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Plantation America: the US South and the Caribbean in the literary culture of empire, 1898-1959

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Dissertation

**PLANTATION AMERICA: THE US SOUTH AND THE CARIBBEAN IN THE
LITERARY CULTURE OF EMPIRE, 1898-1959**

by

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To my parents and sister.

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ABSTRACT

The American plantation system, far from an idiosyncrasy of the southern United States, was a transnational formation that spread across the US South, the Caribbean, and parts of Latin America, forming a cross-border cultural sphere often called “Plantation America.” How have US and Caribbean writers understood the United States’ relationship to this broader landscape through its most alienated region, the South? And how did the South’s ties to the plantation zone impact how writers imagined the United States as an emerging global empire in the twentieth century? “Plantation America: the US South and the Caribbean in the Literary Culture of Empire, 1898-1959,” explores works by white American, African American, and Black Caribbean writers produced during a period of heightened US colonial intervention in the Americas, from the Spanish-American War of 1898 to the Cuban Revolution of 1959. It contributes to recent US-based scholarship on the plantation origins of Western modernity and draws on an older Black and Caribbean critical discourse on the plantation as a prototypically modern institution. Building on this scholarship, this project demonstrates that US expansion southward prompted writers to reckon with the South’s highly ambivalent relationship with Plantation America, and that doing so served as a fault line for deeply held anxieties over the modern United States’

indebtedness to the plantation complex and its creolized cultural legacies. Its chapters thus show how US empire provoked modern writers to respond to the plantation as a driver of racial capitalism and industrialized labor systems, a blueprint for modern empires, a key site for the emergence and repression of cross-culturality, and a root source for traumatic forms of psychic and spiritual alienation associated with modern subjecthood. Through the lens of Caribbean critical theory, including work by Édouard Glissant, Fernando Ortiz, and C. L. R. James, I examine Richard Wright's postplantation perspective in his little studied Haitian manuscript, transculturation in Ernest Hemingway's Key West and Cuban works, the modern plantation empire in stories of the Panama Canal Zone by the Caribbean-born writer Eric Walrond, and William Faulkner's transnational plantation economy in *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*.

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Introduction: A “Modern System”

In his 2008 essay, “Creolization in the Making of the Americas,” Édouard Glissant begins by noting that within the American landscape is a “‘civilizational region,’ real but long unnoticed” that is loosely held together by a common historical investment in the “plantation system.”¹ Glissant’s emphasis on the slave plantation builds on a long line of Caribbean thinkers, from C. L. R. James to Sylvia Wynter, who understand it as the historical center of the wider Caribbean. Indeed, while dominant US narratives figure it as a “peculiar” idiosyncrasy of the southern United States, the American plantation system was a dominant transnational formation that spread across the Caribbean, parts of Latin America, and the US South, forming a cross-border cultural sphere that Glissant and others have called “Plantation America.”² How have US and Caribbean writers understood the United States’ relationship with this broader zone through its most alienated region, the South? And how did the South’s ties to the plantation system of the extended Caribbean impact how writers imagined the United States as an emerging global empire in the early twentieth century? “Plantation America: the US South and the Caribbean in the Literary Culture of Empire, 1898-1959,” explores works by white American, African American, and Black Caribbean writers produced during a period of heightened US military and corporate colonial intervention in the Western hemisphere, from the Spanish-American War of 1898 to the Cuban Revolution of 1959. It demonstrates that US colonial expansion southward often

¹ Édouard Glissant, “Creolization in the Making of the Americas,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 54, no. 1-2 (March-June 2008): 81.

² Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 115-16, note 1. See also Charles Wagley, “Plantation-America: A Culture Sphere” in *Caribbean Studies: A Symposium*, ed. Vera Rubin (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1957).

prompted writers to reckon with the South's highly ambivalent relationship with the rest of Plantation America, and that doing so served as a fault line for deeply held anxieties over the modern United States' historical and ongoing indebtedness to a transnational plantation system and the creolized cultures that emerged from it. Through the lens of Caribbean critical theory, including work by Glissant, Fernando Ortiz, and C. L. R. James, I examine Richard Wright's postplantation perspective in his little studied Haitian manuscript, transculturation in Ernest Hemingway's Key West and Cuban works, the modern plantation empire in short stories of the Panama Canal Zone by the Caribbean-born writer Eric Walrond and, finally, William Faulkner's transnational plantation economy in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930).

That the ascension of the modern US empire provoked these writers to glance back at the ostensibly vanquished history of the plantation South represents no contradiction, as more and more scholarship is showing. In considering how Wright, Hemingway, Walrond, and Faulkner grappled with the modern United States' relationship with Plantation America, this project builds on recent US-based scholarship on the plantation origins of Western modernity and draws on an older Black and Caribbean critical discourse on the plantation as an essentially modern institution. New work in Southern Studies and on the history of capitalism has challenged dominant understandings of slavery's relationship to the modern world. The traditional view in Western historiography that slavery represented an archaic institution that gave way in the face of modern economic forces is being overturned by scholarship that positions the slave plantation as the long-denied origin of capitalist modernity. In *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (2016), for example, historians Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman consider a growing body of scholarship

in US economic history that fundamentally re-evaluates both the US past and the broader history of capitalism itself by showing how US Northern industrialization cannot be understood apart from the growth of plantation slavery in the South.³ Concurrent work in Southern Studies has shared a similar focus. A 2016 special issue of *The Global South*, for example, addressed the plantation as “a force not marginal but rather central to the concept of modernity,” with essays that accounted for the plantation’s influence on the present as well as its essentially modern characteristics even as it existed in centuries past.⁴ A 2019 essay by Natalie Aikens, Amy Clukey, Amy K. King, and Isadora Wagner, meanwhile, called on Southern Studies to lead investigation into the Plantationocene, a model that “place[s] *plantation* not only at the heart of Western modernity, but also conceive[s] of it as a central engine of capitalism, empire, industrialization, ecological destruction, geological change, and climate change.”⁵

Yet, while this work represents a relatively recent theme within dominant, US-based criticism, the plantation system has long served as a central topos in Black and Caribbean critical traditions, where it has always been a signifier of modernity. C. L. R. James, for example, considered the plantation the “dominant industrial structure” of the Caribbean and famously figured it as the prototypical “modern system” for industrialized production and labor management in the 1963 Appendix to his history of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black*

³ Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, introduction to *Slavery’s Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*, eds. Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 27.

⁴ Amy Clukey and Jeremy Wells, eds, “Plantation Modernity,” Special Issue, *The Global South* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2016), 3.

⁵ Natalie Aikens et al., “South to the Plantationocene,” *ASAP/J*, October 17, 2019, <http://asapjournal.com/south-to-the-plantationocene-natalie-aikens-amy-clukey-amy-k-king-and-isadora-wagner/>

Jacobins (1938).⁶ Enslaved workers in Haiti, James wrote in *Jacobins*, “working and living together in gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar-factories which covered the North Plain...were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time.”⁷ These “sugar-factories,” James proposed, were sites of modern subject formation, where an enslaved workforce encountered methods of production and management that closely resembled the industrial capitalist systems of Fordism and Taylorism.⁸ The point was not to suggest an equivalence between the labor conditions of enslaved workers in Haiti and those of an emerging industrial working class, but rather to show that the former preceded and set the foundation for the latter. Blurring distinctions between the “traditional” plantation and the “modern” factory, James inaugurated a critical discourse that would come to see the plantation as essential to the formation of the modern global economy as opposed to an anachronism within it. Eric Williams, James’ one-time student, further elaborated the intervention in *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) in which he wrote that slavery “produced the cotton to serve as a base for modern capitalism” and argued that Britain’s Industrial Revolution had depended on slave labor in Caribbean colonies, much as James had argued that plantation slavery financed the French Revolution.⁹

In the United States, meanwhile, W. E. B. Du Bois was making similar arguments.

Cedric Robinson observes that in *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), “DuBois would insist

⁶ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Overture and the San Domingo Revolution*. Second Edition, Revised (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 405, 392.

⁷ James, *Black Jacobins*, 85-86.

⁸ On James and the plantation as a forerunner of industrial capitalist systems, see Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Sound of Culture: Diaspora and Black Technopoetics* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2016), 36-37.

⁹ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 5. James writes, “The slave-trade and slavery were the economic basis of the French Revolution.” James, *Black Jacobins*, 47. On the parallel between arguments by James and Williams, see also Laurent Dubois, “Reading *The Black Jacobins* Seven Decades Later,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 42, iss. 2 (March/April, 2009), 39-40.

on the world historical significance of American slavery in the emergence of modern capitalism and imperialism.”¹⁰ As Du Bois writes in his opening chapter, “The Black Worker,” “Black labor became the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of European commerce, of buying and selling on a world-wide scale.”¹¹ These insights corresponded with those of the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz, whose 1940 masterwork, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, held that whereas tobacco in Cuban history was tied to white labor and the small farm, sugar production meant the plantation, Black labor, mass production, and the development of capitalism. The slave plantation, according to Ortiz, laid the groundwork for the modern industrial economic order in Cuba where, “The bell that rang for the slaves in the mill yard...was replaced by the steam whistle that now calls the workers with its ear-piercing note, like the whistle of an inhuman steel overseer.”¹²

More recently, in a book he dedicated to Ortiz, Antonio Benítez-Rojo also understands the plantation as the historical basis for the political and economic power of the Atlantic world, which he calls “the painfully delivered child of the Caribbean.”¹³ Indeed, we can see the traces of James’ and Du Bois’ ideas in the global historical significance that Benítez-Rojo attributes to his expanded concept of the “plantation machine,” “whose flux, whose noise, whose presence covers the map of world history’s contingencies, through the great changes in economic discourse to the vast collisions of races and cultures that

¹⁰ Cedric Robinson, “A Critique of W.E.B. Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction*” *The Black Scholar* 8, no.7 (May 1977), 45.

¹¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Russel and Russel, Inc. 1962), 5.

¹² Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet De Onís (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 36- 37.

¹³ Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, second edition, trans. James E. Maraniss (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.

humankind has seen.”¹⁴ As Benítez-Rojo’s description suggests, even as this discourse positions the plantation as the origin point of racial capitalism, it also stresses the plantation’s central role for quintessentially modern forms of cross-cultural contact. Ortiz had argued, in *Cuban Counterpoint*, not only that the demands of sugar production created the modern, capitalist economic order in Cuba, but also that the cross-cultural processes emerging out of the plantation, which he dubbed “transculturation,” were “fundamental and indispensable” for any historical understanding of “America in general.”¹⁵ Resisting what he called the “Anglo-American” concept of *acculturation* and its implicit ethnocentrism and colonial undertones, Ortiz emphasized the “creation of new cultural phenomena” resulting from the cultural convergences of Cuba’s plantation history. Indeed, similar to Ortiz, Glissant insists that though “Airtight seals were apparently the rule of the Plantation,” such “tight social barrier[s]” could not “prevent contaminations,” and that it is in these creolized cross-cultural “contaminations” that we find the genesis of modern cultures.¹⁶ “[T]he Plantation,” Glissant writes, “is one of the focal points for the development of present-day modes of Relation...In this outmoded spot, on the margins of every dynamic, the tendencies of our modernity begin to be detectable.”¹⁷

The plantation origins of modernity, these critics show, both fasten the Western world’s economic and political power to the denied history of racial slavery and tie its dominant cultures to the fiercely suppressed forces of creolization. Drawing on these insights, I examine how Wright, Hemingway, Walrond, and Faulkner confronted, and at

¹⁴ Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 5.

¹⁵ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 103.

¹⁶ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 65, 67.

¹⁷ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 65.

times evaded, this plantation-derived modernity during the full emergence of the US global empire, when United States expansion into the Western hemisphere brought the South's complex enmeshment with Plantation America to the surface. Indeed, this project builds on scholarship showing the South's highly conflicted position within the US empire. If, as Sylvia Wynter has argued, the central feature of Caribbean history is the "ambivalence" emerging out of its experiences of plantation colonialism, the US South occupies a similarly split position, both nationally and globally, as a region simultaneously recruited and exploited, beckoned and repressed by an empire that refuses to acknowledge its dependence upon it.¹⁸ Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn have written that the South suffers an "uncanny hybridity" as "a space simultaneously (or alternately) center and margin, victor and defeated, empire and colony" given its belonging to the United States, but also its own experiences of colonization and its history of plantation slavery, which bind it to the "alien" landscapes of the Caribbean and Latin America.¹⁹ As Southern Studies work in US literature and culture has elucidated, US nationalism developed in concert with the construction of Southern alterity. Leigh Anne Duck, for example, has argued that the image of Southern "backwardness," provided a useful trope against which the United States could maintain its liberal self-conception in the midst of racial apartheid.²⁰ Jennifer Rae Greeson has similarly argued that the formation of US nationalism depended upon the South as "an *internal other* for the nation, an intrinsic part of the national body that nonetheless is differentiated and held apart from the whole."²¹

¹⁸ Sylvia Wynter, "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," *Savacou* 5 (1971): 99.

¹⁹ Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn, introduction to *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies*, eds. Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 9.

²⁰ Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006).

²¹ Jennifer Rae Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1.

Harilaos Stecopoulos, meanwhile, argues that the South's foreign, un-American status within the national consciousness illustrates how the failures of Reconstruction associate the South with other colonial sites subjected to the dubious promises of US modernization.²² The South's split position as the United States' "internal other" is well illustrated by its ambiguous position with respect to US "New World" colonialism. While, on the one hand, the Southern plantation model has been at the vanguard of the US colonial regime, on the other, the South's own semi-colonial status as a region defined in the national imagination by a history of racial slavery, military defeat, and chronic economic "backwardness," has meant that the South often resembled a Caribbean colony even as it sought to colonize the Caribbean.

The following chapters thus draw on a variety of materials -- including literary fiction, correspondence, an unpublished manuscript, primary historical documents, and literary and historical scholarship -- to establish two central and interconnected claims. First, this project shows that US colonialism into the Western hemisphere compelled US and Caribbean writers to contend with the South's deeply ambivalent relationship with Plantation America, given its divided position as symbol of both empire and colony. Walrond's *Tropic Death*, for example, stresses the Southern framework of US colonial power. However, in writings by Wright, Hemingway, and Faulkner, by contrast, the US Caribbean empire provides a screen against which Southerners, Black and white, attempt to understand and guard against their own varied experiences of colonization, both real and imagined. Such a dynamic, while it operates differently in the works of each writer, serves to challenge US

²² Harilaos Stecopoulos, *Reconstructing the World: Southern Fictions and U.S. Imperialisms, 1898-1976* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

exceptionalist narratives of cultural and historical purity by divulging the United States' complicated entanglement with the plantation zone of the wider Caribbean.

This leads us to the project's second central claim, which is that in prompting these writers to consider the relationship between the South and the Caribbean, US colonial expansion into Plantation America triggered an array of doubts and disturbances regarding US modernity in light of its reliance on plantation forms. As the Caribbean discourse on the modern plantation suggests, it is precisely because the plantation zone so thoroughly undergirded the rise of Western empires that it is so thoroughly repudiated in honor of the West's modern self-image. In the following chapters, I show that for Wright, Hemingway, Walrond, and Faulkner, US expansion into the Caribbean surfaced this repressed dependence on the plantation. My chapters thus demonstrate how US empire provoked modern writers to respond to the plantation not just as a physical institution, but as a collection of ideas and practices that have structured, for example, the development of racial capitalism and industrial labor systems, the emergence of modern empires, the growth and repression of cross-culturality, and the evolution of traumatic forms of psychic and spiritual alienation associated with modern subject formation.²³

When, for example, we take seriously Hemingway's engagement with the plantation region in Florida and Cuba and view his work through a Caribbean critical lens, the themes of psychic trauma famously associated with this quintessential white American writer appear in his work as symptomatic of racial slavery's modern legacies. When, to take another

²³ Here I am drawing on Aikens et al., who write, "*plantation* isn't just a material institution that has led to the planetary catastrophes of the Plantationocene; it's also a set of ideas, archives, ideologies, and, most important for our purposes as literary and cultural critics, narratives. Ideologies of the plantation fundamentally shape history, economics, and ecologies on a planetary scale, and they also fundamentally shape how human beings relate to each other and to the natural world." See Aikens, et al., "South to the Plantationocene."

example, we understand with the help of C. L. R. James and others that the slave plantation represented a major forerunner for modern labor regimes, we can see how Walrond's depictions of industrialized Black labor render the Panama Canal Zone as a modern plantation. Indeed, guided by the Caribbean discourse and by more contemporary critics, particularly Michelle Stephens, the following chapters explore how writers located the sources of modern trauma not in the metropolitan settings of colonial centers, or on the European battlefields of World War I, but rather in the plantation landscapes of the Deep South and the extended Caribbean.²⁴ This historical and geographic reorientation away from the colonial center and toward Plantation America also has implications for how we understand these writers' experimentations with literary form. In my third chapter, for instance, I argue that Walrond's fragmented prose style and surreal imagery should be understood as his attempt to give expression to forms of cross-culturality that exceed methods of labor management first developed on the slave plantation. Likewise, in my fourth chapter, I argue that Faulkner's stream of consciousness style in *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury* acts, in the case of Darl Bundren, for example, as a response to the linear routinizations of plantation-derived labor systems. With such arguments, I hope to show that the more we understand with help from Du Bois, James, Ortiz, and others, how slavery made the modern world, the more we will see how the central formal as well as thematic problems found in these modern writers' works respond to historical forces set in motion by the slave-based plantation complex. Indeed, in the following chapters, I hope to

²⁴ Michelle Stephens, "Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death* and the Discontents of American Modernity," in *Prospero's Isles: The Presence of the Caribbean in the American Imaginary*, eds. Diane Accaria-Zavala and Rodolfo Popelnik (Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean, 2004).

show that US colonial expansion into Plantation America caused Wright, Hemingway, Walrond, and Faulkner to unearth in their writings, at times unintentionally, the buried plantation foundations of US modernity, just as it prepared to launch into the so-called “American Century.”

Chapter One, “Richard Wright’s Haitian *Detour*: Caribbean Radicalism, US Empire, and the Journey from Deep South to Global South,” examines Wright’s manuscript from a trip he took to Haiti in 1950. While never finished, and largely neglected by scholars, the manuscript is Wright’s first attempt to go beyond the American scene and it represents a crucial step for his intellectual shift toward a de-nationalized, cosmopolitan orientation that understood Black US Southern experiences as part of a broader postcolonial narrative. Indeed, in visiting Haiti Wright followed a long tradition of African American writers who developed an international frame of reference in part through their travels to Haiti, from Frederick Douglass in the nineteenth century, to James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston in the twentieth.

Wright traveled to Haiti during a critical period in the nation’s political history that followed its occupation by the United States from 1915 to 1934, and his notes must be contextualized within this political moment. Employing Édouard Glissant’s concept of “detour,” this chapter shows that for Wright, who was born on a plantation in Mississippi, Haiti’s efforts to transform its plantation-based economy in the years following the occupation allowed him to re-envision possible futures for his own native land. Wright’s notes from his time in Haiti show him re-encountering key problematics within his early Southern writings, including his attention to the sharecropper system, his search for effective responses to racial conflict, and his representations of women in relation to struggles for

Black liberation. Appearing in his notes on Haiti, these themes show Wright indirectly and unexpectedly returning to the US South by traveling to a different plantation society abroad. And in contrast to the emphasis on determinism and male perspectives in Wright's earlier Southern fiction, in the Haitian manuscript we see that as Wright moved away from a nationalist perspective, he more readily began to explore human agency and gender equity as constituent elements of his vision for a postcolonial, postplantation modernity. If, as Farah Jasmine Griffin argues, Wright's Southern texts of the 1930s and 1940s offer "no indication that the South holds any possibility or redemptive value," Haiti's changing social structures following the US occupation provided Wright with the sense of possibility and postcolonial renewal that he found lacking in the South.²⁵

Wright's Caribbean migration thereby enabled him to reconsider the South's apparently intractable conflicts through a tactic of "detour," which allowed him to indirectly address the South by looking to what Glissant calls "the landscape of a zone shared elsewhere." Indeed, as Glissant describes it, Wright's manuscript represents "a trickster strategy *to find another place*: that is, in these circumstances, to link a possible solution of the insoluble to the resolution other peoples have achieved."²⁶

Chapter Two, "Hemingway's Hemispheric South: Transculturation, White Grievance, and Failed Affiliation in *To Have and Have Not*," focuses on Hemingway's 1937 novel set in Depression-era Key West and Havana, *To Have and Have Not*. Here, I frame my reading with work by the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz, given that Hemingway kept a

²⁵ Farah Jasmine Griffin, *"Who Set You Flowin'?: The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 37.

²⁶ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 26, 23.

translation of Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint Tobacco and Sugar* (1940) at his home in San Francisco de Paula, Cuba. A foundational figure for Cuban Studies, Ortiz is perhaps best known for introducing the term *transculturation* to describe the "creation of new cultural phenomena" arising out of Cuba's plantation history.²⁷ Drawing on Ortiz, in this chapter I hope to show that while matters of cross-cultural contact, race, and empire are themes not traditionally associated with his oeuvre, Hemingway's time in Plantation America led to a deep preoccupation with the racial and colonial legacies of the Caribbean and the US South, and that these legacies appear as original sources of modern trauma in his fiction.

Ralph Ellison once wrote, "Although it is seldom mentioned, Hemingway is as obsessed with the Civil War and its aftermath as any Southern writer, and this fact turns up constantly in his work."²⁸ With Ellison's provocative claim in mind, the first section of this chapter works to situate Hemingway within the American plantation zone, calling particular attention to his importance to Black Southern and Black Caribbean writers including Ralph Ellison and Derek Walcott, and his connections to the Cuban avant-garde and the *Afrocubanismo* movement through such writers as Alejo Carpentier and Nicolás Guillén.

I then turn to *To Have and Have Not*, examining its white, working-class, and Southern protagonist, Harry Morgan, and his interactions with the novel's other "have nots" including Cuban revolutionaries, Black Caribbean fishermen, Chinese immigrants, and African American smugglers. I show that like Ortiz's *transculturation*, Harry's cross-cultural encounters both threaten his racial and colonial status and gesture toward the potential

²⁷ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 103.

²⁸ Ralph Ellison, "Society, Morality, and the Novel," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 709.

creation of new social structures. We see such possibility, for example, in the vacillating attention Harry and the Black crewman, Wesley, give to each other's injuries, which, I propose, stand in for older, historical wounds of racial violence. Similarly, in *The Old Man and the Sea*, I draw attention to Santiago's competition with "the great negro from Cienfuegos" which, serving as a mirror for Santiago's relationship with the marlin, reveals both the potential for racial reciprocity and Santiago's failure of racialized individualism. These gestures toward affiliation, though they ultimately represent failed possibilities, both locate the sources of modern trauma in racial slavery and point toward the potential for new cultural phenomena emerging out of the plantation's legacy.

My next chapter, "The Modern Plantation Empire and Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death*" examines how writings by the Caribbean-born author, Eric Walrond, both understand and attempt to overcome the plantation framework of the modern US empire. Born in British Guiana in 1898, Walrond lived in Barbados and the Panama Canal Zone before moving to New York City in 1918 where he fell in with Harlem's literary scene and published a collection of short stories set in the Caribbean called *Tropic Death* (1926). Frequently compared to Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), *Tropic Death* placed Walrond at the center of the New Negro movement for its modernist portrait of a Caribbean undergoing transformation during the US construction of the Panama Canal. Although he died in obscurity after failing to produce another book, his work has received more critical attention in recent years for its

immigrant, anticolonial perspective and its challenge to monolithic visions of the African diaspora.²⁹

But if Walrond's strength, as these critics assert, is his sensitivity to the multiplicity of "New World" Black cultures and experiences, this focus stems at least in part from a desire to counter a US empire fundamentally indebted to Southern plantation codes. Throughout Walrond's work, marines and policemen as well as corporate executives and managers representing the American empire in the Caribbean hail from the US South. In *Tropic Death* and his later writings, moreover, Walrond emphasizes the US empire's reliance on Black labor and racialized labor management practices. Indeed, like the images of an industrialized Black workforce in Walrond's Canal Zone stories, the subtext of labor management in Walrond's fiction evokes a modern plantation, particularly when we understand that these modern, corporate colonial practices derived from labor management methods first employed on the slave plantation.

Situating Walrond's fiction within the Caribbean critical discourse on plantation modernity, this chapter shows how Walrond's fiction contributes to a revisionist historical narrative in which the plantation lies as the forefront of modernization, as opposed to its receiving end, as a transnational, technological, scientific, and essentially capitalist institution. Viewed from this perspective, Walrond's depictions of Black workers in the Panama Canal Zone -- deracinated, atomized, and regimented according to racialized labor control strategies -- serve as both a critique of the plantation system and as an affirmation of the

²⁹ See, for example, Louis Chude-Sokei, "Foreign Negro Flash Agents: Eric Walrond and the Discrepancies of Diaspora," in *Eric Walrond: The Critical Heritage*, eds. Louis J. Parascandola and Carl A. Wade (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2012).

humanity of Black Caribbean workers, as modern subjects central to the making of the modern world. Indeed, Walrond seeks to both express and exceed the pressures of the modern plantation empire. Returning again to the Caribbean tradition, particularly work by Édouard Glissant and Sylvia Wynter, this chapter shows that Walrond's style, more than an attempt to render plantation conditions, represents his efforts to overcome the constraints of plantation management and to give expression to a cross-culturality that the plantation unintentionally produces and then cannot adequately contain.

Finally, in "William Faulkner's Transnational Plantation Economy," I read Faulkner's poor white Bundrens of *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and the declining Compson family of *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) through the historical lens provided by W. E. B. Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935). Whereas a Southern Agrarian view understands these families as victims of an invading modernization originating in the US North, this denies the white South's role in producing its own undoing. If slavery made the modern world, as Du Bois asserts in *Black Reconstruction*, then the Bundrens and the Compsons set in motion during the nineteenth century the forces that would turn back against them in the twentieth. Read through Du Bois, these texts bring into focus the modern United States' transnational plantation economy, which spreads across parts of the South, the Caribbean, and Latin America, and which now loops back against the white classes that continually enable and endorse it.

The chapter begins by reading Darl Bundren's WWI experience through Du Bois' argument that the racialized "system of industry" leading to WWI emerged out of the slave plantation. Rather than a root cause of his trauma, Darl's wartime experiences actually mediate an earlier disturbance represented by the modern plantation "wasteland" before

him. If Walrond's style defies plantation constraints, Faulkner's stream of consciousness technique in Darl's section similarly diverges from the physical and psychological regimentations of plantation-based labor systems. I then turn to the recurring symbol of the banana, a corporate plantation commodity, which illustrates the Bundrens' position within the hemispheric plantation system that poor white Southerners underwrote even as it exploited them. Like Addie Bundren's corpse and its delayed interment, Faulkner's Bundrens represent an unwelcome reminder of US modernity's repressed reliance on plantation regimes.

Turning to *The Sound and the Fury*, I begin by noting that the novel's symbols of Northern power are tied to the US corporate empire in the Caribbean, Wall Street to Nicaragua and the Northern banker, Sydney Herbert Head, to Cuba. Read through Du Bois, the Compsons' decline stems from the slave labor foundations of US imperial wealth, which now turns against the planter classes that helped to generate it. Jason Compson, for example, rails against the corporate empire represented by Wall Street, but denies his own family's role in fueling, through slavery, New York's rise as a financial giant. Quentin Compson likewise faces the US empire's plantation economy in bankers like Head and his Havana cigar, but also in Northern centers of US economic and political power, like Harvard and Boston, that cannot be uncoupled from their historic ties to slavery. Unlike Jason, however, Quentin senses his family's role in their own demise. His famous associations to "Mississippi or Massachusetts" on the day of his suicide, for instance, indicate that Quentin's alienation stems from the intimate relationship between the Southern plantation and Northern industry, his family's slaveholding past, and the United States' emerging status as a global economic hegemon. Indeed, if Quentin, like Darl, suffers modern anxieties and discontent, I

hope to show how Faulkner finds the origins of these disturbances in the slaveholding South, and thus figures the plantation not only as a foundation for the modern United States' economic and political power, but also as a root source of psychic crisis.

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1. **Richard Wright's Haitian *Detour*: Caribbean Radicalism, US Empire, and the Journey from Deep South to Global South**

In 1950, Richard Wright traveled to Haiti with plans to collect material for his first travel journal.¹ His unfinished notes from his time there have received little attention from scholars despite the growing interest in his travel writings.² Perhaps this is because Wright's trip to Haiti has the appearance of a minor episode in the author's life compared to his later travels in Africa and Asia, which resulted in published works. Such an interpretation overlooks the larger context of Wright's Haitian trip. Wright had a longstanding relationship with the Caribbean – formed mainly through his friendships with Caribbean writers and intellectuals – that began early in his career and lasted until the end of his life in 1960. Wright's time in Haiti was an outgrowth of his friendships and collaborations with C. L. R. James, Aimé Césaire, George Padmore, and other Caribbean thinkers, who had a profound influence on the author's intellectual development. This Caribbean influence often goes unacknowledged in accounts of Wright's internationalism during the latter period of his career.

Wright's trip to Haiti represented a crucial step for his emerging interest in Black international and anticolonial perspectives, which allowed him to recast his Southern background within a more global, transnational frame. Alongside the influence of Caribbean radicalism, which arose partly in response to the US occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934,

¹ Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, trans. Isabel Barzun, second edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 351.

² For interest in Wright's travel writings, see Virginia Whatley Smith, ed., *Richard Wright's Travel Writings: New Reflections* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001). For the only analysis I have found of Wright's unfinished travel journal on Haiti see, Jeff Karem, *The Purloined Islands: Caribbean-U.S. Crosscurrents in Literature and Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

Wright's time in Haiti during the wake of that occupation contributed to his consciousness of the US South's relatedness to colonial and plantation societies abroad, prompting him to connect his experiences in the Deep South to the experiences of colonized peoples in the Global South. Examining the Caribbean aspect of Wright's career expands our understanding of the transnational influences shaping this American author. More specifically, it reveals the impact of US imperial expansion on Wright's intellectual shift toward a de-nationalized, cosmopolitan orientation that understood Black US southern experiences as part of a broader postcolonial narrative.

Wright's manuscript from his time in post-US occupation Haiti represents a transitional text linking Wright's depictions of the US South with his later examination of decolonization in Africa. In its attention to sharecropping, a marginalized Black peasant class, and racial conflict, the Haitian manuscript resonates with Wright's early Southern texts including *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), *12 Million Black Voices* (1941), and *Black Boy* (1945), while its focus on the uncertainties of Haiti's postcolonial moment following the US occupation anticipates Wright's investigation of Ghana's independence movement in *Black Power* (1954). The text thus speaks to Haiti's critical role for Wright's integration of African American experiences within global Black and postcolonial politics. Indeed, in visiting Haiti Wright followed a long tradition of African American writers who developed a transnational frame of reference in part through their travels to Haiti, from Frederick Douglass in the nineteenth century, to James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston in the twentieth.

However, while the intersections between Wright's thinking on the US South, the Caribbean, and Africa, show his interest in diasporic politics, Wright's relationship to Black

internationalism was never simple. Wright's anti-essentialist stance was deeply skeptical of solidarities formed on the basis of race. He preferred instead to articulate collectivity in terms of shared historical and political experiences.³ The complexity of Wright's relationship with diasporic and postcolonial politics, however, was not due solely to his anti-essentialism. Wright's Haitian manuscript shows that while he worked to establish links between Haiti and the US South, that project was complicated by his incredulous attitude toward Haitian folk culture as a potential barrier to modernity. Jeff Karem observes that Wright's perspective on folk culture in Haiti mirrors his response to Black American folk forms in the US South.⁴ I would add that it also anticipates his reaction to traditional cultural practices in *Black Power*. Wright's skepticism in the manuscript towards folk cultures illustrates his ambivalence about Haiti. The time Wright spent in Haiti clearly represented an advancement of his efforts to break out of a narrow American scene. Yet, Wright's notes on Haiti also reveal his hesitancy to fully identify with a society that, in his eyes, so closely resembled the South he had escaped.

To be sure, Wright's Haitian manuscript and its correspondences with his Southern writings and *Black Power* show how the South haunted Wright's turn toward a global perspective as the diasporic zones that he encountered were often troubled by their

³ The first chapter of *Black Power* provides a clear example of Wright's skepticism about racial community. Anticipating his trip, Wright asks, "Being of African descent, would I be able to feel and know something about Africa on the basis of a common 'racial' heritage? Africa was a vast continent full of 'my people'...Or had three hundred years imposed a psychological distance between me and the 'racial stock' from which I had sprung?" As Richard King writes, "Wright – like Franklin Frazier – shied away from romantic racialist claims to deep spiritual or cultural affinities among people of color." Richard Wright, *Black Power: Three Books from Exile: Black Power; The Color Curtain; and White Man, Listen!* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 18. Richard King, "Richard Wright: From the South to Africa – and Beyond," in *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies*, ed. Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 229.

⁴ Karem writes that in the Haitian manuscript, "Wright's conflicted perspective echoes his own description of his complex attitude toward the folk culture of Mississippi in his journal writings and in his poetic-ethnographic study *12 Million Black Voices* (1944)." Karem, *Purloined Islands*, 235.

association with the South in his mind. When Wright saw the South in the postcolonial world it produced a set of conflicted responses that resulted in an ambivalent global posture. At times, Wright's perception of the South abroad engendered a welcome sense of identification with the outside world that freed him from his intellectual seclusion within the US. At other times, however, especially when it came to Wright's encounter with Black folk cultures, the image of the South abroad was a less welcome, more intrusive presence that reproduced the alienation and estrangement Wright first experienced in Mississippi. In this way, the familiar, but also disconcerting South that Wright perceived first in Haiti and later Ghana led to an ambivalent internationalism that kept him from embracing uncritical forms of transnational solidarity and directed him instead to emphasize his critical perspective as a detached exile.⁵

The appearance of the South in Wright's Haitian manuscript shows one element binding his global migrations to his US experience. As Paul Gilroy writes, Wright's "enthusiasm for an emergent, global, anti-imperialist and anti-racist politics need not be seen as a simple substitute for [his] commitment to the struggles of blacks in America. He strives to link it with the black American vernacular in a number of ways."⁶ Édouard Glissant's concepts of "reversion" and "diversion," (also translated as "return" and "detour") can help us to understand how Wright's trip to Haiti allowed for new insights not only pertaining to the postcolonial scene abroad, but also to the US South.

⁵ For discussion of Wright's "exilic consciousness," see Cornel West, introduction to *Black Power: Three Books from Exile: Black Power; The Color Curtain; and White Man, Listen!*, by Richard Wright (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).

⁶ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 148.

