is with the smell of her surroundings: "the ghostly smell of the life-everlasting reminded her of the smell of her mother's flowered bandbox when she took it out of the closet on Sunday mornings" (244). The shadow of a smell, conjured up in a dream, allows Dorinda to peel back the layers separating her from her past, her former home, and her family.

However, it's not just sensation and not just the physical world, but their fusion through art and culture that catalyze the associations shaping Dorinda's future. When she attends a concert with her would-be suitor Dr. Burch and hears Beethoven's Pathetique Sonata, the text attributes a kind of coercive effect to the music: "Pure sensation *held* and *tortured* her" (238, emphasis mine). "This was not music," Dorinda concludes—it was "the sound of a storm coming up through the tall pines at Old Farm. She had heard this singing melody a thousand times, on autumn afternoons, in the woods" (238). It's as if Dorinda is being pushed, against her will and by sensory cues and memories, both back into her past and forward towards her return to Pedlar's Mill.

These are the sorts of ephemeral foundations upon which Dorinda builds her future: it's not thought exactly, and not even emotion, but an asymmetrical bundle of the two, directed by the senses, that leads Dorinda through her period of numbness. Blankness gives way to sensation, which itself gives way to language and ideas. The diction used to describe the final stage in this process, when Dorinda diligently attends lectures and studies the "modern ways of getting the best out of the soil" (242), makes compelling allusions to agricultural labor: "gleaning, winnowing, storing away in her memory the facts which she thought might someday be useful" (246). In the end, it is the "*idea* of the country" that "worked like leaven in Dorinda's imagination" (249, emphasis mine). In that quintessential modern gesture, agricultural labor has been abstracted, dissected, and reconceptualized with an eye towards efficiency, scientific research, and the unbending demands of the marketplace. Or, to borrow Dorinda's own optimistic phrase, "Enterprise, industry, and a little capital with which to begin" (246). In Raymond Williams's analysis,

the ideological function of the "country" is thus achieved, as the image of the pastoral serves to abstract and mask inequitable labor arrangements.[105]

Dorinda's psychological recovery, such as it is, ends with a "shock of joy" as she realizes that "she was no longer benumbed, that she had come to life again. She had come to life again, but how differently!" (244). In the opening description of the New York section, when Dorinda is wandering without purpose, the text describes her as a "machine" and we're to understand her time in the city as animating a process by which she sheds the characteristics of machinery and reacquires her humanity (203). It's worth noting here that her former-lover Jason did this to her, that, ironically enough, he turned Dorinda into a machine by exploiting her biological fertility. And yet in the novel's decision to rebuild Dorinda as a capitalist *par excellence*, it's as if barren ground, in human form, is precisely the condition needed to grow a newly constituted producer.

We should also recognize, however, that this reconstitution of the human is staged in the sorts of highly mediated spaces of clinical and scientific authority that were unavailable in Pedlar's Mill: the hospital and the physician's office, the physician's home, the university, the upper Manhattan parlor. More pointedly, following Foucault's lead in *The Birth of the Clinic*, it's surely worth noticing that Dorinda's guide through all of this is the ultimate figure of authority in the modern episteme, the physician. Her hope to revitalize Old Farm is enthusiastically endorsed by Dr. Farady and his wife, and they provide both the training and the financial backing necessary to transform the farm. Given that, then, it's possible to see Dorinda herself as a kind of agricultural project, an empty plot of land cultivated and ushered into productivity by an attentive caregiver. Dorinda "had

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[105] Williams, *The Country and the City*, 9-12.

picked up more or less of the patter of science" (233), but there's a sense that, while she can vaguely comprehend the path forward and the methods at her disposal, she's been brought to those conclusions by forces beyond her logical reckoning. So while the text is committed to the power of modern science and empiricism, Dorinda's acquisition of rationality is anything but rational.

