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This dissertation is rooted in an inquiry into why images of the grotesque and abjection are not only intimately associated with the American South, but also why these images are so readily produced and embraced by its writers, politicians, and artists. Is the production of these images just a question of pandering to national audience for material profit, or is there a deeper strategy at foot to assert regional identity and influence the nation? This dissertation argues the latter and asserts that a central purpose of the Southern abject is to subvert the structures of the national body and propose alternatives. Because the idea of a national body is, in itself rooted in somatic language and imagery, it is useful to investigate the impacts of transgressions of national purity in terms psychological responses to violations of bodily integrity. To this end, I will deploy ideas of abjection rooted in the work of Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler to determine the ways in which these transgressions reveal the constructed nature of the national body, denaturalizing its form, and creating a space in which alternative bodies can be formed which can exert not only regional agency, but also a form of national control.

In order to do this, this dissertation examines three different "topographies" of abjection that were disruptive to the hegemonic national body's sense purity at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. First, the objective topography, a view of the national body from the point of view of types of aspects of identity and experience that are measurable and quantifiable. These include elements of the physical world like the body and the environment, as well as the experience of time. The second layer, the social topography, includes aspects of identity like race, class, and gender, which effect the immediate social view and experience of the subject. The third layer is the historical topography. This topography has less to do with the

literal passage of time than the emergence of the emergence of an agreed upon an agreed upon narrative that defines the ideological progress of the nation. The reason that these three topographies were important at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries is that they represented areas in which changes in technology, medicine, and social sciences gave a new categories and language through which the national body and its threats could be defined.

This dissertation argues that a supposedly progressive liberal North needed an abject South in order to perform the continual struggle for a "more perfect union: As such, the South as abject heterotopia in which abjection could be contained was, and is, essential to the nations ideological progress towards an ever more democratic nation. This containment in a grotesque "problem region", also gave the nation a way of struggling with issues of objective, social, and historical abjection, while not confronting these same issues in the rest of the country. Interestingly, for the South, there is also a power in this abject positioning, in that the intentional deployment of forms of abjection can disrupt the supposed coherence of a national body. This is a powerful rhetorical and ideological tool that allows for a space to develop in which the norms of the national body can be challenged as unnatural and unhelpful and alternative bodies can be developed. Abjection achieves this by making plane the boundaries of the national body and revealing its constructed nature, and, in doing so, denaturalizing it so that its overarching hegemonic power is compromised by its own incoherence.

The question then, is way does the South have this power in ways that other regions of the country do not? In this dissertation, I argue that the South is uniquely positioned to accomplish this because of its role as national member and outsider. The South's unique history of separation and reunion means that the region can be seen as both a part of the national body and separate from it. The region's role as a constituent part of the national body at its founding

meant that it provided much of the leadership as the country formed its ideological direction, along with its early political and social discourse. At the same time, the region violently resisted this same national identity, forcing the nation to defeat and ideologically "recolonize" the region. This double-positioning as both a part of the national body and as the container of an antithetical ideology that had to be purged through a form of violent emesis makes the region a kind of abject heterotopia.

Using the work of progressive writers like Erskine Caldwell who uses the objective topography of abjection to call attention to the ongoing damage caused by immoral exploitation of mindless capitalistic myth, and Jean Toomer who uses the social topography of abjection to disrupt national norms of race in order to argue for a different understanding of identity, this dissertation examines the deployment of abjection for alternative liberal and progressive goals. At the same time, this argument also looks to the writing of Southerners who embraced highly regressive and conservative ideologies, such as William Gilmore Simms, Thomas Dixon, and the Agrarians to argue for an alternative history and future that had hitherto been seen as contained within an abject historical topography. This dissertation argues that the topographies of Southern abjection are still essentail forces that impact and shape the the regional and national identity today as it struggles with how to define itself and its history.

NATION, REGION, AND POWER IN THE SOUTHERN ABJECT HETEROTOPIA

by

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_____
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DEDICATION

With my whole heart, I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Gabrielle, whose patience, creativity, love, and spirit have inspired me even on the most difficult days. Gabrielle, as well as our two young children, Jonah and Rory, have been unparalleled examples of the kind of deep openness, curiosity, and ingenuity that it takes to embrace and change the world.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my parents. First, I would like to thank my father, Dr. Hugh Thorne Compton, who believed that it was incumbent on each one of us to experience literature not only because of its artistic beauty, but also because of its power to shake the structures of society by throwing open our minds and allowing us to claim our own humanity and see the humanity of others. To my mother, Johanna Compton, I would also like to offer thanks for example of a fierce questioner of status-quos who insisted that it is incumbent on all of us to use our voices to dismantle structures that exploit and oppress others.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Benjamin S. F. Compton has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

> …Of course, I have found that anything that come out of the South is
> going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it *is* grotesque,
> in which case it is going to be called realistic.
> Flannery O'Connor, *Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction*
> (40)

If one were looking for a reliable way to examine the way the South exists in the national consciousness, they might begin by casting an eye back to H.L. Mencken's "Sahara of the Bozart," or W.J. Cash's *The Mind of the South,* or Jennifer Rae Greeson's *Our South*: *Graphic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature*, or even Scott Romine's *The Real South: Southern Narrative in the Age of Cultural Reproduction*. But it might be equally important to turn to a source that has been one of the most trusted repositories of cultural information and arbiters of the national zeitgeist for the past 70 years – *TV Guide*. Because of mass media's ability to both reflect and shape the population's self-conception, television is a good place to begin an investigation of the South's cultural and material value to the nation. For instance, one of the top-rated shows of the early 2010s was a reality show broadcast by The Learning Channel that chronicled the life of a Southern family living in central Georgia as they struggled with personal, economic, and familial obstacles and fought to assert their own agency and embrace the American dream. The show documented participants, including Chubbs, Chickadee, Mama June, Pumpkin, and, of course, Alana "Honey Boo Boo" Thompson, as they grappled with their place in the world, and occasionally grappled with each other. *TV Guide's* description of a few of these episodes is illuminating. For instance, the magazine gives the plot of the second episode of the first season, titled "Gonna Be a Glitz Pig," as, "Sugar Bear buys Alana a miniature pig, which Alana names Glitzy, to cheer her up after a string of pageant losses. Later, June signs Alana and

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Pumpkin up for an etiquette class" ("Here Comes Honey Boo Boo Season 2 Episodes"). The

premiere of the second season ("Mo'Butter, Mo'Better") is described as, "June punishes the girls

for not doing their chores by taking away their phones. Meanwhile, the family watch wrestling;

enjoy a roadkill supper; and find a slippery substitute for a waterslide" ("Here Comes Honey

Boo Boo Season 2 Episodes"). And finally, the premiere of season three (titled "The Manper") is

described as, "Sugar Bear carves out some space for himself in a camper, while Pumpkin looks

for guinea pigs on whom to practice for beauty school, but the family reunite for a trip to the

Redneck Games in Georgia" ("Here Comes Honey Boo Boo Season 3 Episodes").

Despite its respectable ratings, the show was almost universally critically reviled with

many reviewers and journalists noting both the show's absolute grotesqueness of some of its

characters and situations, along with the seeming embrace of child exploitation. But more than

that, some critics took on the implicit gaze of the show as being most problematic. Megan

Carpentier of *The Guardian* bemoaned the way that the "rednexploitation" revealed a sense of

snobbery on the part of both the show's creators and its audience. The people watching at home,

Carpentier argued, are encouraged to "point and snicker" at the characters (Carpentier). James

Poniewozik, writing for *Time,* makes a similar point, writing, "[t]he depressing thing, really, is

the TLC viewers, or rather, the way the show seems to assume that those viewers will look at this

family and the world" (Poniewozik). His point is that the audience's gaze dehumanizes the

participants. Their existence becomes little more than a car wreck created for the repulsion and

titillation of the viewing public.

Both critical positions, those whose disgust is for the family and those who reserve that

judgement for the show's creators, have merit. The family unit clearly is troubling and rife with

neglect and abuse. There were numerous concerns that the children were being put in

inappropriate situations and mistreated and exploited. The show was finally canceled in 2014 when it was revealed that Mama June was dating a man who had been previously convicted of molesting her eldest daughter when the girl was eight years old. There is also no doubt that the creators sought to produce a cartoonishly titillating show that the majority of Americans could look at, gasp at, and remark upon its absolute oddity and abnormality. From the point of view of the creators of the show, these characters were always meant to be something outside of the acceptable national standards for behavior, appearance, and values, which is why people would want to watch.

In this way, the South was the perfect place for a show like *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* to take place. Often seen as the nation's backwater, to many the region has come to embody a laundry list of the nation's least desired characteristics – poverty, regression, malnourishment, and moral corruption. It would be untrue to say that these characteristics do not exist within the borders of the region, but it would be equally untrue to say that they do not exist within the rest of the nation as well. But why would Southerners be so complicit in propagating and sustaining this kind of abject grotesqueness? Why would the cast of *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* voluntarily inhabit such a position in which they could become the subject of national derision? Why would any Southerner want to use abjection and the grotesque to define themselves? That is what this dissertation will explore, but before that, it is useful to examine what the value of a grotesque and abject South is to the United States as a whole.

The Need for an Abject South

> There was not, after all, a great difference between the world of the North
> and that of the South which she had fled; there was only this difference:
> the North promised more. And this similarity: what it promised it did not
> give, and what it gave, at length and grudgingly with one hand, it took
> back with the other – James Baldwin, *Go Tell It On the Mountain*

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In Baldwin's 1953 novel, we see a dawning truth that violently rejects narratives and cultural assumptions that position the North as a progressive utopia and counterpoint to the grotesque horrors of the South. Baldwin, along with Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and many others, sought to foreground the ways in which violence, racism, poverty, and abjection form a systemic constellation of forces that shape not only the American South, but the nation as a whole. In this, we see the evidence that the grotesqueness of the South does not stop at the Mason-Dixon line, but spreads through the urban cityscapes of even the most "advanced" Northern metropolises. It is this idea that Rosa Parks refers to when she describes Detroit as "the northern promised land that wasn't" (Theoharis 24).

The statements of Parks, Wright, Ellison, Baldwin, and countless others are essential cultural critiques because they disrupt the idea of a truly progressive liberal democracy rooted in Jeffersonian ideas of an "Empire of Liberty." In this antiquated view of America, the rights and freedoms of each citizen would be held paramount and sanctified in both the spirit and laws of the nation. Jefferson, wistfully referring to this idea as he exited the presidency in 1809, writes of the nation and his experiences: "Trusted with the destinies of this solitary republic of the world, the only monument of human rights, and the sole depository of the sacred fire of freedom and self-government, from hence it is to be lighted up in other regions of the earth, if other areas of the earth shall ever become susceptible of its benign influence" ("To the Citizens of Washington" 3). It is to this lofty and noble goal that Jefferson thought America should constantly strive, and, despite the creaking age of the idea (as well as Jefferson's own problematic relationship to slavery), it is still one that, rightly or wrongly, lies at the heart of the nation's self-conception as, "a political entity in which membership is constituted not through ancestry of common traditions but through shared commitment to individual rights and capitalist

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progress" (Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* 1). This conception of idealized self also serves as an evolutionary teleological concept – the final logical step in the creation of a fully self-actualized just and equitable nation that could be an example to the rest of the world.

But it is at this heart that exists an irresolvable struggle which looms, specter-like, just behind any discussion of the idealized America. This haunting spirit is not an external force, but rather an inherent feature of the progressive liberal republican ideology. This feature is the essential truth that progressive nationalism cannot be static. By its very nature, it cannot remain stable for long, rather, it requires something to push against, and, as an ideology, must be constantly struggled with and reasserted for it to have any meaning. In an 1846 speech, abolitionist Charles Brandon Boynton frames the American project as one might discuss the role of missionaries:

> The struggle is ever to elevate humanity, to overturn and remove whatever can abridge, either the rights or the comforts of man; whatever can impede his progress, fetter the intellect, or interpose human authority between man and his God. Against all these, and all *such* things, American principles have eternal war, which can only be ended by the unconditional surrender of the wrong. These are the original foundations of the American State. (10-11)

This "eternal war," as Boynton puts it, creates an ideology that functions in an almost Derridean fashion in which its finality must, at every point, be incomplete in order that it should strive for a better self-conception.

The impossibility of resolving this conflict is written in the nation's founding documents which establish one of the primary goals of the nation as the formation of a "more perfect Union." This statement is rhetorically powerful because of its vastness and ambiguity. Denotatively, perfection exists as a binary state – one cannot become *more* than perfect, one can

only strive for the impossibility of perfection. This struggle is present once again in the Great Seal of the Nation. Approved in 1782, the seal features an eagle grasping arrows and olive branches on one side, and an unfinished pyramid beneath an "Eye of Providence" as well as the words "Annuit Coeptis" (generally translated as "He favors our undertakings," or "providence favors our undertakings"). The pyramid itself was meant to symbolize strength and a lasting nation, but its incomplete nature invites the interpretation that the work is forever unfinished. This, coupled with description of the work of American democracy as an "undertaking," rather than a final product, suggests that the struggle will always be present.

The complexity of the issues is embodied in Jefferson himself, who, despite proclaiming the central role of human rights to the national identity, owned slaves. Claims that Jefferson treated these slaves with a degree of kindness and humanity cannot assuage his guilt for participating in a system that dehumanizes its victims and converts them into chattel. Given this, one might argue that the only way to resolve the cognitive dissonance of espousing human rights and participating in slavery is to cease to view those who are enslaved as human, an argument which hardly fits with his ideals of the American ethos. Regardless, for Jefferson, and for the nation, true progressive republican ideology was an ideal for which it was worth the struggle, if only to create a goal worth attaining. Carl Schurz, German-American statesman and Union general, in an 1859 speech decrying the Fugitive Slave Act, speaks to this difficulty:

> As its advocate I speak to you. I will speak of Americanism as the great
> representative of the reformatory age, as the great champion of the dignity
> of human nature, as the great repository of the last hopes of suffering
> mankind. I will speak of the ideal mission of this country and of this
> people. You may tell me that these views are visionary, that the destiny of
> this country is less exalted, that the American people are less great than I
> think they are or ought to be. I answer, ideals are like stars; you will not
> succeed in touching them with your hands. But like the seafaring man on
> the desert of waters, you choose them as your guides, and following them
> you will reach your destiny. I invite you to ascend with me the watchtower

of history, overlooking the grand panorama of the development of human affairs, in which the American Republic stands in so bold and prominent relief. (59)

Whether this is productive rhetoric, or a pretty way of dismissing criticism, is up to interpretation, but these complexities and their resulting rhetoric aside, the progressive ideologies that Jefferson and others supported can never achieve their end goal because a teleological end would undermine the eternal nature of the struggle. But how, then, is this kind of ideology sustainable and how can a nation engage in a constant ideological struggle without either triumphing over or losing to an opposing side? The answer to this comes through both the conscious and unconscious casting of the nation's South and North.

Casting the South and North

Benedict Anderson's exploration of the creation and spread of Nationalisms begins by positing that not only nationalism, but the concept of "nation" itself is an outgrowth of ideology as much as geographic boundaries. For Anderson, these are "imagined communities" because, "The members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). This concept of nationhood as community is particularly important in a geographic region as large and diverse as the United States. Colin Woodard, in his book *American Nations*, posits that the country is not one united front, but really an affiliation of eleven separate nations, each of which possesses its own history, culture, and relationship with the land. Woodard argues that, far from this being a new occurrence, this aspect of Americanness has been baked in since the beginning, and that the unity of the fledgling colonies and regions came about not necessarily from a shared dream of a national identity, but as necessity to throw off the yoke of English rule. In the wake of the new nation's victory, it was up to the founding fathers to find a way of

maintaining unity for the purpose of mutual protection and expansion of trade. But, as he points

out, there was never a true shared sense of American identity:

> By the middle of the eighteenth century, eight discrete Euro-American
> cultures had been established on the southern and eastern rims of North
> America. For generations these distinct cultural hearths developed in
> remarkable isolation from one another, consolidating characteristic values,
> practices, dialects, and ideals. Some championed individualism, others
> utopian social reform. Some believed themselves guided by divine
> purpose, others championed freedom of conscience and inquiry. Some
> embraced an Anglo-Saxon Protestant identity, others ethnic and religious
> pluralism. Some valued equality and democratic participation, others
> deference to a traditional aristocratic order. All of them continue to
> champion some version of their founding ideals in the present day. (2)

Though Woodard may be accused of oversimplification, it remains true that the nation cannot be

simply boiled down into a set of inherent beliefs and shared characteristics. Therefore the United

States' Declaration of Independence and Constitution exist both as announcements to the world

of a vision of free democratic values, and as documents meant to articulate, and remind the local

citizens of a manufactured shared ideology and sense of communal affiliation.

It is because of this internal tension that the imagined "American community" is a

delicate and precarious creation whose greatest struggles have come not from external forces, but

from those within. A young Abraham Lincoln, in his 1838 address to the Young Men's Lyceum

of Springfield, Illinois, addressed this point two decades before the brutal Civil War, which

nearly tore the country asunder. As he considers the greatest threats to the nation, Lincoln

remarks,

> At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means
> shall we fortify against it? Shall we expect some transatlantic military
> giant, to step the Ocean, and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of
> Europe, Asia and Africa combined . . . could not by force, take a drink
> from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand
> years. At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I
> answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come
> from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and

finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide. ("The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions: Address Before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois")

This ever-present danger came to a head with the rising tensions over slavery which led inexorably to the Civil War. While the material fact of slavery was the cause of the war, equally essential was what slavery represented. In the opinion of the Union, slavery was incongruous with the progressive republican ideals of freedom and humanitarian morality enshrined within the founding documents of the nation. In short, the nation could never fulfill its destiny while still pursuing slavery. Confederate ideology, on the other hand, argued the nation was founded on principles of self-determination and freedom from the powerful arm of a centralized state entity that was common in the monarchies of Europe. For the Confederacy then, America could never fulfill its destiny while governmental mandates prevented the citizenry from pursuing cultural and economic self-determination through the preservation of a slavery-based plantation culture.

This ideological conflict proved to be unsolvable through traditional strategies of legislation, propaganda, and other ideological means, leaving armed conflict as the only option. Years later, as the Union triumphed, the goal shifted to a process of rebuilding the vanquished South in a way that rearticulated the larger Jeffersonian ideals of a progressive democratic republic. For the North, this project was a necessity because in the aftermath of the Civil War, the country struggled with how it would materially rebuild an entire region of the country that had been physically scarred and decimated by four years of bloody conflict. Perhaps more urgent, though, was the rush to reform the fundamental ideology of the South. This project of an ideological reconstruction was imperative not only because the nation needed to banish a profound evil from one of its regions, but also because the country needed to cleanse its soul and

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reestablish its own moral and spiritual authority so that it might live up to the ideals on which it was founded. Angelina Grimke, writing in a resolution for the Women's Loyal National League at the height of the war in 1863, echoes Jeffersonian language while she addresses the far-reaching implications of the war as an ideological struggle:

> This war is not, as the South falsely pretends, a war of races, nor of sections, nor of political parties, but a war of *Principles*; a war upon the working-classes, whether white or black; a war against *Man*, the world over. In this war, the black man was the first victim; the workingman of whatever color the next; and now *all* who contend for the rights of labor, for free speech, free schools, free suffrage, and a free government, securing to *all* life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, are driven to do battle in defense of these or to fall with them, victims of the same violence that for two centuries has held the black man a prisoner of war. (Grimke)

Grimke goes on to assert that the war is a defining moment for the country where it must either "become one vast slaveocracy of petty tyrants, or wholly the land of the free" (Grimke). While Grimke presents the war in terms of competing principles and ideologies, it would be naïve to think that the war itself would end this struggle. In fact, in many ways, the war itself was just the opening salvo to the larger struggle for the right to ideologically and rhetorically define the South.

The purpose of the Reconstruction Era was to create temporary infrastructure investment in the South and force reluctant steps toward reaffiliation with a national identity rooted in progressive, classically liberal and republican nationalisms. Unfortunately, what began as a radical movement to redistribute land, resources, and power in the South, became, under President Andrew Johnson, a watered-down doctrine that was mired in chaotic political infighting. Whatever the initial intention, the country lacked the political will to create a real and lasting ideological change in the South. As a result, temporary gains were quickly erased as new forms of systemic legally enshrined racism and white supremacy were created to maintain old

social order. Reflecting on this in his 1935 *Black Reconstruction in America*, W. E. B. Du Bois

frames Reconstruction as a critical failure, particularly in its goal of bolstering the rights of the

newly freed Black Americans:

> The price of the disaster of slavery and civil war was the necessity of
> quickly assimilating into American democracy a mass of ignorant laborers
> in whose hands alone for the moment lay the power of preserving the
> ideals of popular government; of overthrowing a slave economy and
> establishing upon it an industry primarily for the profit of the workers. It
> was this price which in the end America refused to pay and today suffers
> for that refusal. (325)

It is easy to imagine why a sudden and forcible change in ideology exerted by outside forces

would be a difficult sell. After all, the region had staked its future on resistance to newly

emerging forms of national identity that required them to give up long held social schemata

based in the intersections of classical Arcadian and agrarian ethea, along with influences of

European caste systems, and finally, white supremacy. Any temporary progress that was

achieved under the federal guidance of Reconstruction was precarious at best, and quickly

receded as the government eased pressure.

Building the "New South"

As many Southerners bristled at the prospect of a new social order imposed by a

victorious North, a few broke ranks with their former comrades in arms and actively embraced a

wholesale change in the material dynamics and social structure of the region. Though not the

best known, among the earliest of these individuals calling for the birth of a New South was

former Confederate senator Benjamin Harvey Hill. As a lawyer and lifelong politician, Hill was

emblematic of the unstable and explosive Southern politics that led up to the Civil War.

Originally a member of the Whig party, Hill unsuccessfully vied with Democrat Joseph Brown

for governor of Georgia in 1857. Two years later, he was elected to the state senate as a Unionist

who passionately decried the movement for secession. Nevertheless, in the months after

secession, he quickly allied himself with Jefferson Davis and became a Confederate senator. In

the immediate aftermath of the war, Hill fought vociferously against Radical Reconstruction. Yet

in 1871, Hill surprised many with a speech before the alumni of the University of Georgia that

offered an impassioned plea that Southerners should let the past die and embrace the changing

tide of social and economic order. For Hill, the way forward lay not in rearticulating or

repackaging failed systems, but instead in an investment in the education, people, and ideas that

would spur innovation in the next generation. As he observed:

> In the present, far more than in any preceding age, ideas govern mankind.
> Not individuals, nor societies; not kings nor emperors; not fleets nor
> armies, but ideas— educated intellects—using and controlling all these, as
> doth the mechanic his tools, uproot dynasties, overturn established
> systems, subvert and reorganize governments, revolutionize social fabrics,
> and direct civilizations . . . Thought is the Hercules of this age, and his
> strength is equally a vigorous fact, whether it be employed in throttling the
> lion of power, or in cleaning out the Augean stables of accumulated social
> errors. (355)

Throughout the speech, Hill combines classical allusion and rhetoric with ideas of modern

capitalism, thus embodying the kind of South that he wished to see in future generations. His

major point, though, is that the South needs to come to terms with the fact that slavery was

ultimately a disaster for the region, not only because it invited war and bloodshed, but because it

fundamentally enfeebled the minds and will of everyone concerned. In Hill's estimation, the

slave-owning populations became detached both bodily and intellectually from the processes of

labor, thus descending into "elegant leisure, luxurious abandon, and hospitable idleness" (355).

To add to this, Hill notes that because the slave system relied on keeping those in bondage

ignorant, that entire generations of potential development and advancement had been quashed.

Thus, in Hill's opinion, slavery was the weight that would never allow the South to reach its full

potential. On this point, Hill makes a call for all Southerners to look to the future, saying that the

South cannot afford "to waste time and strength in defense of theories and systems, however

valued in their day, which have been swept down by the moving avalanche of actual events." He

goes on to note:

> No system which has fallen and been destroyed in the struggles of the past
> will ever be able to rise and grapple with the increasing power of its
> conqueror in the future. We can live neither in nor by the defeated past,
> and if we would live in the growing, conquering future, we must furnish
> our strength to shape its course and our will to discharge its duties. The
> pressing question, there fore, with every people is, not what they have
> been, but whether and what they shall determine to be; not what their
> fathers were, but whether and what their children shall be. (355)

His speech caused considerable consternation, first, as a post-mortem for the old South, it is an

explicit rejection of long enshrined social, political, economic, and cultural tradition. Second, it

indicates that the only way forward is to join with the North's versions of these traditions.

Not that every Southerner was receptive to the ideas and rhetoric of the New South. An

August 1881 editorial in the *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Journal & Messenger* characterized

the term and its proponents as "radical rot," and goes on to note of the rhetoric of the New South

that "Nothing is or can be more hateful to our people," and that, "To the Radicals it signifies the

subjugation of the South and the destruction of her institutions and symbolizes the death of the

Confederacy and the blasting of all our hopes. If we understand them, they mean the phrase as an

insult, a cowardly gibe at our failure. So far as the Southern people are concerned, we believe

they understand the matter just as we do, and that they as heartily resent it" ("The New South"

800). For the many living in the South, then, even the suggestion of adapting to what had come

to be considered a Northern ideology was heretical and a grave dishonor.

Nevertheless, the rhetoric of the New South began to pick up steam in the early 1880s.

Henry Grady struck a positive and utopian tone as he extolled the virtues of the New South to

northern audiences. Speaking at the New England Club of New York on December 21, 1886,

Grady said:

> The new South is enamored of her new work. Her soul is stirred with the
> breath of a new life. The light of a grander day is falling fair on her face.
> She is thrilling with the consciousness of growing power and prosperity.
> As she stands upright, full-statured and equal among the people of the
> earth, breathing the keen air and looking out upon the expanded horizon,
> she understands that her emancipation came because through the
> inscrutable wisdom of God her honest purpose was crossed, and her brave
> armies were beaten. (*The New South, and Other Addresses* 38)

What is striking about visions and narratives of a New South that were being generated by Hill,

Grady, and others, is not just that they articulated a different vision for the South, but rather that

Southerners *themselves* were attempting to create a new rhetorical and ideological form for the

South.

Grady's efforts at selling a New South are particularly interesting for a few reasons. First,

because the New South that he liked to describe – a South that had embraced industrial

production and left behind old economic systems based in agriculture, as well as a South that

was beginning to thrive once more – was, in fact a purely imaginative construction. Instead, the

South was beset by poverty because of, among other reasons, their agricultural system decimated

by years of war, disease, and, of course, the emancipation of slaves. Between 1860 and 1880, the

per capita agricultural income for Southern states dropped precipitously, from $61.59 in 1860 to

a low of $34.34 in 1870 before slightly recovering to $41.46 in 1880 (Brinkley 117). This

poverty would continue throughout much of the late 19th and early twentieth century. Secondly,

the reason this New South was imaginary more than anything else was that industry simply did

not exist in the region in the way these spokespeople claimed. As Jack Kirby notes on this

subject, "Industrial production workers did not outnumber farmers until the late 1940s, and a

majority of the southern population did not become urban until the 1950s" (xvi). While it would

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be easy, as some critics have, to write off the comments of Grady and his contemporaries as being misguided and hyperbolic at best, and fraudulent at worst, the efforts of these Southern publicists were designed to create a counter narrative to the images of despair, degradation, and deprivation that were pervasive in the aftermath of the Civil War. In effect, what we see is Southerners using rhetoric and ideology to invent their own South.

What is fascinating about this is that it not only, as noted above, creates a counter narrative to the way in which the South was depicted within a national consciousness, but also that it was an attempt to upend the idea that the region was a passive recipient of forced modernity. During Reconstruction, the rhetoric that surrounded the South was largely that of a vanquished and colonized people who had brought their colonization upon themselves by declaring themselves as "other" to the United States. In a section from the Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, June 20, 1866, the signatories wrote of the South that:

> They opened hostilities and levied war against the government. They continued this war for four years with the most determined and malignant spirit . . .. Whether legally and constitutionally or not, they did, in fact, withdraw from the Union and made themselves subjects of another government of their own creation. And they only yielded when they were compelled by utter exhaustion to lay down their arms . . . expressing no regret, except that they had no longer the power to continue the desperate struggle . . . The people waging it were necessarily subject to all the rule which, by the law of nations, control a contest of that character, and to all the legitimate consequences following it. One of those consequences was that, within the limits prescribed by humanity, the conquered rebels were at the mercy of the conquerors. That a government thus outraged had a most perfect right to exact indemnity for the injuries done, and security against the recurrence of such outrages in the future, would seem too clear for dispute. (x-xi)

This was typical of the language and rhetoric surrounding Reconstruction. This rhetoric, as Jennifer Greeson writes, was matched by actions and strategies based in "models provided by European imperial administration" (236). What seems to be commonplace in the discussions and

formulations of the South that were being bandied about throughout the rest of the country was a creation of a tamed and passive South. Reconstruction was something that would be *done to* the South. All the rebuilding would be done not for the South's sake, but for the sake of a larger nationalist ideology that showed the North as benevolent conquerors who had banished a national evil and brought about progress and civilization to a region stunted by its own base and savage instincts. With this in mind, the rhetorical rebuilding of the South by *Southern* voices takes on more weight. The idea of the New South, rather than just being a motto of what could be created, becomes an important moment of the assertion of Southern agency and expression of self-determination.

It is not only this affirmation of agency that makes the statements of Grady and his contemporaries interesting, but also the audience to whom they were making their case. When Grady makes his case saying:

> Old South rested everything on slavery and agriculture, unconscious that these could neither give nor maintain healthy growth," the New South "presents a perfect democracy, the oligarchs leading in the popular movements social system compact and closely knitted, less splendid on the surface but stronger at the core - a hundred farms for every plantation, fifty homes for every palace, and a diversified industry that meets the complex needs of this complex age" ("The New South" 38),

it is not Southerners to whom he is speaking, but rather the Yankees in New York City. Similarly, former Confederate diplomat Edwin De Leon of South Carolina wrote in an 1870 article for the New York-based *Putnam Magazine* of the ways in which both the North and South would benefit from a reunification, noting, "The Northerner will carry South his thrift, his caution, his restless activity, his love of new things: the Southerner will temper these with his reckless liberality, his careless confidence, his fiery energy, and his old-time conservatism ; and both will be benefited by the admixture" (459). De Leon goes on to list a number of ways that

the South has improved over the five years since the end of the Civil War, but ultimately comes to his real question: "What are the inducements to tempt the Northern capitalist or farmer to invest, or move South? Can he do better there, than by employing his labor and his funds at home, or in the wide West, whose virgin charms woo so many of the hardy sons of the North to wend their way towards sunset?" (460).

It is De Leon's question that makes the appeals about the New South so compelling. What we see here is the rhetorical construction of a New South specifically for Northern audiences for the purposes of gaining access to capital and entrance into new markets. While we can see this as simply being a play to reintegrate the South into a growing and shifting national economy and identity, that would undersell a project that would help shape the Southern economy from 1870s until today. Namely that the South, a region whose agricultural economy had been decimated by war, disease, and of course emancipation; a region that, despite what the publicity said, still did not have a foothold in industrial markets; this South needed something to sell. It needed a product and what they found was that the only thing they had left to sell was the image of the South. During this period, the image of New South was marketed to northerners as a region ready to be brought back into the ideological and material fold of the rest of the nation.

This image becomes more complex when we look at the ways in which purveyors of New South ideology addressed Southern audiences, and the ways in which their invented South may have been created to fit materially and rhetorically within the reasserted affiliative bonds of the United States. Many of the New South salespeople did not wish to give up the enshrined ideology of white supremacy that had motivated the slave trade in the first place. Grady, for instance, in an address at the Texas State Fair in Dallas in 1887, decries the ways in which the North sought to dictate not only the laws of the South, but what he refers to as their thoughts and

traditions. Referencing Vice President Henry Wilson's statement that "We shall not have finished with the South until we force its people to change their thought, and think as we think," he says:

> Not enough to have conquered our armies – to have decimated our ranks, to have desolated our fields and reduced us to poverty, to have struck the ballot from our hands and enfranchised our slaves – to have held us prostrate under bayonets while the insolent mocked and thieves plundered – but their very souls must be rifled of their faiths, their sacred traditions cudgeled from memory, and their immortal minds beaten into subjection until thought had lost its integrity, and we were forced "to think as they think." ("The South and Her Problems" 58)

Grady rejects a model of society that would bring true equality, arguing that to accept that would be to go against God's will, and that "The superiority of the white race must be maintained forever . . . because the white race is the superior race. This is the declaration of no new truth. It has abided forever in the marrow of our bodies, and shall run forever with the blood that feeds Anglo-Saxon hearts. In political compliance the South has evaded the truth, and men have drifted from their convictions. But we can not escape this issue. It faces us wherever we turn. It is an issue that has been, and will be" ("The South and Her Problems" 53). For Grady, this is a prime selling point for the New South – an embrace of the movement away from agricultural and merchant capitalism to industrial capitalism, and the wealth that it brings, while maintaining old ideologies that maintain a status quo of white supremacy.

In many ways, whether he knew it or not, this New South of Grady's perfectly captures the positioning of the South in relation to the rest of the United States in terms of race. To say that the North did not overtly or obliquely embrace white supremacy would be naïve, but what Grady sought to create utilized the existing sectionalization of the nation to build an ideological locale in which the nation's desire for white supremacy could be freely expressed under the guise of culture and tradition, while at the same time rejected. This allows the nation to have it both

ways – to embrace white supremacy while also holding itself up as a model of progressivism,
freedom, and humanity. In this way, the image of the South as a thoroughly unmodern
backwards wasteland was one of the region's most valuable exports.

The National Use of Regional Abjection

Regardless of propaganda on both sides, ideologies of the "Progressive Liberal North"
and the "New South" contradict reality and, upon reflection, seem to be nothing but braying
braggadocio of those who were attempting to sell a new sense of Americanness. What we find in
both cases is pure ideology without praxis. Taken separately, the ideologies of the "Progressive
Liberal North" and the "New South," perhaps, reveal a country that idealizes itself and desires to
constantly make itself better. But when these ideologies are taken together, we find, once again,
two ideologies that are fundamentally incompatible.

The reason for this disunity is that the fallacy of the "Progressive Liberal North" relies on
a South that is antithetical to the progressiveness. It requires a South that is defined by what H.L.
Mencken described as a "unanimous torpor and doltishness." Mencken goes on to describe this
abject South as having a "curious and almost pathological estrangement from everything that
makes for a civilized culture" and notes that:

> The South has simply been drained of all its best blood. The vast
> hemorrhage of the Civil War half exterminated and wholly paralyzed the
> old aristocracy, and so left the land to the harsh mercies of the poor white
> trash, now its masters. The war, of course, was not a complete massacre. It
> spared a decent number of first-rate Southerners – perhaps even some of
> the very best. Moreover, other countries, notably France and Germany,
> have survived far more staggering butcheries, and even showed marked
> progress thereafter. But the war not only cost a great many valuable lives;
> it also brought bankruptcy, demoralization and despair in its train- and so
> the majority of the first-rate Southerners that were left, broken in spirit and
> unable to live under the new dispensation, cleared out. (143)

Clearly, this is not completely true. Mencken's casting of the South leaves out not only the industrious work that was being done to rebuild the region such as expansion of railways, as well as efforts to create more centralized urban outposts in the South, but also glosses over the cultural contributions of writers like Kate Chopin and Thomas Nelson Page. Perhaps most striking is Mencken's willful omission of the contributions of a new generation of African American intellectuals like Charles Chesnutt and Booker T. Washington to larger national discussions of race, culture, and identity. Mencken's key misunderstanding though is that he formulates the South as a separate geographical region rather than a set of ideologies and affiliations. With this in mind, we might wonder exactly how it was that this image of a broken and battered South came to define not only the region itself, but the nation.

Intranational "Orientalism" and the Northern Gaze

It is helpful here to turn to Edward Said's seminal post-colonial analysis of western imperialism, *Orientalism*, to understand the construction and function of a post-bellum abject South. As Said contends, the Orient is "almost a European invention," (1) created, at least partially, for the purpose of gaining "strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (3) to cement a strong cultural hegemony by "reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter" (7). So too we might imagine the post-Civil War South being an innovation created by external forces for the purposes of entrenching a larger progressive national identity by "othering" the South as a savage, abject, and regressive locale.

In Said's estimation, the development and promulgation of Western hegemony that is implicit in Orientalism finds its roots in an enforced passivity of the object of study (the Orient).

In this, the region only attains definitive meaning when looked at and contextualized through the Western gaze. This gaze captures, flattens out, and repurposes any idea or experience within the material and ideological framework of "the Orient" as being merely an extension, or reflection, or attempted negation of Western hegemony. As Said writes, "The main thing for a European visitor was a European representation of the Orient" (1). This is a function not only of material experience, but also epistemological, etiology, and philosophical rationality and self-projection. Said goes on to write:

> Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character. (7-8)

One of the ideas that Said is getting at here is that a function of Orientalism is to flatten out cultural differences and recast them in ways that serve the West's teleological positioning as the superior cultural space. For Said, even the quest to study or define the Orient objectifies and subjugates the object of the gaze, allowing it only to exist within the confines of a teleological subjective narrative that asserts the West as the end result of a cultural evolution from savage and ignorant to the refined and rational. This narrative is important not only to concepts of Orientalism, but also to the European imperial project as a whole. It serves as justification for the physical and epistemological violence that European culture and colonizers have inflicted throughout the world.

As we consider this cross section of Orientalism and Colonialism, it is also important to note that, while the West may use its self-avowed cultural and moral superiority as justification for its continued physical and epistemological violence, that both projects rely on maintaining

the colonized space and its people as "the other." If, for instance, a colonized country became completely harmonized with its European colonizers, then there would be no moral justification for maintaining the colonized status. Rather, the colonizers would have to admit their other, more accurate, reasons for colonization – expansion of wealth, exploitation of natural resources, development of a cheap or enslaved labor market, etc. With this in mind, there must be an investment in keeping the "other" as other.

But how do we shift this dynamic from questions of European imperialism to the relational identities that developed between the American North and South in the time leading up to and following the Civil War? To fully address this, we might start with two deceptively simple questions that have enormous repercussions on the ways in which Americans view themselves and their country – What is the South? And What is the North?

Necroexceptionalism in the North's South

It turns out that these questions are difficult, but essential to understanding their relationships. For the purposes of this argument, the South is not specifically regarded as a geographic space, but an ideological region that happens to fit within the nation's southern regions. The South, if we are to follow Said, can be regarded as "the other," or, more specifically, the Not-The-North. This process of othering effectively hollows out any intrinsic meaning of the region and creates a floating signifier that acts as a repository for a variety of projected meanings which can serve the ideological needs of the nation. In effect, this process erases any real positioning of the South and substitutes a series of simulacra which are consistently rearticulated until they no longer conceal a sense of reality, but in effect *become* reality themselves. Jean Baudrillard, in speaking of the ideas of simulacra, notes that, "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting

the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes" (2). This happens because this simulacra of the South exists not only in the minds of the North, but also in the minds of Southerners for whom the manufactured meaning becomes recast as culture, history, and tradition.

One of the clearest examples of Southern simulacra serving the national identity comes from the region's purported poverty and backwardness. This aspect of the Southernness is important to the overarching national ideology because it allows the dominant forces to have a playground in which they can enter an unending process of correction of the region's physical, social, and moral difficulties and precarity. In her essay "Violence, Mourning, Politics," Judith Butler explores the ways that concepts of vulnerability, loss, and mourning shape and are shaped by our social relationships and interactions with others. For Butler, loss and mourning stem from a sense of vulnerability. This vulnerability is not something that we can force or will away, we are all always already subjected to it. She notes that vulnerability "precedes the formation of 'I'," and that we exist in vulnerability simply by being born into a world in which we need others to survive (as newborn babies, for example, we are in a state of extreme vulnerability to the destructive whims of others, but we also need others to support and nurture us in order to survive) (31). In Butler's essay, she sets out to investigate vulnerability in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11th and the ensuing American reaction, but before she can begin, she must raise a few questions that are more fundamental: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what *makes for a grievable life*?" 20). Articulating these questions

allows us to deconstruct the ways that external political and social relationships help to fashion the individual subject and shape its sense of vulnerability (both corporeal and emotional).

While Butler frames these questions as a way of exploring and dissecting the rise of an ideology of grievabilty and vulnerability that served to bolster a growing sense of nationalism in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11th, by tracing this nationalistic impulse back to the formation of postbellum America, it becomes apparent that this ideological framework helped to establish and underscore images of a progressive liberal republican American exceptionalism that at once subjugated and subsumed the American South. An impulse that creates what we might call the North's South.

The North's South is an ideological dressing of the South that exaggerates certain aspects of the region specifically for the North's larger ideological goals of progressive republicanism and democracy. The North's South is a land of contradiction, at once ruined and romantic. It is both genteel and grotesque. It is a region that represents both a reminder of history and a warning of a possible tragic future as we see in Duck's observation that, "During the Depression, southern traditionalism was increasingly seen as a threatening chronotype; no longer an effective container for the nation's disavowed antiliberalism, the trope of the backward south began to comprise an image of what the United States could become" (7). But most of all, it is a construct. It is a region that has been laboriously epistemologically constructed in ways that other parts of the nation have not. Indeed, if we are to reflect on the ways in which other parts of the country are ideologically constructed vis-à-vis the nation, no other region functions in quite the same way in terms of its culture and difference.

It is worth noting that the South is not the only region that has received this particular treatment in America's history. One need only look to the symbolic function of the New England

region in the country's early history and the ways in which it functions as the purported engine

and display case for all American ideological and cultural progress. New England as symbol

represented a fusion of Puritanism, Republicanism, and a deep value of religious and personal

freedom. Charles Brandon Boynton, speaking to a gathering of Native Americans in Cincinnati

in 1847, took a particularly romantic view of the region's ability to radiate Puritan freedoms and

ideals:

> Puritanism is at least eighteen hundred years old. It is but another name for
> Apostolic Christianity, embodied in civil institutions. Puritanism,
> Protestantism, and True Americanism are only different terms to designate
> the same set of principles, working out in all laws with more or less
> success similar results . . . It was a Puritan state, which was founded in the
> cabin of the May-flower – those were Puritan colonies which shaped the
> early destinies of our country; they were Puritan orators whose spiritual
> lightning flashed throughout the masses of the people, and kindled all it
> touched – and was a Puritan who led our armies to victory. A Puritan
> Assembly produced the Declaration, and the Confederation was Puritan in
> all its principles, and its aims. Puritanism belongs not to New England
> only: it is found wherever a heart throbs with genuine American feeling. It
> is Protestant Christianity seeking to clothe the spirit of Liberty in a fitting
> body of free institutions. (10-11)

But while the North, and New England comes to be defined as the seat of culture and rationality

– a region that breathed life into the nascent American dream of life, liberty, and the pursuit of

happiness, the South becomes marked as its antithesis. Far from these cliched American ideals,

the region comes to be defined by oppression and death.

It is the South as region of death that is of particular import when defining the region's

character and purpose vis-à-vis the nation. It is also this characteristic that leads to a

consideration of a particular national ideal that, for lack of better terminology, we might call

"bioexceptionalism." Bioexceptionalism, I argue, is a nationalist view that says participation in

the national economy and culture leads to an existence where all the basic elements necessary to

sustain life are not only met but are also exceeded. These elements, including food, medicine,

shelter, education, and economic opportunity flow in an abundance, which, in turn, ensures a stable and prosperous existence as well as a maximum amount of bodily agency. This bioexceptionalist ideal has been a part of America's national narrative since its birth. But bioexceptionalism, like most other aspects of nationalistic ideology, needs to operate under constant threat, or else its exceptionalism is meaningless. In this case, the threats to bioexceptionalism are those markers of physical, cultural, and ideological death that without constant struggle would overwhelm and smother life.

As is the case in Orientalism where "the other" helps give shape to the hegemonic forces because it allows them to say, "Those who are not us are other and those who are other than other are us," the shadow of death allows the promise of life to be an essential good. With this in mind, bioexceptionalism's antithesis, necroexceptionalism, refers to a culture that lacks the ability or resources to sustain life. Not only can it not take care of itself, but the culture also produces death. Achille Mbembe defines necropolitics as, "contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death [that] profoundly reconfigure the relations among resistance, sacrifice, and terror" (39). He argues that necropolitics and necropower, "account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (40). Additionally, Mbembe, in his essay which formulates necropolitics, argues that sovereignty means "the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not." (27)

Necroexceptionalism follows from these ideas, but also considers the ways these "death-worlds," when taken to the extreme, can be seen as not only containing death, but also

overflowing with it and threatening the sanctity of life itself. In the ideological conflict between bioexceptionality and necroexceptionality, those who are marked by sovereignty as necroexceptional are not only disposable, but also toxic and poisonous to others. Additionally, these subjects cannot receive the same interventions as bioexceptional subjects because necroexceptional subjects can never really be "alive."

In her discussions of grievability, Butler also foregrounds the current nationalist discourses that dehumanize, other, and de-realize populations to produce an environment where those subjects may be eliminated without moral consideration. This is essential because, as Butler writes, "If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated" ("Violence, Mourning, and Politics" 33). For this reason, if we are to regard the North as producer of bioexceptionalist narratives of itself, then any travesties committed by their side are either justified or flatly unquestioned. This allowed not only for the abuse of prisoners of war at Camp Douglas in Illinois, but also the continued oppression and subjugation of Native American tribes, even as the nation sought to establish itself as a moral and humane world power. Again, we might return to Thomas Jefferson as an example of ways of justifying being both "humanitarian," and a participant in the slave economy – a conflict that can only be resolved by regarding enslaved people as not-human. As Butler argues, attempts to combat these narratives often run into skepticism and accusations of justification of inhuman acts ("Explanation and Exoneration, or What We Can Hear"). These individuals, as individuals, lack the opportunity to even have a narrative of their own. This ideology creates a self-sustaining cycle where we cannot grieve them because they are not like us, and they are not like us because we cannot grieve them.

This grievability also serves another purpose that, though Butler does not explicitly refer to, is nonetheless worthy of consideration. Grievability that highlights connections through identifiable narratives is not only a way of remembering life; it is also a way of deferring the negation that accompanies death. In the United States, a country that prides itself on many different forms of social and political exceptionalism, this desire and ability to regulate and defer death and decay through narratives such as obituaries and moving tributes serves to underscore a sort of bioexceptionalism. We might traditionally see this American bioexceptionalism as referring to a nationalist view that the basic elements necessary to sustain life are not only met, but are also exceeded, ensuring a stable existence and bodily agency. Economic wealth, health care, control of one's body, technology, as well as the abundance of natural resources and the ability to convert the resources into materials that produce life and allow it to flourish, all feed into this bioexceptionalist American ideology.

Butler's questions of humanity and grievability turn out to be essential, particularly at a time during which the United States is engaged in a seemingly endless ideological "War on Terror" that generates and heightens new vulnerabilities that allow the state to exercise expanded governmental and sovereign powers ostensibly for the purpose of ensuring security for the national subject. Butler's concepts are crucial because they also draw our attention to the ways in which vulnerability may be used as a generative force to create and affirm interconnected social relationships and identities based around ideas of American exceptionalism.

One of the results of this "excess of life" is that the progressive United States may direct that life which overflows to subjects that it deems worthy. These are subjects who do not currently benefit from bioexceptionalism and may lead excessively precarious or vulnerable lives. Paul Amar defines this process as "parahumanization" and describes it as "the creation of

politically disabled 'victim' subjects that must, essentially, be constantly protected or rescued by enforcement interventions regardless of their consent or will to be rescued" (17), and notes that parastatal formations ("certain transnational forms of public-private partnership, NGO mobilization, and development expertise") are often brought in as a way to create specific interventions. This "deeming" does not happen at random; rather, it first requires that the group has a "sponsor" who is already a neoliberal subject.

Jasbir Puar traces the ways in which certain types of queer subjects can suddenly find themselves accepted into the national dialogue. To achieve this, Puar argues, these subjects must first embrace homonormativity. Puar starts from Lisa Duggan's definition of homonormativity as a "'new neo-liberal sexual politics' that hinges upon 'the possibility of demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' . . . 'a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative forms, but upholds and sustains them," and argues that these new accepted subjects become a part of a larger practice that she terms "homonationalism." Homonationalism, Puar contends, is a "collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism that is generated both by a national rhetoric of patriotic inclusion and by gay and queer subjects themselves" (38-39). These "good" subjects who are accepted as part of a new national narrative are those who reinscribe heteronormative values (by starting families, getting married, etc.), and/or those who possess excess cultural or market capital. These subjects are thus able to fully constitute themselves as bioexceptional.

Once these groups are deemed to be a part of the American bioexceptional ideology, effective parastatal formations can be created to target individuals in other countries who resemble the members of the newly recognized group. While advocacy groups may have existed before, it is these parastatal formations that generate and formalize the rhetoric and articulate it in

such a way that it becomes part of the larger national conversation. At the same time, strengthened transnational connectivities emerge that connect the repressed population to the United States. These connectivities allow for the flow of the U.S. nationalist bioexceptional discourse to both the oppressed populations and to their oppressors. Thus, as Puar points out, with the rise of the homonational subject, comes national and governmental discourses that specifically use the treatment of homosexuals as a pretext for intervention (rhetorical, military, humanitarian, or all three). In this, the excess life that overflows from bioexceptionalism begins to operate transnationally. This is not to say that these repressed subjects are literally saved or given access to any life-giving resources, rather they are simply recoded as being "alive," (whereas before they were not considered at all), and accordingly to stand up for them, even if it is only rhetorically, is to stand up for life.

As life and bioexceptionalism are so tethered to the United States' self-identity, these interventions also become a way of articulating U.S. nationalism both at home and abroad. Puar addresses this, noting, "For contemporary forms of U.S. nationalism and patriotism, the production of gay and queer bodies is crucial to the deployment of nationalism, insofar as these perverse bodies reiterate heterosexuality as the norm but also because certain domesticated homosexual bodies provide ammunition to reinforce nationalist projects" (39). Marnia Lazreg discusses this kind of intervention in terms of what she calls "military feminism" in the French Algerian War, writing:

> The rhetoric of 'women's emancipation' purported to liberate women
> (from their cultural norms deemed beyond the pale) just as it sought to
> 'protect' them from the FLN. The overwrought colonial theme of the
> 'oppression' of Algerian women that preceded the war facilitated the
> military's strategic interest in women, and obscured the fact that the war
> was a defining moment for women. (145)

Thus, this "liberation" is not just liberation *from* something (from death, oppression, hunger, etc.), but also liberation *to* something (to inclusion in the U.S. neoliberal and bioexceptional discourse.

Again, while Puar is using this particular lens in order to examine transnational ideological issues surrounding repression of homosexual and queer identities, we can see a similar process at work in the runup to the Civil War, in which the North, despite their own oppression and mistreatment of its Black citizens, recode Black slaves as being worthy of life, and thus rhetorically bring them into the national discourse as a population in threat of being consumed by the Southern death-world. Thus, we might consider part of the ideological framework of the war to be the casting of the bioexceptional North versus the necroexceptional South, a region that can be exploited because it is always already dead.

But these ideas did not fade with the end of the war. Indeed, they became more entrenched into the national discourse as the nation sought to reform itself. For Southerners, as word of defeat spread throughout in the days and weeks after Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, the region convulsed with myriad emotions from rage and anger to acceptance and relief. For many, though, this was more than just a "lost cause," it was a moment of eschatological fear and despair. It was more than the sign of an end of an era; rather, it was a terrifying omen that signaled the end of *everything*. Writing in the Anderson, South Carolina's *Intelligencer* on April 13th of 1865, one editorialist opines:

> It is not among improbabilities that the present generation is the last which
> Providence will permit to people in this planet. For four hundred years
> human testimony, drawing its inspiration from Scriptural prophecies, has
> pointed undeviatingly; to this era as the one in which will be witnessed the
> end of time, and the beginning of eternity; Protestant and Roman Catholics
> - the highest authorities - however much they have differed on other
> topics, harmonize fully in the belief that we have now entered upon the
> long anticipated conflict of powers, which is to close "the transgression of

desolation" and precede the coming of "the ancient of days." ("The End of
Time" 1)

As evidence of this, the writer notes the

> [U]nsettled condition of the civilized world, the premonitory throbbing of
> revolution among old systems of Government, the complications growing
> out of our own struggle which threaten to involve other nations, the
> dissolution of social bonds, the loosening of restraints and breaking down
> of the barriers which confine man within a civilized pale, are all
> circumstances now in course of occurrence which are quoted as evidence
> of the final hour" (1).

Given the scope of destruction and loss that the nation suffered during the preceding four years,

the writer might be forgiven their use of such labored apocalyptic imagery. For many, as they

surveyed the ways in which the war had scarred both the people and the earth itself, it must have

been unthinkable that anything could possibly grow out of this once flourishing land, culturally

or physically. This made it all the more uncomfortable for those in the South that the North

would dictate the region's future.

Unification and the Bioexceptional Ethos

Because of bioexceptionalism's fetishization of the preservation and progress of bodies

within the scope of a nationalist ideology, the coalescence and unification of a national body is

of primary concern. The development of this national body is, however, beset by two competing

impulses that divide its attention. The first of these impulses is *expansion* of the body. Because,

in general, this national body gains strength and power through continued inclusion of additional

lives and communities, it is in the best interest of the bioexceptional nation state to include as

many people as possible. A bioexceptionalist society with a surplus of resources will find that the

inclusion of large populations leads to an affirmation of the society's life giving and supporting

ability. Any excess death that develops with the addition of more people is, on the whole,

outweighed by the ideological benefits of the image of life. For instance, the United States gains

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global power not only because of a labor pool that can fuel industrial and technological production, but also because of the notion that its resources are not totally expended supporting this life. Thus, the true power of bioexceptionalism lies in not only the size and conditions of the population, but also the ability to support a potential population. Ideally, as the potential population is slowly converted to the main population, the excess new population can be used to generate innovative technologies and resources designed to more efficiently support population growth and maintain the sense of excess that allows for further expansion.

The second impulse that complicates the development of a national body is *unification*. This impulse is predicated on the idea that to most effectively regulate the production and consumption of resources, a standardized population needs to emerge in order to weed out any variants that may complicate, and thus hamper, societal efficiency. To accomplish this, populations, environments, and the means of production must be homogenized in order to simplify regulation and purge complex aberrations. Thus, this idea of unification requires both practical and ideological intervention to achieve. It is this goal that America took up in the end of 19th and beginning of the 20th century as it sought to secure and make coherent its own national body in order to best exploit its own growing industrialism and global interests. It did this by beginning to more effectively regulate temporality, physical spaces (both somatic and environmental), social identity, and ideological concepts of the nation's direction.

The South's Use of Regional Abjection

As will be discussed in this dissertation, in all these categories the hegemonic national identity benefited from using the South as an example of "bad subjecthood." But while the foisting of abjection onto a region may be advantageous for a nation like the United States, the question remains, what is in it for the South? Why would representatives of a region voluntarily

embrace and, in many cases, produce such an ideological position? Why would Southerners

choose to create narratives in which their region becomes a pitiable or savage landscape marked

by desolation and despair? What was there to gain, both materially and ideologically by

producing texts in which one's own people are grim, horrifying, or just completely incompatible

with the new world? How could Southerners and the South utilize their position as the nation's

abject to their advantage? Broadly speaking, that is what this dissertation will seek to explore and

answer. Because this is a complex question and cannot possibly be boiled down to a single

coherent answer, I will focus specifically on what abjection offers the South in terms of regional

power and the ability to critique, and in some cases control, the direction of the national identity.