Glissant identifies diversion as a strategic response to the historical experience of forced displacement among diasporic Blacks. In diversion, Glissant sees an alternative to the impulse for return to Africa, or reversion, which is characterized by “obsession with a single origin.”⁷ This response, Glissant writes, proves impossible when “memory of the ancestral country fades” with the difficult “need to come to terms with the new land.”⁸ Diversion, on the other hand, navigates through an indirect route the conflicted condition of being caught between the impossibility of return and the difficulty of facing the new environment and its unfronted challenges. Glissant writes,

Diversion is the ultimate resort of a population whose domination by an Other is concealed: it then must search *elsewhere* for the principle of domination, which is not evident in the country itself: because the system of domination (which is not only exploitation, which is not only misery, which is not only underdevelopment, but actually the complete eradication of an economic entity) is not directly tangible. Diversion is the parallax displacement of this strategy.⁹

For Glissant, diversion is exemplified by a long line of Caribbean intellectuals who have made various aesthetic and political investments in Africa. In the work of Marcus Garvey, Aimé Césaire, George Padmore, and Frantz Fanon, Glissant finds an attention to Africa that did not directly confront the problems of adaptation in the new land, but nevertheless “led us *somewhere*, authorizing by diversion the necessary return to the point where our problems lay in wait for us.”¹⁰ Their efforts to “illustrate and establish the landscape of a zone shared elsewhere,” Glissant argues, provide license to confront the conflicts of the new environment: “Diversion is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by reversion: not a return

⁷ Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 16.

⁸ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 18.

⁹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 20.

¹⁰ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 25.

to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away.”¹¹

Much of Wright’s life and work fall outside of Glissant’s models. Colonial conditions in the South and Martinique, which serves as the basis for Glissant’s thought, differed considerably and Wright addressed the South directly in his work throughout his career. However, as Brent Hayes Edwards writes, the benefit of Glissant’s concept of diversion is that it permits a rethinking of “simplistic models of expatriation and exile, working instead with a paradigm in which indirection can be functional – can indeed be strategically necessary in certain conditions.”¹² For Wright, Glissant’s diversion can help us to see how his migrations facilitated rather than precluded further confrontation with his own native land. At the broadest level, Wright’s perspective from Haiti enabled him to see the South’s interrelation with the postcolonial world, but more specifically, Wright’s notes on Haiti show him encountering again, at times with new insight, key problematics within his Southern writings, including his attention to sharecropping and systems of indenture, his search for effective responses to racial conflict, his representations of women in relation to struggles for Black liberation, and his attitude toward Black folk cultures. Appearing in his notes on Haiti, these themes show how in describing the “landscape of a zone shared elsewhere,” Wright’s travel to Haiti allowed him to indirectly return to the US South, which was his initial “point of entanglement.” If, as Farah Jasmine Griffin argues, Wright’s Southern texts of the 1930s and 1940s offer “no indication that the South holds any possibility or

¹¹ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 26.

¹² Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 23.

redemptive value,” Wright’s trip to Haiti allowed him to reconsider the apparently intractable conflicts of the South by confronting similar antagonisms in Haiti where changing social structures during the period following the US occupation provided a sense of possibility and postcolonial renewal.¹³ And in contrast to the emphasis on determinism and male perspectives in Wright’s earlier southern fiction, in the Haitian manuscript we see that as Wright moved away from a nationalist perspective, he more readily began to explore human agency and gender equity as constituent elements of his vision for a postcolonial, postplantation modernity. Wright’s Haitian diversion employed a tactic of looking elsewhere for possibility in response to the unyielding problems of the South. Or, as Glissant describes it, “a trickster strategy *to find another place*: that is, in these circumstances, to link a possible solution of the insoluble to the resolution other peoples have achieved.”¹⁴

This chapter is divided into three sections. Each explores a different dimension of how Haiti and the Caribbean came to influence Wright’s development. The first section situates the chapter within the critical literature on Wright’s internationalism and his attention to the Caribbean and the broader colonial world. The chapter then investigates Wright’s friendships with James, Césaire, and Padmore, paying special attention to their role in Wright’s emerging global perspective. Here, I focus on each of these writers’ engagement with Haiti in order to demonstrate the likelihood that Wright’s decision to travel to Haiti originated in these relationships. The third section shifts to an analysis of Wright’s Haitian manuscript where I focus on Haiti’s post-occupation context and on continuities between

¹³ Farah Jasmine Griffin, *“Who Set You Flowin’?”: The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 37.

¹⁴ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 23.

Wright's early Southern texts, the Haitian manuscript, and *Black Power*. As a conclusion, I offer one possible explanation for why Wright left his notes on Haiti unfinished and unpublished.

Wright's Internationalism

Wright's expatriation to Paris in 1946 represented a turning point in his career. Whereas Wright's earlier publications, including, *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), *Native Son* (1940), and *Black Boy* (1945), focused on African American experiences in the United States, and particularly the US South, after 1946 Wright published a series of travel writings set in Africa, *Black Power* (1954), Asia, *The Color Curtain* (1956), and Europe, *Pagan Spain* (1957). Virginia Whatley Smith writes that when Wright moved to France, "he entered an arena of intellectual thought and humanistic challenges that transcended the narrow limits of his former American home." By 1957, Smith observes, Wright identified as a "'rootless' man of the world." In addition to the influence of French existentialism, post-war movements for the decolonization of Africa and Asia contributed to Wright's international consciousness. Once outside the United States, Smith suggests, Wright commenced to connect his critique of racism in the US to anti-racist struggles across the globe.¹⁵

Paul Gilroy, writing in defense of Wright's creative production after leaving the US, makes a similar case about the significance of exile for the author's intellectual evolution:

Like that of many of the black American writers who followed in his wake, Richard Wright's creative development was boosted and transformed by the decision to

¹⁵ Virginia Whatley Smith, introduction to *Richard Wright's Travel Writings: New Reflections*, ed. Virginia Whatley Smith (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), xi.

relocate himself far away from the United States. This relocation contributes much to the presentation of the links between the struggles against racial subordination inside America and wider, global dimensions of political antagonism: anti-fascism, anti-imperialism, and political and economic emancipation from colonial domination.¹⁶

Kevin Gaines affirms Gilroy's position and in his consideration of Wright's relationship to Ghana argues that Wright's move to France was an important precursor to his trip to Africa in 1953. "In a development as crucial as his embrace of Marxism," Gaines writes, "Wright's previous exile to France had prompted him to situate the plight of the American Negro within the modern world," implying that Wright's decision to leave the US allowed him to extend his consideration of Black experiences to Africa.¹⁷

In Paris, Wright encountered the interconnected intellectual strands of existentialism and anticolonialism that together influenced his burgeoning international perspective. As Bill Schwarz observes, the prominence of existentialism in postwar France was due both to the experience of liberation from Nazi occupation, and to the presence of Black French colonials in Paris.¹⁸ Schwarz writes that existentialism "moved to the centre of philosophical life in France, propelled by the urgency of a revived black politics."¹⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre's movement within and between these two groups demonstrates their interrelatedness. For example, Sartre's consideration of *Négritude* in his essay, "Black Orpheus," which was first published as the introduction to Léopold Senghor's 1948 anthology of Black poetry,

¹⁶ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 154.

¹⁷ Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 52.

¹⁸ Bill Schwarz, "Black America and the Overthrow of the European Colonial Order: The Tragic Voice of Richard Wright," in *Cultures of Decolonisation: Transnational Productions and Practices, 1945-70*, ed. Ruth Craggs and Claire Wintle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 37.

¹⁹ Schwarz, "Black America," 37.

contributed to his influence among Paris' Black colonial population.²⁰ For Wright, who met Sartre in New York in 1947,²¹ existentialism provided a lens through which he began to connect the struggles of Black Americans to broader spheres of human experience. Gilroy writes that in his existentialist novel, *The Outsider* (1953), Wright was “demonstrating how the everyday experience of blacks in the United States enabled them to see with a special clarity – a dreadful objectivity – the same constellation of problems which these existentialist authors had identified in more exalted settings.”²² Schwarz supports this analysis when he states that Wright’s “conviction that black America lived – and that *he* had lived – what the philosophers were theorizing is persuasive.”²³

Alongside Senghor and Alioune Diop, as well as a number of metropolitan French writers and the Algerian-born Albert Camus, both Wright and Sartre helped to establish the journal *Présence Africaine*. According to Michel Fabre, it was partly through his collaboration with the writers surrounding *Présence Africaine* that Wright “now saw his struggle to free America from racism as part of a much larger fight.” Connecting his experience in the US to global efforts against racism, Wright’s “activities with *Présence Africaine* and the intellectuals from the French-speaking Third World represented a stage of his spiritual evolution just as important as his contacts with existentialist philosophy.”²⁴ It was during this period of the late 1940s and early 1950s, Fabre notes, that Wright entered “a second maturation, or a reorientation,” whereby his focus on the United States shifted toward “a more European,

²⁰ Schwarz, “Black America,” 37; Michel Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 182; Jean-Paul Sartre, “Black Orpheus,” trans. John MacCombie, *The Massachusetts Review* 6, no. 1 (Autumn, 1964-Winter, 1965).

²¹ Schwarz, “Black America,” 38.

²² Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 171.

²³ Schwarz, “Black America,” 39.

²⁴ Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 320.

more global, view of his own situation in particular, of the black situation in general and of the situation of contemporary man.”²⁵

The explanation of Wright’s internationalism – its focus on exile and existentialism, as well as its concentration on African and Asian decolonization – tends to downplay the influence of Caribbean anticolonialism, as Schwarz’s examination of Wright’s contacts with Caribbean thinkers makes clear. It also does not take into account how US imperialism would come to shape Wright’s consciousness of the Global South through its impact on the Caribbean political thought that he encountered and through his trip to Haiti during the period following the US occupation. Scholarship on Wright and the Caribbean tends to emphasize Wright’s relationship with George Lamming and his introduction to Lamming’s 1953 autobiographical novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*. John Wharton Lowe compares *Castle* to *Black Boy* and draws out several points of commonality in Wright and Lamming’s representations of US Southern and Caribbean contexts. He explores, in particular, the theme of exile in these works as well as in the authors’ lives, and argues that Wright’s efforts to join aesthetic aims with political protest influenced Lamming’s approach.²⁶ In his examination of Wright and the Caribbean, which I return to below, Jeff Karem considers *Black Boy*, *Castle* and Wright’s novel *The Long Dream* (1958) as “part of a hemispheric dialogue about home, identity, and diaspora.”²⁷ He argues that while *Black Boy* was inspirational for Lamming’s novel, *Castle* would come to influence Wright’s depiction of the Black South in *The Long Dream*. Karem is critical of Wright’s earlier writings on the Caribbean, but he argues

²⁵ Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 316.

²⁶ John Wharton Lowe, *Calypto Magnolia: The Crosscurrents of Caribbean and Southern Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

²⁷ Karem, *Purloined Islands*, 237.

that the evidence of Lamming's influence on this later work shows that "Wright allowed his encounter with the region to transform his novel," and that "Wright eventually started to see the Caribbean in his U.S. South."²⁸

Schwarz's consideration of Wright's connections to Caribbean writers demonstrates that the Caribbean influence on Wright began earlier in his career. Instead of emphasizing Wright's relationship with Lamming, Schwarz focuses on Wright's associations with C. L. R. James, George Padmore, and Aimé Césaire, all of whom Wright came into contact with during the 1940s. These Caribbean contacts, Schwarz argues, contributed greatly to Wright's global attitude. Following Schwarz, this chapter also considers James, Padmore, and Césaire as sources of Wright's expanded worldview, but unlike Schwarz's analysis, it focuses on each of these authors' relationship with Haiti to show that Wright's interest in Haiti followed the political and intellectual pattern set by these Caribbean influences. Furthermore, with much help from recent work by Raphael Dalleo, this chapter considers how the US occupation of Haiti informed the West Indian radicalism that Wright met in order to demonstrate the impact of US empire on Wright's development.

The Influence of Caribbean Radicalism

In 1940, two years after publishing his history of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins* (1938), C. L. R. James wrote a review of Wright's first published novel, *Native Son*, that illustrates Haiti's importance for the creative and political kinship the two authors would form some four years later. In a section of the review entitled, "The Sleeping Volcano," a

²⁸ Kareem, *Purloined Islands*, 237.

phrase that harkens back to nineteenth-century descriptions of Haiti as a “slumbering volcano,” James proposed that Bigger Thomas signaled the coming “Negro revolution” in the US.²⁹ If the South is weakened, James averred, “then, wherever the Negroes outnumber the whites, we shall see some of the bloodiest massacres this continent has ever known. Whoever doubts this should study the slave revolt of Spartacus, and the black revolt in San Domingo: the end of the San Domingo revolt was the complete annihilation of the white population.” Whether or not Wright read the review, which was published in the Marxist magazine, *The New Internationalist*, it does show James’ interest in joining Wright’s work to his own study of Haitian history and in creating a comparative analysis of US and Haitian racial politics. “America differs from San Domingo in one important respect:” James continued in the comparative mode, “the Negroes are a minority and in a proletarian revolution the white proletariat of the North will be dominant.”³⁰ The correspondences James found between the US and Haiti may well have come up between the two authors after they met, likely in 1944.³¹ In a letter to Constance Webb from that year, James recounted a meeting with Wright. “For years I have wanted to talk to him more than to anyone else in America (political and literary)” James wrote, “because from his books I felt that he understood the

²⁹ For references to Haiti as a “slumbering volcano” see, Maggie Montesinos Sale, *The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Ship Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

³⁰ J. R. Johnson [C. L. R. James], “Native Son and Revolution,” in *Critical Essays on Richard Wright’s Native Son*, ed. Kenneth Kinnamon (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 49-50.

³¹ Schwarz writes that they met in 1944. Schwarz, “Black America,” 33. Margaret Walker gives 1938 as the date of their meeting. Margaret Walker, *Richard Wright, Daemoniac Genius: A Portrait of the Man and a Critical Look at His Work* (New York: Amistad, 1988), 120. Fabre does not state when Wright met James. He writes that in 1944 Wright included James within what Wright called a “thinking coterie” of contemporary writers. Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 268. In his biography of James, Kent Worcester also does not specify when James and Wright met. Worcester first mentions Wright when detailing James’ life during the early 1940s when, after Wright broke with the Communist Party in 1942, “Constance and C.L.R. spent a great deal of time in the company of the ex-communist author and his wife, Ellen.” Kent Worcester, *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 75.

Negro question.” James was convinced of this partly because, “I had done close study of the San Domingo Revolution, and had learnt the essence of the question there.” Wright’s point of view matched his own, James determined: “He has worked to it artistically, I through history. But our conclusions are identical.”³² Wright reciprocated James’ interest. In 1944, James and Webb met regularly with Wright and his wife, Ellen Poplar, while during the same time Wright worked to put together a ““thinking coterie”” that would include James as a member alongside J. Saunders Redding, Horace Cayton, and St. Clair Drake, among several others.³³

According to Fabre, Wright read *The Black Jacobins* in 1951 while preparing a film project on Toussaint Louverture that never materialized.³⁴ Outdoor scenes would be filmed in Haiti, but Wright hoped to complete the project in Yugoslavia.³⁵ Looking for help with the film, in 1950 Wright wrote a letter to Streten Maric at the Yugoslav embassy in Paris in which he “quoted *The Black Jacobins* to emphasize the importance of L’Overture in Haitian history.”³⁶ Still, James was apparently convinced that Wright had never read the work. In a 1953 letter, Dorothy Padmore, George Padmore’s partner, relayed to the Wrights James’ frustration “that Dick although he has known him ten years, will not read his *Jacobins*. He feels that this is very strange, and that Dick won’t do so because it will bring him up against

³² Anna Grimshaw, ed., *Special Delivery: The Letters of C.L.R. James to Constance Webb, 1939-1948* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 189-190.

³³ Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, 75. Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 268. On the friendship between Wright and James also see, Schwarz, “Black America,” 33-36.

³⁴ Michel Fabre, *Richard Wright: Books and Writers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 79.

³⁵ Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 352.

³⁶ Fabre, *Richard Wright: Books and Writers*, 79.

some fundamental questions which he doesn't want to face!"³⁷ Even if Wright did not read James' book, the episode shows Haiti's presence in their relationship, since it was important to James that Wright study his history of Haitian revolt. That Wright possessed a copy of James' play, *Toussaint Louverture (The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History)*, which James finished writing in 1934, was staged in 1936, but went unpublished until 2013, also shows Haiti's important position within James and Wright's intellectual exchange.³⁸

The Black Jacobins and *Toussaint Louverture* are about the revolution in Haiti and not, at least directly, about the US occupation there. To be sure, James is typically associated with his challenge to European colonialism, not with the US empire. However, Christen Høgsbjerg and Raphael Dalleo both consider how the loss of Haitian independence under the US occupation helped to inspire James' interest in Haiti's history. According to Høgsbjerg, James' research on Haiti began during the late 1920s and early 1930s in the midst of the brewing nationalist movement in Trinidad. James began researching and teaching the history of the Caribbean and, "No doubt mindful of the plight of Haiti itself – since 1915 under American military occupation – James was soon 'reading everything' he could on the Haitian Revolution."³⁹ Dalleo, meanwhile, has shown that the American occupation shadows James' work on Haiti. While he provides no definitive proof that the occupation inspired

³⁷ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Poplar and Richard Wright, November 2, 1953. Box 103, Folder 1521, Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. This detail is also noted by Schwarz, "Black America," 34.

³⁸ Among the Wright Papers is an undated version of James' play on Toussaint Louverture, which he finished writing in 1934. See C. L. R. James, *Toussaint Louverture (The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History)*, No Date. Box 89, Folder, 1102a, Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. George Padmore, whose own work on Haiti is discussed below, petitioned Alain Locke to help publish the play soon after it was staged in London in 1936. C. L. R. James, *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History; A Play in Three Acts*, ed. Christian Høgsbjerg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 3, 42, 217.

³⁹ C. L. R. James, *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History; A Play in Three Acts*, ed. Christian Høgsbjerg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 6.

James to write *The Black Jacobins*, Dalleo does offer substantial evidence that “James’ interest in Haiti was mediated by the occupation” and convincingly argues that James’ silence on the subject is meaningful. It indicates, Dalleo argues, “just how threatening the occupation was to the vision of anticolonialism that animates *The Black Jacobins*.”⁴⁰

James would not have been the only source of Wright’s interest in Haiti, and the shadowy presence of the occupation surrounding *The Black Jacobins* is only one piece of evidence showing how US imperialism in the Caribbean contributed to Wright’s developing global perspective. One year after *The Black Jacobins* was published, in 1939 Wright was the guest of honor at a dinner held for the Haitian author Jacques Roumain.⁴¹ At the time, Roumain had yet to publish his novel, *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (1944), but was known as the founder of the Haitian Communist Party and for co-founding *La Revue indigène*, an important journal in the literary movement of *indigénisme*, which emerged in response to the US occupation.⁴² Nineteen thirty-nine also marked the beginning of a synchronicity between Wright and the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire. That year, Césaire published *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* in the magazine *Volontés*. According to Fabre, no evidence shows that Wright ever read the poem in any edition, and given that Wright never became fluent in French, he would not have read Césaire’s work in its original language, particularly not in 1939.⁴³ Nevertheless, the echo of Césaire’s “*Native Land*” in the title of Wright’s *Native Son*,

⁴⁰ Raphael Dalleo, *American Imperialism’s Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 27.

⁴¹ Keneth Kinnamon, *Richard Wright: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism and Commentary, 1983-2003* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2006), 341.

⁴² Valerie Kaussen, *Migrant Revolutions: Haitian Literature, Globalization, and U.S. Imperialism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 1.

⁴³ Fabre, *Richard Wright: Books and Writers*, 27. For Wright’s French language ability see, Jerry W. Ward, Jr. and Robert J. Butler, eds., *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 118.

published the following year in 1940, suggests a parallel development between the writers that may help us to understand their collaboration in the years to come.

Wright first met Césaire in Paris in 1946, a pivotal year for the American author. Léopold Senghor, the Senegalese poet whom Wright had also just met that summer arranged for their introduction.⁴⁴ Wright and Césaire both participated in the forming of *Présence Africaine*, which, as previously mentioned, contributed greatly to Wright's expanding intellectual and political vision. While during this time, as Fabre notes, Wright was "interested in everything concerning Africa," Schwarz observes that *Présence Africaine* also "deepened his ties to the Caribbean diaspora" and, I would add, sharpened his interest in the region, since the circle surrounding the journal included not only African perspectives, but also those from the francophone Caribbean.⁴⁵ Wright's involvement with *Présence Africaine* contributed not only to his consciousness of Africa, but also to his awareness of the Caribbean, and of Haiti in particular. As Césaire had written in *Cahier* in 1939, it was in "Haiti where negritude rose for the first time."⁴⁶

Following their work together on *Présence Africaine*, Wright and Césaire reconnected in 1949 to sponsor *Caribbean Rhapsody*, ("Rhapsodie Caraïbe,") a revue by the African American dancer, choreographer and anthropologist Katherine Dunham, whose fieldwork in the Caribbean, including Haiti, had a pronounced influence on her work.⁴⁷ Dunham's *Caribbean Rhapsody* made its French debut at the Théâtre de Paris in Montmartre in

⁴⁴ Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 307.

⁴⁵ Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 318. Schwarz, "Black America," 39.

⁴⁶ Aimé Césaire, *The Original 1939 Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, ed. and trans. A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 19.

⁴⁷ Toru Kiuchi and Yoshinobu Hakutani, *Richard Wright: A Documented Chronology, 1908-1960* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014), 253.

November of 1948.⁴⁸ Wright and Césaire sponsored a version performed at the Ambassadeurs in 1949 that was, according to Geneviève Fabre, “slightly different” than earlier versions.⁴⁹ Still, descriptions of the show’s earlier iteration give some indication of the contents of the 1949 version. Reviews described a show in three parts. Beginning with dances deriving from sources in Brazil and other parts of Latin America, the show then turned to “a second ballet set in the West Indies,” before ending with a jazz theme indicative of Harlem and Chicago.⁵⁰ Fabre describes a different variation with three acts including, “Africa,” which drew on Brazilian and African sources, “Americana,” which was organized around traditional plantation dances and spirituals, and “Rites of Passage,” which included “Veracruzana,” a piece inspired by Mexican folk culture, as well as choreographies pertaining to death, male puberty rituals, and other rites overseen by *Gede* of the Vodou tradition.⁵¹

It is unclear whether Wright exercised any influence over the version of *Caribbean Rhapsody* he sponsored in 1949. His involvement with the show, however, attests to the importance of Caribbean and specifically Haitian material for Wright at this point in his development. Dunham’s trip to Haiti in the mid-1930s was the principle source of her international aesthetic.⁵² Joanna Dee Das writes that Dunham expressed “a *politics of diaspora*”

⁴⁸ Geneviève Fabre, “Katherine Dunham on the French Stage: (No Repeat of La Revue Nègre),” *Se&F Online* 6, no. 1 and 2 (Fall 2007/Spring 2008), http://sfoonline.barnard.edu/baker/fabre_01.htm

⁴⁹ Fabre, “Katherine Dunham on the French Stage.”

⁵⁰ Fabre, “Katherine Dunham on the French Stage.”

⁵¹ Fabre, “Katherine Dunham on the French Stage.”

⁵² Joanna Dee Das, *Katherine Dunham: Dance and the African Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 43. As an anthropology student studying under Melville Herskovits, between 1935 and 1936 Dunham spent some ten months conducting ethnographic research on dance throughout the Caribbean, spending the final and longest period of her trip in Haiti. Not unlike her contemporary, Zora Neale Hurston, Dunham adopted a participant-observer method in her encounter with Haitian folk culture and developed friendships within Haiti’s political and intellectual circles including with Dumarsais Estimé and Jean Price-Mars, both of whom were associated with *indigénisme*. The ongoing impact of the American occupation also furthered Dunham’s politicization by inspiring her to see her choreography as a counter to sensationalist depictions of Haiti in the American cultural mainstream that persisted in the wake of the occupation. As Das argues, when Dunham left

through her aesthetic choices, which, as *Caribbean Rhapsody* illustrates, combined African, Latin American, Caribbean, and North American settings with choreography derived from a mixture of formal traditions, including “ballet, modern dance, Afro-Caribbean forms, African American vernacular traditions, and Asian movement vocabularies.”⁵³ While throughout her career Dunham described her approach as “primitive,” scholars have argued that her choreography exhibits “fusion,” “synthesis,” or a “creole” sensibility.⁵⁴

Wright’s collaboration with Césaire to sponsor Dunham’s anticolonial, diasporic, and creole aesthetic shows how far he had traveled by 1949 from the American environs of Mississippi and Chicago with which he is most typically associated. However, African American, and particularly Black Southern experiences remained an integrated part of Wright’s worldview. It is possible, for instance, that Wright influenced Dunham’s 1950 ballet *Southland*, which depicts the lynching of a Black “field hand” named Richard after he is falsely accused of rape by a white woman.⁵⁵ The name of the show’s central character may not be a direct reference to Wright, since all of the ballet’s characters were named after the

Haiti, she not only had new material that would inform her art, but also a new consciousness of the political implications of her aesthetic choices. Das, *Katherine Dunham*, 35-53.

⁵³ Das, *Katherine Dunham*, 2-5.

⁵⁴ On Dunham’s use of the term “primitive,” see Das, *Katherine Dunham*, 5-6. Das writes that by 1940, Dunham “had abandoned... [previous]... approaches in favor of ‘fusion’: a blending of her ballet and modern dance training with Afro-Caribbean forms.” Das, *Katherine Dunham*, 56. John O. Perpener III, writes, “By the late 1930s, Dunham was continuing to explore the blending of African, European, Caribbean, and American dance elements. For example, she was further synthesizing creole dance forms (which were themselves a synthesis) with ballet and modern dance.” John O. Perpener III, *African American Concert Dance: The Harlem Renaissance and Beyond* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 141-142. VéVé Clark writes of Dunham’s *L’Ag’Ya*, which was included in *Caribbean Rhapsody*, “The form of the ballet is *creole* in every sense of the term; that is, it is born of the American sensibility and mixes African and European elements.” Quoted in Perpener, *African American Concert Dance*, 141.

⁵⁵ Constance Valis Hill, “Katherine Dunham’s *Southland*: Protest in the Face of Repression,” in *Kaiso! Writings by and about Katherine Dunham*, ed. VéVé A. Clark and Sarah E. Johnson (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005) 349-351. Hill also notes that *Southland* begins with a chorus singing, “Is it true what they say about Dixie?” Hill, 349. The same song is used as an epigraph in Wright’s *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938).

dancers who played them⁵⁶ – Richard was performed by Ricardo Avalos – but beyond clear parallels in theme between Wright’s work and the ballet, it is notable that following their contact in Paris in 1949, in the summer of 1950 both Wright and Dunham were in Brazil and Argentina. After Wright finished shooting the film version of *Native Son* in Buenos Aires, in early July he visited Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo on his way to Haiti before heading back to Paris.⁵⁷ Dunham’s company, meanwhile, toured Latin America along the same path but in the opposite direction, beginning in São Paulo in July before heading to Rio de Janeiro and then to Buenos Aires, where Dunham began composing her anti-lynching ballet.⁵⁸ Perhaps Wright and Dunham crossed paths but never met in Latin America, but their subsequent projects – Wright’s notes on Haiti and Dunham’s *Southland* – illustrate how interconnected the Caribbean and the US South had become for both Dunham and Wright during this period.

Wright and Césaire continued to work together in the summer of 1950 on an exhibition entitled “Revelation of Negro Art,” which included, “works from the Musée de l’Homme and performances of ritual songs and dances at the Cité Universitaire.”⁵⁹ That Wright and Césaire were collaborating during the same period that Wright traveled to Haiti in July of 1950 only increases the likelihood that that the poet influenced Wright’s travel plans, especially given Césaire’s own interest in Haiti. Haiti and Toussaint Louverture occupied central roles in the 1939 version of *Notebook* and the several months he spent in

⁵⁶ Hill, “Katherine Dunham’s *Southland*,” 349-350.

⁵⁷ Kiuchi and Hakutani, *Richard Wright*, 259.

⁵⁸ Das, *Katherine Dunham*, 135. Hill, “Katherine Dunham’s *Southland*,” 348.

⁵⁹ Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 319.

Haiti in 1944 impacted Césaire profoundly.⁶⁰ In a 1967 interview with the Haitian poet René Depestre, Césaire elaborated on his figuration of the relationship between Haiti and *Négritude* that he had first articulated in *Notebook*:

Haiti represented for me the heroic Antilles, the African Antilles. I began to make connections between the Antilles and Africa, and Haiti is the most African of the Antilles. It is at the same time a country with a marvelous history: the first Negro epic of the New World was written by Haitians, people like Toussaint L'Overture, Henri Christophe, Jean-Jacque Dessalines, etc.

Agreeing with Depestre's proposal that Haiti's "national history is Negritude in action," Césaire continued, "Haiti is the country where Negro people stood up for the first time, affirming their determination to shape a new world, a free world."⁶¹ Years after his trip to Haiti, Césaire would produce both his own historical analysis of the Haitian Revolution, *Toussaint Louverture* (1960), and the play, *The Tragedy of King Christophe* (1963), which considers the lessons of Henri Christophe's Haiti for decolonization in Africa.⁶² As A. James Arnold writes, "Despite the vicissitudes of its long history as a republic, Haiti represented for the colonized Martinican the possibility of cultural autonomy for blacks in the Caribbean, a central feature of his own concept of negritude."⁶³

While the importance of the Haitian Revolution for Césaire is readily observable, his consciousness of the US occupation of Haiti is less well known. Correcting this deficiency, Dalleo writes that Césaire's attention to US imperialism in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950) may

⁶⁰ A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude: The Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 13-14.

⁶¹ "An interview with Aimé Césaire, Conducted by René Depestre," in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 90.

⁶² Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 13-14.

⁶³ Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 14.

have been influenced by an earlier generation of Black protest against the occupation.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Dalleo avers, Césaire may have seen the threat of re-colonization in Haiti as a sign of the insecurity of political sovereignty in the Caribbean, influencing his support for departmentalization in Martinique.⁶⁵ Césaire’s denunciation of US empire in *Discourse on Colonialism* – “American domination – the only domination from which one never recovers. I mean from which one never recovers unscarred” – shows his concern with US power during the same period that he was working with Wright in the late 1940s and 1950.⁶⁶

During the same year that he met Césaire and began mixing with the francophone community around *Présence Africaine*, Wright also met George Padmore, who would become one of his closest friends. Padmore and C. L. R. James had been childhood friends in Trinidad. Dalleo notes that the two met again in London in 1933 and began working closely together during the following years, just as James started his research for *The Black Jacobins*.⁶⁷ Like James, Padmore is most often associated with his critique of European empire, but Dalleo shows that Padmore’s anticolonialism was rooted in his early analysis of US imperialism, particularly as it appeared in Haiti. In 1931, Padmore published *Haiti, an American Slave Colony*, a pamphlet that he repurposed for his 1931 book, *Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, which emphasizes Haiti.⁶⁸ These works, along with Padmore’s attention to the occupation as editor of the *Negro Worker* from 1931 to 1933, support Dalleo’s claim that

⁶⁴ Dalleo, *American Imperialism’s Undead*, 67.

⁶⁵ Dalleo, *American Imperialism’s Undead*, 68.

⁶⁶ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 77.

⁶⁷ Dalleo, *American Imperialism’s Undead*, 37.

⁶⁸ Dalleo, *American Imperialism’s Undead*, 156-157.

“Padmore’s earliest writings – his first articulations of anticolonialism – are framed through opposition to US more than British empire.”⁶⁹

It was not until 1946 that Wright met Padmore, at James’ suggestion, while visiting London. Padmore’s focus on Haiti occurred largely during the early 1930s, but Dalleo argues that even as his focus shifted toward the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, and later toward decolonization in Ghana, Padmore’s earlier analysis of the occupation continued to influence his understanding of these later events.⁷⁰ The occupation may have formally ended in 1934, but its lessons continued to reverberate into the postwar period. On the last night of his trip to London, Wright and Padmore attended a dinner held by the Colored Writers Association where Wright met several intellectuals from throughout the postcolonial world. Much like his involvement with *Présence Africaine*, Wright’s exposure to non-US writers and thinkers allowed him to link his own experience in the South to colonial experiences outside the United States. As Fabre writes, Wright’s “friendship with Padmore influenced his political thinking and further increased his interest in Africa, and for the first time he met black militants from all the English-speaking countries.”⁷¹ “The voice of the American Negro is no longer a lone voice,” Wright stated in an interview in New York in 1947. “You hear echoing voices in the people of Burma, China, South Africa. Three-quarters of the world’s population is colored. The attitude toward the Negro problem is entering a new phase.”⁷² Fabre's analysis and Wright's own account emphasize his concern with Africa and Asia.

⁶⁹ Dalleo, *American Imperialism’s Undead*, 147.

⁷⁰ Dalleo, *American Imperialism’s Undead*, 149.

⁷¹ Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 308. Wright would go on to write the introduction for Padmore’s *Pan-Africanism or Communism* (1956).

⁷² Keneth Kinnamon and Michel Fabre, eds., *Conversations with Richard Wright* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi Press, 1993), 124. This quote is also referenced in Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 308.

However, correspondence between Padmore and Wright shows that he was also interested in the Caribbean during the late 1940s. In a 1948 letter of introduction, very likely addressed to Grantley Adams, Padmore notes that Wright “is very interested in the problems of the West Indies on which you can speak with authority.”⁷³ The following year, 1949, before traveling to Ghana or to Indonesia, Wright contacted his friend William Rutherford at UNESCO telling him that he was, in Fabre's words, "anxious to do a report" on Haiti.⁷⁴

The Haitian Manuscript

Wright arrived in Haiti during the summer of 1950 and stayed for just over two weeks.⁷⁵ He had just finished shooting the film version of *Native Son* in Argentina and visited Haiti as part of a longer journey en route back to Paris that appears to have doubled as a tour of the African diaspora in the New World, including stops in Rio De Janeiro, São Paulo, and Port of Spain, where he spent time with Eric Williams, and finally New York where he saw James and Constance Webb before returning to Europe.⁷⁶ It is likely that when Wright arrived in Port-au-Prince, his precise intentions for a project on Haiti were still unformed. Although UNESCO had rejected Wright's offer to write a report for them,⁷⁷ in the months leading up to the trip Rutherford had written to encourage Wright that, “The project of taking Haiti off the back and putting it on the front page, or moving her contributions, people, and culture from stale text books prominently into men's minds and hearts, is one of

⁷³ George Padmore, Letter, September 9, 1948. Box 103, Folder 1522, Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁷⁴ Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 351.

⁷⁵ Kiuchi and Hakutani, *Richard Wright*, 259.

⁷⁶ Kiuchi and Hakutani, *Richard Wright*, 259.