And power, as it is configured in this text, is nicely captured by a phrase of David Harvey's—it is the "urbanization of capital." Not the urbanization of bodies or of spaces directly, but capital itself, with all of its flows and pressures. In other words, this configuration of power is not so much about the spread of urbanization as urbanity but the dispersal of capitalism's development function, which transforms barren ground into productive ground, and idle workers into efficient workers, not for any benevolent purpose—indeed, the novel's conclusion makes it hard to tell whether Dorinda, or anyone else in Pedlar's Mill, is better off for all of her innovation—but to grow its sphere of influence. That Dorinda becomes the emissary of modern capital is predictable enough since she alone has been vaccinated against the economic and cultural obsolescence of rural southernnness. It is also fitting though that, upon arriving back in Virginia, Dorinda's brother Rufus tells her, with awe, "You've come back looking as if you could rule the world" (258). Indeed she has.

None of this should be taken as an argument that the physical environment, the ground itself, would be better left alone: the text tells us, for instance, that when farmer James Ellgood lets his fields go fallow during a postwar labor shortage, the land "r[a]n to waste again" (463). It is, rather, a way of recognizing the means by which capitalism aligns itself with the cultural power of the city and with science in order to extend its reach, to

work its transformative effects upon the spaces and people of the rural South. Agriculture, "the land" itself, becomes a vector of this capitalist expansion, as formerly striated spaces are rendered "smooth" (or at least smooth*er*) through incorporation into the larger modern/global market. For instance, the railways and improved roads that link the products of Dorinda's dairy to the service industry—the hotels—in Washington thus fits a formerly neglected corner of the state into a grid of connectivity that stretches not just along the eastern seaboard but through transnational patterns of exchange. These technologies of transportation act as a boon to both Dorinda's business and to her sense of psychic wellness. At one point, she even attributes her mother's "mania" to the isolation of a world without the "telegraph and the telephone" in which "the roads were no better than frozen bogs" (437).

Modernity does bring dangers however, the most obvious example being the train wreck responsible for Nathan's death. More subtly, however, the narrator tells that "[e]ven at Pedlar's Mill there were ripples of the general disintegration" that connectivity, particularly connectivity eventuated by World War I, provides (462). If the massive casualties of the war stand as a brutal expression of modernity's obsessions with efficiency and speed, Dorinda's operations suffer a small-scale disruption of those same features: above any moral or sentimental objections, she decries war for its ability to cut the quality of her labor supply and to disrupt the railway schedule. One solution to her labor problem is automation: "[W]henever it was possible, she had replaced hand labor by electricity" (468)—a process pushing both the laborers and their practices ("hand labour") towards extinction. And in much the same way that the stories by Fisher noticed the creative

destruction built into the New Negro, Glasgow's novel is committed to exploring cycles of ruin and regeneration attending to the growth of the New South.

But what of the differences between the country and the city? While the text performs an enlarged notion of spatial difference—Pedlar's Mill and New York are presented as opposing entities—it works in a contrary motion to show how interpenetrated each space is with the other. As I've discussed above, New York City is always striated with signifiers of the country, while the future of Pedlar's Mill—its landscapes, its labor practices, its fashions—is shaped by the version of New York City that Dorinda brings to Virginia. This is a move that, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, results in a landscape deemed smooth by modernizing forces: the whole country/city distinction is effectively deterritorialized in favor of a kind of monolithic space ruled by market forces.

One curious episode from the opening of the New York section shows some of the subtlety with which the South lingers on in the novel: as she wanders the city, Dorinda finds herself drifting into "the only old-fashioned neighborhood in New York" (205). Following Leigh Anne Duck's again, we recognize this as a kind of temporal zone of alterity, littered with "old stuff," much of it familiar (265-68). (Dorinda notices, for instance, "a wardrobe exactly like the one great-grandfather left" (206).) Her escort here is a woman named Garvey, who feeds her tea and listens to Dorinda's concerns, adding a few of her own: "we are old-fashioned folks, and my husband sometimes says that we haven't got any business in the progressive 'nineties. Everything's too advanced for us now . . . I guess it's living so much with old furniture and things that were made in the last century" (208).