I will address these questions and argue that the images of abjection and the grotesque that are

specifically generated by Southerners are, in fact, a rhetorical strategy to maintain agency and

assert a perverse control of the region's identity as it ponders its past, present, and future, and

faces the continual questions of its place in the national schema. The argument that the rhetoric

of Southern abjection serves to bolster regional self-determination should not be mistaken to

mean that the practitioners of this rhetoric sought an explicit rejection of a national unification,

quite the opposite in fact. For those who deploy this rhetoric, it is a demand to rejoin and

reaffiliate with the modern nation state, with all its ideological structures and economic

opportunity, but on *their own* terms. As such, I will look at the ways in which Southerners use

abjection and the grotesque as social and political tools to demand change. In *Our South,*

Jennifer Greeson raises the question, "What is the South good for?" (2) as a way of

understanding the ways in which the marginalized South feeds into a larger national narrative

and identity. In this project, I will follow Greeson's question, but limit its focus to the ways in

which manifestations of the South *created by* Southerners directly impact regional conceptions of the South's place in a larger national narrative.

With this idea in mind, I argue that shifting genres, forms, and themes in Southern literature between the 1860s and the 1930s constitute not only changing literary tastes, but also a struggle for *who* will define the South and, perhaps, who will define the nation. Examining the period through this lens is important because it subverts assumptions of an ideological passive and subservient South that some political forces wished to create as a condition for reentry into the national identity. Specifically, in this project, I will examine literature that is marked by abjection and the grotesque in the last thirty years of this period. This is a particularly critical moment, I argue, for two reasons. First, because the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States were defined by formalization of the national identity as the borders of the country became more stabilized and the growth of industrialization meant more regulation on ideas of space and time. Added to this, during this period, the nation became increasingly interested in a new sense of a purity of national identity, using the cover of new fields of social sciences to justify racism and xenophobia, as well as to argue for the wholesale elimination of types of populations who were deemed to be unproductive and genetically inferior. In a sense, we see an attempt to formalize the national body. The second reason this is important is that because it is at this point that the South is finally beginning to fulfill the promises of the New South ideology and the moment when the South must grapple with the reality of what moving forward looks like. While I will look at many different writers, I will contain the majority of the analysis to more progressive writers like Erskine Caldwell and Jean Toomer who use abjection as a way of critiquing not only the South, but also the nation's hypocrisy and failures when it comes to issues of race and class. I will also consider conservative writers like Thomas Dixon and the Agrarians

who use the victimization and abjection of the South as a way of formulating a specific shared political identity which seeks to move the region and the country backwards to a historical moment (real or imagined) which they regarded as their noble birthright.

This project has six chapters, each of which explores how Southern abjection formulates identity and interacts with the national body. Chapter two will further explore abjection and position the South as an abject space in line with Foucauldian heterotopias. This necroexceptional space acts as an important site of resistance which can reveal and disrupt the inner workings of modern American nationalisms predicated on a flawed idea of a coherent and unified modern national body. This image of an abject heterotopia is important because it fuses somatic and spatial theories to develop a bifurcated sense of national identity that exists in both the psychological and physiological world. The chapter will propose a way of examining this abject heterotopia through a series of "topographies" that interweave and overlap to create an overall map of the region. These layers – the objective, the social, and the historical - represent aspects of American existence that were subject to ideologies of national unification as the national body was formalized at the beginning of the twentieth century, and, as such, their corruption or abjection act as trouble spots that threaten the stability of the ontological direction of the nation.

This chapter will also examine the way that images of Southern abjection and grotesqueness act as Baudrillardian simulacra which are constantly rearticulated until they become de facto truth in the eyes of not only a hegemonic Northern gaze, but also in the minds of Southerners themselves who internalize them as a culture, history, and tradition that marks them as outside of unified conceptions of post-bellum industrial Capitalistic bioexceptional American mainstream identity. But viewing this through the lens of the abject reveals that this

outsider status is illusionary, and that, by virtue of being marked as oppositional to the mainstream national body, those that inhabit abject heterotopias are endowed with a unique power to reveal the inner workings of the ideological superstructure of national identity. This type of revelation is powerful, because it reveals the manufactured nature of national identity, which, in turn, allows individual subjects the ability to challenge what would otherwise be understood as natural subject positions.

The following chapters will each examine a specific topography of the Southern abject heterotopia. Each chapter will start by establishing a centralized aspect of American identity that was becoming increasingly formalized and homogenized at the beginning of the twentieth century. Following this the chapters will investigate specific Southern authors and texts that intentionally use and manufacture the abject as a way of challenging a normative national identity.

Chapter three will examine Objective Topography. This topographic category is a combination of three layers – the somatic, the environmental, and the temporal, all of which can be measured through positivistic, observable, measurable, and empirical standards. Beginning with an examination of how these layers had become formalized in the national consciousness at the beginning of the twentieth century, I will examine how they become twisted and grotesque in the abject heterotopia of the South. Using Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*, I will argue that the writer uses them to critique a central failure of American promise and unity, the myth of social and economic mobility.

In chapter four, I will examine the Social Topography of abjection by using Jean Toomer's *Cane*. Starting with a historical analysis of the ways in which social, specifically racial, roles and identities were becoming both more codified and ideologically loaded at the

beginning of the twentieth century, I will argue that Toomer uses individuals who problematize strict racial identities as a way of arguing for the falseness of the contemporary American ideas of race, as well as the inherently destructiveness of using it as an organizing principle in the quest for American unity and shared national identity.

While these two chapters will show the critique of the false coherence of the national body as moving toward progressive changes, chapter five will examine historical abjection as a powerful Southern topography that is used to interrupt a formal national unity built on a specific teleology of progress and change. This abjection is centered in an inability or unwillingness to let go of specific moments in time and the impact that has on the subject's view of themselves and their region within a national teleology. This chapter will examine several diverse kinds of texts from the Alan Tate, William Gilmore Simms, and Thomas Dixon Jr., to the South's monuments to the Confederacy, to modern political rhetoric, to argue that discussions of political and social abjection have been, and continue to be, used to attempt to influence the ideological direction of the country as a whole.

In all of this, voices of the South do what the South is known for – they disrupt the coherent union of the national body. In the use of these topographies of abjection, the South demands that the nation examine what they usually leave unquestioned and denaturalize those elements of society that are thought to be a natural extension of American identity. In this, these Southerners develop a region of resistance in which new identities can be formed and recognized within a new, and more complex national body.

CHAPTER II: ABJECTION AND THE ABJECT SOUTHERN HETEROTOPIA

In his description of an ontological style of criticism, John Crowe Ransom discusses two separate, but interdependent aspects of the aesthetics and meaning of poetry – structure and texture. For Ransom, the structure referred to the form and the explicit "paraphrasable" meaning, or statement, of the poem. The texture, on the other hand, is all those elements – metaphor, imagery, rhyme, sound, etc. – that can operate independently of the structure and form. Taken together, these allow the poem to stand as its own complete ontological being. As a nod to this founder of the Fugitives and suzerain of Southern poetry, we might begin to look at the South itself through a similar bifurcated lens.

Clearly, the South cannot be defined simply through geographic terms, yet the region's geography is essential to understanding its culture and history. Historian Edward Ayers begins an exploration of the history of the South by reaching back far past any organized life or culture to the very formation of the region, writing, "The very land beneath what became the South began in upheaval. About 475 million years ago, continental masses slammed into one another. Complex mountains formed, with rock from deep within the earth lying on top of sedimentary material that had once been the coast of the continent" (Ayers). Ayers goes on to point out that much of the region's particular placement, which resulted in long humid growing seasons, coupled with areas of particularly rich soil that resulted from continental shift caused by tectonic collisions, fated the region to possess a strong agricultural ethos, which was linked inescapably to the land.

But to examine the South from a purely geographical lens would omit and distort the sociological and historical patterns that also shaped the land and its people. That Ayers begins his exploration of the history of the South with such violent imagery pays tribute to the fact that,

in as much as the region has projected an aura of gentility and arcadian simplicity, much of the region's history has been defined by profound violence, privation, and precarity.

These elements are the contours and reliefs of the region, and they give depth and definition to the geographic structure of the South. While their total effect defies the boundaries of a coherent singular meaning or a "paraphrasable core" (to use Ransom's terminology), to ignore them and focus on just one side of this duality would, in Viviane Koch's words, be an act of "slander" to the object (252). As such, the two sides, while nominally distinct, fuse together to form the central ontology of the Topography of the South. In this chapter, I will argue that abjection and the grotesque are two of the most central aspects of this topography. I will examine what a necroexceptional abject South looks like and the way that it was used in the first half of the twentieth century to respond to dominant narratives of a unified modern nation, as well as those of a romantic, lost South. In this, these authors work to fuse a new sense of complete Southern identity and to challenge the contours of the larger American self-image. This Southern identity puts aside the trend of flattened out and unnuanced depictions of national modernity and Southern heroism by presenting, and in many cases exaggerating, the grotesqueness and suffering of the region. The absurdity of the exaggerated grotesque matches and deflates the equal absurdity of the narratives of an advanced nation and an "heroic" South, and ultimately allows the writers to develop works that serve both regional needs, as well as the needs of a national narrative. In this analysis, I will roughly break down Southern abjection into three different, but often overlapping topographies: the objective, the social, and the historical.

While these categories are by no means exhaustive, they are, I will argue, the main three pillars of Southern abjection because they mark the ways in which the region challenges the integrity of the national body. The cartographic term "topographies" characterizes this aspect of

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the Southern ontology for a few reasons. Primarily, because national ideologies that create the need and the market for an abject South rely, at least to a certain degree, on a physical geographic conception of a South that has distinct borders that separate it from the rest of the nation. Secondly, these four types of abjection are not necessarily expressions of reality, but rather they are mapped onto certain aspects of reality. In effect, they are representative of the focus and ideologies of the "mapmakers" of the postbellum South. Thirdly, "topographies" implies an inability to simply flatten out ideas of abjection. Any attempt to do so would ignore the complexities of lived experience based in the gradations of the intensity and frequency of the abjection. Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, because the term topography exists within both studies of place and of body – topographic anatomy being the study of regions of the body and the ways in which their systems interact locally and intersect with larger networks of anatomical structures. It should perhaps go without saying, but these topographies of abjection function on both symbolic and literal levels. It is also worth noting this because of the way the context of abjection distorts material reality.

Abjection and the Generation of Self

Following from Julia Kristeva's consideration of abjection as a subjective reaction to the threat of a breakdown between the subject and object, or, more specifically, between the self, the other, and that which the self has cast off, it becomes clear that abjection is fundamentally a way of transforming the material into the symbolic. Because of this psychological impulse, when it comes to works that intentionally invoke the abject, the separation between the material and the symbolic is, itself, threatened. What this means is that the subjective experience of the symbolic reading of the abject can alter the meaning, authenticity, and subjective experience of the material reality.

For instance, in *You Have Seen Their Faces*, Erskine Caldwell mixes Margaret Bourke-White's documentary photos with his own imagined quotes for the subjects. In this, Caldwell intentionally plays up the symbolic abjection because he knows that it fits into pre-established narratives of the South. This symbolic abjection thus confirms the pre-established narrative in the mind of the reader as well as their subjective assumption of the material reality. In Caldwell and Bourke-White's book, this strategy works so well that sociologist and Smith College professor Frank Hankins noted in his review of the book that, "The photographs by Mrs. White are remarkably good; the comment by Caldwell gives striking facts and interesting and moving case histories. From the whole emerges a telling account of the South's poor rural population" (Hankins). This is not to say that the picture that Caldwell painted was not without truth; rather, that the sentimental, embroidered, titillating retellings of the region's privations become a de facto reality that substitutes itself for the factual truth. For those outside of the region, the level of Caldwell's conjured abjection creates a more evocative cultural experience than reality. This is particularly true for outsiders like Hankins whose Northern gaze reflects a desire to see the South both as cultural object worthy of academic study and as a site in need of active intervention. The result is that the experience is rooted in an intertwining of early and late-stage Baudrillardian sign orders in which the fusion of the first order representations (the photographs) mixed with Caldwell's invented quotes and narratives produce a product that is a simulation that precedes the truth of the original. This happens because Caldwell's words purport to be the words of the subjects of the photos, implying a sense of participation and agency that is not afforded to the subject merely through the gawking lens of the camera. Thus, this new abject hyperreality rearticulates and reinforces the already existing images of the South.

In Caldwell's work, and in the work of many others, this process erases any real

positioning of the South and substitutes a series of simulacra which are consistently rearticulated

until they no longer *conceal* a sense of reality, but, through a Baudrillardian process *become*

reality themselves. While these types of images can be created by the South, a hegemonic

Northern gaze helps to cement them into a reality in themselves. This gaze operates by pointing

out the ways in which the South counters the rules and values of the rest of the nation. In a

March 1933 *Chicago Tribune* article entitled "Soil of the South Yield Spring Crop of Novels"

and sub headed "Three Groups of Po' Whites Are Described," the way Fanny Butcher prefaces

the review reveals another level threat that the South provides for the Northern gaze:

> The soil of the south as yielded its spring crop of novels in the trio of tails
> of po' whites of assorted degrees of po'ness and earthiness but, oddly
> enough, not assorted degrees of whiteness, for, unlike most novels about
> the crackers of the south there is no miscegenation in any of these three
> books. (8)

That she also frames her reading in the expectation of miscegenation reiterates a specific view of

the South in which the strictly constructed rules of racial separation are endangered. While

Butcher does not place a value judgement on the erosion of this barrier, the fact that she

contextualizes it within a discussion of impoverished, desperate, poorly educated, and precarious

"po'whites," creates the idea this kind of integration is an abject threat to the wholeness of racial

purity.

It is also important to note that Butcher's take on Southernness comes in the form of a

linguistic assault on acceptable speech by those marked by the scourge of Southern poverty. The

apostrophe in "po'" and "po'ness," not only represents an attempt at uneducated Southern

dialect, but, more importantly, is a placeholder that indicates loss and absence, while

simultaneously filling the void so that the word may still have some life and meaning. In this, the apostrophe is the marker of the abject.

In the review itself, Butcher, the paper's longtime literary critic, reviews Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's debut novel *South Moon Under,* Erskine Caldwell's *God's Little Acre,* and Marstan Chapman's *Glen Hazard.* The review, which lauds each of the books (though notably offering far more measured praise for Caldwell's work), relies repeatedly on the evocation of an illegible South defined by otherness and marked by precarious and constantly on the verge of death – a sort of "anti-self" to the American sense of identity. In the review of *South Moon Under,* Butcher writes:

> The characters . . . have many of the characteristics of those in the best
> novels of the Kentucky or Tennessee mountains or of the wilds of the deep
> south. They are primitive earth bound souls. They belong to their little
> piece of earth as much as their little piece of earth belongs to them. They
> would rather starve there than enjoy whatever plenty anywhere else might
> provide. But they always manage somehow just to escape starvation. (8)

Butcher, who, despite being born in Kansas, spent nearly her entire life after the age of three in Chicago, represented a particular type of voice of the intelligentsia in the urban and urbane literary scenes of large, bustling Northern cities. With this in mind, it is not surprising that her Northern gaze emphasizes and fetishizes the more grotesque and abject representations of the South. Her focus checks the boxes of all the most stereotypical desires for images of the South from a Northern perspective – simple people, sentimental connections to the land, intransigence, poverty, and suffering. But Butcher emphatically insists that, while the plot of the novel might be fiction, these specific aspects are absolutely real, writing that the novel, "gives the reader not only a sense but a certainty of reality. The people are real. The background is real. The talk is real." This insistence on the truth of the abjection reinforces the simulacra of the South, thereby

erasing any alternative narratives. But it is the end of the review that highlights the value of this abject simulacrum to the Northern gaze:

> If the reader feels after reading *South Moon Under* that he "would rather see than be one," at least he is certain that he has seen not only one but many of the people who live so remotely and so strangely that he finds their culture—as well as their language—almost more foreign than he would find in many foreign cities. In the Florida scrub most readers would be lost in a moment, not only actually, but spiritually. (8)

This observation highlights a connection between the characters in the book and the audience. These characters, in all their otherness, represent the constant reminder of the chaos and precarity which lurks not outside of the boundaries of the nation, but within it. These characters, along with the so-called truths that Butcher speaks of are a form of physical and spiritual death which would threaten to consume the reader if unchecked. By rhetorically positioning the story in this way, Butcher exemplifies what Kristeva would later discuss in her exploration of abjection and catharsis – that the experience of facing these characters and their abject lives allows the reader to achieve a sense of catharsis by vicariously experiencing and then being delivered from the threat of death, decay, and otherness, and, in doing so, finding a more secure sense of self.

In the beginning of *Powers of Horror,* Kristeva notes, "[t]here looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced" (1) and goes on to note that one of the functions of art is to provide a catharsis that purifies abjection (17). Thus, the recontextualization of the abject within the safety of art functions as a form of Aristotelian mimesis that allows a controlled distance through which the audience can reclaim rational control of the feelings generated by their own sense of abjection in their lived experience.

This is precisely why the abject holds such fascination and sway over the artistic imagination. It is through this abjection that we find a sense of catharsis which helps to purge, at least temporarily our fears of our *own* abjection. This is why the abject must be so grotesque – the audience must feel a real sense of revulsion in order to achieve a successful catharsis. As readers and consumers of this art, we are all like Mrs. Freeman in O'Conner's "Good Country People," who has, "a special fondness for the details of secret infections, hidden deformities, assaults upon children. Of diseases, she preferred the lingering or incurable" (183). We love them because they show us not only titillating images, but also because they affirm the wholeness and integrity of our own subjective selves.

As noted, the physical response and emotional trauma of the different forms of the abject is more than just a corrosive experience. For Kristeva, it is ultimately a generative experience that allows the formation of the individual's sense of as ontological self, separate from the structures that produced it. She explores this in her discussion of "food loathing" which she describes as one of the basic and earliest forms of abjection. In this, she provides an anecdote about her intense and violent reaction to the feeling of her lips touching the skin on the surface of a glass of milk that her parents have given her. The emotional and somatic response to not only the literal experience of the milk, but also its complex symbolic value (the nourishment of the milk juxtaposed with the decay of the skin on its surface; the evidence of parental care through the offering of milk juxtaposed with the evidence of parental neglect at offering something in decay), gives birth to a new sense of self. As she describes this moment:

> Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk
> cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want
> none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do
> not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the food is not an "other" for "me,"
> who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject
> myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish

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myself. That detail, perhaps an insignificant one, but one that they ferret
out, emphasize, evaluate, that trifle turns me inside out, guts sprawling; it
is thus that they see that "I" am in the process of becoming an other at the
expense of my own death, During that course in which "I" become, I give
birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. Mute protest of the
symptom, shattering violence of a convulsion that, to be sure, is inscribed
in a symbolic system, but in which, without either wanting or being able to
become integrated in order to answer to it, it reacts, it abreacts. It abjects.
(3)

Thus, the experience of the art predicated on the abject and the experience of the abject itself, not

only purifies, but is also instrumental to the formation of the new self apart from that which has

come before. Thus, on the surface, the experience of the abject can be used as a form of nation

building for the country as a whole. At the same time, it is the revolutionary recognition of the

necessity of upheaval that inevitably leads to the violent creation of independence, a theme that

would have been familiar to Southern writers who were simultaneously reacting to and against

the region's history. By taking the foisted identity, along with the historical truth of their own

situation and placing it in the context of the abject, Southern writers can form their own new

identities which reject their own placement within the national consciousness, while, at the same

time, forging a new identity and relationship to the America as an ideological structure.

What fuels the rhetorical power of Southern abjection is not, strictly speaking, the horror

it causes in the minds of readers, but rather its inherent lack of legibility to a bioexceptional

normative nationalist discourse. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*,

Judith Butler expands on existing ideas of abjection by framing them as socially formative,

noting that the experience of repulsion, whether it be physical or social, consolidates hegemonic

identities and entrenches social control by stressing the tenuous border between the self and the

other. Anchoring her point through a somatic lens, she writes, "The boundary between the inner

and outer is confounded by those excremental passages in which the inner effectively becomes

outer, and this excreting function becomes, as it were, the model by which other forms of identity-differentiation are accomplished. In effect, this is the mode by which Others become shit" (170). She goes on to note that the markers of a socially legible and stable self depend on "cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the abject" (170). But this differentiation is not so simple because, as she points out:

> For inner and outer worlds to remain utterly distinct, the entire surface of the body would have to achieve an impossible impermeability. This sealing of its surfaces would constitute the seamless boundary of the subject; but this enclosure would invariably be exploded by precisely that excremental filth that it fears. (170-171)

In this, it is not merely a problem of the integrity of the body, but also its symbolic and rhetorical make up. That which has been deemed abject is that which has been excluded or ejected from the body. Because that which is excluded or ejected only has meaning within the context of the body, this process, rather than limiting the scope of the body, extends it to reincorporate that which has been rejected. Part of the horror, then, that the abject imparts is that it is inextricably linked, and, indeed produced by the subject itself. It is not some alien other, but one of our own making whose existence troubles the line between self and other. As Butler writes, when the wholeness of the subject is challenged in this way "the meaning and necessity of the terms are subject to displacement. If the 'inner world' no longer designates a topos, then the internal fixity of the self . . . become similarly suspect" (170). Looked at through a lens of a constructivist social view, this conflict endows abjection with a deconstructive power that, in turn, can threaten and unmake and remake the subject.

   As Butler and others point out, it is not only the individual that experiences abjection in this way, but also the larger body of society itself. As such, the continued creation and determination of social and political abjection (in the form of otherness) is necessary for

affirming the society's perceived subjectivity (through the continual definition of selfhood and otherness). In other words, to not be marked as other, one must exist within the sanctioned body of society, obeying its rules and inhabiting the form of a "good subject." At the same time, it is impossible to fully separate the "Other" from the self because the Other must be one that is not alien, but one who is continually produced by and excreted from the wholeness of subjecthood of society.

Despite the seeming oppressive nature of this societal abjection, there is power in being marked as socially illegible. In her *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection,* Butler begins by exploring power and the formation of the subject. Picking up on Foucauldian and Althusserian discussions of the idea, she notes the exertion of hegemonic social power upon the individual is, paradoxically, both a repressive and empowering act. Following from Foucault, she terms this ambivalent double-valence "subjection," noting that, "'Subjection' signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject . . . the subject is initiated through a primary submission to power . . . power that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity" (2-3).

This subjection then is instrumental in not only the development of the subject itself, but also in the development of personal agency as the subject develops its own awareness of itself and its relationship to power. In Althusser's example of the police officer who shouts, "Hey, you there!" to a person on the street, the individual turns in response and thus becomes and affirms their subjecthood within the discourse of power of the ideological apparatuses. At the same moment, the subject is endowed with a choice of how to respond. Should they run? Should they thank the officer for their service? Should they nod and try to walk by? This agency is rooted in

the individual's knowledge of self-vis-à-vis the power that created them. A "good subject," one who maintains order and fulfills the expectations of the social order, might choose to greet the police officer and welcome their attention. A "bad subject," one who is, for one reason or another, outside the expectation of social order, might flee, fearing disciplinary action. In either case, the subject has exerted an individual agency within the context of the ideological system that produced them. This last point is important because, while agency exists for the subject, the power that it endows the subject with cannot fully eclipse the power that created it. In fact, even attempts to subvert or overthrow the ideological power structure serve only to reinforce the dominant ideology because resistance to any ideological framework requires the rearticulation of that which is being resisted.

But the fact that the ideological framework is inescapable does not mean that resistance is meaningless. While the subject's agency and power cannot eclipse the power of structure that formed it, they can, and do expose the mechanisms of power and, in this, reveal that the structures are neither monolithic, nor necessarily internally coherent. This resistance is possible because by defining the good subject, the hegemonic power makes visible those requirements that both affirm and threaten the society. If we were to take Butler's somatic imagery, those who inhabit the identity of bad subject are marked as the filth and excrement that must be expelled lest they poison and threaten the integrity of the social body. Thus, the bad subject who is expelled from the body of society is not functionally socially illegible, but rather, what we might call (il)legible, which is to say their social legibility is contingent on the way that they exist outside the expected norms of social legibility. It is this (il)legibility that is at the heart of abjection, and, in this, these subjects become the abject of society.

The roots of the rhetorical and political power of this (il)legible abject social position are two-fold. First, it is grounded in the ability to make visible and vulnerable those aspects of society that are susceptible to corruption and subversion. In the body of society, these abject (il)legible subjects are like the excrement or toxins of a burst appendix that must be forcibly removed because their presence threatens to contaminate the healthy organs. As Butler says, failure to expel them would result in a body "exploded by precisely that excremental filth that it fears" (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* 171). In this, the (il)legible acts as a constant reminder of the lack of full integrity of the body and the falseness of absolute purity.

The second aspect of this power comes from the necessary creation of an alternative space outside of the body where the abject can be discarded. While this space is provisionally separate from the body, because the abject lack any functional ontological meaning without the centralized body, the alternative space is not truly an "other" space at all, but rather a de facto extension of body. Thus, the attempt to expel the abject results not in their erasure, but in their repositioning. This means that any attempt to demarcate the body from the abject is ultimately futile. Instead of full demarcation, the best the centralized body can offer is prohibition and a rearticulation of societal expectations. This interdiction echoes the formative ambivalence of subjection in that, as Butler argues, the prohibition of certain identities, behaviors, and subjects, has the unintended consequence of eroticizing those very actions and bodies. In other words, if a certain identity or action is outlawed for me, it becomes an object of desire (*The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* 103).

Abject Southern Heterotopias

These points, taken together suggest that the abject space, particularly when it is tied to a specific physical space or geography like the South, functions not as a null state or a void, but rather as a realm more akin to a heterotopia. Foucault describes heterotopias as "real places . . . —which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (24). These spaces, which are separate or discontinuous from the hegemonic culture, and both are real (as opposed to imagined) and repositories for layers of meaning that alternatively reflect and challenge the dominant ideas of culture and identity. Because of the way these heterotopias have inherent connections to the ideologies of the culture that create their meaning, their functions are fluid and apt to change over the course of time. For Foucault, these functions exist between two poles.

> Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real
> space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more
> illusory (perhaps that is the role that was played by those famous brothels
> of which we are now deprived). Or else, on the contrary, their role is to
> create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as
> well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. (27)

Foucault gives six principles for conceptualizing the heterotopic space. First, he writes, all cultures have heterotopias, and they can be broken down into two types – heterotopias of crises and heterotopias of deviation. Heterotopias of crisis, he argues, are those spaces where bodies are deposited at moments of transition between recognizable social identities. Foucault writes, "There are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc" (24). For this, he gives the example of the honeymoon suite – a location which functions as an adjunct to the formal transition of

marriage yet is separate because the act of consummation of the marriage must take place outside of view of society. He also gives the example of 19th century boarding schools as "elsewhere" in which "the first manifestations of sexual virility" could emerge far from the organized domestic sphere of home (24). These types of heterotopias, he argues, are being replaced by heterotopias of deviance – spaces in which individuals whose behavior is deemed to be counter to the norms and expectations of society can be placed. These places, which operate parallel to the main hegemonic society, include spaces like prisons or hospitals. Heterotopias of deviance are needed because the bodies who might inhabit them are fundamentally disruptive to a coherent societal self-image and a utopian view of society.

In terms of its service to the nation, the South fluctuates between both poles. Because of the nation's need for a teleology towards liberalize progress, the regressive South serves as an eternally transitionary space where that work must be continually done in a way that does not threaten the national ideology that states that America is already an advanced liberal nation. At the same time, the South, whether it be in terms of its geographic borders or perceived ideological borders (Northern "rednecks" or "good ol' boys") provides a physical and rhetorical place in which all those who suffer from necroexceptional or anti-bioexceptional tendencies (poverty, lack of education, isolationism, anti-progressivism) can be contained.[1]

The second principle that Foucault uses to define heterotopias is that their functions are anchored to a specific time and, as society changes, the meaning of the heterotopia changes to reflect these changes. He gives the example of the cemetery, noting that prior to the 19th century, cemeteries were usually located at the center of a city, usually beside a major church. This

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[1] It is important to note that the South is not the only non-institutional national heterotopia that serves these kinds of roles. In a nation formed by capitalism and white supremacy, the highly racialized symbolic and physical realms of "the ghetto" also fulfill some of these duties.

placement, in which death is corralled into a separate, but central space indicated an abstract

relationship with death seen through the lens of religion and older hierarchies (he points out that

these spaces were reserved for upper classes and that the bodies of ordinary people were sent to

the charnel houses). With the beginning of the 19th century, he argues, shifts in religious beliefs,

social hierarchies, and scientific understanding, changed the societal meaning of cemeteries. As

both God and religion shifted from centrality in society, so too did conceptions of the human

soul as everlasting representation of the self. Instead, the body became the marker of the self and,

as such, there was a need to preserve its presence, even in death. But at the same time, the

increased focus on humanistic and secular conceptions of the world meant that the bodies of the

dead became a marker of precarity and a reminder of the ever presence of death. This, coupled

with increasing movements away from long established social orders, resulted in a

"democratization," of death in which saw an expansion of those who desired to be interred in

cemeteries.

Foucault also places this change within the context of increasing scientific advances in

medicine, noting that the dead are reminders of illness that doctors cannot cure. Advances in the

understanding of disease and contagions equally contributed, as they believed the "presence and

proximity of the dead right beside the houses, next to the church, almost in the middle of the

street, it is this proximity that propagates death itself" (25). As a result, cemeteries were moved

outside of the main city, and their meaning shifted. They were, "no longer the sacred and

immortal heart of the city, but the other city, where each family possesses its dark resting place"

(25). The South, which once represented a form of civilized agrarian gentility and ease, has,

through the development of technology, abolishment of slavery, increased political liberalization,

banning of de jure segregation, and a growing reckoning with the horrors of the history of slavery, has become redefined as a savage space.

Third, heterotopias are repositories for diverse, often conflicting elements and types of bodies. Foucault writes that they have, "[T]he power to juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are in themselves incompatible" (25). As such, these spaces are important in that they are not isolated pockets of otherness, but rather locations that collect and cultivate heterogeneous connections, ideologies, and bodies. This is not to say that these spaces are chaotic masses of confusion, rather, as Foucault notes, they are places in which these heterogeneous oppositions can be organized strategically to produce a sense of systemization and wholeness. Foucault uses the example of a garden that contains flowers from various places throughout the world, and yet can be reordered in certain ways to create distinct types of meaning. In the South, this heterogeneity comes from a collection of various kinds of violations of American bioexceptional identity – whether it be poverty, poor health, isolationism, historical intransigence, anti-liberalism, or any host of other aspects of stereotypical Southern life that stand in contrast to the hegemonic ideology. Additionally, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the South saw not only increasingly heterodox populations, but a formalization and articulation of multiple caste systems in which race and class operated both independently and as a unit to produce polymorphic subject positions that were highly dependent upon contextual factors in addition to traditional social strata.

Fourth, heterotopias represent a fundamental temporal discontinuity. Foucault splits this into two distinct types – indefinitely accumulating time and precarious time. The former of these are sites in which time does not function in a fluid and linear way, but rather is more flattened out and rhizomatic. He gives the examples of libraries and museums, sites in which collections

from multiple times are accumulated and organized in a specific location. In an abstract sense, the function of these spaces means that the need to collect is endless and does not stop at any point. The latter of these refers to spaces or events like fairs or festivals that operate within extremely strict time periods. These are spaces in which temporary collections of bodies and experiences exist. For these bodies and experiences, the limited nature of their existence adds to their meaning. The South's obsession with history continually forces it into temporal discontinuity. This is because, as discussed earlier, the Southern impulse to conflate history with the more amorphous and politically charged signifier of "heritage," means that the past is continually recycled and replayed in the region. From heroic Confederate monuments that present a noble Southern struggle, to old plantations where predominantly white tourists can come to view the nobility of old Southern aristocracy, to Confederate flag bumper stickers, to the continued influence of organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the past exists in an eternal present in the region.

Fifth, while heterotopias are demarcated and separate, they are accessible and permeable. Transition into these spaces must either be compulsory (as in the case of prisons, hospitals, etc.) or must take place through the enacting of some sort of process or ritual (say, in the case of a theatre or a circus, buying a ticket). In the case of the heterotopic abject South, there are several possible historical lines of demarcation that mark its borders with the North – the Mason Dixon line, the edges of the Confederacy, the allotted slave states after the Missouri Compromise – each of which has its roots in an amalgamation of geography and ideology.

The sixth, and final element to which Foucault refers is the heterotopia's relationship to other spaces with which it is associated. He groups these into two categories, spaces of illusion and spaces of compensation. Spaces of illusion provide an opportunity to expose the interiority

and reality of the bodies and societies that make up the hegemonic space. He gives the example

of a brothel in which non-normative fantasies and subjective identities that are repressed and

papered over in the hegemonic space can be expressed and experienced within the realm.

Alternatively, he mentions spaces of "compensation," (27) in which structure and identity are

strictly organized and thus reveal the messiness of the hegemonic world. Again, the region

functions in both categories simultaneously. In terms of a space of illusion, the South, whether it

is the region itself or its larger more symbolic identity (in those not from the South, but who

embrace its identity), with its resistance to certain nationally normative ideas allows for the

enacting fantasies of alternative histories that allow for those who feel disconnected from these

norms to assert their own desired and repressed subject positions. Obviously, in the context of

region's history of white supremacy, these fantasies often involve a continuation of forms of

slavery, whether literally or symbolically.

Taken together, these elements build a space that is revelatory and has the potential to

both sustain and disrupt society at large. The Southern writers who inhabit and sustain this

heterotopia do so by using the grotesque and abject to invert the American mythos in such a way

that it profoundly unsettles and alienates the reader's sense of self and ideas about their

relationships vis-à-vis the society at large. In doing this, the writers leverage the grotesque and

the abject in order that the reader may find a glimmer of recognition of their own senses of

identity and social situation within the exaggerated form. As Robert Penn Warren writes, "The

grotesque is one of the most obvious forms art may take to pierce the veil of familiarity, to stab

us from the drowse of the accustomed, to make us aware of the perilous paradoxicality of life.

The grotesque evokes dormant emotions, particularly the negative ones of fear, disgust,

revulsion, guilt. But it is close to the comic, and in it laughter and horror meet" (246).

A problem emerges, though, in that if the grotesque takes place within too familiar of a location or exists too close to reader's ontological sense of self, the reader may reflexively deflect any self-identification and, instead, project it onto others, thus rendering any productive social use of the grotesque useless. As such, the grotesque requires a nominally separate space in which it may flourish – a space distant enough to be unthreatening, yet close enough to establish some familiarity. Summarizing the effect of this, Leigh Anne Duck writes, "Theoretically, when encountering such a space, audiences cannot imagine a stable object on which to project whatever disgust or outlandish delight they might feel; accordingly, our fear, derision, or celebration implicates us as well" (91). From this, writers like Mikhail Bakhtin argue that the alienated reader will begin to reject or question those elements when they arise in more familiar forms in their everyday life. Here emerges the importance of the development of realms of the grotesque and abject that are both familiar and uncanny; realms that occupy space that have meaning to both the individual as independent ontological and as national subject.

The South, with its own history of both national membership and transnational otherness, becomes the perfect laboratory and space to stow, contain, and explore the grotesqueness and alienation. While this space acts as an inversion of the American myth, this relationship still allows it to accomplish a version of what Eliot describes as a mythical method, that is, that it serves as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" ("Ulysses, Order and Myth"). Thus, the alienation within the realm of the grotesque can transcend the borders of the abject heterotopia and can exercise power within the hegemonic society at large. To establish a sense of familiarity which can be alienated, the abject South of the period can be viewed through the lens

of the nation's own self-image and the emerging norms that were beginning to define the new national character.

Normative Topographies

To understand the way that this abjection functions, it is important to look at the social and historical conditions that were emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the nation found balance after the rocky conclusion of the 19th century, the American experience and life were becoming more coherent and streamlined. Advances in medical and social sciences, coupled with new technologies and an ever-widening sphere of American influence, meant that Americans' identity and sense of self were increasingly homogenous. This homogeneity was an attempt to project a stable national identity both at home and abroad as the country was becoming more influential globally, both politically and in the markets. In the context of this argument, this supposedly stable geographic and ideological space, can be thought of as the hegemonic North. To map the Southern Abject Heterotopia, there first needs to be a set of criteria that is legible not only in the heterotopia, but also in the hegemonic space in which it exists in parallel. Because of the nature of heterotopias, these criteria need to be expressions of the normative experience rather than those of outliers. In other words, the criteria needs to be based on the rule rather than the exception. With this in mind, we can map the Southern Abject Heterotopia onto three different, but overlapping topographies: the objective, the social, and the historical.

CHAPTER III: THE OBJECTIVE TOPOGRAPHY

In this chapter I will discuss the ways in which Erskine Caldwell uses the abject South as a laboratory to open up the body of the American mythology and expose the false promise of economic and social mobility, as well as the permanent damage that such a lie can inflict on generations of individuals. He does this by creating a South that intentionally subverts and upends American normative bodily, environmental, and temporal topographies that have been predicated on ideologies of progress which flatten out the objective and measurable lived experience for ease of capitalist consumption. The body, the environment, and time are of particular concern because they represent areas of experience that were generally believed to be objective truths, and thus unaffected by the tides of ideology. Caldwell's writing elucidates the falseness of this notion and highlights how capitalism uses the supposedly neutral nature of these realms to operate in shadow, secretly informing our most basic interactions with the world. To be clear, Caldwell does not offer much of a solution to this problem, as his characters inevitably become consumed, hollowed out, and discarded by their own societally fueled ambitions. What Caldwell does do, however, is to make his audience stare, gape, and be disgusted with the results of myths of mobility. In this, Caldwell forces his audience to experience the depths of abjection with which not only the South was struggling, but also entire swaths of the nation as a whole. As a result of this, he hopes to blow up the sentimental normative ideas of the American self and demand immediate action.

The Normative Objective Topography

The Objective Topography is a combination of three separate layers of experience, all of which can be verified and shared through positivistic, observable, measurable, and empirical standards. These layers include categories like the somatic and environmental, which can

roughly be experienced and described in agreed upon scientific terms yet excludes socially constructed ideas such as race and gender, which, while they are perhaps more formative, are not measurable in the same way. It is worth noting though, that, despite its name, the Objective Topography, like all the topographies, becomes subjective as it moves into the symbolic realm through the use of the abject. The three layers that make up the Objective Topography realms of experience, the environmental, the bodily, and the temporal, form the realm that can be most readily regulated in the service of a national identity fueled by capitalistic progress and economic expansion. The emergence of this realm was especially important in the beginning of the 20th century as the upheaval of the last hundred years had been tamed and corralled into the realm of history and the country was looking for a new unified identity.

As the twentieth century began, American's relationship to physical space and time began to solidify. In this, the ideology of American nationalism converted the objective truths about space, the environment, the body, and time into symbolic ideals about the strength and unification of the national body. For coherent and sustainable expansion to occur, the industrialized modern capitalist economy required shared objective experiences to become normalized and able to be manipulated to meet the needs of economic progress. To this end, enormous effort was put into making these objective experiences imminently knowable so that any type of deviation could be controlled for the purposes of a strengthening capitalist ideology.

The Environmental Layer

During this period, America's conception of the physical space of the nation began to become more formalized and connected to capitalist expansion. For example, by the 1880s, with the immediate horrors of the Civil War fading into memory, the country was looking ahead to what its newly reunited future might physically look like. As Reconstruction ended, both the

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North and the South had to contend with how they would work together to return the nation to prosperity and, though many disagreed about the details of the new economy, it was almost universally agreed that the railroad would be at its center. This presented numerous problems, not the least of which was that the nation's railroads were a patchwork of varied sizes and gauges which required constant laborious adaptation of train cars to make them usable in different regions. Anticipating these problems, Congress passed the Pacific Railway Act of 1863 which both laid out plans and funding for the Transcontinental Railroad and set the national standard track gauge at 4' 8 1⁄2". Over the next few years, even with the Civil War raging, the North labored on the change, eventually completing it in 1880. In the years after the Civil War, the South refused to adapt its larger gauge railroads to national standards. This move was ultimately self-defeating because it impeded its own ability to ship and receive goods at benefit from the national economy. Finally, the South agreed and, on May 31st, 1886, over the course of 36 hours, the South used tens of thousands of workers to pull up track and regauge the lines to meet the national standard. In many ways, this marked the true reunification of the nation under a single capitalist system – a nation in which economic expediency bridged the gap between physical space ideologies.

Additionally, by 1900, the frontier had been conquered and the continent settled from coast to coast. With the defeat of Geronimo in 1876 and the later massacre of the Lakota people at Wounded Knee in 1890, the Indian Wars were largely finished, and Americans were able to brutally force the last Native American tribes onto reservations. Added to this, was the fact that property rights in the west were becoming increasingly solidified, which meant that images of a free and open range were being replaced with segmented tracts of land that were able to be bought, sold, and owned by individuals and companies. At the same time, rapid advancements in

transportation in the form of new railroads, and, eventually automobiles, meant that not only was the land settled, but also that American's relationship to distance and travel had changed markedly. All of this meant that the land, once mysterious and open, was now knowable, exploitable, and undeniably marked as part of the American space.

At the same time, increased mechanization made it easier to conform entire environmental regions to the needs of agricultural industries like tobacco and cotton. As efficiency and productivity increased, the number of people employed in agricultural industries began to decrease precipitously. The USDA estimates that in 1900, 41% of the workforce was engaged in agricultural labor, and by 1930, it was just 21.5% (Dimitri, Eggland and Conklin). The increase in mechanization and declining need for labor also meant that farmers could farm more acres and, as a result, the farm economy became increasingly concentrated in fewer hands, a trend that only accelerated throughout the rest of the century. With fewer people working in agriculture, the overall relationship to land became, for most of the population, less sentimental and personal. As a result of this, many feared that individuals would find themselves parched for essential natural experiences and, as such, would need nature to be brought to them. Foreseeing this, Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of New York's Central Park wrote "It is one great purpose of the Park to supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers, who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country, a specimen of God's handiwork that shall be to them, inexpensively, what a month or two in the White Mountains or the Adirondacks is, at great cost, to those in easier circumstances" (279). In this desire, nature would not only be known, but also curated for maximum effect.

The Bodily Layer

Simultaneously, advances in medical technology fueled by new understanding of genetics, bacteriology, and germ theory, meant that the human body and its intricate processes was becoming more legible and systematic. The hard learned lessons of the horrors of the Civil War, in which soldiers were far more likely to succumb to infection and disease than to enemy fire, helped to catalyze change and prioritize new medical treatments and sanitation for the nation as it entered the 20th century. Records from the War helped to centralize the use of statistics to track diseases and allow the development of scientific hypotheses of how diseases and epidemics spread and might be controlled. All of this endowed a new sense of agency about health, illness, and even death, leading to ideas that the integrity of our own physical selves could be preserved through diligent work and scientific research.

This new scientific understanding of health, disease, genetics, and the body also gave birth to a fervor for eugenics which prioritized normative bodies that fit into certain molds. Suddenly, these aspects of human experience were labeled, quantified, and inserted into formulae that could judge not only a person's worth, but also the potential worth of any offspring. Adherents of eugenics advocated for medical, scientific, and social policies that ranged from forced sterilizations of so called "unfit" people to limiting choices of people in poverty to restricting immigration.

All of this meant that the ideal American space, both physical and somatic, was one in which chaos and disorder could be conquered, systematized, and regulated in ways that ensured efficiency and utilitarian value.

The Temporal Layer

On July 1st, 1913, in the heart of Paris, a transmission was sent up through the Eiffel Tower. The signal marked a global sea change and the culmination of a half century of industrialization. At 10 am on the cool summer morning, for the first time in history, the time was broadcast to stations around the world simultaneously (Kern 13). At this moment, localized methods of time keeping slipped into irrelevancy as the world began the steps to carve out a universally standardized time. While this transmission marked the world's movement into standardized time, the United States had begun the process of synchronizing its time three decades earlier.

The standardization of time in the United States was, like much of the expansion and exploration of the land, driven by the need for economic growth. This expansion, once again, was largely driven by the railroads. In the 19th century, the railroads were the most effective methods of moving people and product throughout the country and, as such, the economy depended on a system that was functional and reliable to ensure stability. But, like conflicts over railroad gauges, disagreements over localized time threatened any sense of reliability. Stephen Kern notes this problem, writing:

> Around 1870, if a traveler from Washington to San Francisco set his watch in every town he passed through, he would have set it over two hundred times. The railroads attempted to deal with this problem by using a separate time for each region. Thus cities along the Pennsylvania Railroad were put on Philadelphia time, which ran five minutes behind New York time. However, in 1870 there were still about 80 different railroad times in the United States alone. (12)

As is imaginable, this temporal chaos made for unpredictable schedules and threatened the profits and expansions of a rapidly industrializing economy. On this, Jonathan Martineau notes that "as capitalist production was increasingly in need of coordination inside and between

economic regions, as the movement of goods and commodities over great distances with the development of unified markets increasingly determined the rate of profit, as the production and realization of surplus value called for a uniform time-system" (128). To finally bring a degree of order to the system, the railroad companies imposed a standard set of times throughout the entire country beginning on November 18th, 1883. In this, time, which had been beset by the chaos of locality, was finally made legible and predicable as this "railroad time" was quickly adopted for civil and governmental purposes until it became fully accepted as the new standard time.

In many ways, this industry and profit driven standardization of time marked an irreversible shift that allowed modern capitalism to fully colonize the nation. Like the changes that came with the expansion of the nation and the standardization of railroads, capitalist regulation of the temporal space served to flatten out and ultimately eliminate the truly local identity and ethos that relied on an historical and individual relationship with the time and the land, and instead, replace it with a collective experience that ensured reliable profit and systems of regulating labor. Eviatar Zerubavel notes that this type of change not only forces temporal measurement to be viewed through the lens of industry, but it also substitutes the individual's relationship to capitalism for their relationship to nature and culture. He writes:

> The abolition of local time-reckoning practices and the introduction of
> supralocal standards of time, mark a most significant point in the history
> of man's relation to time, namely, the transition from a naturally based
> manner of time reckoning to a socially based one. . . With the exception of
> a single meridian within each time zone, there is always at least some
> discrepancy between standard clock time and actual solar time. In
> dissociating the former from the latter, we have removed ourselves one
> step further away from nature. (19)

This movement, along with the embrace of industrial theories such as Taylorism, also meant that every moment existed in context of capital and could be made quantifiable and explicable. In this way, the modern experience of time is one of strict boundaries and minimal deviation.

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The Abject Southern Topography

Like its normative counterpart, the Objective Topography of Abjection relates to three separate formations – abjection of the body, abjection of the environment, and abjection of time. It is on these measurable realms that exist the literal embodiment of abjection, which is based on the threat of the symbolic merging with the somatic. This realm, which can be shared and objectively experienced, involves a root cause of abjection that is independently verifiable. The Objective realm is that which is fundamental because it is that which we assume to be shared truth. And yet because of how basic we assume these truths to be, the potential for abjection is most terrifying. For Kristeva, and others who explore the abject, bodily abjection is the most immediate and essential form of the experience. It is terrifying because the bodily level of abjection is the thin boundary that literally separates the self from the unself – the united form from the form in decay. In this, elements like poverty, destitution, and decay become markers of historical material loss and corruption. If we imagine some of the physical attributes of Caldwell's characters like Elle May's mouth which "looked like it had been torn; her flaming upper gum looked like a bleeding painful wound under her left nostril," (*Tobacco Road* 37) or Sister Bessie Rice's underdeveloped nose that lacks both a bone and a top, a feature that the writer tells us is like "looking down the end of a double-barreled shotgun," (*Tobacco Road* 48) we can see the ways in which decay and abjection are written on the body and is ultimately inseparable from it. At its heart, this level of abjection is the threat of the symbolic overpowering the somatic.

In addition to the bodily manifestations, the Objective realm also includes decay and loss in both infrastructure and environment. Burnt out estates, collapsing houses, impenetrable roads, ruined and exhausted farmlands, all these take center stage in literature of the abject South.

These elements defy the careful consolidation, cultivation, and curation of the environments of the national discourse. The death and decay that seems to grow from the ground in Caldwell's work speaks to a fundamental horror that emerges when the tenuous connection to the environment becomes toxic. While this decay happens in other environments, this is particularly potent in the South where traditional ideologies have stressed the inherent connection of the people to the land. In this kind of connection, the land becomes an extension of the physical body, and the physical body becomes an extension of the land. As such, a threat to one is a threat to both. The land is marked and left abject by this use and abandonment, its state a monument which reveals the workings of a capitalist system that leaches the best and discards the rest:

> [Jeeter's] grandfather had cleared the greater part of the plantation for the production of tobacco. The soil at that time was better suited to the cultivation of tobacco than to that of any other crop. It was a sandy loam, and the ridge was high and dry. Hundreds of tumbled-down tobacco barns, chinked with clay, could still be found on what was left of the plantation; some of them were still standing but most of them were rotted and fallen down. The road on which Jeeter lived was the original tobacco road his grandfather had made. . . After seventy-five years the tobacco road still remained, and while in many places it was beginning to show signs of washing away, its depressions and hollows made a permanent contour that would remain as long as the sand hills. (*Tobacco Road* 63)\

These tobacco roads, of which Caldwell reminds us, are found all over the region showing the destructive promise and results of an economic system that is predicated on environmental and human exploitation. These results will far outlast any temporary economic gain and, for as long as their existence, will expose what exists inside the body of the nation.

The last aspect of the abject Objective Topography relates to time.[2] Abjection of the temporal realm manifests as an assault on the normative flow of time. Whereas the idealized

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[2] For the purposes of this argument, I am drawing a line between temporality and the passage of history. Temporality, in this case, is the passage of time that can be felt and measured by an individual. This particular conception of time refers to that which regulates the day-to-day interactions, and those that happen over a lifetime.

national time marches forward ever onward and can examined, divided up, and fully exploited, time in the abject South exists in a state of decay. Rather than moving forward (or even backwards), abject Southern time simply grinds to a halt, freezing those who inhabit it in a moment or a series of moments that simply refuse to change. Unlike the repetition of industrial assembly line work in which an employee does the same action repeatedly, abject Southern time does not necessarily lead to the production of anything. In fact, its lack of productivity is precisely why it is a threat to normative national temporality.

These three elements, taken together present a view of the South that is both grotesque and subversive. To the extent that these exaggerated elements, or at least their deployment in fiction, do not represent the full objective reality of the South, is a problem that some have with labeling writers like Erskine Caldwell as "realists." The criticism is that the grotesqueness becomes the focus rather than the characters or the story. Writing in his autobiography *With All My Might,* Caldwell responds to some of this criticism and lays out his view of realism,

> In storytelling, what I wanted to portray was a revelation of the human spirit in the agony of stress or the throb of ecstasy. And I believed this could be accomplished effectively only when characters and situations were invented by me and were not imitations of life but interpretations thereof. Consequently. I felt it was necessary for fiction to seem to be more real than life itself in order for it to be believable in the mind of the reader. True realism then was not the reality of life but the forceful illusion of it. (96)

Caldwell's "realer than real," strategy is at the heart of his use of abjection. By stripping away everything that society constructs to distract us from the feelings of suffering, privation, and loss that we experience, Caldwell shows them to be fundamental to our existence at this time and this place in history. These elements, which we so often seek to ignore or bury deep within ourselves,

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The realm of history represents larger ideological shifts over a given time. Please see chapter 5 for a discussion of historical abjection.

must be exposed if their roots are to be ripped out and some sort of catalyzing catharsis is going to be achieved. In his work, Caldwell searches for the reasons why these elements have become so fundamental to us. In both *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre,* the answers that he comes to are the false promises of capitalism and their toxic impact on easily exploitable classes.

Caldwell's Objective Realm and the Myth of Mobility

Rudolf Sühnel begins his examination of Marxist trends in literature and criticism in the United States in the 1930s by setting a grim stage. "In the Great Depression which followed the stock-market crash of 1929," he writes, "the old capitalist system went to pieces. Fifteen million unemployed in 1932 made it obvious that neither conservative self-assurance nor liberal *lasser-faire* would do any longer" (53). In the wake of this massive upheaval, many politicians and social critics struggled to understand and articulate the full weight and impact of the Great Depression on the stability of the psyche of the United States and the sanctity of the American dream. For Erskine Caldwell, along with many other writers of his generation, the poverty and precarity that followed the Great Depression were nothing new.

Throughout Caldwell's body of work, the economic and social insecurity have existed in the American South for generations. In his short stories, as well as novels, Caldwell displays poverty and privation as Southern birthrights. Passed down between generations, these elements infect all aspects of Southern life. A native of Georgia and son of an Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church minister, the plight of the South and the Southerner was never far from his mind. Left-leaning progressives championed his narratives and essays, believing that his humor and harsh realism made him the ideal person to communicate the struggles of the working class. Writing in his photo-documentary study of sharecroppers in the South, Caldwell notes:

> The South has always been shoved around like a country cousin. It buys
> mill-ends and it wears hand-me-downs. It sits at second-table and is fed

short-rations. It is the place where the ordinary will do, where the makeshift is good enough. It is that dogtown on the other side of the railroad tracks that smells so badly every time the wind changes. It is the Southern Extremity of America, the Empire of the Sun, the Cotton States; it is the Deep South, Down South; it is The South. (*You Have Seen Their Faces* 1)

Caldwell describes the individuals who inhabit this land as "either already worn out physically and spiritually," or, "are in the act of wearing themselves out" (*You Have Seen Their Faces* 5). For Caldwell, these individuals have long been victims not only of agricultural hardship, but also of meaningless and unchanging socio-economic conditions that mark the individual subject as having a highly precarious and vulnerable life. This status stands in sharp contrast to the normative national identity and America's ideology of life, forward moving progress, and economic expansion.

Judith Butler notes that that precarity denotes a certain unsafe instability in which a life, or any subject position, may be eradicated by outside and uncontrollable forces. This precarity implies a lack of access to the basic necessities to sustain life, as well as the ability to change material circumstances. Butler also argues that precarity exists in terms of structured subject position, writing that it is a politically induced condition in which "certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" and which is marked by a condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection. ("Performativity, Precarity And Sexual Politics" ii). The characters of *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre* all inhabit such a position. Through nature, politics, and the whims of a repressive system, they can never thrive.

In the foreword to the 1934 edition of *God's Little Acre,* Caldwell bristles at claims that his characters are simply poor whites or "poor white trash." Responding to his critics, he writes, "[p]oor white is a slick phrase that actually has no more comparative value than 'rich Negro' would have. It continues, however, to be a term applied by one level of society to a level of society below it. It is undoubtedly one of the injustices of civilization. When a word or phrase ceases to be apt description and becomes a term of disdain" (VII). The phrase "white trash" itself suggests a certain level of abjection. The characters to whom it is applied are those who have been expelled from a unified national body. Their position is the result of a national emesis which simultaneously attempts to disunify them from the body and mark them as waste. But, like anything that has been vomited forth, it reveals exactly what goes into and fuels the national body. For Caldwell, the Great Depression was the perfect time to compose novels that forced his audiences to look at these people and to ponder what it is that the national body is made up of. While the Depression may have increased the distribution and awareness of the country's problems of poverty and precarity, to believe that they had in some way been birthed by sudden economic crisis would be deeply naive.