⁷⁷ Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 351.

great importance and value.” Still, Rutherford admitted earlier in the letter, “I don’t quite see exactly what you have in mind.”⁷⁸ A letter from Wright to Haiti’s ambassador in Buenos Aires indicates similarly vague intentions concerning his travel journal: “I would try to react to the life of the Haitian people as an individual,” Wright wrote, “to record in words my impressions and responses to the tissue and texture of Haitian experience and living. I would expose my sensibilities to the mores, traditions, music, institutions, and landscapes of Haiti.”⁷⁹ Wright’s *12 Million Black Voices* (1941) had given him experience with book length nonfiction, but at this point in his career he had yet to publish any travel writing. This was Wright’s first attempt to go beyond the American scene and the newness of this endeavor resulted in an imprecision that illustrates how the more global sense of relation that he was seeking did not develop effortlessly. Wright’s uncertainty surrounding his Haiti project, for instance, shows Wright experimenting with the form of his travel writing as his international perspective came into focus.

Wright’s notes from his time in Haiti contain just over six pages of typescript followed by another twenty-two pages of handwritten notes.⁸⁰ While Wright’s handwritten notes are at times illegible, they are sufficiently readable to examine. I have used brackets to indicate where I am unsure of a particular word. The typed pages appear to be the beginnings of a first draft based on the handwritten notes, which consist of biographical

⁷⁸ William A. Rutherford to Richard Wright, December 5, 1949. Box 105, Folder 1589. Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 351.

⁸⁰ Wright’s Haitian manuscript is undated, but its content strongly suggests that it was composed during and after his time in Haiti. For example, in the typescript Wright casts the text as an account of his impressions during “a recent visit to Haiti.” Richard Wright, [Haitian Biographies], No Date. Box 5, Folder 90, Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. [Haitian Biographies] is the Beinecke Library’s archival label for Wright’s manuscript.

sketches of a variety of Haitian people, from brief portraits of anonymous “peasants,” to comparatively lengthy profiles of more prominent Haitians from the Black middle class and the Haitian elite. The fragmented nature of Wright’s handwritten notes suggests they were taken during interviews, especially since they offer little to no commentary or interpretation of Wright’s own. It is only in the typescript that Wright begins to add his own impressions and insights to these biographical portraits.

The common theme running throughout the manuscript is what Wright describes as the “perturbation” of Haitians as they break away from the nation’s traditional social and political structures. As I discuss below, the end of the US occupation in 1934, which then President Sténio Vincent described as Haiti’s “Second Independence,” created an opening for new possibilities in Haitian society.⁸¹ Although the occupation only appears in Wright’s handwritten notes, rather than prominently in his typescript, the break from tradition that Wright describes should be understood as a result of Haiti’s renewed independence in the aftermath of American withdrawal. Wright’s sense of possibility for post-occupation Haiti is clear in the biographical sketches he provides. Paule Duncan, a young woman from the Black middle class, eschews marriage in pursuit of her own freedom, while Max Pinchinat disregards his father’s expectations and leaves the military to become a modernist painter. Yvonne Sylvain, meanwhile, breaks gender barriers to become a doctor. And Emile St. Lôt and Daniel Figrolé, two of Haiti’s most consequential politicians in the postwar period, strive to empower the nation’s Black peasant class.⁸² Taken together, these individual stories

⁸¹ Matthew J. Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 1.

⁸² Fabre writes that Wright’s notes contain sketches of “the actor Daniel Figrolé; and the Minister of Justice and Labor, Emile Saint Jot.” Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 352. My research finds that the person described in Wright’s notes is actually the politician Daniel Figrolé. Several pieces of evidence support this conclusion. The

describe a process of social, cultural and political decolonization in Haiti during the period following the US occupation.

Wright alludes to Haiti's postcolonial moment in the opening paragraph of the typescript, which instructs the reader that his portraits of individual Haitians are intended as metaphors for the nation:

The degree of civilization obtaining in a given nation can be determined by examining the quality and intensity of the personal problems which plague or occupy the attention of its citizens. And of all the problems engaging an individual's attention the one which casts the individual's personal life in the form of a question is the most engrossing; indeed, such question-problems constitute a kind of light emitting from the individual, an invisible radiance whose beams are forged of the concerns that link its personality with its environment.⁸³

Here, Wright contends that Haitian society as a whole can be apprehended through the individuals he portrays, and his interest in "[casting] the individual's personal life in the form of a question" signals to the reader that Haiti is likewise undergoing a period of national transition and uncertainty. Although Haitian independence began in 1804, the interruption of that independence by the United States meant that in the years following the occupation changes in Haitian society closely resembled the transition toward national liberation in

age, place of birth, schooling, and professional background of Wright's subject are all consistent with Figiolé's biography. Underneath his subject's name Wright notes, "36 yrs old. Né a Pestel [-] Port of Prince – Lycée Pition [sic]." Daniel Figiolé was born in 1913 and would have been thirty-six in 1950. Furthermore, he was born in Pestel and attended and later taught at the Lycée Alexandre Pétion in Port-au-Prince. Perhaps most conclusively, Wright notes, "He read a lot of the political leaders of the world, but what [sic] really impressed by the leaders in the past of Haiti. Mouvement Ouvriers Paysans. (MOP) Founded 1946." Wright, [Haitian Biographies]. Figiolé formed the Peasants and Workers Movement (Mouvement Ouvriers Paysans) following the overthrow of President Élie Lescot in 1946. Moreover, taken as a whole, Wright's sketch describes the career and outlook of a political figure rather than an actor as Fabre writes. For an overview of Figiolé's biography, see Matthew J. Smith, "Figiolé, Pierre-Eustache Daniel," in *Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography*, ed. Franklin W. Knight and Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). My research also suggests that "Emile St. Jot," is a misspelling of Emile St. Lôt, who did lead Haiti's labor ministry, as both Fabre and Wright's notes indicate. Matthew J. Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 112

⁸³ Wright, [Haitian Biographies]. Wright's edits to this paragraph are not indicated in this quotation.

Africa and Asia that would accelerate in the years to come. As Matthew J. Smith writes of Haiti's political environment following the occupation, Haiti's "postoccupation predicament, in which radicals with contrasting views of black power, radical nationalism, and Marxism fought for political space, suggests a situation not unlike the postcolonial struggles elsewhere in the world later in the twentieth century."⁸⁴ Smith's observation about the similarities between post-occupation Haiti and other postcolonial societies helps to explain the relation of Wright's Haitian manuscript to his later group of travel writings including *Black Power*. Wright's trip to Haiti was an early step for his emerging interest in the decolonizing world, which he would develop further during his trip to the Gold Coast three years later. It was in Haiti in the wake of US imperialism that Wright first decided to write at length on the questions and uncertainties of postcolonialism that he would encounter again in Africa. To be sure, Wright's description of the Gold Coast as "The Nervous Colony" in *Black Power* appears to draw directly from his earlier sense of "perturbation" among Haitians during the post-occupation period.⁸⁵

Whereas Wright's Haitian manuscript points forward to Africa's postcolonial future, it also looks back to Wright's past experience in the US South. The "perturbation" and "nervousness" that Wright found in Haiti and Ghana echo his descriptions in *Black Boy* of his own anxiety as an African American in the United States. Haiti's Black peasant class and its rising Black middle class clearly reminded Wright of African American experiences in the US. Indeed, in the opening paragraphs of the typescript, he emphasizes the common experiences of Haitians and Americans. "[M]y desire," Wright states in the typescript, "is to

⁸⁴ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 2.

⁸⁵ Wright, *Black Power*.

present to American readers in terms and concepts familiar to them a few intense life-problems or questions as lived by Haitians, my conviction being that the color of their skins is of far less moment than the astounding identity which exist between Haitians and other peoples.”⁸⁶ This “astounding identity” linking Haitians and “other peoples,” including American readers, is reinforced by Wright’s assertion that it “is not the differences which exist between people” that interests him, so much as the “miraculous similarity which links life on its deeper levels into one vast reservoir of human consciousness and experience.”⁸⁷ Wright’s assertions of an “astounding identity” and “miraculous similarity” between Haitians and Americans showcase his desire to break out of a national mold that isolated his experience as an African American from related and contemporary struggles occurring elsewhere in the world. They recall his earlier proclamation after returning from abroad in 1947 that “the voice of the American Negro is no longer a lone voice” and they anticipate his 1953 introduction to George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin*, in which he wrote, “One feels not so much alone when, from a distant witness, supporting evidence comes to buttress one’s own testimony.”⁸⁸

The role of Wright’s manuscript as a precursor to *Black Power* that bridges the South and the postcolonial world cannot be fully appreciated without some understanding of the political situation he encountered in Haiti, which was in many ways shaped by the US occupation. In Wright’s manuscript, the occupation is present in the memories of his interviewees and forms the backdrop for their social and political aspirations. Yvonne

⁸⁶ Wright, [Haitian Biographies]. Wright’s edits are not indicated here.

⁸⁷ Wright, [Haitian Biographies].

⁸⁸ Fabre, *Richard Wright: Books and Writers*, 220.

Sylvain, for example, remembers her father's opposition to the occupation and the presence of US marines during her childhood: "She grew up in an atmosphere where the freedom of the country was a [live?] issue," Wright notes. "She recalls the U.S. troops when a child and she [and?] [others?] learned to vent their scorn and disapproval of them."⁸⁹ Emile St. Lôt also looked back to the occupation. While attending an agricultural school as a young man in 1926, St. Lôt, "Had a conflict with white American – director." Wright records that he "did not like the attitude of U.S. superiority" and Wright's notes suggest that the experience prompted St. Lôt to leave agricultural school and enter into law school.⁹⁰ Sylvain and St. Lôt's memory of the occupation shows its formative role in their individual lives and demonstrates the enduring legacy of that event for Haitian society following the withdrawal of US marines, when Haiti's renewed independence prompted profound debate over its uncertain future course as a nation.

When Wright reached Haiti in the summer of 1950, he arrived toward the end of a period characterized by fervent political struggle over competing visions for independent Haiti.⁹¹ Smith has described the years following the occupation as "modern Haiti's greatest moment of political promise."⁹² The nationalist movement that had formed to oppose the occupation continued to develop under the governments of Sténio Joseph Vincent and Élie Lescot.⁹³ During the 1930s and 1940s the movement first animated in the 1920s by Jacques Roumain and Jean Price-Mars gave rise to the competing ideologies of Marxism and *noirisme*,

⁸⁹ Wright, [Haitian Biographies].

⁹⁰ Wright, [Haitian Biographies].

⁹¹ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 1.

⁹² Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 2.

⁹³ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 7.

“an assertive brand of Haitian black nationalism,”⁹⁴ both of which aimed to overturn the power of Haiti’s dominant classes that persisted in the decades following US withdrawal.⁹⁵ In the revolution of 1946, Marxist and *noiriste* groups together participated in mass-protests that culminated in the overthrow of Lescot and the rise of Dumarsais Estimé. Black, and from a peasant background, Estimé’s ascension represented a rebuke of Haiti’s light-skinned elite and a dramatic shift in the political trajectory of the nation.⁹⁶ The revolution also represented, as Smith points out, “the first popular response against a U.S. supported government in postwar Latin America and the Caribbean.”⁹⁷

While Smith writes that Estimé’s tenure witnessed “the country’s first real attempt to create a stable democracy,” it largely failed to live up to the aspirations of 1946 as appeals to Black empowerment too rarely translated into effective policy.⁹⁸ In May of 1950, facing growing opposition, Estimé gave way to the military government of Paul Magloire.⁹⁹ By the time Wright arrived in Haiti in July of 1950, the political radicalism that had led to the revolution of 1946 had largely dissipated.¹⁰⁰ The Magloire presidency, Smith argues, marked “a transition toward an uncompromising form of dictatorial rule” characterizing the Duvalier era.¹⁰¹ In its conservatism and persecution of opposition, Magloire’s government represented the beginning of the end for the period of political radicalism between the US occupation and the ascension of Duvalier.¹⁰²

⁹⁴ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 2.

⁹⁵ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 7-10, 13-28.

⁹⁶ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 71-72.

⁹⁷ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 71.

⁹⁸ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 104, 147-148.

⁹⁹ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 146-147

¹⁰⁰ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 147.

¹⁰¹ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 161.

¹⁰² Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 149-150

That Wright appears to have interviewed two of post-occupation Haiti's most prominent political figures shows that he was familiar with the political situation in Haiti and that he remained interested in Haitian radicalism despite its suppression under Magloire. Emile St. Lôt and Daniel Figiolé, not unlike Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, were at the forefront of efforts to chart a course for Haiti in the post-occupation era. St. Lôt had been associated with *noirisme* since at least the mid-1940s. He was instrumental in the popular movement to overthrow Lescot in 1946 and during Estimé's *noiriste* tenure, he considered himself among Haiti's *authentiques*, who, according to Smith, believed themselves to be "the real inheritors of the legacy of Dessalines furthest removed from Europhile culture and appearance."¹⁰³ Daniel Figiolé, also associated with the *noiriste* movement and a leader of the 1946 revolution, held unmatched popularity among the capital's working class, leading one editorial to refer to him as "the Moses of Port-au-Prince" for his famous ability to mobilize protestors en masse at a moment's notice.¹⁰⁴ Figiolé's political organization, the Mouvement Ouvriers Paysans, or Peasant and Workers Movement, which Wright makes note of in his manuscript, did not prevail in the 1946 elections but was successful in helping to develop the Haitian labor movement.¹⁰⁵ Despite his meeting with these figures, Wright would have felt conflicted about several aspects of their ideology.

¹⁰³ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 57-58, 85, 108-109. When Wright met with St. Lôt in the summer of 1950, the Haitian's own prospects for becoming president may have been fresh in his mind. Months earlier he had helped to block Estimé's bid to stay in power. Some believed Magloire had turned St. Lôt against Estimé by promising him the presidency. Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 144.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, "Figiolé, Pierre-Eustache Daniel" Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 85-86.

¹⁰⁵ Smith, "Figiolé, Pierre-Eustache Daniel." Years after Wright's trip to Haiti, Figiolé briefly became provisional president of Haiti following the overthrow of Magloire in 1956. However, with the backing of the Haitian military and the United States, both of whom were suspicious of Figiolé's politics, François Duvalier ultimately succeeded in becoming president in 1957. Smith, "Figiolé, Pierre-Eustache Daniel."

While Figiolé was influenced by socialism, Haitian *noirisme* was frequently hostile to Marxism, which continued to influence Wright well after his official break with communism in 1942.¹⁰⁶ At the extreme end of the ideological spectrum, *noirisme* was also antidemocratic and committed to biological definitions of race that Wright would have rejected.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Wright's contact with *noirisme* does not appear to have continued past his brief stay in Haiti. He would again come into contact with key figures of post-occupation Haiti at the First Conference of Negro Writers and Artists in 1956, but here Wright would have met the young Marxists René Depestre and Jacques Stephen-Alexis, as well as Jean Price-Mars, who was critical of *noirisme* despite his influence on the ideology.¹⁰⁸ Regardless of the differences between Wright and the *noiriste* ideology he encountered in Haiti, his acquaintance with Haitian Black nationalism is an important antecedent of his call for "black power" in Africa.

Wright's interviews with St. Lôt and Figiolé helped to set the stage for his examination of Ghana's political scene, but they also helped to reshape his understanding of the US South. Wright's notes on St. Lôt and Figiolé include key themes within his Southern texts, including sharecropping, and the question of how to respond to racial conflict, that both fostered Wright's identification with postcolonial experiences in Haiti and allowed him to indirectly return to the conflicts of the American South by considering their variations abroad. Wright's emerging sense of the South's relation to the postcolonial world is clearly visible in the opening chapters of *Black Power* where, upon his arrival in Ghana, Wright's first associations are to the South. "The soil was a rich red like that of Georgia or Mississippi," he

¹⁰⁶ Jerry W. Ward, Jr. and Robert J. Butler, eds., *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia*, 253.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 23-28.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 27.

writes, “and, for brief moments, I could almost delude myself into thinking that I was back in the American South.”¹⁰⁹ Later, Wright’s first visit to Nkrumah’s residence also sparks a recollection of his years in the South: “I was led forward into a red, two-story brick dwelling that looked remarkably like a colonial mansion in Georgia or Mississippi.”¹¹⁰ These comparisons complicate Wright’s assertion that in Africa he was “faced with the absolute otherness and inaccessibility of this new world.”¹¹¹ At least initially, aspects of the colonial society Wright met in Ghana appeared strangely familiar to him. Signifiers of the American South, similar to the red soil and colonial mansions that Wright observes in *Black Power*, also appear in his notes on St. Lôt and Figmolé.

Wright’s notes include very little, if any, indication of his own personal impression of St. Lôt and Figmolé, but with their attention to Haiti’s Black peasant class and that population’s struggle within a “sharecropper system,” Wright returned to a subject that pervades his Southern writing of the 1930s and 1940s. In his notes on St. Lôt, Wright records that after being elected senator in 1946, St. Lôt’s “aim was to bring the 90% the peasants into the political life of the country.” He was convinced, Wright later writes, that “his country could not progress unless Haiti was given [back?] to the 90% of the people who made it up. Then and then alone could have a [way?] of life with dignity and decency.” In order to accomplish this, St. Lôt “aimed to wipe out the sharecropper system.”¹¹² Like St. Lôt, Figmolé also emphasizes Haiti’s peasant class in his vision for the nation’s future. Wright notes that Figmolé strives “to give class consciousness to the peasants and workers of Haiti.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Wright, *Black Power: Three Books from Exile*, 55.

¹¹⁰ Richard Wright, *Black Power*, 73.

¹¹¹ Richard Wright, *Black Power*, 59.

¹¹² Wright, [Haitian Biographies].

After that they [will?] be able to fight and defend and protect them against [injustice?], and finally to put them in a place where they can contribute to the [national?] life.”¹¹³ St. Lôt and Fignolé’s focus on sharecropping in Haiti and a Black peasant class at the margin of national life helps to explain Wright’s sense of a “miraculous similarity” between Haiti and the United States. Importantly, however, Wright did not simply return to the subject of sharecropping. Instead, he encountered alternative models for addressing this familiar problem of his native land. To be sure, St. Lôt and Fignolé’s political optimism about overturning the sharecropper system in Haiti differs considerably from Wright’s earlier depictions of sharecropping in the US South.

In contrast to St. Lôt and Fignolé’s hopeful aspiration to end Haiti’s systems of indenture, in Wright’s earlier works, sharecropping in the South represents an intractable system that affords few paths of resistance. In *12 Million Black Voices*, sharecroppers live “within the web of a system we cannot beat.”¹¹⁴ The “plantation system,” in Wright’s telling, appears as a nearly inescapable network of external controlling forces that determine the lives of Black farmers in the South: “we travel down the plantation road with debt holding our left hand, with credit holding our right, and ahead of us looms the grave, the final and simple end.”¹¹⁵ The brutality of sharecropping is a prominent theme in Wright’s fiction as well. Wright’s 1938 collection of novellas, *Uncle Tom’s Children*, for example, offers a portrait of the South in which sharecropping precipitates violence and death. In “Down by the Riverside” Mann’s efforts to survive a flood are compromised by his disadvantages as a

¹¹³ Wright, [Haitian Biographies].

¹¹⁴ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 41.

¹¹⁵ Wright, *Black Voices*, 41, 59.

sharecropper. Although not named as such, Mann's predicament as a poor farmer signals his sharecropper position. As his "old house" threatens to collapse in the rising floodwaters, Mann recalls that he chose to remain at home despite warnings because "He had thought if he stayed he would be the first to get back to the fields and start spring plowing."¹¹⁶ Now, as the seeds for next year's crop begin to rot, Mann's family is unable to purchase a boat, which leads to the death of his wife and unborn child, and ultimately to his own murder by white soldiers. Silas' background as a sharecropper likewise contributes to his violent end in "Long Black Song." Silas' escape from sharecropping – "He had worked hard and saved his money and bought a farm so he could grow his own crops like white men" – fuels his rage at a white salesman who has assaulted his wife, Sarah.¹¹⁷ The salesman's violation, which Silas understands to be first and foremost an attack against himself, is particularly incensing for Silas because of his mobility and new economic status. "Fer ten years Ah slaved mah life out t git mah farm free..." Silas states.¹¹⁸ Yet he continues to be persecuted: "They take yo lan! They take yo freedom! They take yo women! N then they take yo life."¹¹⁹ Rather than fleeing after he kills the salesman, Silas remains to face the ensuing mob and his own certain death.

In these novellas, and in *12 Million Black Voices*, there are few signs that sharecropping can be upended. Unlike in Haiti, where the Black politicians St. Lôt and Figiolé fight to abolish sharecropping, in the South, as Wright notes in *Black Voices*, "There are no black policeman, black justices of the peace, black judges, black juries, black mayors, or black men anywhere in the government."¹²⁰ In Wright's South, "[wiping] out the

¹¹⁶ Richard Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 62, 63.

¹¹⁷ Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children*, 147.

¹¹⁸ Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children*, 151-152.

¹¹⁹ Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children*, 152.

¹²⁰ Wright, *Black Voices*, 43.

sharecropper system” does not appear as a possibility. Instead, “the plantation system,” in Wright’s account, leaves little room for imagining individual or collective agency beyond a very limited set of responses. “Everything fits flush,” Wright writes in *Black Voices*, “each corner fitting tight into another corner. If you act at all, it is either to flee or to kill; you are either a victim or a rebel.”¹²¹ Farah Jasmine Griffin writes that the limited agency Wright affords Black Southerners in *Black Voices* means that “More often than not they appear as the objects of history, as victims who are always acted upon.”¹²² Disempowered by the “web” of sharecropping as well as the judicial system and the lynch mob, Black Southerners in Wright’s telling have few avenues of recourse.¹²³ Unlike in the later writings of James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison, Griffin argues, Wright’s emphasis on these harrowing conditions results in works showing “no indication that the South holds any possibility or redemptive value,” which explains why Wright’s migration narratives do not include stories of return to the South.¹²⁴ “For Richard Wright,” Griffin writes, “a return to the South is a retreat into a dark and ugly history. The only positive movement is a progressive, linear one forward into the future, abroad to Europe, or to a final death on the city pavement.”¹²⁵

Wright’s South was a place that could only be escaped, rather than redeemed, as Griffin argues. However, the theme of sharecropping in his Haitian manuscript shows Wright returning to a central theme within his Southern texts only this time, in Haiti the future upending of sharecropping remains imaginable. The lack of possibility that Griffin describes in Wright’s South necessitated Wright’s indirect strategy, or diversion. Unable to

¹²¹ Wright, *Black Voices*, 57.

¹²² Griffin, “*Who Set You Flowin’?*”, 32.

¹²³ Griffin, “*Who Set You Flowin’?*”, 32-33.

¹²⁴ Griffin, “*Who Set You Flowin’?*”, 37, 160.

¹²⁵ Griffin, “*Who Set You Flowin’?*”, 165.

find openings for change within a society where “everything fits flush,” Wright turned to postcolonial possibilities in Haiti where two Black politicians promised to transform the nation’s “plantation system.” In Haiti, in other words, Wright witnessed proposed solutions to what he understood as intractable in the South, which allowed him to think again, if only partially and indirectly, about potential remedies for the seemingly irrevocable conflicts of the American South.

In addition to his discussion of sharecropping, St. Lôt’s conflict with a white American during the US occupation also provides a point of identification for Wright. Here as well, however, St. Lôt’s response to the American contrasts with how many of Wright’s Black southern characters respond to racial conflict in his fiction. As mentioned previously, Wright’s notes indicate that St. Lôt left agricultural school for law school after “a conflict with white American – director,” which St. Lôt attributes to “the attitude of U.S. superiority.” St. Lôt’s educational opportunities in Haiti are not available to the Black Southern sharecroppers in Wright’s fiction, but St. Lôt’s decision to enter law school nevertheless displays a form of human agency beyond the choice “either to flee or to kill.” In his reading of *Uncle Tom’s Children*, Richard Yarborough suggests that Wright celebrates Silas for seizing upon a final chance to assert his own will by remaining behind to fight the lynch mob. While “Down by the Riverside” and “Long Black Song” both depict Black Southerners as nearly powerless, Yarborough writes, “Wright also suggests in these stories that choosing the terms of one’s own death in a world that refuses to let you live as a human being constitutes an existential triumph of no small order.”¹²⁶ Silas’ violent end, Yarborough

¹²⁶ Richard Yarborough, introduction to *Uncle Tom’s Children*, by Richard Wright (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), xxvi.

argues, “dramatizes Wright’s belief that one must finally impose his or her own meaning on reality. And doing so in the face of death is, to Wright, heroic.”¹²⁷ Still, Sarah’s multiple appeals to Silas to flee with her indicate that at least from her perspective Silas’ death is unnecessary. Moreover, Silas’ decision to remain behind is not courageous in Sarah’s eyes. Instead, she views Silas as a person swept up by historical forces beyond his control. “[W]hen the killing started” Sarah thinks to herself after leaving Silas to face the mob, “it went on, like a red river flowing. Oh, she felt sorry for Silas! Silas...He was following that long river of blood.”¹²⁸ Even in this last effort to assert control, Silas remains a casualty of his environment, according to Sarah’s interpretation. Whether viewed as heroic or as further evidence of his apparent choicelessness, Silas’ violent death is in keeping with the limited view of Black Southern agency that Wright offers in *Black Voices*. In contrast to Silas, St. Lôt’s response to racism and his vision for post-occupation Haiti maintains the sense of possibility that Griffin finds lacking in Wright’s South. Much like his attention to St. Lôt’s vision for sharecropping, Wright’s notes on St. Lôt’s individual agency in response to a white American show him re-addressing those conflicts that appear virtually irresolvable in his Southern texts.

Wright’s portrait of Paule Duncan, which differs considerably from many of his depictions of women in his fiction, also shows Wright rethinking important problematics in his earlier writings. If “individualistic race rebellion” and “black masculinism” are associated, as Cheryl Higashida observes, then just as Wright’s notes on St. Lôt show his exposure to models of racial protest beyond the choice “either to flee or to kill,” his description of

¹²⁷ Yarborough, introduction, xxvii.

¹²⁸ Wright, *Uncle Tom’s Children*, 153.

Duncan shows Wright distancing himself from a male-dominated political viewpoint.¹²⁹ Wright's identification with Duncan and her lead position in the typescript make Wright's Haitian manuscript an important text for considerations of his gender politics given the often masculinist vision of his fiction. Several scholars have argued that Wright reduces his female characters to stereotypes and subordinates their experiences to that of his male characters. In Wright's fiction, Sherley Anne Williams argues, "Neither women characters nor 'women's questions' figure centrally." Instead, "Women are only supporting players with bit parts."¹³⁰ It is significant, then, that Wright's first travel writing involves a serious consideration of female perspectives through his portrait of Duncan and his notes on Yvonne Sylvain, Haiti's first female medical doctor and a key figure within the feminist movement in Haiti. Moreover, Wright's focus on educated, elite and middle-class Haitian women in the manuscript complicates the negative association between women and folk culture that scholars have found in his fiction.¹³¹ In contrast to much of Wright's earlier work, Wright's first travel manuscript foregrounds middle class Haitian women, which suggests that Wright's gender politics were troubled by his new efforts to de-nationalize his writing. Indeed, Wright's first travel writing contains a vision of postcolonial modernity in which gender equality is inseparable from struggles for racial and economic justice.

Appearing as the first biographical sketch in Wright's typescript, Paule Duncan is a young, educated woman from the Black middle class who has broken with her society's

¹²⁹ Cheryl Higashida, "Aunt Sue's Children: Re-viewing the Gender(ed) Politics of Richard Wright's Radicalism," *American Literature* 75, no. 2 (June 2003): 397.

¹³⁰ Sherley Anne Williams, "Papa Dick and Sister-Woman: Reflections on Women in the Fiction of Richard Wright," in *American Novelists Revisited: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. Fritz Fleischmann (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1982): 395, 397.

¹³¹ For discussion of this vein in Wright criticism, see Higashida, "Aunt Sue's Children."

expectation to marry in pursuit of her own individual freedom. Wright depicts Duncan's choice to renounce marriage as a subversion of the role traditionally prescribed to women of her class, and thus figures the gender order as a key social structure undergoing transformation in post-occupation Haiti. As Wright observes,

Catholic, rural, French, the educated classes of Port au Prince regard women as not possessing the right to be completely free. Marriage is the only door to security for a beautiful girl. This custom has held for generations and only very recently has it been questioned. Its most dramatic and [sic] challenge came in the form of an intensely feminine, husky-voiced, winsome dark girl of 24 years of age. Petite, fragile, 110-pound Paule Duncan elected to live freely and independently amidst the almost two-century old customs of Port of Prince in defiance of the expectations of society and the fears of her family.¹³²

Aspects of Wright's description of Duncan conform to Black female stereotypes that scholars have identified in his fiction. Wright's focus on Duncan's body, her "intensely feminine" affect and "winsome" appearance correspond with the sex object stereotype that Nagueyalti Warren has observed as typical of Wright's Black female characters.¹³³ Wright's later assertions that Duncan "is no neurotic girl with Freudian [sic] complexes" and that "In actions and words she is free and spontaneous; no excessive introspection or reserve mars her personality" reinforce the paternalism of Wright's portrait – he refers to Duncan as a "girl" throughout the sketch – by portraying her as childlike and primitive, uncorrupted by the "Freudian complexes" of the West.¹³⁴ Furthermore, Wright's repeated focus on her sexuality threatens to obfuscate Duncan's own rebuke of patriarchy. To be sure, Wright

¹³² Wright, [Haitian Biographies]. Wright's edits are not indicated in this quotation.

¹³³ Nagueyalti Warren, "Black Girls and Native Sons: Female Images in Selected Works by Richard Wright," in *Richard Wright: Myths and Realities*, ed. C. James Trotman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 64.

¹³⁴ Wright, [Haitian Biographies]. Warren writes that in *Black Boy*, "Both Aunt Addie and Granny display the primitive and childlike nature that allows them to accept uncritically the oppressor's religion. Warren, "Black Girls and Native Sons," 63.

adopts a paternalistic and at times objectifying gaze toward Duncan even as he emphasizes her confrontation of middle-class patriarchy.

However, Duncan does not fit what Warren calls “the ideal sex object [who] represents no challenge or threat emotionally, intellectually, or otherwise.”¹³⁵ Duncan is clearly threatening to the established order. Her siblings are “puzzled and a little afraid that their beautiful older sister has ~~smashed~~ abandoned the pattern of tradition and family protection.” Later, Wright describes Duncan’s sisters as “shocked by Paule’s goings and comings without saying when or where.” And while “no serious objections have so far come from Paule’s family, nor has the church indicated any disapproval,” Duncan’s “friends brand her as ‘different’ and pretentious.” Young men interested in Duncan, meanwhile, “expect their women to be submissive, and Paule is anything but that.” As quoted above, Duncan’s choice not to marry is figured as a “challenge” to the gender orthodoxy. Elsewhere, Wright refers to Duncan’s “rebellion” and writes that she “confronts Haitian life with a smile and reassuring explanations which are clearly worded.” Nevertheless, despite his representation of Duncan as a heroine, Wright’s critique of Haitian gender politics through Duncan is limited by his implication that Haitian women in general are passive accepters of their own circumscribed position in society. Women themselves, in Wright’s manuscript, at times figure as the main obstacle barring their path to freedom. In Wright’s telling, Duncan “grope[s] for some way to tell Haitian women to be individual human beings, to live richer lives.” Women are “awed by her, envy her, but are shocked at the very idea of being so free...” The objective here is to enlighten Haitian women, which comes at the expense of a

¹³⁵ Warren, “Black Girls and Native Sons,” 66.

broader critique of inequality. Still, Wright's assertion, through Duncan, that women are "caged and locked away" or "chained to their dull homes" demonstrates his ability to recognize structural inequities facing Haitian women. Wright's awareness of systemic gender barriers is indicated by what is perhaps Duncan's most explicitly political challenge, which is her desire "to see the ballot extended to [women in Haiti]."¹³⁶

Furthermore, although Wright's portrait of Duncan is frequently paternalistic, Duncan's political agency is particularly significant given her age, since in his fiction Wright often limits displays of power by women to matriarchal figures. Warren writes that the "non-feminine stereotype" stands alongside the sex object in Wright's work. Depicted as "tough, hard-working domestic[s] who [assume] the role of matriarch," these women are unsympathetic and hostile toward Wright's male characters, dedicated to religion, and "desexualized by the nature of their physical appearance and sometimes by their age."¹³⁷ Warren's reading of the non-feminine type in Wright's work, among whom she includes Bigger Thomas' mother in *Native Son* and Granny and Aunt Addie of *Black Boy*, corresponds with several aspects of Williams' examination of Aunt Sue in "Bright and Morning Star" of *Uncle Tom's Children*. In "Bright and Morning Star," Aunt Sue displays her commitment to her communist sons, and to the Party itself, when she kills a "stool" with whom she has shared party secrets, making her the most politicized female character in the collection. Williams reads the novella as "one of the most deft and moving renderings of a black woman's experience in the canon of American literature," but finds that Wright nevertheless "reinforces the image of the black woman as a symbol of the reactionary aspects in Afro-

¹³⁶ Wright, [Haitian Biographies].

¹³⁷ Warren, "Black Girls and Native Sons," 60-62.

American tradition” by employing aspects of the mammy stereotype in his characterization of Aunt Sue.¹³⁸ As Williams argues, Aunt’s Sue’s humble performance of domestic labor, her struggle to raise her two sons as a widow amidst poverty and racism, her Christian faith, and her protective attitude toward her young white comrade, Reva, which mimics the mammy/mistress relationship, all associate her with stereotypical images of the Black matriarch.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, Williams writes, Aunt Sue is a “complex and dynamic” character compared to women in Wright’s later fiction where, “strength in black women is seen increasingly as emanating from a kind of religious hysteria” that contributes to the plight of Wright’s Black male characters.¹⁴⁰ “These are primarily older women,” Williams notes, “for power, even in such a limited form, is seldom a quality Wright associates with young black women.”¹⁴¹ To be sure, considering that none of the younger female characters in *Uncle Tom’s Children* serve as directly as political agents, Aunt Sue’s political instrumentality appears to be authorized by her age, which, alongside her religious loyalties, associate her with the “non-feminine stereotype” in Warren’s analysis, which is “sustained by the desexualized, devoutly or fanatically religious image.”¹⁴² Aunt Sue’s political power, in other words, appears alongside other non-threatening, or disempowering qualities. In comparison to Aunt Sue, whose politicization appears to come at the expense of her adherence to the matriarchal stereotype, Duncan represents a rare example in Wright’s work of a politically dynamic young female character.

¹³⁸ Williams, “Papa Dick and Sister-Woman,” 398.

¹³⁹ Williams, “Papa Dick and Sister-Woman,” 398-403.

¹⁴⁰ Williams, “Papa Dick and Sister-Woman,” 404-405.