It's an association with outdated *things* that marks these people off as old; it is as if what Bill Brown calls the "material unconscious" is rubbing off on them, saddling them

with an unshakable sense of anachronism. Brown uses the device as a means of "nam[ing] literature's repository of disparate and fragmentary, unevenly developed, even contradictory images of the material everyday," in order to explore "history as the unconscious," so that the "necessarily repressed can be rendered visible in sites of contradiction or incomplete elision" (4-5). Following Brown's model, the dominant narratives of progress that carried the 1890s require a sublimation of non-participants, figures such as Garvey and the residents of Pedlar's Mill.[106] They sink out of view, occupying side streets and back alleys like the one Dorinda stumbles upon, but their stuff remains, as a sort of mass-produced memento mori. They have become people out of time and place, and their association with these outmoded objects of mass culture anchors them in the past, and it is this bracketed past—and Dorinda's instant recognition of it—that marks the "old-fashioned" street as a kind of South in miniature.

The link between obsolescence and the South is further established when Dorinda walks the city streets, seeing herself through the eyes of Fifth Avenue: her dresses have become "absurd and countrified" (228), and for the first time since she left Pedlar's Mill, she perceives herself as "old-fashioned and provincial" (210). In this scene, the text offers a brand of accidental rusticity, a quality of "absurd[ity]" that needs to be shaken as quickly as possible. But, as the New York episode concludes, it's plain that Dorinda's associations with her homeland are not so easily transcended. The novel rewrites the standard story of a southerner's homecoming by providing a distinctly ambiguous twist on Dorinda's feelings:

[106] For more on the archaeology of objects in American literature, see Brown's *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003), which includes an innovative reading of "Regional Artifacts" in the New England fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett. Pages 81-135.

"She realized that the Pedlar's Mill of her mind and the Pedlar's Mill of actuality were two different places. . . . [S]he felt as strange as she had felt in New York" (256). Tellingly, this is an observation that is not so far removed from an attitude expressed in the depths of her period of numbness: "Pedlar's Mill or New York, what did it matter? The city might have been built of straw, so little difference did it make" (202).

Like a true modern, she is estranged anywhere and everywhere. Indeed, after settling into her place at Old Farm, the tendency towards melancholic reverie runs backward, up towards the North. Seeing a sunset the "colour of autumn fruits," Dorinda reels back to "the heart of a pomegranate that she had seen in a window in New York; and immediately she was swept by a longing for the sights and sounds of the city" (314). Her reactions track nicely onto Judith Butler's description of a method of mourning compounded by "the sedimentation of objects loved and lost, the archaeological remainder, as it were, of unresolved grief" (133). This is also a sensory experience facilitated by "objects" but framed by commodification, a reminder that the central means by which the "country" becomes resituated in the "city" is through commercialization and the rule of the market.

Just as the novel unseats ideas of bounded country and city spaces, it likewise complicates related ideas about regional difference: if the natural world of Virginia conjures the urban North, and if the very aura of the southern soil is accessible—is, in fact, inescapable—in New York City, then how much trust can we invest in narratives of regional exclusivity? In other words, where Dorinda's sensations and extra-linguistic impressions are concerned, it's difficult—if not impossible—to make one thing stand for her Virginia roots and something else stand for the New York City present without

imposing a deeply subjective order on the surroundings. This may all seem obvious enough but it has important implications for a text that is nominally committed to the experiential differences between the country and the city, so much so, in fact, that it has often been cast as an expression of southern-exclusivist Nashville Agrarianism. Like the black migrants in Fisher's stories, Dorinda hopes to flee her home for a new life in the city only to reencounter alarming fragments of her old life. The novel keeps with the larger sociological realities of white migration in that, unlike the African American figures in those stories, she's inclined—and allowed—to return and, most provocatively, to prosper.

Station to "Pennsylvania Station"

My discussion of migratory modernism has depended heavily on the political, economic, and discursive possibilities of mobility that accompany the arrival of turn-of-the-century modernity. A key node in this configuration is the train station and Pennsylvania Station in particular, since it was the major terminal receiving incoming migrants moving up from the South. In a 1932 poem titled "Pennsylvania Station," Langston Hughes evaluates the combination of optimism and anxiety that the building metaphorizes. The poem's speaker notes the structure's resemblance to a "vast basilica of old," recognizing it as an evocation of a "dream of God," and the trains pulling in and out of the station come to stand for the hope extended by increased mobility: movement is a mode of redemption (159).[107] William Faulkner's take on Pennsylvania Station explores roughly the same ground, with a distinctly different note of emphasis. "Pennsylvania Station" appeared in the *American*

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[107] The poem appeared as "Terminal" in 1932 but was republished under the title "Pennsylvania Station" in 1962.