If not the Great Depression, then what *did* cause the deprivation and dehumanization of poverty in America? In both *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*, Erskine Caldwell gives us a simple answer: capitalism and the toxic myth of mobility. Narratives of the American Dream rely heavily on the individual's ability to improve their lives by advancing socially and economically. Along the way, these individuals break through barriers and overcome potential limitations through sheer force of will and hard work. As a prerequisite, this dream requires a belief in America as a fundamentally fair and egalitarian idea that rewards hard work regardless of where one comes from. For Caldwell though, the mobility promised by the dream is a fiction.

While it is an attractive fiction, it is ultimately destructive because it causes a fundamental split in the subject between the neoliberal fantasy of socioeconomic mobility fueled by industrial capitalist forces and the abject reality of static impoverished life. This dual existence is impossible to maintain because it compromises the unity of the subject by requiring them to enter a state of perpetual cognitive dissonance. The subject can only maintain this double subject position by actively ignoring the material realities of their own unchanging condition or by attempting to contextualize them as necessary hardships that will earn them an eventual reward. Thus, the myth of mobility turns the subject's will against themself, sapping their mental and spiritual energy until they can no longer sustain the dream. Once the dream dissipates and conflict is resolved, the psychic damage of the resulting self-awareness annihilates the subject, causing either physical or emotional death. In these two texts, Caldwell illuminates existing social abjection, which can be viewed as subjective, by layering it onto physical and temporal abjection, that which can be seen and felt objectively. He does this to systematically expose the damage that the myth of economic mobility has wrought on the American South and the country as a whole. To be clear, Caldwell does not deny this kind of mobility is possible, rather he sees the intrinsic promise of its guarantee as a weapon that has been used to subjugate and suck the life out of individuals and their environments, leaving them as decaying husks of what they once were.

Caldwell's goal in using such startling and grotesque imagery to present the region's abjection is to prevent the suffering from being flattened out, defanged, and folded into a national narrative. It is not broad metaphoric or vague ideological statements that Caldwell is making, rather an immediate call for help. In *You Have Seen Their Faces,* he writes,

> The American mind is by this time so accustomed to weeping over lost
> causes that in this instance there is likelihood of the sharecropper

becoming just another figure in a sentimentalizing nation . . . The everyday sharecropper is anything but a heroic figure at present; if he continues being the nation's under-dog, that is that he will become. As an individual, he would rather be able to feed, clothe, and house his family properly than to become the symbol of man's injustice to man. (26)

It is essential, then, that his characters and settings work to destabilize the romantic, heroic, and classically tragic sentimentality that was so common in other writers, particularly those of the "Lost Cause" genre, as well as much of the work of people like Alan Tate and his contemporaries. For Caldwell, this dreamy sentimentality took the reader away from the harsh reality rather than toward it. If change was going to be made, in Caldwell's opinion, stark images of the South had to be met head-on. In a larger sense, the abject's ability to demand the focus of the audience and make them uncomfortable in their own subject position means that Caldwell's work can also be viewed through a larger national lens and can act as a critique of sentimental national mythologies that perpetuate poverty and the exploitation of labor throughout the county.

On Caldwell and the Limits of Eugenics

When talking about Caldwell, it is impossible to ignore the author's interest in eugenics, and indeed the linkage of the decay of nature and people, reflects prominent discussions of eugenics that were going on at the time that Caldwell was writing. Eugenics, after all, is a supposed solution to the evidence of the abject – a way removing all the disturbing or upsetting reminders of societies' inability to fully unify around a distinct identity. Caldwell uses the physical "decay" of his characters to map ideas about poverty, social decline, and the ontological hopelessness of the region onto grotesque bodies that demand our attention. Much of the abjection and grotesqueness in *Tobacco Road* and *Gods Little Acre* is rooted in Caldwell's own ideas about eugenics and the experiences of his father as a minister and social reformer. But while it is an attractive lens through which to see Caldwell's work, it is one that he ultimately

feels ambivalent and unsatisfied by. For Caldwell, it is only half of the picture, if that. The rest of the picture has to do with complex social and economic forces that work to inculcate national identity and class-based limitations.

By the time Caldwell was writing, the modern eugenics movement had already been picking up steam for more than fifty years. Starting in the late 1860s, Francis Galton began connecting the theories of Charles Darwin (his half-cousin) with burgeoning fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, genetics, genealogy, and social reform to piece together a set of beliefs that he labeled as "eugenics." The proposed field postulated that in addition to certain physical characteristics, elements of human intelligence, ability, and behavior were passed down genetically. The upshot of this was that individuals were, to a degree, predestined to assume certain roles in society not only because of environmental factors, but also because of genetic fate. As a result, many eugenicists saw ideas like forced sterilization of undesirable people as an issue of social improvement. In a larger sense, eugenics is predicated on the need to protect the unity of the normative social body from those forces that would corrupt it or poison its essential functions. Many of the solutions that eugenics offers are centered around the banishment of these potentially "corrosive" forces to a space outside of the national body, or of life itself. In this impulse, eugenics seeks to not only remove the physical representations of this "corruption" for the overall "health" of the national body, but also to permanently purge the idea of them because their existence suggests a disunion within this same national body. Additionally, this concept of "social improvement," is often tied to capitalist ideas of productivity and service to the overall marketplace. The rhetoric around the types of individuals and families targeted by eugenicists often revolved around their supposed lack of productivity, their hindering the productivity of others, or their "draining effect" on the economy. All of these are implicitly

targeted at people who are already existing in poverty, rather than upper-class families which may exhibit the same characteristics, but whose wealth protects them from scrutiny. One of the most familiar genres of eugenics texts was the "family study". These supposed longitudinal intergenerational studies examined families, groups of families, or people who shared certain social fates (prisoners, for example), to follow the ways in which traits were passed down from generation to generation. Again, almost all the studied individuals and families were already impoverished, a fact that ensures that eugenicists view of societal abjection is nearly uniformly tied to stratified class systems sustained by capitalism. These studies recognized, but generally minimized, the impact of environmental factors on subsequent generations and instead postulated that nature was responsible for any sort of predisposition. American eugenicist Henry Goddard, for example, gained popular and professional fame for his 1912 study *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness.* The study supposedly traced the two branching sets of decedents of Martin Kallikak, a heroic soldier in the Revolutionary War. Goddard claimed that on his way home from the war, Kallikak became temporarily physically involved with a "feeble minded" woman who worked as a barmaid, but that upon returning home he resumed what Goddard regards as a morally upstanding life with his Quaker wife. In Goddard's description of events, the relationship with the barmaid produced a son, who then, in turn had children of his own. The study then compares the two branches (the descendants of him and his "lawful wife" and those of him and the "nameless feeble-minded girl," both labels presaging what is to come in his analysis) (36) of the family in terms of mental fitness, morality, and social positioning. While the descendants of the "lawful wife" are shown to be almost universally "normal," the vast majority of the descendants of the barmaid, starting with the first son (who is

nicknamed "Old Horror") are found to be degenerate and "feeble-minded." Goddard catalogues

these noting that of:

> One hundred and forty-three of [the descendants], we have conclusive
> proof, were or are feeble-minded, while only forty-six have been found
> normal. The rest are unknown or doubtful.
> Among these four hundred and eighty descendants, thirty-six have been
> illegitimate.
> There have been thirty-three sexually immoral persons, mostly prostitutes.
> There have been twenty-four confirmed alcoholics.
> There have been three epileptics.
> Eighty-two died in infancy.
> Three were criminal.
> Eight kept houses of ill fame.
> These people have married into other families, generally of about the same
> type, so that we now have on record and charted eleven hundred and forty-
> six individuals.
> Of this large group, we have discovered that two hundred and sixty-two
> were feeble-minded, while one hundred and ninety-seven are considered
> normal. The remaining . . . being still undetermined. ("Undetermined," as
> here employed often means not that we know nothing about the person,
> but could not decide. They are people we can scarcely recognize as
> normal; frequently they are not what we could call good members of
> society. But it is very difficult to decide without more facts whether the
> condition that we find or what we learn about, as in the case of older
> generations, is or was really one of true feeble-mindedness.) (18-19)

Later studies, of course, disproved eugenic arguments of hereditary "morality" and social

position. This, coupled with highly suspect scientific processes (Goddard is accused of

retouching pictures to make them more abject, as well as inventing information, and conflating

stories about different families), make much of the work of Goddard and his contemporaries

difficult to take seriously in any modern context. But at the time, there were serious

repercussions for social policy as eugenicists argued that people determined to be "feeble-

minded," or in other ways degenerate should be segregated and sterilized. As shown in Goddard,

the conflation of physical conditions (epilepsy, genetic illnesses that may cause increased infant

mortality, etc.) with descriptions of moral character was common in the eugenics movement,

and, indeed, this is what we come to see in Caldwell's writing. Growing up surrounded by the Calvinistic beliefs of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian (A.R.P.) Church, the eugenics movement must have felt like a social extension of spiritual truth.

Caldwell's father, Ira was a minister in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, but he wrestled with ideas of social predestination for years before somewhat reluctantly coming to the eugenics movement. In 1930, the elder Caldwell published a series of articles in *Eugenics: A Journal of Race Betterment* entitled "The Bunglers: A Narrative-Study in Five Parts," in which he details his efforts to help a poor, mostly illiterate, farming family to become more respectable by changing their environmental factors – something that would have put him at odds with the eugenics movement. To accomplish this, Ira S. Caldwell arranged for the family to move into town, and to receive medical treatment for hookworm and other conditions that traditionally beset those in poverty. He also found the father a job, placed the children in schools, took the family to church, and collected donations for clothing, healthy food, and other items that would help nurture physical, intellectual, and spiritual development. The goal was to show that active intervention to change the environmental factors that create and sustain poverty could raise even the most hopeless families to a socially acceptable and productive nature.

By all accounts, the experiment was a complete failure as every single intervention was undermined by the family itself. The father decided to quit the job, the children were uninterested in going to school, and the family ultimately decided that they would rather move back into their old house than be subjected to the elder Caldwell's social improvement. All this left Ira Caldwell feeling defeated, and, as a result, he began to embrace the idea that there must be something biological factor at work to cause such cross-generational bad behavior and misery. While he somewhat reluctantly concludes that sterilization of families like the Bunglers would

"lessen the pressure from the lower levels of society," he does not give up the ghost entirely in his quest for an environmental explanation for the family's condition. He notes of Benjamin Bungler, the father of the family:

> Whether he was doomed to failure because of a bad biological inheritance, whether he was poor in worldly goods and full in mental equipment because of inferior social inheritance, whether personal causation was the main factor in his unfortunate life, or whether he was hit amidships by inexorable economic determinism are all interesting and possibly important questions. It may be that all these forces entered a conspiracy to send his frail bark on the rocks. (I. Caldwell)

He later goes on to note:

> If the sordidness, the crushing poverty which is the dominant note could be visualized, there would be no surprise that the children who grow up under such adverse conditions should ignore the conventions of society and laws of the state. If the newer thought as to the importance of environmental and social heredity in the development is trustworthy there is little wonder that many of the Bunglers leave what normal people usually look upon as the path of rectitude and virtue. (I. Caldwell)

It has been well established that Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* took much inspiration from his father's work. Throughout the book, the names, relationships, and characterizations are cribbed from the elder Caldwell's work, so much so that it seems as if the experiences of the Lester family might just be part six of the narrative study. With its maladjusted behavior, anti-social mentality, and unbelievable wave of ignorance, one could almost imagine how long Goddard's list of "feeble-minded" behavior would be if he had examined the Lesters and Waldens.

For some, the depictions of these types of characters were simply too much and invited criticism. In the March of 1935, in response to what was perceived to be years of abuse from Erskine Caldwell picking on the region, the *Augusta Chronicle* dispatched two of its reporters to Jefferson County to investigate the kind of poverty and debasement that was featured so

prominently in the writer's novels and articles. The goal of this investigation was not to "embarrass Mr. Caldwell or to support him…[t]hey merely sought the truth and they found it" ("Investigation -- Now What" 4). What they found was a litany of stories and people who seemed to confirm the images that Caldwell had created. *Time* magazine, giving examples of some of these findings, noted, "a family of [who] 16 occupy a ramshackle two-room house, operating a farm as tenants. Rent: 800 lb. of cotton a year. Last year's crop was four bales. After paying two bales for rent and two for fertilizer and funds advanced, the year's profit was 62¢." Along with a "Mother, son, imbecile daughter and her two children" who "live in squalor in a one-room house on 40¢ a day when the son can find work." The daughter, the article notes, was "again pregnant, freely admitted various parentage of her children, the father of one being the girl's cousin." And finally, a family which it describes thusly:

> Father is unable to work because of heart trouble. Mother, 60, so weak
> from malnutrition that sometimes she can hardly walk, plods ten miles to
> Wrens to beg a little food. Son, 21, also suffering from undernourishment,
> has had twelve days relief work since Christmas at $1.20 a day. This
> family shares its two rag-covered, rickety beds with a young woman who
> had nowhere else to turn. When the reporters called, not a scrap of food
> was in the house. All they ever have is cornbread; the meal barrel was
> empty. ("Along Tobacco Road")

Their conclusion highlights both the abjection of these individuals and positions this abjection as an implicit threat to the continued existence of a coherent national order. It is a call to action, but, at the same time offers a sense of sighing resignation that was common in pro-eugenic conversations.

> We know we have lost people among us in the United States. . . And we
> may rest assured they will remain with us through time interminable if left
> to themselves. They want the pride, the strength, and the will to raise
> themselves above their present state. . . Living in squalor and primitive
> ignorance, they are breeders of disease and imbecility. They have no share
> in those higher aspirations which have glorified history three thousand
> years. They are shorn of almost every trace of moral responsibility. In

truth, they are human dregs. . . Their only hope, as we see it, lies in
sympathy extended them by society as a whole, not mere charitable
sympathy, but a studied scientific understanding of their pitiable
conditions and the remedies it calls for. A nation-wide program of
rehabilitation for those not too far gone in degeneracy together with
sterilization of the unfit and institutional care of the totally irresponsible
would do much to remove from our civilization one of its ugliest blots.
("Investigation -- Now What" 4)

This type of language and rhetoric, in which those in extreme poverty are determined to be both

"with us," and "human dregs," reveals the primary double-positioning that is the result of

abjection within the sphere of the nation's self-conception. Not only that, but there is also a

creeping fear that these individuals who are "breeders of disease and imbecility," and are "shorn

of almost every trace of moral responsibility," are corruptive to a cohesive national body that is

supposedly the natural high point of western civilization.

The article also opines, "What their origin was and why they have failed to develop

forward, perhaps the social sciences can tell us . . . That is not our problem" (4). This kind of

point, where systemic investigation of a cause of misery is eschewed in favor of the silencing

and eradication of those who are the symptoms of those problems, is also typical of pro-eugenic

arguments. And it is this last point where the editorial misses the mark of Caldwell's writing

because it is not only the Bunglers that invade Erskine Caldwell's writing, but also the

ambivalence about the *causation* of the social ills of the Lester family. For every possible

biological explanation that the Lester family is raucous, immoral, grotesque, ignorant, lazy, and

self-defeating, we are reminded that complicated social, economic, and environmental factors are

at work as well. The Lester farm, for instance, which was once "the most desirable soil in the

entire west-central part of Georgia" (*Tobacco Road* 63), was sucked dry of any sort of healthy

soil by multiple generations of over-farming both tobacco and cotton, two crops that were highly

in demand. It is clear that his grandfather (a tobacco farmer) and his father (a cotton farmer) were

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farming the market instead of attempting any sort of subsistence growing. This is important

because it shows that, despite outward appearances, previous generations of Lester family were

not some clueless yokels, but rather individuals who attempted to buy into the myth of American

economic advancement. Critics often frame the Lesters as leaches on society, but Caldwell paints

a picture in which they are not only grotesque caricatures, but also victims of market-forces and

a capitalist system that sucks individuals dry and abandons them to their fate. Jeeter ponders this

as we are told that he, "could never think of the loss of his land and goods as anything but a man-

made calamity. . . [h]e sometimes said it was partly his own fault, but he believed steadfastly that

his position had been brought about by other people" (62). After his grotesque, disturbing, and

comical behavior throughout the book, it would be easy to write off Jeeter's claim that his

position is only "partly" his fault as being a gross understatement, but we are also told about

Captain John, a wealthy outsider who swooped in to buy the farm at a sheriff's sale. At first

blush, Captain John is a lifeline for Jeeter and those in the struggling area, offering credit and

supplies,

> But the end soon came. There was no longer any profit in raising cotton
> under the Captain's antiquated system, and he abandoned the farm and
> moved to Augusta. Rather than attempt to show his tenants how to
> conform to the newer and more economical methods of modern
> agriculture, which he thought would have been an impossible task from
> the start, he sold the stock and implements and moved away. An
> intelligent employment of his land, stocks, and implements would have
> enabled Jeeter, and scores of others who had become dependent upon
> Captain John, to raise crops for food, and crops to be sold at a profit. Co-
> operative and corporate farming would have saved them all. (62-63)

Caldwell's indictment here is that the Lester family is set up to fail not by intrinsically

biological factors, but rather by a capitalist system that prioritizes short-term profits over human

need. Captain John's interest in the land was never sentimental, nor was it about the crops

themselves, but rather about the cash those crops earned. Because of a lack of sentimental

attachment, speculators and absentee landlords can exploit the land and its people, exhausting

both before gleefully returning to the city. Captain John represents the murky aspect of

capitalism that has the resources to cultivate both the people and the land, but whose self-interest

prevents them from doing either. At the end of *Tobacco Road,* Lov somewhat haphazardly

explores this idea of abandonment as he contemplates God's place in the struggle of the Lesters.

In this moment, it is difficult not hear the continued overlap of the image of the absentee god and

equally absent landlord:

> It looks like the Lord don't care about crops being raised no more like He
> used to, or He would be more helpful to the poor. He could make the rich
> people lend out their money, and stop holding it up. I can't figure out how
> they got hold of all the money in the country, anyhow. Looks like it ought
> to be spread out among everybody. (181)

Again, Caldwell channels his father in this idea. In his autobiographical collection of

essays *Deep South: Memory and Observation*, Caldwell recalls how his father, despite his place

in the church, often remarked that, "the South was more in need of trained professional social

welfare workers and public-school teachers than it was of additional ministers and

evangelicalists" (20). For Caldwell, then, while eugenics may offer short-term benefits, the

system itself is almost certain to fail. The reason for this failure is that capitalism and the

exploitation of labor requires the presence of an abject population who can be used up and

continually discarded in ways that would be unacceptable for non-abject populations. If the

abject is a marker of the attempted action of othering, then those that are marked as abject are

disposable in ways that do not require the pains of ethical conflict. Because Caldwell recognizes

this particular limitation of eugenics, he shifts his focus to illuminating the capitalistic forces that

create abjection.

Bodily and Environmental Abjection in Caldwell

In 1937, Erskine Caldwell joined with Margaret Bourke-White to publish a book that would document the struggles of sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the American South during the Great Depression. The result of this collaboration was the photo-documentary text *You Have Seen Their Faces.* This work, seen as scandalous and exploitative by some, and revealing by others, explored the profound impact of poverty on a population that was already reeling from rapid economic and socio-political changes. The combination visceral photographs and bleak descriptive text showed an unvarnished and unmade South that desperately needed a new direction. Caldwell observed his subjects as individuals who "are either already worn out physically and spiritually," or, "are in the act of wearing themselves out" (5). Similarly, the author describes the land itself as being in crisis, writing that "[i]t now lies barren and worthless after decades of cotton-growing…the rains and winds are eroding the land, washing away and blowing away the earth, until it takes on the appearance of a country cut and scarred by deep gullies and gorges" (3). This exhaustion of the land, coupled with large population shifts to urban industrial areas, meant that the entire region was beginning to decay.

For Caldwell, like many of his contemporaries, the South was more than just a collection of geographical boundaries. Instead, it was a spiritual idea fueled by history, economics, tradition, and a deep connection to the earth. Caldwell's focus on the South as a spiritual locus where the individual and the land are irreducibly intertwined means that, thematically, his writing explores many of the same trends of the major Southern voices of his day, particularly those of John Crowe Ransom, Andrew Lytle, and the rest of the Southern Agrarians. While he and his contemporaries share this theme, Caldwell differs from other writers in that he sees not a sentimental, joyful, symbiotic bond, but a mutually abusive and codependent relationship which

is made worse by constant over-exploitation. This is a strategy that Jay Watson, writing in *The Mississippi Quarterly*, notes, "ironically inverts the logic outlined by Caldwell's contemporaries in Nashville" (285).

This inversion acts as the primary theme in two of Caldwell's best-known texts, *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*. In the novels, Caldwell shows a complete lack of sentimentality when it comes to the plight of the modern South. Caldwell's descriptions of the South are far from idyllic or arcadian; they are, instead, horrifying in their despair and hopelessness. These descriptions are notable for their overt grotesqueness. Leigh Ann Duck describes the purpose of Caldwell's use of the grotesque, noting that "grotesque works require a distinct kind of setting, one that, while alienated or inverted from the world of the audience, nonetheless suggests some ineffable correspondence as well…when encountering such a space, audiences cannot imagine a stable object on which to project whatever disgust or outlandish delight they might feel; accordingly, our fear, derision, or celebration implicates us as well" (91). For Caldwell, this conception of the South is essential because it recognizes and engages with the genuine issues of poverty, decay, and violence with which the region was struggling. This abject physical grotesqueness allows Caldwell to depict the South in crisis on many levels. The mutual decomposition of the ecological resources of the American South and of the lives of those who were, as Lewis Nordan describes them, "spiritually attached to the soil" ("Forward") is a pervasive theme throughout much of Caldwell's work and leads him to ponder whether the American South is even capable of surviving in a post-agrarian industrial age.

Despite Caldwell's inversion of ideas of sentimentality and loss that were so prevalent in the writing of the agrarians and writers of the "Lost Cause," they all share a similar sense of trauma based in ongoing loss. The difference lies in both the starting point of this trauma, and

whether there is hope of some sort of redemption. While writers of the Lost Cause had the advantage of a definite starting point for the sense of Southern loss and trauma, for both the Agrarians and Caldwell, that point is far more vague and nearly impossible to pin down. For the Agrarians, the Civil War marked a moment of profound loss for the region but was not its origin of the loss itself. Rather, that loss also found its roots with the movement toward an industrial future that fundamentally wounded the agrarian society, which they saw as a more effective and elegant way of organizing human life. Implicit in this was a commentary on industrial capitalism, which they saw as the corrosive force that poisoned both the people and the land. Caldwell finds more in common with the Agrarians in this respect, but also does not seem to completely buy into the idealized past for which Nashville crowd longed. While Caldwell, himself, struggles with his own, sometimes very pronounced, sense of racism and white supremacy, he does not seem to believe that the ends of slavery and exploitative labor (a supposedly refined and genteel South) justified the means.

This difference leads to a further essential difference in the question of recovery of the past. Subscribers to the Lost Cause, like Thomas Dixon, believed that recovery could be achieved through political and marshal action that would offer the region the ability to determine its own destiny. For the Agrarians, the rebuilding must begin in the imaginations of the reader through which the sentimental sense of loss could be used to rebuild not only political structures, but also a more artistic and spiritual sense of individual and regional identity. Caldwell, on the other hand, seems to think that the entire system is unredeemable, and questions whether any intervention within the current political context is likely to save the region.

This is why Caldwell makes the grotesqueness of the body and the environment so striking. For Caldwell, there is nothing to be gained by retreating into an old mythos of a perfect

balance between man and his environment. Rather, he thinks that his audience needs to focus on what is in front of them. While he does make the distinction between the physical realms of the environment and the body, it is a tenuous border, and Caldwell uses them as mirror images, each informing and reflecting the other. By overlaying and interweaving these two grotesque layers on a realistic Southern setting, Caldwell gives his audience a full picture of a stagnating region and individuals who are unable to adapt to a rapidly industrializing world.

Tobacco Road

We can begin to trace the abjection of the normative physical/ecological topography of *Tobacco Road* by examining the devolution of the Lester's property. Christopher Rieger, in his ecocritical study of the novel, notes that "the barren, sterile landscape… in *Tobacco Road* is best understood as both a symbol of the debased lives of its inhabitants and as a presence that simultaneously constitutes and is constituted by the Lester family and their actions" (135) Once considered to be "the most desirable soil in the entire west-central part of Georgia," Caldwell describes the farm as a dry and infertile mess where, "the soil had become depleted by the constant raising of cotton year after year, and it was impossible to secure a yield of more than a quarter of a bale to the acre" (*Tobacco Road* 63,65). No amount of human intervention seems to make difference, as evidenced by the large amounts of fertilizer that the family pours into the land. In fact, nature itself seems to be conspiring against the family, as hard summer rains continually wash away the rich fertilized soil. Things have gotten so bad that "nearly all interaction between human beings and nature have come to a halt" (Rieger 135). This speaks to the double-positioning that the abject requires. This South, and its inhabitants, are simultaneously a part of the nature of the world and separate from it.

The environment's abjection comes not from its disrepair, but rather from its sterility and inability to serve any sort of purpose in a larger capitalist system. This, more than anything else is what makes it, and the South, abject within the context of a national capitalist ideology. In a national ideology that proclaims its modernity and its identity rely on everything being exploitable, the appearance of something that is inherently unexploitable for profit is a threat to the national ideological bodily unity. These spaces expose an uncomfortable truth about the capitalist system that fuels America's identity, namely that this is its result. The decaying and decrepit environment we see in Caldwell is a corpse that reminds the national body of its own mortality.

Even Jeeter's description of his turnips ("all the one's I raised got them damn-blasted green-gutted worms in them" (18)) indicates that what little *can* be produced from the land is flawed, corrupted, and undesirable. This extends not only to the crops, but also to the people who inhabit the land. Graphic physical descriptions of Jeeter's daughter Ellie May's harelip ("her mouth looked like it had been torn; her flaming upper gum looked like a bleeding painful wound under her left nostril" (37) and their neighbor Bessie whose "nose had failed to develop properly. There was no bone in it, and there was no top to it . . .[t]he nostrils were exposed. Of Bessie's nose, Dude says looking at it was like 'looking down the end of a double-barreled shotgun'" (45). Both descriptions suggest both physical bodily decay *and* the literal erosion of bodily barriers which protects and separates them from nature.

Both Ellie May, with her gaping mouth, and Bessie, with her overly exposed nostrils, represent a humanity that is vulnerable and wide open to the impacts of nature and the whims of society. Their decaying outer shells work in conjunction with the description of the ramshackle house in which the Lester's live --

> The centre of the building sagged between the sills; the front porch had
> sagged loose from the house, and was now a foot or more lower than it
> originally was; and the roof sagged in the centre where the supporting
> rafters had been carelessly put together. Most of the shingles had scattered
> in all directions about the yard. When the roof leaked, the Lesters moved
> from one corner of the room to another. (7)

-- to the wrecked remains of Bessie's car at the end of the novel. All of these suggest a decay of the structures that hold the chaos of nature at bay, as well as the falseness of claims that any structure (be it physical or social) will protect these individuals from becoming ejected from the social body. This kind of strategy speaks to an ultimate abjection in which the inside is no longer able to be contained, and the boundary between self and other, as well as between subject and object, no longer exists. The decay of bodies is particularly noteworthy because they are abject within themselves while, at the same time, act as microcosms for the decay of the larger social body. In them, Caldwell gives evidence of the falseness and precarity of the idea of a unified social body. As such, these characters are both symptoms of what has been expelled and of what we fear will become of the unified national body. In this, their threat is both a reminder of our own tenuous subject position and an assault on the idea of stable subject positions. What makes the loss of these structures even more dangerous is that nature, in the absence of any sort of protection, is far from being a nurturing, in fact; it seeks to consume humanity.

In this, Caldwell is echoing naturalist themes to evoke the abject horror of abjection and the precarity that poverty engenders. While characters like the absentee Captain John can decamp to the cities and continually add layers of protection to ensure bodily security, those like the Lesters are always on edge, not only a nudge away from not only physical annihilation, but also the complete absorption into the chaotic mass that lies outside of society. Indeed, the physical decay of these features make them (il)legible in a society that defines itself by wholeness and unification and shows just how ready it is to eject those who do not serve it into

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the gaping maw of destruction. The physical "decay" of these characters and their environment are striking because of what they reveal about not only them, but about us. They reveal the precarity that the entirety of the population faces if they find themselves outside of already inseparable economic and social norms. It is a fear of being consumed by that chaos which exists beyond the unified national body. Once consumed, there is no possibility of return to the social norm.

Caldwell manifests this kind of consumption literally several times throughout *Tobacco Road.* The first evidence of this kind of consumption occurs in the depiction of Jeeter's fear of rats. Jeeter's fear, we are told, began with his father's death. As Jeeter's story goes, the night before the funeral, he locked his father's body up in the corn-crib and went into town to purchase some tobacco and Coca-Cola. He picked the corn-crib because its locking door meant that no one could get in to disturb the sanctity of his father's body. At the same time, this corn-crib represents the promise of surplus, a promise that will ultimately remain unfulfilled. The only surplus the Lesters have is death. Unfortunately, this plan fails –

> The following afternoon, at the funeral, just as the casket was about to be lowered into the grave, the top was lifted off in order that the family and friends might take a last look at the deceased. The lid was turned back, and just as it was fully open, a large corn-crib rat jumped out and disappeared in the woods. Nobody knew how the rat had got inside until someone found a hole in the bottom of the wooden box where the rat had gnawed through while it was locked in the crib… Jeeter ran to the side of the box and saw what had happened. The rat had eaten away nearly all of the left side of his father's face and neck. Jeeter closed the lid and had the box lowered into the grave immediately. He had never forgotten that day.(73)

This horrifying scene echoes earlier moments which describe the hunger and desperation of the Lester clan and suggests a corrupted inversion of the expected agricultural norms in that the Lester's themselves have become the crop which nature must consume to stay alive, their bodies an example of excess humanity left to rot.

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Caldwell returns to the idea of natural consumption at the novel's end when, despite the fact that he has not actually planted anything, Jeeter decides to do his annual burn of useless and undesirable plants (the broom-sedge, blackjack, and young pine seedlings) to prepare his farm so that "he could have the land ready for plowing in case something happened that would let him plant a crop of cotton" (174). The fire succeeds in its purge, but it also rages out of control, consuming the Lesters and their house:

> The fire burned lustily throughout the night…The fiery, red flaming roof was a whirling mass of showering embers in a short time. The dry tinder-like shingles, rotted by the autumn and winter rains and scorched by the searing spring and summer sun for two generations, blazed like coals in a forge. The whole roof was in flames in a few seconds, and after that it was only a matter of minutes until the rafters, dry and dripping with pine pitch, fell down upon the floor of the house and upon the beds. Half an hour after the roof first caught, the house was in black smoking ashes. Ada and Jeeter had never known what had happened. (179)

The fire eventually overwhelms and consumes Jeeter and Ada Lester. Christopher Rieger sums up the scene, noting that "the creeping broom-sedge of despair can only be burned away by the fire of hope so many times before Jeeter's spirit and body lie barren and broken, vainly awaiting the rejuvenation of spring" (139). In the end, the fire is far more successful than Jeeter could ever have expected. It has indeed consumed the useless, infertile, dead, and parasitic elements of the farm, starting with the Lesters themselves.

It is, in some ways, appropriate that the Lesters should be purged with the rest of the invasive species, as the family themselves have, throughout many generations over-exploited the land with a shifting mono-culture beginning with tobacco and then moving onto cotton, both of which are known to leech nutrients out of the soil, leaving it exhausted, infertile, and susceptible to erosion. The fact that Caldwell describes the fire as burning "lustily" also suggests that nature gets a somewhat sadistic thrill from the destruction of the parasitic Lester clan. But just as

important as the parasitic reading of this event is the idea that the Lesters choice to pursue mono-culture and market-based farming was predicated on the idea that they could somehow get ahead in the world. For three generations, farming at the whims of the market has resulted in the slow loss of land to taxes, unpaid bills, and speculative landowners. With each loss comes not only the realization of an inability to move forward, but also the fact that they cannot move at all. This realization leads to the idea that the Lesters were never actually a part of the economy of progress, but rather were *subjected* to it. The promise of economic deliverance is the increasingly ineffective fertilizer that gives the illusion of hope for success, a promise guaranteed only to secure the manufactured consent of the proletariat. In Caldwell's memoir about his father, he makes a similar observation about the poor populations who have given their lives to the coal industry. By the 1960s, coal towns in Tennessee and Kentucky were already ailing and on the verge of collapse. He describes these areas as being the results of modern industry, yet also being off the beaten path, hidden from the typical consumers.

> Along the trains and footpaths in the ravines, out of sight of paved roads
> and highways, shacks and cabins tilt and sag and rot on the verge of
> collapse in the shadow of the green summer thatch of white oaks and
> black walnuts. The faces of the young people are blank with despair and
> the voices of the old people saying that all is lost and tomorrow will be
> like yesterday and today – unless it's worse. (Caldwell, *Deep South* 30)

In the world of Caldwell, it is *always* worse, and for the Lesters, that ultimately results in their consumption in the fire. With this conflagration, Caldwell effectively destroys what is left of the flimsy barriers that separate the family from nature, as well as the self from the unself. In this, their expulsion from the body of society, both physically and symbolically, has become permanent.

As the neighbors burry the charred remains of the Lester's bodies, Caldwell once again ironically inverts the sentimental ideas about arcadian connections to the land. While this

physical merging happens at the end of the novel, we see a metaphorical merging much earlier in

the description of the abundant, but useless blackjack wood that grows throughout the property:

"The blackjack never grew much taller than a man's head; it was a stunted variety of oak that

used its sap in toughening the fibres instead of growing new layers and expanding the old, as

other trees did" (133). Andrew Silver notes that the blackjack "comes to embody all of the

Lesters, they are a species apart, ineluctably inferior…The scorched earth under the blackjack

patch, where Ada and Jeeter are finally buried, provides a fitting tombstone for the Lester

family" (55). Indeed, the image of the Lesters as blackjack comes to define the physical and

ecological topography of Caldwell's South and the characters who populate it: stunted, tough,

and unable to change or expand even when their lives may depend on it.

But to say that the blackjack comes to embody the Lesters purely because of its

inferiority misses the central question of what defines something as parasitic, inferior, or in the

context of the national body, abject. In the case of the blackjack, it is simply that there is no way

to exploit it for profit. We are told that a load of it, which would typically take Jeeter a week to

gather would bring "fifty or seventy-five cents…if he could find a man to who wanted to buy it,"

(*Tobacco Road* 12) but this was generally a futile undertaking:

> Usually, when [Jeeter] did succeed in getting a load of it to Augusta, he
> was not, able to give it away; nobody, it seemed, was foolish enough to
> buy wood that was tougher than iron water-pipes. People argued with
> Jeeter about his mule-like determination to sell blackjack for fuel, and they
> tried to convince him that as firewood it was practically worthless. (7)

We are told later that pine wood was more marketable because it "burned better and was

less trouble to use" (141). In the end, the only reason that blackjack is parasitic is not its

invasiveness, but rather that it has no function in the economy. Similarly, the Lesters, worn down

by generational poverty and futility, simply have nothing left to offer a capitalist system predicated on the exploitation of labor and are thus shunted into an abject half-world.

In *You Have Seen Their Faces,* Caldwell paints a picture in which this is not just the fate of the Lesters, but of all sharecroppers. As an interlude, he plays out the story of an imaginary young man, full of energy, hope, and drive, who finds himself first working as a tenant farmer, then, after years of meager reward for his hard work, still cannot make any progress, so must become a sharecropper. It is a discouraging story that underlines the toxicity of the myth of mobility in an economy that is stacked against the poor. In Caldwell's narrative, years of backbreaking labor suck in not only the farmer himself, but his wife and children as well. Hunger and illness beset them, but there is seemingly no escape until the suffering becomes on the sharecropper's body as his face becomes "drawn and tight" and "bitterness molded into his mouth and cheeks. He woke up with it in the morning, lived with it through the day, and went to sleep with it at night. He was broken in health and spirit. He was down and out. He did not expect anything better as long as he lived" (*You Have Seen Their Faces* 31).

Finally, Caldwell's sharecropper sees his life for what it truly is. He realizes that "the land he has worked all these years has been farmed-out, or that erosion has washed the topsoil away, or that he has broken his health so that he cannot work." It is only at this moment, that the full picture becomes clear as he looks at the entire economic system that brought him to this point, starting with the landlord who has

> the power of law and wealth behind him. His word is final. A sharecropper cannot dispute his word, cannot question his honesty. He represents the agricultural system that acquires sharecroppers and mules for their economic usefulness, and disposes of them when no more profit can be extracted from their bodies. Behind the misery and suffering of the sharecropper's life the landlord exists as real as his own pain and anguish. It is only after he has been tossed aside that he realizes that the landlord, while watching and calculating the slow but certain demoralization, has

been making plans to put a younger man, preferably a Negro, in his place. The landlord knows by experience that the sharecropper will have fulfilled his period of usefulness at a certain stage in his life, and that if he helped the sharecropper, he would not be able to operate a profitable farm. Profits, the landlord knows, can be made in cotton only at another man's expense. Experience and business judgement tell him to turn the tenant out, and to put in his place a young man, a young man who has just turned twenty-one. (33)

To the sharecropper, the landlord acts as a defacto god – a distant and unquestionable force whose whims control the fate of the farmer. The landlord-god created the mental and physical form of both the farmer and the land by continually subjecting them to the suffering, exploitation, and hopelessness that the economic relationship needs to be profitable and then, when the farmer is used up, the landlord god casts him out of his twisted Eden and begins fashioning a new poor creation.

In the case of the Lesters, their landlord-god has not only used them up, but also abandoned them. If there was little hope before, this almost atheistic image cements the idea that there can be no deliverance from the pain and suffering that the family has been created to endure. While the look and behavior of the family is certainly grotesque, one of the questions that Caldwell seems to be asking here is what else could we expect? In a way, this merges the idea of eugenics with his own sense of social activism. In itself, this strategy speaks to the enormity of systemic forces designed to keep individuals poor. If economic status has become as unchangeable as biology, then what kind of society have we created?

God's Little Acre

In *God's Little Acre,* Caldwell plays out the results of this question as he depicts the Walden family's search for economic advantage. Once again, the writer returns to a malicious inversion of the connection between the Southerner and his land as the novel's protagonist, Ty Ty, repeats the refrain, "I feel it in my bones," whenever someone asks him how he knows that

there is gold on his land. His feeling is, of course, wrong, but the entirety of his land will be

decimated proving this fact. In his belief that he convert himself into a successful participant in

the modern economy, Ty Ty has hollowed out his property in his vain search for gold, perverting

its intended purpose and making it infertile and uninhabitable:

> Fifteen or twenty acres of the place had been potted with holes that were
> anywhere from ten to thirty feet deep, and twice as wide. The new ground
> had been cleared that spring to raise cotton on, there was about twenty-
> five acres of it. Otherwise there would not been sufficient land that year
> for the two share-croppers to work. Year by year the area of cultivated
> land had diminished as the big holes in the ground increased. By that fall,
> they would probably have to begin digging in the new ground, or else
> close to the house. (14)

In Ty Ty's blithely irrational belief that he can inhabit a rich and modern subject position (the

rich gold miner), he has inadvertently destroyed his original subject position (the poor farmer).

As evidenced in the ruined farm, Ty Ty has gone further than Jeeter Lester in distancing himself

from his subject position. While Jeeter simply lets the earth lay fallow and become overwhelmed

with weeds and invasive species, Ty Ty has set about destroying the land, robbing it of any

potential for growth. The holes that Ty Ty digs in his search for gold are grotesque perversions

of holes that he might dig for planting and, as such, instead of crops sticking up from the earth,

all he has are mounds of dirt.

Notably, at least initially, there is one piece of land which he will not touch – the titular

"God's little acre." But even this has been warped by a capitalistic urge. Describing it to Pluto,

he says,

> You see that piece of ground over yonder, Pluto? Well, that's God's little
> acre. I set aside an acre of my farm for God twenty-seven years ago when
> I bought this place, and every year I give the church all that comes off that
> acre of ground. If it's cotton, I give the church all the money the cotton
> brings to market. The same with hogs, when I raised them, and about corn
> too, when I plant it. That's God's little acre, Pluto. I'm proud to divide
> what little I have with God. (18-19)

While devout on the surface, Ty Ty's conception of his relationship to God here bears more than a passing resemblance to that of a tenant farmer and their landlord. The fact that this kind of relationship has taken on a religious tone, suggests just how deeply an exploitative capitalistic system has been integrated into the American subject. And yet, like the Lesters, the landlord-god has abandoned them, or at least has no use for them. Continued prayers, particularly at the end of the novel, all go unanswered. Even when Ty Ty prays for Buck to spare Jim Lesley, there is no reply except the violent sound of a gun echoing through the night.

The lack of deliverance is particularly upsetting for Ty Ty, because God's little acre is supposed to be not only a symbol of his piety, but also a marker of safety. In reality, it has never really meant anything. It is an empty gesture, as Ty Ty simply chooses which acre is God's little acre, depending on where he decides to dig on any given day. As a result, no matter where the acre is, it lies barren, as he tells Pluto when the would-be sheriff asks about what grows on God's Little Acre, saying "Growing on it? Nothing Pluto. Nothing but maybe beggar-lice and cockleburs now. I just couldn't find the time to plant cotton on it this year" (19). Just as illusionary as the sacrificial meaning of the acre is the idea that God would bless the land with any sort of sanctified protection. When Buck shoots Jim Lesley, it takes Ty Ty a few moments, but he realizes that they had mentally willed the acre to be on the ground where his house stood – the very ground on which Jim was killed.

It is this realization, coupled with the awareness that Jim's blood is now inexorably mixed in with the land, which pushes Ty Ty to his moment of absolute abject crises when he, for the first time, sees his double subject position and realizes the horrible reality of his existence. It is an anagnorisis so profoundly upsetting that it fundamentally realigns the way he sees and experiences the land in front of him. Gazing out over the land, he, for the first time sees, "the

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piles of red clay and yellow sand, the wide red craters between, the red soil without vegetation"

(295). Caldwell first gives us this moment as a somatic reaction and then goes on reflect it in the

environment, effectively obliterating the boundary between the two:

> Ty Ty tried to force his eyes upon the floor so he would not lift them to
> look at his desolate land. He knew if he looked at it again he would feel a
> sinking sensation in his body. Something out there repelled him. It was no
> longer as it had been before. The big piles of earth had always made him
> feel excitement; now they made him feel like turning his head away and
> never looking out there again. The mounds even had a different color now,
> and the soil of his land was nothing like earth he had ever seen before.
> There had never been any vegetation out there, but he had never realized
> the lack of it before. Over on the other side of the farm, where the new
> ground was, there was vegetation, because the top soil in the new ground
> had not been covered with piles of sand and clay in one place, and big
> yawning holes in others. He wished then that he had the strength to spread
> out his arms and smooth the land as far as he could see, leveling the
> ground by filling the holes with the mounds of earth. He realized how
> impotent he was by his knowledge that he would never be able to do that.
> He felt heavy at heart. (297)

It is this particular inversion of sentimental body-environment connection that helps to fuel this

strain of Southern abjection as physically manifest. For Ty Ty, the double erosion of the line

between the living self and the dead self (the impotent self, no longer capable of agency or

meaningful action), as well as the line between the enfeebled self and the enfeebled natural state,

is enough to annihilate his will. Ty Ty has ruined his land by attempting to convert it from a

natural environment to a more industrial landscape capable of literally producing capital. This

scarring spreads out seemingly forever on his land, as Caldwell describes, writing, "There were

such great piles of excavated sand and clay heaped over the ground that it was difficult to see

much further than a hundred yards without climbing a tree" (19). In his despair, he has nothing

left to do but keep digging, plunging further and further into the earth. In this, he desperately

tries wipe his mind of the abject truth that he has been shown. In a last show of his ontological

impotence, he wills God's little acre to follow Buck around wherever he goes, offering sanctified

protection. But this is, as he knows, useless. As Ty Ty finds himself deeper in the hole than ever before, Caldwell heavily implies that Buck goes to commit suicide, though Ty Ty barely registers the excitement above him. As the novel closes on this image, it becomes clear that the deep holes that mar his property are nothing but a cemetery waiting to be filled, gaping holes in the earth waiting to consume the family.

In the end, one of the reasons that Ty Ty simply cannot recognize his own lack of social mobility is centered on his own body, and in this Caldwell layers the physical and social topographies of abjection.[3] One of the reasons that this stasis is so abject and galling to Ty Ty is that it seems to upend his understanding of an American social contract predicated on white supremacy. In his essay comparing the imagery and political function of *God's Little Acre* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, Chris Vials follows David Roediger's reading of whiteness as a "'public and psychological wage' that enables its downtrodden beneficiaries to claim certain short-term advantages while ultimately denying them the class consciousness necessary to recognize the real social forces that hold them down" to assert that

> Pluto's and Ty Ty's whiteness is constructed through their relationship to
> their black tenants… Although the exploitative sharecropping relationship
> confers a degree of power to both Ty Ty and Pluto, the reader can clearly
> see that this power does not ennoble them. Rather, it makes the former a
> tyrant and the latter a fool and helps neither to recognize the social causes
> of scarcity in the countryside driving them to dig and worry. (80)

Decades prior to Vials and Roediger ideas about "the psychological wage of whiteness," Lillian Smith explored the same idea in her 1949 book *Killers of the Dream* which contains a section that deconstructs the perceived racial hierarchy in the South specifically as an outgrowth of capitalism and economic exploitation. In her essay "Two Men and a Bargain,"[4] she details the ways in which

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[3] For a detailed explanation of the social topography of abjection, please see Chapter Four.

[4] For a more detailed discussion of Smith's essay, please see Chapter Five

capitalistic interests maintain power, particularly in the South, by instilling racial animus and fear into easily exploitable white populations. She argues that as long as poor Whites believe they are superior to Black people, they will focus their aggression on maintaining their perceived privileged position rather than demanding better wages, working conditions, and material benefits.

Ty Ty's view of his own whiteness tracks with this same "grand bargain," and leaves him open to both direct exploitation and the myth of mobility. In addition to the economic and social benefits that Ty Ty sees as being his by virtue of his whiteness, he also sees himself as having a racially coded intelligence that makes him more advanced than the African American characters with whom he interacts. In fact, he believes that his access to this racially coded intelligence is crucial to accessing modern economic and social mobility. In this way, Ty Ty sees whiteness and white supremacy as essential to the creation of the modern neoliberal subject, and thus the antithesis of abjection. We witness this in his constant explicit comparisons of his own white "scientific" beliefs to the "backwards" superstitions of African American, as he says things like, "We're going about this thing scientifically, and no fooling around with conjur. It takes a man of science to strike a lode. You've never heard of darkies digging up any nuggets with all their smart talk about conjur. It just can't be done. I'm running this business scientifically clear from the start" (33).

Despite his repeated insistence on his own scientific modernity, a state that would put him in line with the national body, he never once does anything scientific. Far from having a scientific method, he puts his faith in gut instinct, obsessively digging in once place until he gets a feeling about where to dig next. For Ty Ty then, deeming himself to be "scientific" is simply a rhetorical technique of asserting his own supposed non-abject social position. Even when he kidnaps Dave, its so the albino will help to "divine" where the gold is buried and not, as he

insists that the two Black men believe, to help him "conjur" the treasure. In this case, it seems as though "divinin" is simply a rhetorical recoding of "conjuring," as neither have any real scientific validity. Will brings up this point, saying that using a diviner is "not scientific, like you've always talked about being," to which Ty Ty replies, "I reckon it is, I know what I'm doing. Some folks say a well-diviner ain't a scientific man, but I maintain he is. And I stick up the same way for a gold-diviner" (118). The implication of Will's assertion here is that Ty Ty's self-conception as an individual who is a part of the modernity, and there for the modern national body, is absolutely wrong. Ty Ty's denial suggests either an unwillingness or inability to see the truth.

To admit that his racially coded intelligence and modernity is nothing but hollow rhetoric that has no basis on reality or any ability to affect his material circumstances, would be disastrous for Ty Ty. This realization would jeopardize not only his own conception of his place in societal hierarchy (he could no longer assert his own white supremacy), but also his belief that he has any sort of skills that would allow him to transcend his present economic conditions. Owning up to his delusions would fundamentally annihilate Ty Ty's myth of mobility because the acknowledgment would mean that mobility requires more than hard work and a dogged belief in the power of one's ability to will change. Worse yet, if he were to come to terms with his own lack of racially coded intelligence while still believing in white supremacy, he might preclude himself from the "whiteness" that he understands to be paramount in his own white supremacist society. In his implicit and explicit failure to proceed from the moment in which he is stuck, we see the inevitable overlapping of the objective and social topographies of abjection.

Interestingly, Caldwell troubles a unified idea of what consists of "whiteness" by including an albino as an object of curiosity and wonder. After kidnapping Dave and taking him

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away from his white wife, Ty Ty says, "It's a good thing we brought him away. I hate to see a white woman taking up with a coal-back darky, and this was just about as bad, because he is an all-white man" (117). In effect, Ty Ty sees Dave as being too white, and therefore not white at all. Christopher Vials notes that in continually defining the albino as "an all-white man," that Ty Ty "attempts to create a new racial category for Dave… he inscribes this new category with the rigid boundaries of the familiar, historical, black-white relationship of Jim Crow" (84). Despite this, the images of Dave tied up and working at gunpoint elicit more familiar mental pictures of slavery. Still, this position seems to be mutable, at least to a certain extent. As Ty Ty sees Dave flirting with his daughter, he seems to contradict his earlier disgust with Dave's marriage to a white woman. In this case, he does not seem to mind. In fact, the scene offers Ty Ty a moment of realization. Looking at them, as Caldwell tells us, Ty Ty suddenly sees Dave differently:

> Up until then Ty Ty had not for a moment considered Dave a human
> being. Since the night before, Ty Ty had looked upon him as something
> different from a man. But it dawned upon him when he saw Darling Jill's
> smile that the boy was actually a person. (125)

At first glance, Ty Ty's evolution in his regard for Dave may seem to be suggestive of the flexibility of socially constructed racial positioning. In viewing Dave's humanity, we might imagine that Ty Ty is showing us that progress is indeed possible, and subjects can transcend the identities projected on them by society. However, as Caldwell reminds us, Ty Ty still casts Dave as other, and that, to Ty Ty, "He was still an albino, though, and he was said to possess unearthly powers to divine gold. In that respect, Ty Ty still held him above all other men" (125).

Conceptions of both white supremacy and the triumph of modernity are, if not rooted, then at least inexorably linked to structures of capitalism based on comparative social hierarchies that require repression and exploitation of those who are marked as expendable or abject. In both the racially coded language of modernity and intelligence, and in the incoherent logic that it

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implies, Ty Ty is fighting a losing battle. Trusting in his own whiteness, he buys into the system that perpetuates his own abjection. He can never be modern, nor can he ever overcome his subject position. His delusions will simply feed his desire, and his desires his delusions, until he is used up and empty.

Caldwell's Temporal Abjection

Because this topography represents the corruption and abjection elements of existence that can be measured and experienced objectively, time also falls into this category. In the case of the abject Southern heterotopia in relation to the rest of the nation, this abjection of time comes in the form of stagnation. While we can see decay and devolution in both the physical elements of Caldwell's South, it is his use of temporal stagnation that presents the most subtle, yet powerful evidence of a world in decline. Indeed, the temporal aspect of Caldwell's rural South seems to be caught in a powerful net that inhibits all forward motion and forces its inhabitants to relive the same moments repeatedly. Caldwell addresses this point specifically in *You Have Seen Their Faces,* describing the sharecropper system as little more than an repetition of the system of slavery, noting that it was "born of the plantation system, and the new was anything but an improvement of the old"(5) and saying that "[a]fter all these years the sun still rises in the East and sets in the West and the South is still sick" (3). Caldwell integrates this terrible sameness into his texts, a move that highlights a "static temporality" which "constitutes an almost tangible barrier enclosing the actions and even the psyches of his characters; their resolute repetitions suggest – to the point, it has been argued, of inducing – psychomotor disturbance" (Duck, "Erskine Caldwell and the Abject South" 86). Given this, Caldwell's use of repetition of language, action, and desire suggests that the rural South is stuck in an inescapable cycle of misery and failure that will consume generations of individuals and families.

The Stuckness of the Lesters and Waldens

There is a lyric quality to Caldwell's dialogue in *Tobacco Road* that, on its surface, suggests that the characters are either too stupid or too self-centered to know that they are being endlessly repetitive. Characters say the same lines repeatedly until, what at first seems to be a melodious undertone, becomes as mindlessly repetitive as a broken record playing a recording of a broken record. Jeeter Lester's incessant questions to his son in law, Lov, in the first few pages ("What got you there in the sack Lov…I been seeing you come a far piece off the road with that there croker sack on your back"; "Did you have a hard time getting what you got there in the sack, Lov?"; "What you got in that there croker sack, Lov…I been seeing you for the past hour or longer, even since you came over the top of that far hill yonder" (8,9)) and his repeated demands to his son Dude ("By God and By Jesus Dude, ain't you never going to stop bouncing that there ball against that old house? You've clear about got all the weather-boards knocked off already"; "Quit chunking that durn ball at them there weather-boards Dude"; "Aint you never going to stop chunking that durn ball against the house, Dude?" (12,15)) establish a pattern of dialogue repetition that we will see repeatedly throughout the novel. As if to cement this, Caldwell even goes so far as to create a circuitous and repetitive monologue for Jeeter to deliver about his inability to grow healthy turnips:

> By God and Jesus, Lov, all the damn-blasted turnips I raised this year is
> wormy. And I ain't had a good turnip since a year ago this spring. All my
> turnips has got them damn-blasted green gutted worms in them, Lov.
> What God made turnip-worms for, I can't make out. It appears to me like
> He just naturally has got it in good and heavy for a poor man. I worked all
> the fall last year digging up a patch of ground to grow turnips in, and then
> when they're getting about big enough to pull up and eat, along comes
> these damn-blasted green-gutted turnip worms and bore clear to the
> middle of them. God is got it in good and heavy for the poor. (10)

None of these questions, demands, or complaints advance the action of the scene in any way. He is, instead, largely ignored or angrily defied, a fact that he seems to either not notice or be so inured to that he pushes on regardless. This idea comes to define many of the characters as they continually say the same things repeatedly. The statements have such minor impact on the world, that, in the end, their only purpose seems to be to frustrate both the listener (within the story) and the reader. This frustration creates what Jay Watson refers to as the "rhetoric of exhaustion and the exhaustion of rhetoric" (295). Even Caldwell's relentless insertion of chapter breaks in the novel underlines this droning existence, a fact that Watson addresses, saying "though chapter breaks intervene, that is, as if to interrupt the monotony, they frequently fail to indicate meaningful transitions in action or dialogue, so the same stupefying conversations, the same lifeless encounters, simply drone on" (290-291). *Tobacco Road* seems to meander on and on into eternity, offering no coherent relief to either the characters or the readers.

Caldwell not only infuses his text with repetitions in dialogue, but also in the actions of his characters. Dude's unending impulse to throw baseballs against the house and honk horns, Elie May's habit of taking shelter in and peeking out from the china berry bush, and Bessie's endless prayers are among the many actions that Caldwell forces his readers to read repeatedly. These types of actions happen so often they are robbed of any power or narrative strength, and we are forced to see them as just another aspect of the endlessly pointless life that has settled on the South.