¹⁴¹ Williams, “Papa Dick and Sister-Woman,” 405.

¹⁴² Warren, “Black Girls and Native Sons,” 62.

While Wright's treatment of Duncan avoids common stereotypes, Duncan also stands out among Wright's depictions of women for her leading role as the first biographical sketch in Wright's manuscript, which makes her the protagonist of the text. In this respect, Duncan is distinct from, for example, Brother Mann's wife Lulu in "Down by the Riverside." Williams argues that Lulu's silent position in the story's background make her "a metaphor of the general representation of women in Wright's work."¹⁴³ Threatened by a prolonged labor with her and Mann's child, Lulu becomes the primary catalyst for Mann's heroic attempt to find a doctor and safety from the rising floodwaters. As Mann's courageous battle with his environment assumes the narrative center, Lulu dies without uttering a word.¹⁴⁴ "Lulu is not an identifiable personality," Williams writes, "but an occasion for the hero to demonstrate soul, his persistence and grace under pressure."¹⁴⁵ This dynamic is absent from Wright's Haitian manuscript, where Duncan's story is foregrounded.

As the manuscript's central figure, Duncan's experience is distinctly reminiscent of Wright's own story as depicted in *Black Boy*, which indicates that Wright identified with her by recalling his past experience as a young person at odds with the status quo. For example, Duncan's defiance of family, friends, and society because of a demanding "emotional need for knowledge and experience" and "a force in herself to be herself" mirrors Wright's rebellion during his youth against the restrictions of the South.¹⁴⁶ As Wright recalls in his autobiography, "In me was shaping a yearning for a kind of consciousness, a mode of being that the way of life about me had said could not be, must not be, and upon which the

¹⁴³ Williams, "Papa Dick and Sister-Woman," 394.

¹⁴⁴ Williams, "Papa Dick and Sister-Woman," 394-395.

¹⁴⁵ Williams, "Papa Dick and Sister-Woman," 395.

¹⁴⁶ Wright, [Haitian Biographies].

penalty of death had been placed.”¹⁴⁷ For their dissent, both Duncan and Wright are alienated from their communities. “Paule is alone,” Wright states, “There are but few others who dare to follow her, to be like her.” Furthermore, in a passage that parallels Wright’s frequent descriptions in *Black Boy* of the “distance” he senses “between [him] and the world,” Duncan “is glad to be free of the social restraints which bog others down in fear and anxiety,” but “There are moments when she feels isolated, cut off from the normal processes of life.”¹⁴⁸ In portraying his text’s lead figure, Wright emphasizes those parts of Duncan’s story that map on to his own experience in the South, justifying his sense of the “astounding identity” he perceived “between Haitians and other peoples.”¹⁴⁹

Duncan’s central position within the text complicates Williams’ critique regarding the subordinate role of women in Wright’s fiction and lends support to arguments by Joyce Ann Joyce and Cheryl Higashida, both of whom re-examine Wright’s female characters in *Uncle Tom’s Children*, in order to unsettle understandings of Wright and gender. In her reading of “Long Black Song,” Williams argues that Sarah serves only to intensify Silas’ predicament by serving as the primary source of his destruction through her encounter with the white salesman. Joyce, in contrast, writes that as the text’s protagonist, Sarah’s perspective is not secondary to Silas’, but rather acts as the text’s “moral consciousness.”¹⁵⁰ When, at the story’s end, Sarah describes Silas and the white salesman as “two toy men” fighting each other as in a game, she emerges as the “emotional superior” who understands the ineffectual

¹⁴⁷ Richard Wright, *Black Boy (American Hunger): A Record of Childhood and Youth*. The restored text established by the library of America (New York: Perennial Classics, 1993), 169.

¹⁴⁸ Wright, [Haitian Biographies]. Wright, *Black Boy (American Hunger)*, 253.

¹⁴⁹ Wright, [Haitian Biographies].

¹⁵⁰ Joyce Ann Joyce, “Richard Wright’s ‘Long Black Song’: A Moral Dilemma,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 42, no 4. (Fall 1989): 380.

nature of their violent conflict.¹⁵¹ Both Silas and the white salesman abuse Sarah, Joyce argues, while “she, the focus of Wright’s moral viewpoint, comprehends a level of reality that lies outside their male-dominated struggle for power.”¹⁵² In keeping with Joyce’s re-reading, Higashida argues that “*Uncle Tom’s Children* ultimately critiques the limitations of individualistic race rebellion, which is associated with black masculinism.”¹⁵³ Instead, the collection’s concluding novellas, show Wright’s female characters exhibiting the “synthesis” of Black nationalist and Communist ideals that Higashida finds in Wright’s 1937 manifesto for Black literature, “Blueprint for Negro Writing.” Like Joyce, Higashida writes that “Long Black Song” does not validate Silas’ response. Rather, the message of the story lies in Sarah’s critique of Silas’ reaction and in her developing vision for an ideal alternative.¹⁵⁴ As Higashida avers, Sarah’s belief that Silas has capitulated to “the old river of blood,” undermines “the masculinist racial militance” espoused in the collection’s earlier novellas and prompts her to imagine another way: “Somehow, men, black men and white men, land and houses, green cornfields and grey skies, gladness and dreams, were all a part of that which made life good. Yes, somehow they were linked, like the spokes in a spinning wagon wheel. She felt they were. She knew they were.” By gesturing toward racial integration and human interdependence through the “folk symbol” of the wagon wheel, Higashida argues, Sarah burgeoning vision draws from the Marxist and nationalist sources that Wright advocated for in “Blueprint.”¹⁵⁵ Likewise, in her examination of “Bright and Morning Star,” Higashida contends that Wright dispenses with the mammy stereotype in his depiction of

¹⁵¹ Joyce, “Richard Wright’s ‘Long Black song,’” 385.

¹⁵² Joyce, “Richard Wright’s ‘Long Black song,’” 384.

¹⁵³ Cheryl Higashida, “Aunt Sue’s Children,” 397.

¹⁵⁴ Cheryl Higashida, “Aunt Sue’s Children,” 404.

¹⁵⁵ Cheryl Higashida, “Aunt Sue’s Children,” 406-407.

Aunt Sue and instead figures the Black mother and domestic worker as key figures within his conception of revolutionary struggle.¹⁵⁶

These revisionist readings run counter to Williams' argument that Wright could not "imagine a constructive role for [black women] in the black man's struggle for freedom."¹⁵⁷ Duncan's centrality, limited as it is by Wright's recurring paternalism toward her, speaks to the constructive role he envisions for women in post-occupation Haiti, particularly given his characterization of Duncan as future oriented. As Wright notes at the conclusion of his sketch,

Paule is imitating no one; she has no model to follow. Her thinking and groping led her to this. She enjoys it. She feels a reserve of unspent power. She expects the unexpected. 'They might strike at me someday, but I'll understand what will make them do it.' This facing the future without definite answers, this creating herself out of herself, she feels is her right. 'I feel that life is freedom,' she says and behind her smile lurks no illusions.¹⁵⁸

Here, Duncan's "facing the future without definite answers" and her "creating herself out of herself" make her emblematic of the nation, itself undergoing a process of self-recreation following the US occupation. Wright thus stages Duncan's story as fundamental to his vision for postcolonial renewal.

Duncan's challenge to established gender roles was part of a broader middle class and elite women's movement in Haiti that advanced an anti-patriarchal program rooted in the anti-imperial resistance campaign against the US occupation.¹⁵⁹ As Grace L. Sanders

¹⁵⁶ Cheryl Higashida, "Aunt Sue's Children," 416-418.

¹⁵⁷ Williams, "Papa Dick and Sister-Woman," 396.

¹⁵⁸ Wright, [Haitian Biographies].

¹⁵⁹ Examining the generation of Haitian women activists following the occupation, Grace L. Sanders traces "the transition in Haitian women's activism from an anti-imperial and anti-racist international project to an anti-patriarchal national focused movement" Grace L. Sanders, "La Voix des Femmes: Haitian Women's Rights,

demonstrates, anti-occupation activism by Haitian women “spawned a new sense of social consciousness regarding women’s position in the country.”¹⁶⁰ “[I]n the post-U.S. occupation period of renewed nostalgia for the Haitian Revolution,” Grace writes, “Haitian women challenged the premise and promise of Haitian democracy and national identity by publically articulating their experiences of violence, sexual practice, and political inequality.”¹⁶¹ In addition to his portrait of Duncan, Wright’s notes on Yvonne Sylvain, of the well-known Sylvain family, and the first female medical doctor in Haiti, indicates his interest in Haitian women’s activism. Yvonne’s mother and father, Eugene and Georges Sylvain were deeply involved in the opposition to the occupation, while Yvonne and her sisters became renowned for their academic and professional accomplishments as well as for their political activism.¹⁶² In 1934, Yvonne’s sister, Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, Haiti’s first female lawyer, co-founded the nation’s first women’s rights organization, The Women’s League for Social Action (*La Ligue Feminine d’Action Sociale*). Yvonne was a “prominent” member of the organization, which, among other initiatives, led the effort for women’s suffrage that passed in November of 1950, some four months after Wright’s visit.¹⁶³

At the broadest level, Wright’s notes on Yvonne Sylvain, which document her efforts to access the exclusively male medical profession, are significant for their attention to a central figure within the Haitian feminist movement, especially given his often problematic treatment of female characters in his fiction. More specifically, however, the Haitian

National Politics and Black Activism in Port-au-Prince and Montreal, 1934-1986,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2013), 29.

¹⁶⁰ Sanders, “La Voix de Femmes,” 101.

¹⁶¹ Sanders, “La Voix de Femmes,” xvii.

¹⁶² Sanders, “La Voix de Femmes,” 6.

¹⁶³ Sanders, “La Voix de Femmes,” 111, 162.

manuscript's attention to educated, elite and middle-class Haitian women departs from Wright's focus on working class African American female characters, which complicates the negative association between Black women and folk culture that scholars have identified in his fiction. As Higashida writes, "dominant narratives of Wright...frequently yoke his denigration of folk culture, his misogyny (especially toward African American women), and his Marxist perspective."¹⁶⁴ Contrary to these narratives, Wright's notes on Sylvain are focused on her professional accomplishments, which distance her from Haiti's working class and peasant population and its association with folk culture. Likewise, in his depiction of Duncan, Wright is careful to separate her from traditional culture. Although Duncan often travels "alone into the primitive wilds of Haiti to paint, to study the life of the peasant, their voodoo rituals etc." making her "one of the best informed young women in Haiti on the life of the peasant," Duncan "studies," rather than embodies Haitian folk culture. Wright further emphasizes this separation by highlighting Duncan's knowledge of French literature: "Paule reads widely in French contemporary literature, Prevert, Gide, Geardi, etc. Someday perhaps she thinks she might open a school for Haitian girls to train them in a new way of life."¹⁶⁵ Whereas Williams argues that in his fiction Wright frequently links Black female sexuality with "a peasant mentality," in his Haitian manuscript Wright distances Duncan from Haiti's peasant population and associates her with the modern, or "new way of life."¹⁶⁶

Wright's portrait of Duncan and his notes on Sylvain demonstrate his interest in the position of women in postcolonial societies, which would surface again, as Gilroy points out,

¹⁶⁴ Cheryl Higashida, "Aunt Sue's Children," 396.

¹⁶⁵ Wright, [Haitian Biographies].

¹⁶⁶ Williams, "Papa Dick and Sister-Woman," 410.

at the First Conference of Negro Writers and Artists in 1956. Before giving his address, Wright commented on the absence of women at the conference:

I don't know how many of you have noticed it [-] there have been no women functioning vitally and responsibly upon this platform helping to mold and mobilize our thoughts. This is not a criticism of the conference, it is not a criticism of anyone, it is a criticism that I heap upon ourselves collectively. When and if we hold another conference – and I hope we will – I hope there shall be an effective utilization of Negro womanhood in the world to help us mobilize and pool our forces. Perhaps some hangover of influence from the past has colored our attitude, or perhaps this was an oversight. In our struggle for freedom, against great odds, we cannot afford to ignore one half of our manpower, that is, the force of women and their active collaboration. Black men will not be free until their women are free.¹⁶⁷

As Merve Fejzula observes, notwithstanding the “remarkable...awareness” of Wright’s criticism, his use of the term “manpower” to describe the resources of Black collectivity is “evocative of the discourse in operation at the congress that might have enabled the obscuring of women’s involvement.”¹⁶⁸ Even as Wright criticizes the conference, his gendered characterization of Black internationalism enacts its own form of silencing. Nevertheless, between Duncan’s lead position in the Haitian manuscript, his attention to Sylvain’s struggle as a woman in the medical field, and his statement at the conference, there is evidence to suggest that as Wright’s focus moved away from a US nationalist discourse and toward a more global orientation, his views on the role of women in “our struggle for freedom” experienced an accompanying shift.

¹⁶⁷ Richard Wright, “Tradition and Industrialization: The Plight of the Tragic Elite in Africa,” *Présence Africaine*, no. 8/10 (June-November 1956): 347.

¹⁶⁸ Merve Fejzula, “Women and the 1956 Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris,” *Black Perspectives* (blog) African American Intellectual History Society, November 3, 2016. <https://www.aaihs.org/women-and-the-1956-congress-of-black-writers-and-artists-in-paris/>

The common starting point for discussions of Wright and gender – his contentious relationship with Zora Neale Hurston through their critical reviews of each other’s works in the nineteen thirties – is also complicated by Wright’s time in Haiti. Some twelve years after condemning *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Wright would follow in Hurston’s footsteps to the site of that novel’s composition, replicating certain aspects of her literary explorations. Wright’s biographical sketches of Haitians during the post-occupation period and his attention to gender in Haitian society both closely resemble, at least in form, Hurston’s examination of Haiti in *Tell My Horse* (1938), which is a clear precedent for Wright’s manuscript. To be sure, despite their differences regarding Marxism and folk culture, both Hurston and Wright sought to transcend the boundaries of the nation by following the routes of the US empire to Haiti.

However, whereas *Tell My Horse* involves a deep exploration of Haitian folk culture, Wright’s manuscript downplays this aspect of Haitian society, reaffirming important differences between the two authors. “On a recent visit to Haiti,” Wright states in the introductory paragraphs of the typescript,

I was struck less by the exotic nature of its drums and Voodoo religion than by the sense of perturbation that lay behind the words and actions of its young people. The majestic contours of the Haitian landscape [sic] and its dramatically colored skies were less appealing to my sensibilities than the chronic poverty of its millions of black peasants who are seeking so valiantly but hopelessly to rise from the dirt which chains them to their station in life. Between the light-skinned elite which wields [sic] so much influence in Haitian life and the voiceless peasants there is emerging a middle group whose lives are moving upwards from the folk anchored superstitions of the past towards a freer and less traditional conception of life and individual action.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Wright, [Haitian Biographies].

Wright's evasion of Haiti's "exotic...drums and Voodoo religion," alongside his minimization of "the majestic contours of the Haitian landscape," can be read as countering the exoticism that pervaded US discourse on Haiti during the occupation. However, Wright's efforts to highlight the "chronic poverty of [Haiti's] millions of black peasants" while deemphasizing this group's cultural practices is in keeping with his complicated relationship with folk culture whether in Haiti or the US South. As Richard King observes, in part through his childhood experience in the South, and partly through the influence of Marxism and Chicago School sociology, Wright "became convinced quite early that the folk culture of black southerners, both in itself and as it was disrupted by the Great Migration northward, was an inadequate vehicle for black progress in the United States."¹⁷⁰ In keeping with King's assessment Robin Lucy states, "For Wright, folk culture is an element of an unusable past that cannot be translated into modernity."¹⁷¹ The Haitian manuscript largely affirms these arguments although Wright's edits suggest that his attitude toward folk culture was not entirely set in stone. For example, his decision to delete his initial description of "black peasants" as "hopeless," but retain his characterization of them as "voiceless" indicates a fluctuating perception of this group's role in shaping post-occupation Haiti. Moreover, his decision to describe the middle class as "moving towards a freer and less traditional conception of life" while editing out his reference to "the folk anchored superstitions of the past" also signals his hesitation to dismiss outright the place of folk culture in postcolonial modernity.

¹⁷⁰ King, "Richard Wright," 229.

¹⁷¹ Robin Lucy, "Flying Home': Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and the Black Folk During World War II," *Journal of American Folklore* 120, no. 477 (Summer 2007): 263.

Despite these signs of uncertainty in Wright's draft, it is clear that his view of folk culture in Haiti corresponded with his critiques of cultural traditions in the South and elsewhere. As Jeff Karem observes, "Wright's conflicted perspective [in the Haitian manuscript] echoes his own description of his complex attitude toward the folk culture of Mississippi," and as Wright increasingly looked beyond the US during the later years of his career, he drew similar conclusions about the postcolonial world as a whole.¹⁷² For Wright, the way forward for African Americans as well as "the future of all other formerly subjugated people, lay precisely in the future rather than in the past, in joining the historical process rather than in seeking refuge in past traditions," King writes.¹⁷³ This would hold true for Wright in his impression of Africa. As King argues, "The theme informing *Black Power* is one that dominated Wright's American writings – the necessity for a people, caught between the traditional and the modern, to choose the modern."¹⁷⁴ Wright's attitude toward folk culture in the Gold Coast mirrors his discomfort with Haiti's "drums and Voodoo religion," which in turn resonates with his description in *Black Boy* of his estrangement from his "peasant" father and Black Southern culture in general.¹⁷⁵ This sense of alienation from folk culture highlights the ambivalence involved in Wright's internationalism. Karem writes that the section of Wright's manuscript quoted above "embodies a microcosm of Wright's conflicted views on the Caribbean."¹⁷⁶ Ultimately, Karem argues, while Wright sought to identify a "miraculous similarity" between Haiti and the US, his edits show that the specificity of Haitian society actually baffled him: "most of Wright's deletions have the effect

¹⁷² Karem, *Purloined Islands*, 235.

¹⁷³ King, "Richard Wright," 230.

¹⁷⁴ King, "Richard Wright," 234.

¹⁷⁵ Wright, *Black Boy (American Hunger)*, 35.

¹⁷⁶ Karem, *Purloined Islands*, 235.

of eliding the complex specifics of the Haitian power structure, shaping them to fit more familiar dynamics that he had observed in the United States and elsewhere.”¹⁷⁷ Certainly, Wright’s assertion of a “miraculous similarity” feels forced in light of his complex attitude toward Haiti, but whereas Karem reads Wright’s language as obfuscating differences between Haiti and the US, I read it as Wright’s effort to counterbalance his underlying hesitancy to fully identify with Haitian society, given its resemblance to the South in his eyes. Wright’s trip to Haiti was instrumental for his endeavor to incorporate the US South into a broader postcolonial narrative. In Haiti’s political possibilities following the US occupation, moreover, Wright encountered proposed solutions to conflicts that resembled the seemingly intractable difficulties of the US South. However, Wright’s manuscript also shows that as much as Wright’s internationalism freed him from his isolation in the US and allowed for a new understanding of his native land, in Haiti Wright also re-experienced the estrangement he first felt in the American South, which led to an ambivalent sense of identification.

By the late 1950s Wright embraced his “aloneness,” which stemmed not only from his relationship to folk culture, but also from his exile status and from what Cornel West has identified as his “deep allegiance to intellectual candor and existential honesty.”¹⁷⁸ In the introduction to his collection of essays, *White Man, Listen!* (1957), Wright proclaims himself a “rootless man,” but adds that he is “neither psychologically distraught nor in any wise particularly perturbed because of it...I declare unabashedly that I like and even cherish the state of abandonment, of aloneness.”¹⁷⁹ Wright’s dedication of the collection to Eric

¹⁷⁷ Karem, *Purloined Islands*, 236.

¹⁷⁸ Cornel West, introduction, viii.

¹⁷⁹ Wright, *Black Power: Three Books from Exile*, 647.

Williams and to “the westernized and tragic elite of Asia, Africa, and the West Indies,” highlights the insights he gained from a detached perspective. These “tragic elite,” Wright states, are,

the lonely outsiders who exist precariously / on the clifflike margins of many cultures – men who are / distrusted, misunderstood, maligned, criticized / by Left and Right, Christian and Pagan – / men who carry on their frail but indefatigable shoulders / the best of two worlds – and who, / amidst confusion and stagnation, / seek desperately for a home for their hearts: / a home which, if found, / could be a home for the hearts of all men.¹⁸⁰

As West observes, Wright “posits exilic, rootless outsiders like Wright himself to be the guardians of freedom and caretakers of global humanist ideals.”¹⁸¹ Wright’s description of these “tragic elite” no doubt draws from his encounter with groups from throughout the Global South and from his own experience on the “margins of many cultures,” but the influence of Wright’s Haitian interlude remains central. While Wright makes no specific reference to Haiti, the middle class Paule Duncan of Wright’s Haitian manuscript is also readily recognizable in this description. Wright’s dedication of the book to Eric Williams, and to the elites of the West Indies, in addition to those of Africa and Asia, are also reminders of how Wright’s encounter with the Caribbean came to shape his intellectual development toward rootless internationalism.

¹⁸⁰ Wright, *Black Power: Three Books from Exile*, 633.

¹⁸¹ West, introduction, xii.

Conclusion: From Haiti to Ghana

Despite the significance of Haiti for Wright, the fact remains that he never completed his Haitian manuscript. His plans to return to Haiti for a year apparently faded and his work on Toussaint Louverture never materialized.¹⁸² Wright's ambivalence about Haiti cannot explain his abandonment of the project, since similar complexities would characterize his impression of Ghana, but would not keep him from completing and publishing *Black Power*. Why is it that, at least for a brief period, Haiti was at the forefront of Wright's thinking, but then faded from his attention? Why did Wright leave his Haitian manuscript incomplete instead of publishing it as he seems to have originally intended? Karem suggests that Wright's manuscript went unfinished because Wright's American perspective kept him from accurately reading the complexity of Haitian society, a misreading, or inability to translate Haitian reality that left the Caribbean at the margins of Wright's internationalism.¹⁸³ Alternatively, I argue that Wright's exposure to the Caribbean and Caribbean intellectuals was foundational for his global outlook and that his Haitian notes were left unfinished not because of misreading on Wright's part, but rather because of Ghana's rising importance for Black international politics in the 1950s. The significance of Haiti for US and Caribbean Blacks during the 1920s, which was partly a consequence of the US occupation, continued into the 1940s. Smith writes that in the early 1940s "Haiti remained foremost in the U.S. black view of global black politics" and that a parallel interest in Haiti among Black Caribbean intellectuals and artists persisted into the post-occupation

¹⁸² Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 387.

¹⁸³ Karem, *Purloined Islands*, 236.

years.¹⁸⁴ However, by the 1950s, political radicalism was on the decline in Haiti, while in Africa's Gold Coast the independence movement intensified. Kevin Gaines writes that during this period Ghana became "a beacon for the black world's liberatory aspirations," a description that might well be applied to Haiti for much of the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁸⁵ Wright may have left his Haitian manuscript incomplete because Ghana was rising in prominence just as political activism in Haiti was dissipating. 1957 marked both Ghana's achievement of political independence and the onset of the Duvalier regime. Furthermore, the development of Wright's travel writings from his notes on Haiti to *Black Power*, mirrors the intellectual and political trajectory of two major Caribbean influences on him, Padmore and James, who both honed their anticolonialism in analyses of Haiti before turning to Ghana. In this sense, Wright's trip to Haiti in the wake of the US occupation was not marginal. Alongside his exposure to Caribbean radicalism, Wright's Haitian manuscript, complicated as it is by his ambivalence toward Haitian folk culture, propelled Wright's anticolonial internationalism and his growing consciousness of the US South's relation to the broader colonial world.

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¹⁸⁴ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 57-58.

¹⁸⁵ Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana*, 26.

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2. Hemingway's Hemispheric South: Transculturation, White Grievance, and Failed Affiliation in *To Have and Have Not*

Among Ernest Hemingway's books at the Finca Vigía, his home in San Francisco de Paula, Cuba, was a 1947 translation of Fernando Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, first published in 1940.¹ A foundational figure for Cuban Studies, Ortiz was an early twentieth-century Cuban sociologist and public intellectual whose masterwork, *Cuban Counterpoint*, is perhaps best known for introducing the term *transculturation* to describe the history of cross-cultural contact shaping Cuban life.² Distinguishing his term from what he calls the "Anglo-American" concept of *acculturation* and its implicit ethnocentrism, in *Cuban Counterpoint*, Ortiz emphasizes the "creation of new cultural phenomena" resulting from the meeting of different cultural and ethnic groups.³

Ortiz's transculturation provides a useful frame for this chapter's discussion of Hemingway, which focuses on his 1937 novel based on Caribbean and US Southern material, *To Have and Have Not*. Set in depression-era Key West and in Havana during the political turmoil of the early 1930s, *To Have and Have Not* centers on Harry Morgan, a

¹ *Cuban Counterpoint* was first published in 1940. Hemingway owned the 1947 English translation by Harriet de Onís: Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (New York: Knopf, 1947). See James D. Brasch and Joseph Sigman, *Hemingway's Library: A Composite Record* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981), 279.

² Ortiz writes, "I have chosen the word *transculturation* to express the highly varied phenomena that have come about in Cuba as a result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place here." Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 98.

³ In the original text, Ortiz describes acculturation as "la voz anglo-americana *acculturation*." Harriet de Onís' translation uses "English" instead of Anglo-American (102). I have chosen to use the term Anglo-American because it points more directly to the anticolonial implications of Ortiz's concept. Gustavo Pérez Firmat also retains Ortiz's use of "anglo-american." Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 26. Regarding the ethnocentrism of the term acculturation, see Pérez Firmat, *The Cuban Condition*, 21, and Bronislaw Malinowski, introduction to *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, by Fernando Ortiz, trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), lviii. For "new cultural phenomena," see Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 103.

hardboiled charter boat fisherman out of Key West, who, in the midst of the Great Depression, is reduced to smuggling illicit cargo across the Gulf Stream to support his family. Scholars have often read the book's proletarian theme as Hemingway's response to charges from leftist critics that his work of the period was out of touch with the vast suffering caused by the Great Depression.⁴ To be sure, Hemingway draws a stark contrast between the novel's "haves," who include affluent Key West tourists, and its "have nots," like Harry and other working-class Key West locals. But the novel is severely reduced if we limit its concerns to class differences among its characters. Although Hemingway did not move there until 1939, he began staying in Cuba for extended periods during the early thirties, soon after moving from Paris to Key West in 1928. In addition to, and inseparable from its class concerns, *To Have and Have Not* is also sensitive to the complex of racial and cultural distinctions that Hemingway encountered when he made his way to Key West and then Cuba.

Consider, for example, the dense social fabric of the novel's "have nots" who extend well beyond Key West's white working class to include the "bums" of Havana, Black Caribbean fishermen, Cuban revolutionaries, Chinese immigrants, African American smugglers, and disillusioned American veterans. Throughout the novel, Harry is associated with this wide-ranging population loosely connected by their distance from centers of power, although that distance varies, but differentiated by ethnicity, language, culture, and

⁴ James Meyers writes, "*To Have and Have Not* was Hemingway's misguided response to the critics' demand for political commitment." "*To Have and Have Not*," he continues, "was, on a superficial level, about economic injustice and the need for solidarity." Jeffrey Meyers, *Hemingway: A Biography* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1985), 296. See also, Milton A. Cohen, "Beleaguered Modernists: Hemingway, Stevens, and the Left," in *Key West Hemingway: A Reassessment*, ed. Kirk Curnutt and Gail D. Sinclair (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009) and Dan Monroe, "Hemingway, the Left, and Key West," in *Key West Hemingway: A Reassessment*, ed. Kirk Curnutt and Gail D. Sinclair (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

nationality. In keeping with Ortiz's transculturation, Harry, who makes his living on the Gulf Stream border between the Americas, is continually coming into contact with cultural difference. He encounters, and is a part of, what Antonio Benítez-Rojo has called the Caribbean's "soup of signs" in a book that he dedicated to Ortiz.⁵ Indeed, Mark P. Ott has described Hemingway's Gulf Stream as akin to Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zones," which she defines as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination."⁶ But we should note that Pratt's work, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, is indebted to Ortiz, whose ideas emerged out of the same social and political context that Hemingway was exposed to when he first starting visiting Cuba in the early thirties.

Ortiz's concept was in keeping with the spirit of nationalist and anti-imperial sentiment against the United States that was reaching a boiling point when Hemingway first began staying in Havana.⁷ The revolutionary fervor in Cuba was part of a larger wave of anticolonial nationalism moving through the Caribbean and Latin America in the 1920s and 1930s. Of Latin America, Luis E. Aguilar writes that movements throughout the region expressed "a new creed of Latinism, Indianism, nationalism – essentially anti-Yankeeism," while throughout the Caribbean, meanwhile, Raphael Dalleo writes that popular movements

⁵ Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. James Maraniss (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 2.

⁶ Mark P. Ott, "A Sea Change: The Gulf Stream and the Transformation of Ernest Hemingway's Style, 1932-1952" (PhD diss., The University of Hawai'i, 2002), xxiii-xxiv. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, second edition (London: Routledge, 2008), 7. Citing Ortiz, Pratt describes transculturation as "a phenomenon of the contact zone" (7).

⁷ "By the third decade of the twentieth century, Cuban intellectuals were beginning to develop a critique of their country's economic and social condition and to coach that critique in anti-imperialist (that is, anti-U.S.) terms." Aviva Chomsky, Pamela Maria Smorkaloff, Barry Carr, eds., *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 189.

brought about “a new form of anticolonial politics.”⁸ Alongside these regional developments and the encroachment of US neo-imperialism, Ortiz’s concept asserted Cuban autonomy and valorized Cuba’s transcultural history as a source of national identity.⁹ More broadly, however, Ortiz also challenged the rigid conceptual boundaries underpinning imperial power. As Fernando Coronil writes in his introduction to *Cuban Counterpoint*, “[Ortiz’s] counterpoint of cultures makes evident that in a world forged by the violence of conquest and colonization, the boundaries defining the West and its Others, white and dark, man and woman, and high and low are always at risk.”¹⁰

I am employing Ortiz’s term, not so much to demonstrate his influence on Hemingway – in fact, *Cuban Counterpoint* was published three years after *To Have and Have Not* – as to highlight the novel’s own concern not only with class, but also with racial and colonial orders and their potential breakdown. In a Key West characterized by deindustrialization, postwar disillusionment, and the political neglect of the working class, Harry’s tacit authority as a white American is continually destabilized by his association with the novel’s other “have nots,” just as the novel threatens US imperial authority by comparing conditions in Key West and Havana. Harry’s predicament, in other words, is not only his economic insecurity. Tangled up with his economic status, Harry’s “whiteness” and his “Americanness,” and the presupposed authority accompanying them, also appear unstable in a novel that compares his plight with that of non-white and non-American “have nots.”

⁸ Luis E. Aguilar, *Cuba 1933: Prologue to Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 68-69. Raphael Dalleo, *American Imperialism’s Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 2.

⁹ On the anti-colonialism of Ortiz’s term, see Pérez Firmat, *The Cuban Condition*, 26-27.

¹⁰ Fernando Coronil, “Introduction to the Duke University Press Edition, Transculturation and the Politics of Theory: Countering the Center, Cuban Counterpoint,” in *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, by Fernando Ortiz, trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), xiii-xiv.

Economically a “have not,” Harry is a “have” in terms of his position within racial and colonial orders, though these forms of authority threaten to slip away as his place within the nation becomes increasingly peripheral.

We might be tempted to read *To Have and Have Not* as Hemingway’s racial lament for the dislocated white American working class since fear of an impending loss of his racial and colonial position is a central feature of Harry’s cross-cultural interactions. Indeed, Ortiz theorizes that transculturation is a process involving phases of both “deculturation” and “neoculturation,” the former entailing “the loss or uprooting of a previous culture.” In discussing the transculturation of dominant cultural groups, Diana Taylor writes that the violence of cross-cultural encounter “point[s] to the important facet of transculturation that is completely missing from most analyses: the sense of loss. Those associated with the dominant groups resist losing what they see as their rightful place at the economic, historic, and cultural center of things.”¹¹ This is Harry’s fear, and it forms the basis of his racial grievance and his white supremacist nationalism. Were this the entire story, we might be persuaded to read Hemingway’s novel as a statement of remorse over the collapse of old orders, or as an expression of despair over Harry’s deculturation and his loss of an essential cultural identity and status.

But in his depictions of Harry’s cross-cultural interactions, Hemingway is as preoccupied with the search for new social and cultural systems as he is with the destruction of old ones. Put another way, these relationships register forces of both deculturation and neoculturation, “the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena.” To be sure, in

¹¹ Diana Taylor, “Transculturating Transculturation,” *Performing Arts Journal* 13, no. 2 (May 1991): 103.

Harry's relationships with the other "have nots," fraught and violent as they are, Hemingway repeatedly shows the potential for intimacy and affiliation. We see this intimacy, for example, in Harry's relationship with the Cuban rebel, Emilio, which reveals competing experiences of marginalization that disturb colonial hierarchies. We see it as well in the attention Harry and the Black crewman, Wesley, give to each other's injuries, which, I propose, stand in for the older, historical wound of racial violence and inequity. Indeed, while Harry's relationship with Emilio reflects colonial relations between the US and Cuba, Harry's relationship with Wesley alludes to a history of Black-white relations in the US South. And just as Harry and Emilio unsettle a colonial divide, between Harry and Wesley we see a response to past racial trauma. These gestures towards affiliation point to the potential new cultural phenomena arising out of Harry's cross-cultural relations.

Such intimacies, however, ultimately signify failed possibilities because they never prevent Harry's violence and aggression toward the novel's other "have nots." Harry kills Emilio, repeatedly denies the severity of Wesley's injury, and later concludes that he can't depend on "no rummy nor no nigger."¹² But they are nevertheless central for his realization at the end of his life concerning his individual insufficiency. Indeed, although Harry seeks to protect his status, in the end he is let down by his own racialized individualism. As Clinton S. Burhans, Jr. argues, Harry shares with Santiago of *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), both the sin of "isolated individualism" and an eventual recognition of the need for "solidarity and interdependence."¹³ What Burhans does not examine is how Harry's individualism is

¹² Ernest Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 105.