Mercury in 1934 but it had been in the author's pipeline since the 1920s.[108] Although critics have largely dismissed the piece as inconsequential in the author's oeuvre, its setting in the port of entry and departure for southern migrants coming to New York, as well as its interest in transient subjects who move between the North and South, make it a richly suggestive text for this study.[109] While "Pennsylvania Station" is certainly not the only place where New York City appears in Faulkner's fiction, it does present an opportunity to consider both the ways in which tropes coded "southern" respond to a geographic shift northward and how Faulkner's version of New York corresponds to spaces represented in the migration narratives of Fisher, Hurston, and Glasgow.

The most vital important point of contact: the very same station that serves as a portal to Gillis' new life in "City of Refuge"—and the site where Rev. Ealey recruits new church members—offers a temporary shelter to the unnamed narrator and his companion in "Pennsylvania Station." Yet the outline of migration that appears in "Pennsylvania Station" is a horseshoe-shaped inversion of the familiar pattern, from the urban North down into Florida and then back again. For the story's speaker, the South is a place to recuperate and hide out from the elements, a telling inversion of the trajectories we've encountered elsewhere. And although the thrust of the narrative consists of little more than a shaggy dog story about a ne'er-do-well nephew named Danny who squanders the money his mother had set aside for a formal burial, the story's setting and its adoption of

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[108] Joseph Blotner speculates that the story might have originate from Faulkner's own time in the city, which would date it as early as 1921 when he worked as a clerk at Doubleday's bookshop (1:595). See Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* Two Vols. (London: Chatto, 1974).
[109] For a succinct overview of critical reaction to the story, see Gene M. Moore, "The End of the Line in 'Pennsylvania Station,'" *Faulkner Journal* 23.1 (Fall 2007): 27-36.

issues central to Faulkner's wider oeuvre bears noticing. For instance, in the story, Penn Station becomes a living index of past voices, coated and recoated with histories, much like Faulkner's vision of the South: the station is "filled . . . with a weary and ceaseless murmuring, like the voices of pilgrims upon the infinite plain, like the voices of all the travelers who had ever passed through, inquiring and ceaseless as lost children," and by sheer demographics many of these palimpsestic voices would be southern ones (609). This reading of Penn Station takes its place alongside the description of Frenchman's Bend that opens *The Hamlet* or the detailed picture of the jailhouse that appears in *Requiem for a Nun* (to list just two examples), each of which makes an extensive list of the forces that structure space, creating that familiar effect in Faulkner whereby the sedimentary layers of past events and their participants butt up against one another, overlapping and making a music of multiplicity.

In a memorable passage from *Intruder in the Dust*, Chick Mallison offers up a perceptive theory of space: "not north but North, outland and circumscribing and not even a geographical place but an emotional idea" (149-50)—not necessarily "North" in a specific, geographically determined sense but perhaps "north" in the sense of not-South, of a differently orientated north (or south), with all the possibilities that such suggestions entail. Faulkner's visions of space are alive to the essential constructedness of place, to the possibilities of regions and spaces as "emotional ideas." The Faulknerian South is thus less strictly a set of geographic coordinates, signifying a "little postage stamp" of southern soil, than a sociopsychological space—a structure of feeling, to borrow Raymond Williams' model—that represents a particular relationship between place, person, and history. The South presented by Faulkner is thick with historical memory, and it operates as a site

where racial and class-based tensions often propel individuals into generation-spanning conflicts. Richard Gray explains it this way: Faulkner's rural South is marked by a "habitual preoccupation with the past, [a] long romance with memory, and [a] rift" that highlights "the growing discontinuity it was experiencing between its notions of the past and the present" (216).