The seemingly eternal repetition of dialogue and action cements a feeling that there is no escape from the terrible present that the Lesters (and the South as a whole) occupy. Even death offers little hope of an exit, as Dude (who has hitherto offered no interest in farming, or even doing anything rather than throwing balls and honking horns) ends the book saying, "I reckon I'll

get me a mule somewhere and some seed cotton and guano, and grow me a crop of cotton this year…It feels to me like it's going to be a good year for cotton. Maybe I could grow me a bale to the acre, like Pa was always talking about doing" (184). Dude's fairly unconvincing final statement (he will get a mule *somewhere*; he tempers his statement of action with a "maybe") suggests that the cycle of inactive poverty and desperation will continue unabated. Indeed, there is no resolution in repetition, a fact that gives the reader the feeling that if they ever have any lingering doubts about what will become of Dude, they need only to start the book over and substitute Dude's name for Jeeter's.

While Caldwell stresses this kind of temporal abjection in *Tobacco Road,* its roots and its connection to this myth of mobility become clearer in *God's Little Acre.* Descriptions of stasis in *God's Little Acre* also suggest the multiple and opposing subject positions that threaten to consume the book's characters. Throughout the novel, we see characters who suffer under the delusion that they have the ability to move forward, yet who seem to be almost frozen in time. Progress, for these characters, is continually deferred, and so the characters must repeat the same words and actions repeatedly. While *Tobacco Road* manifests temporal abjection largely in the context of the mourning that results from capitalism's responsibility of the loss and disunification of the self and the land, *God's Little Acre* addresses the temporal nature of imagined mobility as more of a direct critique of the capitalist systems and their toxic promises for the poor. He places this not only in the context of class, but also other illusionary promises of race. In this, he reveals the deep-seated rottenness that the national body seeks to cover up by projecting a national unity.

Christopher Metress recognizes this in his examination of repetition in the book, writing that the novel was "a critique that employed symbolic and technical repetitions in order to

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disable one's faith in the American quest for material success" (169-170). In the book, Caldwell

ties this idea of stasis and repetition to delusions of ideological and socioeconomic progress to

indict the American Dream. Throughout the novel, Caldwell traces the ways in which the false

perception of mobility and mutability of status drains the will of the characters, eventually

leading to their destruction. In this, Caldwell does not offer an alternative to destruction, but

rather hopes to elucidate the falseness of the myth of mobility and the coherence of the natural

body. From the beginning of the novel, Ty Ty sees himself as a man who transcends old-

fashioned superstitious beliefs. When Buck, frustrated at their continued inability to find any

gold on the farm, suggests that they use a "deviner," Ty Ty responds by asserting his own

modernity.

> There you go again talking like the darkies, son … wish you had the sense
> not to listen to what they darkies say. That ain't a thing in the world but
> superstition. Now, take me, here. I'm scientific. To listen to the darkies
> talk, a man would believe they have got more sense than I have. All they
> know about it is that talk about deviners and conjurs. (Caldwell, *God's
> Little Acre* 5)

Despite Ty Ty's claim to scientific rationality, his actions and language betray a conception of

the world rooted in traditional belief in superstition. When Pluto Swint, the sweaty and rotund

candidate for sheriff tells him that they do not have a chance of finding gold without an albino to

help, Ty Ty responds with a statement that both distances him from superstition and embraces it:

"I've heard the darkies talking about it, but I don't pay no attention to what the colored people

say. I reckon I could use one though, if I knew where to find it ... I always said I'd never go in

for none of this superstition and conjur stuff, Pluto, but I've been thinking all the time that one of

those albinos is what we need. You understand, though, I'm scientific all the way through. I

wouldn't have anything to do with conjur" (10). Ty Ty's seemingly contradictory reply suggests

an unrealized and unspoken cognitive dissonance. He is at once convinced that he is a thoroughly

modern man, separated from crude beliefs and practices of the primitive superstitious man, yet

he leaps at the chance to capture and exploit the albino (Dave), and, when asked how he knows

how there is gold on his land, he continually repeats "I feel it in my bones."

Clearly, it takes some amount of will to maintain this double position. When a man

insists that Ty Ty does not even have a basic understanding of the terminology understanding of

gold digging, let alone a real scientific or historical appreciation for how unlikely it would be for

gold to actually be on his land, instead of facing the fact that his own methods have been

unscientific, Ty Ty stubbornly maintains that his patience will eventually pay off, insisting "a

load of gold is what I've got my heart set on. That will be my ship coming in, and I don't give a

dog-gone for the name you call it. You can call it lode mining or placer mining, which ever you

want, but when I get a load of it, I'll know dog-gone well my ship has come in" (266). Ty Ty can

maintain this cognitive dissonance by asserting his own experience as proof of his own expertise:

> The man don't know no more about digging for gold on my land than one
> of those mules out there. I've been doing it for nearly fifteen years, and I
> reckon if anybody knows what I'm doing, I do. Let the man have his say,
> but don't pay him no heed, son. Too many men talking will get you all
> balled up, and you won't know which way is straight up and which is
> straight down. (266)

Ty Ty's last two sentences are especially noteworthy because they indicate that a struggle and

exercise of will is necessary to ignore a fundamental truth. In his *A Theory of Cognitive*

Dissonance, Leon Festinger notes that "the existence of dissonance, being psychologically

uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance

… when dissonance is present, in addition to trying to resolve it, the person will actively avoid

situations and information likely to increase the dissonance" (3). If Festinger is correct about the

urge to resolve cognitive dissonance, then why might Ty Ty explicitly wish to disregard the

scientific advice offered by the man? The answer is that resolution of the

"scientific/superstitious" would elucidate an even more uncomfortable truth about Ty Ty's position regarding both his race and his ability to overcome his predetermined socioeconomic status. In addition to the material results of this, the realization would be an existential crisis as far as his own place in the national body. For Ty Ty, the realization that the promise of American mobility did not apply to him would mean that he is no longer legible in the American ethos.

When Will tells Ty Ty that he is leaving and going back to his home in South Carolina, the old man tries to convince him to stay, saying "I aimed to have you help us till we struck the lode, Will. I need all the help I can get right now. The lode is there, sure as God made little green apples, and I ache to get my hands on it. I've been waiting fifteen years, night and day, for just that" (149). Ty Ty's plea suggests his long standing, but unchanging position, but also a sense of futility. He is in the exact same state he was fifteen years ago, only older and slightly more deteriorated. When Will suggests that he plant cotton instead of looking for gold, Ty Ty responds, "I wish now I had spent a little more time on the cotton. It looks like I'm going to be short of money before the lode is struck. If I had twenty or thirty bales of cotton to tide me over the fall and winter, I could devote the rest of the time to digging. I sure do need a lot of cotton to sell the first of September." Will ultimately tells him it is too late for a cotton crop and that he needs to find something else to do to sustain himself, to which Ty Ty responds, "There ain't but one thing I can do, and that's dig" (149). This conversation suggests the malignancy of the cycle in which Ty Ty finds himself – because he wants money and to transcend his subject position, he digs his farm for gold; because he digs for gold instead of planting cotton, he cannot sell cotton for a profit, and thus needs more money; because he needs more money and no way to get it, he must dig for gold. It is a cycle that is ultimately unsustainable – it does not generate any real

profit and it offers diminishing returns in terms of potential for profit (there is only so much land that can be excavated).

At first glance, this cycle is obviously interruptible. If Ty Ty followed Will's advice, for instance, and just planted cotton instead of digging once cotton season comes around again, he might be able to find a more sustainable life for himself. After all, as Will says, "You could raise more cotton on this land in a year than you can find gold in a lifetime" (149). But, in truth, Ty Ty's fool's errand may have less to do with his actions and more to do with his desire for wealth and to be a modern subject. Even if he planned to plant cotton and not dig at all, his want to advance himself and make enough money to overcome his subject position would mean that he would need to engage in the capitalist system and adopt industrial farming techniques to produce enough to be competitive in the marketplace. Christopher Rieger, notes that this was a problem that beset the South as it attempted to keep pace with modern demand:

> Over production of crops and massive extensions of credit were not
> policies that would ensure the healthy, long-term existence of individual
> farmers, but rather expedient maneuvers for maximizing short-term
> profits. Mono-crop farming and intensive fertilization also may yield large
> returns, but it is a combination that guarantees a rapid and lasting decline
> in soil fertility. (138)

This cycle, in which farmers needed loans to buy more crops and more fertilizer to produce more crops, then needed to produce more crops to pay the loans, then needed even more loans to buy more fertilizer because the land was becoming exhausted, caught many in the South who believed they could advance themselves in the modern economy. Thus, even if Ty Ty could stop digging for gold, his desire would still ensure that he was subjected to an inescapable process. The only way out would be to change his desire and his fundamental belief in the way society works. Since his desire is so fundamental to his sense of identity and self, to change it would be to eliminate himself. Unwilling to do this, Ty Ty engages in a mindless repetitive process of

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digging that will not end until the hole that represents his desire consumes him. He cannot give it up because he always believes that he is on the verge of fulfilling his desire, as Darling Jill says, "He and the boys always think they're going to strike it soon. That's what keeps them at it all the time" (66). It is this always-almost fulfillment that locks Ty Ty in and convinces him that he is moving forward. However, despite believing that he is making progress, (particularly after kidnapping Dave), he still just down a hole, doing the same thing he has been doing for fifteen years.

Pluto Swint is similarly stuck in a cycle that feeds on his desire. During the novel, we see Pluto repeatedly insist that he needs to depart the Walden's company in order to go out into the surrounding area and "count votes," but he never seems to be able to. Caldwell describes this in one scene:

> "I reckon I'd better be going home, now," he said.
> He made no effort to rise from the chair and no one paid any attention to him.

Then, a few lines later,

> "I've got to be going home," Pluto said. "And that's a fact."
> Pluto's statement was completely ignored. (120)

Pluto's stasis is in large part due to his overwhelming desire for Ty Ty's daughter, Darling Jill. At every opportunity he gets, he tells anyone who will listen that he wants to marry Darling Jill. She, in turn, mocks him about his weight and teases him. But she always gives him a glimmer of hope – just enough to keep his desire for her alive. Flaunting her body suggestively and telling him that she will marry him some day, she always manages to keep him engaged and prevent him from breaking out of his cycle of stasis. This gives Pluto the illusion of progressing, though he will never be able to fulfill his sexual or employment desires.

In the book's other major plot line, we see stasis and the constant deferral that Will, Ty

Ty's son-in-law, experiences as he and the rest of the town of Scottsville wait for the resolution

of a mill strike. Caldwell describes the scene, writing,

> At noon the whistles of the cotton mills up and down the Valley blew for
> the midday shutdown. Everywhere else there was a sudden cessation of
> vibration, and the men and women came out of the buildings taking cotton
> from their ears. In the company town of Scottsville the people did not
> move from the chairs on their porches. It was noon and it was dinner-time;
> but in Scottsville the people sat with contracted bellies and waited for the
> end of the strike. (94)

The static experience of Will and the rest of the town is a little different than Ty Ty and Pluto's,

in that, at least initially, these characters do not feel as if they are making progress. Equally

frustrated by both the union and the mill owners, they begrudgingly accept a sort of inertness

while outside forces debate their fate by arbitrating. The men of the town are stagnant and feel

unable to effect any real change in their lives. They wait and wait, repeating the same

conversations repeatedly. Jay Watson points to this kind of feeling as depression and a feeling of

complete inhibition based on the loss of a "loved (libidinally cathected) object" or idea (266).

For the men of the mill town, this "loved object" is not only the mill, but also the feeling of

masculinity and socioeconomic agency that the work gives them.

Caldwell uses highly sexualized language to describe the women who take the place of

the men at the mill and the work that they do, always describing the women's breasts as "erect,"

and noting that "the girls were in love with the looms and the spindles and the flying lint. The

wild-eyed girls on the inside of the ivy-walled mill looked like potted plants in bloom" (99-100).

Thus, both the women and the mill are coopting the masculine role, depriving the men of their

place in society. Because the men desire to reclaim these feelings so much and because the mill

is so tied to them, they will wait, seemingly endlessly, for outside forces to change the material

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conditions. The violent scene in which Will says, of Griselda's clothes, "I'm going to rip every piece of those things of you in a minute. I'm going to rip them off and tear them into pieces so small that you'll never be able to put them together again. I'm going to rip the last damn thread," (224) and then proceeds to have sex with Griselda, then, is an opportunity for him to assert his dominance not only over women, but also over the mill.

Despite the feeling of stagnancy, the men never cease to believe that, given the chance, they could run the mill. Like the momentary assertion of power in the scene with Griselda, the conversation that Will and his friend Harry have is an attempt to prove a degree of agency. In Harry's opinion, all that they need to do is to turn the power on:

> Let the mill run three shifts, maybe four shifts, when we turn the power
> on, but keep it running all the time. We can turn out as much print cloth as
> the company can, maybe a lot more. But all of us will be working then,
> anyway. We can speed up after everybody gets back on the job. What
> we're after now is turning on the power. And if they try to shut off the
> power, then we'll get in there – and well, God Damn it, Will, the power
> ain't going to be shut off once we turn it on. (105-106)

In this and Will's subsequent agreement, we can see the way that the employees of the mill believe that they can rise from the abject powerlessness of labor to controlling the means of production. It is this belief that keeps the men going until the end of the book.

The realization of this myth of mobility comes suddenly and violently at the novel's end. Will is killed, shot in the back by the mill guards after he temporarily turns the power back on, proving that, while the workers may be able to rise up and take the means of production, it will only ever be a short-lived victory. The literal death of Will Thompson also seems to be the figurative death of will for the striking workers. As a man says upon seeing Will's body, "They were afraid of Will... They knew he had the guts to fight back. I don't reckon there'll be any use of trying to fight them without Will. They'll try to run now and make us take a dollar-ten. If Will

Thompson was here, we wouldn't do it. Will Thompson would fight" (250). Thus, the social order inevitably reverts, leaving the strikers in the same position they have always been, over-worked, underpaid, and cursed to be so until they die.

Likewise, self-awareness comes swiftly to the Walden farm as Ty Ty realizes that, despite all his efforts, he has failed to make himself or his family into a modern or civilized group of people. As his son Buck prepares to kill his other son, Jim Leslie, Ty Ty makes one last futile effort to convince himself and his family, saying "I've aimed all my life to have a peaceful family" (287). The old man's continued insistence to calm the two men fails, suggesting that even his authority in the position of father is meaningless. As his efforts fail and he realizes that he is ultimately unable to change anyone or anything in relation to his or his family's material condition, he turns to God for help, praying that he will intervene. But this too is a fruitless endeavor, and there is nothing to do but watch Buck kill Jim Leslie.

As Jim Leslie dies, Ty Ty finally seems to grasp what his attempt to partake in the American Dream has wrought. He looks out over his farm and sees nothing but empty holes and barrenness. Gazing out over the land, he, for the first time sees, "the piles of red clay and yellow sand, the wide red craters between, the red soil without vegetation" (294). He feels the desolation in his body as well, as exhaustion and weakness overcome him. Moreover, he finally admits that his quest for gold, like his quest to keep his family peaceful, has always been futile.

> It was no longer as it had been before. The big piles of earth had always
> made him feel excitement; now they made him feel like turning his head
> away and never looking again … There had never been any vegetation out
> there, but he had never realized the lack of it before…He wished then that
> he had the strength to spread out his arms and smooth the land as far as he
> could see, leveling the ground by filling the holes with the mounds of
> earth. He realized how impotent he was by his knowledge that he would
> never be able to do that. (298-299)

In this final realization of the destructive power of his desire, Ty Ty articulates the senselessness of the world, saying, "There was a mean trick played on us somewhere. God put us in the bodies of animals and tried to make us act like people. That was the beginning of trouble. If he had made us like we are, and not called us people, the last one of us would know how to live." Then, as his dream ebbs away, he suddenly grasps the depth of his own precarity, saying, "I feel like the end of the world has struck me … It feels like the bottom has dropped completely out from under me. I feel like I'm sinking, and I can't help myself" (299).

At this point, we see Ty Ty flinging himself back into the hole and begin digging again. In the end, this is where his want to engage in the American Dream gets him – down a hole and digging himself even deeper. His conflicted subject position has been resolved and his unity restored, but without the dream of advancement and the myth of mobility, he has nothing except his terrible reality. The horror of his own abjection annihilates what is left of his will. His digging is only mechanical, and he goes on simply because his body has not died yet. He is spiritually used up, and when death comes, he will already have made his own grave.

The idea stasis, as well as multiple and opposing subject positions also spills over into the language of the novel. While there is much repetition of language[5] in *God's Little Acre,* it is Ty Ty Walden's relentless reiteration of the phrase "What in the pluperfect hell?" that underlines a double subject position. The phrase presents the reader with puzzling image. The word pluperfect can refer to what is also known as the "past perfect tense," so Ty Ty's continual repetition of the word might bely a feeling of loss for the perfect past. But pluperfect also means

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[5] Much has been written about repetition, particularly in language, in Caldwell's work. Even Ty Ty's name suggests a sense of progression. Kenneth Burke describes the process of reading Caldwell as one in which "I feel as though I were playing with my toes" (173). Jay Watson's "The Rhetoric of Exhaustion and the Exhaustion of Rhetoric: Erskine Caldwell in the Thirties" and Christopher Metress's "Repetition as Radical Critique in Erskine Caldwell's *God's Little Acre*" both highlight the ways in which repetition of language highlights, in Watson's words, a "*discursive* poverty that is symptomatic of spiritual impoverishment" among Caldwell's characters (219).

"more than perfect," which, put beside the word "hell," suggests a certain contradiction. How can hell be more than perfect? The phrase, then, seems appropriate for a man who continually denies the hell in front of him.

In all of this, Caldwell creates an environment in which the regular flow of time has been perverted and made abject. From the perspective of the unified national body, the type of time that flows through (or rather does not flow through) Caldwell's work is a profound threat to an established order that requires forward momentum as part of its promised ideology of capitalistic upward mobility. The grotesqueness of the stasis of both the Lester and Walden families dramatizes the falseness of the promises of capitalism and what happens when a national body is built on such an idea.

In both novels, all this endless repetition, taken together, has frustrated both readers and critics alike. Kenneth Burke describes repetition as Caldwell's "greatest vice," and says that "sometimes when reading Caldwell, I feel as though I were playing with my toes" (54). Burke's toes aside, it is important to explore the possible implications of repetition in Caldwell and the way that abjection affects these characters not only physically, but psychologically. Watson suggests that this rhetorical idea is part of larger strategy that Caldwell uses to show the impact of not only economic depression (in their poverty), but also *psychological* depression on the South. Again, Watson sets the terms for this analysis, noting that:

> The leading theorists of the psychoanalytic mechanism of the condition all agree that depression is, in a fundamental sense, a form of exhaustion. According to the model proposed by Freud…real or perceived loss of a loved (libidinally cathected) object is at first experienced by the forsaken subject in terms of the frustration of its needs and wishes, a frustration which, when prolonged, leads to anxiety and anger. (293)

This overlapping of temporal abject topographies works together to fundamentally paralyze and sabotage the subject. In individuals suffering from depression, this anxiety and anger ultimately

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fails to resolve the feeling. This failure leads to the feelings of helplessness and "the drawing away of cathectic energies from the ego, 'emptying [it] until it is totally impoverished… Depression, in other words, is exhaustion from inner rage at one's helplessness, one's inability to satisfy one's own wishes and needs" (293). In his *Mourning and Melancholia*, Sigmund Freud catalogues the symptoms of melancholia and depression as including "profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-reviling, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment." Freud goes on to explain how these symptoms are also manifest in the process of mourning, noting that

> Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world—in so far as it does not recall him—the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him. It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription of the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests. (244)

While Freud would continually refine and update his definitions of melancholia, depression, and mourning, the ideas that he expressed in *Mourning and Melancholia* are useful because they show the cross sections between depression, inhibition, and profound loss.

The "exhaustion" that Watson speaks of in reference to Caldwell's characters causes their complete inhibition and inability to move in any direction. It is not as if there are no alternatives for the characters, in fact, opportunities at the factories in Augusta abound. Bessie brings this point up as she looks over the ashen remains of the Lester property – "If he'd gone to Augusta and worked in the cotton mills like the rest of them done, he would have been alright" (Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* 182). But this is never to be because, as Lov reminds us, Jeeter was "killing

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himself worrying all the time about the raising of a crop. That was all he wanted in this life – growing cotton was better than anything else to him." Lov also notes that Jeeter "was a man who liked to grow things in the ground. The mills ain't no place for a human who's got that in his bones" (181-182). While unintentional on Lov's part, this depiction of Jeeter is an almost pathological description of someone who is unable to move on and accept the truth of his situation.

The repetition in the novel, particularly Jeeter's continued insistence that he will someday farm the land again, suggests that the characters are subject to what Tammy Clewell calls "hyperremembering". Clewell describes this term in her article "Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud's Psychoanalysis of Loss" as being "a process of obsessive recollection during which the survivor resuscitates the existence of the lost other in the space of the psyche, replacing an actual absence with an imaginary presence" (44). By restating dialogue and repeating actions, Caldwell shows that the characters are psychologically unwilling or unable to cope with a loss and absence.

If we are to look at Caldwell's characters through the lens of Freudian mourning, we can see them as inhabiting a world characterized by extreme loss. At the heart of this mourning is a loss of the nurturing mother figure. In fact, every mother figure in the novel is in some way compromised, sick or unable to provide sustenance. Caldwell describes Ada, Jeeter's wife and the mother of his children, as suffering from pellagra (an extreme vitamin deficiency) and being "always cold except in midsummer" (*Tobacco Road* 27). This disease is "slowly squeezing the life from her emaciated body" and makes it so she is "usually surprised to wake up in the morning and discover that she was alive" (71). Jeeter's own mother also suffers from pellagra and spends much of the book wasting away from malnutrition and hunger, until she is finally

(perhaps mercifully) run over by Dude. The mothers of *Tobacco Road* are so unable to nourish, that their children (for the most part) completely abandon them. Of the more than twelve Lester children, only two remain. The rest, psychologists might argue, have been able to resolve their sense of melancholia and mourning at their de facto abandonment by their mother (as she has retreated into sickness) and been able to move on.

But, if we to affirm this psychological root for the repetition, exhaustion, and inhibition that plagues the Lester family, we must look at a larger maternal loss. As Watson writes:

> If the first and foremost "good object" in psychoanalytic theory is the mother (or, technically, the mother's breast, whose absence starts us on the long road to individuation and adulthood, and, at the same time, becomes the necessary precondition, though not the sufficient cause, of depression), the object whose loss seems most profoundly to infuse the Caldwell world with its characteristic senses of trauma and lethargy is the motherland, which is technically still there, of course, but which can no longer offer Caldwell's characters the sustenance which was once, and would ideally still be, its principal function in an agrarian society. (294)

By conceptualizing the locus of loss and its resulting symptoms as being not the literal mother, but the natural "mother earth", we can see how Caldwell overlays and infuses the physical/ecological topography with the psycho-temporal to depict a South that is strangled by its inability to properly mourn and move on from the apparent loss of its "nurturing mother" (nature and the independent agrarian economic system).

This loss may even explain the vocal repetition that we hear from the book's characters. Clewell, in her exploration of mourning, cites Nicolas Abraham's and Maria Torok's essay "Introjection-Incorporation: Mourning or Melancholia", noting that

> In defining the structure of mourning in relation to the first loss we experience, that of the mother, Abraham and Torok argue that the introjection of this primary loss establishes "an empty space" from which speech and the meaningfulness of language emerge", and points out that in order to fill the When confronted with the loss of the maternal breast, itself a consolation for the loss of an intrauterine mother-child union, the infant

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> mourns by learning "to fill the void of the mouth with words"… That is, the successful displacement of libido from the lost mother takes place through a process of "vocal self-fulfillment." … the child verbalizes the loss, replaces the satisfactions received at the breast "with the satisfactions of mouth devoid of that object but filled with words addressed to the subject," and thereby comes to terms with the painful separation. (50-51)

The relentless need to repeat statements in *Tobacco Road* suggests the characters are stuck in the process of attempting to assert linguistic mastery to compensate for a primal loss. The fact that most, if not all of the repeated dialogue is directly related to something that loss or denial of something nurturing (turnips, good crops, health, the weather-beaten house, etc.), further underscores that this loss is maternal in nature and, when combined with the inhibition of action, lets the reader know that this feeling of melancholia and mourning is permanent.

This is not to say that no one in the novel can master their emotional void. In fact, the majority of the Lester children have moved on to (presumably) better lives away from the farm to the city. This accomplishment, coupled with the fact that they do not seem to be burdened by the sense of repetition that those left behind are, suggests that they have moved past their mourning and have been able to recover healthy self-control and determination. In fact, by leaving the farm and heading to the city of Augusta, we can see these characters as repudiating both their real (Ada) *and* symbolic (nature) mother. The monumental rejection of the mother, though, is a permanent state, a fact that we can see in the fact that the children, once gone to the city, never return. Dude Lester tries to walk a middle road, leaving his mother and family to marry a woman, but he cannot make a full break. The woman who he marries, Bessie, is much older and simply functions as a substitute mother for the young man, as she dotes, prays, and provides for him. In the end, this inability to make a full break ensures that he will return to the ailing farm (his symbolic mother).

Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* is a text dense with the angst and anxiety of a conflicted man watching a conflict region consume itself. This consumption is a slow, silent, and terminal process that subtly sucked entire generations of poverty-stricken farmers. While Caldwell places the blame largely on the mono-farming, the exploitative tenant farming system, and a lack of economic opportunity, he also layers on the external/physical and psycho-temporal topographies to ponder the question of whether the symbolic agrarian South is capable of surviving. The novel's end provides a fairly grim answer to the question. The slow withering away of the fertile and promising land of the South suggests that it may last a generation or two longer, but that the full collapse of the agrarian South and those who depend on it is inevitable. For Caldwell, the only individuals who will be able to survive this change are those who are able to adapt and move on. Whether it is through the hostile separation (a sort of Kristevian "matricide") or through fundamental change of the definition of the South, Caldwell makes it clear that if the region does not find an escape from both the claws of sentimental mourning and melancholy for the "lost South" and the promises of capitalistic mobility, the region, both physically and spiritually, is doomed.

The Permanency of Loss and the Need for Action

At the end of both *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*, Caldwell does not leave his audience with much hope for the future. The myth of mobility, it seems, is unconquerable in the novels. The characters are doomed forever to their static subject positions, a realization that leads to complete physical and psychic annihilation. In both books, there is an implicit promise that by participating in a growing capitalist economy, one can significantly improve their lot in life. What is more, participation is supposedly the only path to having one's humanity recognized in a capitalist economy. For the Lesters and the Waldens, there is a final realization that reveals the

unquestionable falseness of this, as well as the horrific truth that they were never participants in this society, but rather those who were subjected to it – tools that were meant to be exhausted and then replaced. The only true mobility is death, or, at least in the case of the Waldens if not death then at least down into the ground into the hole of immobility that only gets deeper, and threatens to consume the farm, the house, and indeed the whole of the South.

The final acts of both texts feature belated realizations from secondary characters that articulate the binds that the main characters, and indeed the South itself are in. After Jeeter's death, Lov cluelessly and somewhat sentimentally attempts to absolve the farmer from any responsibility for his fate, but despite his inflated sense of Jeeter's ability, he does stumble on a fundamental truth:

> "I reckon old Jeeter had the best thing happen to him," Lov said. "He was killing himself worrying all the time about raising a crop. That was all he wanted in this life – growing cotton was better than anything else to him. There ain't many more like him left, I reckon. . . There ain't no sense in them raising crops. They can't make no money at it, not even a living. If they do cotton, somebody comes along and cheats them out of it. (237)

Clearly, Jeeter was never really "killing himself worrying" about raising his crop. While Jeeter may have felt a deep desire to plant the land, his overall energy and behavior reveal a man who has become inured to his own suffering and even resigned to it. But, despite Lov's rather clumsy sentimentality, he articulates the bind that people like Jeeter are in vis-à-vis the larger economic system. Basically, his argument is that, while growing food may meet basic needs, there is no money nor mobility in it. As a result of this, the subsistence farmer is illegible in the larger capitalistic system, and thus isolated from the social ideology. To add to this, without the money to buy fertilizer or seed (the two major costs that farmers must go into debt for), the farming is impossible. The only alternative, then, is to buy into a system in which one plants cash crops to get ahead, but unfortunately, the very people who encourage that strategy are the first to cheat

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the farmer and squeeze all the life out of them and their farms. This encapsulates the myth that anyone could advance, and it is true not only for the farmers of the *Tobacco Road,* but also for the mill workers of *God's Little Acre.*

In the closing pages of *God's Little Acre,* Ty Ty bemoans his situation and the inherent double positioning that he has come to know that he and his family inhabits when it comes to society thwarting desire. As is typical with Caldwell, while Ty Ty speaks most immediately to ideas of sex, his philosophizing equally applies to all the other promise and unfulfillable desire that besets all the characters of the book:

> There was a mean trick played on us somewhere. God put us in the bodies of animals and tried to make us act like people. That was the beginning of trouble. If He had made us like we are, and not called us people, the last one of us would know how to live. A man can't live, feeling himself from the inside, and listening to what the preachers say. He can't do both, but he can do one or the other. He can live like we were made to live, and feel himself on the inside, or he can live like the preachers say, and be dead on the inside. (299)

The problem, in Ty Ty's estimation, is not that subject positions exist, but rather the incessant belief that one could change their own impulses, desires, and self-conceptions to fit into an idea of normalized socialization. This illusion of the ability of change, in Ty Ty's opinion, kills the inner-self, and death radiates outward. This is true not only the acquiescence to rules of puritanical sexual relationships, but also to placing one's faith in the fact that being a good capitalistic subject will lead to anything but thwarted desires and internal death, a fact that Ty Ty soon underlines saying, "I feel like the end of the world has struck me. . . I feel like the bottom has dropped completely out from under me. I feel like I'm sinking and can't help myself" (300). In this, Ty Ty has realized his own inability to act and can only watch as he and his family descend into hopelessness.

Because the objective realm of abjection starts from an idea of sharable experiences that can be quantified, at the heart of it is an indictment of detachment. In this, Caldwell is particularly concerned with the acts of watching and looking, acts that simultaneously invites in and indicts both the reader and the characters. There are numerous moments of "looking" in which characters stare at the alluring, grotesque, or comic, but are frozen and unable to engage. In *God's Little Acre,* for instance, Pluto accidentally comes upon Darling Jill taking a bath and he stares at her. As Caldwell tells us, "He did not wish to turn around and leave, but he was afraid to go closer". When she catches him watching, she stares back. "Pluto thought that perhaps Darling Jill was trying to stare him out of countenance, or perhaps drive him back around the house, but he had remained there several minutes already and he did not know what she intended to do. He was determined, after having stood there so long, to make her take the first move." The only thing he can do is sputter two lines that he has repeated over and over: "Well, darn my socks! … And that's a fact" (59). Additionally, when Ty Ty comes upon Dave and Darling Jill having sex near the woods, he freezes in place, staring at them. "Neither of them was aware of his presence," Caldwell writes, "even though the yellow light flickered in Darling Jill's eyes and twinkled like two stars when her eyes blinked." Ty Ty is hypnotized by the sight of his daughter having sex with an albino, eventually turning to Will and saying "Did you ever see such a sight … Now, ain't that something?" (137). In the final scenes, as Buck is about to kill Jim Leslie, Ty Ty cannot help but watch. At the end of *Tobacco Road,* after Jeeter has set the fire that will envelope and consume him, he just watches as it spreads into the fields and surrounds the house. Not even realizing the danger of the situation, coupled with the shifting winds in the late season burn, he tries to go to sleep, but tosses and turns as he smells the fire and makes plans that he will never accomplish:

He looked straight up at the black ceiling, solemnly swearing to get up the
next morning to borrow a mule. He was going to plow a patch to raise
some cotton on, if he never did anything else as long as he lived. . . He
went to sleep then, his mind filled with thoughts of the land and its sweet
odors, and with a new determination to stir the earth and cultivate plants of
cotton. (232)

When the fire does consume the house along with Jeeter and his wife, there is nothing

anyone can do to stop the inferno. Neighbors run down to the Lester property, but, "[t]hey had

not realized how fast the dry pitch-dripped house had burned to the ground, until they reached it.

. . [t]here was a crowd of twenty or thirty men standing around the ashes… [t]here was nothing

anybody could do then… [t]here was nothing that could be saved… Jeeter's old automobile was

a pile of rust-colored junk" (234-235). On first glance, Caldwell is giving us another image of the

sort of ruined grotesque and abject landscape that the Lesters have created to inhabit, but his

inclusion of the image of Jeeter's old automobile suggests something more complex. The car,

Caldwell has noted since the beginning, has always been junk. It was the last of Jeeter's real

possessions and it was filled was symbolic meaning for the farmer. Even before the events of the

book, we are told that after his cow had died, and his only possession of any value was the car,

"[h]e had begun to think that he was indeed a poor man" (15). This moment of abject self-

realization is embodied by the rusted-out car with its drooping radiator. He fears this self-

realization of his social position so much that he makes Ada promise that if he happens to die in

the automobile, that she would go to town to buy him a suit to bury him in. He binds Lov to a

similar promise in hopes of ensuring that "[he] was buried in a suit of clothes instead of overalls"

(94). The car itself is an image of the failed promise of agency, social mobility, and ability to

fully participate in an industrial capitalist economy. This is underlined when Dude and Bessie go

to purchase a new automobile in the city and Dude becomes increasingly paranoid that

something will happen to prevent him from getting the car. Upon getting the car, it is almost

immediately wrecked as Dude drives recklessly, hitting, among other things, his own grandmother. This car too, comes to symbolize the failed promise of mobility as Dude honks the horn endlessly and dives off at the end enraptured with the same false promise of an ability to get ahead that his father had. It is not the fire that pushed Jeeter's car into its current state, but rather it is an entire atmosphere of moral, social, physical, and environmental decay that made its state inescapable. The fact of the matter is that from the beginning of the story, everyone, including the reader, has been like the gawking farmers at the end, staring at this car, and the grotesque horror it represents, and is unable to do anything because it is too far gone.

In all these scenes, "looking" equates to passivity. The characters may gawk and stare, but nothing ever changes simply by looking. In this way, Caldwell implicates the reader in the process of passivity that leads to the conditions in which his characters live. The reader becomes the "looker" who stares and stares but is impotent and can do nothing. Scholars, including R.J. Gray and James Devlin, have noted that Caldwell seems to engage a process that anticipates Bertolt Brecht's verfremdungseffekt. As Brecht writes, this strategy, which is variously conceptualized as "the alienation effect" or "distancing effect," consists of:

> turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one's attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected. What is obvious is in a certain sense made incomprehensible, but this is only in order that it may then be made all the easier to comprehend. Before familiarity can turn into awareness the familiar must be stripped of its inconspicuousness; we must give up assuming the object in question needs no explanation. (143)

In *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*, Caldwell invites his audience to look at grotesqueness and abjection of the poverty and the degradation that goes hand in hand with the myth of mobility. In doing so, he creates grotesque characters and absurd situations that ensure that the audience does not get lost in their familiarity or connections to an archetype. The alienation from

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the characters and situations in the novels allows the audience to move past passive acceptance of the impact of desperation on the characters and wonder to what forces created this situation and why. Instead, his readers must demand an explanation and possibly a change. On its surface, it may appear as if Caldwell offers no real interventions to this problem. Despite proposing a few solutions (conservation of soil, broader education efforts, collective action of tenant farmers, governmental control of certain farming industries, etc.) in his later works such as *You Have Seen Their Faces*, solutions are largely absent within *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*. Caldwell himself was criticized by progressives, as well as proponents of Marxism and dialectical realism, for not showing any real revolution or characters who have the ability to create definitive change (Metress 178-181). If we look deeper though, we see moments in which Caldwell is actually inflicting the same struggle that the characters feel onto the readers. In this way, we see the true radicalness of the novels, as Caldwell blurs the lines between book and reality, between character and reader. He is, in a sense demanding collective action. This collective action cannot come from the South alone, but from everywhere that experiences poverty and the myth of mobility. While it is true that Caldwell does not seem to offer specific answers as to what this action is, or what it might look like, *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre* lays out what should be targeted, the myth of mobility, as well as the racist and sexist beliefs that it engenders. Not only that, but Caldwell also lets us know that the stakes are nothing less than our emotional, physical, and spiritual selves. If we are ever to pull ourselves out of holes, we need a reunification not only of the self, but also as a people.

CHAPTER IV: SOCIAL ABJECTION AND JEAN TOOMER

The Normative Social Topography

While the end of the Civil War represented a supposed fulfillment of a Jeffersonian

American ideology that was committed to liberty, the limits of social mobility rooted in race,

class, gender, and cultural background proved to be stubborn obstacles that hampered lasting

change. The culture of Jim Crow and lynching in the South is well known, but the North also

propagated policies of de facto and de jure judicial and extra judicial policies that enforced racial

and cultural separation. From housing policy, to education, to work, to domestic interpersonal

relationships, there was a nationwide feeling that the freedoms that made up American ideals did

not extend to the mixing of races and cultures. In fact, in the beginning of the 20th century, there

was an increasing focus on a purity of national identity. Starting in the late 19th century,

America's newly found political stability, in combination with the birth of industries, as well as

advancements in international transport, led to a boom in immigration particularly from southern

and eastern Europe. New protections for immigrants, along with the newly ratified 14th

Amendment's guarantee that any person born in the United States was guaranteed birthright

citizenship codified America's image as a land of opportunity in which brave new futures could

be made. In response to this, a growing nativist movement began to advocate for stronger

restrictions that could curb immigration and preserve what they saw as an American identity

based on Anglo Saxon purity. Seven years after the ratification of the 14th Amendment, these

nativist impulses led to the signing of the Page Act, which banned the immigration of all Chinese

women (who were considered "immoral") and any other person who was deemed "undesirable."

The vagueness of what was considered "undesirable" allowed for a great degree of leeway in

deciding who to turn away, while, at the same time helping to resolve any cognitive dissonance

that might emerge from a land of liberty turning entire groups and cultures of people away. It would act as a cover for those who supported racist policies but did not want to be considered racists. This type of rhetoric was still alive 150 years later when an anti-immigration presidential candidate claimed that "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. […] They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (Trump). A few years after the Page Act, the Chinese Exclusion Act targeted any Chinese immigrant, effectively shutting down immigration from the country to the United States entirely. The rationale of the passage of the act was a combination of nationalism and racism – an argument that these immigrants were fundamentally deleterious to the nation's moral fiber and economy.

Following on heels of this was the formation of anti-immigrant organizations like the Immigration Restriction League (IRL). A collection of influential politicians, industrialists, and intellectuals, the IRL argued for strict limitations on immigrants from southern and eastern European countries, arguing that their ethnicities made them inferior to the peoples of the United States and western Europe. The organization was one of the driving forces behind the Immigration Act of 1917, a law that they hoped would provide measures that would "discriminate in favor of immigrants from Northern and Western Europe, thus securing for this country aliens of kindred and homogeneous racial stocks" (Immigration Restriction League 1).

The implication of this nativism was not only a commentary on the way America saw the world, but also a statement of how America defined itself. Immigration laws based in a desire for "kindred and homogenous racial stocks" operate from the assumption that there is a normative America which is racialized as white and from Northern or Western European descent. It also

posits that exposure to or mixing with outsiders (those who do not fit this description) is an inherent threat to the normative identity and thus to the country as a whole. The establishment of both this normative racial identity and its precarity also provides a theoretical framework that justifies oppression of "others" not only from outside the borders of the country, but from those who already exist within its borders.

As a result of this ethos, the de facto and de jure rules of separation of different races, cultures, and classes, became a way of protecting systems of segregation by justifying them through the invocation of national interest. This, along with long held racist sentiments throughout the nation meant that ideas of racial purity and white supremacy were not only the province of the South, but an enduring national legacy that played out through segregation of schools, housing, and employment in the North and West as well. Additionally, partially fueled by increases in migration patterns of Black American citizens northward, the reemergence of militant racist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan occurred in states that had long been anti-slavery. At the same time there were dramatic increases in cases of lynching, not only in the South, but also in states like Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. While some claimed that lynching was merely an extrajudicial punishment for heinous crimes, it was in fact a tool to maintain white supremacy through terror. Violations of racial boundaries, whether physical, social, economic, or interpersonal, were punished by groups of white men. Ida B. Wells noted this Northern culpability, writing, "It is now no uncommon thing to read of lynchings north of Mason and Dixon's line, and those most responsible for this fashion gleefully point to these instances and assert that the North is no better than the South. This is the work of the 'unwritten law' about which so much is said, and in whose behest butchery is made a pastime and national savagery condoned" (Wells). While the number of lynchings in the North and West does not compare to

that of the South, the root cause of maintaining racial purity, white power, and old rigid social orders were the same.

Toomer and Racial Abjection, and The Southern Abject Social Heterotopia

In many ways, Jean Toomer was uniquely positioned to explore the intricacies of social abjection because of his own complicated relationship with race and identity. In an America that was becoming increasingly nationalistic and zealous in its definitions of "American purity" based on binary subject positions, Toomer's ambivalence about his own racial identity placed him outside of the strictly demarcated sets of identities that the normative social topography required. In January of 1923, Jean Toomer wrote to Waldo Frank expressing his dismay with fellow writer Sherwood Anderson. Complaining about Anderson's limited conception of him, Toomer writes, "[h]e limits me to Negro. As an approach, as a constant element (part of a larger whole) of interest, Negro is good. But to try and tie me to one of my parts is surely to loose [sic] me" (164). The writer's familial history, which included whites, African Americans, and people of mixed descent, meant that he inhabited a racially distinct space in which he could neither be represented nor defined by essentializing dominant binary modes of racial classification. As Rudolph Byrd and Henry Louis Gates note in their introduction to the 2011 Norton Critical Edition of *Cane*, "[h]e defined himself as an 'American, neither black nor white, rejecting these divisions and accepting all people" (Gates xxxviii).

On the subject of race, Toomer notes that it is "difficult to determine the nature of a man; so most of us are even more content to have a label for him" (qtd. in Gates xl). The constant struggle to resist and transcend these proscriptive labels became a major theme in Toomer's writing and, indeed, in much of his life. Born into an elite family of mixed racial heritage in Washington, D.C. (a city which, in many ways, can be characterized by its own set of unclear

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identities), Toomer spent his life negotiating a world that seemed defined by rigidly constructed binaries of race and class. The varying degrees of success that his characters have in negotiating these same binaries seems to reflect the ambiguities and anxieties that Toomer himself faced as he attempted to assert control over his own identity and come to terms with a world that sought to essentialize and define him.

In many ways, the abjection of Toomer's socially illegible characters presaged his own slide into obscurity in the middle of the twentieth century. In his review of the 1969 edition of *Cane*, New York Times columnist Roger Jellinek opined, "How could it be that Jean Toomer's novel, acclaimed as the spark of the 'Negro Renaissance' of the twenties and ranked with Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* should have been virtually unavailable since its limited editions in 1923?" (45). Such a descent from a writer who Allen Tate described in 1924 as composing works that "challenge some of the best modern writing" (qtd. in Bontemps 215) to relative obscurity over the subsequent four decades, suggests a puzzling collapse of critical attention and artistic output. This rapid disappearance is particularly vexing for a voice who sociologist and Harlem Renaissance luminary Charles S. Johnson described as "triumphantly the Negro artist, detached from propaganda, sensitive only to beauty… More than artist, he was an experimentalist, and this last quality has carried him away from what was, perhaps, the most astonishingly brilliant beginning of any Negro writer of this generation" (qtd in Bontemps 211) and as W.E.B. Du Bois noted in 1924, "a man who has written a powerful book but who is still watching for the fullness of his strength and for that calm certainty of his art which will undoubtedly come with years" ("The Younger Literary Movement" 162).

By all accounts, Toomer never fulfilled his full potential in the years and decades that followed his initial success. Indeed, though Toomer continued to write for the rest of his life, *Cane* has remained the critical and artistic high-water mark of the writer's career. In the years following *Cane*, Toomer showed an increasing interest in spirituality and the teachings of George Gurdjieff, as well as others. As such, his writings began to reflect less mainstream philosophies and ways of thinking. In her introduction to her critical study of Jean Toomer's life, philosophy, and writing, Nellie McKay details the impact that this shift had on the writer's career. She writes that the critics rejected his newer work, regarding it as didactic, tedious, and inaccessible to the reading public. McKay sums up this critical response: "His style, they said, disqualified his work as literature; he had grown doctrinaire. The voice of the philosopher-teacher was not an acceptable substitute of the literary artist who had created *Cane*. Gradually, *Cane* and Toomer were forgotten" (McKay).

But why, then, was *Cane,* a book that had been championed by Waldo Frank, Sherwood Anderson, Hart Crain, Langston Hughes, among many others, relegated to the dustbin of literary history? The answer to this question might reside in the complexity of both the author's identity and form of the text. It was not until the late 1960s, when African American voices and culture were moving more into mainstream focus in popular and academic culture, that Toomer regained some critical traction in publications like the *CLA Journal* and the *Black American Literature Forum* (O'Daniel XV). Even with this partial revival, Toomer was not regularly anthologized in academic collections until the mid to late 1980s when increased scrutiny on the canon began to destabilize the centrality of traditional white, male authors, and offer voices who had been hitherto neglected. During this period, a slew of new critical studies and collections of the author's work debuted. These texts, including a Norton Critical Edition of *Cane,* Darwin

Turner's *Cane: An Authoritative Text, Background, Criticism,* Nellie McKay's *Jean Toomer, Artist,* and Therman B. O'Daniel's *Jean Toomer: A Critical Evaluation*, helped to bring further attention to the writer. Jean Toomer's biography, as well as his attitude to race, raises questions that make it difficult to strictly categorize him as simply an African American writer.

In December of 1894, Jean Toomer was born as Nathan Pinchback Toomer to Nathan Toomer and Nina Pinchback, both African Americans. His maternal grandfather, Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback was one of many children of Major William Pinchback, white Virginia planter and Eliza Stewart, an enslaved woman of mixed race (Gates xxii). Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback, or P.B.S. Pinchback, as he would come to be known, was born a free Black man in Macon, Georgia and eventually fought for the Union in the Civil War. During Reconstruction, Pinchback became Louisiana's first Black lieutenant governor and, for a period of thirty-five days from December 1872 to January 1873, the acting governor (Gates xxii-xxiii).

Jean Toomer would later describe his grandfather as a manipulative politician who, in fact, had actually been a white man who had only faked his blackness for political reasons. In his book, *The Wayward and the Seeking,* Toomer raises questions about his grandfather's narrative and heritage:

> He claimed he had Negro blood, linked himself with the cause of the Negro and rose to power. How much he was an opportunist, how much he was in sincere sympathy with the freedmen, is a matter which need not concern us here… it would be interesting if we knew what Pinchback himself believed about his racial heredity. Did he believe he had some Negro blood? Did he not? I do not know. What I do know is this – his belief or disbelief would have had no necessary relation to the facts – and this holds true as regards his Scotch-Welsh-German and other bloods as well. (24)

Though few others questioned Pinchback's racial authenticity, Toomer's skepticism suggests insecurity about racial labels, an insecurity made more puzzling by questions about his father's race.

Nathan Toomer, Jean's father, abandoned the young family soon after Jean was born. Though the two had sporadic contact, the boy never knew many details beyond the few details his mother's family would share. Later in his life, while visiting Sparta, Georgia, the author spoke to a barber who claimed to have known his father. Toomer asked if the people of the town regarded his father, whom he knew to be light skinned, as white or black. To his surprise, the barber told him that the elder Toomer had "stayed in the white hotel, did business with white men, and courted a black woman" (Gates xxx). This, combined with his doubts about his grandfather, blurred Toomer's sense of his own race, and placed him within a racial zone where he was simultaneously both races, and neither one nor the other. In and of itself, this speaks to a kind of social abjection, particularly in the context of an America that was obsessed with racial boundaries and identity. Toomer's own self-conception of race and his embrace of his own otherness in a system that embraces binaries meant that he could not be effectively socially legible within the society in which he lived. Instead, critics pinned a race onto him, effectively erasing his own material experience.

With this in mind, we might also see texts and literature as subjects that society interpellates in ways that are similar to the authors. As such, editors, publishers, and critics label texts and constitute them in specific genres or types. Just as individuals must enact behaviors that mimic and reiterate the expectations of their race, gender, or sexuality, textual genre performance requires inherent expectations about how the text will operate. While the texts themselves are unable to perform and reiterate, critical interpretive acts force them into performances that

reinforce societal expectations of both the type of text and the author. As a result, once a text is interpellated through a certain lens, critics continually reinforce this identity by interpreting the text through language or ideology that specifically falls in line with those expectations. Texts that subvert these expectations often fail to be intelligible as texts and are thus, like individuals, stigmatized or ignored. Thus, texts that are deemed as "African American texts" or the "Negro texts" must fulfill certain expectations to remain intelligible.

Because much of *Cane* deals with individuals who are the embodiment of blurry or unclear racial backgrounds, the text fails to articulate what many saw as the authentic African American experience. While *Cane*'s critical reputation waned over the following years and decades, other works such as Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* rose to prominence. While these newer works addressed controversial issues of race, societal norms, and transgressive behavior, they did so through the lens of characters with stable racial identities. Even when anthologies began including Toomer on a larger scale in the 1980s, the texts that inevitably appear are not those with racially ambiguous characters.[6]

Compounding Toomer's failure to create a text that met expectations for racial performativity was the fact that the author became increasingly resentful of being labeled a "Negro writer." In January of 1923, Jean Toomer wrote to Waldo Frank expressing his dismay with Sherwood Anderson's reception of his work. In the letter, Toomer complains that he finds Anderson's narrow conception of him to be suffocating. Toomer writes, "He limits me to Negro.

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[6] Since the late 1980s when Toomer began to be anthologized on a more regular basis, his most frequently represented story has been "Blood Burning Moon." While "Blood Burning Moon" is a story of racial transgression, it revolves around a familiar narrative of a forbidden love between a white woman and a Black man. The story, while it depicts the graphic and violent results of such an affair on the man, does not trouble racial boundaries in a major way because each character is defined within a stable and binary racial classification. Thus, the story does not question ambiguous racial identity, so much as it questions racism. For more specific details about Toomer's anthologized works, see the University of Texas Arlington's "Covers, Titles, and Tables: The Formations of American Literary Canons" website (https://uta-ir.tdl.org/uta-ir/handle/10106/1264)

As an approach, as a constant element (part of a larger whole) of interest, Negro is good. But to

try and tie me to one of my parts is surely to loose [sic] me" ("Letter to Waldo Frank" 113).

Similarly, the author bristled at attempts by Frank and Liveright to market the book as being a

work of a "negro" writer. Despite Liveright's insistence that the classification was essential to

the *Cane's* success, Toomer wrote:

> My racial composition and my position in the world are realities which I
> alone may determine … I do not expect to be told what I should consider
> myself to be. Nor do I expect you as my publisher, and I hope, as my
> friend, to either directly or indirectly state that this basis contains any
> elements of dodging … Feature Negro if you wish, but do not expect me
> to feature it in advertisements for you … Whatever statements I give will
> inevitably come from a synthetic human and art point of view; not a racial
> one. ("Letter to Horace Liveright" 113)

This type of statement was emblematic of Toomer's evolving views on race, As Rudolph Byrd

and Henry Louis Gates note, "he defined himself as an 'American, neither black nor white,

rejecting these divisions and accepting all people" (xxxviii)

Toomer's rejection of racial labels is one of the reasons that his work was neither

published nor anthologized for much of the middle of the century. In his essay, "The Strange

Literary Career of Jean Toomer," Michael Nowlin, points to the author's intransigence on the

issue, noting that for "Toomer, the prospect of a nobler literary future necessitated his refusal to

allow [James Weldon] Johnson to publish poems from Cane in his updated edition of *The Book

of American Negro Poetry* (1931) or Nancy Cunard to publish anything by him in *Negro* (1933)"

(226). At the same time, Toomer also declined the opportunity to donate a copy of his *Essentials*

to the New York Public Library's "Negro division." In a letter to the librarian, Toomer wrote

"Since 'Essentials' is not about the Negro, you will, I hope, appreciate why I do not think it

would be consistent to have a special copy in the Negro division" (qtd. in Nowlin 226). George

Hutchinson notes the debilitating impact that Toomer's rejection of racial labels had on the

writer, writing, "ironically, the demand that he accept a 'black' identity drove him away from connection with African American culture, a fundamental source of his art" (Hutchinson 243).

Despite his desire to move beyond race, mainstream popular and academic culture still regarded him as an African American writer, a fact that hindered him from being accepted into the major anthologies that catered to predominantly white audiences. These anthologies left little room for nonwhite texts, outside of sporadic collections of "Negro Spirituals."[7] Outside of these, white authors such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Joel Chandler Harris were the only ones who articulated versions of African American voices. Thus, Toomer's desire to escape the suffocating boundaries of race and to write as an American writer rather than an African American writer, meant that he cut himself off from nearly every avenue of meaningful publication and anthologizing. This, in combination with his struggle to produce new work that had any artistic merit, meant that Toomer slowly slipped into oblivion.

In many ways, Toomer knew he would never write a book like *Cane* again. His experiences in Sparta had energized him and helped him to see the rapidly ebbing folk culture of the South. This loss of this culture profoundly moved Toomer and inspired him to write a "swan song" for a disappearing folk-spirit that was becoming industrialized in "the modern desert." Toomer would later reflect on this swan song, writing, "this was the feeling I put into *Cane*. It was a song of an end. And why no one has seen and felt that, why people have expected me to write a second and a third and a fourth book like *Cane*, is one of the queer misunderstandings of my life" (*The Wayward and the Seeking* 123). It seemed that in both the text and the construction of *Cane*, Toomer had said what he wanted to say.

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[7] Interestingly, these anthologies often present these spirituals, not as major culture work, but as "local color." The 1947 anthology, *The Literature of the United States*, for instance gives equal weight to "Cowboy Songs," along with the songs of hobos.

When James Weldon Johnson asked him if he could reprint parts of *Cane* in the second edition of *The Book of American Negro Poetry,* Toomer declined, writing back, "My poems are not Negro poems, nor are they Anglo-Saxon or white or English poems. My prose likewise. They are, first, mine. And second, in so far as general race or stock is concerned, they spring from the result of racial blending here in America which has produced a new race or stock. We may call this stock the American stock or race" (106). Despite this insistence, the complexity of Toomer's relationship to race often gets elided even in more contemporary discussions, as can been seen in a passing reference to the writer in Tom Dardis's 1995 biography of Horace Liveright in which the biographer remarks in an awkward, condescending, and inaccurate tone that *Cane* was the "first purely literary book written by an American black" (Dardis 270).

These types of arguments complicate discussions of Toomer's racial identification and force us to look beyond accusations of racial passing, and toward an attitude that steps outside of the racialized binaries to view them externally. Ironically, it is Toomer's insistence on exploring the poetry and texts of the "American stock or race" that places him outside of national legibility. If Toomer finds himself outside of, and indeed alienated by totalizing labels of Blackness and whiteness, then his body and social position are always in focus and act as examples of what happens when one exists outside of the social body. In some ways, the narrative of "passing" would make Toomer more legible, particularly in an America obsessed with essentialized ideas of race. A "passing narrative" in which Toomer seeks to forsake one racial identity for another, while suggesting a superficial fluidity of race, still upholds a strict set of differences. On the other hand, a narrative in which the details and implications of race are expanded and recontextualized challenges hegemonic normative social constructs, and thus exposes and deconstructs the ways in which current ideas of race are made. This exposure, which reveals the

internal workings of the body of society, is thus seen to be a threat to the integrity of society and must be expelled. It is these ideas that, for Toomer, make the social valance of his own race abject.