¹³ Clinton S. Burhans, Jr., "The Old Man and the Sea: Hemingway's Tragic Vision of Man," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Old Man and the Sea: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed., Katherine T. Jobes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968).

informed specifically by white racist resentment, or how his final awareness of interdependence signals a desire for cross-cultural and cross-racial affiliation in particular. To be sure, Harry's famous final words, "No matter how a man alone ain't got no bloody fucking chance," recall his failed affiliations with Emilio and Wesley, and they point away from a focus on Harry's own racial grievance and perseverance over his own woundedness and toward a desire to find new social arrangements.¹⁴

These arrangements remain undefined in Hemingway's novel. Indeed, I am not suggesting that *To Have and Have Not* ever comes close to offering a fully articulated vision for new kinds of cultural relation. Rather, I am suggesting that Hemingway was open to the complex history of Plantation America in the 1930s, and that almost despite himself, he allowed the creative process to go where it may in *To Have and Have Not*. In so doing he subjected himself to that which he could not fully understand or control. While Hemingway did not approach a fully defined politics, in other words, he did submit himself to this creative vulnerability and in putting Harry together with Emilio and Wesley, he allowed these constructed oppositions, as if of their own propulsion, to confess their instability and contingency.

Like other texts that I examine in this project, *To Have and Have Not* highlights complex associations between the US South and the Caribbean – in this case Key West and Cuba – that challenge a colonial narrative of US exceptionalism and cultural purity. In my last chapter, I argued that Richard Wright's Haitian manuscript shows that his exposure to radical changes within Haitian society following the US occupation allowed him to

¹⁴ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 225.

reconsider key problematics within his earlier Southern fiction and to rethink the social and political possibilities for African Americans in the US South. As in Wright's Haitian manuscript, in *To Have and Have Not* Hemingway also considers the relationship between Southern and Caribbean societies, but in a much different sense. Whereas Wright's manuscript is concerned principally with the experiences of Black US Southerners and Haitians, *To Have and Have Not* juxtaposes the predicament of a white working-class character with that of revolutionary Cuban "have nots," revealing competing grievances. To be sure, in *To Have and Have Not*, the Cuban political context becomes the example against which Harry attempts to understand his own emerging economic and white racial resentment in Key West. Distinctions between center and periphery, "or the West and its Others" in Coronil's words, are blurred by these projective identifications, just as Harry's tenuous authority obscures his position as either colonizer or colonized.

This chapter builds on work by Toni Morrison and Hideo Yanagisawa that focuses on the theme of race in Hemingway's novel. In her influential reading of *To Have and Have Not*, Morrison argues that the novel's Black characters serve as foils against whom Harry demonstrates his racial authority. As Morrison writes,

Within a milieu that threatens the dissolution of all distinctions of value – the milieu of the working poor, the unemployed, sinister Chinese, terrorist Cubans, violent but cowardly blacks, upper-class castrati, female predators – Harry and [his wife] Marie (an ex-prostitute) gain potency, a generative sexuality. They solicit our admiration by the comparison that is struck between their claims to fully embodied humanity and a discredited Africanism.¹⁵

¹⁵ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 80.

While my emphasis on race as a central theme in the novel builds on Morrison's argument, I stress that in tense company with the construction of racial mastery that Morrison uncovers, there are also impulses at work in the novel that seek to destabilize Harry's authority and to reconfigure cultural arrangements. Indeed, my own argument is more consistent with Yanagisawa's claim that Harry experiences an "identity crisis...directly related to his liminal position within the prevailing racial hierarchy."¹⁶ Focusing on the representation of Asian characters in *To Have and Have Not*, Yanagisawa argues that Harry's racial dominance is threatened by the "sophisticated" Chinese human smuggler Mr. Sing and by Key West tourists who "begin to collapse the distinctions between [Harry] and racial others" by associating him with Asian historical figures, such as Genghis Khan.¹⁷ Harry's brutal murder of Mr. Sing, Yanagisawa argues, therefore represents a reassertion of racial status.¹⁸ I also find racial anxiety at the center of Harry's relationships with the novel's non-white and non-American characters. And like Yanagisawa, I at times find him working to restore compromised racial and colonial structures. But unlike Yanagisawa, I argue that in Harry's relationships with Emilio and Wesley, the threatening deterioration of racial distinction and hierarchy gives way not only to a violent and protective stance, but also to a desire for cross-cultural intimacy and new kinds of social relations.

These matters of cross-cultural contact, race, and empire are themes not traditionally associated with Hemingway's oeuvre. To be sure, Hemingway may seem an odd choice for a project centered on the US South and the Caribbean, but between Key West and Cuba, for

¹⁶ Hideo Yanagisawa, "Harry Morgan's Identity Crisis: Orientalism and Slumming during the Great Depression in Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*," *The Hemingway Review* 34, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 48.

¹⁷ Yanagisawa, "Harry Morgan's Identity Crisis," 52, 55.

¹⁸ Yanagisawa, "Harry Morgan's Identity Crisis," 51.

some thirty years, or roughly half of his life, Hemingway's primary residence was in precisely this hemispheric zone. Three of Hemingway's novels – *To Have and Have Not* (1937), *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), and *Islands in the Stream* (1970) – as well as a number of his short stories are set in the American plantation region. *To Have and Have Not*, I hope to show, engages directly with its racial and colonial politics.

Since Morrison's reading of Hemingway, moreover, and in the wake of new interpretations of Hemingway's relationship to gender and sexuality, scholars have begun to re-examine the question of Hemingway and race. Amy L. Strong's *Race and Identity in Hemingway's Fiction* (2008) and Marc K. Dudley's *Hemingway, Race, and Art: Bloodlines and the Color Line* (2012) both present arguments for Hemingway's preoccupation with race and its social construction. *Hemingway and the Black Renaissance* (2012), meanwhile, edited by Gary Edward Holcomb and Charles Scruggs, offers a collection of essays that investigate intertextuality and influence between Hemingway and Black modernist writers.¹⁹

Indeed, if Hemingway feels distant from the Caribbean and the US South, *Hemingway and the Black Renaissance* calls attention to his significance for major Black writers from these regions. Derek Walcott, for example, locates Hemingway within Caribbean and Southern traditions when he writes that Hemingway, "is a West Indian writer, because wounded as he was, he found this part of America new, as new as Twain found the Mississippi."²⁰ Ralph Ellison, likewise situates Hemingway within a Southern milieu when he points out that

¹⁹ Amy L. Strong, *Race and Identity in Hemingway's Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Marc K. Dudley, *Hemingway, Race, and Art: Bloodlines and the Color Line* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2011.) Gary Edward Holcomb and Charles Scruggs, eds., *Hemingway and the Black Renaissance* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2012).

²⁰ Derek Walcott, "On Hemingway," in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 112.

“Although it is seldom mentioned, Hemingway is as obsessed with the Civil War and its aftermath as any Southern writer, and this fact turns up constantly in his work.”²¹

More than just associating Hemingway with the South, Ellison’s observation suggests that like his contemporary William Faulkner, or like nineteenth century white American novelists such as Herman Melville and Mark Twain, Hemingway can be read for his attention to the nation’s racial and imperial conflicts. Ellison praised nineteenth century American writers like Melville and Twain for their engagement with the “moral predicament of the nation,” by which he meant its simultaneous embrace and rejection of democratic values. In Hemingway’s writings, Ellison would eventually come to find similar concerns. In 1946, Ellison condemned Hemingway’s technique of understatement as merely the stylistic face of a limited moral vision.²² But by 1957, Ellison’s view of Hemingway’s understatement had essentially reversed. Where he had once found moral evasion, Ellison now found critique. “As I read Hemingway today” Ellison wrote, “I find that he affirms the old American values by the eloquence of his denial...and is most moral when he denies the validity of a national morality which the nation has not bothered to live up to since the Civil War.” It was Hemingway’s “readers and imitators” instead of Hemingway himself, whom Ellison this time found guilty of ducking the nation’s moral contradictions. Twentieth century readers, Ellison wrote in 1957, “had forgotten the historical problems which made

²¹ Ralph Ellison, “Society, Morality, and the Novel,” in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 709.

²² Ralph Ellison, “Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity,” in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan (New York: Modern Library, 1995).

Hemingway's understatement fully meaningful, even though it was here exactly that the ideas which were said to absent were most present and powerful."²³

If Ellison helps us to see Hemingway's consciousness of race in the US context, Hemingway's reading of and association with Cuban writers and artists shows his attention to Cuba's racial and colonial politics. When, in 1940, Ortiz introduced his concept of transculturation as the defining element of Cuban culture, he was following in the footsteps of Cuba's avant-garde, which dedicated itself during the 1920s and 1930s to the study of Cuba's national culture as a principal mode of resistance against government corruption and US hegemony. Out of this context emerged *afrocubanismo*, a movement of mostly white Cuban writers and artists who emphasized Afro-Cuban culture in their works as a way to encourage cultural renewal and independence. We know that Hemingway had some awareness of these developments in Cuban culture because, in addition to *Cuban Counterpoint*, he owned several books by writers associated with the avant-garde, perhaps most significantly, *Orbita de la poesía afrocubano, 1928-37* (1938), Ramón Guirao's seminal anthology of afrocubanista poetry.²⁴ In addition to his reading, Hemingway also promoted the work of the Cuban vanguard painter Antonio Gattorno, publishing a monograph of his paintings in 1935 that, alongside a forward by Hemingway, contained commentary by Guirao and the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier, another key figure within the avant-garde.²⁵ That Hemingway translated the first portion of Nicolás Guillén's *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934) also

²³ Ellison, "Society, Morality, and the Novel." For more on Ellison and Hemingway, see Robert G. O'Meally, "The Rules of Magic: Hemingway as Ellison's 'Ancestor,'" in *Speaking for You: The Vision of Ralph Ellison*, ed. Kimberly W. Benston (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1987).

²⁴ James D. Brasch and Joseph Sigman, *Hemingway's Library: A Composite Record* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981).

²⁵ See Sean Poole, *Gattorno: A Cuban Painter for the World* (Miami: Arte al Día Internacional, 2004).

attests to his awareness of the Cuban vanguard.²⁶ This does not demonstrate that Hemingway was influenced by these writers and artists, or that he embraced their politics. But it does show that Hemingway's travel to Cuba exposed him to an artistic and intellectual scene that was deeply preoccupied with Cuba's history of cross-cultural contact and mixture.

In Key West, moreover, Hemingway encountered a city with its own racial preoccupations. Indeed, understanding Key West's composite culture and its repression during the Jim Crow-era helps to show Hemingway's awareness of racial and cultural fixations in the US South. The heterogeneity of the "have nots" in Hemingway's novel reflects not just the Cuban scene, but a multiracial and multiethnic Key West. Geographically closer to Havana than to Miami, Key West exhibited the South's imbrication within the circum-Caribbean through a history of trade and migration. During the nineteenth century, as Cubans and Bahamians migrated to the city in search of work, relatively fluid racial boundaries obtained. Writing in 1888, one reporter observed, "[I]here is such a conglomeration of American colored and white folks, Cubans, colored immigrants from Nassau and Conchs...that it is impossible to determine where the line begins and where it ends."²⁷ By the 1920s, however, Jim Crow segregation had become entrenched. The lynching of Manuel Cabeza in 1921, which Hemingway references directly in *To Have and Have Not*, stands as one example of the Klan's presence and power on the island during this period.²⁸ This suppression of Key West's composite and Caribbean-inflected culture links Key West to a particular form of racial anxiety in the US South, which stems not so much from the

²⁶ Norberto Fuentes, *Hemingway in Cuba*, trans. Consuelo E. Corwin (Seacus, N.J.: L. Stuart, 1984), 260.

²⁷ Quoted in Andrew Gomez, "Jim Crow and the Caribbean South: Cubans and Race in South Florida, 1885-1930s," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 36, no. 4 (Summer, 2017), 28.

²⁸ See Gomez, "Jim Crow and the Caribbean South."

effort to prevent intermixing, but from the repressed knowledge that such mixing has already occurred. As Glissant writes of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, it is "[a] composite culture that suffers from wanting to become an atavistic one and suffers in not being able to achieve that goal."²⁹ Key West, in other words, was very much a part of the South and it had its own suppressed history of transculturation when Hemingway began living there in the late 1920s.

Indeed, when we consider, as a few examples, Hemingway's time in Plantation America; his shifting position within the scholarship on his treatment of race; his importance to Derek Walcott and Ralph Ellison, who place him in West Indian and Southern traditions; or his connection to the Cuban avant-garde and *afrocubanismo* through such writers as Alejo Carpentier and Nicolás Guillén; then Hemingway seems far less distant from the US South and the Caribbean, and far less remote from the themes of cross-culturation, race, and empire.

§

In a 1936 letter to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, Hemingway described what would become *To Have and Have Not* as his "Key West-Havana" novel and noted, "The book contrasts the two places – and shows their inter-relation."³⁰ At least three backstories are important here, if we are to understand the "inter-relation" that Hemingway found between

²⁹ Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, 115.

³⁰ Hemingway to Maxwell Perkins, Cat Cay, Bahamas, July 11, 1936, in *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 447-48.

Key West and Havana in the 1930s: the economic crisis enveloping Key West; the Labor Day Hurricane of 1935 that killed 259 WWI veterans working on a public works project in the Florida Keys; and the nationalist and anti-imperial fervor in Cuba that culminated in the overthrow of President Gerardo Machado in 1933. What associates these three disparate backdrops in Hemingway's novel is the disillusionment and resentment shared by its unemployed Key Westers, disenchanting veterans, and Cuban rebels. Whether in Cuba, where, as one Cuban rebel declares, the problem lies with the "old politicians" and "big sugar estates," or in Key West, where Harry and the veterans condemn New Deal "alphabet men" and "Mr. Roosevelt," both Cuban and Key West "have nots" express their dissatisfaction with the symbols and figureheads of American power.³¹

By the time Hemingway made Key West his primary residence in 1930, the economic crash of 1929 had sent the city's already troubled economy into crisis.³² Key West's condition, one reporter later noted, "was just about the most desperate in the country."³³ Images of economic decline, shading into stereotype, characterize the Key West of *To Have and Have Not* "where all was starched, well-shuttered, virtue, failure, grits and boiled grunts, under-nourishment, prejudice, righteousness, interbreeding and the comforts of religion."³⁴ Its "unpaved alleys," "shacks" and "vacant lot[s]," reflect the worsening straits of a city where the once profitable industries of pineapple-canning, sponging, and cigar-

³¹ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 166, 206.

³² Gail D. Sinclair writes that by February of 1930, Key West had become Hemingway's "home base." Gail D. Sinclair, "Hemingway Chronology: The Key West Years," in *Key West Hemingway: A Reassessment*, ed. Kirk Curnutt and Gail D. Sinclair (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), xix. Gary Boulard writes, "Even without the ripple-effect ravages of the depression, Key West would undoubtedly have faced a troubled financial future in the mid-1930s." Gary Boulard, "'State of Emergency': Key West in the Great Depression," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (October 1988), 167.

³³ Quoted in Boulard, "State of Emergency," 167.

³⁴ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 193.

manufacturing had been dying for years.³⁵ In July of 1934, Key West reached a breaking point: it was over five million dollars in debt; some eighty percent of the population, which had dropped from 19,350 in 1920 to 12,831 in 1930, was now on relief; and tons of garbage littered the streets after city workers went without pay and quit.³⁶ Declaring a “state of emergency,” the city eventually turned its authority over to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), a new agency within Roosevelt’s New Deal, which set out to revitalize the island by transforming it into a “tourist mecca.”³⁷

The FERA project was successful in attracting tourists and reinventing Key West’s economy, although it would take until the 1940s for the city’s population to begin growing again. As Garry Boulard writes, “If the success of [FERA’s] program must necessarily be measured in terms of how many tourists visited the island, rather than through the traditional social welfare prism of how many residents on relief bettered their economic condition, then the FERA/Key West project was a stunning triumph.”³⁸ Hemingway, however, was a staunch critic of the project. He resented the influx of visitors to Key West, particularly after his home was named as a tourist destination, but he was also concerned that FERA’s renovations would displace the city’s working class.

In *To Have and Have Not*, Harry understands the FERA project in Key West as an effort to gentrify the city, driving out its poorer residents, locally known as “Conchs.”³⁹ As

³⁵ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 193. Boulard, “State of Emergency,” 166-169.

³⁶ Boulard, “State of Emergency,” 166, 169, 171.

³⁷ Boulard, “State of Emergency,” 166-167, 172.

³⁸ Boulard, “State of Emergency,” 175.

³⁹ The Oxford English Dictionary provides the following definition of “Conch”: “(a) *Bahamas slang*. A West Indian. (b) *U.S. local*. A ‘poor white’ of the Florida Keys or North Carolina, *esp.* one of Bahamian origin. (Also written *conk*, etc.)” “conch, n.” OED Online. September 2019. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/38201?redirectedFrom=conch>

Harry tells his friend and Key West local, Albert, “let me tell you, my kids ain’t going to have their bellies hurt and I ain’t going to dig sewers for the government for less money than will feed them.” Harry continues,

What they’re trying to do is starve you Conchs out of here so they burn down the shacks and put up apartments and make this a tourist town. That’s what I hear. I hear they’re buying up lots, and then after the poor people are starved out and gone somewhere else to starve some more they’re going to come in and make it into a beauty spot for tourists.⁴⁰

Harry’s resentment over what he saw as the political neglect of Key West’s poor and working-class residents typifies the theme of disaffection running throughout Hemingway’s novel. A similar sentiment characterizes the World War I veterans appearing in *To Have and Have Not*, who Hemingway based on a group of veterans living and working in Florida as part of a public works project. The veterans came to the Keys following the 1932 Bonus March on Washington D.C., during which thousands of veterans demanding reparations for their service in WWI set up camp outside the city only to be violently dispersed by federal troops. In response to subsequent marches in 1933 and 1934, the Roosevelt administration encouraged marchers to join public works projects, such as the Overseas Highway project in Florida, which was sponsored by FERA.⁴¹

Hemingway, who at times encountered the veterans in Key West, saw their employment in the Keys as a ploy to keep them out of the public eye following the Bonus Marches and was deeply disturbed and angered when 259 of them were killed by a Category

⁴⁰ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 96.

⁴¹ James H. Meredith, “Hemingway’s Key West Band of Brothers: The World War I Veterans in ‘Who Murdered the Vets?’ and *To Have and Have Not*,” in *Key West Hemingway: A Reassessment*, ed. Kirk Curnutt and Gail D. Sinclair (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 242, 248-249.

5 hurricane that swept through Florida's Upper Keys in 1935.⁴² In "Who Murdered the Vets?" an essay published by *New Masses* just days after the hurricane, Hemingway recounted the devastation he observed after joining relief efforts in the aftermath of the storm and decried what he saw as the political failures responsible for the disaster.⁴³ "Whom did they annoy and to whom was their possible presence a political danger? Who sent them down to the Florida Keys and left them there in hurricane months?" Hemingway wrote. "[T]he veterans had been sent there; they had no opportunity to leave, nor any protection against hurricanes; and they never had a chance for their lives."⁴⁴ Hemingway was not alone in suggesting that sending the veterans to the Keys had the advantage of preventing another Bonus March, nor was he alone in seeing political negligence behind the catastrophe, which led to multiple investigations. One report by the American Legion concluded that "inefficiency, indifference and ignorance" among those in charge of the veterans' camps had resulted in "murder at Matecumbe [Key]." And although an initial investigation by the Works Projects Administration exonerated FERA and the Florida ERA, declaring the event "an act of God," a later investigation carried out by the WPA and the Veterans Administration concluded that state officials overseeing the camps had been negligent.⁴⁵

⁴² Meredith, "Hemingway's Key West Band of Brothers," 244, 242.

⁴³ *New Masses* was an unusual venue for Hemingway, who years earlier described it as "the most peurile [*sic*] and shitty house organ I've ever seen." Hemingway to F. Scott Fitzgerald, Paris, September 7, 1926, in *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 216.

⁴⁴ Ernest Hemingway, "Who Murdered the Vets? A First-Hand Report on the Florida Hurricane" *New Masses*, September 17, 1935, 9.

⁴⁵ A *Chicago Daily Tribune* editorial stated, "The camps on the Florida Keys were established to avert another bonus march on Washington, with all the political embarrassments involved in such a demonstration of discontent." Quoted in Willie Drye, *Storm of the Century: The Labor Day Hurricane of 1935* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2002), 233. Republican Senator Edith Nourse Rogers raised the same point when she asked of the veterans during a Congressional hearing "Were they sent in order that they might be as far away as possible?" (Quoted in Drye, 271). Drye writes, "As far as President Roosevelt and his advisors were concerned, sending the veterans was a best of both worlds solution – it provided help for them and political benefit for the Roosevelt Administration" (Drye, 46). For the conclusions of the American Legion report, the initial

Hemingway's forceful critique in *New Masses* is echoed by the veterans of *To Have and Have Not*, who appear in a scene set sometime before the hurricane as a nearly riotous group in a Key West bar.⁴⁶ As one veteran named Nelson Jacks declares, "Mr. Roosevelt has shipped us down here to get rid of us." "Because we're the desperate ones," he continues, "The ones with nothing to lose. We are the completely brutalized ones. We're worse than the stuff the original Spartacus worked with. But it's tough to try to do anything because we have been beaten so far that the only solace is booze and the only pride is being able to take it." Just as FERA, in Hemingway's novel, endeavors to "starve" the working class out of Key West, the veterans of *To Have and Have Not* are "shipped" out of Washington by Mr. Roosevelt.

It was this image of Key West, one characterized by economic distress and political failure that Hemingway chose to combine in his novel with the political turmoil that he encountered in Havana in the early thirties. Having fought for independence from Spain, Cuba had entered into client status with the United States, which dominated nearly all aspects of its economy and maintained a constant threat of intervention through the Platt Amendment. When Hemingway began visiting Havana, nationalist and anticolonial sentiment against the US had been rising for nearly a decade. Alongside the revolutionary fervor of the 1920s, the onset of the depression in 1929 produced widespread political conflict that ultimately led to the overthrow of President Machado in August of 1933 and the rise of Fulgencio Batista, who continued to practice severe repression against

investigation by WPA official Aubrey Williams, and the later joint investigation between the WPA and the VA, see Drye, 275, 225, and 257.

⁴⁶ Meredith writes that in *To Have and Have Not*, "the Labor Day hurricane goes unmentioned; it requires an attentive reader to realize that the action *precedes* the disaster." Meredith, "Hemingway's Key West Band of Brothers," 245, emphasis in original.

government opposition.⁴⁷ Hemingway was in Havana in the summer of 1933 and had some exposure to the violence leading up to Machado's ousting. According to some accounts, his wife, Pauline Pfeiffer, was "fired upon" in the city that summer, while others hold that during a fishing trip Hemingway witnessed a Machado police boat dumping bodies in the ocean.⁴⁸ According to his biographer, Carlos Baker, Hemingway privately referred to Machado as a "lousy tyrant," and later noted that he had been "working against Machado" that spring with the photographer Walker Evans, who was in Havana to make pictures for Carleton Beal's scathing indictment of the Machado regime, *The Crime of Cuba* (1933).⁴⁹

Let me transition now away from this historical and biographical context to a closer look at Harry's relationship with the Cuban revolutionaries of Hemingway's novel. *To Have and Have Not* opens with a shootout in Havana between government and opposition forces and ends with Harry's death at the hands of Cuban revolutionaries who hire him to smuggle them back to Cuba after robbing a Key West bank to support their cause. Milton A. Cohen argues that the novel contrasts Harry and other Key West locals, who "show a genuine proletarian unity," with the "professional" Cuban revolutionaries, who are shown to be

⁴⁷ "Cuba passed successively from colonial status under Spain to a client role with the United States to dependency under the Soviet Union." Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, Third Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), xiii. "North American investments in Cuba rose from \$50 million at the end of the nineteenth century to 1.3 billion during the 1920s. By the mid-twentieth century, Cuba operated almost entirely within the framework of the economic system of the United States." Pérez, Jr. *Cuba*, 10. For the social and economic conditions leading up to Machado's ousting, see Pérez, Jr. *Cuba*, 173-209. For a historical account of the Batista regime, see Pérez, Jr. *Cuba*, 210-236.

⁴⁸ Carlos Baker writes that in August of 1933, "The Hemingways were safe enough at the Ambos Mundos, though Pauline and Jinny were reportedly fired upon when they ventured into the streets." Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 245. In a 1975 interview with Norberto Fuentes, Alejo Carpentier recalled, "Evan Shipman went fishing with Hemingway around 1933, and they saw Machado's police boat throwing some bodies into the waters of the Gulf Stream. Evan later told me the story in Paris." Norberto Fuentes, *Hemingway in Cuba*, trans. Consuelo E. Corwin, ed. Larry Alson (Secaucus, N.J.: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1984), 264.

⁴⁹ Baker writes, "Ernest's sympathies lay with the Cuban people. He said privately that he hoped to Christ they would get rid of the 'lousy tyrant' Machado." Baker, *Ernest Hemingway*, 245. For Hemingway's recollection of his time with Walker Evans, see James R. Mellow, *Walker Evans* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 180.

killers after they murder Harry's friend Albert, who Harry has hired to assist him.⁵⁰ But as much as Harry and the Cubans are contrasted, the novel also points to similarities in their experiences. Motoring across the Florida straits, one young Cuban rebel, Emilio, declares his ideals to Harry:

We are the only true revolutionary party...We want to do away with all the old politicians, with all the American imperialism that strangles us, with the tyranny of the army. We want to start clean and give every man a chance. We want to end the slavery of the *guajeros*, you know, the peasants, and divide the big sugar estates among the people that work for them. But we are not communists.⁵¹

Harry responds with disdain. "He's a radical...That's what he is, a radical," Harry thinks to himself before dismissing the young rebel outright: "What the hell do I care about his revolution. F --- his revolution...All I got to do is make a living for my family and I can't do that. Then he tells me about his revolution. The hell with his revolution."⁵² Such a strong reaction from Harry indicates that Emilio's words have affected him deeply. We can attribute much of his offense to the death of his friend Albert, whom the Cubans have just killed, and whose murder makes Emilio's idealism all the more upsetting to Harry: "To help the working man he robs a bank...and then kills that poor damned Albert that never did any harm. That's a working man he kills. He never thinks of that."⁵³

Yet the anger animating Harry's response to Emilio cannot be explained by Albert's death and the rebel's apparent hypocrisy alone. Indeed, Harry's frustration with the Cuban has to do with his discomfort over his sense of what they share, rather than how they differ.

⁵⁰ Milton A. Cohen, "Beleaguered Modernists: Hemingway, Stevens, and the Left," in *Key West Hemingway: A Reassessment*, ed. Kirk Curnutt and Gail D. Sinclair (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 81.

⁵¹ Ernest Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 166.

⁵² Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 166-168.

⁵³ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 168.

Anticipating Harry's reaction to Emilio, "You talk like a radical" had been Albert's response to Harry when he vented his resentment toward the FERA project in Key West.⁵⁴ This same accusation is leveled against Nelson Jacks, who is accused of being "just a goddamn radical" by a fellow veteran.⁵⁵ Indeed, Nelson, Harry, and Emilio represent mirror characters in terms of their disparate but competing experiences of marginalization.

With respect to this point, it is significant that Harry's condemnation of Emilio's cause occurs only after Emilio repeatedly emphasizes how grave conditions have become in Cuba. "You do not know how bad things are in Cuba," Emilio says to Harry. "You can't know how bad they are," he continues, before repeating again, "You cannot realize how bad it is."⁵⁶ Emilio's trouble in Cuba was, in fact, not only different, but far worse than Harry's predicament in Key West. Harry's difficulties in Key West are, for example, far from the political violence that he witnesses in Havana in the novel's opening scene. But the point is that for Harry, Emilio's account of "absolutely murderous tyranny" in Cuba activates his own sense of desperation over his situation at home. As Harry thinks to himself, "All I got to do is make a living for my family and I can't do that. Then he tells me about his revolution. To hell with his revolution." To be sure, Harry rejects Emilio not because of their differences, but rather because for Harry, the rebel comes to represent his own vulnerability in Key West, the part of himself with which he is most uncomfortable. Harry, in other words, unwittingly identifies with Emilio, but to accept that identification would

⁵⁴ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 96.

⁵⁵ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 206.

⁵⁶ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 167.

mean acknowledging his own desperation, thereby losing his claims to racial and colonial status, which he refuses to do.

This brings us back to the threatening senses of risk and loss as key components of transculturation. The mirroring of Harry and Emilio frustrates any reading of them as the representation of a colonial opposition in which Harry, standing in for the United States, maintains his singularity and his dominance over the Cuban, Emilio. Such hierarchal distinctions instead become blurred, spelling Harry's disarticulation from a position of racial and colonial power. This is the threat that transculturation poses for Harry, to return to Diana Taylor's point, the threat of losing what he sees as his "rightful place at the economic, historic, and cultural center of things."

Indeed, for Harry, the blurring boundary between himself and Emilio does not lead to any straightforward sense of solidarity. On the contrary, as I have tried to show, Harry's lurking sense that he and Emilio might be associated is precisely what leads to his hostility and what underlies his racial nationalism. It is portrait of the psychology of white racism in the tradition of Herman Melville, Joseph Conrad, or William Faulkner. To focus on Melville as an example, we can measure his significance for Hemingway by the extent of Hemingway's evasion of influence. "Melville is shit" Hemingway wrote to Ezra Pound in 1930 before expressing his wish, in 1949, to "throw lots of mud" in Melville's face while surpassing him as a writer.⁵⁷ Yet Harry can be read as a counterpoint to Amasa Delano of *Benito Cereno* (1855) with both representing two sides of the same coin of white racism.

⁵⁷ Ernest Hemingway to Ezra Pound, 28 February 1930, in *The Letters of Ernest Hemingway, Volume 4, 1929-1931*, ed. Sandra Spanier and Miriam B. Mandel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 247. Ernest Hemingway to Charles Scribner, 6 and 7 September 1949 in *Ernest Hemingway Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 673.

Whereas Delano's willful blindness and false innocence allows him to preserve a liberal self-image while perpetuating racial violence, Harry's hostility toward Emilio originates in his desire to protect his own precarious sense of privilege. Indeed, as if in response to the threatening breakdown of distinction and to the potential equalizing of status between himself and Emilio, Harry attempts to reassert his authority as an American. "Cubans are a hell of a people," Harry thinks to himself, while reflecting on the bank robbery. And later: "It's the Cubans run Cuba. They all double-cross each other. They sell each other out. They get what they deserve. The hell with their revolutions."⁵⁸ In the end, Harry kills Emilio and the other Cubans on board in an attempt to keep himself from being killed, although there is reason to think that Harry planned on killing them and taking the stolen money all along. Harry's dismissal of Emilio's protests and his subsequent killing of the Cubans, in other words, represents a reassertion of the authority he had lost in sensing the commonalities between himself and the young Cuban rebel. As Yanagisawa argues, Harry reestablishes his "racial dominance" when he brutally murders the Chinese human smuggler, Mr. Sing.

But Harry's reassertions of power are never quite complete. Indeed, the breakdown of cultural boundaries represented by Harry's anxious recognition of himself in Emilio does not lead only to violence. At the same time that he dismisses Emilio, for example, Harry cannot help but feel an affinity for him. We are meant to sympathize with Emilio, who is introduced as "not much more than a kid" and "pleasant speaking."⁵⁹ Harry, taking advantage of Emilio's age and inexperience, attempts to befriend him in order to protect himself. While privately rejecting Emilio, Harry offers him food and coffee, acts

⁵⁸ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 164, 168.

⁵⁹ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 100, 103.

sympathetically toward his plight in Cuba – “It must be bad, all right” – and even feigns solidarity: “I guess you’ve got a good program, if you’re out to help the working man. I was out on strike plenty of times in the old days when we had the cigar factories in Key West. I’d have been glad to do whatever I could if I’d known what kind outfit you were.”⁶⁰

Complicating this otherwise disingenuous pretense of friendship are the moments when Harry is actually drawn to Emilio. “The kid is kind of a nice kid,” Harry thinks to himself before Emilio declares his ideals. And even after Harry angrily repudiates him, Emilio continues to enter his thoughts: “Harry could see him smile in the binnacle light. He was a nice-looking boy all right. Pleasant talking, too.”⁶¹ These private thoughts show that Harry’s hostility toward Emilio is in tension with attraction. Emilio is a younger version of Harry, who, jaundiced and inured to suffering, is drawn to a youthful, idealistic, and “pleasant talking” inverse image of himself. Indeed, Emilio’s wish to “give every man a chance” echoes Harry’s earlier claim that he had “lost the last chance [he] had to make any honest money” and foreshadows his dying proclamation that “a man alone ain’t got no bloody fucking chance.”⁶²

These gestures toward affinity between Harry and Emilio are crucial because they betray an impulse to find new cultural formations, or the “new cultural phenomena” that Ortiz found in his analysis of cross-cultural encounter. They show that while Hemingway is sensitive to how the cross cultural provokes violence by threatening Harry’s white American

⁶⁰ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 163-168

⁶¹ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 164, 169.

⁶² Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 166, 121, 225.

identity, his novel also reveals how the threat to that identity might become the basis for exploring new social relations beyond established colonial and racial orders.

Harry's ambivalent dynamic with Emilio runs through his relationships with the novel's other "have nots," which both threaten Harry's authority as a white American, and, like his private attraction to Emilio, show the potential for intimacy across colonial and racial divides. Take, for example, Part Two of the novel, originally published in 1936 as the short story, "The Tradesman's Return." Whereas in Part Three, the instability of Harry's authority is revealed through his resemblance to non-American "have nots," in Part Two, domestic race relations in the South take center stage, and the fragility of Harry's authority becomes apparent through his relationship with a Black crewman named Wesley. The section opens on Harry's boat, where he and Wesley are suffering from injuries sustained the previous night during an attempt to smuggle liquor across the Gulf Stream. Although the events of the night before are not depicted, it becomes clear that Harry and Wesley were intercepted by authorities who opened fire after Harry refused to turn over their load of liquor. Now, despite the seriousness of their wounds, Harry has decided to wait for a rendezvous boat rather than head back to Key West for medical treatment. After being spotted by a federal official, or "alphabet man," and after high winds suggest that no rendezvous boat will be coming, Harry dumps the liquor and prepares to return to Key West.⁶³

This episode is at the center of Toni Morrison's influential reading of the novel in her examination of race in the American literary canon, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992). Morrison focuses on the divergent ways that Harry and Wesley

⁶³ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 83.

respond to their injuries. Whereas Harry, whose injury is worse than Wesley's, responds with stoicism, "Wesley's speech is restricted to grumbles and complaints and apologies for weakness."⁶⁴ His purpose in the story, Morrison argues, is to highlight the white protagonist's courage and manliness. Indeed, Wesley apologizes to Harry for not helping to dump the liquor, to which Harry responds with the section's final lines, "'Hell,' [...] 'ain't no nigger any good when he's shot. You're all right nigger, Wesley."⁶⁵ Harry's authority, Morrison argues, is predicated upon his distinction from an inferior Black character. It therefore serves to reinforce racial hierarchies and stabilize racial categories.