And, as "Pennsylvania Station" suggests, sometimes even when Faulkner's settings aren't southern per se, they remain "South." Unlike "Mr. Acarius," the only other Faulkner story set in New York City and one whose sole mention of the South comes with the appearance of a nurse from Alabama, or the word of Gavin Stevens, who describes New York City—Greenwich Village in particular—as a "place with a few unimportant boundaries where young people of any age go to dream," "Pennsylvania Station" goes farther towards making the North and the South speak to one another (350). Although the story occupies a minor place in the Faulkner canon, critics who mention "Pennsylvania Station" typically notice the story's unique narratalogical structure: an unnamed derelict provides the substance of the story, which is bookended by the observations of an omniscient narrator. Writing of the story's opening scene, Theresa Towner and James Carothers notice what is perhaps the narrator's unconscious nod to southern culture by paying special attention to the text's description of "eyes of people drugged with coffee, sitting up with a strange corpse" (609). Towner and Carothers go on to explain that "[p]articularly in the South, the dead body was watched over by family before burial" (337), all of which implies that the voice guiding this "experiment in . . . urban realism" comes from the South (334).

Like Hurston's "Story in Harlem Slang," Faulkner's examination of the hunger and helplessness of New York City refugees is related through the voice of a southern-seeming, rural-minded narrator, a quality that comes through the narrator's inventory of images. For example, although the storyteller has an association with the city that goes back at least ten years before the story's telling, when the text describes him it reaches for similes of the country: he is "like a checked and long-broken horse" (617), "like the caricature of an up-State farmer" (609); in an especially evocative phrase, the text explains that the man and his fellow-migrants in the station are "as transient as scarecrows blown by a departed wind upon a series of rock ledges" (610). The story's unincorporated human figures are most readily ascribed the characteristics of the rural rather than the urban. Opening and closing the story's narrative frame with an obliquely regional sensibility, the text embodies a unique version of Griffin's "South in the City," one that underscores the dialogic relationship between the two spaces.

While the narrator of "Pennsylvania Station" supplies the story's frame, its essential details come from a nameless transient, on the topside of middle age, who tells a brief story to a fellow drifter. The man's background is largely obscured: we know that he's the lone survivor in a family of eight children, has poor health, and that he had lived in, or near, New York before decamping to Florida to flee the harsh winter ten years before the narration begins. Now back in New York, sitting on a bench in the smoking room at Penn Station, he entertains his friend with a story of his now-dead sister, Margaret, and her only child, Danny. Margaret is a working woman ("she scrubbed in them tall buildings down about Wall Street" (613)) whose primary goals as both as laborer and a consumer are directed towards death and its rituals: her singular character quirk is that each week she

contributes a small amount to an installment plan to pay for a deluxe casket. About Danny, the text reveals even less: he works in Chicago, seems to have some shady connections that put him at risk—at one point he is accused of killing a police officer—and he didn't attend his mother's funeral, sending in his place a "wreath of flowers that must have cost two hundred dollars." The storyteller is adamant on this last point, repeating it three times, as if that alone were enough to prove that his nephew, his last living relative, is a "good boy" (611).

The only real twist in the plot is that Danny ends up in trouble in Florida and when the storyteller seeks out his sister to assist with some legal fees, he discovers that she has already drawn on her account with the coffin wholesaler Mr. Pinckski to bail Danny out—sending her down from the deluxe model with gold handles and plush lining back to a cheap "wooden box," and undoing five-and-a-half-years of saving in a single stroke (615). She dies just as the storyteller returns to New York to discuss Danny's case; he stays on in the city, Danny's lawyer sets him up with a job in Chicago, and the story ends with a shrug: "Is that so?," the man's friend says, "I'm going to the Grand Central" (625). The point may be that the story doesn't have much of a point, or that its point is significantly blunted by a set of social and familial relations that are always kept out of sync by distance and time, as the three principal characters never occupy the same space at once: they are always veering away from or bouncing off of one another in the sorts of patterns of interstitial crossings staged by the train station itself.