<p style="text-align:center;">**Racial Abjection in *Cane***</p>

While Toomer returns repeatedly to complicated issues of race and identity throughout *Cane*, he complicates these ideas by juxtaposing essentialized beliefs about the purity of racial binaries, in which one is *either* black or white, with transgressive acts that challenge and ultimately tear down these boundaries. Throughout the entirety of the book, we see characters who struggle to operate outside of strict binary positions. Whether these be binaries of desirability (alluring and repulsive), as is the case with Fern; or age (young and old), as is the case with Esther who is "prematurely serious" and whose "cheeks are too flat and dead for a girl of nine" ("Esther" 35); or race (Black and white), as is the case with numerous characters throughout the book, the middle space in which these characters exist sets them in opposition to the expectations that others would project onto them, and thus place them outside of the realm of social legibility. In fact, the middle space is not a middle space at all, but rather a space outside of the confines of the national body. It is a space in which the ejected subjects are stored.

The Haunting of Racial Norms in "Becky"

For many of these characters, existence as "both" and "neither" is status quo, but there are moments in which Toomer shows how these identities are constructed. This act is particularly perceptible in "Becky," the collection's second short story. "Becky," the story begins, "was the white woman who had two Negro sons" (14). By having children outside of her race, she has sacrificed her own racial purity, and taken on a hybrid identity that puts her at odds with both sides of the racial binary. "White woman who had two Negro sons" becomes both her

racial and gender signifier. In addition, Becky is linguistically isolated in this first sentence, as the article in the sentence suggests, she is not "*a* white woman who had two Negro sons," but rather "*the* white woman who had two Negro sons." This choice of article forecloses any sort of meaningful connection for Becky and reinforces her otherness. Likewise, Becky is not offered a last name, unlike the minor characters who are mentioned in passing like John Stone and Lonnie Deacon who surreptitiously provide her housing on the edge of society, David Georgia who provides her with limited sugar sap, and Hugh Jourdon who spots Becky's second baby (14). Again, this cuts Becky off from any sort of connection within the text. All other singly named individuals in the text have their isolated signifiers mitigated by their overt connections to others through shared experiences and actions.

In the story, Toomer suggests the social construction of this identity by layering it onto the literal construction of a space in which to keep Becky, writing, "White folks and black folks built her a cabin" on the "narrow strip between the railroad and the road" (14). This cabin, like the South itself, is a heterotopia for abject – a demarcated physical space that exists both outside the realm of organized society and as an extension of it. It is there that Becky must be kept as a visible reminder of social abjection. Her presence, reminding everyone of the precarious socially constructed nature of race on which the society has been built. As such, Toomer describes the overwhelming ambivalence that both groups feel toward Becky as they realize that, like all things that are abject, she can be neither accepted nor truly abandoned. Describing this conflict, Toomer writes, "White folks and Black folks . . . fed her and her growing baby" but "prayed secretly to God who'd put His cross upon her and cast her out" (14).

This focus on the socially constructed nature of race and identity sets Toomer apart from many of his contemporaries, both white and Black. In his 1926 essay, "The Negro Artist and the

Racial Mountain," Langston Hughes writes specifically on the necessity for and the uniqueness

of Toomer's voice,

> The Negro artist works against an undertow of sharp criticism and
> misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from the
> whites. 'Oh, be respectable, write about nice people, show how good we
> are,' say the Negroes. 'Be stereotyped, don't go too far, don't shatter our
> illusions about you, don't amuse us too seriously. We will pay you,' say
> the whites. Both would have told Jean Toomer not to write *Cane*. The
> colored people did not praise it. The white people did not buy it. Most of
> the colored people who did read Cane hate it. They are afraid of it.
> Although the critics gave it good reviews the public remained indifferent.
> Yet (excepting the work of Du Bois) *Cane* contains the finest prose
> written by a Negro in America. And like the singing of Robeson, it is truly
> racial. (693)

As Hughes notes, Toomer's writing created an inescapable paradox for the author – despite its

authenticity and its nature as a "truly racial" text, people on both sides of the racial divide largely

ignored *Cane* because it not only transgressed racial boundaries and expectations, but it also

forced people to examine their construction and the ways in which they are reiterated.

In "Becky," Toomer presents the markers of social abject manifest upon the title

character in the eyes of the society. The story begins, "Becky had one Negro son. Who gave it to

her? Damn buck nigger, said the white folks' mouths. She wouldn't tell. Common, God-forsaken,

insane white shameless wench, said the white folks' mouths . . . Who gave it to her? Low-down

nigger with no self-respect, said the black folks' mouths. She wouldn't tell. Poor Catholic poor-

white crazy woman, said the black folks' mouths" (14). In this, we see that it is not only the

racial question that separates Becky from both communities, but also a fundamental mystery of

the father's identity. That this question is so high on everyone's mind suggests that her existence

would be more palpable, or at least legible if a father could be identified. The presence of a

Black father would allow her to, at very least, fit into familiar narratives in which supposedly

innocent white women are victimized and "sullied" by Black men, or alternatively, as a white

woman who "tempted" a Black man. At very least, this would allow her to fit into some sort of narrative. But the mystery remains, and Becky's children exist almost as immaculate conceptions, born into a world that is ultimately unready and unwilling to accept their existence. It is as if, somehow, Becky, as a white woman, can produce Blackness on her own. And if that is possible, then the social structures of race fall apart.

The unwillingness to accept the children, like the unwillingness to accept their Becky results in the two boys becoming larger than life shadows that threaten to disrupt the order of society. We are told by the narrator, "They'd beat and cut a man who meant nothing at all in mentioning that they lived along the road. White or colored? No one knew, and least of all themselves" (15). This brief story of their violent nature is puzzling coming from a town in which race is so clearly demarcated. That the town clearly does not know the man who was assaulted is evidenced by the ambiguity about his race, suggests that the story is made up, or at least embellished to act as a warning, positioning the boys as a threat to the social order of both communities.

The question of their disappearance is equally puzzling and suggests a general inability of society to even recognize them. The narrator says, "They drifted around from job to job. We, who had cast out their mother because of them, could we take them in? They answered Black and white folks by shooting up two men and leaving town. 'Goddam the white folks; goddam the niggers,' they'd shouted as they left town" (15). In this section, we see them seeking a sense of permanency and even asking for a place within the community, but there is no answer provided. Toomer frames this question of the community taking them in, but then purposely omits the communities answer, creating a literal and figurative silence that speaks volumes. Instead of an answer from the people, we are redirected to the "answer" that the young men gave in reply,

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which suggests that these individuals are not deemed worthy of an answer or an explanation of the town's abandonment of their mother and themselves. Again, this positions them as threats to everyone, reinforcing the image that any interaction they may have with the main body of society is violent and potentially damaging the carefully built social structure.

Essential to many of Toomer's stories is a narrative voice that does the looking for the reader. It is through this voice that we see the violations of social normality and the ways in which it writes abjection and otherness upon the victim. This is important because what we are seeing is the social act of interpellation as it reads and expels individuals to the abject edges of society. The voice in "Becky" describes the title characters, noting that her eyes were sunken, "her neck stringy, her breasts fallen" and that her mouth was, "setting in a twist that held her eyes, harsh, vacant, staring" (14). The overall image of Becky, then, is that of a corpse – someone who is always already dead. After word gets out about her second son, we are told, "But nothing was said, for the part of man that says things to the likes of that had told itself that if there was a Becky, that Becky was now dead" (15). At this point, Becky is physically erased, yet her social function as abject subject remains. She has fully transformed from the physical to the symbolic. To be clear, this symbolic function is not related to her own experience of the world, but rather a horrifying reminder to the hegemonic masses that the individual may be excreted from the body of society and, as such, everyone must face their own precarity and social death.

Focus on the two boys offers a bit of respite for the community who struggle with symbolic meaning of Becky's abject meaning. They are, at very least, partially legible in that they are classifiable as "not white," and that they seem to be an active threat to the community rather than a symbolic one. When Toomer's narrator remarks that, "[i]t seemed as though with

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those two big fellows there, there could be no room for Becky" (15). The room to which he refers is both a commentary on the physical space of the house and the mental space that the community has for this problem. Her seeming absence presents an opportunity to resolve the crisis that the fact of her existence engenders as he observes, "the part that prayed wondered if perhaps she'd really died, and they had buried her" (15). But that, as we are told, "no one dared ask" whether this was true, suggests that Becky as symbol now precedes Becky as physical body, and thus there is a fundamental inability to resolve the meaning of her presence.

In fact, it is this ambiguous absence that continues to haunt and unsettle the people of the community. After the boys leave and thus free up the physical and mental space for Becky to exist for the town, her potency in the symbolic register is, if anything, more haunting and horrifying. Toomer writes:

> Smoke curled up from her chimney; she must be there. Trains passing
> shook the ground. The ground shook the leaning chimney. Nobody noticed
> it. A creepy feeling came over all who saw that thin wraith of smoke and
> felt the trembling of the ground. Folks began to take her food again. They
> quit it soon because they had a fear. Becky if dead might be a haint,[8] and if
> alive - it took some nerve even to mention it. (15)

In this moment, Toomer provides the clearest example yet of the haunting spectral force that appears to endow Becky with such meaning. In this, her power has ceased to be in the social and somatic form that has been expelled from society. In fact, it is her lack of such a form that inspires the dread of the people. The ethereal smoke rising from the chimney; the unresolvable fact that the people, or at least the narrator claims that the "ground shook the leaning chimney" and that "A creepy feeling came over all who saw that thin wraith of smoke and felt the trembling of the ground," yet, we are told, that "nobody noticed it;" (15) the unaccountable dread

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[8] A malignant spirit or ghost, usually one in search of vengeance. The word, which is derived from "haunt," originated with Gullah Geechee populations in coastal South Carolina and Georgia.

that inspires limited action, all of this speaks to her unspoken power even as she sits at the edge of existence. In fact, it is because she straddles the line between being and nonbeing, between life and death, between social legibility and social excrement, that she remains a potent force within the community. Becky is a force whose very abjection reveals, questions, and thus begins to deconstruct a natural social unity. Unlike her children who were born into a certain social position based on their race, Becky has transgressed social norms and is unapologetic. In her transgression and her subsequent punishment, the interiority of the social body is put on display, and everyone must face its constructed nature and therefore the precarity of their own social existences.

To mitigate her resurfaced threat, the citizens first attempt to offer a degree of reintegration into the body of society, taking her sustenance to meet her most basic human needs. An acceptance of the food would be proof that her abjection, and therefore the social threat to their own social positioning, is not absolute. But it is apparent that the food is neither accepted nor touched, leaving the community to again fear her. Interestingly, it is not the vengeance of a haunting ghost that they fear most. They fear that she may be still alive. Again, if she were to be dead, she would become once again socially legible – a tragic outcast who died, but whose symbolic threat can be buried and forgotten. To a degree, even a spectral haunting has legibility in that it may be contained within a linguistic framework, but as the speaker notes, "if alive – it took some nerve even to mention it" (15).

The story begins with a linguistic isolation (she is "*the* white woman who had two Negro sons") and it starts to draw to a close with this same sense of linguistic exclusion. Exclusion is one of the factors at the heart of abjection. Unlike omission, exclusion requires the expansion of the rhetorical space to contain that which is being excluded. Just as the purely abject forces the

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extension of the figurative boundaries of the body, exclusion in the linguistic realm forces the extension of the rhetorical boundaries. In this extended boundary there is horror for those within the body society because in it they see not only abjection, but also their own connection to its creation. What is not said, or more precisely, what *cannot* be said is that Becky's abjection and her compromised subject position has nothing to do with the sons she bore or whomever fathered them. It was the community that wrenched and forced her into oblivion, exiling her physical presence and reconstituting her as symbolic. The feeble attempts to feed and care for her that can be stopped and restarted and stopped without regard to her actual needs or, in fact, if she is alive at all, are gestures meant not to sustain her, but rather to maintain the veneer of wholeness of the body of society. It is the guilt and denial of their own behavior that horrifies the community, and Becky has become transformed into the symbolic embodiment of that which can be excreted, as well as a reminder of the community's bile.

The story ends with an unquestionable indictment of the community. As a group of churchgoers returns from an outing, they notice an overpowering sense of death hanging over them. The air is thick with decay as the narrator observes, "There was no wind. The autumn sun, the bell from Ebenezer Church, listless and heavy. Even the pines were stale, slicky, like the smell of food that makes you sick" (15). It is as if we have crossed headfirst into the realm of horror as the narrator tells us that the horses nervously stop and refuse to go any further until they are whipped. As they near the little strip of land on which Becky's house sits, the narrator goes through a sudden and disturbing change – "Quarter of a mile away thin smoke curled up from the leaning chimney. . . O pines, whisper to Jesus. . ." (16).

It is at this moment that the narrator experiences the horror of knowing abjection himself, in this case social abjection rooted in isolation and separation from community. As the narrator

witnesses this scene and comes close to seeing the remains of Becky's house, the reader sees a linguistic change in which, for the first time, the narrator uses first person pronouns to refer to himself. If only for a moment, the experience has robbed the narrator of the ability to be a detached member of the community, but instead has forced him to become an individual, separate and isolated from a communal experience. Compounding this, is a further separation from his own body and sense of self as he feels as if inexplicable changes are occurring to his physical form. His bodily integrity feels as if it is failing, as "eyes left their sockets for the cabin" and "ears burned and throbbed" (16). But again, the main concern here is not his physical integrity and abjection, rather it is his social decorporialization. In this section, there is a sudden syntactical decay of the recently emerged first person referent as the sentence, "Goose-flesh came on my skin though there was neither chill nor wind" is immediately followed by "Eyes left their sockets for the cabin. Ears burned and throbbed" (16). In the last two of these sentences, the personal pronoun – the self – is eradicated. Within the space of these sentences, the narrator has come to know himself as an individual, isolated from the shared communal experience, and moved quickly to a complete erasure of his social and ontological self. Just as Becky's body has been erased by her abjection (no one ever actually sees her), so too our narrator seems to be suffering a similar fate. When he recovers a marginal sense of self and reclaims the personal pronoun, he says, "Uncanny eclipse! fear closed my mind!" (16).

In many ways, this image of an eclipse is a perfect embodiment of the entire process of abjection social embodiment – a slow erasure of the self. Those who watch the slow-motion eradication that is an eclipse find themselves, like the sun, isolated by darkness. And like an eclipse, it may present an ominous sign of what is to come. The mix of colors in the eclipse also cannot be ignored – the fact that such disquietude is inspired by darkness covering up the white

light of the sun suggests an explicit fear of the white community. So too does the intrusion of night into the strictly demarcated realm of the day. But an eclipse does not last long and neither does the figurative darkness that surrounds the narrator here. Just as the moon's shadow slowly recedes, so too does the feeling of isolation and abjection for the narrator. As it recedes though, the narrator must fight his own horror at the depths of the erasure and social abjection that he has witnessed.

Almost immediately, these feelings are manifest in the physical world as walls that contained Becky begin to collapse. We are told, "the ground trembled as a ghost train rumbled by. The chimney fell into the cabin. Its thud was a hollow report, ages having passed since it went off" (16). The reader, like the characters, witnesses the house fall in on itself, but, as we are told, the sound of the implosion seems oddly disconnected from the fall." The action then speeds up as the narrator describes he and his friend being "pulled out of our seats [and] dragged to the door that had swung open" (16). In this section Toomer's narrator has once again become depersonalized and separate from the structures of time, space, and personal agency that make up his sense of self.

The penultimate moment of the story lingers with the narrator and Barlo as they penetrate the walls of the prison that has both contained and perpetuated Becky's social abjection.

> Through the dust we saw the bricks in a mound upon the floor. Becky, if
> she was there lay under them. I thought I heard a groan. Barlo, mumbling
> something, threw his Bible on the pile. (No one has ever touched it.) (16)

In this moment, the horror of Becky still exists in that the ambiguity of her initial survival of the collapse (the unclear groan) situates her as being simultaneously alive and not alive. This double positioning is an echo of her abject racialized social positioning. Maintaining this ambiguity is essential because it allows Barlo and the narrator the social and moral leeway to do what they

have always done – avert their eyes, turn away, and make a token, and ultimately indistinct gesture.

The two characters flee from the scene like Ichabod Crain frantically riding to the old church bridge, the narrator breathlessly tells the reader, "[s]omehow we got away. My buggy was still on the road. The last thing I remember was whipping old Dan like fury; I remember nothing after that - that is, until I reached town and folks crowded round to get the true word of it" (16). It is only at the moment when the narrator is fully restored to social connection that the horror of social abjection can be resolved. Once again protected by the integrity of a communal body, he can return to the detached and comfortable tone of the beginning of the story, as he finishes his tale where it began – "Becky was the white woman who had two Negro sons. She's dead; they're gone away. The pines whisper to Jesus. The Bible flaps its leaves with an aimless rustle on her mound" (16). The completion of the narrative circle here suggests that the social body has been purified and is unbothered by any dangling loose ends that might once again threaten the integrity of the social body.

Dreams and Nightmares of Race in "Esther"

This image of a circle is powerful and prevalent in *Cane*, which Toomer felt to be a unified text and thus was hesitant about having any single part anthologized separately, lest that threaten the work's integrity. The frontpieces to the book's three sections are simple arcs which, theoretically, assembled would make a complete circle.[9] In an ebullient letter to Waldo Frank, Toomer remarked:

> [*Cane]* is a circle. Aesthetically, from simple forms to complex ones, and
> back to simple forms. Regionally, from the South up into the North, and
> back into the South again. Or, from North down into the South, and then a

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[9] Because of the printing, the arcs to not actually match up to form a complete circle. While it is tempting to read some sort of intentional meaning into this, it is more likely that the fault was in the transference of the manuscript to the printed page and that Toomer's intention was a circle of full completion and return.

return North. From the point of view of the spiritual entity behind the
work, the curve really starts with Bona and Paul (awakening), plunges into
Kabnis, emerges in Karintha etc. swings upward into Theatre and Boxseat,
and ends (pauses) in Harvest Song. Whew! (Toomer, "Letter to Waldo
Frank" 101)

Left unsaid in this is the way these journeys take place through a tour of genres – from poetry to prose to lyrical plays, not to mention the blurring of lines of non-fictional biographical experiences and completely invented situations. The image of the circle also suggests the emergence of a new sense of wholeness and the emergence of a new kind of body that encompasses all of complexity that the separate subject positions, criteria, and classifications that the text represents.

The entire book is concerned with people on the margins whose existence subverts social purity and easy determination. In "Esther," we see a dreamy very light-skinned young Black woman, whose "hair would be beautiful if there was more to it." The description continues, "And if her face were not prematurely serious, one would call it pretty. Her cheeks are too flat and dead for a girl of nine" (24). This description reflects one in the book's first story "Karintha," in which the title character is introduced thusly:

Men had always wanted her, this Karintha, even as a child, Karintha
carrying beauty, perfect as dusk when the sun goes down. Old men rode
her hobby-horse upon their knees. Young men danced with her at frolics
when they should have been dancing with their grown-up girls. God grant
us youth, secretly prayed the old men. The young fellows counted the time
to pass before she would be old enough to mate with them. This interest of
the male, who wishes to ripen a growing thing too soon, could mean no
good for her. (Toomer, "Karintha" 8)

Esther and Karintha embody a curious social position in which they can be seen neither as their own ages, nor as fully adults, thus exposing the constructedness of the social body when it comes to who is counted. Toomer gives us radically different results of these ambiguous social positions that exist on the edge of legibility in that Karintha inspires desire and Esther repulsion,

two responses that sum up the psychological response to the grotesque. In "Esther," the title character, like the rest of the community, finds herself drawn to a man named Barlo. The image that we get of Barlo, a "clean-muscled, magnificent, black-skinned Negro" with a "smooth black face" and "rapturous eyes" (35) is intimidating to Esther to say the least. Barlo's mere presence is enough to draw the attention of all members of the community, regardless of race. Esther, on the other hand, finds herself continually on the fringes of society, even when she is in the midst of it. She is, by turns, withdrawn and given to flights of imagination. The family store, the source of all her father's wealth, is an island from which she observes the town, providing only superficial and cursory interactions. We are told of her customers that they regard her as "a sweet-natured accommodating girl" (38). For Esther, these relationships are all transactional and transitory, whether it is because she cannot find a node of connection, or whether it is because she has been forced to work this job to "keep the money in the family" and that any sort of interloper would threaten that.

Personal relationships have been equally futile for Esther, whether it is because they were too innocent, such as the little fair boy with whom she "had an affair" in school, or threatening in their implied sexuality, such as the Northern salesman who "wanted to take her to the movies the first night he was in town" (38). Repeatedly, she finds herself stuck without a definitive identity. In many ways, all of this is at the heart of Esther's social abjection. Unlike many of the tropes of the "tragic mulatto," Esther is not trying to "pass" – the smallness of the town and her apparent lack of interest in any sort of social mobility ensures that is not an issue. Neither does she exactly suffer at the hands of domineering hegemonic white society. In fact, for most of the story, her "tragedy" is in her unremarkableness and distance from much of the social interaction of the town. Pondering her position, she thinks, "I don't appeal to them. I wonder why" (38). Again, it

would be easy to simply regard Esther's struggle as one of skin color that seems to defy a binary position. That would certainly make sense given Toomer's own ambiguous relationship with race. But to only see Esther's position in terms of skin color ignores an equally powerful conversation of history that Toomer, and many other writers of the Harlem Renaissance, were engaged. In this discussion, the writers sought to explore how Black America could reconcile their sense of identity without a sense of history. For many descendants of slaves, the physical and epistemological violence of slavery had completely severed them from any sense of a past. Lack of records, coupled with a system that brutally separated families meant that tracing any sort of ancestry was difficult, if not impossible. Langston Hughes's 1921 poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," provides a pan-African solution, positing a deep continuity between the Africa and of his ancestors and its great cultural achievements, and the America of the present and more recent history. This impulse is empowering specifically because it allows Black Americans to reclaim a history and cultural context the encompasses slavery but is not defined by it. Instead, the history and cultural context are rooted in spiritual and physical relationships with a land and world outside of the realm of whiteness and America. This allows for the radical forging of a powerful new identity can disrupt ideas of white supremacy.

But Hughes's imagery, as empowering as it is, ran into difficulty because of the fundamental disconnection that many Black Americans felt with Africa. Countee Cullen's 1925 poem "Heritage" speaks to this as the poet wonders repeatedly,

> One three centuries removed
> from the scenes his fathers loved,
> Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
> What is Africa to me?

The "heritage" of the poem's title is a mélange of twice-told stories and anthropological observations with which the speaker has no direct connection. He writes,

Africa? A book one thumbs
Listlessly, till slumber comes.
Unremembered are her bats
Circling through the night, her cats
Crouching in the river reeds,
Stalking gentle flesh that feeds
By the river brink; no more
Does the bugle-throated roar
Cry that monarch claws have leapt
From the scabbards where they slept. (31-40)

This idea of a past "unremembered" establishes a central internal conflict because it suggests a space (a memory, an idea, a piece of the self) that should be filled but cannot. It is this that the speaker struggles with as he attempts to find a connection but finds himself alienated both from his own heritage and from the culture that subjugated his ancestors. This double alienation is a crises on both a personal and spiritual level as he longs for the "heathen gods / Black men fashion out of rods, / Clay, and brittle bits of stone, / In a likeness like their own," (85-88) and yet, he seems to sigh, "My conversion came high priced; / I belong to Jesus Christ, / Preacher of humility, / Heathen gods are naught to me" (89-92) Yet even this "conversion," does not assure security or enlightenment as he feels an obligation to Christ, yet feels no real connection. Instead, he wishes for a Black god who "would not lack Precedent of pain to guide it, / Let who would or might deride it; / Surely then this flesh would know / Yours had bourne a kindred woe" (102-106) In this moment, the speaker posits that at the nexus of spiritual connection and belief, is an awareness of a purposeful suffering, such as Christ's death on the cross. But the speaker feels that his continued suffering and that of his ancestors do not fully correlate with those Christ, which means that a spiritually transcendent and cathartic experience is impossible. His initial solution is to create different gods that merge the old with the new,

Lord, I fashion dark gods, too,
Daring even to give You
Dark despairing features where,

Crowned with dark rebellious hair,
Patience wavers just so much as
Mortal grief compels, while touches
Quick and hot, of anger, rise
To smitten cheek and weary eyes.
Lord, forgive me if my need
Sometimes shapes a human creed. (107-116)

These gods would speak to him and give him a sense of identity, allowing himself to see his own likeness in the divine. But we see that this is a lost cause as the speaker reluctantly concludes that any sort of revolutionary action would surely consume him in ways that he could not control. He writes,

All day long and all night through,
One thing only must I do:
Quench my pride and cool my blood,
Lest I perish in the flood,
Lest a hidden ember set
Timber that I thought was wet
Burning like the driest flax,
Melting like the merest wax,
Lest the grave restore its dead
Not yet has my heart or head
In the least way realized
They and I are civilized. (117-128)

This inability to take action, Cullen tells us, is rooted in the fact that the speaker has been "civilized." This "civilization" marks a definitive break from history and an installment only in the present moment and subject position. This has robbed any sort of self-determination or passionate sense identity and left the speaker impotent, disconnected, and vainly grasping for meaning. In its crises, Cullen's poem recalls Eliot's *The Waste Land* written three years earlier. But while Eliot's epic draws to a moment of possible synthesis and offers the promise of some alternative to the overwhelming disconnection of the modern world, Cullen is unable to find any sort of synthesis or resolution.

This fundamental ontological argument of identity and its performance echoed back and forth through the writers of the Harlem Renaissance. In the very same essay in which Hughes praised Toomer, he explicitly criticizes an anonymous poet who makes an argument remarkably similar to Toomer's about an "American race":

> One of the most promising young Negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet – not a Negro poet," meaning, I believe, "I want to write like a white poet"; meaning subconsciously, "I would like to be a white poet"; meaning behind that, "I would like to be white." And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America – this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible. (692)

Whether Hughes is talking about a real poet, or if he is subtly indicting Toomer, it comes to the same idea of authenticity in Black writing and Black experience. The problem, once again, is that Hughes proposes an essentialized version of Blackness that excludes any sort of ambivalence or feeling of disconnection to established racial identities. Cullen's poem, like much of Toomer's work, argues that these feelings of disconnection and separateness from both white and Black people *is* common experience of Blackness in a highly racialized America, in that it is only people who are defined to be non-white experience it. As such, the idea of an "American race," as Toomer puts it, or wanting to be "a poet – not a Negro poet," as the young man says in Hughes's essay is, far from being a rejection of Blackness, an expression of the ways in which the racial boundaries created by white supremacy alienate individuals from themselves and their identities. It is tempting to see the rhetoric of Toomer and this younger poet as anticipating the erasure of race that has emerged with signs that read "All Lives Matter," but this is not an erasure of race, it is an argument that the nature of its social construction can be alienating.

Further, this argument posits that since only people of color are subjected to race in this way, that the expression of this angst can be read as an expression of Blackness.

It is tempting to describe this position of being simultaneously both and neither, as being a liminal space, but liminality implies a sense of movement and eventual resolution, something with which Cullen and Toomer both struggle. Part of the reason for this is that race was viewed as an immutable social truth – a definitive position in which one's sense of history and identity are predetermined by larger systemic forces. In the America of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and particularly in the South of the era, the disconnection of people of African descent from history was an essential tool in their oppression. This is because a paucity of history is not reflective of one's identity and social position, rather it is a generative factor in its development.

It is this crisis that generates the social abjection of Esther. She is an individual who exists outside of the realm of society because she has no stable sense of identity or history. The only history she has is her present moment, which is not consciously formative for her. Like the names of the customers, she often "listlessly forgets that she is near white, and that her father is the richest colored man in town" (Toomer, "Esther" 38). Particularly in a highly racialized South, one would assume that these aspects of one's identity would be difficult to forget, but because Esther has no history, she has no context in which to place her social position. Like her orphaned namesake in the Hebrew Bible, Toomer's Esther seemingly has no markers of a past.

Esther's father cultivates this isolation and social confusion with his own views on their race which range from ambivalent to hostile. For him, racial value and capitalistic positioning are inexorably linked as he offers Esther advice like, "Good business sense comes from remembering that white folks don't divide the niggers . . . Be just as black as any man who has a

silver dollar" (38). For Esther's father, then, the binary of race may be immutable, but there is importance in maintaining a sense of distance within these boundaries. He believes in emulating the White middle class to the point of rejecting racial identity. As such, he wants the identification of her Blackness to exist only within the confines of the store where it is in direct view of the White gaze. Outside of the store, on the other hand, there should be distance between Esther and the "niggers." The complexity of this racial situation suggests an inherent weakness in what W.E.B. Du Bois refers to as a "group economy" in which a closed cycle of consumption develops between Black clientele and Black businesses.[10] This development allows for the creation of a nearly independent economy that is not dependent upon the whims of white society. Esther's father, contrary to the spirit of this idea, is willing to profit off his Black customers while rejecting the sense of community. Esther's father's insistence that they "keep the money in the family," is thus a twisted view of Du Bois's concept. Charles Scruggs and Lee VanDemarr address this double-positioning by asking, "If Esther's family cannot *be* white because the community knows her family is 'black', and if blackness is of value only in business transactions, what kind of identity is left for her?" (152)

It is her lack of identity and history that draws her to King Barlo. As a character and a man, Barlo is larger than life and relentlessly definable. Toomer describes him as a "clean muscled, magnificent, black-skinned Negro" (37). Everything that Barlo does shakes the world and draws the attention of the town. Citizens, both Black and White, stare in amazement. He is seen as almost a religion unto himself as "white and black preachers confer as to how best rid

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[10] Du Bois saw this as part of an evolution of Black participation in the capitalist system and achievement of economic security. For Du Bois, this was a four-step evolution, "The first effort was by means of the select house-servant class; the second, by means of competitive industry; the third, by land-owning; and the fourth, by what I shall call the group economy." The trajectory of these four steps is toward a radical shedding of dependence on economies and capitalist systems that were explicitly built upon white supremacy.

themselves of the vagrant usurping fellow" (37). Toomer, describing his look as he rises from the ground after his frenzied sermon, notes that "he is immense" and that "he assumes the outline of his visioned African." For the Black community, his unashamed Blackness inspires a sense of spiritual and economic self-sufficiency that which is summed up perfectly by the "portrait of a black madonna on the courthouse wall" by "an inspired Negress, of wide reputation for being sanctified" (37). The madonna signifying the idealized Black community – productive, life giving, and able to reproduce itself without the intervention of whiteness. The mural's position on the courthouse also hints at a desire for legal self-determination as well. Barlo, the inspiration for this art, with his definitive identity is the image of a self-actualized Black person in America, a claim that Esther cannot make.

In the second section, Esther begins to dream and finds herself fantasizing about the city in flames and fire fighters pulling a baby from a window. In her dream, the baby is hers, but she thinks to herself, "how had she come by it?" She assumes that it must have been an immaculate conception. This image of an immaculate conception echoes not only the image of the madonna painted on the courthouse wall, but also Esther's own isolation. By virtue of her ambiguous social position and her father's insistence on distance, she cannot find connection with the community or the image on the wall, thus she must remake it herself. The father of the baby is unclear, but the father of this dream is clearly the experience of seeing Barlo. She has thus been "impregnated" by Barlo and the image on the courthouse wall. This baby, though not actually described, is assumedly light-skinned like their mother. Thus, Toomer's use of the word "immaculate" here refers both to its conception and to its appearance (unmarked by color). Almost as soon as she recognizes the baby, the dream must come to an end. "It is a sin to dream immaculately," she realizes, "[s]he must dream no more. She must repent her sin" (38).

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Biblically speaking, this sin of dreaming "immaculately" is rooted in the serious offense of man coopting the divine. The "immaculate" baby of the dream is a graven image. At its heart, a biblical pronouncement against this fantasy is rooted in the clear separation between mortal man and divine being. This line is immutable and to cross it would invite damnation. Yet, because of Esther's inability to find any sort of connection, an immaculate conception is the only way that she would be able to make a deep human connection with anyone. Thus, a choice – the damnation of sin or the damnation of isolation. Socially, the sin of dreaming "immaculately" is rooted in a similarly unbreachable wall of racial identity. Even as a light-skinned Black woman whose father preached his distaste for other Black people, she is subjected to the rules and restrictions of race. For her, dreaming of having an "immaculate" baby is to have a white baby who would be evidence of a grave social sin. As we are told, "she must repent her sin." Her repentance comes in the form of the second dream.

> There is no fire department. There are no heroic men. The fire starts. The loafers on the corner form a circle, chew their tobacco faster, and squirt juice just as fast as they can chew. Gallons on top of gallons they squirt upon the flames. The air reeks with the stench of scorched tobacco juice. Women, fat chunky Negro women, lean scrawny white women, pull their skirts up above their heads and display the most ludicrous underclothes. The women scoot in all directions from the danger zone. She alone is left to take the baby in her arms. But what a baby! Black, singed, woolly, tobacco-juice baby — ugly as sin. Once held to her breast, miraculous thing: its breath is sweet and its lips can nibble. She loves it frantically. Her joy in it changes the town folks' jeers to harmless jealousy, and she is left alone. (38)

In this dream, the passionate flames are allowed to burn unchecked as a voyeuristic town looks on. The tobacco juice, which, when it was spit upon Barlo earlier could not debase him but made "smooth black face … glisten and shine," (35) has taken on a seminal quality, impregnating the flames with its dark color and earthiness. The women of the town, with their delicate natures, cannot look or stand to experience the rawness of the passion. From the images of the seminal

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tobacco juice and the description of the child as a "Black, singed, wooly, tobacco juice baby –

ugly as sin" (38) it is clear that this child is Barlo's. From the town's reaction, we can see that the

child is just as much of a transgression as the white child that she had in her previous dream.

This embrace of Blackness would have been a particular threat to the almost-white social world

that her father has tried to cultivate for her. And yet, while this dream holds the same kinds of

transgressions as the previous one, Esther relishes in it. She loves the baby and through it can be

utterly transported and connected even while she is alone.

This imaginary child born of social transgression and Blackness is desirable to Esther

because it is a way to simultaneously destroy the isolating social boundaries that her father has

erected and, at the same time, declare a definitive identity. For Esther, Barlo's powerful

Blackness holds the promise of mitigating her own racial ambiguity and thus allowing a

connection with the community at large. As time drags on and tales of Barlo's deeds drift back to

the town, Esther finds herself increasingly drawn to him not only as an avatar of Blackness that

can confound her father's strict ideas of racial appropriateness, but also the way he seemingly

beats the repressive economic system that her father represents. We are told that

> She thinks of Barlo. Barlo's image gives her a slightly stale thrill. She
> spices it by telling herself his glories. Black. Magnetically so. Best cotton
> picker in the county, in the state, in the whole world for that matter. Best
> man with his fists, best man with dice, with a razor. Promoter of church
> benefits. Of colored fairs. Vagrant preacher. Lover of all the women for
> miles and miles around. Esther decides that she loves him. (38)

Interestingly, the concept of Blackness here moves beyond a question of skin color and social

positioning and, instead, becomes a descriptor for types of actions. These actions suggest that

"Blackness" is equal parts transgressive to the regimented status quo and nurturing of a new,

different kind of community. Scruggs and VanDemarr address this, noting that

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> Before the Great War, Barlo was a jack-of-all-trades --- cotton-picker, preacher, gambler, all within a working-class milieu; when he returns to Sempter after the war, he is "as rich as anyone," even Esther's father. Barlo's success represents not only the forces of modernity that will transform the small towns, but a new black middle class that will replace Esther's father as the town's leading black citizen and will eventually replace, and intermarry with, the mulatto elite of Northern cities. (152)

Clearly, Esther's father believes in uplifting himself socially just as much as Barlo does, but while he is content to "play the game" to which American white supremacy has dealt him a hand, Barlo circumvents that system by seemingly making his own rules. Scruggs and VanDemarr point to the way that, through Barlo, Toomer subverts Booker T. Washington and others who preached that the race could be uplifted through hard work and talent. Toomer does this by "making Barlo a combination of visionary and confidence man, and by implying that his material success is due to shrewd speculation in the wartime cotton boom rather than to diligent labor" (153). As such, Barlo represents an opportunity to transcend both the racial and economic bonds that have isolated her.

As midnight comes and she slips out to attempt to seduce Barlo, Esther makes her way through the empty streets, the town seems to change around her. Suddenly, she feels a new connection to her environment as "[g]hosts of the commonplaces of her daily life take stride and become her companions" (40). For Esther, it seems that this quest to overcome her own social isolation has finally started to work. The anticipation builds as she regards the house where Barlo is staying. "The house is squat and dark," we are told, "[i]t is always dark" (40). It is as if Barlo's Blackness radiates from this house and Esther is inexorably drawn to it. When she finally arrives in the house, she experiences sensory overload in which sight, sound, and smell are all obscured. But already, the illusion is coming unraveled, as the roaring flames of passion and seminal tobacco juices of her vision are replaced by "a dull flame," and tobacco smoke that suffocates

her and makes her sick. Still, she is drawn inescapably toward Barlo until "[b]lackness rushes into her eyes" (40) and she sees him standing there before him.

Their meeting is short and brutal as he effortlessly turns away her advances, telling her that she has no place at the house. For Barlo, Esther does not even register as a sexual being as her voice is described as a "frightened child's that calls homeward from some point miles away" (41). When another woman mocks Esther, saying "So that's how the dictie niggers does it. . . Mus give em credit for their gall," the spell is finally broken, and a sense of the unfortunate reality is restored. It is at this moment when Esther finally registers her complete social abjection and can see both herself and Barlo for what they really are. In deploying the term "dictie nigger," the woman's comment places Esther outside of both the white and the Black community. In March of 1920, Marcus Garvey wrote of what he called the "Boston four hundred." These four hundred people, Garvey wrote,

> call themselves the aristocracy of the Negro race, in other words, they call
> themselves "The Dickties." "We are the dickties," they say, and "we are
> [far] removed from the mass of the Negro race." They call the white
> people of Boston "our good white friends" and they try to live near to
> these good white people and believe themselves so much better and so
> much more advanced and so much higher up in the social scale than the
> 12,000 and more of the race who live in Boston. (251)

Garvey saw this part of the Black social schema as not merely an annoyance, but actually a hinderance to progress that would prevent self-sufficiency. This population, like Esther's father, saw themselves as the gatekeepers of both capital and respectability, and in both cases, this meant an emulation of whiteness and a rejection of all but the utilitarian uses of Blackness (making money off Black customers, for instance). Garvey argued that so long as these individuals were the leading decision makers, white power and white supremacy would be constantly reproduced not only by white populations, but also by Black people. It is important to

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note that this position is not solely based on degrees of Blackness, but rather on interactions of race, capital, and white supremacy. A light skinned Black woman, or a woman of ambiguous racial background is not immediately abject based on unclear racial definitions. In this moment Esther realizes that her lack of a coherent identity is a result of her father's desire to erase Blackness. It is this crisis that is at the heart of her inability to have a relationship to herself or anyone else. This collapse of Esther's ontological grounding confirms what she feared the entire time – that she is illegible in the context of her society.

Samira Kawash, in her analysis of James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, writes that the narrator "is trapped in a paradox: he lives under the imperative to be the blackness his blood has marked him as being, but because this blood that marks his race is nothing but a mark, he must fail." She goes on to note that:

> While whiteness sustains its own boundedness and exclusiveness by insisting on its own purity and projecting all impurity onto blackness, the narrator brings to the surface the necessary failure of racial identity to ever be what it says it must be – a failure shared by blackness and whiteness. He has transgressed, or perverted the natural order, not because he has moved from one position in that order to another, but because his inauthentic (and therefore guilty) relation to every position upsets the very naturalness of that order. (150-151)

Again, it is not necessarily purely a question of Esther's skin color, but this "inauthentic" relationship to racial positioning that casts her into the abject. The mocking woman's final sting, "Mus give em credit for their gall," puns off the intersection of internalized racial hatred and capitalism that has brought on Esther's inauthenticity. The viscousness of the woman's attack has robbed Esther of what little subjecthood she had and has converted her into an object that is made up of all the failures of race and class – an object that can be easily named and discarded.

As soon as Barlo hears this, "his faculties are jogged," and he recognizes Esther's social abjection just as she does. Suddenly, Barlo feels very foreign to her as she sees him as hideous.

Barlo's baby in her fantasy was simultaneously endearing and "ugly as sin," but that was when she had a hope of embracing his Blackness and stability of identity. Now that her abject position has been confirmed, Esther looks at Barlo and "sees a smile, ugly and repulsive to her." Rationalizing her own shattered desire, she echoes the limitation she placed on her own fantasy earlier and thinks to herself that "conception with a drunken man must be a mighty sin." Then, we are told that she "draws away, frozen," (41) an oxymoronic phase that hints at her impossible position.

The final two lines of the story cement Esther's position as not someone who exists in the midst of a struggle between two societies but someone who has been expelled from both. Toomer writes, "She steps out. There is no air, no street, and the town has completely disappeared" (41). As she leaves, she steps not back into society, but into the abject space outside of it. It is there that she will remain, horrified by her knowledge of herself and the way she has been constructed.

The (Dis)union of Race in Toomer's South

The South's history as the nation's most explicit purveyors of racial identities makes it the perfect ground on which Toomer can expose larger modes of social and racial abjection that plague the country as a whole. In his 1910 book *The Southern South*, Harvard historian Albert Bushnell Hart reveals, by turns, his interest and racist antipathy for African Americas. Yet he also remarks on the way that miscegenation and people of mixed races confound certain naturalness and immutability of structural "scientific" ideas about race. He writes,

> The point is, however, not only that miscegenation in the South is evil, but
> that it is the most glaring contradiction of the supposed infallible
> principles of race separation and social inequality. There are two million
> deplorable reasons in the South for believing that there is no divinely
> implanted race instinct against miscegenation; that while a Southern
> author is writing that "the idea of the race is far more sacred than that of

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the family. It is, in fact, *the most sacred thing* on earth," his neighbors, and possibly his acquaintances, by their acts are disproving the argument. The North is often accused of putting into the heads of Southern Negroes misleading and dangerous notions of social equality, but what influence can be so potent in that direction as the well-founded conviction of negro women that they are desired to be the nearest of companions to white men? (155)

Much of Hart's writing is racist and problematic. His last point here about the desire of white men for African American women does not consider long histories of rape, coercion, and violence fueled by white supremacy. But his main point about the "evil" of miscegenation being that it destabilizes white notions of natural superiority shows a growing awareness, even among adherents of racist ideologies, of the idea that racial social positioning is structural rather than natural.

In Mary Dearborn's *Pocahontas's Daughters: Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture,* she writes of ambiguous racial identity through the lens of Freud's uncanny, noting that "[i]n the text of the uncanny, distinctions and boundaries are repeatedly effaced and redrawn . . . The connection between the uncanny and the experience of miscegenation is clear: the mulatto herself is a kind of uncanny text about the coherence and limits of the self" (142-143). She goes on to note that, in a society obsessed with racial purity, characters of mixed races are emblematic of an "unsuccessful repression" that "constitutes an implicit threat to cultural equilibrium" (150). This erosion of boundaries of the self that this racial position implies not only a blurring of the line between the self and the other, but also between the subject and the object, as characters like Esther and Becky effectively lose any sense of self-definition outside of the symbolic position which has been thrust upon them. Their bodies lose any material value and only function as objects which are abstract threats to social order. At the same time, by existing outside of social order, these bodies show the way that its limitations and methods of construction generate

oppressed subjects. As ambivalent as society is about witnessing these methods of construction, the sacrifice of these subjects at the altar of symbolism, is necessary to maintaining the integrity of the larger social body of a supposedly unified national identity.

In "Race as a Kind of Speech Act," Louis F. Mirón and Jonathan Xavier Inda view race through the Butlerian lens of performativity and performative language, arguing that "race does not refer to a pregiven subject. Rather, it works performatively to constitute the subject itself and only acquires a naturalized effect through repeated or reiterative naming of or reference to that subject" (86-87). In effect, society defines the subject and demands reiterative racialized behavior as a prerequisite for a coherent and intelligible place in the social order. While, as in the case with gender performativity, the fact that subjects must continually reiterate and perform these behaviors allows for gaps and fissures that can challenge the social order, unless these differences are continually performed by individuals, those individuals invite stigma, punishment, and isolation. These are precisely the stakes for Toomer's characters. Failure to perform race, class, gender, age, or any number of social constructs results in real world punishment. For Toomer, it is not about broad strokes of ideology or abstract ideas of freedom, it is the ways in which these constructs have a deleterious impact on the real lived experiences of individual subjects.

For Toomer, it is a price too high to pay for a reward that is ultimately hollow and fragmenting. In using abjection to expose and lay bare the social construction of the value of race, class, and other supposedly essential elements of subjecthood, he shows the falseness of the integrity of the social body itself. As such, when he writes to Waldo Frank in January of 1923 to complain about Sherwood Anderson's insistence on viewing him merely through the lens of race and class, he speaks to the oppressive nature of such labels. Toomer's insistence on eschewing

racial labels and, instead, identifying himself as simply "American" is powerful in this context because Toomer's conception of "Americanness" was, somewhat ironically, the antithesis of the prevailing idea of social determination in the normative hegemonic American society. Unlike Toomer's view, the traditional American ideology was largely untroubled by the nuance of questions of complex intersections of race, gender, and class, and, at the same time, saw them as largely immutable. For an America obsessed with nationalism and defining a coherent "national character," the immutability was an important way to maintain order and stave off chaos. Toomer's "Americanness," on the other hand, begins with the idea that these false categories that are ultimately corrosive to the agency and self-determination of the individual subject. Toomer's desire, then, to be seen as an "American" is not a defaulting to a neutral national identity, it is rather the desire to redefine the term and create it as something truly liberatory. In using the South, with its strict ideas of social, class, and racial identity, Toomer embraces the abject extreme of the nation to present a picture of the hypocrisy and oppression that the nation ignored in the creation of a self-image liberty that hides an undercurrent of racist nationalism and white supremacy. It is a project that all his fellow countrymen, both oppressors and oppressed, need to be forced to stare at so that they may see the innards and bile of the national body for what they are. Only then, can the country attain the title of "American" that Toomer so desires.

CHAPTER V: HERITAGE AND VICTIMHOOD NATIONALISM IN SOUTHERN

HISTORICAL ABJECTION

The Normative Historical Topography

On November 19th, 1863, Abraham Lincoln looked out over large crowds as he began his speech at the consecration of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg. His 271-word speech was not even the main event of the day (that honor went to former Secretary of State Edward Everett, whose two-hour, 13,607-word speech is barely remembered now), but its words set the tone for the nations self-conception for decades. The speech, which was so popular that it is still memorized and recited by elementary school students to this day, is a call for a renewal of the commitments of the founding fathers. He speaks of "a new birth of freedom" in America and the affirmation "a government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." Somewhat ironically, given the national and cultural esteem given to Lincoln's speech, Lincoln notes, "The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. . . The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here" ("The Gettysburg Address"). In many ways, this "new birth of freedom," became folded into the nation's ideological self-conception. It was both a casting back to the ideals of Jeffersonian and Madisonian democratic principles, and a looking forward to a future in which the nation finally fulfills these principles and can act as a beacon of freedom to not only its citizens, but to the rest of the world. This "new birth" suggested the nation could finally achieve its highest ideals once it was reborn without the original sin of slavery. This was, and remains, an impossibility. The shadow of slavery will always loom large over the nation, and its lasting social, economic, and ontological effects have

echoed and multiplied in the ensuing generations. And yet. Lincoln's "new birth," marked not

only a supposed new chapter in the nation's history, but also a new form of American

exceptionalism.

Early promoters of the American nationalist ideology may have focused on the nation as

a kind of prelapsarian state that was committed to grand egalitarian ideals and the notion that a

new kind of society could be formed from the ground up, but that failure to achieve these goals

would be tragic for not only the nation, but also the Christian spirit of the world. In his famous

speech to his fellow settlers of the Massachusetts Bay colony, John Winthrop said,

> For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all
> people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this
> work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help
> from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. *We*
> shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all
> professors for God's sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God's
> worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us
> till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going.
> (Winthrop)

Clearly this was a great onus and responsibility for the nation to take on, but so enshrined were

attitudes of Christian settlers who believed that it was their obligation to stake out a new

Christian nation that would be free of old baggage, that they believed that it might be possible.

Clearly, by the time of the Civil War, the moral and spiritual corruption that slavery had

engendered in the nation, had proven that country had failed in its quest. Though many in the

pro-slavery South sought to cast the practice as both biblically sanctioned and a form of

missionary work (they were supposedly giving the gift of Christianity to people who had never

had it before), much of the white resistance to slavery came from religious communities like

Methodists and Quakers, and others who saw the practice of slavery as antithetical to the spirit of

the nation that leaders like Winthrop had described.

Lincoln's "new birth" offered an opportunity to reclaim and rebuild this "city upon a hill," by recasting the slavery and its eventual destruction as a struggle that could prove the righteousness of the nation. The nation had sinned, but it could now repent, and, like the prodigal son, return to his father wiser than before. In a political sense, the exceptionalism of a reborn America was one in which it was committed to rooting out those forces that threaten liberty, even if they are within its own borders. Both are important because they are able to frame America's sins and horrors of slavery as necessary steps in a teleology that built a modern nation state that could point to its own moral growth as part of its own rapidly growing international ethos. In this, the nation develops a new history that defines not only the nation's future, but also redefines the nation's past.

In one way or another, the exceptionalism of a reborn nation that is committed to liberalism, human rights, and democracy, set the course for the nation's self-conception and the image that it wished to present to the world for the hundred and fifty years. As the nation's growing modernization allowed it to become an increasingly large and productive international presence, the United States' presence as the enforcer of liberal democratic values of human rights became increasingly distinct. Despite the nation's hesitancy in entering both World Wars, the historical narrative was always framed as a full commitment to democracy and the rights of all people to life. In his speech requesting a declaration of war against Germany in 1917, Woodrow Wilson framed the decision as one of the fulfillment of the nation's promise.

> The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted
> upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to
> serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for
> ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely
> make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall
> be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and
> the freedom of nations can make them. (W. Wilson)

In his 1947 speech introducing his doctrine for international engagement, Harry Truman laid out

the rhetoric that would echo throughout the Cold War as the justification for America's fight

against Communism.

> At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose
> between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one.
> One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished
> by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guaranties
> of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from
> political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a
> minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and
> oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the
> suppression of personal freedoms. I believe that it must be the policy of
> the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted
> subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. I believe that we
> must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way. .
> . In helping free and independent nations to maintain their freedom, the
> United States will be giving effect to the principles of the Charter of the
> United Nations. . . The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery
> and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They
> reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died.
> We must keep that hope alive. (Truman)

He finishes with a sentiment that recalls the warning in Winthrop's speech more than 300 years

earlier:

> The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their
> freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the
> world-and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own Nation. Great
> responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of
> events. I am confident that the Congress will face these responsibilities
> squarely. (Truman)

Truman's sentiment here is not only that liberal democracy is the fate of the United States, but

that it is also incumbent upon the nation to spread those values far and wide. This speaks to a

form of American exceptionalism in which the nation is so suffused with both freedom and

material wealth, that it may use its modern might let its freedom overflow into those nations who

are considered to be less free. This kind of ideology lasts even to present day as the national

leadership have used the language of liberation, human rights, and democracy as a way to justify interventions in regions like South America and the Middle East.

As hollow as many of these justifications are, and despite the overwhelming evidence that the nation still has not come to grips with its own past and present issues of violent oppression and persecution, the teleology of American history as a movement toward true liberal democracy remains a palpable and generative force in the formation of its national identity and nationalist beliefs. As Leigh Anne Duck notes, the nation can maintain this cognitive dissonance by creating a bifurcation between what she calls the "enlightened nation" and the "backward South." She writes "While associating the nation with democracy and change and the region with racism and tradition, twentieth-century U.S. nationalism repeatedly celebrated the latter paradigm, failing to either address its incongruity with liberalism or to analyze the desires that rendered this restrictive model of collectivity attractive to so many national audiences" (3).

Because of the South's placement in this binary as the regretful, but necessary antithesis to the national identity, the region is marked as historically abject in that it is "backward" or regressive. But this position, like all abject positions, comes with a power to illuminate the construction of the nation's body and, by doing so, attempt to construct a new historical body.

In this chapter, I will frame Southern abjection as a site of resistance to the progressive North. At the root of this, I will argue, is a powerful constitutive narrative of loss and victimhood that shapes a specific kind of Southern identity, as well as its relationship to the nation as a whole. This type of politicized narrative, which Jie-Hyun Lim refers to as "victimhood nationalism," uses real and imagined trauma to forge an entrenched collective identity, history, culture, which dictates a people's self-conception and relationships with others. For this argument, I will examine both current social and political conversations, along with the

memorials, texts, and artifacts that enforce narratives that re-enshrine the regions victimhood and collective identity for generations. Through this "hereditary victimhood," I argue, the victimized South uses its perceived "otherness" to develop a shadow history of the nation that reinterprets real historical points and asserts a new teleological national end-point in which the nation's self-described progressivism is undercut by narratives of "heritage" whose goals are a retrenchment of cosmopolitan values and a return to a society rooted in agrarian white-supremacy.

This process relies on the development of what I will term "historical abjection." This topography of abjection relies on the retreat to a definite historical moment during which a nation's ideological stance was supposedly clarified to foreclose specific national identities. In this, the adherents of historical abjection seek to prevent this foreclosure by extending the historical moment just before these identities were rejected indefinitely. In this, the conflict is never finished, so that the interpretation of not only the historical moment, but also all moments that come after it, can be challenged and used to create a new national narrative. In the case of the United States, this definite historical moment is the Civil War and the rejected identity one which is defined by overt white-supremacy, anti-cosmopolitanism, local control, a rejection of globalism, and an embrace of older patriarchal social and family structures.