Yet other impulses at work in this episode evince the instability of Harry's authority. Indeed, just as Hemingway's cross-cultural mirroring of Harry and Emilio allows for moments of affinity that challenge established colonial and cultural hierarchies, in Hemingway's depiction of Harry and Wesley, we see a desire for new modes of social relation beyond US white supremacist culture. For example, while Harry and Wesley respond differently to their injuries, they also address each other's wounds. The previous night, Harry "had dressed the nigger's wound and the nigger had bandaged his arm."⁶⁶ In the daylight, Harry "gave the negro a cup of water out of a demijohn" and Wesley, referring to Harry's injured arm, says to him, "Let me tie it up in a sling." Later, Harry "went below and came up with a blanket." He says to Wesley, "Let me cover you up."⁶⁷ Whereas the contrast between Harry's stoicism and Wesley's "blubber[ing]" appear to establish Harry's racial command and

⁶⁴ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 74.

⁶⁵ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 87.

⁶⁶ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 71.

⁶⁷ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 72, 74, 77.

superiority, Harry and Wesley's ministrations of each other's injuries offers a very different picture of interracial interdependence in response to past trauma.

Harry and Wesley's care for each other's injuries is particularly significant given the importance of woundedness as a theme in Hemingway's fiction. Philip Young famously argued that Hemingway's focus on wounded protagonists represented a central theme unifying his corpus. Following Nick Adams, who is injured in WWI, all of Hemingway's heroes were to be physically and psychologically wounded figures who must learn how to live with their suffering. Importantly, however, Young argues that Nick's wound represents more than his literal injury in the war. Rather, according to Young, it "culminates, climaxes and epitomizes the wounds he has been getting as a growing boy," which are the result of his "contact with violence and evil."⁶⁸

Young does not read Harry as a "Hemingway hero" in the tradition of Nick Adams, but there is reason to believe that, like Nick's war wound, Harry and Wesley's injuries are "symbol and climax" for an older trauma: "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual dis-grace."⁶⁹ Consider the depth of Wesley's animosity toward Harry. The proximate cause of Wesley's anger is Harry's failure to stop for the authorities, which resulted in them being fired upon, and Harry's refusal to take them to a doctor. But Wesley's language extends back to older conflicts as well. "You treat a man no better than a dog," Wesley asserts while lying injured in the boat, "You don't care what happens to a man, [...] 'You ain't hardly human.'" "Why didn't we stop when they started shooting?" Wesley continues

⁶⁸ Philip Young, *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1966), 40, 39.

⁶⁹ Young reads Harry Morgan as a "code hero," rather than a "Hemingway hero" in the tradition of Nick Adams. Young, *A Reconsideration*, 65. For Nick's wound as "symbol and climax," see Young, *A Reconsideration*, 41.

with no answer from Harry, “Ain’t a man’s life worth more than a load of liquor?” “I’ll kill you. I’ll cut your heart out,” Wesley declares after Harry repeatedly tells him to “Take it easy.” Later, while headed back to Key West, Harry’s apparent indifference elicits more disdain from Wesley: “‘You ain’t human,’ the nigger said. ‘You ain’t got no human feelings.’”⁷⁰ These indictments appear to reach beyond the immediate conflict over smuggled liquor to older racial traumas involving inhumanity and the devaluation of human life.

Hemingway clearly intended to foreground racial themes in his depiction of Harry and Wesley. His original title for the 1936 short story, “White Man, Black Man, Alphabet Man,” announces race as a prominent theme, while the published title “The Tradesman’s Return,” also gestures toward racial themes given the association it evokes with the slave trade, particularly when we consider that in this story Harry has no trade but is a smuggler, a title which is also evocative of trade in human beings. Indeed, when we recall Hemingway’s reverence for *The Adventures Huckleberry Finn* (1884), which he saw as the source of all modern American literature, it becomes clear that a history of racial violence implicitly surrounds this story of a white man and a Black man alone together and running from the law on a boat in the US South.⁷¹ In this sense, the “Return” of “The Tradesman’s Return,” refers not only to Harry’s return to Key West from Cuba, but to the reopening and exacerbation of a wound that has not healed.

These intimations of an older trauma behind Harry and Wesley’s predicament, are made more explicit toward the end of *To Have and Have Not* by Hemingway’s reference to a

⁷⁰ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 69, 74, 86

⁷¹ “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. If you read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating. But it’s the best book we’ve had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since.” Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1935), 22.

lynching in Key West. When Harry, on the brink of death, and his boat are brought back to Key West by the Coast Guard, a crowd gapes at the bodies of the Cuban rebels he has killed. Officials cover the bodies with blankets, the narrator recounts, “thus veiling the greatest sight the town had seen since the Isleño had been lynched, years before, out on the County Road and then hung up to swing from a telephone pole in the lights of all the cars that had come out to see it.”⁷² Seven years before Hemingway moved to Key West, in 1921, Manolo Cabeza, a resident of the city known as Isleño, or the Islander, because he came from the Canary Islands, was whipped and then tarred and feathered by members of the Ku Klux Klan for living with a mixed race woman known as Rosita Negra. Surviving this first attack, days later Cabeza killed one of the Klansmen and was arrested, only to once more face Klan members who broke into the jail when it was left unguarded and brutally murdered him.⁷³

This allusion to Jim Crow segregation, the taboo of miscegenation, and the terror of the KKK, points directly to a history of racial violence that up to this point has only been hinted at in Hemingway’s novel. Looking back now at the tense relationship between Harry and Wesley, the story of Cabeza’s lynching brings to the surface a latent meaning in Wesley’s accusations inhumanity: “You don’t care what happens to a man. You ain’t hardly human.” The origin of Harry and Wesley’s injuries, in other words, does not lie only in their proximate cause. Instead, in Young’s words, Harry and Wesley’s trouble “culminates, climaxes and epitomizes” a long history of racial violence and trauma.

⁷² Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 253.

⁷³ Andrew Gomez, “Jim Crow and the Caribbean South: Cubans and Race in South Florida, 1885-1930s,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 36, no. 4 (Summer, 2017), 25-26.

The theme of physical and psychological injury in Hemingway's fiction is often associated with World War I, but *To Have and Have Not* is not the only work by Hemingway to suggest that the source of a character's wound is racial violence. Throughout his work, Hemingway's white male protagonists witness from a distance forms of racial violence, inequity, and conflict that inform their psychic pain. We might consider, for example, "Indian Camp," of *In Our Time* (1925), in which a young Nick Adams observes his father perform a caesarean section on a Native American woman without anesthetic, while her husband commits suicide in the bunk above her bed.⁷⁴ Or consider Robert Jordan, of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), who recalls that as a child he witnessed the lynching of "a Negro" from "under the blinds of a window" before his mother "pulled [him] away." "You were too young," Maria responds after Jordan has recounted his story, "You were too young for such things." Pilar, in turn, says to Jordan, "Don't speak of such things [...] It is unhealthy."⁷⁵ Young draws attention to both "Indian Camp" and to this memory of a lynching as important events in the development of Nick and Robert Jordan's psychic wounds, but he downplays the racial theme at the center of these episodes. As Young writes, "Just as 'Indian Camp' was not about Indians, nor 'The Killers' about gangsters, but were about Nick, so this story is not about a Negro but about young Robert."⁷⁶

Certainly, these stories are primarily about white American men. The white psyche, and its pain and shock, remains central. We do not hear, for example, from the Negro of Jordan's memory. Instead, our attention is directed to Jordan's experience. But the fact that

⁷⁴ Ernest Hemingway, "Indian Camp," in *In Our Time* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925).

⁷⁵ Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), 116-117.

⁷⁶ Young, *A Reconsideration*, 112.

Nick and Robert Jordan's traumas are traceable to these events in particular is significant for our understanding of these characters and of Hemingway's artistic concerns. It shows that alongside their encounters with war, suicide, or other forms of what Young describes as "violence and evil," racial violence and inequity, if only observed from a safe distance, also fuels the psychic wounds of Hemingway's white protagonists. There is a critique here by Hemingway that reaches beyond his focus on white reactions. In stories like "Indian Camp," or in Robert Jordan's memory of a lynching, the forms of racial violence emerging out of plantation colonialism appear as root causes of a disturbed modern world.

Returning now to Harry and Wesley, if we understand that as with Nick Adams and Robert Jordan, Harry and Wesley's injuries can be seen as "symbol and climax" for a history of racial violence, then this section of the novel takes on additional meaning. In keeping with Morrison's argument, much of Harry and Wesley's exchange betrays an urge to establish Harry's racial dominance. For example, if we take the view that the wounds of this episode are historical, Hemingway's choice to depict a Black character's response to injury as "grumbling" and "blubber[ing]" works to deny or at least minimize that historical trauma.⁷⁷ We see a similar dynamic at play in Wesley's attraction to his own wound. "The nigger went on grumbling like that and he could not keep from taking the bandage off to look at it." "Leave it alone," Harry admonishes him, implying that Wesley's wound would heal if he would only stop needlessly picking at it.⁷⁸ Time and again Harry tells Wesley to "take it easy," thereby diminishing the injury and betraying his own refusal to acknowledge it. Indeed, much as Harry dismisses Emilio's plight so as to avoid confronting his own desperation in

⁷⁷ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 68, 75.

⁷⁸ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 68.

Key West, Harry will not fully acknowledge Wesley's wound because doing so would mean admitting to his own historical injury, which is caused not only by his economic hardship, but by the self-inflicted, dehumanizing consequences of his own racism.

Yet other desires are also present. If we understand Harry and Wesley's wounds to be historical, then Harry's description of the previous night when he "had dressed the nigger's wound and the nigger had bandaged his arm" is revealing. It shows that in company with the construction of white male mastery that Morrison reveals, we also find Hemingway searching for cross-racial contact and mutuality as a means of repairing the devastating historical consequences of slavery. Here again we see Hemingway approaching the transcultural. To be sure, we see a segregating impulse in Harry's efforts to distinguish himself from Wesley and thereby secure his racial mastery. But the signs of interdependence and familiarity between Harry and Wesley ultimately reveals their historical entanglement with each other, or what Ortiz called the "intermeshed" relations arising out of cross-cultural contact.⁷⁹ Harry and Wesley's attention to each other's injuries, moreover, reveals a desire for new cultural forms and relations apart from the prevailing US racial order.

Hemingway returned to a similar image in his other novel of the Gulf Stream, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), where possibilities for racial reciprocity appear in Santiago's memory of an arm-wrestling match with "the great negro from Cienfuegos who was the strongest man on the docks." The match, which lasted "one day and one night," is an expression of antagonism and rivalry. As with Harry and Wesley, however, Santiago and the Negro's relationship also contains a measure of mutuality. "There was much betting and

⁷⁹ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 98.

people went in and out of the room under the kerosene lights and [Santiago] had looked at the arm and hand of the negro and at the negro's face...Blood came out from under the fingernails of both his and the negro's hands and they looked each other in the eye and at their hands and forearms." Santiago wins the match, "[forcing] the hand of the negro down and down until it rested on the wood" and is declared "The Champion." But much as the animus between Harry and Wesley or Harry and Emilio obscures other impulses, Santiago's victory conceals the parity he and the Negro established during those moments when he "looked...at the negro's face" and he and the Negro "looked each other in the eye."⁸⁰ Indeed, the physical intimacy that Santiago and the Negro share in their wrestling and tight grip on each other matches Harry and Wesley's close proximity on Harry's boat. Like the blood that threatens to mix in Santiago and the Negro's tightly clasped hands, when Harry surveys the damage to his boat he notes that "Wherever the nigger had not bled, he, himself had bled."⁸¹ In both cases, Hemingway's portrait of antagonism between racial oppositions contains moments of mutuality and intimacy that endanger the racial order.

This tension between aggression and mutuality is echoed by Santiago's relationship with the marlin, whom Santiago kills even though he comes to love it as his "brother."⁸² Clinton S. Burhans, Jr. has argued that Santiago's journey "too far out to sea," and his killing of the marlin, whom he loved "as his brother and his equal," represent his great sin of "isolated individualism." Tragically, this has been a necessary failure, Burhans argues, because it is only by experiencing the limitations of individualism that Santiago comes to

⁸⁰ Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 69-70.

⁸¹ Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 71.

⁸² "He is my brother," Santiago thinks to himself, "But I must kill him and keep strong to do it." Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, 59.

acknowledge “human solidarity and interdependence.”⁸³ Building on Burhans, I propose that Santiago’s failure of individualism contains within it a more specific commentary on race and power. Santiago’s regret over killing the marlin correlates with the moment in which Santiago and the Negro “looked each other in the eye.” In both cases, the established power dynamic is threatened by Santiago’s recognition of interdependence. Indeed, just as a taut line connects Santiago and the marlin, Santiago and the Negro face each other with “their hands gripped tight.”⁸⁴ His relationship with the Negro, then, is a mirror for his relationship with the marlin. His killing of the fish, accordingly, speaks not only to an abstract failure of individualism, but also, and more specifically, to the racialized violence that emerges as a consequence of it.

The specifically racial connotations of Santiago’s failure appear once more in the moments just after he has killed the marlin. Here, Hemingway’s language indicates that in killing the fish Santiago has reproduced a history of racial violence and trauma. “I have killed this fish which is my brother and now I must do the slave work,” Santiago says aloud, before thinking to himself, “Now I must prepare the nooses and the rope to lash him alongside.”⁸⁵ “Slave work,” “nooses,” and “rope to lash” together provide a host of connotations signifying that Santiago’s violence toward the fish has reinscribed another kind of brutality. Indeed, Santiago’s plans to tie the marlin to the side of his boat resembles both the physical binding of a slave and a lynching:

⁸³ Clinton S. Burhans, Jr., “*The Old Man and the Sea*: Hemingway’s Tragic Vision of Man,” in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Old Man and the Sea: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed., Katherine T. Jobes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968).

⁸⁴ Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, 69.

⁸⁵ Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, 95.

I must prepare everything, then bring him in and lash him well and step the mast and set sail for home.

He started to pull the fish in to have him alongside so that he could pass a line through his gills and out his mouth and make his head fast alongside the bow. I want to see him, he thought, and to touch and to feel him. He is my fortune, he thought. But that is not why I wish to feel him. I think I felt his heart, he thought. When I pushed on the harpoon shaft the second time. Bring him in now and make him fast and get the noose around his tail and another around his middle to bind him to the skiff.

"Get to work, old man," he said. He took a very small drink of the water. "There is very much slave work to be done now that the fight is over."⁸⁶

Alongside the phrases "Slave work," "nooses," and "rope to lash," introduced just moments before, this passage appears to describe more than just the process of tying a fish to a boat. The brutal nature of Santiago's plans to "lash him well," "make his head fast," "get the noose around his tail," and "bind him," recalls both plantation and Jim Crow violence. His description of the marlin as "my fortune," moreover, looks back to the fortunes gained through slave labor and trade.

Next to his degradation and objectification of the marlin, however, this passage also hints at Santiago's coming guilt. His desire "to touch and to feel him" speaks to this, as does his admission that he "felt his heart...When I pushed on the harpoon shaft the second time." Soon afterward the sharks arrive, "almost as a punishment," as Burhan argues, for Santiago's act.⁸⁷ "Half fish," Santiago later says to the dead marlin after the sharks have eaten half its body, "Fish that you were. I am sorry that I went too far out. I ruined us both."⁸⁸ Considering the specific language that Hemingway uses to describe the moments just after

⁸⁶ Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, 95-96.

⁸⁷ Burhans, Jr., "*The Old Man and the Sea*," 75.

⁸⁸ Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, 115.

Santiago has killed the fish, a prominent feature of his sin of “isolated individualism” is that it has replicated a historical pattern that brutalizes both oppressed and oppressor.

Santiago’s sin of individualism is also Harry Morgan’s, Burhan notes, as is his eventual “awareness and understanding of solidarity and interdependence.” Burhan writes, “Santiago is Harry Morgan alive again and grown old; for what comes to Morgan in a sudden and unexpected revelation as he lies dying is the matrix of the old fisherman’s climatic experience.”⁸⁹ Indeed, Santiago’s killing of the marlin recalls Harry’s violence toward the other “have nots” and the abortive possibilities for affiliation between them. Santiago’s regret, in turn, reiterates Harry’s final words about the hopelessness of “a man alone.”

§

In his introduction to *Cuban Counterpoint*, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski elaborates on the distinction Ortiz draws between the terms acculturation and transculturation. Regarding the former, Malinowski writes,

It is an ethnocentric word with a moral connotation. The immigrant has to *acculturate* himself; so do the natives, pagan or heathen, barbarian or savage, who enjoy the benefits of being under the sway of our great Western culture. The word *acculturation* implies, because of the preposition *ad* with which it starts, the idea of a *terminus ad quem*. The “uncultured” is to receive the benefits of “our culture”; it is he who must change and become converted into “one of us.”⁹⁰

Gustavo Pérez Firmat, makes a similar point when he writes,

⁸⁹Burhans, Jr., “*The Old Man and the Sea*,” 73.

⁹⁰ Bronislaw Malinowski, introduction to *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, by Fernando Ortiz, trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), lviii.

[O]ne of the difficulties of ‘acculturation’ is its ethnocentrism, since the term assumes an already-existing cultural matrix into which outsiders are received. Instead, Ortiz stresses the creative leap, the quantum of novelty inherent in cultural shifts; it is not a matter of entering a stable, already existing culture, but of creating a different cultural configuration altogether.⁹¹

I have tried to show that in addition to class, *To Have and Have Not* also concerns itself with the racial and colonial orders that Hemingway encountered when he made his way to the US South and the Caribbean. In his relationships with the novel’s non-white and non-American “have nots,” Harry Morgan is repeatedly confronted with cultural difference. In keeping with Ortiz’s critique of the prevailing anthropological discourse, his own racial and colonial status is hardly stable.

Instead, as Harry struggles to stay afloat amidst economic distress and political neglect in Key West, that status is often jeopardized. What Hemingway called the “inter-relation” in his novel between Key West and Cuba, or Harry and Emilio, puts colonial hierarchies at risk, much as Harry’s relationship with Wesley at times reveals the insecurity of his authority. To be sure, in *To Have and Have Not*, it is Harry, the white American, who most embodies what Ortiz called the “state of transition” brought about by cross-cultural contact.⁹² It is Harry, who, in Ortiz’s words, is “faced with the problem of disadjustment and readjustment, of deculturation and acculturation – in a word, of transculturation.”⁹³ Given Harry’s pain, we might read Hemingway as mourning Harry’s racial “loss” as well as his economic decline, which are difficult to disentangle from each other. But in his relationships

⁹¹ Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 21.

⁹² Ortiz writes, Cuba’s history, “more than that of any other country of America, is an intense, complex, unbroken process of transculturation of human groups, all in a state of transition.” Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 103.

⁹³ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 98.

with Emilio and Wesley, we also see a desire for affiliation that dissipates but then resurfaces in Harry's final admission of his own individual weakness and insufficiency.

Ortiz argued that his concept was "fundamental and indispensable," not only for our comprehension of Cuban history, but also, "for analogous reasons, of that of America in general." Deriving from a history of conquest, colonization, and slavery, transculturation represents a "painful process" that "at times [gives] rise to the most terrible clashes."⁹⁴ Yet transculturation, in Ortiz's analysis, also threatens old orders and produces new cultural phenomena. Reading *To Have and Have Not* through the lens of Ortiz's concept, we find possibilities for such new cultures in Harry's relationships with the novel's other "have nots." Indeed, although they ultimately represent failed possibilities for affiliation, in Harry's uneasy recognition of himself in Emilio, or in Harry and Wesley's attention to each other, we see Hemingway allowing for constructed oppositions to give way to alternative social arrangements past Harry's politics of racialized individualism and grievance.

To quote Coronil again on how Ortiz's work threatens colonial authority: it "demystifies its ruling fantasies – notions of the authentic native, of separate pure cultures, of a superior Western modernity."⁹⁵ I have tried to show that Hemingway's comparisons of Key West and Havana and Harry Morgan's association with the novel's other "have nots," also challenge the racial and cultural boundaries underlying imperial power. Indeed, while the threat to Harry's authority often provokes violence and hostility, like Ortiz's transculturation it also creates an opening to conceive of new cultural formations.

⁹⁴ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 103, 102, 99.

⁹⁵ Coronil, "Introduction," xvi.

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3. The Modern Plantation Empire and Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death*

In 1954, while a patient at Roundway Hospital, a psychiatric facility in Wiltshire, England, the Black Caribbean writer Eric Walrond published one of his last pieces of fiction in the hospital's literary journal, *The Roundway Review*. The semi-autobiographical story mainly charts the US experiences of its Caribbean protagonist, Jim Prout, who has recently arrived in New York. But it also looks back to Prout's past experiences in the Panama Canal Zone during the era of US construction in the early twentieth century. It was there, Prout recounts, that his father was killed by a white American policeman named Rowde who spoke with a "Texas drawl."¹ Prout's father, a Black Caribbean immigrant in Panama, had been working as a policeman for the Americans when he and Rowde were tasked with tracking down a local Hispanic man who had been sabotaging canal construction. Rowde's explanation for the killing is that it was "a case of mistaken identity." "I reckon," he explains, "I mistook him for the sp--k."²

Walrond's publications in the *Roundway Review* on the one hand highlight his distance in the 1950s from an earlier life of artistic prominence during the height of the Harlem Renaissance. Yet they also represent a return to this period in that they revisit the major themes of his earlier fiction, including those of his only book, a once much lauded collection of short stories set in the Caribbean called *Tropic Death* (1926). Migration, race, and colonialism, for example, are abiding themes in Walrond's corpus, from *Tropic Death* to the

¹ Eric Walrond, *In Search of Asylum: The Later Writings of Eric Walrond*, eds. Louis J Parascandola and Carl A. Wade (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 115.

² Walrond, *In Search of Asylum*, 111, 115. My redaction.

Roundway Review fiction. However, while these themes are well documented within the scholarship on Walrond, his enduring preoccupation with the particularly “Southern” character of US empire, which appears in both *Tropic Death* and the later fiction, remains a neglected theme in the author’s oeuvre. Rowde’s “accident” is that he misapplies to the Canal Zone a US racial lens that treats Jim’s father and the local man as interchangeable subjects on one side of a white/non-white racial binary. But if Rowde’s racist, supposedly inadvertent error in judgment stands in for the familiar theme of American imperial innocence, his distinctive dialect gives this common trope a particularly Southern aspect. The modern American empire, in Walrond’s fiction, speaks with a Southern drawl.

Born in British Guiana in 1898, Walrond lived in Barbados and the Panama Canal Zone before moving to New York City in 1918 where he fell in with Harlem’s literary scene and published *Tropic Death* to much acclaim. Frequently compared to Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1923), *Tropic Death* placed Walrond at the center of the New Negro movement for its modernist portrait of a Caribbean undergoing transformation during the US construction of the Panama Canal. Although he died in obscurity after failing to produce another book and was a lesser-known figure of the Harlem Renaissance for much of the last century, his work has received more critical attention as scholars have turned towards transnational, hemispheric, and diasporic critical frameworks. Michelle Stephens, Raphael Dalleo, and Imani D. Owens, for example, stress the significance of the anticolonial perspective that Walrond brought to Harlem as a Black Caribbean immigrant.³ For Louis Chude-Sokei and

³ Michelle Stephens, “Eric Walrond’s *Tropic Death* and the Discontents of American Modernity,” in *Prospero’s Isles: The Presence of the Caribbean in the American Imaginary*, eds, Diane Accaria-Zavala and Rodolfo Popelnik (Oxford: Macmillan-Caribbean, 2004); Raphael Dalleo, *American Imperialism’s Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016); Imani D. Owens, “Hard

Rhonda Frederick, meanwhile, Walrond is vitally important because his life and work, shaped by his multiple migrations, challenge monolithic conceptions of the Black diaspora by calling attention to its intraracial differences.⁴

But if Walrond's strength, as these critics assert, is his sensitivity to the plurality and polyglot nature of "New World" Black cultures and experiences, this focus stems at least in part from a desire to counter the rigid racial binarism and obsession with racial classification that he saw in a US empire derived from Southern models. Throughout Walrond's work, marines and policemen as well as corporate executives and managers representing the American empire in the Caribbean hail from the US South. In *Tropic Death* and his later writings, moreover, Walrond emphasizes the US empire's reliance on Black labor and racialized labor management practices. These included racial segregation and labor segmentation strategies intended to exacerbate conflicts between Black and Hispanic workers. Walrond sought to foster multiracial alliances by drawing attention to such strategies and their Southern origins. Indeed, like the images of an industrialized Black workforce in Walrond's Canal Zone stories, the subtext of labor management in Walrond's fiction evokes a modern plantation, particularly when we understand that these modern, corporate colonial practices derived from racialized management methods first employed on the slave plantation. Far from a peripheral or premodern region, the South is at the center of

Reading: "US Empire and Black Modernist Aesthetics in Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death*" *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 41, no. 4 (Winter, 2016).

⁴ Louis Chude-Sokei, "Foreign Negro Flash Agents: Eric Walrond and the Discrepancies of Diaspora," in *Eric Walrond: The Critical Heritage*, eds, Louis J Parascandola and Carl A. Wade (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2012); Rhonda Frederick, "Genre, Gender and Eric Walrond's Equivocal Transnational Vision," in *Eric Walrond: The Critical Heritage*, eds, Louis J Parascandola and Carl A. Wade (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2012).

US imperial power in Walrond's writings. Modern US colonialism, from *Tropic Death* to the *Roundway Review* fiction, is fundamentally indebted to Southern plantation codes.

Walrond, moreover, was not alone in recognizing the intimate relationship between the plantation system, modern colonial regimes, and Western modernity at large. As the relationship between modern capitalism and slavery comes under new scrutiny among contemporary US historians and critics, Walrond's fiction offers one avenue into the long intellectual history among Black and Caribbean writers and scholars regarding modernity's debt to the plantation. Concern with the Southern aspect of US empire is a neglected theme within Walrond's corpus but, more broadly, it also represents a neglected point of concern for Harlem writers and radicals in general during the 1920s. Black writers and activists often invoked the Southern face of US colonialism in New Negro-era periodicals, from Marcus Garvey's *Negro World* to W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Crisis*. Walrond's fiction partakes in this broader conversation. It also fits within the Caribbean critical tradition on the plantation that includes such critics as C. L. R. James, Fernando Ortiz, Eric Williams, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Édouard Glissant, and Sylvia Wynter who insist that the plantation represents a modern system.

Reading *Tropic Death* through this Caribbean critical lens helps us to see the larger significance of Walrond's attention to US imperialism's reliance on Southern forms. As the Caribbean tradition illuminates, by emphasizing the plantation origins of modern US colonialism, Walrond deviates from traditional historical narratives of modernization's triumph over a plantation-based, agrarian cultures in the Caribbean. Rather, Walrond's fiction contributes to a revisionist historical narrative in which the plantation lies as the forefront of modernization, as opposed to its receiving end, as a transnational, technological,

scientific, and essentially capitalist institution. Viewed from this perspective, Walrond's depictions of Black workers in the Panama Canal Zone, deracinated, atomized, and regimented according to racialized methods of labor control, serve as both a critique of plantation systems and as an affirmation of the humanity of Black Caribbean workers, as modern subjects central to the making of the modern world.

Indeed, whereas *Tropic Death's* experimental style is much noted by his critics, the relationship between his style and his attention to the plantation has not been fully explored. While not specifically focused on the plantation, Michelle Stephens and Imani D. Owens both consider how Walrond's modernism functions as a response to colonialism. Stephens writes that Walrond "transferred the site of the modern wasteland from Europe to the Americas" and in so doing relocated the sources of modern trauma away from the European war zones of World War I, and toward an older history of conquest and colonialism in the Americas, much as Du Bois had done before him.⁵ Owens meanwhile, argues that "Walrond's use of fragments and bits of image (what Du Bois calls his 'impressionistic pen') are key to his rendering of imperialism's disorienting violence, a geography that literally shifts and disintegrates."⁶ Building on their work, this essay stresses how Walrond's aesthetic responds in particular to the role of the slave plantation as an origin point for modernity, specifically in terms of its importance for the emergence of US neocolonialism and its use of racialized labor management.

To be sure, *Tropic Death's* style can be read as Walrond's effort to depict the alienating conditions of a plantation-derived modernity. Yet Walrond is as sensitive to the

⁵ Stephens, "Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death*," 170.

⁶ Owens, "Hard Reading," 97.

limits of plantation control as he is to its expansive reach. For instance, Walrond's demonstration of creative autonomy in his use of experimental prose and at times surreal imagery stands in direct contrast to the themes of regimentation, management, and mechanization that characterize his depictions of Black workers in the Canal Zone. Returning again to the Caribbean tradition, particularly work by Édouard Glissant and Sylvia Wynter, I hope to show that Walrond's style, more than an attempt to reflect plantation conditions, represents his efforts to overcome the constraints of plantation management and to give expression to the cross-culturality that the plantation unintentionally produces and then cannot adequately contain.

§

As I outlined in the introduction, recent work in Southern Studies and on the history of capitalism has challenged dominant understandings of slavery's relationship to capitalist modernity.⁷ The traditional view in Western historiography that an outmoded plantation system gave way to modern economic forces is being revised by new scholarship that figures the slave plantation as the origin point of global capitalism. However, while this work represents a relatively recent development within the Western academy, a Caribbean critical tradition has long understood the plantation as fundamentally modern. It is within this tradition that I want to situate Walrond's allusions to the plantation framework of modern

⁷ For attention to "Plantation Modernity" in Southern Studies, see for example, Amy Clukey and Jeremy Wells, eds, "Plantation Modernity," Special Issue, *The Global South* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2016). For recent work on slavery and capitalism, see Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds, *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

US empire. Returning to this discourse, recall that C. L. R. James, for example, stated plainly that the slave plantation represented a “modern system” in the Appendix to his 1938 history of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, elaborating on a point he had made in the text.⁸ Enslaved workers in Haiti, James wrote in *Jacobins*, “working and living together in gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar-factories which covered the North Plain...were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time.”⁹ These “sugar-factories,” James proposed, were sites of modern subject formation, where an enslaved workforce encountered methods of production and management that closely resembled the industrial capitalist systems of Fordism and Taylorism.¹⁰ Blurring distinctions between the “traditional” plantation and the “modern” factory, James inaugurated a critical discourse that would come to see the plantation as constitutive of the modern world, as opposed to an anachronism within it.

James’ insights corresponded with those of the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz, who James revered for having “ushered the Caribbean into the thought of the twentieth century.”¹¹ In his 1940 masterwork, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, Ortiz had claimed that whereas tobacco in Cuban history was tied to the small farm and skilled, free, white labor, sugar production meant the plantation, Black and enslaved labor, mass production, mechanization, and the development of capitalism. The slave plantation, according to Ortiz, laid the groundwork for the modern industrial economic order in Cuba where, “The bell that

⁸ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Overture and the San Domingo Revolution*. Second Edition, Revised (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 392.

⁹ James, *Black Jacobins*, 85-86.

¹⁰ On James and the plantation as a forerunner of industrial capitalist systems, see Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Sound of Culture: Diaspora and Black Technopoetics* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2016), 36-37.

¹¹ James, *Black Jacobins*, 395.

rang for the slaves in the mill yard...was replaced by the steam whistle that now calls the workers with its ear-piercing note, like the whistle of an inhuman steel overseer.”¹² The foremost example here is Cuba’s twentieth-century sugar central, which, although it contains feudalistic qualities, resembles James’ “sugar-factories,” but at a more advanced stage of capitalist development:

The central is now more than a mere plantation; there are no longer any real planters in Cuba. The modern central is not a simple agricultural enterprise, nor even a factory whose production is based on the raw materials at hand. Today it is a complicated ‘system of land, machinery, transportation, technicians, workers, capital, and people to produce sugar.’ It is a complete social organism, as live and complex as a city or municipality, or a baronial keep with its surrounding fief of vassals, tenants, and serfs. The latifundium is only the territorial base, the visible expression of this. The central is vertebrated by an economic and legal structure that combines masses of land, masses of machinery, masses of men, and masses of money, all in proportion to the integral scope of the huge organism for sugar production.¹³

This was the Cuban sugar central as it appeared in the mid-twentieth century, according to Ortiz. Yet he insisted that slavery had always represented “a form of capitalism,” with slaves cast in the role of “automotive machines.”¹⁴

Four years after Ortiz, James’ one-time student Eric Williams made similar assertions in *Capitalism and Slavery*, in which he argued that slavery “produced the cotton to serve as a base for modern capitalism.”¹⁵ Indeed, much as James had argued that plantation slavery financed the French Revolution, Williams contended that Britain’s Industrial Revolution

¹² Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet De Onís (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 36- 37.

¹³ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 52.

¹⁴ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 60, 48.

¹⁵ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 5.

depended upon slave labor in Caribbean colonies.¹⁶ More recently, in a book he dedicated to Ortiz, Antonio Benítez-Rojo also understands the plantation as the historical basis for economic and political development in the West, locating what he calls the “plantation machine” at the center of the Atlantic world. “Let’s be realistic,” he writes,

...the Atlantic is today the Atlantic (the navel of capitalism) because Europe, in its mercantilist laboratory, conceived the project of inseminating the Caribbean womb with the blood of Africa; the Atlantic is today the Atlantic (NATO, World Bank, New York Stock Exchange, European Economic Community, etc.) because it was the painfully delivered child of the Caribbean, whose vagina was stretched between continental clamps, between the *encomienda* of Indians and the slaveholding plantation, between the servitude of the coolie and the discrimination toward the *criollo*, between commercial monopoly and piracy, between the runaway slave settlement and the governor’s palace.¹⁷

We can see the growing understanding of the centrality of the plantation for modernity in the line from James’ sugar factory and Ortiz’s modern sugar central to Benítez-Rojo’s expanded concept of the plantation machine, “whose flux, whose noise, whose presence covers the map of world history’s contingencies, through the great changes in economic discourse to the vast collisions of races and cultures that humankind has seen.”¹⁸

Although *Tropic Death* preceded this scholarship by some years, its depictions of plantation structures in a modernizing Caribbean anticipate the critical discourse. For example, consider *Tropic Death*’s emphasis on Black labor for US empire. Four of the collection’s ten stories are set or partially set in the Panama Canal Zone: “The Wharf Rats,”

¹⁶ James writes, “The slave-trade and slavery were the economic basis of the French Revolution.” James, *Black Jacobins*, 47. On the parallel between arguments by James and Williams, see also Laurent Dubois, “Reading *The Black Jacobins* Seven Decades Later,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 42, iss. 2 (March/April, 2009), 39-40.

¹⁷ Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, Second edition, trans. James E. Maraniss (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.

¹⁸ Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 5.