The station thus offers a key to both the story's meanings and its methods: If a mélange of fragmented voices and histories is key to the formation of Faulkner's version of modernism, Faulkner's Penn Station is experienced as a compellingly modern site. As

Marian Aguiar argues, "the train [holds] a central place as an overdetermined symbol of modernity. The railway's ability to reconstruct space and time through movement ma[kes] it a primary space for the constitution of new identities" (73). In "Pennsylvania Station," both the railway station and the railway carriages it houses, act as repositories of disparate *voices.* Certainly, the "constitution of new identities" seems to be on the docket for our train travelers but one thread that binds each of these stories is the fact that an old identity cannot be so easily elided. In all of the narratives, the promise of escape that the train represents collapses inward, and the originary conflict reemerges. Writing about what a "geography of modernism" might mean, Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker explain that a "spatial history of modernisms would . . . ground the use of geographical tropes in the material practices and places of modernity, responsive to their discrete and palimpsestic local, regional, national and transnational provenances" (4). Geographies of modernism, then, aren't about the outright creation of new spaces but about remolding their polysemous, preexisting meanings. Ideas about these spaces—the South and New York City—paradoxically carry both the momentum and the inertia of history, and these contending forces work to shape and reshape collective imaginings about each region's meaning.

Houston A. Baker Jr.'s evocative description of the railway offers further insight: "The railway junction is marked by transience. Its inhabitants are always travelers—a multifarious assembly in transit" (7). Notice that Baker's statement encompasses not the moving train car but simply the junction itself, as if to say that in the modern world encapsulated by the railroad station, one can be in transit while sitting still. "Pennsylvania

Station" thus becomes a variation on a familiar modernist theme about the impossibility of becoming a fixture in a contact zone that forever denies fixity.

Consequently, the figures populating "Pennsylvania Station" find themselves lodged in a liminal position—they belong in the places they don't belong. As Gene Moore remarks, the station itself, that "great temple of transportation," has been become "a mausoleum for those who have nowhere to go" (29). Moore's description of the station a "mausoleum" likely comes from the opening paragraph referenced above, wherein shop windows take on the appearance of sleepless eyes, "sitting up with a strange corpse" (609). It's also important to note that the subway trains that rattle the station's floor also arrive through metaphors of death and lifeless bodies. To those who watch it fly by, the train takes on the terrifying appearance of mobile sepulcher with windows that serve as "niches in whose wan and fleeting glare human figures like corpses set momentarily on end in a violated grave yard leaned in one streaming and rigid direction and flickered away" (614). These are spaces in which the dead are unearthed and made to move, where stories of the departed prevail, and where indeterminacy and transition reign.

This same principle of transience and indeterminacy extends to the characters' racial identities. In some sense, the troubled nephew Danny in "Pennsylvania Station" functions as a less tragically turned version of Samuel Beauchamp of "Go Down, Moses": he is entangled with the law but reached for, and possibly saved somehow, by the efforts of his family. Yet whatever the characters' racial makeup might be, their class positions mark them off from the dominant culture. They clean buildings, drift around the country, and, in the case of Danny, can only grasp at prosperity through sublegal activity.

It's no coincidence, then, that in the *Collected Stories* volume, this piece is grouped in the "Middle Ground" series.[110] But, as middle spaces often go, this is an unsteady, insecure position: "they seemed to stand in the grip of a dreadful reluctance and inertia," the text tells of the story's transients (624). Working out a murky conflation of class and race, the characters in "Pennsylvania Station" stand as thoroughly modern figures, marked by elliptically defined hybridity and motion. Jack Temple Kirby makes the case that "[c]lass . . . was the most important determinant of migrants' well-being and acculturation in new communities," but this story lets issues of race and class loose in the same orbit, declining to make any definitive comment but acknowledging the function of the train depot as a contact zone where a whole panoply of people interact and react to one another and to their environment (*Rural Worlds* 330). As with Joe Christmas, *Light in August*'s slippery, "parchment" colored protagonist, it's impossible to definitively locate the figures in "Pennsylvania Station," and they come to exhibit the ways in which constructions of whiteness and blackness respond to modernity's creation of a destabilized geographic center.