Abjection, Transnationalism, and Victimhood

To see how Southern historical abjection functions, not only as an ideology, but also as a shared identity, it is useful to examine how power could be generated by the loss of the Civil War. In his essay "Victimhood Nationalism in Contested Memories: National Mourning and Global Accountability," Jie-Hyun Lim deconstructs the idea of victimhood, not as an individual experience, but a national-identity signifier which, through "education, commemoration, rituals and ceremonies among the masses," (140) becomes part of a cross-generational collective

identity which establishes not only the collective self as victim, but also the collective other as victimizer. This "hereditary victimhood," in Lim's opinion, "consolidates the national collective that binds generations together," and becomes "transformed into historical culture, be it on the level of consciousness or of sub-consciousness," and it feeds "a specific form of nationalism that rests on the memory of collective suffering" (138-139). In his analysis, Lim points to two different approaches to history and the past that each enable this kind of victimhood nationalism – specifically the overcontexualization and the decontextualization of the past. He writes,

> Victimhood nationalism in underprivileged nations tends to over-contextualize the past, which provides them with a morally comfortable position as historical victims; while victimhood nationalism among the hegemonic nations is inclined to de-contextualize its historical victimhood in order to ignore its past crimes and sins. If over-contextualization negates the coexistence of perpetrators and victims, and perhaps bystanders within the same nation, de-contextualization conceals the past of perpetrators who fell into the role of victims under certain circumstances, such as in the case of war atrocities. (141)

The U.S. South occupies an interesting spot within this relationship in that it tends to both over-contextualize and decontexualize its past simultaneously. This may have something to do with the region's unique standing within the context of U.S. nationhood and national identity. Many of the conceptions of victimhood nationalism are predicated on an understanding of transnational space. This is because nationalism itself requires transnational space and actors to have any focus or meaning. As Adam Lerner writes, echoing Lim, "'the nationalist imagination can be fed only in transnational space' because of the way it implicates an ontological other in the form of competing nations" (64). Studies in victimhood nationalism have tended to examine differentiated trauma experienced by multiple countries as it relates to larger conflicts, such as the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima, or the wars and acts of genocide in Bosnia and Serbia in the 1990s. What sets the South apart in this discussion is its simultaneous existence as both

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member of the larger national body and apart from it. As such, simple discussions of national identity are complicated by transnational historical patterns. Any discussion of the South, particularly regarding its history, must be viewed not through a uniform localized lens, but through the prism of transnational relations. As an example, in the aftermath of the Civil War, the language around Reconstruction tended toward the rhetoric of colonialism – people on both sides spoke of the North "occupying" the South as a way of forcing the region into compliance with the North's more "civilized" progressive ideologies. For instance, just after the compromise of 1877, New York Times reporter and Washington correspondent Howard Carroll wrote of the unchecked violence of the South where Republicans were "hunted, outraged, and murdered," and the incredible bodily risk that Republicans and their followers took in the South. He goes on to bemoan the end of Reconstruction, but notes that the white men who came down from the North, "need not be ashamed…for they have done much to civilize the South" ("Southern Republicans: Their Suffering for Their Party" 4). Throughout much of the late 1860s and 1870s, newspapers would regularly run stories under headlines about "Southern savages" ("Southern Savages: Latest from the Scene of the Outrages in Mississippi" 5).

At the same time, the South cannot fully be seen to be a separate, colonizable space because of its history as part of the union and the region's strong voice in shaping the nation's conception of itself. As such, the South's conception of itself is both, to use Lim's language, an "under-privileged nation," and a "hegemonic nation," which, following from Lim's analysis means that the region would tend to over-contextualize and decontexualize its past simultaneously. To simplify and frame this in terms that align more clearly with the discourses of the South, I will refer to this seemingly paradoxical impulse toward over-contextualization and decontextualization, "southern heritage."

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A tacit, yet important aspect of victimhood nationalism is that it cannot involve the complete destruction of the victim. Obviously, there are practical reasons for this, the main being that if the victim or class of victims was completely eliminated, there would be no one left to articulate the victimhood or the nationalism. But this non-destruction of the victim is not only in reference to the physical world, but also to their ideological and ontological existence. This is to say that the victim, or class of victims cannot be fully assimilated by the victimizer. The sense of self must maintain a distinct difference for the integrity of the memory of victimhood and ongoing precarity to continue to exert any power.

Equally important to this victimhood nationalism is its understanding of the victim/victimizer dichotomy. Lim notes that victimhood nationalism is contingent upon on an understanding of this an either/or question (151). This is essential to the formation of national identities because it cements the self (represented here as the victim) and the other (the victimizer). This dichotomy is comforting to the victim because it avoids any sort of nuance that might complicate the formation of intra-state assemblages that generate a national historical commonplace. Both Lim and Lerner note that the strategic deployment of the narrative of victimhood in constructing a nationalist identity not only binds the population together, but it also allows for an expulsion of guilt or responsibility for past recriminations. This quest for a purgation of guilt is particularly effective as the historically abject South engages in the play of over- and decontextualization. The abject historically South's over-contexualization of the past can be seen most clearly in its fierce commitment to the memorialization of the Confederacy, as well as its leaders, monuments, and battlefields. As will be discussed later in this chapter, these memorials act not only as reminder of history, but also as a statement about a divergent nationalism, complete with its own heroes and ideologies. But the narrative that these memorials

codify is also contingent upon the perception that these people and events need continued intervention to sustain them because of the scale of physical and ideological destruction that came with the end of the Civil War.

Indeed, it is the level of destruction and the identity of those who caused it is essential to the Southern identity. This comes out through the deployment of ideologically loaded language for the Civil War and its aftermath. Terms like "The Lost Cause," and "The War of Northern Aggression," function as ways of delineating the South's experience in the war, not by directly emphasizing honor or victory, but rather by enshrining loss and victimhood. In doing so, the region preserves the victim/victimizer and self/other dichotomies even after it rejoins the United States national discourse. As such, the heroes and martyrs of the Confederacy remain potent symbols of past, present, and future victimization. In the final stanza of "Ode: Sung on the Occasion of Decorating the Graves of the Confederate Dead at Magnolia Cemetery", Henry Timrod, the so-called "poet laureate of the Confederacy" writes,

> Stoop, angels, hither from the skies!
> There is no holier spot of ground
> Than where defeated valour lies,
> By mourning beauty crowned. (17-20)

This commitment to not only preserving the memory of the violent past, but also recontextualizing it in terms of a religious experience, suggests a departure from the facts of history and a worship of an imagined martyrdom.

Abject History and Frozen Time

The abject South's obsession with this kind of "heritage," and "history," suggests that the region occupies two simultaneous temporalities. First, the one in which it is moving forward and aligned with the neoliberal progressive nation. In this temporality, it both benefits from and contributes to the national project. Its second temporality is one of stasis. It is a manufactured

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temporality in which the nature and character of the region is frozen at the height of what they see as honorable battle to defend the region's supposed moral, spiritual, and social freedom of the Confederacy. Despite the seemingly contradictory nature of these temporalities, they are not mutually exclusive. To understand this, it is useful to turn to what Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal refer to as "cryopolitics." The term, originally coined by Michael Bravo and Gareth Rees in an exploration of the financial, scientific, and geopolitical value of the Arctic in the twenty-first century, was expanded upon by Radin and Kowal in their book *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World*, to bring it into conversation with the biopolitics of Foucault and the necropolitics of Agamben. Though Radin and Kowal's focus is explicitly on exploring the cultural, political and ideological consequences of the deferral of death through technoscientific methods, cryogenic freezing is, nonetheless useful when exploring the implications of the impulse of the South to suspend its history and development at the moment of a profound cultural death. In their introduction to their study, they write that the "conceptual axis of biopolitics—with life at one pole, offset by death at the other—has been extremely influential in allowing scholars to examine both life and death as sites at which power acts upon bodies, populations, and territories. Cryopolitics intervenes in this axis of life and death to orient attention to a seemingly paradoxical conjunction of the "cryo" and the "political"—suspended animation and action—that produces a zone of existence where beings are made to live and are not allowed to die" (Radin and Kowal 6). Taken in a sociological view, the cryogenic freezing of a culture interrupts temporality and prevents the writing of definitive history. As a result, the culture is shifted into a context of an eternal present in which it is never dead and yet never alive.

To draw a more concrete difference between this past as history and past as eternal present, it is useful to look back to the strange case of the preservation of utilitarian philosopher

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Jeremy Bentham. In his will, he requested not only that his body be dissected so that it could be of use to science, but also that the remaining portions of his body should be brought together, stuffed, and displayed. He also requested that,

> If it should so happen that my personal friends and other disciples should be disposed to meet together on some day or days of the year for the purpose of commemorating the founder of the greatest happiness system of morals and legislation my executor will from time to time cause to be conveyed to the room in which they meet the said box or case with the contents therein to be stationed in such part of the room as to the assembled company shall seem meet. (259)

Bentham's request, odd as it is, represents the preservation of a body as object. Despite any effort to make the object look as if it is lifelike, he makes it clear that this form is an aid to memory which venerates the stable past for the view of a stable present. This stability allows the viewer to form a definite relationship with the object and regard its meaning as concretely established, objective, and able to be passed on.

Cryogenic freezing, on the other hand, presents a host of seemingly unstable and unresolvable conflicts. First, the body, frozen in a moment of life, has been removed from a linear model of time, both from the point of view of the frozen subject and from the point of view of the observer. This interruption of linear progression effectively blurs the line between past, present, and future, and renders time to be meaningless. As such, this lack of stability ensures that no definitive history of the subject can be written, nor can any final establishment of value or meaning be shown and passed to future generations. Thus, the subject cannot be mourned, nor can a definitive history be written. Instead, what emerges is the amorphous idea of "heritage," which for the purposes of this argument, I will define as the enacting of traditions and values of the past in the present.

The most striking difference is the interruption of the impulse to delineate a difference between subject and object. The frozen body is both subject *and* object. In this duality, it becomes the embodiment of unresolvable abjection until such time that the form is reanimated. This is further complicated by the technological realities and limitations of cryogenic freezing in which the process is not really an extension of life (for, as of now, the reanimation process is impossible), but, at best, an extended deferral of the moment of death. Hopes that one could freeze a sick relative and thaw them out when a new treatment becomes available are, as Lauren Berlant puts it, nothing but "cruel optimism," and "a system sustained by hopes that can never be fulfilled" (cited in Radin and Kowal 19). And yet, this use of science to exert a biopower that indefinitely defers is appealing, particularly for those for whom the feared death of another would result in a change in social order, diminishment of power, and admission of failure. Thus, the impulse to deploy cryogenics allows for the development of an emotional and social stasis for both the subject and their loved ones. The price of this is both the constant reminder of the abject inseparability of the subject and object, and the inability to mourn and fully release the dead.

Viewing this from the perspective of the Confederacy, we might imagine that the rhetoric of bitterness and loss at the end of the Civil War marked the Confederacy as not dead, but frozen in time. A passage in the *Register of Kentucky State Historical Society* in 1903 notes that those who memorialize the South

> have given their cause an unfortunate name – the "Lost Cause." It was not
> lost because its defenders were outnumbered, any more than Stephen was
> lost because he was stoned to death. The principle involved in a just cause,
> like the divine spirit of truth, is immortal, and, crushed to earth, will rise
> again and glow in the heavens, covering its defenders on earth with the
> glory of triumph. (J.C.M. 92)

Once again, this rhetoric returns to biblical, almost messianic imagery of noble suffering, loss, and the inevitable ability to rise for ashes, and, after much tribulation, conquer the ungodly tormentors. But with the physical and financial ruin of the South, the purveyors of this kind of rhetoric put more stock into a resurrection through ideology as they did into more marshal means. In his 1866 book *The Lost Cause,* Edward Pollard writes of moving the field of battle to cultural institutions and the ballot box:

> All that is left the South is "the war of ideas." She has thrown down the sword to take up the weapon of argument, not indeed under the banner of fanaticism, or to enforce a dogma, but simply to make the honourable conquest of reason and justice. In such a war there are noble victories to be won, memorable services to be performed, and grand results to be achieved. The Southern people stand by their principles. There is no occasion for dogmatic assertion, or fanatical declamation, or inflammatory discourse as long as they have a text on which they can make a sober exposition of their rights, and claim the verdict of the intelligent. (750)

While not mentioned directly, the "text" that Pollard desires is a coherent party platform to persuade the populace. Proponents of the Lost Cause also began generating a set of texts, both literal and figurative, that would lay an alternative future base memorializing the "frozen" Confederate past.

In his poem "Morris Island," William Gilmore Simms begins laying the groundwork for frozen memorials yet to come. The poem, written in the wake of a series of bloody battles which resulted in Union soldiers taking control of the island in Charleston's harbor in 1863, begins with an almost epic invocation –

> Oh! from the deeds well done, the blood well shed
>   In a good cause springs up to crown the land
> With ever-during verdure, memory fed,
>   Wherever freedom rears one fearless band,
> The genius, which makes sacred time and place,
> Shaping the grand memorials of a race! (1-6)

The poem itself is not a tale of outright triumph, but one of sentimental memory of loss, martyrdom, and victimization. It is notable that the ode is not dedicated to the Confederate soldiers who fought and died, but to the land itself. The land, scarred by war and loss, is continually referred to as stark and bare, as if the violence of the North was directed not only on the Confederate soldiers, but on the life of the land itself. But for the speaker, this depth of this destruction becomes a marker of greatness, as he opines,

> Oh! barren isle--oh! fruitless shore,
>   Oh! realm devoid of beauty--how the light
> From glory's sun streams down for evermore,
>   Hallowing your ancient barrenness with bright! (11-14)

And, for Simms, it is the level of violence and victimization that will be important in codifying new generations of proud Confederates, even if the region is forced to rejoin the union. As he closes the poem, he begins to construct the cultural pathway through which the memory of the victimization shall be communicated from generation to generation, thus holding the larger Confederate line by writing its history. It is as if he is preparing for the moment of its cryogenic unfreezing. He writes,

> Taught by the grandsires at the ingle-blaze,
>   Through the long winter night;
> Pored over, memoried well, in winter days,
>   While youthful admiration, with delight,
> Hangs, breathless, o'er the tale, with silent praise;
> Seasoning delight with wonder, as he reads
> Of stubborn conflict and audacious deeds;
>   Watching the endurance of the free and brave,
>   Through the protracted struggle and close fight,
> Contending for the lands they may not save,
>   Against the felon, and innumerous foe;
> Still struggling, though each rampart proves a grave.
>   For home, and all that's dear to man below! (21-33)

Again, here it is the hopelessness of the situation and the surety of victimization and loss that lends the soil, and those who fought for it in vain, the power to transcend death and take on the

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role of heroes and martyrs for generations to come. Simms ends the poem not with a peaceful resolution, but with an invitation to more violence and victimization.

> Earth reels and ocean rocks at every blow;
>   But still undaunted, with a martyr's might,
>   They make for man a new Thermopylæ;
> And, perishing for freedom, still go free!
>   Let but each humble islet of our coast
> Thus join the terrible issue to the last;
>   And never shall the invader make his boast
> Of triumph, though with mightiest panoply
>   He seeks to rend and rive, to blight and blast! (34-42)

This invitation to violence and destruction is tinged with both biblical and classical connotations. The invocation of martyrdom is particularly important in the over-contextualization of victimization because it allows the victim to draw strength and moral rectitude from their suffering, all while creating an ultimate sense of meaning. Just as it is in religion, this kind of martyrdom is essential to developing a sense of shared history and nationalism that can sustain a group, even in defeat.

While Simms's poem was written at the height of the Civil War, its tone and message set the mood for much of the narrative of the "Lost Cause," that would come after it. When Simms anthologized the poem, along with others from writers of the Civil War in the 1866 book *War Poetry of the South*, he somewhat more subtly sought to highlight the South's victimization, bitterness, and defiance in the anthology's preface, writing of the book, "Though sectional in its character, . . . now that the States of the Union have been resolved into one nation, this collection is essentially as much the property of the whole as are the captured cannon which were employed against it during the progress of the late war." He continues by simultaneously offering a justification for the book and a bid to decontexualize the historical truths that led to the Civil War -

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> The emotional literature of a people is as necessary to the philosophical historian as the mere details of events in the progress of a nation. This is essential to the reputation of the Southern people, as illustrating their feelings, sentiments, ideas, and opinions--the motives which influenced their actions, and the objects which they had in contemplation, and which seemed to them to justify the struggle in which they were engaged. It shows with what spirit the popular mind regarded the course of events, whether favorable or adverse; and, in this aspect, it is even of more importance to the writer of history than any mere chronicle of facts. The mere facts in a history do not always, or often, indicate the true *animus*, of the action. ("Preface" v-vi)

It is in these last few sentences that Simms sets up a pivot to a South decontextualized from its history. The argument here is that the South's popular conception and feelings about the roots of the war, while outside of the accepted national narrative, should be used as the lens through which future generations judge the motives and actions of the Confederacy. This is essential to the South because, as much as the region over-contexualizes its history of perceived victimization during and immediately after the Civil War, it is its decontextualization of the horrors of its own creation that enables the South to maintain a coherent sense of identity free of guilt or responsibility. In the narrative of Southern history, the region's real identity begins only in the lead up to the Civil War. Prior to this, the region had been a powerful agent of national discourse, providing many early political and social leaders who helped to give shape to the ideology and image of the nation. There are many in the South who attempt to obscure the causes of the Civil War by insisting, for instance, that the war was not about slavery, but about "states' rights," or about industry, or about a changing direction of the nation.[11] Even when the question

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[11] It is important to note, though, that this narrative of the beginning of the South is reproduced not only within the region, but nationally as well. When it comes to discourses about national history, the story of "the rogue South," is tied to the rise and fall of slavery. The way that this discourse has been taught and discussed, however, is concentrated on the years immediately leading into the region's secession and the war. Thus, the discourses about slavery in the United States are always told through the lens of the North's elimination of it. This narrative omits the decades since the nation's founding, and the century before in which the nation as a whole largely turned a blind eye to slavery, or actively encouraged it as a way of creating and sustaining a national economy. This convenient historical construction allows the nation as a whole to minimize its own guilt and maintain its progressive ideology.

of slavery inevitably arises, this narrative supplies a few ready answers, and those that it does

offer ignore documented historical texts like the Acts of Secession, and Confederate Vice-

President Alexander Stephen's "Cornerstone Speech" which explicitly state slavery's centrality

to the Confederate cause. Instead, the main argument is, as Jefferson Davis, opined in his address

to the third session of the First Confederate Congress in 1863, was that slaves were, "peaceful

and contented laborers," who were happy with their status. This is the image that would be

enshrined into the popular imagination by writers like Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler

Harris, and even later purveyors of popular imagery of the South like Margaret Mitchell and

even Walt Disney. In this argument, slave owners took on a patriarchal role, providing a form of

education and civilization to otherwise "savage" people. In response, the enslaved people

rewarded the owners with hard work and loyalty. In this narrative, the relationship was symbiotic

and honorable. Thomas Nelson Page pushes this decontextualized historical image in his book

The Negro: The Southerner's Problem, writing,

> No servants or retainers of any race ever identified themselves more fully
> with their masters. The relation was rather that of retainers than slaves. It
> began in the infancy of both master and servant and grew with their
> growth, and continued through life. . . The servants were 'my servants' or
> 'my people'; the masters were to the servants '*my* master and *my* mistis,'
> or 'my white folks.' Both pride and affection spoke in that claim. In fact,
> the ties of pride were such that it was often remarked that the affection of
> the slaves was stronger toward the whites than their own offspring. (173-
> 174)

Page's argument explicitly revises the past both linguistically and historically. His insistence that

a group of people who were legally and culturally the property of white slave owners could be

considered "retainers" rather than slaves, seeks to eliminate the physical and epistemological

violence of the chattel slavery which systematically dehumanizes individuals, while robbing

them of ontological and bodily autonomy. While it may be true that the children of slaves may

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have grown up around the children of slave owners, to say that this generated a utopian relationship once again eliminates the forced structure of the relationship. The entire premise of the statement disregards the fact that the violence of chattel slavery is not only visited upon children, but also that they are considered property even before birth. His last point about slaves taking more pride in "the whites" than in their own children (though he uses the somewhat more dehumanizing term "offspring") suffers from equal decontextualization because slave families were often broken up and sold to people hundreds of miles away. But regardless of this historical inaccuracy, points like Page's undermine the claim that slavery was not central to the cause of the Confederacy. That so much energy would be exerted to make slavery seem like a palatable, if not heroic, action for White people, then why would they not fight to preserve it? Page, like many who simultaneously make the argument that slavery was good and that it was not central to the war, predictably ignores this point because to address it would force him to face the inhumanity of the slave system and thus to have to admit the South's complicity rather than victimhood.

This decontextualization minimizes any sort of moral responsibility for slavery and the causes of the Civil War, and thus affirms a marker of victimhood on the South. Page also extends his argument, writing that the evidence suggests that slavery was instrumental in helping the enslaved to be better. In this, he bemoans the loss of the "old-time Negro" who was once "as well known as the cotton-plant and the oak tree," (163) a comparison that, once again, dehumanizes Black individuals. The "old-time Negroes" that Page refers to are former slaves who, in his estimation, were not only happy and hardworking, but also, thanks to the slave system, "industrious, saving, and, when not misled, well-behaved, kindly, respectful, and self-respecting." He compares these individuals to those Black people born after slavery, whom he

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calls the "new issue," who are "lazy, thriftless, intemperate, insolent, dishonest, and without the most rudimentary elements of morality" (80). The extension of this argument was that the loss of slavery was ultimately morally corrosive to Black populations. Even in this argument which frames slavery as a positive institution, the victims in its loss are the white people because, in Page's estimation, they must not only rebuild their communities, but also contend with the new "negro problem."

By excluding the historical horror of slavery and decontextualizing the South's past, these explanations decouple the moment of the South's perceived victimization from its historical roots and thus preserves the wholeness of the victim/victimizer dichotomy. According to Lim, "[w]hat is most stunning in victimhood nationalism is the magical metamorphosis of the individual victimizer into the collective victim. It is through this process that individual perpetrators can be exonerated from their own criminal acts" (139). Through both the over-contexualization of the South's suffering in the Civil War and the decontextualization its cultivation of the inhuman acts of slavery, the South establishes the dialectic of Southern heritage – an ideology in which the region's victimhood is both heroic and unearned, where the scale of the victimization both proves the region's nobility and absolves it from the guilt of the horror of slavery.

To resist the reinstatement of blame and responsibility for the horrors of slavery and the Civil War, the South's victimhood nationalism must be continually restated and reaffirmed as it is passed down from generation to generation. This intergenerational ideological indoctrination is accomplished through texts, memorials, and stories that are passed down as "local culture and history." In the establishment of victimhood nationalism, a problem arises as the generations move further and further away from the primary act of perceived trauma, namely that the lack of

immediate experience with perceived victimization threatens the integrity of the unified

nationalism. To maintain a sense of unity, a narrative of "constant vigilance" emerges to ensure

the sanctity of the nation and security of its people. Lerner addresses this point, writing,

"[v]ictimhood's projections often span both time and space, implicating either uninvolved

nations or younger generations within perpetrating nations that were not present for their

forebears' crimes." He goes on to write that, "because nationalisms are defined by their

aspirations to exert exclusive control over the state apparatus, and victimhood nationalism …

stems from the narration of trauma as constitutive of national identity and the projection of

grievances onto third parties, these identity narratives oftentimes inspire otherwise irrational state

actions, including violence against nation-states uninvolved in precipitating traumas" (63).

In the case of the American South, with its unique relationship with the nation in which it

occupies a space of both national membership and transnational otherness, this projection occurs

against not America as a unified body, but onto those who are perceived to embrace a particular

kind of Americanism. This Americanism is rooted in a similar cosmopolitan, industrial, and

urban point of view that is reminiscent of what was embraced by the North in the years leading

up to the Civil War and its aftermath. Thus, the victimizer becomes not a geographically bound

set of people, but a transnational ideology that exists within the borders of the reunified country.

In the view of those who embrace the Southern victimhood nationalism and its resulting

historical abjection, this ideology represents a constant threat of displacement and social

reordering that is rooted in the same kind of intervention that created the Reconstruction era

South. Because the victimizer is framed as an ideology rather than a specific population, it is

always present and always working to oppress its victims. Similarly, because of the South's

double-positioning as both estranged other and national member, the threat is everywhere. As a

region that is an estranged other, it comes from an exterior domineering American liberal cosmopolitanism, and as national member, the threat is based on an understanding of unity under a totalizing American ideology, and therefore can come from the South itself, and therefore the true inhabitants of the region must always find allies to help protect themselves.

Lilian Smith's Grand Bargain

In Lillian Smith's 1949 book *Killers of the Dream,* she mixes memoir, essays, and other genres to present a vivid, and, at times quite polemical view of the state of her native south. In one section, which she entitles, "Two Men and a Bargain," Smith presents what she calls a "parable," that explores race and economic relations in the South. She begins,

> Once upon a time, down South, Mr. Rich White made a bargain with Mr. Poor White. He studied about it a long time before he made it, for it had to be a bargain Mr. Poor White would want to keep forever. It's not easy to make a bargain another man will want to keep forever, and Mr. Rich White knew this. So he looked around for something to put in it that Mr. Poor White would never want to take out. He looked around . . . and his eyes fell on the Negro. I've got it, he whispered. (154)

The "grand bargain" that Mr. Rich White offers is simple – he will control the means of production and keep most of the profits and, in exchange, he will use his money and influence to further ingrain white supremacy. Additionally, Mr. Poor White will always be guaranteed a (extremely low wage) job and social status above the Black population. To sweeten the offer, Mr. Rich White guarantees complete autonomy to Mr. Poor White, as well as the right to violently rule over the Black population, as long as their actions do not threaten profits. This type of deal, which Maxwell and Shields refer to as, "white supremacy, buttressed by paternalism and evangelicalism," (1) is a call by Mr. Rich White to reject the meddling of the North (even though he is northern himself) and progressivism in order to make the South great again. Smith notes that, of course, this bargain was never written out or signed, but that it emerged "little by little,"

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and goes on to say, "it grew out of bitter years when it was hard for the luckiest man in the devastated South to make a living, out of hurt pride over having lost a war to the Yankee . . . out of the aching need for a scapegoat (two were better), out of boredom and an ignorance that made a hodgepodge of ideas, and out of the fact that for the few the bargain paid off in big profits and always one hoped to be one of the few" (169).

While Smith's "parable," based in the real history of the shifting powerbases in the South during and after Reconstruction, anticipates the Southern Strategy that would begin to emerge in the next few decades, it also anticipates the ways in which those directly benefiting from this would seek to dodge and distract when criticism arose by refocusing the conversation on the perceived displacement, victimization, the Lost Cause, and the South's right to self-determination. She writes,

> Write something about Yankees meddling with our affairs and something against FEPC and the New Deal and make it plain that human rights are never as important as states' rights, but don't use *human*, think of some other way to say it. Keep saying that whatever is done about race has to be done by the South in its own way. Keep saying that . . . Better write plenty about unfair freight rates and the South being a colony of the North and about how wicked a place Harlem is. And wait a minute, boys – write something good about folks needing to read their Bible and go to church on Sunday, folks needing the old-time Religion. (163)

The section, particularly the admonishment, "make it plain that human rights are never as important as states' rights, but don't use *human*, think of some other way to say it," are markedly accurate in the ways in which later generations would seek to mask the more blatantly white supremacist tactics and ideologies that would undergird the Southern Strategy decades later. This particular strategy that also suggests one of the things that fuels the hereditary victimhood nationalism of the South is the implicit and explicit merging of the idea of individual rights and state's rights, which, through generations of transition, becomes a larger merger of the image of

the self and of the state. Thus, any attempt to regulate the region becomes a personal affront to the individual, even if they have no particular interest in the area being regulated. Smith's exploration of this "parable," which ultimately results in not only rearticulating and codifying white supremacy and the amoral violent oppression and dehumanization of Black peoples, but also creates a situation in which the rich whites manufacture consent from poor whites which will guarantee a continued cycle of poverty and precarity, is a damning judgement on not only those outsiders who exploit the South, but also those poor whites who willingly participate in their own oppression by accepting a pittance and the illusion of social advancement rather than fighting against the real agents of exploitation, in this case embodied in Mr. Rich White.

Victimhood, Even in Victory

The continued articulation of victimhood through narratives of "Yankee meddling" allowed the proponents of Southern historical abjection to maintain their status as martyrs despite an increasing series of victories for the region. Throughout this era, white Southerners increasingly found themselves in a double-bind in which they wanted to reject the legitimacy of the progressive federal government control, but, at the same time, found that participation within that same government was the only way to become legible and reclaim any semblance of regional power. This changed with the disputed election of 1876 in which numerous voting irregularities and accusations of fraud led to a negotiated settlement between Democrat Samuel Tilden and Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. In the terms of this settlement, Southern Democrats would recognize Hayes as president, but only in exchange for the end of Reconstruction and the formal withdraw of federal troops from the region.

Despite this victory and the re-ascension to power for Southern whites, they still saw themselves as eternal victims and martyrs within the context of the fight for the soul of the

nation. As they solidified regional dominance, they used their new-found legislative power to formalize racist policies like Jim Crow that were rooted both in white supremacy and in the fear of power being wrested from white hands once again. In this, the memory of federal rule, and, what Hodding Carter referred to as the "angry scar of reconstruction," always operated within the political machines that ran the South. These feelings led to a need for constant aggressive vigilance and the willingness to challenge the progressive North on their own turf and to create laws that would enforce "traditional Southern values."

The first major fusion of both these ideas came with the passage of the Withdraw Car Act (better known as the Separate Car Act) in the Louisiana State Legislature in 1890. The law, which required "equal, but separate" accommodations on train cars for white people and people of color, passed with comparatively little opposition. Though Republican legislator Henry Demas decried the law as coming from the "ranks of Democratic Senators who pandered to the needs of the lower classes," (cited in Hasian 9) the law went into effect and almost immediately drew challenges as activists began testing the state's ability to enforce such legislation. In the first major challenge, activists scored a minor victory when the court found that Daniel Desdunes, who bought a first-class ticket in a white cabin from New Orleans to Montgomery, could not be charged because doing so would violate the Commerce Clause. Despite this affirmation of the ability for Black people and people of colors to have free choice of seats during interstate travel, the challenge to the law's intrastate effectiveness did not go so well.

In June of 1892, Homer Plessy was denied entrance to a whites-only car because he was determined to be legally Black. The argument that Plessy's 13th and 14th Amendment rights had been violated, were ultimately unsuccessful because the judge argued that Louisiana had de jure right to regulate travel within its borders. The case rapidly rose to the Louisiana Supreme Court,

which upheld the lower court decision, and eventually to the United States Supreme Court. Plessy's lawyers argued that the law was a de facto declaration that Black people were inferior and second-class citizens, and that this was a violation of the equal protection guarantees of the 14th Amendment. The Supreme Court almost unanimously disagreed. In the middle of the decision, Henry Billings Brown, writing for the majority, noted,

> We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff's argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it. (Supreme Court of the United States)

The decision was an unbelievable victory for the forces of the South who wanted to maintain a societal construction based on white supremacy and to oppose any sort of meddling intervention from the North. This section of Justice Brown's opinion is particularly important because it vouches safe any racist white action and moves the burden of guilt to the oppressed for pointing out the systems of racism. It also eases the contradiction of the South's double-position as both a part of and outside of American hegemony. This is the section whose influences are most clearly echoed a few generations later in people like Lee Atwater whose basic philosophy was "as long as you don't say the n-word, you have plausible deniability about your racism."

Just as important is Brown's declaration that the argument against "separate but equal," "assumes that social prejudice may be overcome by legislation, and that equal rights cannot be secured except by an enforced commingling of the two races" (Supreme Court of the United States). In this, Brown not only strikes down this appeal, but also argues for a complete federal and legislative disengagement from the issue of race. This sentiment meant that the forces of segregation and white supremacy in the South were afforded not only a victory in the case, but a

larger philosophical victory that robbed the government and the progressive North of the ability

to ever reenact Reconstruction policies that the South found so threatening.

Despite this victory, many in the South held on to the mantle of victim and martyr

because it allowed them to stand in opposition to and as an inversion of the expanding power of

the progressive North.   This emergence of victimhood nationalism allowed the region to hold

onto its grip on the title of martyr, a grip that grew even tighter in the mid- to late-twentieth

century as the rising tide of the Civil Rights movement gave way to an increased interest in using

federal legislation as a method of forcing change to old systems based on segregation. Once

again, many in the South argued that the North were enforcing a radical social change. This

resulted in, among many other social eruptions, the presidential candidacies of George Wallace

and Strom Thurmond. On the candidacy of Wallace, Michael Perman writes that one of the most

effective tools in his arsenal was an appeal to white populations who, despite their own political

and social capital, saw themselves as victims. Perman writes that Wallace painted them as

"cornered and under attack," and that by voting for Wallace they could, "find their voice and

fight back." Perman goes on to describe the way in which these voters saw themselves (313).

Perman continues:

> Depicted as the middle, they were beset, on one side, by the federal
> government and the liberals who ran it and, on the other, by assertive
> Black people, young protesters, and all sorts of countercultural dissidents.
> Pressured from above by the liberal government and from below by
> demanding minorities and disrespectful youth, the victimized people in the
> middle saw themselves as the mainstream and the upholders of traditional
> values, which were under attack. Wallace offered himself as their
> protector and spokesman. He understood them, and he invited and incited
> them to lash out and give vent to their anger and rage. (313)

He thus became the spokesmen not only for them, but for their imagined community that was

bound together by the perception of victimhood.

In this, an unbridgeable gap emerges, one that says to accept these people and ideologies is a threat to the ontological security of the voters to whom Wallace appealed. Again, Wallace voters were not by any means bound by the geographies of the South, but it was the location of their biggest concentration. And the reason for this is clear. By the time that Wallace came along, the South was had just past the centennial of their surrender at the end of the Civil War. All over the South, a renewed interest in war had taken hold as statues and memorials were built and refurbished for the anniversary. In 1961, for instance, South Carolina raised the Confederate battle flag atop their state house to celebrate the "Confederate War Centennial." While, on its surface, the act was simply a historic commemoration, many in the state and throughout the country saw it as an act of resistance against the growing Civil Rights movement and the resulting increase in federal pressure to end segregation. The symbolism of the flag atop the statehouse, flying with the Palmetto state flag and the US flag is an undeniable display of depth of the ideological sway that the lost Confederate world still had, and a further confirmation of the region's dual existence as a national member and transnational other. The fact that the following year the South Carolina legislature voted to keep the flag flying did nothing to assuage the fears that the South could never change. The presence of the flag suggests the preservation of a definite historical moment in which the Confederacy still lived, and its values still vied for national control. This erasure of the Confederacy's end point embraces an abject history in which it is eternally in the present and may control the future. As it turned out, the actual resolution calling for a formalization of the flying of the flag did not mention the Civil War at all. Rather, it was a bland concurrent resolution that simply ordered "the Director of the Division of Sinking Funds and Property is hereby requested to have the Confederate Flag flown on the flagpole on top of the State House" (South Carolina State Senate 314).

The issue of the flag atop South Carolina's state house became something of a case study in the deployment of the tenets of covert racism, Southern Strategy, and the use of Southern abject history to extend the past into the present for the purpose of changing the future. While the original bill that allowed the flag to fly was connected to a memorialization of the Civil War's centenary, it also did not provide a clear end date for when it should be taken down and, nearly forty years later, with the millennium rapidly approaching, the flag still flew atop the state's capital as an ever-present marker of the South's rebellion. What is more, the flag's presence invited the resurrection of old battles and rhetoric of the Confederacy, essentially bringing the Civil War into the present. By the late 1990s, a growing call to remove the flag had reached the office of then Governor David Beasley who, after some thought, began to push for the flag's removal to a less prominent place on government grounds. Almost immediately, there was an outcry from throughout the state demanding the Beasley back down. Laura Woliver, Angela D. Ledford, and Chris J. Dolan note that far-right and white nationalist groups like the Ku Klux Klan, the Council of Conservative Citizens, the John Birch Society, and the League of the South, joined together to demand that the flag stay where it was, accusing the governor of kowtowing to "pro-Yankee liberals," "young blacks," the NCAA, and Communists to destroy Southern culture and history (714-715). The League of the South declared that the South Carolina NAACP had made what they dubbed a "heritage violation" in calling for the removal of the flag. They defined heritage violations as "attacks on the cultural identity of the Southern people-especially our Confederate heritage," as well as instances of "cultural genocide against the people of the South" (715).

This kind of rhetoric operates upon the tacit argument that both whiteness and victimhood are the essential markers true Southerness. The vague ideals "cultural identity" and

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"confederate heritage" on which these arguments hang have no room for a racially pluralistic notion of Southerness. Rather, they cast all non-white individuals as either subhumans or outsiders who are intent on further corrupting the region. This rhetoric does this by effectively dehistoricizing and erasing the non-white experience when it comes to relationships with the South. At the same time, the language used by organizations like the League of the South embraced feelings of victimization, precarity, and loss as primary markers of the authentic Southern experience. In doing this, and by highlighting the constant threat of the North and people of color, these white supremacist groups set themselves up as martyrs and as heralds of a righteous resistance. While this can be seen as a powerful form of nation building, it requires the constant articulation of the abject and unending fear, whether real or imagined, of subjugation, death, and annihilation.

While these extremist groups were rallying on the edges of the flag controversy, some of their rhetoric filtered through into mainstream political discourse, most notably the continued invocation idea that the celebration of the flag was based on "heritage, not hate."[12] This concept, which is often deployed in the defense of monuments to the Confederacy, harkens to Atwater's idea that, while racist speech acts are socially repellant, many people are willing, if not eager to accept racist social policies as long as they are not represented by racist language. This call for acts of white supremacy masked by seemingly neutral language flows through the "heritage, not

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[12] For example, as far back as the 1980's neo-confederate South Carolina state politician Glenn McConnell deployed this term as a way of defending the Confederate flag that flew atop the state house from organizations like the NAACP who called for its removal. In response to these calls, The Confederate States of America Historical Preservation Society, a pro-Confederate organization with which McConnell was associated, held a "Confederate Memorial Service" that was advertised under a banner of "Heritage, Not Hate." The advertisement also offered the following quote from Robert E. Lee – "The reputation of individuals is of minor importance (compared) to the opinion posterity may form of the motive which governed the South in their late struggle for the maintenance of the principles of the Constitution. I hope, therefore, a true history will be written and justice done them." The quote and its deployment seeks to dehistoricize the horrors of slavery and its centrality in the Civil War. ("Confederate Memorial Service")

hate" argument and has allowed it to gain prominence in mainstream social and political conversations. A plain text reading of this concept would suggest that the word "heritage" is an open and inclusive signifier that implies, at very least, a shared definition of history and identity. This is problematic for several reasons. First, as noted about, because of the context of the argument, as well as those making the argument, the heritage to which it is referring is anything but inclusive. The statement is a declaration that the seemingly open word, "heritage," is in fact, meant to signify "white heritage" or, perhaps, "the heritage of the struggle for white supremacy." Again, by implicitly dominating and colonizing the word "heritage," white proponents of the flag are rhetorically and epistemologically enacting a strategy of white supremacy that silences and erases the histories and identities of non-white Southerners. Secondly, the word refers not to a heritage that preserves real historical moments, but an imagined one in which the South is envisioned as a pre-fallen state without sin or injury. The imaginary Edenic South was egalitarian (to all white people), fair, noble, and heroic. These, taken together with a concentration of victimhood, cement a unified Southern identity that blamelessly stands in opposition to progressive liberal ideology.

Dixon and the Romantic South as Beginning and End

This Romantic South is not an expression of reality, but rather an invention of, what Leigh Anne Duck calls a white southern collective memory working in tandem with an "uncritical assessment of Southern racism" (164). It is a South whose appeal lies in the fact that its images and manufactured memories are dehistoricized and decontextualized to the point that trauma and guilt can be effectively banished. At the end of *Gone with the Wind,* as Scarlet stands knee-deep in death, destruction, and loss, and yet girds herself to bravely rebuild and remake herself, stronger for the suffering. Mitchell writes,

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> With the spirit of her people who would not know defeat, even when it
> stared them in the face, she raised her chin. She could get Rhett back.
> She knew she could. There had never been a man she couldn't get, once
> she set her mind upon him. "I'll think of it all tomorrow, at Tara. I can
> stand it then. Tomorrow, I'll think of some way to get him back. After all,
> tomorrow is another day." (1037)

Similarly, Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* ends on a hopeful note, despite the overwhelming

threat of loss.

> At twelve o'clock Ben stood at the gate with Elsie.
> "Your fate hangs in the balance of this election to-night," she said. "I'll
> share it with you, success or failure, life or death."
> "Success, not failure," he answered firmly. "The Grand Dragons of six
> States have already wired victory. Look at our lights on the mountains!
> They are ablaze—range on range our signals gleam until the Fiery Cross is
> lost among the stars!"
> "What does it mean?" she whispered.
> "That I am a successful revolutionist—that Civilization has been saved,
> and the South redeemed from shame." (337)

Neither Scarlett, nor Ben Cameron struggle with or question the larger questions of the morality

of their social station or the implications their actions vis-à-vis the brutal enslavement and

inhuman treatment of other people, nor will any of their setbacks or losses permanently disable

them. Rather, their grit, defiance, and determination will allow them to write their own future.

Cameron's triumphant description of "the South redeemed from shame" is a particularly telling

aspect of this form of Southern Romance and its impact on the imagined history, heritage, and

victimhood that the pro-flag supporters embraced. In his exploration of affect theory, Silvan

Tomkins discusses shame as "an interruption and a further impediment to communication, which

is itself communicated" and notes that the performance of shame, both conscious and

unconscious, has the effect of compounding shame. As he writes, "[w]hen one hangs one's head

or drops one's eyelid or averts one's gaze, one has communicated one's shame and both the face

and self unwittingly become more visible, to the self and others" (Tomkins 137). The increased

visibility combined with the vulnerable state acts as its own independent source of shame, generating a self-sustaining cycle in which everything but the shame is eliminated, leaving the individual at the mercy of not only their own internal shame, but also vulnerable to the gaze of others which can erase the subject's agency and ability to self-define outside of the context of performance of shame. The subject, then, faces the risk of social annihilation from which there can be no return. With this in mind, this idea of shame is situated in the abject liminality between social legibility and social death. In this, Ben Cameron's efforts to create a "South redeemed from shame," take on a messianic air in which the region is not only cleansed, but also justified and affirmed in its righteousness.

This kind of defiance and reclamation of a supposed heritage allows for an important interruption in the ideologies of an American national project that is predicated on a teleology of evolution toward an inclusive and progressive liberal nation state. It anchors the idea of "heritage" at a fixed point and changes the ideological temporal trajectory from a structured linear advancement toward the present and beyond, to a regression into a definitive past moment. Part of this movement backwards requires both an erasure of history (which is to say, that which came after the definitive past moment), and an erasure of the potential future of that history (which is to say, progress that might come after that point). The first of these is consistent with the unification that Lim and Lerner discuss in their concepts of victimhood nationalism, the second creates a possible end goal – a moment in which the victim might be redeemed. The goal of these is not only the obliteration of progress, but of time itself. Contrary to what one might expect, the definitive end point of this movement backwards is not some antebellum utopia, but rather the war itself.

There are several reasons for this, first of which is that, in the mind of many Southern whites, the war was the last noble moment before the rise of the abject feeling of shame. More than that, it was the moment of coalescence of the region's shared victimhood identity and sense of community based on that victimhood. On April 10th, 1865, the morning after his surrender at Appomattox Court House, Robert E. Lee issued General Order 9, which would be his final official address to the Confederate troops:

> After four years of arduous service marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude, the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources…I need not tell the brave survivors of so many hard fought battles who have remained steadfast to the last that I have consented to this result from no distrust of them; but feeling that valour and devotion could accomplish nothing that would compensate for the loss that would have attended the continuance of the contest, I determined to avoid the useless sacrifice of those whose past services have endeared them to their Countrymen … You will take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed …With an unceasing admiration of your constancy and devotion to your country and a grateful remembrance of your kind and generous consideration for myself, I bid you all an affectionate farewell.
> (Lee)

The feeling that Lee evokes is one of sentimental pride in the face of unimaginable loss. He articulates the point that, while the fight could go on, death would be the only reward. When he says, "[y]ou will take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed," there is an unmistakable finality to the sentiment – an order to stand down. But while Lee ends with the personal and personable tone of a Southern gentleman, the moment obscured a sense of dread at the coming reaffiliation with the progressive national project. As part of this reaffiliation, the South had to accept that the end of the war not only required a surrender of arms, but also on a claim for self-determination and on the ability to have the agency to control the direction of the country as a whole. The loss meant that the ideals and ideologies, as well as the strength and values, of the South had been tested and defeated. Slavery,

the root cause of the war, and social foundation that many Southerners fought for had been proven to fundamentally incompatible with the nation, and many saw that its immorality had been proven through the North's victory.

This was especially galling to a region in which questions of religion and those of social order often went hand in hand. While the region's religions had undergone a certain degree of change and sectionalization, particularly starting in the 1830s, there still remained an almost Calvinist ideology of predestination and social positioning. Fox-Genovese and Genovese point out that this social arrangement was a foundation with slavery at its base and note that even the population of non-slave-holding whites were happy to accept and reproduce this structure. They go on to note that, "[f]or southerners, more than their northern contemporaries, emphasized a concrete or literal relation between signs of divine sanction and their social referents. Southerners turned to the Bible-God's Word-to justify their ways. And tellingly, their preferred language reversed matters. One after another, both secular and clerical proslavery writers, invoking Milton, insisted that they were justifying the ways of God to man" (213). In 1862, in his final blessing, William Meade, the so called "Bishop of the Confederacy" declared that Robert E. Lee was engaged in "a holy cause," and using the rhetoric of the holy crusades said,

> I see it now as I have never seen it before. You are at the head of a mighty
> army, to which millions look with untold anxiety and hope. You are a
> Christian soldier—God thus far owns and blesses you in your efforts for
> the cause of the South. Trust in God, Gen. Lee, with all your heart . . . you
> will never be overcome—you can never be overcome. (Cited in Guelzo)

But the South was not alone in using the Country's motto, "annuit cœptis," as a call to arms. The North, for whom the memory of Puritan images of America as a "redeemer nation" committed to the freedom and democracy and a "city of a hill" lingered as powerful cultural touchstones. Alexis de Tocqueville, in his examination of the development of the direction and character of

America, noted that the fusion of religious belief and a political ideology committed to liberty and individualism propelled the material, philosophical, and moral success of early America. What emerged in the lead up to the Civil War, then, was a conflict that was rooted in regional conceptions of religion as much as politics. Miller, Stout, and Wilson, in their appraisal of the impact of religion on the war, argue that "Americans believed that God was on the side of those who were right with Him" (4) and that, "One of the principal reasons for the intensity of northern and southern differences over slavery was the conviction each side had that its peculiar society best embodied republican, Christian virtue and that the other threatened both republican liberty and Christian order. In the end, neither side dared yield, for to do so would invite not only political defeat but, surely, also God's wrath" (5). With this in mind, the war had a bubbling spiritual undertone – a question of what kind of God the nation wanted – that always existed just below the surface. Again, in his 1863 Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln begins by articulating the core American values of liberty and equality (both of which can be traced back to Puritan rhetoric), and ends the speech, saying,

> It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion - that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth (Lincoln, The Gettysburg Address).

In this, Lincoln asserts that the God that America shall be under is not the one of the South – the one that condones slavery as a lamentable, but acceptable part of divinely constructed social order, but rather the God from whom not only the revolutionary forefathers drew their inspiration, but also the Puritans who laid the groundwork for them.

Taken in this religious context, the shame and loss that racked the South was evident not only in the loss of life and property, but in a spiritual upheaval. It was the instillation of utter and eternal victimhood, not only of the body, but also of the spirit. In writing about the power of religion in the construction of the state, de Tocqueville points out, almost prophetically in the case of the South, that, "[w]hen the religion is destroyed in a people, doubt takes hold of the highest portion of the intellect, and half paralyzes all the rest of its powers" (de Tocqueville 418). For the South, if slavery was not the religion, it was, at very least, a central expression of it. It is this complete physical, moral, and spiritual loss – the moment in which the old South was forcibly discarded and made abject – that leads many in the South to desire for a return to War rather than an antebellum South. A return to the Civil War would mark an opportunity rewrite the past and make the South triumphant and to redeem not only region, but their version of a God of America that approved of slavery and white supremacy.

Enacting this impulse and desire requires a fundamental realignment of temporality and history through which the war can not only be revisited, but also extended into the present moment. Thus, the preoccupation with a specific kind of "heritage," and the idea that "the South will rise again," are not about history, but rather an inversion of the present moment. They are a covert way of reclaiming the region from what many far-right white supremacists view as ideological abjection and death. This, then, asserts a specific "Southern time" that resists a national hegemonic temporality that is predicated on the teleological determinism of the ideology of American progressivism. This "Southern time," is a site of conflict in which the region can dehistoricize itself and assert its own historical narrative, based not on the shame of a lost cause, but on the honor of a noble eternal struggle against the forces who would dominate, subsume, and force the body, soul, and mind into a state of abject decay.

This struggle is encapsulated in the fight over monuments to the Confederacy. According to The Southern Poverty Law Center's (SPLC) report, "Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy," as of 2019, 1,747 Confederate memorials stood throughout the country, including, but not limited to, 780 memorials and 106 public K-12 schools and colleges that bear the names of Confederate leaders. The SPLC also notes that there are "80 counties and cities named for Confederates; 9 observed state holidays in five states; and 10 U.S. military bases." In the next year, as the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by white law enforcement officers sent shock waves through the nation, a growing backlash resulted in a movement to finally rid the nation of these memorials. As had been the case before, there was pushback from rightwing and white supremacist groups who declared the removal of the monuments to be "erasing culture and history" and an attempt at "cultural genocide."[13] Ironically, this rhetoric adopts progressive interventionist human rights centered language to highlight the supposed precarity and abjection of the white Southerners (the implication being that the white Southerner is in real physical danger akin to the horrors of the Holocaust) as they attempt to use systemic white supremacy to enact and celebrate legal and cultural forms of oppression. In this, the South essentially uses the tools of the progressive ideological state to bolster its own standing and increasingly wall off the region in its own Southern temporal shell.

This strategy is not new though. In the immediate aftermath of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, when Southern states had successfully argued for state sanctioned segregation and white supremacy,

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[13] For example, in the case of the South Carolina Confederate flag, Glenn McConnell, a neo-Confederate who proudly had a store that sold Confederate memorabilia and who would later go on to become South Carolina's Lieutenant Governor and then president of the College of Charleston, decried the attack on the flag as an attempt at "cultural genocide." On a 1999 episode of Nightline, he also stressed victimhood saying, "It hurts us to see groups like the Klan holding that flag. You want to talk about a sick feeling? Our group, our historical groups, we are disgusted when we see it. But we're equally disgusted and sickened by the political rhetoric and people say it's an emblem of racism, it's an emblem of hate, it's shameful and all of this. How do they think we feel when it's the emblem of our ancestors? They hurt our feelings."

the region went on a building spree that lasted approximately twenty years, during which they constructed Confederate memorials throughout the region and the nation as a whole. There had been a slight increase in interest in memorializing the Confederacy in the immediate aftermath of Reconstruction, but the spike and sustained interest at the beginning of the 1900s dwarfed that in number and intensity. Both of these marked moments of victory when the South saw itself as being able to regain agency and bring itself back from the brink of ideological death. A similar, but smaller spike came twenty years earlier with the end of Reconstruction and the region's discovery of their ability to affect not only their own direction, but also the path of the nation.

In the case of the end of Reconstruction, the memorials also coincided with a renewed national interest in local-color literature that stressed the uniqueness and character of the nation's regions. The movement itself, which is often traced back to the 1868 publication of the *Overland Monthly* in which writer and editor Brett Harte offered colorful sketches, stories, and descriptions of the people of California and its mining camps, emerged partially out of an exhaustion with the rhetoric of national unity and a desire for the expression of localized identities. The popularity of Southern local-color writing with Northern, largely urban audiences, can be at least partly explained in an often-morbid curiosity about the characters and customs of the recently conquered region. For the Southern writers producing this kind of literature, it was an opportunity to argue for a specific sense of history, identity, and traditional social arrangement, while, at the same time, reengaging with the national marketplace. Writers like Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris stress not only the unique dialects, sounds, and situations of the South, but also an overwhelming sense of white supremacy and paternalism. These texts, often marked by a sentimental feeling of simplicity and connection to a more natural world with an uncomplicated relationship with slavery, created an opportunity for white

Southern writers to leverage nostalgia (both real and imagined) as a tool to disrupt the new social order.

But an interest in local-color writing also allowed African American authors like Charles Waddell Chesnutt and Paul Lawrence Dunbar to use non-threatening language and plots to confront and expose the hypocrisies, egoism, and foolishness of not only white Southerners, but also the white Northerners who had come down to exploit and make money off the newly conquered land. In this, African American writers brought many local issues of life and survival to national attention and, at the same time, began making inroads into major publishing networks in the North.

As the South became more assertive in its positioning within the nation, this sentimental local-color writing in which regional difference and distinctiveness was stressed increasingly gave way to literature that celebrated the "Lost Cause" of the Civil War. Books like Thomas Dixon Jr.'s *The Leopard's Spots, The Clansman,* and *The Traitor* leveraged the lingering bitterness with perceived mistreatment of the region during Reconstruction, as well as the desire to memorialize the veterans of the Confederacy, many of whom were dying by the beginning of the 1900s, to create stories that sought to not only preserve a nostalgic Southern nobility, but also to make the case for continued resistance and action to reclaim that which was they believed was taken from them. Dixon's works, in particular, were able not only to revisit some of the conflicts that caused the Civil War, but also to bring them into the current moments.

Forcing Open the Space for Abject History

At the heart of why the writing of Dixon and others could generate an abject history in hopes of creating a new present and future is a fundamental dispute about what happened at the end of the Civil War. The way the end of the war is framed by critics and historians of the

hegemonic narrative of the nation, as well as in the shared mind of the country, is that the North, having dominated the South, reunified the nation under the progressive values and ideals that the nation was founded upon in 1776. Central to this conception is the idea that the reunion was a de facto restoration of the nation that had existed prior to the War. This is, in fact, not the case. Rather, what emerged from this uneasy reunion was a new country – the Reunited States, or United States 2.0.

Rather than July 4th, 1776, or even Lincoln's date of the nation's rebirth in 1863, this new state's date of birth was March 4, 1877. Instead of the Declaration of Independence, this new state's founding document was the Compromise of 1877 which effectively put an end to the Reconstruction era. The Reconstruction era was the final gasp of United States 1.0 – an attempt through martial force to regulate and restore the old American ideology. The end of 1876 had seen the growth of the most serious political crises since the end of the Civil War. The election in November of that year had been marked by accusations of fraud and voter suppression on both sides, particularly in Southern states like South Carolina where white leaders used violence to intimidate and discourage large numbers of Black citizens from utilizing their new-found enfranchisement. This chaotic election took place against the backdrop of a worsening economic recession and increasing labor unrest. In his history of the Compromise of 1877, C. Vann Woodward writes,

> It was a depression year, the worst year of the severest depression yet experienced. In the East labor and the unemployed were in a bitter and violent temper that foreshadowed the unprecedented upheaval of the summer. Out West a tide of agrarian radicalism was rising in the shape of Granger, Greenbacker, and Silverite heresies. From both East and West there came threats against the elaborate structure of protective tariffs, national banks, railroad subsidies, and monetary arrangements upon which the new economic order was founded. (26)

In the wake of all of this, the ruling Republican party feared losing control not only of the South, but of the direction of the nation as a whole. The election was of particular concern to Republicans because Southern Democrat Samuel Tilden was generating so much interest not only in the South, but also in Northern states like Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey, where voters had become more frustrated with a perceived lack of economic progress. When the votes were tallied, Tilden had received 184 electoral votes, just one shy of the 185 he needed for outright victory and was leading the popular vote by 250,000. The Republicans and their candidate, Rutherford B. Hayes, cried foul and pointed to several instances of extreme voting irregularity and issues with partisan certification of ballots. Because a clear winner of the Electoral College had not been established, the decision went to Congress. In order to secure victory, Republicans secretly met with what they believed were Southern moderates to negotiate a deal to ensure Hayes's election. The Republicans finally managed to win the acknowledgement of the Southern states, but only after promising the removal of all remaining Northern troops and a guarantee of legislation to help modernize and industrialize the ailing region. As a final part of the deal, the South demanded that they allow to be able to deal with their African American populations as they saw fit. Grateful for the opportunity to avoid conflict and maintain political control, the Republicans accepted the demands and Hayes was inaugurated.