“The Palm Porch,” “Subjection,” and “Tropic Death.” I hope to show that another, “The Yellow One,” can only be fully understood in the context of Caribbean labor for United Fruit Company (UFCO) plantations in Central America. Even “Panama Gold,” which is set in Barbados, centers around a character who has just returned from the Canal Zone, where he lost his leg in an accident. To be sure, although *Tropic Death* clearly represents a challenge to US-centrism, it nevertheless offers a portrait of the Caribbean largely oriented around a meshwork of labor migration routes that crisscross between sites of US enterprise, operated by both the US government and private corporations, which taken together bring into focus an expanded plantation empire, entirely dependent upon Black migrant labor.¹⁹

It is a vision of the Caribbean that maps onto what Walrond’s one-time political idol and employer Marcus Garvey encountered after first leaving Jamaica in 1910. According to Amy Jacques Garvey, Garvey’s politicization took shape only after he witnessed Black labor for US empire throughout Central America, including in Panama where he saw Black workers “jim-crowed in separate quarters” and in Limón, Costa Rica, where he worked on a UFCO plantation and “then realized that white men did not regard the lives of black men as equal to those of white men.”²⁰ It is a portrait of the Caribbean that also corresponds with that of Walrond’s contemporary, Jacques Roumain, whose *Masters of the Dew* (1944) is set against the backdrop of worker migrations between US-occupied Haiti and sugar plantations in Cuba, many of them US-owned.²¹ In fact, after the Canal was completed, many Caribbean workers moved on to UFCO plantations in Cuba, where they joined migrant workers from

¹⁹ For *Tropic Death*’s challenge to US centrism, particularly Black US centrism, see Chude-Sokei, “Foreign Negro Flash Agents.”

²⁰ Amy Jacques Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism* (Kingston: United Printers, 1963), 8.

²¹ Jacques Roumain, *Masters of the Dew*, trans. Langston Hughes and Mercer Cook. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1978.

Haiti.²² Claude McKay, another contemporary and sometime rival of Walrond who himself first came to the US aboard a UFCO steamship, also noted this pattern of migration in an early poem, “Peasants’ Ways o’ Thinkin.” Written from the perspective of a Jamaican worker, it highlights the draw of better pay, but also the particularly harsh plantation conditions in Colón, in the Canal Zone, and UFCO banana fields in Limón:

“We hea’ a callin’ from Colon,
 We hea’ a callin’ from Limon,
 Let’s quit de t’ankless toil an’ fret
 Fe where a better pay we’ll get.”

Though ober deh de law is bad,
 An’ dey no know de name o’ God,
 Yet dere is nuff work fe we han’s,
 Reward in gol’ fe beat de ban’s.²³

Walrond himself was a product of Black worker migration for US empire, which assumed a massive scale by the early twentieth century. Between the middle of the nineteenth century and the end of US canal construction in 1914, some 300,000 Caribbean people, largely from British colonies, made their way to Central American ports, mainly to work for the French and US canal projects and US-owned corporations like United Fruit.²⁴ During the US canal construction years alone an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 Caribbean workers traveled to Panama.²⁵ Among them was Walrond’s father, who left Barbados for

²² Jason M. Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 121-122.

²³ Claude McKay, *Complete Poems*, ed. William J. Maxwell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 11.

²⁴ Colby, *The Business of Empire*, 7.

²⁵ Olive Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves: West Indians and the Building of the Panama Canal* (Kingston, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2014), 9.

Colón in 1910, to be followed a year later by his family.²⁶ Walrond spent his adolescence in the Canal Zone and would later write that he considered himself “spiritually a native of Panama” to emphasize the impact of his experiences there, not the least of which was his witnessing of canal construction by Black workers.²⁷

In *Tropic Death*, Walrond’s depictions of Canal construction often correspond with the plantation modernity described by scholars like James, Ortiz, and Benítez-Rojo. “The Palm Porch,” a version of which was first published in Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* (1925), centers on Miss Buckner, a “half white” Jamaican woman and her “flamingo brood” of daughters.²⁸ Set in Colón, Miss Buckner runs the brothel where her daughters work, catering to white sailors and European and US colonial officials. The story opens, however, not inside the brothel, but with an image of Black workers in the Canal Zone:

Below, a rock engine was crushing stone, shooting up rivers of steam and signaling the frontier’s rebirth. Opposite, there was proof, a noisy, swaggering sort of proof, of the gradual death and destruction of the frontier post. Black men behind wheelbarrows slowly ascended a rising made of spliced boards and emptied the sand rock into the maw of a mixing machine. More black men, a peg down, behind wheelbarrows, formed a line which caught the mortar pouring into the rear organ of the omnivorous monster.²⁹

For a US audience, the passage first defamiliarizes plantation-esque images of Black labor through its location in the Canal Zone as opposed to the US South, and by associating such labor with Caribbean workers as opposed to African Americans. At the same time that it

²⁶ James Davis, *Eric Walrond: A Life in the Harlem Renaissance and the Transatlantic Caribbean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), xv.

²⁷ Eric Walrond, “*Winds can Wake up the Dead*”: *An Eric Walrond Reader*, eds. Louis J. Parascandola (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 332.

²⁸ Eric Walrond, *Tropic Death* (New York: Liverwright Publishing Corporation, 2013), 85, 92.

²⁹ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 85.

recalls and relocates the plantation for US readers, however, it also emphasizes the modern, industrialized labor conditions that Black workers faced in the Canal Zone. The workers, “form[ing] a line,” and moving “slowly,” are seemingly interchangeable, their movements strictly controlled and repetitive so as to make them appear nearly as mechanized as the “rock engine” or “mixing machine.” To be sure, we can see aspects of Benítez-Rojo’s “plantation machine,” or Ortiz’s modern sugar plantation, which “combines masses of land, masses of machinery, masses of men, and masses of money” in Walrond’s description of “black men,” and “more black men,” working behind wheelbarrows to feed a machine that has taken on life as an “omnivorous monster” and threatens to spin out of control.

The passage mirrors the image of Black labor that opens the collection. “Drought,” the first story in *Tropic Death*, tells the story of Coggins Rum, a Barbadian stone cutter whose daughter, Beryl, dies after eating marl in an attempt to satisfy her hunger. Although “Drought” is set in Barbados, as opposed to the Canal Zone, and is one of the few stories in *Tropic Death* to not directly make reference to the US presence in the region, its opening passage of Black workers quarrying stone provides an image of industrial plantation labor that later portraits of canal construction will echo: “The whistle blew for eleven o’clock. Throats parched, grim, sun-crazed blacks cutting stone on the white burning hillside dropped with a clang the hot, dust-powdered drills and flew up over the rugged edges of the horizon to descent [*sic*] into a dry, waterless gut.”³⁰ Like the canal workers described in “The Palm Porch,” the stone cutters in “Drought” are regimented and tightly managed, in this case by the call of the whistle. The “clang” that sounds as the workers drop their “dust-

³⁰ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 21.

powdered drills” further testifies to their industrial setting. These details indicate that while Coggins and his family might initially appear as members of a peasant class, Coggins’ work much more closely resembles that of a factory worker than a small farmer. Beryl, moreover, dies after consuming an industrial by-product.

“Subjection,” which centers around a white marine’s murder of a Black worker in the Canal Zone, offers a similar portrait of plantation-esque labor. Here again, the worker’s synchronized and rhythmic movements resemble the regimented labor of industrial factory workers: “Toro Point resounded to the noisy rhythm of picks swung by gnarled black hands. Sunbaked rock stones flew to dust, to powder. In flashing unison rippling muscle glittered to the task of planing a mound of rocky earth dredged up on the barren seashore.”³¹ A later passage emphasizes similar themes: “Gangs were forming. Driven by marines, platoons of black men went to obscure parts of the Toro Point bush to cut paths along the swirling lagoon back to the Painted City. Fierce against the sun moaning men jogged with drills on their backs, pounding to dust tons of mortared stone paving lanes through the heathen unexplored jungle.”³² Forming “gangs” and “platoons,” Walrond’s Black workers are again tightly organized and controlled. Running “with drills on their backs,” they appear in danger of losing their distinction from machines, much as the enslaved workers of Ortiz’s sugar plantations are cast in the role of “automotive machines.” If the US empire represented a modernizing force, such descriptions suggest it was a plantation modernity that much like James’ “sugar-factories” depended on an industrialized Black workforce.

³¹ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 99.

³² Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 110.

Returning to the Caribbean critical tradition, the discourse on the modern plantation can help us to understand the larger significance of these allusions to the plantation-esque forms of the US empire. By providing a historical framing in which the plantation signifies the development of capitalist modernity, rather than its antithesis, James, Ortiz, Williams, and Benítez-Rojo can help us to see how *Tropic Death* avoids conventional narratives of modernization. To be sure, there are times when Walrond's descriptions appear to conform to more traditional narratives. As Walrond writes of Black migrants in Panama in *Tropic Death*'s title story, "In the isles of their origin they were the tillers of the soil -- the ones to nurture cane, and water sorrel, stew cocoanuts and mix Maube -- now theirs was a less elemental, more ephemeral set of chores. Hill and vale, valley and stream gave way to wharf and drydock, dredge and machine shop."³³ Descriptions like these are one reason why *Tropic Death* is often compared to Jean Toomer's *Cane*. Toomer's inspiration for *Cane*, he famously recalled, was that for Blacks in the South "the trend was towards the small town and then towards the city -- and industry and commerce and machines. The folk-spirit was walking in to die on the modern desert."³⁴ It was a comparison that Walrond himself made in "Drought," in which the narrator explains that the story's setting, "wasn't Sepia, Georgia," -- a reference to "Sempter," Georgia, of *Cane* -- "but a backwoods village in Barbadoes [*sic*]."³⁵ Certainly, both *Cane* and *Tropic Death* depict societies facing the pressures of modernization.

³³ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 186-187.

³⁴ Jean Toomer, *The Wayward and the Seeking: A Collection of Writings by Jean Toomer* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1980), 123.

³⁵ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 22. Stephens writes, "In a manner remarkably similar to that of Jean Toomer in his descriptions of the southern United States in *Cane*, Walrond literalised the metaphor of the modern 'wasteland' on Caribbean shores. In his very first story, 'Drought,' Walrond made the geographic connection between the Caribbean and the (black) American South by situating the reader with the phrase, 'It wasn't Sepia, Georgia, but a backwoods village in Barbadoes.'" Stephens, "Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death*," 173.

But what James, Ortiz, and others help to make clear is that these are works that also challenge orthodox understandings of the plantation's relationship to this process of modernization. Traditional distinctions between the plantation and the factory are obscured in a South where, for example, "cotton-stalks look rusty," as is the case in Toomer's Georgia.³⁶ Similarly, Walrond's images of Canal Zone laborers working in "flashing unison" resemble both the gang labor of the plantation and the assembly line of the factory. *Tropic Death* and *Cane* should be read not as stories of modernization's triumph over agrarian, plantation-based cultures but, rather, as the Caribbean scholarship helps us to see, as stories of the modern, capitalist, industrial plantation's ascension over alternative economic systems and cultural formations.

Yet the discourse on the modern plantation can help us to understand Walrond's stories in another way as well. Édouard Glissant and Sylvia Wynter both consider how the modern plantation not only fails to establish complete control, but actually produces the seeds of its own destruction. Although Glissant does not elaborate on industrial capitalism's relationship to the plantation, he nevertheless writes of the plantation as a modern system because of its role as a catalyst for cross-cultural contact and creolization. "[T]he Plantation," Glissant writes, "is one of the focal points for the development of present-day modes of Relation...In this outmoded spot, on the margins of every dynamic, the tendencies of our modernity begin to be detectable."³⁷ Drawing attention to its position as an origin point for creolization, Glissant's work asks whether the plantation might ultimately contribute to its

³⁶ Jean Toomer, *Cane* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2011), 8.

³⁷ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 65.

own dissolution in that it produces, and then cannot adequately contain, the cross-culturality it depends on preventing for its own survival. As Glissant writes, though “Airtight seals were apparently the rule of the Plantation,” such “tight social barrier[s]” could not “prevent contaminations.”³⁸ Wynter also explores the unintended effects of the plantation in her essay, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” in which she suggests that even as it oppresses, the plantation might unwittingly be tied to a later freedom. Similar to Ortiz, who understood Cuban history as a perpetual tension between tobacco and sugar production, the one leading to the small farm and the other to the plantation, Wynter proposes that the central conflict of the Caribbean is that between the autochthonous folk culture linked to enslaved worker’s plot, and the exogenous colonial system linked to the plantation, “the first sketch of monopoly capitalism.”³⁹ As Wynter writes, “[F]rom early, the planters gave the slaves plots of land on which to grow food to feed themselves in order to maximize profits. We suggest that this plot system, was...the focus of resistance to the market system and market values [of the plantation].”⁴⁰ Yet, instead of turning uncritically toward the plot system in response to the ascension of the plantation, Wynter points to the unresolved tension experienced by Black workers who both maintained their plots and worked on the plantation, placing them awkwardly between these two systems and the values they represented. As Wynter writes referring to the Caribbean as a whole, this “ambivalence” between the plot and plantation “is at once the root cause of our alienation; and the

³⁸ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 65, 67.

³⁹ Sylvia Wynter, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” *Savacou* 5 (1971), 101. The crucial difference being that in Wynter’s work, the plot, as a site of anticolonial resistance, is associated with the enslaved Black worker, whereas in Ortiz’s work the Cuban small farm is a predominantly white space that counters the foreign-owned plantation and its associations with capitalism and Black labor.

⁴⁰ Wynter, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” 99.

possibility of our salvation,” intimating that such ambivalence represents an antidote to the rigid social hierarchies and “airtight seals” of the plantation system.⁴¹

Glissant and Wynter help to illuminate Walrond’s own sensitivity to the plantation’s inability to establish complete control. In keeping with the ambivalence that Wynter emphasizes, the themes of mechanization, regimentation, and management that pervade Walrond’s descriptions of Black workers in the Canal Zone are always in tension, in *Tropic Death*, with his experimental style and at times surreal imagery. Indeed, throughout *Tropic Death*, Walrond’s style corresponds with Glissant’s thinking on the modern plantation in that it often functions to express the cultural excesses that the plantation system has failed to manage or contain. For example, whereas “The Palm Porch” opens with an image of industrial plantation labor that emphasizes the machine and labor management, we quickly learn of the failure of this system to maintain control. The opening passage describing canal laborers is seen from Miss Buckner’s perspective, who, after observing the workers from the porch of her brothel in Colón, thinks back to the early days of canal construction:

After the torch, ashes and ghosts -- bare, black stalks, pegless stumps, flakes of charred leaves and half-burnt tree trunks. Down by a stream watering a village of black French colonials, dredges began to work. More of the Zone pests, rubber-booted ones, tugged out huge iron pipes and safely laid them on the gutty bosom of the swamp. Congeries of them. Then one windy night the dredges began a moaning noise. It was the sea groaning and vomiting. Through the throat of the pipes it rattled, and spat stones -- gold and emerald and amethyst. All sorts of juice the sea upheaved. It dug deep down, too, far into the recesses of its sprawling cosmos. Back to a pre-geologic age it delved, and brought up things.⁴²

⁴¹ Wynter, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” 99.

⁴² Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 86.

The first lines describe the Caribbean “wasteland” that Stephens calls our attention to: a bare and lifeless setting that mirrors the sense of alienation in the opening passage’s depiction of Black labor. While this “half-burnt” landscape resembles modernist responses to the decimation of World War I, Walrond’s intervention is to locate the origin of modern trauma in the older history of the plantation system.

However, while the passage begins with the plantation’s destructiveness, its tone makes a significant shift in Walrond’s imagining of an industrial accident. The passage describes an earthquake set off by dredges that have apparently struck a fault, one possibly based on a major earthquake in 1882 that caused significant damage in Colón, an event Miss Buckner conceivably experienced. In the passage, the earthquake marks the critical juncture at which point canal construction can no longer maintain command and impose order. Earlier images of regimentation, management, and mechanization on burnt and barren settings give way to a surreal imagery that describes an accidental and chaotic release of energy: the vomiting and spitting of gems, crystals, and juices. The restrictive pressures of the plantation are supplanted by an expansive sense of space and time: the “sprawling cosmos” of the sea and the “pre-geologic age” exposed by the cracking open of the earth’s surface. The scene can be read as Walrond’s attempt to explore what happens when the plantation is no longer able to contain the excessive stresses caused by its multiple and intersecting social and economic fault lines. The earthquake, in this reading, is a rupture beyond which the plantation loses control. Like Glissant’s identification of cultural forces that escape the plantation’s “tight social barrier[s],” the earthquake can be read as an event that surfaces the cross-cultural “contaminations” that the plantation unintentionally gives rise to and is then unable to adequately manage or contain.

Take Miss Buckner, for example, who in many respects embodies the limits of plantation control. If the Black workers of the Canal Zone appear strictly organized and mechanical, Miss Buckner, like the earthquake, represents an unmanageable force. This is the case despite her investment in the racial hierarchies of the Canal Zone which, like the images of Black labor, associate the Zone with the plantation-based racial systems of the US South. Referring to the Canal Zone's notorious Gold and Silver system of racial segregation, which extended to nearly every corner of public life, Miss Buckner bemoans her daughter's involvement with a "silver" worker. However, Miss Buckner's own "mystical heritage" undermines this very system.⁴³ As the narrator explains, "Whether she was the result of a union of white and black, French and Spanish, English and Maroon -- no one knew."⁴⁴ The threat inherent to this resistance to racial classification is exhibited by Miss Buckner's murder of a British official who refuses let go of her daughter, Anesta, even after Miss Buckner has promised her to a Spanish Captain. Although this dispute serves as the immediate cause for Miss Buckner's violence, the significance of the murder cannot be fully understood outside of her evasion of racial categories and her excessive, surreal, and even cosmic presentation, which associates her with the earthquake and its symbolic threat to plantation management. Standing at "fully seven feet tall," words flying "like blazing meteors out of her mouth," Miss Buckner moves "like a whirlwind" through her brothel and the city of Colón.⁴⁵ Her "jeweled, half-white hand" and the "glittering pattern" of "watches and brooches which shone on her bosom" together with a "gathering of emeralds and pearls" further establish

⁴³ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 90.

⁴⁴ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 90.

⁴⁵ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 89, 90, 96.

Miss Buckner's connection with the earthquake and its surfacing of "gold and emerald and amethyst."⁴⁶ It is significant, then, that Miss Buckner's weapon is described as both a "studded dagger" and a "diamond-headed pin."⁴⁷ Indeed, just as Glissant and Wynter write of the plantation's potential contributions to its own demise, in "The Palm Porch" canal construction accidentally produces the materials that Miss Buckner will use to kill the British official.

This tension in "The Palm Porch" between plantation management and its limitations also characterizes "Subjection." As we have already seen, the story's descriptions of Black labor in the Canal Zone, like those of "The Palm Porch," emphasize mechanization, regimentation, and management. The marine who kills Ballet, moreover, like Corporal Rowde of Walrond's *Roundway Review* fiction, speaks with a Southern accent. When Ballet challenges the marine after he strikes another worker, the marine responds, "'I'll git you yet,' [...] 'I'll fill you full of lead yet, you black bastard!'"⁴⁸ As Ballet later runs past "dinky bathhouses for the blacks" and "platoons" of Black workers, such images combined with the marine's Southern dialect suggest that the Canal Zone represents a modern variation on the Southern plantation.⁴⁹

However, "Subjection" should not be reduced to a story of plantation violence alone, especially given that like his depiction of the earthquake in "The Palm Porch," Walrond's prose-style in "Subjection" works to counter its otherwise strong emphasis on the

⁴⁶ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 85, 93, 96.

⁴⁷ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 93.

⁴⁸ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 101.

⁴⁹ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 108, 110.

restrictions of plantation management. Consider how Walrond describes the marine's attack on a canal worker:

A ram-shackle body, dark in the ungentle spots exposing it, jogged, reeled and fell at the tip of a white bludgeon. Forced a dent in the crisp caked earth. An isolated ear lay limp and juicy, like some exhausted leaf or flower, half joined to the tree whence it sprang. Only the sticky milk flooding it was crimson, crimsoning the dust and earth.⁵⁰

Here again, like the charred, half-burnt settings described in "The Palm Porch," Walrond links the destruction of human life with that of the landscape by comparing the worker's injured ear to a torn leaf. More importantly, however, for our discussion, the scene is also frequently cited as an example of Walrond's aesthetic innovations. For Owens, it exemplifies her argument that "*Tropic Death's* stylistic experiments seek to illuminate contemporary forms of violence that were insidious, pervasive, and often confounding."⁵¹ The imagery in this particular passage, Owens writes, "depicts both body and land as sites of disorienting violence."⁵² Yet Walrond's style can also be read as his attempt to overcome, rather than render, the imperial plantation system. Indeed, his break from realist conventions stands in direct opposition to the restrictive, highly managed environment that he describes. In the passage above, it is as if Walrond begins with the image of a white marine striking a Black worker, shatters it, and then presents his reader with the resulting fragments: "a ramshackle body," "a white bludgeon," "an isolated ear." The effect is disorienting, but such confusion is productive in that it allows for the possibility that a paradigmatic scene of racial

⁵⁰ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 100.

⁵¹ Owens, "Hard Reading," 98.

⁵² Owens, "Hard Reading," 104.

violence might be rearranged, potentially into a very different image. The link to the landscape established in the passage, for example, has the suggestive effect of intermixing images of violence with signs of a living, although threatened, natural world. The image of the “exhausted leaf or flower,” in particular, suggests a possible, if undefined, future thriving and transformation even as it also registers the plantation’s destructiveness. In this sense, Walrond’s style performs its own attack against the plantation’s attempt to manage and police not only the literal space of the Canal Zone, but also the rigid conceptual boundaries that it depends upon. Walrond’s style, in other words, here signifies the limits of plantation management, much like Miss Buckner and the earthquake in “The Palm Porch.”

These frequent allusions to the plantation structures of the Canal Zone, and Walrond’s efforts to overcome them, should be understood as part of a broader conversation among Walrond’s Harlem Renaissance peers who frequently contended that US colonialism throughout the Caribbean relied on Southern racial codes. In fact, several other Black writers and activists of the 1920s looked at Panama and saw the US South. And many asserted that Southerners themselves had brought such racial systems to the Caribbean. Historians continue to debate whether Southerners did in fact preside over the work culture of the Canal Zone. While records suggest that Southerners did not constitute a majority of US personnel, this does not contradict, for example, claims that Southerners were overrepresented among foremen and managers in the Zone.⁵³ To be sure, evidence

⁵³ Multiple Canal Zone historians have written against a “myth” about Southerners in the Zone. Yet the exact nature of the myth remains unclear. It appears to have begun with John Biesanz, who wrote, “On the theory that Southerners knew how to handle Negroes the administration hired its supervisory force largely from the South; they imposed a system of racial relations similar to that back home” (23). Michael L. Conniff then averred, “The oft-repeated view that the Canal Zone was racist due to southern influence is simply a myth” (34). Michael E. Donoghue, in turn, asserts “A pervasive myth from the canal construction era claimed that the majority of U.S. workers were Deep Southerners, who brought with them a Jim Crow mentality and peculiar

concerning Panama and other sites of US colonial influence does not invalidate the perception of Southern dominance among Harlem Renaissance-era writers and activists. As Hans Schmidt has written concerning the widespread impression that Southerners predominated among marine forces occupying Haiti between 1915 and 1934, “whether or not there was a disproportionately large number of Southern marines in Haiti, the fact that many observers felt that this was the case indicates that Southerners and Southern racial codes were conspicuous.”⁵⁴ This was the case in Panama, where, Marcus Garvey’s *Negro World* asserted in 1919, “Most of the Americans employed as foremen, superintendents and officials were rabid Negro-hating Southerners who proceeded to produce a racial environment similar to that of their native section.”⁵⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois’ *The Crisis*, meanwhile, reported in 1923 that Southerners had come “by the hundred, then by the thousand” to the Canal Zone, which represented “the transplanting from Georgia, Alabama, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, etc., of the very worst form of race hatred which these states can boast of.”⁵⁶ Such anxieties over the migration of white Southerners and Southern race ideology to the Caribbean, moreover, were not confined to the Canal Zone. In Cyril Briggs’

white identity that re-created the American South in the Zone” (52). There are differences, however, between the propositions that most supervisors were Southerners (Biesanz), racism was the result of “southern influence” (Conniff), and that the “majority of U.S. workers” were from the South (Donoghue). Because the nature of the myth itself is slippery, it is difficult to prove or disprove. Donoghue, for instance, writes that according to the 1912 census and other documents, Southerners accounted for approximately 32 percent of US canal personnel (52). However, this evidence only disproves the claim that the majority of American personnel were Southerners. It does not disprove the claim that most supervisors or foremen were Southerners, or the more general claim that racism in the Zone was the result of Southern influence. See John Biesanz, “Race Relations in the Canal Zone,” *Phylon* 11, no. 1 (1st Qtr., 1950), 23; Michael L. Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal, Panama, 1904-1981* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985); Michael E. Donoghue, *Borderlands on the Isthmus: Race, Culture, and the Struggle for the Canal Zone* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

⁵⁴ Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 145.

⁵⁵ “Conditions in Panama,” *Negro World* (June 28, 1919) in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1910-1920, Volume XI*, ed. Robert A. Hill (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 225.

⁵⁶ G. Victor Cools, “Semi-Peonage in Panama,” *The Crisis* 25, no. 6 (April 1923), 273, 275.

Crusader, a letter describing conditions in the Dominican Republic during the US occupation was headlined “Cracker Kultur in S. Domingo.” “Southern Ku Klux Methods Imported into Fair Caribbean Isle” the title continued.⁵⁷ Harlem kingpin and St. Croix immigrant Casper Holstein offered similar reports in *Negro World* on the US Virgin Islands. “Crackerism and Judicial Oppression Invade St. Croix,” he titled one article and observed that “white capitalists from the South are bent on shackling the isle with a system of conscienceless land-grabbing.”⁵⁸

For Caribbean-born writers like Garvey, Briggs, and Holstein, characterizing US colonialism as an essentially Southern phenomenon was at least partially an effort to make US empire legible to an African American audience much more familiar with racial violence in the South than with US colonialism in Panama and elsewhere in the Caribbean. Such comparisons, however, were not limited to Caribbean-born writers and activists. James Weldon Johnson observed of US marines in his article collection, *Self-Determining Haiti*, “Many of these men are rough, uncouth, and uneducated, and a great number from the South, are violently steeped in color prejudice. They direct all policing of city and town.”⁵⁹ Most US civilian positions in Haiti were also held by Southerners, according to Johnson, who noted, for example, that the head of the customs service and the Superintendent of Public Instruction, both hailed from Louisiana.⁶⁰ Coming from a slightly different rhetorical angle, Johnson’s most well-known and provocative reference to the South in his writings on

⁵⁷ “Cracker Kultur in S. Domingo,” in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1921-1922, Volume XIII*, ed. by Robert A. Hill (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 48.

⁵⁸ Casper Holstein, “Crackerism and Judicial Oppression Invade St. Croix,” *Negro World* (June 3, 1922), in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers: The Caribbean Diaspora, 1921-1922, Volume XIII*, ed. Robert A. Hill (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁵⁹ James Weldon Johnson, *Self-Determining Haiti* (New York: *The Nation*, 1920), 17.

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Self-Determining Haiti*, 10-11.

the Haitian occupation pointed to racial violence in the South in order to challenge US claims to modernity: “[W]hich is worse, to eat a human without cooking him – as is alleged to be the custom in Haiti – or to cook him without eating him – as is known to be the custom in Mississippi?”⁶¹ Some white US writers also explored the connection. Eugene O’Neill’s 1920 play, *The Emperor Jones*, opens “on an island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by white Marines.”⁶² It features the African American emperor, Brutus Jones, who descends into a dream state that transports him back to the slave South, where he finds himself “paralyzed with horror” on an auction block surrounded by white planters.⁶³ Not only Caribbean writers, but also US Black and white artists sensed the intimate relationship between the Southern plantation and modern US empire. More than just making colonialism legible to a US audience, this repeated referencing of the South points to the plantation framework of US modernization projects abroad.

Walrond was familiar with these voices and his own references to the Southern-esque forms of US empire were informed by this broader discourse, particularly by Caspar Holstein and Marcus Garvey. Walrond, for instance, began working for a Garveyite newspaper in 1919, the same year that “rabid Negro-hating Southerners” in Panama were decried in the pages of *Negro World*, where he would later become an editor in 1921.⁶⁴ Walrond also revered Caspar Holstein, particularly for his advocacy on behalf of the Virgin Islands. According to Walrond’s own account, he published Holstein’s writing on the Virgin

⁶¹ James Weldon Johnson, “Haiti and Our Latin-American Policy,” in *In Search of Democracy: The NAACP Writings of James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, and Roy Wilkins (1920-1977)*, ed. Sondra Kathryn Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 113.

⁶² Eugene O’Neill, *Three Great Plays: The Emperor Jones, Anna Christie, The Hairy Ape* (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), 2.

⁶³ O’Neill, *Three Great Plays*, 26.

⁶⁴ Davis, *Eric Walrond*, 55, 56.

Islands while he was editor at *Negro World* in the early 1920s.⁶⁵ In 1925, Holstein wrote again in *Negro World* that the Virgin Islands had been governed by an “uninterrupted succession of Southern Caesars” and asked, “Why this insistence on Southern whites for the governorship of the islands?”⁶⁶ The Southern face of the American empire was a recurring theme in Holstein’s advocacy for the Virgin Islands, which Walrond followed and admired.

Returning to Rowde’s “Texas drawl” in Walrond’s late fiction, we can see that it is only fully understood when situated within this wider conversation. The same can be said for a number of Walrond’s stories that contain Southern policemen, marines, and corporate managers. In addition to the Southern marine of “Subjection,” Walrond’s late piece set during the US occupation of the Dominican Republic, “The Men of the Cibao” (1945-46), also features marines who speak with Southern accents. Here, the narrator tells us, “Lean young men in khaki with thin red necks and a southern drawl swaggered about with big Colt revolvers dangling from thigh or hip.” Recounting marine abuses, one character remarks on “the virtual restoration of slavery to our country.”⁶⁷

Moreover, the plantation model signified by these Southern officials was not limited in Walrond’s fiction to the Canal Zone or other sites of US occupation, but extended to US-owned corporations in the region. “The Yellow One,” of *Tropic Death* and “Bliss” (1953) of the *Roundway Review* fiction both allude to the United Fruit Company (UFCO), an often overlooked presence in Walrond’s fiction, and to its role in racial conflicts between Black

⁶⁵ Eric Walrond, "Says Casper Holstein is Champion of the Oppressed: Eric Walrond Tells how New York Man has Fought to Free Virgin Islanders," *The Chicago Defender* (March 5, 1927). While this reproduction is difficult to read, it is sufficiently legible to examine.

⁶⁶ Quoted in William W. Boyer, *America's Virgin Islands: A History of Human Rights and Wrongs*, 2nd ed (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2010), 118.

⁶⁷ Walrond, *In Search of Asylum*, 50, 53.

immigrant workers and Hispanic groups in Central America. If the images of industrialized Black labor in Walrond's Canal Zone stories evoke a modern plantation, the theme of racialized labor management in "The Yellow One" and "Bliss" produces a similar effect. Indeed, the corporate strategies for labor control underlying the main conflicts of these stories derive from racialized management practices first developed on the slave plantation. The Southern origins of UFCO managers and executives in "The Yellow One" and "Bliss" only furthers the association.

We can conclude that "The Yellow One," which depicts a journey from Honduras to Jamaica, is set aboard a UFCO steamship given the "wagons of crated bananas" that crowd around it at port, while on board its steward escorts "some fruit baron into the mysteries of the galley."⁶⁸ The *Urubamba*, furthermore, carries UFCO workers including the Jamaican husband of the unnamed title character, a "mestizo" woman of "Honduras peasant heritage."⁶⁹ Dressed in "a dirty khaki shirt, made in the States," Alfred St. Xavier Mendez has been "on sprees of work and daring, to the jungles of Changuinola, or the Cut at Culebra."⁷⁰ Alongside his work on the Panama Canal, or the "Cut at Culebra," it is almost certainly UFCO banana plantations that Alfred has worked on in Changuinola, Panama. The once-famous "'Changuinola' banana," one observer noted in 1914, was named for the Changuinola river, "which flows for more than sixty miles with banana plantations of the United Fruit Company on both sides of its banks."⁷¹ Indeed, Alfred is part of what Walrond would later call "the tide of labor that sweeps over the banana lagoons of Tela and

⁶⁸ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 56, 62.

⁶⁹ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 52, 51.

⁷⁰ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 56, 55.

⁷¹ Frederick Upham Adams, *Conquest of the Tropics: The Story of the Creative Enterprises Conducted by the United Fruit Company* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 156.

Changuinola.”⁷² Like Changuinola in Panama, Tela was then another UFCO stronghold in Honduras similar to the port city described in the opening of “The Yellow One.”⁷³ There are hints, moreover, that like Alfred the *Urubamba*’s crew are former UFCO workers given that they are described as “peons of the lagoon” and one, in particular, is beset by “an ague he had caught in Puerta Tela.”⁷⁴

Though published decades later, the semi-autobiographical “Bliss” also centers around Black migrant labor for United Fruit. “Bliss” has been read as a story of a young Black immigrant’s experience working for the Isthmian Canal Commission in Colón, but details indicate that Boysie is employed by United Fruit rather than the US state.⁷⁵ Like Alfred of the “The Yellow One,” Boysie’s co-worker, Old Brown, also a Black immigrant in Panama, has been a part of the “tide of labor” sweeping through Changuinola, where he worked for “the firm.” As the narrator recounts, Old Brown “had served the firm long and variously -- on the wharf at his home in Port Antonio, Jamaica, on a banana plantation in Changuinola and in the Colon agency for the past six years.”⁷⁶ Additionally, like “The Yellow One,” “Bliss” depicts the anti-Black hostility that Caribbean workers encountered when they made their way to Central America to work for US corporations like United Fruit.

Walrond himself had encountered such attitudes as a young immigrant, later writing that his “first taste of prejudice” was in Panama where Blacks were met with “epithets such as *chombos negros*.”⁷⁷ When he returned to the Caribbean on a Guggenheim fellowship after

⁷² Walrond, “*Winds can Wake up the Dead*,” 145.

⁷³ On The United Fruit Company in Tela, Honduras, see Colby, *The Business of Empire*, 124-126.

⁷⁴ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 51, 53.

⁷⁵ James Davis writes that Boysie works for the Isthmian Canal Commission (ICC). Davis, *Eric Walrond*, 320.

⁷⁶ Walrond, *In Search of Asylum*, 82.