Spatial philosopher Doreen Massey recognizes a commonly made distinction between the fluid spaces of postmodern globalization and modernist conceptions of space, explaining that "[i]n place of an imagination of a world of bounded places (modernism) we

[110] The middle-groundedness of "Pennsylvania Station" is matched by the horseshoe-shaped migration of Roger Howes in "Artist at Home," the story that directly follows "Pennsylvania Station" in *Collected Stories.* Howes "came to New York from the Mississippi Valley" before achieving some success as a writer, upon which he "bought a house in the Valley of Virginia and never went back to New York again" (627). This is a reversal of the schema of movement in "Pennsylvania Station" but still worth noting.

are now presented with a world of flows (postmodernism)" (81). But a world of flows is what we meet at every turn in all of these modernist narratives, and, for the migrant of the modern period, these spaces operate in such a way that familiar narratives about regional difference begin to unwrite themselves. Massey further notes that these kinds of binary constructions create a glaring blindspot in critical analysis, as "[b]oth the romance of bounded place and the romance of free flow hinder serious address to the necessary negotiations of real politics," all of which happen in the interstices of bondage and flow (175).

In response to fears that the postmodern turn towards fluidity and openness might simply reinscribe a masculinist emphasis on individuality and frontier, Massey forwards Derrida's late concept of hospitality, defined by Derrida as our "manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners," as a means of negotiating the potential problems of both bounded and open space (17). The migration narratives of Fisher and Hurston each highlight instances wherein hospitality misfires—circumstances in which the host that Derrida conceived of as the necessary provider of hospitality is either absent or unwilling—or, to use Derrida's neologism *hostipitality*, proves hostile, as the invited refugee becomes an unassimilable part of the larger community.[111] "Pennsylvania Station," however, shows a community taking shape in the cracks that fracture the dominant culture, between the two transients and in defiance of the official power represented by the railroad's "man in the uniform"

[111] See Derrida, "Hostipitality," trans. Barry Stocker with Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki* 5.3 (2000): 3-18.

(620).[112] It's a community that includes its own ceremonies (the sharing of space and cigarettes, the telling of stories) and its own safe havens (the benches in Penn and Grand Central Stations) but remains under the direct jurisdiction of no single body—a community without a center. More specifically, the station itself becomes a migratory space that is stripped of a center: although the transients suffer materially, their camaraderie suggests that migration is not always about loss and painful transition, that these spaces can be sites of healing and recompense.

These very qualities of community and communication call up the question of the story's southernness. At a time when the popular imagination often treated both a vibrant oral tradition and a sense of community as constitutive elements of a brand of southernness held under siege by industrial modernity, the text's decision to attach those characteristics to a pair of derelicts seeking refuge in Pennsylvania Station—one of industrial modernity's most prominent accomplishments—powerfully jostles both the meanings of southernness and the shape of the standard migration narrative. The southern voice of the story's narrator thus presents a version of the South that isn't South at all but still carries the abstract qualities of Faulkner's fictionalized homeland.

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[112] Tellingly, *Barren Ground* is about the successful realization of urban hospitality, across class lines. There is, however, an unspoken racial logic at work in the text: black bodies hardly register at all, and as openhearted as Dr. Farady and his wife appear, it's difficult to imagine Dorinda's scenario proceeding as it did were she an African American without resources.

Conclusion:

Depots and Terminals

Throughout this chapter, I've tried to note patterns of migration while maintaining a conspicuous awareness of the fact that one of migration's major features as an aesthetic or as a philosophical disposition is that it creates new possibilities, that it runs patterns back on themselves. I acknowledge, in other words, that migration can resist schematic maps just as it redraws our cultural and physical maps. A richly suggestive example, and one that would make a fine subject for future studies in this vein, is the course of migration in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928). The formulations of migration I've presented throughout the chapter fit basically two molds: the terminal migrations of African Americans moving from South to New York, and the horseshoe-shaped migrations of whites moving back and forth between the two spaces. But while Larsen's novel depends heavily on the energies and obstacles of movement, it scrambles any bipolar or triangulated account of migration, as Helga Crane—a figure of mixed racial heritage—goes from the rural South to Chicago to Harlem to Copenhagen, Harlem again and, finally, back to the rural South.