This agreement not only ended Reconstruction, but also realigned power in the nation. Woodward writes, "traditionally hostile to the new capitalistic arrangements, kept at bay for sixteen years, believed to be nursing bitter grievances, and suspected of harboring all manner of mischief, the South was at last returning in full force, united as never before, to upset the sectional balance of power" (26). But this was not just the rebirth of the South as a political power, it was the dismantling and ceding of the previous trajectory and teleology of the United

States and an embrace of a new direction that valued capitalistic expansion and economic

stability over the ideas of humanism that were integrated into the nation's founding documents.

Woodward ends his study by noting that,

> Between the era of the old compromises and that of the new there had
> intervened a war that turned into a revolution and destroyed the integrity
> of the Southern system but failed to determine the New South's relation to
> the Union. The Compromise of 1877 did not restore the old order in the
> South, nor did it restore the South to parity with other sections. It did
> assure the dominant whites political autonomy and nonintervention in
> matters of race policy and promised them a share in the blessings of the
> new economic order. In return the South became, in effect, a satellite of
> the dominant region. (245)

But the political truth was not just that the South became a pacified satellite for the hegemonic

forces in control, instead the power and influence worked both ways. With this compromise, and

the resulting self-determination afforded by its promises, the South was able to effectively

recreate many of the sites and conditions of slavery, but within an acceptable national discourse.

Court victories in *Plessy v. Ferguson,* and other cases, coupled with Jim Crow laws which

created, what Leigh Ann Duck refers to as an American "apartheid," made white supremacy and

legally enshrined racism not only part of the region's ethos, but also, due to the federal

government's tacit approval, part of the national ethos. And yet, even with its victories in the

United States 2.0, the South still maintained its victimized aura.

Some in the North (and, indeed the South) decried these kinds of policies, but the fact

that the segregation, exploitation of poor and imprisoned labor, discriminatory banking policies,

lack of suitable education, abusive tenant farming industries, and extrajudicial punishments like

lynching, were not institutionalized as slavery per say, but rather as a collection of laws and

cultural practices, it was hard to build the same kind of political and moral resistance that had

helped to start the Civil War. After all, while the War had been about the institution of slavery, it

was not explicitly about the exploitation and oppression of Black people in general. In fact, because of existing ideas of self-determination and American Exceptionalism, many saw the region's laws and practices as an extension of the democratic process, and therefore a strong contributor to the American ethos.

In his *Black Reconstruction in America*, W.E.B. Du Bois pins the North's enabling of the South's de jure racism and white supremacy after Reconstruction on the emergence of what he calls a "new capitalism" that was engulfing the developed world. In the United States, this version of capitalism was rooted in the North's desire for "concentrated economic power and profit greater than the world had visioned," (859) and for this, the North was willing to trade anything. Importantly, though, because the nation had been reborn from the ashes of a moral conflict about slavery, this new capitalism could claim a sense of moral authority. Equally important was the manufactured notion that because former slaves were now free and able to enter into the market economy, this capitalism was endowed with a liberatory function that entwined it with America's self-written narrative of progressivism and human rights. Du Bois points out that this the "new enslavement" that worked hand in hand with the new capitalism victimized not only people of color, but all of the poor and working class. He writes, "Home labor in cultured lands, appeased and misled by a ballot whose power the dictatorship of vast capital strictly curtailed, was bribed by high wage and political office to unite in an exploitation of white, yellow, brown and black labor, in lesser lands and "breeds without the law" (859). While this was true throughout the world, Du Bois writes that it was particularly true in America where the promise of self-determination and economic progress helped to manufacture the consent of the exploited to toil peacefully, working themselves to death because they believed that the system would reward them. The result of this was, as Du Bois writes, that, "the immense

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profit from this new exploitation and world-wide commerce enabled a guild of millionaires to engage the greatest engineers, the wisest men of science, as well as pay high wage to the more intelligent labor and at the same time to have left enough surplus to make more thorough the dictatorship of capital over the state and over the popular vote" (860).

But while poor whites may have felt some of the sting of this kind of exploitation, people of color, and Black Americans suffered infinitely more. This was, in part, due to contemporary trends in sociology that leveraged Charles Darwin's scientific concepts of evolution to create a matrix of theories to explain social order and development. Starting in the 1870s this social Darwinism swept through America's scientific, political, and community circles, interesting many of the top intellectual and social leaders of the day. Part of the attraction was spurred by the growing centrality of science and industrialization, but, equally important for many who embraced white supremacy was the theory's ability to rationalize white supremacy, remove its moral baggage, and recast it as a neutral scientific fact. Joseph Le Conte, a Georgia-born physician and geologist who was the president of the America Association for the Advancement of Science and would go on to found the Sierra Club, is a prime example of this. In his 1892 essay, "The Race Problem in the South," he adopts this tone of scientific detachment to begin to dissect and justify racial supremacy, writing "the laws determining the effects of contact of species, races, varieties, etc., among animals may be summed up under the formula, 'The struggle for life and the survival of the fittest'" (359). He goes on to clarify that the gradation that shows superiority in intra-human racial conflict is not physical ability, but that of intellectual ability, writing, "All the factors of organic evolution are carried forward into human evolution, only they are modified by an additional and higher factor, Reason, in proportion to the dominance of that factor— i.e., in proportion to civilization" (359). Le Conte goes on to offer a

litany of spurious examples that he believes show the superiority of white Europeans, all the while projecting an ethos of scientific reason. In Le Conte's estimation, slavery was good for those whom it victimized. He writes, "the Negro under slavery, and by means of slavery (for in no other way was close and peaceable contact of the two races possible), has been developed above slavery." He also notes, "[s]lavery was probably at one time the only natural or even possible relation between the two races, and was therefore right" (361). But, Le Conte argues, by the time the Civil War came, slavery had served its purpose and "the race-evolution of the Negro had gone as far as it was possible under the conditions of slavery" (361) and so freedom was the natural next step. Le Conte qualifies this though, saying, that while freedom is the next step in their social evolution, it cannot be "complete freedom," because the former slaves could not handle it. As a result, he argues, "Some form or degree of control by the white race is still absolutely necessary. I mean not personal control, but control of State policy" (361). In this, Le Conte minimizes white guilt for slavery attempts to save face for the South's loss of one of its primary economic institutions by saying that slavery had served its purpose for the enslaved so that it was no longer necessary.

Through all of this, Le Conte comes back to what he calls his fundamental argument, which is that,

> Given two races widely diverse in intellectual and moral elevation, and especially in capacity for self government—i. e., in grade of race evolution; place them together in equal numbers and under such conditions that they can not get away from one another, and leave them to work out for themselves as best they can the problem of social organization, and the inevitable result will be, must be, ought to be, that the higher race will assume control and determine the policy of the community. Not only is this result inevitable, but it is the best result for both races, especially for the lower race. (359)

It is this last sentiment that made arguments about social Darwinism so appealing to white supremacists, because it enabled them to not only justify their racism, but also to couch it in the terms of uplift and human rights, a strategy that enables a system of racial oppression to exist within the language of American progressivism. Not only that, but any opposition to these ideas would further prove the martyrdom of those who embraced white supremacy.

Le Conte echoes this ten years later in his autobiography, writing, "in some places negro labor continues to be utterly unreliable. This is especially true of the so-called "black belt," where the negroes are greatly in excess of the whites … the negroes there will not work for wages, as they can live almost with out work on fish, crawfish, and oysters; a little patch of cotton furnishing them the means for tobacco and clothing. They have no ambition to improve and live almost like animals" (235). He contrasts this with areas of the country where "the proportion of whites is greater," in which "the negroes are slowly improving in conduct and in thrift," while those in predominantly Black areas are either stationary or are gradually relapsing into fetishism and African rites and dances" (235-6). This last comparison speaks to what Du Bois would later describe as corrosive elements of the "new capitalism." Le Conte's measurement of so-called evolution was marked by willingness and ability to live within the confines of market capitalism. Even putting aside the fact that many of the people to whom Le Conte is referring were literally "products" of the capitalist system, there is a fundamental assertion that legibility and humanity are contingent upon the ability to successfully navigate placement within capitalist superstructures and the means of production. The higher one moved, the more "human" they were. For freed slaves, this, coupled with a systemic measure that blocked access to capital and quality education, meant that the laws and structures of society would always prevent the achievement of full "humanity" and legibility in society. Du Bois

relates how the engine of this came not only from the South, but also from the North, noting that many Northerners saw the demise of reconstruction as a sort of evolutionary proof that full enfranchisement and citizenship were evolutionarily impossible, and that:

> Under such circumstances, it was much easier to believe the accusations of the South and to listen to the proof which biology and social science hastened to adduce of the inferiority of the Negro. The North seized upon the new Darwinism, the "Survival of the Fittest," to prove that what they had attempted in the South was an impossibility; and they did this in the face of the facts which were before them, the examples of Negro efficiency, of Negro brains, of phenomenal possibilities of advancement. (856)

The bottom line was that within twelve years of the end of the Civil War, the country was beginning to embrace legal, cultural, and scientific ideas that normalized the oppression and exploitation of people of color, but that were not as susceptible to moral critiques of slavery. In fact, the purported neutrality of these scientific and legal "facts" about race, freed the newly emerging industrial capitalist system to exploit the labor of Black people while, at the same time, still claiming to be a force of liberation and eventual uplift. This false promise of freedom, mobility, and equal partnership would come to fuel this kind of capitalism throughout the country and the world.

But this kind of language placed the poor whites of the South in a puzzling position. Still struggling with the loss of capital, infrastructure, and the region's means of social organization, many of the poor white people were not much better off than the newly freed population of former slaves. One of the central elements of social Darwinism was that current social positioning could be traced back to neutral and immutable biological factors that determine one's ultimate social destiny. The fact that white Southerners had been beaten and so thoroughly impoverished for a generation lead to questions about whether they were really as "evolved" as their Northern contemporaries and whether this kind of determinism could bind them in much

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the same way that they had sought to bind African Americans. Sociologist William Graham

Sumner, wrote in his 1906 *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages,*

Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals, a view of the majority of society,

> Every civilized society has to carry below the lowest sections of the
> masses a dead weight of ignorance, poverty, crime, and disease. Every
> such society has, in the great central section of the masses, a great body
> which is neutral in all the policy of society. It lives by routine and
> tradition. It is not brutal, but it is shallow, narrow-minded, and prejudiced.
> Nevertheless it is harmless. It lacks initiative and cannot give an impulse
> for good or bad. It produces few criminals. It can sometimes be moved by
> appeals to its fixed ideas and prejudices. It is affected in its mores by
> contagion from the classes above it. (51)

For Sumner, this structure was the necessary fuel by which those in the ruling classes could

continue to expand their influence and acquire capital. This was important to Sumner because to

him, and to many who espoused ideas that fused social Darwinism and capitalism, direct access

to money was evidence of both social and moral worth. In an early essay, written in the 1880s,

Sumner makes an explicit connection between Darwinism and the fusion of capital and social

positioning,

> Nature still grants her rewards of having and enjoying, according to our
> being and doing, but it is now the man of the highest training and not the
> man of the heaviest fist who gains the highest reward. It is impossible that
> the man with capital and the man without capital should be equal. To
> affirm that they are equal would be to say that a man who has no tool can
> get as much food out of the ground as the man who has a spade or a
> plough; or that the man who has no weapon can defend himself as well
> against hostile beasts or hostile men as the man who has a weapon . . .We
> work and deny ourselves to get capital just because, other things being
> equal, the man who has it is superior, for attaining all the ends of life, to
> the man who has it not. ("The Challenge of Facts and Other Essays" 46)

There is no doubt that this view characterized poor Southern whites, with their lack of resources

and education, as intellectually and morally inferior to the whites in the North. This was one of

the reasons that asserting white supremacy was so essential in the post-Reconstruction South. In

many ways, poor white Southerners could take umbrage at their social position vis-à-vis the

North, but still be pacified knowing that they were not at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Again, Lillian Smith addresses this in her parable "Two Men and a Bargain," writing,

> Once upon a time, down South, Mr. Rich White made a bargain with Mr.
> Poor White. . . [I]t had to be a bargain Mr. Poor White would want to keep
> forever. It's not easy to make a bargain another man will want to keep
> forever, and Mr. Rich White knew this. So he look around for something
> to put in it that Mr. Poor White would never want to take out. He looked
> around . . . and his eyes fell on the Negro. I've got it, he whispered. (154)

Thus, the Northern relationship to the South's growing enforcement of cultural and state-

supported racism and apartheid was not simply a matter of begrudging acceptance, but one of

outright cultivation.

This emboldened writers like Thomas Dixon Jr., who utilized this equivocation, along

with the newness of the unified country to push for a new direction for the nation. Akiyo Ito

Okuda catalogues the ways in which Northern publishers sought to monetize Southern racism to

stir up controversy and boost their bottom lines. Racist screeds from Southerners like South

Carolina Senator Benjamin Tillman and Populist Party candidate Tom Watson were printed in

Northern magazines and periodicals like *McClure's Magazine,* and many others. Additionally,

the beginning of the twentieth century saw the publishing of texts like William Benjamin Smith's

The Color Line: A Brief in Behalf of the Unborn, which further weaponized the intellectual fad

of social Darwinism to support eugenics, as to argue that the "inferiority" of African Americans

meant that there was no point in creating social programs whose goal would be their social and

educational uplift. Of this enabling of racist dogma by Northern publishers, Okuda writes, "It

was Southerners who were outspoken about their views, which created racial tension, but it was

Northerners who offered them the outlets—and who profited by it" (217).

Though these kinds of texts were often met with criticism, many times the responses did little to address the central conceits of the arguments. In a response to Smith's book in the January 1906 issue of the American Journal of Sociology, the reviewer takes issue with Smith's conclusion that African Americans are incapable of social, educational, and moral progress, but is willing to cede the argument of inferiority. He writes, "As a matter of fact, Professor Smith's conclusions are based … upon two assumptions: first, the natural inferiority of the negro as a race; and, secondly, the necessary degeneracy of the types produced by the intermixture of white blood with negro blood. As to the first assumption, it may be granted that Professor Smith has the weight of scientific authority on his side, especially in so far as the inferiority claimed is in respect to intellectual and moral qualities" (570). These types of criticisms did little to dissuade a marketplace that was fueled by a desire both for conflict and for justification of social order.

In his memoir of his experiences in the publishing industry, Isaac Marcosson writes specifically about the way that a profitable symbiotic relationship could be formed by the authors, the publishers and the popular press, a strategy that he sums up as treating books "as news." To illustrate this, he reflects on a book of "Oriental" poems translated by a Syrian refugee. In order to drum up attention for the book, Marcosson wrote an article giving a dramatic and somewhat exaggerated backstory of the translator, which he thought was guaranteed to draw the interest of the popular press. The effort was a success and spawned "exactly one hundred columns of free print" (281). Marcosson goes on write,

> It proved my contention that books could be exploited as news if you had
> the right book to work with. Fortunately I did not lack for material.
> Among the modest violets flowering in our garden of authors was Thomas
> Dixon, Jr. With his book, "The Clansman," I duplicated the experience
> with the Syrian poems one-hundredfold. The first gun was a page
> syndicate article about him that was published in not less than two
> hundred newspapers. To use his own phrase, Dixon had frankly
> "commercialized race hatred" and his book immediately became the

centre of bitter and violent discussion. It was only necessary for me to fan
the flames. (281)

Marcosson's system represented a movement away from the American capitalism of the past 130

year and into a late-stage capitalism in which ideology served as viable product within the

nation's marketplace. Marcosson knew that both progressive outrage and anti-Black conservative

resentment could be leveraged to generate profits and corporate growth. In many ways, this

strategy anticipates much of the criticism that would be directed at social media companies like

Facebook and Twitter about 120 years later, as social media companies who are able to monetize

rage, hate speech, and resentment, to balance profitability against a responsibility to protect the

safety of communities. Fortunately for the South, though the region was struggling to rebuild its

vast agricultural power and was not yet caught up to the North's industrial might, the South's

recent history meant that it had a ready supply of controversial ideology that could be marketed

to the North. What made this ideology saleable was partially its combative and antagonistic

nature, but also its ability to exploit the inherent distance between the Jeffersonian ideal of the

American ethos, and the practical reality of its historic and national structures that were fueled by

white supremacy and violent oppression of Indigenous populations and people of color.

The other idea that made outrage, white supremacy, and the ideology of the Southern

"Lost Cause" a particularly salable product was its reliance on a national skepticism of systems

of power and a narrative that the American experience existed on a timeline of rebellion and

revolution. Thomas Jefferson, in his oft cited 1787 letter to William Stephens Smith, sums up

this particularly American impulse, writing,

> And what country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned
> from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let
> them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon and
> pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of

liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure. (356)

From the Pilgrim's landing at Plymouth and their harsh first winter, to the acts of rebellion in the mid-18th century, to the intellectual and military triumph that was the Revolutionary War and creation of the new nation, the dramatic moments of the history of the United States have always been wrought and shaped into a narrative of unlikely survival and a fight against insurmountable odds. For this type of American narrative, the shadow of death is always at hand and must be beaten back. It is this ethos of high risk for high reward that drove the American sense of purpose and the individual as the country pushed further west, uprooting and massacring more and more people in pursuit of the wealth to which it believed it was entitled. It has also birthed a long history of iconoclasm and suspicions of government institutions that reach back to the beginning of the discussions of federalism and the place of centralized power in the nation. In both of these cases, stories of revolt and revolution fuel a sense of national identity.

Marcosson's impulses to monetize Dixon deploy these national narratives but do so in a way that he believed were ultimately non-threatening to the system of American capitalism. Publishing Southern voices that articulated the controversial and confrontational opinions of people like Dixon allowed publishers to localize this impulse within the confines of the defeated South. Doing so exoticized these kinds of arguments for Northern audiences, allowing them to experience them, respond to them, but see their arguments as a theoretical threat rather than a presence within their own society. Most importantly though, experience of reading, responding, and reacting could be monetized at every step. But this kind of new capitalistic impulse did not take into account the powerful ideological messaging that had the power to disrupt order even in the progressive North.

Unlike his Northern publishers, Dixon's goal was not just financial. He was, in ways, a fanatic. He had lived in the North for many years, acting as preacher and orator, always pushing the Southern ideology to curious Northern audiences. All the while, he was sharpening his messages and trying to figure out how he could merge ideology and action to rebuild the South in its old image. As D. Garvin Davenport Jr. argues in his exploration of Dixon's constructed mythology, the writer was "a spokesman for southern Jim Crow segregation and for American racism in general" (350). Davenport goes on to note that Dixon's goal was actually a new kind of nationalism which involved building "a synthesis comprising Union, southern mission, regional uniqueness, and southern burden" in order to create a "harmonious philosophy of social stability and progress in a totally white American democracy" (350). To this end, for Dixon, the novels are not just an attempt to explain the South's bitterness to the North so that the two may understand each other. Instead, it is a call to action to put Southerners in the driving seat of their region and the nation. It would be a call which would help to fuel the growth of a reborn Ku Klux Klan. For Dixon, the teleological end point of America is not one of reunion and redemption under the current progressive national state, but one of ideological self-determination in which the region's loss to the North is a speedbump along the road to the white supremacist Southern State.

Considering his criticism and revulsion at Stowe's work, it is a little ironic that the trajectory of the influence of Dixon's work followed much the same path as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Though not the cultural icon that Stowe's earlier novel was, Dixon's *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* was a best seller and, thanks to the work of people like Marcosson, was much talked about. But also like *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* it was the profitable stage adaptations of the book that created much of the buzz and brought the story further into the national

consciousness. For Dixon, the play was both about spectacle and rhetoric. Anthony Slide's

biography of Thomas Dixon paints a vivid picture of one of these performances.

> *The Clansman* opened in Norfolk, Virginia, on Friday, September 22,
> 1905, complete with white actors in blackface playing the Negro roles and
> live horses, themselves in full Klan regalia, galloping across the stage,
> carrying the hooded Klansmen. At the end of the third act, Dixon appeared
> on stage, telling his audience: "My object is to teach the north, the young
> north, what it has never known—the awful suffering of the white man
> during the dreadful reconstruction period. I believe that Almighty God
> anointed the white men of the south by their suffering during that time
> immediately after the Civil War to demonstrate to the world that the white
> man must and shall be supreme. To every man of color here to-night I
> want to say that not for one moment would I do him an injury. . . . I have
> nothing but the best feeling for the Negro." (61)

The play, like the book, was met with much curiosity, and responses that ranged from

enthusiastic to outright hostile. In response to a series of bad reviews, Dixon wrote a defense of

the play in which he remarked, "In my play I have sought National Unity through knowledge of

the truth . . . What of the future? This is the question I am trying to put to the American people

North and South ---reverently and yet boldly. . . . My play cannot be misunderstood. In the

white glare of the footlights its purpose and the lesson it conveys becomes clear to every man

and woman in this broad fair land of ours. It is, indeed, the 'writing on the wall.' Will the

American people heed its warning?" (Dixon, "Why I Wrote the Clansman")

Unlike many others who rued the fate of the South, Dixon does not, in the end, relish the

idea of a separate Confederate United States, but rather a nation unified under many of the

Confederate principles. Dixon's deployment of a rhetoric of national unity was important

because it allowed him to paint his plan for the direction of the nation as the will of the American

people, rather than a separate and alien force. Contrary to standard types of historical revisionism

in which the narratives and facts of the past are altered in order to justify actions in the present,

Dixon's assertion of a different teleological end for the nation allowed him to assert a revised

future that frees the South to reinterpret and justify the past. In doing this, Dixon and his peers were creating the "history" and "heritage" that would continue to haunt the discussions of memorials and the memory of the Confederate past for the next hundred and twenty years.

Dixon's books and plays were as much Confederate memorials as the statues and buildings that were beginning to dot the South at the time. They were the sacred history of a hoped-for future nation that would be built upon legal white supremacy. These memorials, whether in text or stone, were an attempt to assert control of the historical narrative and use the tools of nation building to bolster a Southern claim to the nation's future. Importantly, these memorials do not, strictly speaking, *create* history. The facts of the history of the nation are immutable. But, at the same time, the fact of these facts becomes largely irrelevant to the function and ideology of society because of the ever-widening distance from the set of events. The ideological power of history comes not from the events themselves, but from the interpretation of the material traces of these events, because it is through these that meaning can be built. Of this, Frederick Jameson writes that "history is inaccessible to us except in textual form, or in other words that it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization" (82). In Jameson's opinion, it is these texts (in whatever form that may be) that are the basis of the any sort of functional use of history. Paul De Man, comes to a similar conclusion, noting that, "the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts, but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars or revolutions" (165). In both Jameson and De Man's view, there is a clear delineation between the facts of history, and the knowledge of history. The "historical knowledge" that De Man references is culturally situated and derives meaning from the place and time not of its creation, but of its consumption. Critics of De Man charged him, perhaps accurately, with promoting textuality over a sense of empirical history, but to do so

misses the important point about history as an ideological force. In both Jameson and De Man, history exists, but without interpretation it is largely meaningless. Because history is, by definition, that which comes before the present moment, its construction relies not on immediate experience, but on evidence and traces of that immediate experience. In this, history must be assembled and fitted together to make some sort of coherent narrative. This narrative is what De Man refers to as "historical knowledge."

It is important to note that this historical knowledge emerges not just through the historiographies, but through the interpretation of any text from the past. Both Jameson and De Man refer to "texts," but the meaning is, perhaps, purposefully oblique. In fact, De Man's comment about texts that "masquerade in the guise of wars or revolutions," destabilizes a coherent definition of text and opens up a more generalized conception of a text as any sort of material trance, in addition to literal writing. Because these texts, whether they be in the form of writing, memorials, or some other incarnations, can be created, so too can the historical knowledge. The act of memorializing, then, is not an attempt to remember the past, but to create it and use it as a lens to make meaning in the present and the future.

Reconciliation as Vehicle for the Dixon's Past-Future

For Dixon, his texts were an effort to do just this. Ostensibly written as a response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which he believed to be propaganda that libeled the South and pushed the country into war, Dixon's, the first book of "Trilogy of Reconstruction," *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of White Man's Burden,* sought out to reclaim the narrative of the South from abolitionists, carpetbaggers, and the domineering North. In a 1903 interview, he said of *The Leopard's Spots*, "I claim the book is an authentic human document and I know it is the most important moral deed of my life. It may shock the prejudice

of those who have idealized or worshipped the negro as canonized in 'Uncle Tom.' Is it not time they heard the whole truth? They have heard only one side for forty years" (in Riggio 71). This desire to not only memorialize an imagined past, but also to use it as a springboard to build a modern South predicated on the traditions of white supremacy of the region's "heritage," fueled much of the literature of the Lost Cause. Dixon's reference to these three novels as the "Trilogy of Reconstruction," takes on a double meaning in that they are both the stories of Southerners during the Reconstruction Era, as well as an attempt to rhetorically and ideologically reconstruct the heroic cavalier South that Dixon believed had been lost. The double meaning both centers itself within a recognized historic moment, while, at the same time interrupting a cohesive teleological movement towards national progressivism. The ambiguity of Dixon's deployment of "Reconstruction" is an intentionally unclear signifier that permits him to assert the complicated relationship that the ideology of the Lost Cause has with the nation as a whole and to proffer what he viewed as a romantic alternative end point for the nation.

The Leopard's Spots, like the rest of the series concerns the plight of Civil War veterans, former planters, ruined aristocrats, and all sorts of leftovers from the old South. Through the books, Dixon brings these scattered remnants together to create the Ku Klux Klan, an organization that the writer paints as an upstanding moral center of a frayed community. The Klan, in Dixon's estimation, fights for the soul of the South and for a social order based on what they see as rightness, virtue, and a divine right of white supremacy. To this end, the reader witnesses many lynchings and unspeakable acts of violence against African American characters and the Northerners who would dare exploit the South. The goal of this violence (which many characters refer to as being lamentable, but necessary) is to accumulate the cultural and political power necessary to assert a new independence. In this, Dixon pitches his stories as ones of

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liberation rather than oppression, thus giving a nod to the nation's founding ideals. Tellingly, in

Dixon's work, we see these desires as operating in the hearts of a silent majority of Southerners,

who need a push to express themselves. In all of this, Dixon's work anticipates later white

supremacist tracts like William Luther Pierce's 1978 novel *The Turner Diaries* and its 1989

prequel *Hunter,* which present similar struggles, but amplify them and take them to a global

scale.

Sales for Dixon's novels were brisk, and critics were predicably divided about the quality

and message of the text. Throughout the reviews, though, there was a repeated theme that

Dixon's work had a historical authenticity to it, and that it was ultimately good to get a Southern

perspective on, what many reviewers call, "the negro problem" in the South. One review of *The*

Leopard's Spots, from April of 1902 from *The Zion Herald* in Boston, begins,

> At last has appeared the "Uncle Tom's Cabin" of the South! Just half a
> century from the issue of that epoch-making book we have another not
> unworthy, in some respects, to stand beside it as an exponent of truths that
> the North needs to hear concerning the situation in the Southern States. It
> is proverbially difficult for the average man to put himself in the place of
> another trained under totally different circumstances and look at matters
> from that other's point of view. Yet, without this, justice is impossible.
> The Southern point of view as to the Negro problem and the race question
> is presented in this marvelously well-written book, and so presented as to
> awaken sympathy and carry conviction. ("Our Book Table")

This kind of rhetoric is common throughout many of the reviews of Dixon's work. Whether

critics liked or disliked the work, many of them note the need to understand the South from a

Southerners perspective. The presupposition of this is that the narrative that Dixon creates

represents an accurate and authentic type of Southerness which, though morally reprehensible,

must be thoughtfully considered if one is to come to a reasoned and informed judgment about the

region and its people. In the last section of the review, the unnamed critic observes,

The book is not, of course, an exhaustive philosophical discussion of all sides of the mighty question which is taxing, and bids fair to tax for many years to come, the best statesmanship of the country. But it will serve, in our judgment, a good purpose by opening many eyes to the vast difference between maudlin sentimentalism based on certain glittering but sophistical generalities, and plain common-sense grappling with an every-day situation. Abstract political theory wrought out in an easy-chair at a convenient distance from the scene of conflict is one thing, and concrete practice by those who are in the midst of the personal complications of the matter is a totally different thing. ("Our Book Table")

In this, if nothing else, Dixon, like many of the Lost Causers, is successful in "reconstructing" the South in the minds of Northerners and Southerners alike. The assertion of authenticity, through which the region is painted as still engaging in a heroic war against oppression, was attractive to Northern critics because it showed the barbarity and otherness of the South, and attractive to readers in the South because it formulated an alternative subject position for the region and its people.   These kinds of reviews try to play both sides of the issue. This one in particular, notes that, while Dixon's work is generally good, the critic notes that "he has not done so well in the more difficult task of explaining the war and showing what should now be done with the blacks" and that statements from Dixon and his characters like "The South did not fight to hold slaves. . . .We fought for the rights we held under the old Constitution" are misleading, untrue, and "will not stand" ("Our Book Table"). The critic sums up this critique by arguing that Dixon's rhetoric is unlikely to be able to persuade the "general public, as he seems on many pages to endeavor to do, that the future American will unquestionably be a mulatto if equal political and social rights are granted the Negro, and that America is foredoomed to absolute ruin if the Negro is free to marry a white woman. Such hysterical fears need no reply. Matters of that kind can surely be trusted to regulate themselves" ("Our Book Table"). That this critic glibly writes off the potential impact of Dixon's work suggests an essential naivety and unwillingness to fully confront the ideas, actions, and ideologies, for which Dixon advocates. It also shows the

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historical and conceptual differences between the way that the North viewed the South and the way the South viewed itself. This, as much as anything, reveals the fundamental break in temporality and teleology in the two regions. The critic's assumption is that Dixon's work is a flight of fancy based upon a sense of understandable bitterness and an overabundance of passion. For this critic, Dixon is an aberrant outlier whose work is an inevitable hiccup in the eventual full ideological reunion of the nation as a progressive state. The critic even couches the reading of the novel as an act necessary for reunion, writing, "it is proverbially difficult for the average man to put himself in the place of another trained under totally different circumstances and look at matters from that other's point of view. Yet, without this, justice is impossible" ("Our Book Table"). Dixon's New York based publishers, Doubleday, Page & Company make a similar point in an advertisement for the book in the March 16th, 1902, issue of *The Dial,* writing,

> This novel is as remarkable in its way as "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was when
> it first appeared. That book gave, in the form of fiction, a picture of the
> Negro's sufferings from the Northern point of view. Mr. Dixon's book
> gives the Southern point of view of the same question, and as a picture it is
> as graphic and striking as Mrs. Stowe's book. No matter what may be the
> reader's opinion about the race problem, it is certainly right that an
> adequate presentation of the Southern view in the form of fiction, which is
> easy to read and which carries conviction by its sincerity, should be
> studied by people who have not known the facts. (185)

This kind of rhetoric, which utilizes humanitarian language and concepts like empathy and justice, evokes the ideals of Jeffersonian democracy and offers an olive branch to the South which frames the region as the nation's prodigal son – an errant child that will change its ways through compassion, love, logic, and the promise of reaffiliation with the American ideals of its ancestors. This kind of rhetoric also presages the Nation's fundamental failure to fully confront its inability to achieve these ideals. Ironically, it is this desire for the uncritical, quick and easy

fulfillment of abstract ideas of democracy that guarantees that racism and white supremacy will always prevent the creation of the Platonic idea of America.

National Interest

But the Northern interest Southern literature as a vehicle for reconciliation had been around since at least the mid-1880s when journals and periodicals like *The Century Magazine, Lippincott's Magazine, The Atlantic, Harpers Monthly,* and many others, began to find success in publishing Southern voices and stories with Southern themes. Paul H. Buck's 1937 history, *The Road to Reunion 1865-1900* chronicles the ways in which not only did Southern writers learn to temper their rhetoric for a Northern audience, but also how Northern writers, seeing the success of these voices, began to adapt and change their literary styles and subject matter to meet this growing demand. As such, both sides began softening their rhetoric to each other and began to explore tropes of mixed marriages between the old foes and other forms of union. The result of this was a form of literature that was both regional and nation simultaneously, and one where the appearance of Southern authenticity was required, even if it had to be invented.

In many ways, it is this combined effort of Northerners and Southerners to sell ideas of nostalgia and reunion for a profit that marks a moment of real consecration for not only a modern South, but also a neoliberal nation state. Buck stresses the way that,

> For better or for worse Page, Harris, Allen, and their associates of the South, with the aid of Northern editors, critics, magazines, publishing houses, and theaters, had driven completely from the Northern mind the unfriendly picture of the South implanted there in the days of strife. In place of the discarded image they had fixed a far more friendly conception of a land basically American and loyal to the best traditions of the nation, where men and women had lived noble lives and had made heroic sacrifices to great ideals, where Negroes loved "de white folks," where magnolias and roses blossomed over hospitable homes that sheltered lovely maids and brave cadets, where romance of the past still lived, a land where, in short, the nostalgic Northerner could escape the wear and

tear of expanding industry and growing cities and dwell in a Dixie of the storybooks which had become the Arcady of American tradition. (235)

In this, both Northerners and Southerners were invited to join in and reproduce an imagined abject history that operated outside of the national reality.

This was part of a larger movement of reconciliation through which the nation offered redemption to even the most ardent members of the Confederacy. As the twentieth century began, fueled partially by two decades of sentimental and nostalgic literature, many in the North started to regard the sacrifices of the Southerner as part of a grand national tradition, and as a proof of the fierce bravery and commitment to freedom that the nation represented. On the centennial of Robert E. Lee's birth, Charles Francis Adams, a former Colonel in the Union Army who fought at Gettysburg described Robert E. Lee as, "A Virginian of Virginians," and though he may have committed treason, and "may have been technically a renegade to his flag, if you please, false to his allegiance; but he awaits sentence at the bar of history in very respectable company. Associated with him are, for instance, William of Orange, known as the Silent, John Hampden, the original *Pater Patriae*, Oliver Cromwell, the Protector of the English Commonwealth, Sir Harry Vane, once a governor of Massachusetts, and George Washington, a Virginian of note" (75).

The interest of these Northern magazines stood in sharp contrast to earlier Southern sponsored outlets like Albert Taylor Bledsoe's *The Southern Review,* which from its founding in 1867 to 1878 when Bledsoe died, recruited voices that unapologetically sought to, "carry on in letters the struggle which, for [Bledsoe] at least, had not ended with Appomattox" (Buck 175). In a time in which a new generation was coming of age who had not seen the war firsthand, a fusion of Northern publishers and Southern writers had the potential to cement a new shared language, canon, and set of unifying images of the nation. Benedict Anderson talks about the importance of

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these kinds of resources in the development of a shared national conscious and identity, noting that "print capitalism . . . made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves in new ways" (36). In Anderson's view, print production, and mass-production in particular, contributes to the cohesiveness of nationalism and identity not only because it allows for the spread of the entire register of types of language used throughout the nation, but also because through it emerges a central set of national tropes and ideas. For Southerners, this idea of national union was important, but equally important was the ability to create culture and get paid for it.

Prior to the war, writers like William Gilmore Simms had articulated a romantic view of not only the South, but also of its social structure based on slavery. These novels took on new political urgency after the enormous success of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. Between the book's critical and financial success, and the proliferation of plays and musicals based on its plots and characters, images of Simon Legree and the tragedy of slavery came to dominate the nation's consciousness and its views of the South. This meant a decreasing demand for the earlier literature of the South. At the same time, as the region steamed inexorably toward the Civil War, there was a need for an increased focus on the necessity of the establishment of a distinct Southern ethos which could generate and reinforce a cohesive Southern ideology. As Elisabeth Muhlenfeld points out, the schisms in national identity that lead to the establishment of the Confederacy forced Southerners to examine and clearly articulate a sense of their own regional identity. Thus, as the ideological conflict of the South's future being discussed in public forums and statehouses throughout the region, the same conversations were taking place in periodicals and literary journals.

At the outbreak of the war, buoyed by the need to develop a strong identity separate from the nation, there was a rush to generate and entrench an ideology of a heroic and noble South. While this is expected for any region or nation in the midst of a war, it is also important to note that shifts in readership helped to catalyze this movement. Southern writers, even those who were dissenters, found difficulty in reaching Northern readers, and, as a result, they were no longer writing for an audience "to whom they had perforce to defend an increasingly alien culture; instead. . . they addressed their work to men and women who shared their cultural background and concerns" (Muhlenfeld 178). This, coupled with the effects of the war on the region's publishing industry, meant that texts became a mixture of sentimental novels that glorified the war effort, inspirational biographies, political tracts, or some mixture of all three that reinforced dominant ideologies rather than challenging them.

Like the rest of the South after the Civil War, the region's publishing industry struggled to regain any sort of meaningful foothold. This was as much a result of a loss of basic infrastructure as it was a loss of financial backing and patronage. For writers and publishers in the South, material challenges that must have seemed almost insurmountable at the time. The fact that newspapers, journals, and printing presses had either been taken over or destroyed by Union forces meant that an effort had to be made to rebuild the infrastructure for a publishing industry before any locally produced work could be circulated. To make matters worse, the destruction of the publishing industry in the South lead to an increased consolidation of the publishing industry in the Northeast. By 1880, only 7% of the nation's printing establishments and 4% of the nation's total publishing output were in the South (Casper 39). This difficulty in publishing hampered the region's ability to advocate for itself in the aftermath of the war, Thomas Nelson Page rued that this particular difficulty had been an ongoing problem, writing,

"It was for a lack of literature that she [the South] was left behind in the great race for outside support, and that in the supreme moment of her existence she found herself arraigned at the bar of the world without an advocate and without a defense" (cited in Buck). This displacement of a coherent system for articulating regional identity was made even more difficult by the refusal of many Northern presses to publish Southern work that did not, in some way, soften its edge and present themes that were in line with a sense of national unity. This meant that journals of partisans like Bledsoe were never able to successfully take hold and eventually faded into obscurity.

Controlling the Presses and the Narrative

But by the 1930s, the South had recovered enough to begin to hold its own in the quest to disseminate essays and literature which could shape the national consciousness. In 1930, the Southern Agrarians published a collection of essays that acted as a manifesto. The collection, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, sought to defend the South from critics like H.L. Mencken who had derided the region, while, at the same time, to articulate a powerful argument for the disassociation of the region from the progressivism and industrialization which were coming to define the American ethos. The writers, among whom were John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Andrew Lytle, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren, echoed many of the themes of Lost Cause and the romantic South that their predecessors had. The framing of the book, though, a statement decrying the dehumanization of industrialization, updated the stakes of conversation and brought it into line with contemporary critiques of capitalism. In the view of the authors, the recent dissent into world-wide economic depression, as well as the creeping influence of the industrial North below the Mason-Dixon Line, meant that the time was right for

an alternative future. In the book's introduction, the writers lay out the stakes of the project as being no less than the spirit and ontological identity of the South:

> Nobody now proposes for the South, or far any other community in this country, an independent political destiny. That idea is thought to have been finished in 1805. But how far shall the South surrender its moral, social, and economic autonomy to the victorious principle of Union? That question remains open. The South is a minority section that has hitherto been jealous of its minority right to live its own kind of life. The South scarcely hopes to determine the other sections, but it does propose to determine itself, within the utmost limits of legal action. Of late, however, there is the melancholy fact that the South itself has wavered a little and shown signs of wanting to join up behind the common or American industrial ideal. It is against that tendency that this book is written. The younger Southerners, who are being converted frequently to the industrial gospel, must come back to the support of the Southern tradition. (Davidson, et al XLII)

Like many of the writers who had come before, the Agrarians lay out a form of victimization of the South, which requires a form of unified nationalism to repel. Like others who embraced the rhetoric and ideology of the Lost Cause, the Agrarians place the South in a double position of being both national member and transnational other. For the Agrarians, the region is, at once, a part of a communal political destiny, yet should be unwilling to fully integrate into the social and economic structure of that community. The argument makes it clear that the existential threat to its self-determination is major and constant, and that eternal resistance and vigilance is needed to prevent the region's ideological destruction. Of particular concern is the embrace of ideas of the ideology of the "new South," as a modernized industrial landscape in tune with the rhythms and values of the rest of the nation. For them, an uncritical embrace of the new South would mean the destruction of the region's spirit and identity and the creation of an "undistinguished replica of the usual industrial community" (XLIII). Again, the stakes for this are nothing less than the complete annihilation of the region's self-hood.

In updating the rhetoric of the conflict (drawing lines between "industrial and agrarian," rather relying on the old ideologically charged geographic terms of "north and south"), the Agrarians manufacture an ideology of the South that they hope is more exportable and palatable. The introduction repeatedly insists that the South does not expect or want to determine the direction of the nation, while, at the same time, welcomes a unification with like-minded people throughout the nation.

> But there are many other minority communities opposed to industrialism, and wanting a much simpler economy to live by. The communities and private persons sharing the agrarian tastes are to be found widely within the Union. Proper living is a matter of the intelligence and the will, does not depend on the local climate or geography, and is capable of a definition which is general and not Southern at all. Southerners have a filial duty to discharge to their own section. But their cause is precarious and they must seek alliances with sympathetic communities everywhere. The members of the present group would be happy to be counted as members of a national agrarian movement. (XLIII).

This proposal is essentially the development of a transnational assemblage rooted in a rejection of modern cosmopolitan industrialism, and an embrace of the kind of romantic arcadian nostalgia that the South manufactured as a means of dehistoricizing the messier parts of its violent past.

In laying out the structure of the book and its key-terms, the introduction reveals that the Agrarian/Industrial dichotomy is, more or less synonymous with the South/Progressive United States dichotomy, noting that all the articles in the book "support a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way; and all as much as agree that the best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase, Agrarian *versus* Industrial." The passage goes on to clarify some of the boundaries of agrarianism,

> An agrarian society is hardly one that has no use at all for industries, for professional vocations, for scholars and artists, and for the life of cities. Technically, perhaps, an agrarian society is one in which agriculture is the leading vocation, whether for wealth, for pleasure, or for prestige-a form of labor that is pursued with intelligence and leisure, and that becomes the

> model to which the other forms approach as well as they may. But an
> agrarian regime will be secured readily enough where the superfluous
> industries are not allowed to rise against it. 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. (LI)

In this, the Agrarians position themselves as the natural successors to form rural Americanism triumphed by many early American thinkers. These sentiments echo those of Thomas Jefferson who, in his 1782 *Notes in the State of Virginia*, wrote, "those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial," and later, in an 1787 letter to George Washington wrote, "Agriculture ... is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals & happiness."

For the Agrarians, the encroachment of modernity brought about a profound shift of not only material experience, but also moral righteousness. Again, casting themselves as victims, they saw that the South had become increasingly associated with a veneer of death, existential loss, and the eruption of the past in the present. In Allen Tate's poem, "The Oath," for instance plays upon this feeling from its first lines

> It was near evening, the room was cold,
> Half dark; Uncle Ben's brass bullet mould
> And Major Bogan's eighteenth century face
> Above the fire, in the half-light, plainly said,
> There's naught to kill but the animated dead.
> Horn nor mould nor major follows the chase. (Tate, "The Oath" 1-6)"

The poem's images suggest a looming specter of death whose function is not to haunt, but simply to remind the speaker of its existence and loss. But unlike the Poe's Lenore, the creeping memory of this loss cannot be embodied in a single name, nor is it a specter that haunts the speaker exclusively. Rather, it is manifest profound, unnamable loss to all those who bear

witness. The poem plays out as a conversation between the speaker and Lytle (presumably

Andrew Lytle), though hardly any words are spoken. The feeling between the two is

comfortable, yet somewhat inert as the poem continues,

> Being cold I urged Lytle to the fire
> In the blank twilight with not much left untold
> By two old friends when neither's a great liar.
> We sat down evenly in the smoky chill.
> There's precious little to say between day and dark,
> Perhaps a few words on the implacable will
> Of time sailing like a magic barque
> Or something as fine for the amenities,
> Till dusk seals the window, the fire grows bright,
> And the wind saws the hill with a swarm of bees. (7-16)

The blank twilight and the sporadic conversation suggest a sense of exhaustion, not only with the

close of day, but from any ability to create anything new that can occupy the space of the

memory of what was lost. The conversation, while it occasionally sparks with language of epic

determination and poetic grandeur ("Perhaps a few words on the implacable will/

 time sailing like a magic barque"), it is largely rote, as if there is nothing left to say because

there is nothing left to come. The scene gives forth to twin actions which interrupt the droning

mixture of silence and old ideas

> Now meditating a little on the firelight
> We heard the darkness grapple with the night
> And give an old man's valedictory wheeze
> From his westward breast between his polar jaws;
> Then Lytle asked: Who are the dead?
> Who are the living and the dead? (17-22)

The seeming triumph of darkness, matched with Lytle's questions in the same sentence implies a

connection between the two events that fuses the exteriority of the all-consuming darkness with

the puzzled existential questions of Lytle. The combination sets the stage for a poetic epiphany

or anagnorisis. Yet, the moment is interrupted, not by an answer, but a return to silence.

And nothing more was said.
So I, leaving Lytle to that dream,
Decided what it is in time that gnaws
The ageing fury of a mountain stream
When suddenly as an ignorant mind will do
I thought I heard the dark pounding its head
On a rock, crying: Who are the dead?
Then Lytle turned with an oath-By God it's true! , (23-30)

Lytle's outburst is like a fever dream, violent, yet short, and soon returning to a sedate calmness. There are no words to answer Lytle's question, so the speaker's gaze turns outward, trying to understand death and loss as logical and quantifiable actors who exist in the exterior. But this attempt to separate himself from them is again interrupted by a sudden awareness of the violently self-destructive darkness and Lytle's question. Now it is the darkness that echoes the question. This time, though, any mention of the living has vanished. Again, the poem fails to explicitly give us a resolution. Rather, all we get is Lytle's emotional reply. The omission of any sort of resolution suggests that whatever Lytle's answer is defies words, or simply that it defies the ability to put it into language. For Tate, this is one of the virtues of poetry, as he notes in "Narcissus as Narcissus," "Serious poetry deals with the fundamental conflicts that cannot be logically resolved: we can state the conflicts rationally, but reason does not relieve us of them" (Tate, "Narcissus as Narcissus" 155). This lack of an apparent resolution is appropriate for a man who represents a culture that attempts to mourn its loss of the Civil War while, simultaneously, refusing to admit full defeat.

The truth is that Lytle's epiphany is that it is he and the speaker who are dead. The setting and mood, along with the encroaching darkness prove the enervation of the present movement. But it would be a mistake to see Tate's image here as being merely a sentimental statement of the direction of all of modernity. In the introduction to his *Selected Poems*, Tate writes, "The poet as seer who experiences life on behalf of the population is a picture that is not clear in my mind, but

it is an interesting picture; it happens to be one with which I have no sympathy at all" (Tate, "Introduction"). For Tate, the feeling is much more personal. While it is true that he sees this kind of death as defining the South, for him, the impact is on each individual rather than on the region as a whole. This kind of death separates the individual from their ability to create or produce anything new. Like the repetition of Lytle's question, words and actions are stuck in a decaying cycle, losing more and more with each iteration, until finally only the dead remain.

In Tate's poetry, the laboratory of experience is always personal rather than universal. Any universality that arises, for him, should be dictated by the collected experience of individuals rather than by a historic ethos. All of which is to say that Tate's poems stress what he refers to in "Narcissus as Narcissus" as "solipsism" and "Narcissism." The essay deconstructs one of his most famous poems "Ode to the Confederate Dead." The poem, which shares many of the same themes as "The Oath," is a meditation on the individual's relationship to both history and the present moment. In the essay he writes that the poem is about "solipsism or Narcissism, or any other ism that denotes the failure of the human personality to function properly in nature and society." He goes on to lay out some of the key terms of his argument, writing that the narcissism he writes of is not just self-love, but also self-hate. He also writes that, "[s]ociety (and 'nature' as modern society constructs it) appears to offer limited fields for the exercise of the whole man, who wastes his energy piecemeal over separate functions that ought to come under a unity of being… Without unity we get the remarkable self-consciousness of our age" (154).

For Tate in "Ode to the Confederate Dead," the destruction of the heroism of the South is not an event that is locked away in the past, but one that is continuously ongoing. In "Narcissus as Narcissus," he cites Hart Crane's analysis of the poem, writing that the theme of the poem is one of "chivalry, a tradition of excess (not literally excess, rather active faith) which cannot be

perpetuated in the fragmentary cosmos of today--'those desires which should be yours tomorrow,' but which, you know, will not persist nor find any way into action" (158). The poem itself concerns an attempt to journey into a past when "active faith" leads to heroic action and self-determination. Unlike the epic external battles of the soldiers buried in the cemetery, the conflict between "active faith" and the "fragmentary cosmos" happens within the speaker.

Beginning in the second stanza, the influence of paleo modernists like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound really begins to emerge as Tate sets the tone for the rest of the poem,

> Autumn is desolation in the plot
> Of a thousand acres where these memories grow
> From the inexhaustible bodies that are not
> Dead, but feed the grass row after rich row.
> Think of the autumns that have come and gone!—
> Ambitious November with the humors of the year,
> With a particular zeal for every slab,
> Staining the uncomfortable angels that rot
> On the slabs, a wing chipped here, an arm there:
> The brute curiosity of an angel's stare
> Turns you, like them, to stone,
> Transforms the heaving air
> Till plunged to a heavier world below
> You shift your sea-space blindly
> Heaving, turning like the blind crab. (10-24)

It is difficult not hear "Autumn is desolation in the plot/ Of a thousand acres where these memories grow / From the inexhaustible bodies that are not / Dead, but feed the grass row after rich row" as an echo of Eliot's first lines of *The Waste Land* – "April is the cruelest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain" (1-4). But it is not only the language that evokes an Eliotian feeling, but the desire also to reclaim the "active faith" of a tragically lost past through the poetic act follows directly from Eliot, Pound, and their particular school of modernism that draws inspiration from some of Friedrich Nietzsche's concepts of history. Nietzsche's influence on the paleo-modernists draws

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from his views of history and his ideas about what he calls "the mind of Europe." History, Nietzsche came to believe worked circularly and that, as such, we were headed back to a Hellenistic, classical period of high art and culture. This would be a period in which we return to a pre-Christian understanding of ourselves and our own power. It would be a period when we cease to consider the world in terms of good and evil and, instead, consider what is life-giving and what is not. For writers and artists coping with the rapid pace of change and accompanying disillusionment at end of the 19th century, this philosophy had a strong appeal. From this, we begin to see an obsession with a reclamation of the classical. Though we see this in many of the writers of this period, we can most distinctly discern it in the work of T.S. Eliot. In these, we see a desperate need to tip the balance and use art as a way of not only glorifying the past and attacking the present, but also as a method to actively force the culture back into what they say as a harmonious state. In *The Waste Land*, we begin with an evocation to Chaucerian imagery and are continually hurtled back and forth through time by way of imagery that covers everything from Hinduism to Hellenism to early Christianity to the Renaissance to Decadence and even to the local pub. But we might ask, what it the point of this laborious intellectual exercise? The answer in Eliot, as it is for Pound, is in the idea that the reader will become the site in which all of this imagery will be combined. The ideal reader, for Eliot, would internalize all of this imagery and would then become a vessel in which the movement back through history could occur.

As it was with Eliot, so it was with Tate who spends much of the poem melding references to Greek philosophers like Zeno and Parmenides with historical references to the heroic people and battles of the Civil War like Stonewall Jackson, Shiloh, Antietam, Malvern Hill, and Bull Run. Lilian Feder, in a critical appraisal of the poem that Tate considered to be one

of best ever written on the subject of him and his work, notes that the invocation of the Civil War names represent traditional views of heroism, while the inclusion of the particular Greek philosophers provide an epistemological compass through which one might discover the truth of existence. She writes,

> Parmenides and his disciple, Zeno, were the first to separate existence into being and becoming. Theirs is a philosophical system which makes a distinction between the objective and unchanging world of being and the subjective world of becoming. Parmenides (in Frag. VI) warns against the "way of seeming" (the state of solipsism, Tate would say). He warns against the subjective blindness of mere dependence on the senses for knowledge of the world. Thus, Parmenides and Zeno represent for Tate an objective, "whole" view of life. (101-102)

Tate uses this combination of references to evoke the memory of active faith which once lead to heroic vision. Feder notes that for Tate, this heroic vision, "is composed of heroic action based on a view of the world which is objective, whole, and unchanging…it is a vision created out of the ancient past combined with the recent one…is a vision which suggests a continuity in human thought, conduct, and feeling, broken only in the world of today" (102). The poem, then becomes important not merely as a memorial, or as a statement of despair at the solipsism that has consumed modernity, but also as an active strategy though which the poet once again brings harmony and union to the two sides of heroism – clarity of action and of thought. In this, the poem, and ultimately the reader becomes the laboratory in which this fusion will take place. As such, the poem is not about a struggle of an earlier era, it is about an ongoing fight within the culture and the reader. The seeming eternalness of this fight again underlines the importance of precarity, victimhood, and existential struggle in the way that the South views itself and its history. In forcing the reader to participate in this, Tate pushes back the complete annihilation of the South and allows for the possibility of his ideal South to be articulated and attained once more.

Tate's poem once again enshrines the region's victimhood, while opening up the possibility of eventual victory. Like other such memorials, the poem frames the present and that which has come before as the definitive past of an alternative future in which the sins and pain of history are wiped clean and redeemed as noble precursors of a heroic new order.

Conclusion

For writers like Tate and Dixon, and the numerous others that came before and after, the struggle of the Lost Cause is inseparable from a feeling of hereditary victimization. The imagined threat of annihilation powers this movement which, somewhat ironically, allows it to become strongest at moments when the existential threat, in this case the American progressive ideology, is at its strongest. Most instructive of the current rhetoric was the boom in Confederate memorials and mementoes in the middle part of the century. As previously noted, the centennial of the War was seen as a perfect excuse to revive the imagery and rhetoric of the Civil War South. Starting in the mid-1950s, new Confederate memorials began to pop up throughout the country. While supporters of the monuments touted their importance to celebrating a sense of national identity and history, the fact that the increase began shortly after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision and continued to see increases and spikes as the nation desegregated schools and passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, hints that the monuments were as much about resistance as they were about memorialization.

In John Walker Davis's study of the creation of Georgia's second state flag, which flew from 1956-2001 and prominently featured the imagery of the Confederate battle flag, the historian charts the flag's progress from relative obscurity to renewed interest in the late 1940s with the birth of the Dixiecrat party when, in response to the nascent Civil Rights movement, it was once again thrust into the spotlight as a symbol of an anti-progressive white supremacist

agenda. In 1956, in response to the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling two years previously, Georgia's governor Marvin Griffin declared that he supported the change to the flag, saying that it "represented his campaign's oath to maintain 'Georgia's two greatest traditions - segregation and the county-unit system'" (307). This sentiment was echoed by conservative white Georgians throughout the state. In a February 1956 letter to the editor of the *Macon Telegraph,* one Swainsboro man took issue with an editorial that opposed changing the flag,

> The idea to incorporate the Flag of the Confederacy into our flag is a good one and should be approved by all Georgians. In fact, it would be better if we used a complete stars and bars for a flag. It is one way of telling our government and the world that we will never surrender our sovereignty and principles of life to any Supreme Court. . . If you don't have the courage, and guts to fight for what we believe in here in Georgia, then go out of business. . . We don't want to read your pieces condoning mongrelization of the white race. Try God for a change and tell about his separation of the races when He made man. He gave Africa to the black man, Asia to the Yellow, Europe to the white, and America to the Indians. It is man who has changed His doctrines and mixed races, creeds, and society. But the time to stop is here, now! We will not mix the white and black race! (ctd. Davis 327)

Similarly, when considering the change, Georgia House leader Denmark Groover commented on the need to "replace those meaning- less stripes with something having deep meaning in the hearts of all true Southerners." He also remarked that, "anything we in Georgia can do to preserve the memory of the Confederacy is a step forward" (Davis 325).

The use of the flag as both memorial of and declaration of current struggle against victimization continued the over the next few years in South Carolina as it worked to find ways to actively undermine efforts at desegregation. As the centennial of the Civil War approached, numerous state and federal agencies worked together to memorialize the event. On April 11-12, 1961, the hundredth anniversary of the attack on Fort Sumter, a meeting was to be held in Charleston. According to historian John Hammond Moore, a problem arose when the New

Jersey commission voted, just a few weeks prior to the event, to boycott the proceedings. The reason was that many of the functions were to be held at the segregated Francis Marion Hotel, which would mean that Mrs. Madaline Williams, the states only Black delegate, would be unable to attend. In response, as Moore notes, "President John F. Kennedy ordered the national conclave moved to the Charleston Naval Base where facilities were integrated. As a result, the national body and those of most states met there, while the South Carolina Commission and other Southerners met at the Francis Marion as planned, although some of the latter attended business sessions at the base." Moore describes the chaos that ensued:

> Needless to say, the President's action was greeted with howls of protest, with Governor Fritz Hollings and others accusing JFK and New Jersey of trying to score political points with blacks and liberals. Amid such chaos, [State Congressman] John A. May arrived in Charleston resplendent in top hat, gray suit, and a startling Confederate-flag vest, which, he conceded, was from a New Jersey novelty house. But, May quickly added, it was ordered in December long before the current crisis developed. At his request, April 12 was a state holiday and three flags (national, state, and Confederate) flew for a week from a staff atop the Gervais Street portico of the State House. . . In addition, at 4:30 a.m. on the morning of April 12th, a "rebel" landing party briefly occupied Fort Sumter and ran up a 4' by 6' Confederate flag supplied by . . . John A. May! This band of adventurers, according to the *News and Courier* (April 13), included several members of the General Assembly and various "prominent" Charlestonians. Shortly after sunrise, a national park employee hauled down the flag and replaced it with the Stars and Stripes. (Moore)

John May, along with F. Julian Leamond of Charleston County, and William A Pruitt of McCormick County, would ultimately be the voices that pushed to have the Confederate flag hoisted atop the South Carolina state capital in the early 1960s, all the while declaring their commitment to "heritage" and "history."

Like the written monuments of Simms, Page, Dixon, along with Tate and the rest of the Agrarians, these flags represent a form of Southern victimhood nationalism whose goal is not to memorialize the past, but to remove it from its cryogenic slumber and activate its morals and

ideologies in the present moment. As William Faulkner writes, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." For the victimized South, interrupting the nation's progressive teleology, means keeping the past always alive, if meticulously stripped of context and distorted. It lives as present and the hoped-for future of the region and the nation.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION: POWER, PROFIT, AND INFLUENCE IN SOUTHERN

ABJECTION

> Of course, I have found that anything that come out of the South is going
> to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it *is* grotesque, in
> which case it is going to be called realistic. Flannery O'Connor

> "At least I'm not in Mississippi" – Message Scrawled on the Side of the
> Ruins of a building in Iraq

Why the South?

With all of this in mind, we might ask "Why the South?" Why is it that this region can so successfully become a laboratory of abjection? Aren't there just as many opportunities for enacting these same ideological critiques in numerous diverse metropolitan areas, or in the abandoned factory towns of the Midwest, or in highly conservative areas of Utah? After all, did not Erskine Caldwell write numerous short stories about the backwoods of Maine, complete with its own set of broad characters and ridiculous situations? What is it, then, that makes the South the region in which heterotopias of abjection can emerge?

The answer resides in the region's particular relationship to the national body as well as its use to the hegemonic national identity. Since the region's reluctant reunion with the rest of the country at the end of the Civil War, the South has existed both as a member of the larger national body and separate from it. It is both an original member of the nation's constituent parts, providing much of its leadership and ideological direction of the early political and social formation of the nation, and a region that violently rejected the national identity, bringing about its own martial and ideological colonization at the hands of the rest of the country. It is important to differentiate this kind of colonization from the settler colonialism driving the nation's founding and westward expansion. For the North, it was not about adding territories and

resources, but rather reclaiming and repairing a sense of national wholeness by banishing the ideologies of the Confederate South and welding the seams that served as evidence of the rupture. But no matter how much these fault lines have been repaired, they remain as evidence to both the region and the nation of historical patterns of disunion and resistance to pressures of an external hegemony. As such, it is difficult to view the history and ideological construction of the South without taking into account the formative power of the prism of transnational relations.

In this, the South can be effectively cast as "other," a physical and ideological space that contains subjects whose ideological history could be defined as *that which was not* the American identity. It was backwards looking and provincial while the rest of the nation embraced progress and moved toward cosmopolitan urban environments. The South still preached a rugged individualism and local control as the nation moved toward collectivism and a more centralized national government that could be competitive in a growing global economy. It enshrined white supremacy through laws, while the rest of the nation relied on culture. The South was lost in an ineffective and sentimental attachment to tradition and outmoded labor methods while the rest of the nation was embracing an industrial revolution that increased efficiency and profit. It was violent and unpredictable, while the rest of the nation was lawful and content. It was savage while the rest of the nation was civilized. While these broad stereotypes had a limited basis in reality, more importantly, they became a way of differentiating regions. As is ever the case with these kinds of transnational relationships, it boils down to the hegemonic nation saying, "We are that which we are not."

But because of historic truths and regional dependencies for trade and commerce, it is impossible to fully say, "They are not us." This puts the nation in an ideological bind as it seeks to reconcile its view of itself as a forward-thinking modern state with the idea that its constituent

parts are composed of ideologies that are anything but that. In order to resolve this cognitive dissonance, the nation must view the region as abject. A region which is always of the national body and, at the same time, must also always be expelled or in the process of being expelled from the national body in order to maintain the body's ideological coherence. On first look, the continual rearticulation of an American identity which forces the South into this ontological position may engender the region and its inhabitants with a sense of passivity and a lack of agency, but there is actually great power in this abject position.

Because of its dual position as both national member and other, it is uniquely placed to be that which the country is and that which the country is not simultaneously. The paradoxical nature of this positioning breaks down the ideological coherence of the hegemonic national body, denaturalizes the authenticity of a singular "American identity," and, as such, opens up sites of resistance that enable the region to challenge aspects of the country's social, economic, and political construction that might otherwise appear natural and monolithic. This, in turn, allows people both in the South and outside of it to subvert these aspects of the nation's construction and attempt to change the overall direction.

Power in The Objective Topography of Abjection

In his deployment of the objective topography of Southern abjection, Caldwell puts us at odds with the most fundamental sensory and bodily experiences. These experiences are predicated on a set of assumptions about a wholeness, coherence, and knowability of the most basic aspects of our everyday lives – our relationship to our bodies, to our environment, and to the changes that come with the progression of time. For Caldwell, these elements of our existence are so ubiquitous that they simply disappear as we accept them and no longer ponder their construction and our relationships to them. This is precisely why these elements are so ripe

for exploitation by external capitalistic forces. In Caldwell's estimation, dehumanizing capitalism and the toxic myth of mobility have become just as ubiquitous. They are the air we breathe, the pains and pleasures we feel, and track on which we move from childhood to adulthood to our inevitable death. Its invisibility is its power as it creeps into our environment, our bodies, and time itself. As Caldwell continually twists, corrupts, and defamiliarizes these elements, their socially constructed nature comes into sharp relief, enabling the subject to view them as not natural foregone conclusions, but the result of needs of a society hungry to consume not only resources, but also subjects themselves. By revealing the constructed nature of these elements, this refamiliarization returns agency to the subject and allows them to find new locations of resistance.

Caldwell offers no solutions to the problem of the myth of mobility, at least not outright. In *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre,* the audience is left feeling a sense of bleak hopelessness for these characters. The reader has endured page after page of grotesqueness as the characters ricochet between being pitiable and horrible. Rats and rot chew through not only bodies, but also any sense of serenity in nature. Time seems to drag and come undone for both the reader and the characters as phrases and actions are repeated ad nauseum until it seems that skipping one, two, or ten pages would not make that much of a difference to the narrative development. In short, Caldwell does not so much tell stories as inflict them. The horror and frustration are felt both by the characters, and by the readers themselves. This blurring of the line between character and reader is an invitation for collective action not only from the broken-down infertile fields of the South, but from the factories and slums of the North. This form of radical national reunification created by abjection, in which the myths and exploitation of capitalism are ubiquitous, invisible,

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and inevitable, are exposed and vulnerable to change is the only way to develop a more humane national body.

Power in Social Topography of Abjection

In *Cane*, Jean Toomer employs the abject to force his readers to examine what he regards as the interior workings of the construction of race in national identity and the ways in which he thought that the impulse to use it as a tool of strict social classification is limiting and dehumanizing. To accomplish this, Toomer seeks to make the construction of race visible by exploring the alienation and social ejection of those who are viewed as transgressing the strict racial boundaries. For Toomer, these individuals revealed both how race is created and the inhuman treatment of those who are not, or who do not remain "good subjects" in regard to their race. In *Cane,* characters like Becky are simultaneously larger than life and unimaginable to the people who surround them. They are ghosts whose existence haunts, repulses, and attracts the interests of both the white and Black communities. In the cities, towns, and communities that Toomer writes of, the societies function by reproducing strict racial hierarchies predicated on White supremacy and the oppression of Black bodies. In this formulation of society, both Whiteness and Blackness are socially legible categories that define each other in their mutual exclusion (Blackness is that which is not white). From this, the social function of race and identity emerges as notions of racial hierarchies are reproduced through laws and social customs that pass largely unquestioned. If, as we see in Toomer, both whiteness and Blackness are socially legible and have interdependent social functions, then those who do not fully inhabit either of these realms become illegible others whose existence proves the permeability and falseness of the racial binary. In a society in which one's race is a primary mode of defining social function, compromising the category and elucidating the falseness of the binary is an

existential threat that destabilizes the coherence of identity itself. This was precisely what Toomer was after as he sought to define himself not as a Black writer, but, as he notes, an "American writer." What Toomer is referring to is not "passing," but a radical deconstruction of the idea and function of race.

Ultimately, it seems, Jean Toomer fought a losing battle on the question of his own race. In 1941, after not having anything in print since 1936's "The Blue Meridian," the writer reluctantly agreed to allow two stories and two poems from *Cane* in the anthology *The Negro Caravan: Writings by American Negroes*. In 1949, Toomer allowed Langston Hughes and Arno Bontemps to publish sections of *Cane* in *The Poetry of the Negro, 1746-1949* (Nowlin 227). Toomer's acquiescence to be published in these types of journals helped to stabilize his racial identity and thus make it intelligible within the confines of a canon that, to this day, seems to view race as a white/non-white binary (white authors rarely have their races noted within tables of contents of anthologies, whereas non-white writers are often labeled by their race). Ironically, this niche racial labeling led to Toomer's rediscovery, while many of the author's white contemporaries (including Waldo Frank) have seen a much more permanent decline.

The rise and fall and recovery of Jean Toomer's *Cane* raises some interesting questions about the degree to which an author can control the perception of their own identity and the power of these perceptions to shape the continued acceptance and canonization of texts. While critics ultimately rescued Toomer from oblivion, it came at the cost of subverting the author's own ideas about his racial identity. In a sense, Toomer had to agree, begrudgingly, to accept a label, and be remembered as an African American author or face permanent exile. By forcing Toomer to accept an identity in line with a racial binary, editors and critics have reinforced this binary along with a system that views whiteness as normative. Additionally, Toomer's story

underlines the fact that the identity categories and genres associated with anthologies and canonical literature arise out of necessity for external subjects to create an intelligible narrative that links disparate pieces. While this may be useful for readers because it gives them a sense of unity and a lens through which to view the text, it also deprives writers and texts of the ability to create more complex and nuanced identities that do not fit within normative practices. . The most pernicious aspect of these reader expectations is that they are fueled by an invisible ideological definition of the intersections of race and the national body. Toomer's leveraging of the abject, here, makes the invisible visible, allowing for an alternative body which, by its very existence, challenges the hegemony of the binary racial construction.

But why does the South have to be the laboratory for Toomer's particular kind of abjection? Part of the reason is that that in the South, then, today, the history of slavery and white supremacy force the issue of race to exist in a clearer way than in the rest of the country. Once again, this is not to say that the rest of country does not struggle with race, histories of oppression, and white supremacy. It is quite the opposite, in fact. But the South's particular placement within the nation's historical consciousness allows for the hegemonic nation to delude itself by dumping all of its racial angst into the abject South. In doing this, the nation pretends that whatever racial problems that it has can never be as bad as those of the South. Yet, this purgation can never be complete because the South is still part of the nation. Toomer, and others who embrace the social topography of Southern abjection use the double positioning to articulate truths about not only the bodies to the South, but also the social constructions of bodies throughout the nation as a whole.

Both Toomer's characters and his own experience speak to the ways in which the social illegibility and attempted social erasure of subjects that trouble social constructions based on binary racial understandings is common for a national body that seeks racial purity. This suggests that subjects who transgress or reject these same binaries cannot be integrated into the social mythos of the national body and must therefore be excised, or at least isolated in such a way that their presence does not create an existential threat to the coherence of the same body. As we see with Toomer, the only way to remove the abject marker and return to the national body is to forsake the transgressive state and to let oneself be rewritten into an acceptable subject position.

The failures of Becky and Esther signal Toomer's rejection of this possibility. For whatever reason, these subjects, along with their bodies and their history are locked out of the national body and are thus isolated, quarantined, and forever threatened with the risk of erasure. Despite this inability to be integrated into a normative national body, there is still immense power in this realm of social abjection. Firstly, it fulfills a normative hegemonic requirement for the generation of otherness in order to establish norms and the punishment for their violation. But perhaps more importantly, the presence of these subjects forces the reader to denaturalize the flimsy construction of a social order based on racial hierarchies. It does this by the inherent incoherence of race as a definitive social signifier, and thus opens the realm up to transgressive actions that can ultimately challenge and undermine the social order. While the former use of the abject realm projects passiveness onto the subjects as the national body uses the subjects as examples of bad subjects, the latter returns agency and power to the subjects, allowing them a landscape in which they can strike back. In Mark M. Smith's exploration of white sensory perception and the construction of race, he makes a note about the idea of passing:

> Superficially, passing endorsed every white sensory stereotype concerning
> blackness. Plainly, though, passing did not mean that Black people
> accepted the legitimacy of these stereotypes. In some ways, passing
> exposed them as patent nonsense and also demonstrated that at every turn,
> with every gesture, Blacks who passed as white thought – not felt – about
> the form, legitimacy, content, nature, and meaning of the very stereotypes
> they used. Senses, passers showed, could be manipulated. Thus passing
> was less an affirmation of white sensory conceits and more a challenge to
> the wobbly logic underpinning them. (101)

In the social abjection of Toomer and his characters, we see what is arguably the antithesis of passing. They cannot cross racial boundaries because they either cannot or will not embrace the social racial identity that society has constructed for them. This lack of a coherent starting point confounds the ability to make a binary switch. Despite this difference, the embrace of the social abjection that comes along with violation of national ideas of racial purity, hierarchy, and subjecthood forces readers to confront the impossible coherence of a closed system that is based on such malleable material.

Power in the Historical Topography of Abjection

While Caldwell and Toomer's exploration of the objective and social topographies of Southern abjection are attempts to denaturalize aspects of the national body in order to return power and agency to those who are dominated and excluded by its ideology in order to establish more progressive and liberal goals, the use of the Southern abject historical topography has confounds that type of progress by using abjection and victimization to formulate an alternative national body. Predicated on a rejection of cosmopolitan ideas and subject positions, this topography entrenches ideals of a lost South built on a structure of agrarianism, slavery, de jure white supremacy, romanticized ideals of self-determination. In effect, the alternative body which is created within the abject Southern heterotopia is the national body that never was, and it

embraces a history that its adherents believe should have happened, but never did. The so called "Lost Cause" thus is situated not only in a lost past, but also a lost present and future.

Because of this, the sense of loss in the historical topography of Southern abjection seemingly has an eternal presence. Its constant presence means the loss is always in the process of happening, and therefore cannot be fully mourned in such a way that it detaches the individual from the corpse of the Confederacy. Unwilling to admit the corpse is dead, the adherents to this particular topography see it as in a state of suspended animation, always just a nudge away from springing to life. Because this abject historical topography is based in a divergence from a definitive historical moment, the shape of the alternative body – that is to say the abject national body whose history never came to pass – resembles the hegemonic historical national body in its form, but not function. In this, these two bodies are constructed of the same historical moments, but their meaning is different. In the hegemonic national narrative, the Union's victory in the Civil War has come to symbolize the nation's commitment to values of democratic human rights and a movement away from a savage system of slavery that prevented the nation ascension as a moral and industrial world leader. As such, the Union's victory is cast as an inevitable step in the ideological formation of the modern state both at home and abroad. Similarly, Reconstruction is cast as a radical experiment in political and ideological rebuilding to ensure that the nations regions share value systems, and the rise of the industrial South fulfilling national demand for modernization.   Conversely, those inhabiting topography of historical abjection to assign those events a different meaning and teleology. For these people, the Civil War and the Union's victory came to symbolize the overreach of a centralized state that had violated its commitment to the rights of its people. Likewise, Reconstruction was an attempt to use executive fiat and the threat of force to colonize the region and force it to accept an ideological code that upended long

held social and legal structures. The rise of the industrial South, then, emerges as an extension of this invasive logic – an economic colonialization that dehumanized the individual and fundamentally altered centuries of social practice. These competing interpretations lead to different presents – on one hand, a South modernizing and becoming incorporated in the larger nation; on the other, a region held under the boot of an oppressive force wielding ideological and economic power to deprive it (and the rest of the nation) of its rightful individual subjecthood and agency.

These two presents lead inexorably to two different end points. The first is the full reunification of the nation under as progressive liberal state that embraces cosmopolitan values and a global presence. This ending tells American history of a progressive story of egalitarian virtue evolving as a world power – the noble landing at Plymouth Rock that brought hope and an opportunity to those seeking religious freedom, the fiery revolution that threw off the colonial yoke, the outward trajectory of growth that soon saw the nation straddling both sides of the continent, the emergence of uniquely American literature and art, the recognition and eradication of the evil of slavery, the reunification and modernization of the nation which lead to new industries and global power, the decisive participation in two world wars against enemies whose inhumanity was unquestionable, the rise of the women's rights movement, the enacting of civil rights legislation, the triumph in the Cold War, the rapid expansion of new technologies and markets, the war on terror, the legalization of gay marriage, and finally, the election of the first Black president. Against this progressive timeline, a second end point tells the story as necessarily provoking a response that will awaken the spirit of the old South, a Confederacy driven by old hierarchies, tradition, and a reemergence of preindustrial social and economic values that stress kinship, local control, and conservative values.

It is because of the shared history which forms the body of this abject space that Southern historical abjection becomes such an effective tool in disrupting the national hegemonic history and teleology. Additionally, because the ideologies born out of this specific abject topography are based on perceived loss, victimization, and social displacement, they can be readily embraced by non-Southern white populations whose own feelings of powerlessness and victimization have come to define them. At the heart of this is the inability to cognitively align ideologies of white supremacy with the material realities of poverty, disempowerment, and political impotence that these populations feel. The narrative history allows these people to put their own economic and social exploitation into a ready-made context where their suffering is at the heart of a cross-generational national narrative that promises victory. In this, the imagined victimhood of the white Southerners' losses after the Civil War become the roots of all the ills that beset these groups (both in and outside of the South) in the current historical moment. It is the vagueness of the imagined past and future that also gives it an ability to break-free of the borders of the South and to be embraced on a national level and moved closer to the mainstream. Nancy MacLean writes,

> The Right conjured a mythical region that bore little relation to the actual
> South, with its dramatic history of conflict between and within its major
> population groups and of dissent from the dominant conservative ethos. In
> the Right's odes to the Old South, classes never clashed, whites took care
> of blacks, planters shared the interests of city dwellers, men presided over
> orderly households, and liberalism and modernism were foreign imports
> with no local buyers. Their South was a land of propertied gentlemen
> devoted to defending liberty for the good of all. (309)

MacLean also notes that "That conservative leaders propounded this mythical South in the very years scholars and civil rights activists alike were exposing its fundamental falsity reveals a willful blindness to inconvenient empirical evidence," but that by packaging the South and its history in this way, the Right creates a "proving ground for their utopia: a model of actually

existing conservativism that contained untrammeled property rights, a small state restricted to largely punitive functions, a hierarchal order, and public religiosity" (309).

The efficacy of this vision rests, in part, on conservative Southern politicians whose regional authenticity allows them to merge this alternative history with public policy. MacLean traces this back to the 1930s when Southern politicians who represented white planters and Northern politicians who represented conservative business interests began to ally to block progressive reforms like labor rights and taxpayer funded welfare programs. "As early as 1938," she writes, "conservative Southern politicians were using the mythology of the Civil War and Reconstruction to fight the second, more radical phase of the New Deal, with a rallying cry summed up by one historian as 'The carpet-baggers are coming'" (310).

At its heart, the message is of constant struggle. When, in 1984, Mississippi congressman Trent Lott spoke to the Convention of the Sons of Confederate Veterans that "the spirit of Jefferson Davis lives in the 1984 Republican platform," the lawmaker, who would later go on to become the Republican Senate Majority Leader, was invoking not only the values of Davis and the Confederacy, but also their symbolic status as rebels defying the odds to stand up an old world that was slipping away. After receiving pushback for his statement and his participation in the event, Lott said in an interview in *The Southern Partisan,* a magazine that celebrates the Confederacy and neo-confederate causes:

> I think that a lot of the fundamental principles that Jefferson Davis
> believed in are very important to people across the country, and they apply
> to the Republican Party. After the War between the States, a lot of
> Southerners identified with the Democrat Party . . . But we have seen the
> Republican Party become more conservative and more oriented toward the
> traditional family values, the religious values that we hold dear in the
> South. And the Democratic party is going in the other direction . . . The
> platform we had in Dallas, the 1984 Republican platform, all the ideas we
> supported there – from tax policy, to foreign policy; from individual

> rights, to neighborhood security – are things that Jefferson Davis and his
> people believed in. (44)

This statement frames the political environment as a conflict between the "traditional," (the values of Jefferson Davis) and the non-traditional (the values of the Democrats), hinting at a continuing war between tradition and modernization. At the same time, it dehistoricizes aspects of Davis and the Confederacy (slavery, for example) whose explicit inclusion would impede his goal. Simultaneously, the 1984 Republican platform to which Lott referred proposed many policies: mandatory minimums for drug offenses, an increased focus on imprisonment, and conversion of federal entitlements to state run block grants, disproportionately affecting and disempowering people of color struggling against systemic racism. On the subject of education, the platform demands minimizing the role of the federal government and, despite some lip service paid to civil rights, says that, "civil rights enforcement must not be twisted into excessive interference in the education process" (American Presidency Project, UCSB). All of this is an attempt to roll back the progressive programs that in one way or another came to define the national narrative during the early and middle twentieth century, from the New Deal to the Great Society, to the War on Poverty, to the victories of the Civil Rights movement, all for the purpose of returning the nation to its "traditions" and "roots." Arguably, it worked, and though the following decades saw the expansion of many progressive civil rights priorities for underrepresented minority groups, these have inevitably been met with pushback that stresses imagined white victimization and the displacement of "traditional values."

In the midst of the 2016 presidential election, for instance, Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton spoke at a fundraising event sponsored by members of the LBGTQ community. In the midst of her speech, Clinton made the following remarks:

> You know, to just be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right? They're racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic — Islamophobic — you name it. And unfortunately, there are people like that. And he has lifted them up. He has given voice to their websites that used to only have 11,000 people — now have 11 million. He tweets and retweets their offensive hateful mean-spirited rhetoric. Now, some of those folks — they are irredeemable, but thankfully, they are not America. (Reilly)

Clinton's remarks were met with laughter and applause during the event, but soon after the campaign saw a backlash from Republicans and Donald Trump supporters who felt personally attacked by the remark. Seeking to quell a growing sea of angry voices on the right, Clinton later attempted to temper her remarks, saying, that while Trump was a toxic presence in America who amplified the voices of hatred, that in regards to the number of deplorables in the basket, "I regret saying 'half' — that was wrong" (quoted in Merica and Tatum).

Critics and pundits spent weeks deconstructing the remark. Some called Clinton's supposed gaffe a savvy political move because it focused the attention of the country on the extremist voices with whom Trump associated himself. Her apology, likewise, was seen as a way of walking back the remark a little, but still forcing a conversation about Trump's regressive language, policies, and key supporters. The Trump campaign, on the other hand, grasped upon the remark as a way to paint Clinton as an "elite" who was out of touch with the real feelings and experiences of "true Americans."

As the response continued, multiple distinct rhetorical fields emerged as ways of interpreting the Clinton line. One of the main rhetorical fields that emerged was in a cosmopolitan liberal nationalism in which we see a politician articulating a progressive sense of national identity and membership based on a model of affinity that is, as Leigh Anne Duck notes, "open to people of diverse backgrounds" and mandates "no homogenizing panoply of traits or beliefs" (2). In this view, Clinton's line accomplishes two goals. First, it affirms a sense of

national identity rooted in a sense of modern liberal American exceptionalism that places diversity, inclusion, and opportunity at the heart of the country's mythos. The second goal reaffirms a sense of progressive liberal nationalism by constructing what Edward Said would term as "otherness" that is exotic and antithetical to the desired American exceptionalism. These Others serve as implicit threat to the desired social order, while also allowing the liberal progressive national identity to define itself by what it is not. The goal in both of these cases is to create a cohesive and stable social order rooted in a specific ideology.

Another rhetorical field that developed in the wake of Clinton's comments came from Trump supporters who felt unfairly characterized by being tagged as "deplorable." In considering their reactions, there are two major rhetorical threads that stand out. First, we see an unwillingness or inability of "elites" to understand the needs and concerns of "real Americans." From this perspective, the xenophobic and discriminatory language and policy advocated by Trump is not, in fact, racist but rather simply a way of maintaining a sense of national affiliation that is more exclusive and prescriptive. This is a sense of affiliation that finds its roots not in abstract ideology, but rather in social, religious, intellectual, and geographic boundaries that ensure the emergence of a homogeneous normative national citizen. These individuals claim that, far from disrupting American national identity, they are attempting to rescue it from what they might term "corrosive forces" outside and inside their various boundaries that threaten the strict demarcation of "us and them." This version of national identity, because it is more dependent on clear borders, thus, has its existence threatened by the erasure of the strict boundaries of social, religious, intellectual, and geographic that produce the "good national subject." Even more clearly than the progressive liberal sense of national affiliation, this form of affiliation requires the creation or appointment of an Other whose existence creates a justification, desire, and

necessity for national affiliation (because, if it were not for the existence of the outsider/threat/negative space, there would be little need to codify a sense of national affiliation in the first place). In a somatic sense, this formalizes the ideological national body, as well as that which violates that coherence and must be either purged or whose threat must be resisted.

The second thread of discourse that developed from the far-right's reaction to Clinton's line is perhaps less obvious, but more instructive, particularly at a time in the nation's history that has seen the brazen rise of ultra-nationalist white supremacist groups and their increasing normalization into the politics of the right. In this thread, there is no bristling at or denial of the term "deplorable," but rather the acceptance and embrace of the term by some of those to whom it was applied. For this group, the rhetorical labeling of "deplorable" is a marker of their unity in perceived victimization by the progressive national ethos. It reinforces a form of nationalism predicated on victimhood and paranoia of external invasion. These individuals, who unapologetically embrace sets of racist, homophobic, xenophobic, anti-Semitic views, used Clinton's speech as an opportunity for entrenchment rather than change. For these people, the term "deplorable" became a badge that signified an inability to accept the tenets of progressive liberal ideology. They had been marked as irredeemable by a culture that they had no interest in, which, as a result, freed them of the responsibility of having to live up to its expectations. Thus, for these individuals, the term "deplorable," both acted as a tacit permission to engage in behaviors that the society will not accept and helped to strengthen and solidify a form of ideological affiliation based on the negation of progressive liberal modernity. These reactions not only find their roots in Southern victimhood nationalism, but they are also actually extensions of it. The willingness to take on the label of "deplorable," suggests a fundamental resistance to a hegemonic set of national values that the adherents of this ideology believe are being forced

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upon them. The anti-cosmopolitan regressive embrace of a "traditional" social order that stresses xenophobia, racism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and anti-government views seeks to establish a historical endpoint that resembles a neo-Confederate state. This nationalized Southern victimhood nationalism is able to arise because the transnational nature of the American South allows it to be diffused from a geographic identity into an ideological relationship to liberal power structures that threaten a "heritage" of white supremacy.

Victimization, Imagined Histories, and the Southern Strategy

While it is far from true that this "basket full of deplorables" ideology exists only in the American South, the region was particularly primed for it by the lingering echoes of decades of politicization of the region's poverty and racism through the Republican Party's "Southern Strategy," which leveraged the region's identity of victimhood, along with economic insecurity, and lingering feelings of white supremacy and racially fueled resentment and fear, to gain an iron grasp on the wheels of power in the region. The strategy relied on the creation of an imaginary history that could be "reclaimed" by the enacting of conservative policies designed to interrupt the progress of Civil Rights and growing cosmopolitanism so that White people who imagined they had been victimized by such systems could take back power. This imagined past is predicated on the idea that white people deserve such power simply because of the inherent social value their skin color and that any threat to that is a perversion of their American inheritance. The tactic moved into mainstream political strategy in the 1970s and 1980s, notably in the presidential campaigns of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. This strategy capitalized on the resentment of poor whites and sought to direct their anger at progressive forces that had upset what they saw as traditional values and social order. At the heart of much of this campaign was an active strategy to center the Civil Rights Movement, the primary culprit in displacing the

value of and social capital of impoverished whites. The rhetoric relied on the same ideological framework of victimization that had already been handed down between generations of the South. Essentially, what the strategy asked of these poor white Southerners was that they cede political power to the elite of the Republican party, and, in exchange, the elite would ensure that the Southern whiteness, no matter how impoverished or wretched, would receive a guarantee of stable social status that based in a supremacy over Blackness. While this existed implicitly in rallying cries for state's rights, redlining, and anti-school bussing movements, during this time period, the use of these terms and concepts were meant to mask the racialized nature of the strategy. Republican strategist Lee Atwater, spoke on this in 1981, noting:

> Y'all don't quote me on this. You start out in 1954 by saying, "Nigger, nigger, nigger." By 1968 you can't say "nigger"—that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me—because obviously sitting around saying, "We want to cut this," is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "Nigger, nigger." (quoted in Baker 201)

What Atwater is getting at here is the need to leverage the region's legacy of bitterness, resentment, and feelings of white victimhood that emerged in the wake of the Civil War in order to codify a coherent voting bloc that would ensure a powerful Republican base, thus coopting the South's victimhood nationalism for political gain within the country at large. It is of note here that the need to conceal calls for white supremacy within the rhetoric of social and legal issues is a nod to the fact that, despite many of its residences' desires to see the South as its own distinct political and regional entity, that it is dependent on the gaze and rhetoric of the progressive North for legibility and survival. Again, this hints at the South's double-position as national member

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and outsider other. Equally of note is Atwater's rather cynical declaration that this strategy is not necessarily about elevating the status of these white populations, but about ensuring that Black populations always, "get hurt worse than us." This ensures that white populations will have the illusion of advancement based upon their relative status vis-à-vis Black populations. Thus, the further that the Republicans who embraced this strategy could code the racist policies that oppress and deny opportunities to Black people, the better the white people felt about their own positions.

One of the implicit arguments of this Southern Strategy is that the South is inherently white and that any people of color cannot be said to be legibly "Southern." Once again, this has its roots in the image of the South both as national outpost and as transnational space. The transnationality of the South helps to eliminate the region's geographic borders and establish it as an ideology. Thus, even residents of the South can be said to be un-Southern because of their exclusion from the specific type of victimhood nationalism that has come to define the South as a transnational space. People of color, Northern ex-patriots, and those who embrace a pluralistic progressive American nationalism are therefore excluded. At the same time, people outside of the geographic borders of the South can embrace the victimhood nationalism and ideological relationship to progressive power structure and join the Southern assemblage.

Over the last decade, technologies have made it faster and easier to disseminate the ideologies of this abject historical topography than ever. Using social networks as amplifiers, individuals and groups who embrace these ideologies have been able to attract followers to this alternative history based on imagined white grievance and victimization. The simultaneous decontextualization of the violent and abhorrent past of the ideology, and the over-contexualization of some romantic elements make it an attractive and guiltfree way of generating

affiliative links and building powerbases. In fact, the act of decontextualization and over

contexualization can be used as a tool to generate more imaginary victimhood to bind these

individuals closer together.

We can see this in the hysterical debates over the imaginary threat of Critical Race

Theory in education as schoolboard meetings melt down over whether schools should teach

lessons that accurately reflect a history of white supremacy and violent oppression and

domination of non-white bodies. In Tennessee, for example, legislators passed a law that bans

teachers from talking about ideas that would indicate the existence of systemic racism, the need

to examine the lingering effects of slavery, and the current state of racial privilege and

discrimination in America (Allison; and Mangrum). In a letter to the Tennessee Department of

Education, a group called Mom's for Liberty called for using the law to ban the teaching of the

"Great Minds PBC Wit & Wisdom (WW) English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum, Grade 2,

Module 3, 'Civil Rights Heroes.'" The curriculum involves four texts, *Martin Luther King Jr*

and the March on Washington by Frances E. Ruffin, *Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True*

Story by Ruby Bridges, *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles, and *Separate is Never Equal*

by Duncan Tonatiuh. According to this letter, these books and the accompanying lesson plans

contain "both explicit and implicit Anti-American, Anti-White, and Anti-Mexican teaching," and

goes on to note that the inclusion of these materials "implies to second grade children that people

of color continue to be oppressed by an oppressive angry vicious, scary, mean, loud, violent,

[rude], and [hateful]' white population . . . and teaches that the racial injustice of the 1960s exists

today" (Steenman 2). The letter continues,

> For nine weeks [the curriculum] focuses repeatedly and daily on very dark
> and divisive slivers of American history. Without highlighting the positive
> achievements, like unity and the overall improvement of our country,
> students fail to learn and appreciate the continual progress in American

and its accomplishments towards forming a more perfect union…The narrow and slanted obsession on historical mistakes reveals a heavily biased agenda, one that makes children hate their country, each other, and/or themselves. (2)

What follows this appears to be a list of any time one of these books depicts or mentions racial oppression in a way that might indict white people or systems of government power. The letter even goes on to mention that "the word 'injustice' is mentioned 314 times in a 478 page Teacher's Manual," and then goes on to give some of the more grievous examples like, "What does injustice mean?," and "Why is it important to respond to injustice?," and "How can people respond to injustice?" This list appears to take issue seeing the word itself, as it lists "point to the word injustice" multiple times as problematic.

This conflict over Critical Race Theory is the latest incarnation of the conflict between the normative hegemonic history, and the abject field of history. Once again, these two divergent ideologies are composed of the same body of historical moments, but their meaning in a teleology of American identity is different. Interestingly, it is not only the same moments that this abject history utilizes, but also the rhetoric. When the writer posits, "Without highlighting the positive achievements, like unity and the overall improvement of our country, students fail to learn and appreciate the continual progress in America and its accomplishments towards forming a more perfect union,"(2) she is using a rhetoric that suggests an openness and inclusion typical of cosmopolitan views of American progress, and yet, at the same time, she seeks to close the history of white oppression of bodies of color by writing it off as something from a distant past. In doing this, she effectively denies the experiences of oppressed people, silences their voices, and substitutes a version of history designed to minimize white guilt (she casts the violent history of racism, lynching, segregation, and discrimination as a mere "historical mistake"). Similarly, when she writes that the curriculum, and by extension Critical Race Theory itself, "focuses

repeatedly and daily on very dark and divisive slivers of American history," she once again foregrounds white feelings about the interpretation of history, rather than history itself. The divisiveness she speaks of is not the events themselves – the unconscionable abuse and oppression of people of color – but rather the frame that white America was responsible and continues to be responsible for their actions. Proposals like the authors are predicated on the idea that white people should continue to set the terms of history and its interpretation, always purging their own responsibility and making them heroic in the process. This strategy minimizes and erases minority voices and experiences and continues to perpetuate white supremacy not only on a public policy level, but also on an ontological level as it alters the ability of the oppressed subject to fully come to terms with their own history and identity. This, in turn, enforces a status quo that denies these subjects the agency needed to demand historical change.

As these types of arguments propagate and spread not only in the South, but also throughout the nation, it becomes clear that the historical topography of Southern abjection is, perhaps, its most powerful. While the objective and social topographies open up a space for the formulation of images and arguments meant to disrupt national identity and the power structures that generate it, they do so in a way that affirms a national ideology that values progressive cosmopolitan values of inclusion, modernity, and a movement toward egalitarianism. The historical topography, on the other hand, proposes a completely different teleological destination of the country, one defined by a complete rejection of the normative historical topography and instead, a substitution of an ideology that uses terms like "tradition" and "heritage" to redefine the past, the present, and the future in order to ensure the continued dominance of preindustrial social and economic values that stress white supremacy, patriarchy, local control, and conservative values. It is for this reason that this particular topography of abjection can be

monumentally disruptive and destructive to the nation's self-avowed ideals of human rights and democracy.

Why Project Abjection?

In all of this, the South survives and even thrives not in spite of its national positioning as an abject heterotopia, but because of it. Because of its geographic and perceived ideological and cultural differences, the hegemonic national body can deem the region as "exceptional," in as much as the narrative of the nation paints it as the exception to the general trend of American identity. This effectively allows the nation to project its own guilt and responsibility for continued failures to live up to the egalitarian values that it claims to embrace. The hegemonic national body used, and continues to try and use the region as, in Leigh Ann Duck's words, a "container for the nation's disavowed antiliberalism" (6). It functioned and functions as a space in which battles over race, class, identity, and history can be fought without exposing the guilt of the systems of power of the nation as a whole – a way for Northern audiences to denounce the evils of racism, exploitation, and unfair labor practices while still practicing it themselves.

In his book *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, George Lipsitz points to many ways in which the nation at large relies on racism and racist policies while, at the same time, decrying them. He points not only to the hypocrisies of the founding fathers, but also to liberal icons like Franklin Roosevelt who, a year after imprisoning tens of thousands of Americans of Japanese ancestry, gave a speech in which he said, "No loyal citizen of the United States should be denied the democratic right to exercise the responsibilities of citizenship, regardless of his ancestry . . . The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of the mind and the heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry. A

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good American is one who is loyal to this country and to our creed of liberty and democracy" (228). Lipsitz argues, "Roosevelt's simultaneous disavowal and embrace of racism illustrates a broader pattern. By avoiding direct endorsement of white supremacy, by denying the salience of race in determining life chances and opportunities in the present and the past, by relegating racism to some previous era, civil rights rhetoric like Roosevelt's condones the promotion and extension of racist practices" (228).

Because of the South's social, objective, and historical topographies of abjection, the region functions as a savage "previous era" made manifest within the present. This means that the kind of relegation to which Lipsitz refers can easily be projected and appear to be contained within the region, leaving the rest of the nation to live guilt free while enacting policies and social interactions that bolster white supremacy. Lipsitz argues, then, that "Disavowals of racist intent do not mean that racism is not in effect; on the contrary, that is often the way racism works most successfully… a paradoxical and nettling combination of racism and disavowal has always permeated the possessive investment in whiteness" (227). In this, the region serves the nation by allowing the perpetuation of power structures that would otherwise be incompatible with the national self-image. This is true not only of race, but also of economic power structures and those that feed into any ideology that seeks a purity of national identity – inconvenient truths that cannot be totally dismissed must be projected into the nation's abject heterotopia, where they can be contained in a context of a backwards world.

This projection takes the impossible position that the South is both a member of the national body and other from it. In doing to, the nation inadvertently reveals its body's inherent lack of cohesion, undermining any sort of purity of national identity and revealing ruptures that indicate areas of ideological construction which are used to determine a subject's fitness to exist

within a national narrative of progress and modernity. The more exaggerated the abjection, the more the details of the construction of the body come into sharp relief. In this, writers of the South – those who can authentically claim its mark – can open up specific spaces of resistance that draw the gaze of subjects throughout the nation who can then question the national narrative and work to build a new body.

Why Embrace Abjection?

As the Civil War came to its convulsive end and the South looked upon the ashes of its cities and ideologies, the prevailing question was, "what's next?" How could this region, so battered by war and loss possibly move forward and find itself a place in the nation at large? There were, to be sure, those who resisted the call to lay down arms and through gritted teeth demanded the fight go on, but on the whole, there was a feeling of profound loss. The July 3rd edition of the *Charlotte Democrat* reports the suicide of one Edmund Ruffin who shot himself rather than face the results of the South's loss. The paper notes that he "retired to his chamber at an early hour in the morning, and taking a seat in a chair, took a gun, loaded with shot and slugs, and placing the muzzle to his mouth, discharged the piece by pushing the trigger of the gun. The paper describes a grizzly scene in which "the upper portion of his head was entirely blown off," and a note was left reading "I cannot survive the loss of the liberties of my country" ("Suicide of Edmund Ruffin"). He had intended to do the deed on the day of the surrender but, presumably in deference to the rules of etiquette and Southern hospitality, demurred because he had guests. His note went on, striking a particularly Southern tone in its outrage, "And now, with my latest writing & utterance, & with what will (be) near to my latest breath, I hereby repeat & would willingly proclaim my unmitigated hatred to Yankee rule – to all political, social, & business connection with Yankees, & to the perfidious, malignant, & vile Yankee race" (quoted in

Walther 230). The finality of Ruffin's shot as the South surrendered was oddly appropriate as the

Southerner's claim to fame was firing the first shot of the war at Fort Sumter.

A few weeks earlier, the editorial staff of South Carolina's *Edgefield Advertiser*

articulated the kind of apocalyptic vision that Mr. Ruffin may have feared:

> If we were unsafe under the old Government, of which we were voluntary
> members, what will be our condition if we are forced back to it by the
> trials, toils, and sacrifices of a four years war? We should have suffered in
> vain, and our noble youths would have bled and died in vain. The verdict
> of the world would be, the South has been whipped back into the union;
> and the North would execute the judgement upon us as inferiors, vassals,
> and "captives of the spear." Are we ready for this? If the horrible doom, in
> the Providence of God, awaits us, shall we court it? Shall we, by becoming
> panic stricken, and relaxing our efforts and our sacrifices, crawn to the feet
> of our enemies, and voluntarily submit our necks to the yoke they are
> striving to place upon them? Shall we become disheartened by reverses,
> even let them come in legions, and throw down our arms, rushing to
> submit our free limbs and our proud Southern souls to Yankee chains? Oh,
> Almighty God, if we have never prayed before, hear our prayer now, that
> this may never come to pass. ("Richmond Fallen")

This level of rhetoric became commonplace in the conversations, newspapers, and political

discourse of the time as Southerners came to terms with their place both within the national body

and outside of it. As these Southerners looked around, they saw the decay of the world that they

thought was their birthright. But this decay did not stop at the geographical borders to the South,

nor did it only involve the physical space, rather, it was a decay of their idea of what the nation

was and what it could be.

And so, abjection came to define the South, and generation after generation, it has been

handed down as a Southern birthright. But as the years passed, the South and its artists began to

discover the power that lay in their positioning. But where does that power lie? This dissertation

has set out to explore that question and examine what Southern abjection looked like and what its

purpose was for those Southerners who embraced it. While the foisting of abjection onto a region

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may be advantageous for a nation like the United States, the question remains, what is in it for the South? Why would representatives of a region voluntarily embrace and, in many cases, produce such an ideological position? Why would Southerners choose to create narratives in which their region becomes a pitiable or savage landscape marked by desolation and despair? What was there to gain, both materially and ideologically by producing texts in which one's own people are grim, horrifying, or just completely incompatible with the new world? How can Southerners and the South utilize their position as the nation's abject to their advantage?

There is an answer to this question which is, perhaps, too obvious to overlook. Profit. No one ever went broke giving the people what they wanted and, outside of any ideological value, images of depravity, the grotesque, and abjection have always appealed to the reading public. A 1982 retrospective of the work of Erskine Caldwell in the *New York Times* noted that, at that point, *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre* had sold more than 17 million copies (McDowell 25). This number does not even take into account the record-breaking Broadway production of *Tobacco Road,* which, with 3,182 performances, was the longest running Broadway show of the time, and netted Caldwell the then astronomical amount of $2,000 a week in royalties (McDowell 25). Nor is it taking into account the successful film version of *God's Little Acre* which featured a pre-*Gilligan's Island* Tina Louise and went on to be one of the top grossing films of the year.

This profit motive should not be minimized because it suggests a growing embrace of a type of late-stage capitalism in which images and representation can become a profitable alternative to traditional goods-based markets. There is no doubt that the grotesqueness of Caldwell's characters and their living conditions represent a vague simulacrum of Southern life that is more pruriently compelling than reality and fits more neatly into a national narrative that

exoticizes and others the South as a region locked into a backwards past. In a cynical sense,

Caldwell could just be fulfilling a market that other Southern writers were too dignified, honest,

or proud to exploit. This certainly seems to have been the opinion of some of Caldwell's

Southern contemporaries. In his essay, "Sweet are the Uses of Degeneracy" John Donald Wade

offers an analysis of Caldwell's work that is, by turns sarcastically dismissive, grudgingly

complimentary, and fiercely critical of the author's instinct to please the kind and class of people

that he has come to be affiliated with – "the detached, nervous, thrill-goaded metro-

cosmopolitans of his day" (466). Wade, a history professor who contributed to the Agrarians

manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*, saw Caldwell as a cynical opportunist who wrote not for Southern

audiences, but for the idle rich of the North:

> The stories deal with country and village people, among whom, as the
> publisher's blurb makes clear, "love is direct and immediate; hate the
> same." They deal, in short, with just the sort of people that sophisticated
> New Yorkers and would-be New Yorkers – the major part of the book
> buying population of America – can at once most envy and marvel over
> and deplore, with the sort of people best calculated to satisfy at once the
> current vogue for primitivism and the constant vogue of metropolitan
> complacency. Here is God's plenty to prove that country people are, when
> not amusingly simple, quite horribly brutal; it is all a very sad commentary
> on the unhappy folks who have not had the wit to move to some of the
> nation's many Fifth Avenues or Greenwich Villages, or perhaps even the
> Bowery's. (466)

On the run-away popularity of the stage version of *Tobacco Road* with "New Yorkers"[14]

> As ordinary human beings they have been exhilarated by the special
> quality of the book that the liberal courts of our time are always busying
> themselves to declare within the bounds of decency. They have learned a
> great deal about an alien and primitive people. And they have had their
> vanity flattered (never was a New Yorker so depraved) and their
> consciences set easy) if the people whom the Civil War disrupted were of
> *this* stamp, then disruption was what was best for them. The implication
> concerning New York's own responsibility for the sad event, few have
> stressed. (454)

[14] Throughout the essay, Wade makes continuous, mostly sneering, reference to "New Yorkers," but it is clear that his implication is any type of population who subscribes to cosmopolitan values.

The crux of Wade's argument, then, is that Caldwell's goal is to create what I referred earlier to as "the North's South," which is to say, regional simulacra whose grotesque and romantic aspects are exaggerated for the purposes of capitalistic profit and the Northern cosmopolitan goals of progressive republicanism and democracy. The accusation is that Caldwell has sold out his native land in order to earn a profit from the very people who have always represented its antithesis. And Wade is not all together wrong. In some respects, Caldwell's books and stories about the South do feed and fulfill aspects of a Northern imagination that seeks to reassure itself of its own cultural and historical rightness while, at the same time, allowing it to project its own fear and insecurity about its faults onto a convenient other. It is also true that despite his interest in poverty and the exploitation of the uneducated, Caldwell was willing to make a good deal of money off images of these same people. What is more, if the success of television shows like *Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo* and *Duck Dynasty,* as well as books like J.D. Vance's arguably spurious and manipulative *Hillbilly Elegy* are any indication, this clearly remains an effective strategy.

But to focus on profit in a vacuum misses an important aspect of this kind of abjection, which is its inherently affiliative nature when it comes to the relationship between the South and the nation as a whole. We can observe this in two ways. First, the abjection of the subjects of these stories, books, and shows require an explicit knowledge of the normative national body to be effective. Just as Orientalism requires a stable cultural and national identity to fuel the colonizing interpretations of the western gaze, so too does Southern abjection require an ideologically stable national body to produce the grotesqueness and otherness that attracts the gaze (and money) of its national audience. By examining the social and cultural subjects and images that must be excreted for a healthy national body, this abjection helps to define the limits

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of the body and to reinforce desirable behavior of "good subjects" by depicting the abject as

unredeemable others. This kind of affiliation makes the Southern abjection a tool of national

discourse – a morality play performed in a remote geography in which the region must

participate, willingly or unwillingly, for the good of the country as a whole. The risk of this

particular kind of affiliation is that the region's identity becomes subservient to the nation's, and

it becomes difficult for the region to effectively define and create itself. This seems to be of

particular concern to some of Caldwell's Southern critics who bristled at the writer's bleak,

ridiculous, and grotesque depiction of the South. On this point, Wade despaired, "Mr. Caldwell

has apparently persuaded himself and many others, among them the editors of the intellectual

weeklies in New York, that Jeeter Lester and his kind are fairly typical of twenty million

Southern countrymen" (455).

But for Wade, as for the rest of the Agrarians, the project of reaffiliation and insertion of

the symbolic South into the national discourse was precisely the goal. As the "Statement of

Principles" makes clear, the South cannot stand on its own, yet must set its own path.

> Nobody now proposes for the South, or for any other community in this
> country, an independent political destiny. That idea is thought to have
> been finished in 1865. But how far shall the South surrender its moral,
> social and economic autonomy to the victorious Union? The South is a
> minority section that has hitherto been jealous of its minority right to live
> its own kind of life. The South scarcely hopes to determine the other
> sections, but it does propose to determine itself. (Davidson, et al. xlii)

With this in mind, Caldwell willingness to sell out his region to the wool-suited Wall Street

denizens would be understandably vexing. The image of a treacherous Southerner willing to

profit off what Northerners desired was a common insult that the Agrarians hurled at some of

their critics. Donald Davidson records how a debate between John Crowe Ransom and the

delightfully named Stringfellow "Winkie" Barr over the merits of *I'll Take My Stand* became

personal when Ransom accused Barr, a Virginia native, historian, and soon-to-be editor of the

Virginia Quarterly Review, of using Southern heritage and tradition as "a gardenia to stick in his

buttonhole when he goes traveling in New York" (Davidson, *Southern Writers in the Modern*

World 49) Yet, despite this seemingly sectionalist paranoia, the Agrarians understood the need

for the nation because they wanted to be able to spread their ideology to others who were

sympathetic with an eye on turning regional ideology into national power. As they write,

> There are many other minority communities opposed to industrialism and
> wanting a much simpler economy to live by. The communities and private
> persons sharing the agrarian tastes are to be found widely within the
> Union. Proper living is a matter of the intelligence and the will, does not
> depend on the local climate or geography, and is capable of a definition
> which is general and not Southern at all. Southerners have a filial duty to
> discharge to their own section. But their cause is precarious and they must
> seek alliances with sympathetic communities everywhere. The members
> of the present group would be happy to be counted as members of a
> national agrarian movement. (Davidson et, al. xliii)

Once again, this simultaneous national membership and sectionalism suggests a double

positioning in which the region is both a part of the national body and separate from it which

necessitates the use of a transnational lens through which identity and autonomy are formed

through the resistance to outside powers. Donald Davidson later put the terms of the struggle in

transnational terms, which highlight a global gaze and a struggle to define "civilization":

> The South had fought in a good cause, but the world could always be
> made to think it fought for the wrong reasons. We did not want to make
> that mistake again…The conflict crossed sectional lines, and was nation-
> wide. It was in fact world-wide.…I believe we would now be justified in
> defining the so-called Agrarian Movement not only in terms of its first
> gropings and tentative beginning, but also in terms of its ultimate broader
> direction and general fruitfulness of application. For brevity, I might call it
> the cause of civilized society, as we have known it in the Western World,
> against the new barbarism of science and technology controlled and
> directed by the modern power state. In this sense, the cause of the South
> was and is the cause of Western civilization itself. (Davidson, *Southern*
> *Writers in the Modern World* 44-45)

Indeed, this sense of resistance is essential to the Agrarian project because, more than anything, it is defined by what it is not, rather than what it is. As Davidson notes, it stands opposed to the savagery and "barbarism" of the modern industrial world. The book's statement of principles goes to great lengths to establish a binary where industrialism is the hegemonic norm of American society and agrarianism is its antithesis, and perhaps cure. The argument details that status-quo industrialism is corruptive physically through the disruption of the subject's joy they receive through "good labor;" environmentally through the concentration on the scientific and use of machinery to circumvent the subject's relationship with the land; temporally through the ceding of the individual subject's agency to the rhythms of industry; socially through the minimization of what they refer to as "right relations of man-to-man," which they define as being characterized by "such practices as manners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life, romantic love -- … the social exchanges which reveal and develop sensibility in human affairs" (Davidson, et al. xlvii) and historically through the imposition of a teleology of progress that has no end goal (xlviii).

In reinforcing this binary of a normative hegemonic nation predicated on industrialism and a transgressive Southern region defined by agrarianism the writers affirm that those aspects of agrarianism which stand in opposition to the national norm have become abject. In the minds of the Agrarians, the values which they wish to enact as material reality are transformed by the industrial nation into symbols of backwards provincialism which must be expelled for an industrial national body to fully self-actualize. At the same time, the language and rhetoric of the Agrarians argue that those very aspects of the Southern arcadia that are rejected are, in fact, the healthy body of the nation and that their obverses are, in fact, the abject of reality. This double-

sided rejection has the ironic result of tying the region and the nation together as they require each other to articulate their ideologies.

As such, for all their differences, Caldwell and the Agrarians, as well as Jean Toomer, and the writers of the Lost Cause, are ultimately taking part in the same project of reaffiliation. The only difference seems to be the quality of those aspects of society which are considered abject. We see in Toomer and Caldwell, a clueless national body who does not know the depths of sickness, but whose emesis reveals the details of its illness. In the Agrarians we see a national body so twisted and sick that it vomits those aspects that would heal it.

But while the abject's inherently affiliative nature casts these authors into a national conversation rather than just a regional one, the deployment of the abject is neither neutral, nor designed to support a national ideological status quo. In fact, the abject heterotopia of the South gives a geographical space in which alternative and hither to excluded ideologies can coalesce and build the power through which they can speak back to national hegemony and attempt to shift the definition of the national body and its direction. As such, the abject region brims with potential energy and power as it focuses on revealing ruptures in an assumed shared identity and, as a result, dispels hegemonies which might snuff out any alternative formulations.

In this dissertation, I have discussed the way the Southern abject heterotopia has been used as a laboratory to disrupt three of the modes of national hegemony that were developing and formalizing at the beginning of the twentieth century. These realms, the objective, the social, and historical, represent forms of identity production which, when challenged, dismantle the hegemonic impermeability of the national body and allows for the emergence of new national narratives and values that can take the nation in new directions.

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