Helga's southern turn at *Quicksand*'s conclusion is a grimly imagined premonition of the trend of reverse migration that has taken African Americans back South since the second half of the twentieth century. The same economic forces that drew workers North have drawn them South again, as the urban North deindustrializes and middle-class opportunities disappear in places like New York City. And thinkers such as bell hooks and Carol B. Stack productively demonstrate how and why it's not just the South's urban centers that have received southbound migrants. If, however, the phenomenon is primarily driven by economic opportunities, then it makes sense that its influence would spread

beyond any one racial group, which indeed it has: the population boom throughout the Sun Belt is likely *the* major demographic shift of the past several decades. Furthermore, as postmodern technologies of connectivity enact a provisional erasure of regional differences, it has never been easier to evoke—and inhabit—a virtual region. The result is not a disappearance of the rural South or New York City, exactly, but a less geographically determined method of occupying regional or spatial identities. As Scott Romine recently shows, in the twenty-first century there are new ways of putting on a southern costume, and the absurdity of performing "hillbilly" in New York City is suddenly a little less absurd—as the activities at the Jalopy Theater suggest (1-17). If postmodernism-as-an-extension-of-modernism reaches for maximum fluidity of identity, smoothing away bumps on the paths that brought Charlie Poole on his trip to New York, what might this tell us about modernism's associations with migration?

For starters, migration is cultural fragmentation in material and spatial form: it is a means of scattering the self and one's sense of rootedness. And as such it might be subject to suspicion for all the reasons that high modernists like Eliot feared the emergence of modernity: disconnection from one's originating culture, a foreshortened historical sense, a fractured interior and a fissured sense of self. It is, in short, the lack of "monadic closure," to draw up Jameson's phrase again. Eliot himself puts a slightly metaphysical spin on the issue but the substance of his complaint is much the same: "The soul is so far from being a monad that we have not only to interpret other souls to ourself but to interpret ourself to ourself" (*sic*) (148). The migrants we've encountered in the fictions above find it necessary to shuffle multiple selves and contending histories, to make improvisation and adaptation a personal ontology. But since migration can't be pinned down as a strictly modern

phenomenon, it's worth asking what, in addition to its immediate ability to provide greater economic or physical security, is the upside of migration? To put a finer point on it, what are the possible benefits of migration's fragmentation function?

For one thing, it creates slippery human figures that are harder to classify and coerce, harder to slot into a matrix of standardization. Fragmentation-as-a-product-of-migration also forces one to acknowledge that identities are always multiple: as the migrants in the stories above demonstrate, to be at once North and South is a problem but it's a potentially productive one since participation in a modern world requires the ability to match one's own multiple selves against the multiple selves of others. Believing, as someone like Ellie of "The Promised Land" apparently does, that any one person naturally belongs in any one place is a dangerous misreading: she is effectively the flipside of Mammy, and they are each, in their own way, disadvantaged by the flows and permeable boundaries that attend to the emergence of the modern because at the same time that industrial modernity seeks out a system of practices and theories that would create a newly standardized world, it unravels that same world by dispersing images, products, and people out beyond their place of origin.

As characters in all of these narratives navigate dislocated versions of the rural South, they are consistently reminded of the historical scaffolding of their environment and of the effects that landscape can have on the creation, recreation, and decreation of identities. Each narrative can, in turn, be read as an examination of the portability—and durability—of the "South." If we dwell further on the topic, we must be willing to concede that any final conclusions are hemmed in by the limitations of language and labels: tropes of migration go beyond the experience of the migrant alone, just as images of the South

"outside" the South are mostly visible through suggestion, memory, and emotion. Each of these narratives works to prove that, especially in the urban landscapes of the modern North, the South is not emptied of meaning but rerouted and reanimated in provocative ways.

All of which prompts several questions: Should regional stories be resituated as national ones? Is the regional narrative simply a grace note in a longer, more complicated national history of flows and disruptions? Or does a national frame ultimately repeat the limitations of the regional one on a larger scale? What does this conversation gain—or possibly lose—by engaging the global turn of the new southern studies? These are questions that future work in this direction must consider. But even more broadly, the basic parameters of the problem deserve a second look: popular thinking about the cities has too often taken for granted that they alone function as spaces of diffusion and contact, while the country is mired in stasis and tradition. Yet the fluidity—of bodies, material culture, ideas—that these narratives uncover highlights the dialogic encounters of, and within, the country and the city, suggesting that the dynamism of the rural districts, their inhabitants, and their divergent responses to modernity—these diverse and mobile figurations of the rural modern—deserve increased critical attention.

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