⁷⁷ Walrond, “*Winds can Wake up the Dead*,” 280.

publishing *Tropic Death*, his attention came back to such anti-Black nativism, specifically as it was occurring on UFCO plantations. “[D]isturbances,” in Panama’s Chiriquí District, Walrond explained to his benefactors in New York, resulted from “the introduction of West Indian Negro laborers on the banana plantations of a subsidiary of the United Fruit Co.”⁷⁸ It was a subject he had already touched on in his fiction. In “The Yellow One,” after working in Changuinola, and perhaps in Puerta Tela for United Fruit, Alfred has married a local woman, but not before “he had been able to bring round the girl’s hitherto *chombo*-hating folk.”⁷⁹ And although she is married to Alfred, the Yellow One nevertheless retains an anti-Black bias. “‘Wha’ah lot o’ dem,’ [...] ‘an’ dem so black and ugly. R-r-!’” she remarks while watching the *Urubamba*’s crew loading cargo.⁸⁰

This same theme is central to “Bliss,” in which Boysie’s schoolmate, Ramon, rebukes Boysie for approaching him in public, calling him a “‘Chombo’ from the Antilles...black!”⁸¹ It is a formative incident for Boysie, who appears to get the final word when his white American boss, Mr. O’Malley, invites Boysie to sit next to him in his cab, prompting Boysie to reflect that such a scene would “destroy Ramon’s sense of the fitness of things.”⁸² However, the title of the story, a play on the aphorism “ignorance is bliss,” suggests that Boysie does not fully understand the power dynamics at play.⁸³

⁷⁸ Quoted in Davis, *Eric Walrond*, 226.

⁷⁹ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 55.

⁸⁰ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 53.

⁸¹ Walrond, *In Search of Asylum*, 81.

⁸² Walrond, *In Search of Asylum*, 84.

⁸³ Louis J. Parascandola and Carl A. Wade write that the title, “ironically alludes to the clichéd maxim ‘Ignorance is bliss’” and ask, “is it Boysie who is naively dreaming that he has achieved a measure of equality because of this unusual treatment in the Canal Zone’s racialized system, or is it the system itself being mocked?” See Walrond, *In Search of Asylum*, xxxviii.

Given the allusions to United Fruit in these stories, such conflicts between Black Caribbean workers and Hispanic Central Americans should be understood in relation to UFCO's racialized labor control strategies. As in the Canal Zone, UFCO's labor practices included implementing a strict racial hierarchy and racial segregation on its plantations. However, particularly after labor uprisings in 1909 and 1910 among its then mainly English-speaking Black Caribbean labor force, the company also began recruiting Hispanic laborers in order to encourage racial divisions within its workforce. Black Caribbean workers, moreover, were placed in positions of authority over their Spanish-speaking counterparts. Such practices intensified pre-existing racial conflicts dividing Black and Hispanic UFCO workers.⁸⁴

Boysie's conflict with Ramon and the Yellow One's xenophobia should be read within the context of these racialized labor management systems, whether employed in the Canal Zone or on UFCO plantations throughout Central America and the Caribbean. The special favor that Mr. O'Malley shows Boysie, for example, is a reference to this broader context of corporate, neocolonial management, as opposed to a sign that Boysie has transcended his racial and class status as he believes.⁸⁵ The Yellow One's anti-Black comments regarding the *Urubamba's* crew are likewise at least in part an outgrowth of UFCO labor systems that fostered competition and conflict between Black and Hispanic workers.

⁸⁴ Colby, *The Business of Empire*, 117, 144-145.

⁸⁵ "Bliss" may also be intended as a critique of Marcus Garvey. Colby recounts that on his 1921 fundraising tour through the Caribbean, Garvey was invited to ride a train car in Costa Rica normally reserved for whites, much as Boysie is invited to sit next to Mr. O'Malley. Boysie's aims can also be read as a caricature of Garvey's vision to forgo labor organizing in favor of promoting Black capital and upward mobility. Walrond was likely familiar with Garvey's message in Central America, which Colby describes in the following way: "It was the same message Garvey offered black workers in the United States: eschew labor organizing, curry favor with white capitalists, and focus on upward mobility." Colby, *The Business of Empire*, 134.

These were modern labor practices. By the late nineteenth century, labor segmentation was widely employed in US Northern factories, traditionally understood as the birthplace of modern labor management.⁸⁶ However, David Roediger and Elizabeth D. Esch argue that modern management and particularly what they call “race management,” or the use of race to manage workers, derives from the plantation South where white planters writing in agricultural journals “inaugurated management theory in the United States and specifically set out to manage ‘the negro.’”⁸⁷ “The Yellow One” and “Bliss” point to the Southern roots of United Fruit’s “race management” strategies and thereby hint at the plantation origins of US colonial enterprise. At port in Honduras, it is Southerners who supervise the loading of bananas onto the *Urubamba*: “Down on the dock, oxen were yoked behind wagons of crated bananas. Gnawing on plugs of hard tobacco and firing reels of spit to every side of them, New Orleans ‘crackers’ swearingly cursed the leisurely lack of native labor.”⁸⁸ In “Bliss,” meanwhile, Boysie’s boss, Mr. O’Malley, is “a native of Bowling Green, Kentucky,” and when Boysie enters the firm’s offices, they “buzz with the summery accents of Louisiana, Florida, Georgia and Texas.”⁸⁹ Corporate colonial management, in Walrond’s fiction, derives from the US South.

Like the industrialized Black workers and Southern marines featured in “The Palm Porch” and “Subjection,” the Southern managers and executives of “The Yellow One” and “Bliss” point to modern corporate colonialism’s indebtedness to the Southern plantation, an

⁸⁶ Colby traces UFCO’s methods of labor management to US Northern industry. Colby, *The Business of Empire*, 5-6.

⁸⁷ David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch, *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in U.S. History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 23.

⁸⁸ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 56.

⁸⁹ Walrond, *In Search of Asylum*, 83.

insight that effectively reverses traditional narratives of modernization that position the plantation at its receiving end as opposed to its leading edge. Yet, as in earlier discussions, in “The Yellow One” and “Bliss” Walrond is at least as interested in exploring the breakdown of plantation management as he is in depicting its dominance. To be sure, while labor control is a strong subtext throughout “The Yellow One,” so too is the theme of unmanageability, particularly in terms of the racial and ethnic makeup of the ship’s crew and its passengers. Here again, moreover, Walrond’s experimental style directly opposes the ethos of plantation management and its efforts to impose order and control. For example, when the Yellow One descends below deck in search of water for her baby, she encounters the unruly environment of the galley:

Heat. Hearths aglow. Stoves aglow. Dishes clattering. Engines, donkey-engines, wheezing. Bright-faced and flame-haired Swedes and Bristol cockney’s cursing. Half nude figures of bronze and crimson shouting, spearing, mending the noisy fire. The wet, clean, brick-colored deck danced to the rhythm of the ship. Darky waiters -- white shirt bosoms -- black bow ties -- black, braided uniforms -- spat entire menus at the blond cooks.⁹⁰

This is a loud and chaotic scene. Heat and noise interact so that their distinct properties become blurred. Walrond’s short, incomplete sentences likewise provide only bits and pieces of the scene, leaving the reader with only a fragmented image of the setting as a whole. A similar effect is at work with regard to racial and ethnic markers. Walrond here brings together Swedes, Bristol “cockneys,” bronze and crimson figures, Black waiters and blond cooks, but the quick juxtaposition of these figures upsets clear distinctions. Beyond this particular scene of the galley, the diverse makeup of the *Urubamba*’s passengers also

⁹⁰ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 58-59.

frustrates any managerial attempt to impose a fixed system of racial classification. Indeed, between the ship's crew and its passengers we find: "a bow-legged old Maroon," "a tar-black Jamaica sister," "two Costa Rica maidens, white, dainty, resentful," "a Kentucky evangelist," "a Cuban *señora*," a Cuban sailor called "Porto Rico," a "son of the Florida Gulf," a "freckled-faced Carolina 'cracker,'" "a New Orleans creole," and "an Atlanta mulatto."⁹¹ If the "race management" of the plantation seeks to reify racial categories and develop racial hierarchy, in "The Yellow One," these systems are overwhelmed by the ethnic and racial heterogeneity onboard the UFCO steamship. More than an attempt to depict plantation conditions, Walrond's fragmented style expresses a multivocal, multiperspectival cross-culturality that the plantation system cannot adequately manage or contain.

§

I have tried to show how Walrond's allusions to the South in *Tropic Death* and his later fiction reveal modern US colonialism's debt to the Southern plantation. In highlighting Black labor migration to and between private and government-operated colonial enclaves, Walrond's fiction brings into focus a modern plantation empire, dependent on industrialized Black labor and methods of labor management that first emerged out of the slave plantation. Indeed, Walrond's fiction can be situated within an extensive Black and Caribbean critical tradition on the plantation's relationship to modernity, including a widespread conversation among Harlem Renaissance writers regarding the Southern face of US empire, and a

⁹¹ Walrond, *Tropic Death*, 54, 55, 57, 59, 60, 65.

scholarly Caribbean discourse on the plantation as a modern regime. To be sure, reading *Tropic Death* through the lens of this Caribbean discourse illuminates the book's grappling with the plantation origins of modernity and its divergence from orthodox narratives of modernization that figure the plantation, and plantation societies, as archaic and outmoded. As I have tried to show, Walrond's experimental style responds to this plantation modernity, not only by rendering the modern plantation environment, but more importantly, by expressing a cross-culturality that exceeds plantation management.

In James' appendix to *The Black Jacobins*, he writes that the plantation represented a "modern system" and that the slaves of the Haitian sugar plantations "lived a life that was in its essence a modern life."⁹² James' point, Stuart Hall helps us to see, was not only that "the plantation in the Caribbean was at the advance front of modern capitalism," but that the Caribbean represents a first site of modern subject formation. "James understood well enough that the history of modernity revolutionizes *everything*," Hall continues. "Nothing could be turned back. Everything is transformed. Thus the people of the Caribbean - fortuitously, paradoxically - had been transformed into a kind of prototypical, modern people." Harkening back to Wynter's writing on the modern plantation, this ambivalence between "modernity and its contradictions, its backwardness combined with its forwardness," is at the heart of Walrond's treatment of the modern plantation, which, like his paradoxical title, *Tropic Death*, serves as both a critique of the plantation systems of

⁹² James, *The Black Jacobins*, 392.

modern US colonialism and an assertion of the Caribbean's centrality for the making of the modern world.⁹³

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⁹³ Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, "Breaking Bread with History: C.L.R. James and *The Black Jacobins*, Stuart Hall Interviewed by Bill Schwarz," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 46 (Autumn, 1998), 23. Italics in the original.

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4. William Faulkner's Transnational Plantation Economy

In the opening scene of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930), Darl Bundren describes walking with his brother Jewel through a cotton field. As Darl tells us, the path that they follow in single file “runs straight as a plumb-line, worn smooth by feet,” and cuts “between the green rows of laidby cotton,” before leading to a cottonhouse at the center of the field, which leans in “shimmering dilapidation.” From there, the path continues “across the field again, worn so by feet in fading precision.” As they reach the cottonhouse, Darl notes in passing that Jewel, in his “frayed and broken straw hat” and “patched overalls,” walks “with the rigid gravity of a cigar store Indian.” The two brothers then continue on until they reach their family home and their older brother Cash who is working to build a coffin for their dying mother.¹

Before discussing this opening scene, allow me to situate Faulkner's novel between two other well-known texts of the 1930s, both of which turned to the US South in response to a moment of modern crisis. Like Faulkner's novel, *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), the essay collection and literary manifesto set forth by a group of white Southern writers known as the Southern Agrarians, and *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935) by the African American public intellectual and activist W. E. B. Du Bois, both looked southward in the wake of World War I and the global economic collapse of the Great Depression. *As I Lay Dying* has often been read within and against the historical vision offered by the Agrarians, who proposed that the traditions of the Old South, if preserved, might serve as a refuge against the modern

¹ William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 3-4.

upheaval associated with the emergence of industrial capitalism. *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* opened by declaring that its contributors “all tend to support a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way; and all as much agree that the best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase, Agrarian *versus* Industrial.”² With loud echoes of the Lost Cause memory of the Civil War, the Agrarians made clear that modernization consisted of unwelcome historical forces imposed upon the South from without. Faulkner’s struggling, poor white Bundren family, when viewed from the Agrarian perspective, epitomize the rural South’s fatal injury at the hands of an invading modern “industrialism.” Indeed, when Darl Bundren compares his brother Jewel to a “cigar store Indian” he suggests that the Bundren family and white Southern farmers in general represent a “vanishing race” in the face of modernization, much as Native Americans have existed in white racist fantasy.³

However, while *As I Lay Dying* is more often associated with the ideas contained in *I'll Take My Stand*, reading Faulkner’s fiction through the historical lens provided by Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction* opens the novel up to alternative readings obscured by the fundamentally white supremacist historical erasures of the Agrarians, whose vision depended on expurgating racial slavery and Black people in general from Southern history. Published five years after the Agrarians’ manifesto, *Black Reconstruction* also contained a critique of industrial capitalism, but it offered a very different understanding of its relationship to the Southern United States. Du Bois’ main objective was to revise dominant histories of

² *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), xix.

³ On the theme of modernization in *As I Lay Dying*, see, for example, John T. Matthews, “*As I Lay Dying* in the Machine Age,” *Boundary 2* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1992) and Jolene Hubbs, “William Faulkner’s Rural Modernism” *Mississippi Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (Summer, 2008). Both Matthews and Hubbs also counter the Agrarian narrative.

Reconstruction by showing that Black Americans, rather than proving themselves incapable of political participation following the Civil War, represented the central historical agents behind a tragically thwarted effort to achieve democracy in the United States. But if Du Bois' primary task was a revisionist history of Reconstruction, he also situated the period within a much longer historical trajectory. For Du Bois, the tragedy of Reconstruction was its defeat by the same forces of industrial capitalism that had led to global warfare and economic disaster in the twentieth century, forces which he traced back to American slavery.⁴ Much of the first chapters of *Black Reconstruction* is dedicated to demonstrating slavery's indispensable role for the emergence of global capitalism.⁵ As Du Bois writes, "Black labor became the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of European commerce, of buying and selling on a world-wide scale."⁶ In stark contrast to the Agrarian perspective, Du Bois showed how rather than threatening it from without, capitalism had emerged from within the South's economic system. Rather than serving as an antidote, then, in Du Bois' analysis Southern tradition was a root cause of the modern crises of the twentieth century.

To be sure, almost as if he were speaking directly to the poor white Bundren family, Du Bois argued that plantation slavery provided the basis for a racialized capitalist economy.

⁴ Du Bois writes, "The bargain of 1876 was essentially an understanding by which the Federal Government ceased to sustain the right to vote of half of the laboring population of the South, and left capital as represented by the older planter class, the new Northern capitalist, and the capitalist that began to rise out of the poor whites, with a control of labor greater than in any modern industrial state in civilized lands...the dictatorship of capital in the South is complete." W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Russell & Russell: 1935), 630. Eric Foner writes that, for Du Bois, Reconstruction represented a conflict between democratic and "industrial" forces and that the "defeat [of democratic forces] led to the triumph of the industrial-capitalist ideal that dominated American life after the end of Reconstruction." Eric Foner, "Black Reconstruction: An Introduction," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 414.

⁵ On Du Bois' analysis of capitalism and slavery in *Black Reconstruction*, see Cedric Robinson, "A Critique of W.E.B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction*" *The Black Scholar* 8, no.7 (May 1977).

⁶ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 5.

And while white labor enthusiastically endorsed the emergence of this new industrial system and its racial organization, it eventually led to global warfare and economic collapse.

“Indeed,” Du Bois writes,

the plight of the white working class throughout the world today is directly traceable to Negro slavery in America, on which modern commerce and industry was founded, and which persisted to threaten free labor until it was partially overthrown in 1863. The resulting color caste founded and retained by capitalism was adopted, forwarded and approved by white labor, and resulted in subordination of colored labor to white profits the world over. Thus the majority of the world’s laborers, by the insistence of white labor, became the basis of a system of industry which ruined democracy and showed its perfect fruit in World War and Depression.⁷

Du Bois’ frustration with white disregard for the consequences of American slavery is evident throughout *Black Reconstruction*, hence his attention to the white working class as if he were searching for ways to convince whites of their own immediate and self-interested stake in the issue. Indeed, if we look from Du Bois’ perspective at Faulkner’s poor whites, or any other now iconic image of Depression-era white labor, we see the plantation. We see it in their racism, and in the construction of their whiteness (a point that Du Bois elaborated), but also, importantly, in their degraded economic condition and their traumatic memory of World War I, which Du Bois understood as the “perfect fruit” of a racialized industrial system rooted in plantation colonialism. According to Du Bois, “a new capitalism and a new enslavement of labor emerged” in the post-Reconstruction period. “The world wept,” he writes,

because within the exploiting group of New World masters, greed and jealousy became so fierce that they fought for trade and markets and materials and slaves all over the world until at last in 1914 the world flamed in war. The fantastic structure

⁷ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 30.

fell, leaving grotesque Profits and Poverty, Plenty and Starvation, Empire and Democracy, staring at each other across World Depression.⁸

It is within the ruins caused by this colonial plantation structure that we find Darl, himself a veteran of WWI, and Jewel walking toward the dilapidated cottonhouse at the center of their family's field, their psychological and economic injuries to a great extent self-inflicted in light of white labor's fundamental role in generating the structure that Du Bois describes.

Let us now return to this opening scene and consider in greater detail Darl and Jewel's position within this colonial plantation system. In contradiction to the Agrarian fantasy of white yeomen individualism, for instance, in the novel's opening scene it is significant that the brothers are not surrounded by a variety of crops that would indicate self-sufficiency. The fact that their sister Dewey Dell can only offer a plate of turnip greens to the doctor who visits upon their mother's death suggests that the Bundrens are not growing their own food. To be sure, instead of a diversity of crops, Darl and Jewel are surrounded by one crop -- cotton -- grown, not for their own use, but rather for distant manufacturers within a global capitalist market that first developed, as Du Bois helps us to see, in response to the products of the earliest slave plantations in the Americas. As Darl tells us, the path through the family's cotton field is "worn smooth by feet," suggesting that it has been shaped by the footsteps of previous cotton farmers and plantation workers who have walked it before the Bundren brothers, including small farmers, but also indentured servants, enslaved people, sharecroppers, and migrant laborers. Indeed, "worn so by feet in fading precision," the path is a palimpsest that "in fading precision" bears the traces of very

⁸ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 634-635.

different types of workers tied at different times and in disparate ways to the plantation system, including poor whites in the US, enslaved Black Americans throughout the “New World,” and twentieth century laborers in the neocolonial enclaves of the US empire.⁹

Returning to Darl’s comparison of Jewel to a “cigar store Indian,” read through Du Bois it now functions less as an appeal to Agrarian sentimentality than as a signifier of this wider colonial plantation landscape of exploited lands and workers. To be sure, the cigar store Indian’s symbolic value stretches well beyond the US context, recalling European colonization of the Americas, the development of tobacco as a major plantation cash crop in Virginia and Cuba, and contemporary US military and corporate colonial expansion into the Western hemisphere. While Darl’s evocation of a “vanishing” and mythical white yeomanry should not be dismissed, in other words, Du Bois helps us to see how his comparison also serves to contextualize the Bundrens within a transnational plantation system, in which Jewel, like the racist stereotype of the cigar store Indian, appears colonized, foreign, and racially ambiguous.

This chapter considers two white Southern families in Faulkner’s fiction, the poor white Bundrens of *As I Lay Dying* and the declining Compson family of the once powerful planter class in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). Whereas an Agrarian view understands these families as victims of an invading modernization originating in the US North, such a perspective denies the white South’s role in producing its own undoing. If slavery made the modern world, as Du Bois asserts in *Black Reconstruction*, then the Bundrens and the Compsons, as representatives of the white South, helped to set in motion during the

⁹ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 3.

nineteenth century the forces that would turn back against them in the twentieth. This is true in the broadest sense that slavery led to global capitalism, World War, and the collapse of the Great Depression, but also in the more narrow sense that the modern US empire recruited the plantation model in its search for cheap land and labor in the Pacific, the Caribbean, and in the US South. “When raw material could not be raised in a country like the United States,” Du Bois writes, “it could be raised in the tropics and semi-tropics under a dictatorship of industry, commerce and manufacture.”¹⁰ Labor and capital in the “cultured lands” of metropolitan centers united behind “an exploitation of white, yellow, brown and black labor, in lesser lands and ‘breeds without the law.’”¹¹ Indeed, like in Hemingway’s *To Have and Have Not*, in both *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*, US neocolonialism in the Caribbean hovers in the background, providing the example against which Southern whites attempt to understand, and guard against, their own semi-colonized position, both real and imagined.

This chapter builds on work by several scholars showing how Faulkner’s fiction situates the South within the circum-Caribbean and responds to US colonial expansion into that region. These studies elucidate how Faulkner’s fiction responds to the South’s historical entanglements with the Caribbean, the influence of Southern racial ideology on US imperial policy, and the South’s own resemblance to a colonized territory in relation to the US

¹⁰ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 48. Du Bois continues, “The competition of a slave-directed agriculture in the West Indies and South America, in Africa and Asia, eventually ruined the economic efficiency of agriculture in the United States and in Europe and precipitated the modern economic degradation the white farmer, while it put into the hands of the owners of the machine such a monopoly of raw material that their domination of white labor was more and more complete.” Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 48.

¹¹ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 634.

North.¹² This work, however, tends to focus on *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) given Thomas Sutpen's notorious interval as an overseer in Haiti. As Harilaos Stecopoulos has written, compared with *Absalom*, "much of Faulkner's engagement with US imperialism tends to emerge in a more elusive manner, often relegated to a passing comment or a marginal citation." Yet, Stecopoulos continues, "these isolated references sometimes accrue greater narrative significance than a decentered engagement with empire might suggest."¹³ To be sure, while direct references to the wider Caribbean are sparse in both *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*, I hope to show that Du Bois' historical perspective helps us to see the modern US empire as a central theme in these novels. Read through Du Bois, these texts bring into focus the modern United States' transnational plantation economy, which encompasses parts of the South, the Caribbean, and Latin America, and which now loops back against the white classes that continually enable and endorse it. Seeing this modern plantation system in Faulkner's work sheds light onto his broader historical consciousness. As in my chapters on Hemingway and Walrond, in this chapter I hope to show with Du

¹² For probably the most influential work to read Faulkner within the wider Caribbean, see Édouard Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, trans. Barbara Lewis and Thomas C. Spear (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999). For an examination of Faulkner's engagement with the Caribbean context, see John T. Matthews, "Recalling the West Indies: From Yoknapatawpha to Haiti and Back," *American Literary History* 16, no. 2 (2004). There is a substantial body of literature on *Absalom, Absalom!* and US imperialism. See, for example: Maritza Stanchich, "The Hidden Caribbean 'Other' in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*: An ideological Ancestry of U.S. Imperialism," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1996); Barbara Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); George Handley, *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas: Family Portraits in Black and White* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000). Matthews, "Recalling the West Indies"; Sarah Gerend, "'My Son, My Son!': Paternalism, Haiti, and Early Twentieth-Century American Imperialism in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*," *Southern Literary Journal* XLII, no. 1 (Fall 2009). For works that consider Faulkner's South from postcolonial perspectives, see, for example, Deborah N. Cohn, *History and Memory in the Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish American Fiction* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999); Hosam Aboul-Ela, *Other South: Faulkner, Coloniality, and the Mariátequi Tradition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007); John T. Matthews, "As I Lay Dying: Approaching the Postcolonial," in *Approaches to Teaching Faulkner's As I Lay Dying*, eds. Patrick O'Donnell and Lynda Zwinger (New York: The Modern Language Association of America: 2011).

¹³ Harilaos Stecopoulos, "South to the World: William Faulkner and the American Century," in *William Faulkner in Context*, ed. John T. Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 149, 150.

Bois' help how Faulkner's fiction locates the origins of modern trauma in the plantation South. To be sure, when we understand that Faulkner's twentieth century Southerners continue to be constituted by a colonial plantation economy, we can see how Southern "tradition," in Faulkner's fiction, appears as a root cause of modern crisis as opposed to its victim or its antidote.

§

It is well known that World War I informed modernist themes of psychic alienation and disillusionment. Hence, when we learn at the end of *As I Lay Dying* that Darl has "a little spy-glass he got in France at the war," his frequent expressions of existential crisis and his ultimate psychological breakdown are explained.¹⁴ Darl exemplifies the war's traumatic influence on modern subject formation. Read through Du Bois, however, we are able to identify other sources for Darl's psychic crisis. As we have seen, in *Black Reconstruction* Du Bois traces modern trauma not to WWI, but to the older history of plantation-based colonialism, which he understood as the historical foundation for a racialized industrial system that led to World War and economic depression. Du Bois had been making arguments about the colonial sources of modernity well before *Black Reconstruction*. Michelle Stephens has written that while white modernists imagined Europe as "a wasteland ravaged by war and nationalism," a parallel Black creative and intellectual tradition understood colonialism as the engine behind modernism and World War, and thus "transferred the site

¹⁴ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 254.

of the modern wasteland from Europe to the Americas.”¹⁵ Stephens identifies Du Bois as a key member of this tradition. Referring to his 1925 essay in Alain Locke’s *The New Negro*, Stephens writes, “Du Bois explicitly connected the ‘discontents’ of modern civilization, associated with industrialization and class conflict, with a prior era of conquest, colonialism, and racialized oppression.”¹⁶ Applying this historical reframing to Faulkner’s text allows us to read Darl’s psychic “discontent” not just as an effect of World War, but as a result of this older history of plantation colonialism, and his white racist response to its consequences. Darl’s present surroundings, for instance, often trigger his memory of the war. Noticing this, we can see that his difficulty is not simply the war, but rather stems from the violence contained in the Southern landscape and symbolized by his family’s damaged, injured, and “blackened” bodies, which he then filters through his wartime experiences. Darl’s flashbacks to the war, in other words, should be understood as his attempts to make sense of the Southern violence that surrounds him. Read through Du Bois, as opposed to the Agrarians, we can see how Faulkner, through Darl, relocates the “modern wasteland” away from Europe’s war-torn battlefields to the desolated plantation landscapes of Mississippi.

Remember that Darl and Jewel walk in “single file” along the path through the cotton field.¹⁷ The detail recalls Darl’s military experience. He and his brother here resemble troops marching in formation, followed by the time-keeping sound of Cash’s adze in the distance: “chuck chuck chuck.”¹⁸ Yet the image of Darl and Jewel walking in single file

¹⁵ Michelle Stephens, “Eric Walrond’s *Tropic Death* and the Discontents of American Modernity,” in *Prospero’s Isles: The Presence of the Caribbean in the American Imaginary*, eds. Diane Accaria-Zavala and Rodolfo Popelnik (Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean: 2004), 170.

¹⁶ Stephens, “Eric Walrond’s *Tropic Death*,” 171.

¹⁷ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 3, 4.

¹⁸ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 5.

also evokes iconographies of regimented labor of various kinds, including the gang labor of enslaved workers or tenant farmers moving in single file along the gridwork of a cotton field, or the routinized, industrial labor of factory workers on an assembly line of mass production. Darl, in other words, recruits his military experience to mediate an anxiety that predates the war: the physical and psychological regimentations imposed by plantation labor, which seem unavoidable, the path before him running “straight as a plumb-line.” This introductory scene, moreover, is not the only time that Darl will unconsciously recall his experiences in Europe in an attempt to make sense of his present environment. After reaching the family’s house with Jewel, Darl joins his father, Anse, on the porch where he helps himself to a gourd of water from a cedar bucket. “Water should never be drunk from metal” he notes, summoning the metallic taste of drinking from a military canteen.¹⁹ He then associates to drinking out of the bucket at night as a boy, when, “before I stirred it awake with the dipper I could see maybe a star or two in the bucket, and maybe in the dipper a star or two before I drank.” This memory, in turn, causes him to reflect back on his young sexuality, when in the house at night, “I could lie with my shirt tail up, hearing them asleep, feeling myself without touching myself.”²⁰ Darl’s free association to sensual childhood memories contrasts with the regimentations of marching in single file and the harsh, metallic sensations he associates with the war. Indeed, if in the previous chapter, Walrond’s formal experimentations represent his attempt to overcome the constraints of plantation management, Faulkner’s stream of consciousness technique in Darl’s sections similarly diverges from the linear routinizations of plantation-derived labor systems. These afflictions on Darl’s body and psyche occur to him

¹⁹ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 11.

²⁰ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 11.

again when his attention is caught by his father's physical injuries. Although Anse now famously avoids work and makes a point to never break a sweat, this obscures his history of physical labor. Darl notes on the porch that Anse's feet "are badly splayed, his toes cramped and bent and warped." This, Darl remembers, is "from working so hard in the wet in homemade shoes when he was boy."²¹ Returning to the metallic imagery that he associates with war, Darl notes that Anse's boots now "look as though they had been hacked with a blunt axe out of pig-iron."²² From Darl's disturbed perspective, Anse resembles a contorted piece of military machinery, only he is disfigured by labor as opposed to by warfare. Indeed, the words Darl chooses to describe his father's body also describe a war-torn landscape of broken bodies and machines: splayed, cramped, bent, and warped. Darl's violent memories of war here serve as a screen through which he views an earlier disturbance embodied by his father: the psychologically and physically warping effects of plantation labor.

Darl makes a similar association upon his mother's death. Describing Addie's dead body, Darl relates that her face,

is like a casting of fading bronze upon the pillow, the hands alone still with any semblance of life: a curled, gnarled inertness; a spent yet alert quality from which weariness, exhaustion, travail has not yet departed, as though they doubted even yet the actuality of rest, guarding with horned and penurious alertness the cessation which they know cannot last.²³

If Anse looks to Darl like a warped piece of military equipment, his mother's corpse resembles that of a soldier whose body has frozen in a position of exhausted, but terrified vigilance, "spent yet alert," and still guarding himself with "horned and penurious alertness."

²¹ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 11.

²² Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 11.

²³ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 51.

Rather than war, however, Addie's "weariness, exhaustion [and] travail" come from the labor embodied in her "curled, gnarled" hands. Cash too comes to appear like a dying soldier in Darl's eyes. As the Bundrens make their way to Jefferson to bury Addie, their famously disastrous attempt to cross a flooded river that blocks their way nearly kills the oldest Bundren child, who breaks his leg and is kicked in the stomach by a mule. Now on the other side of the river, Cash appears in Darl's description like a wounded soldier, lying on his back on the ground, a rolled piece of clothing under his head, and "pole-thin in his wet clothes, a little pool of vomit at his head and a thread of it running from the corner of his mouth and down his cheek."²⁴ The association is reinforced when, in Darl's words, the family "laid Cash on top of Addie."²⁵ The image of Cash lying on top of his mother's coffin evokes a soldier on a stretcher, or piled bodies in a trench.

Like Anse and Addie's damaged bodies, for Darl, Cash's injury triggers not only his memory of the war, but also an older history of plantation labor. To understand this, we need to look more closely at the river crossing, the scene of Cash's injury, and see with Du Bois' help how Faulkner locates the sources of modern trauma in the floodwaters of Mississippi. As the Bundrens approach the flooded river blocking their way to Jefferson, Darl filters the "desolated" Southern landscape before him through his memory of European battlefields strewn with uprooted trees and bodies. "Above the ceaseless surface they stand -- trees, cane, vines -- rootless, severed from the earth, spectral above a scene of immense yet circumscribed desolation filled with the voice of the waste and mournful

²⁴ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 156-157.

²⁵ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 180

water.”²⁶ Uprooting, severing, and producing immense desolation, the river resembles a Southern wasteland of exploited lands and bodies, whose spectral presence and mournful voices are evoked by the sound of the floodwater. It is scene where the memory of racial slavery and the novel’s repressed Black voices almost make their way to the surface and break through, but do not.

Instead, as the Bundren brothers nearly perish in their attempt to ford the river, the scene becomes about poor white efforts to survive the modern plantation wasteland they themselves helped to create. Hence, the injury that Cash sustains while crossing the river’s “surging and heaving desolation” should be understood as largely self-inflicted.²⁷ The racialized industrial system that triumphed during the post-Reconstruction period could not have done so without poor white backing, according to Du Bois, who writes, “It was the drear destiny of the Poor White South that, deserting its economic class and itself, it became the instrument by which democracy in the nation was done to death [and] race provincialism deified.”²⁸ Lying injured on the river bank, Cash epitomizes the poor white South’s self-destruction in its ruthless attempts to protect itself. From Darl’s perspective, moreover, this is a recurring dynamic. Indeed, in light of Darl’s uncanny sense that the Bundrens have tried and failed at this river crossing before, Cash’s injury should be understood as reactivating a historic, or chronic ailment. Whereas the road to Jefferson for Darl illustrates the unfolding of time in a linear line, staring across the river, time now appears like “a looping string,” suggesting that the Bundrens are caught in a repeating pattern rather than moving

²⁶ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 142.

²⁷ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 148.

²⁸ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 241.

progressively forward.²⁹ Even the mules pulling the family wagon, Darl notes, look “as though they had already seen in the thick water the shape of the disaster which they could not speak and we could not see.”³⁰ The tragic aspect of the scene is not that the Bundren brothers nearly drown, but that they have apparently done this before. Unwilling or unable to adjust course, they now re-enact a “looping” white repetition compulsion, the unmastered task here being the successful survival of the desolated Southern landscape they helped to produce. Thus Cash, like a poor white martyr for what Du Bois calls “race provincialism deified,” repeatedly re-injures himself.

This is not to say that the Bundrens, as poor whites, represent the principal victims of the plantation economies they support or that their aggression is only directed inwards. Rather, it is to say that *As I Lay Dying* illustrates how poor white support for economies that depended upon the subjugation of Blacks and other ethnic groups during slavery and afterwards finally led to their own degradation. This is what Du Bois means when he writes that the “plight of the white working class is directly traceable to Negro slavery in America” and that the poor white South ultimately “desert[ed] its economic class and itself.” The Bundrens injure themselves, in other words, because their self-injuries, while degrading, nevertheless represent a manageable pain that substitutes for and fends off the potentially unmanageable and uncontainable injury of slavery, which exists indistinctly on the outer edges of Darl’s white consciousness. To be sure, the indefinite “murmurs” and “voice of the

²⁹ Earlier in the novel Darl notes, “the road vanishes beneath the wagon as though it were a ribbon and the front axle were a spool” (39). Now, looking at Anse, Tull, Vardaman and Dewey Dell on the other side of the river, Darl states, “It is as though the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality. It is as though time, no longer running straight before us in a diminishing line, now runs parallel between us like a looping string, the distance being the doubling accretion of the thread and not the interval between” (146).

³⁰ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 147.

waste and mournful water” evoked by the sound of the floodwater in Darl’s mind typify the powerful, if vaguely defined fears of slavery and colonization that he projects onto Black and “blackened” bodies.

Much like the river, for Darl the well-known images of the Bundrens’ “blackened” white bodies trigger a memory of Southern violence that he then filters through his wartime experiences. Lying atop the stretcher of his mother’s coffin, Cash resembles an injured soldier when his broken leg turns black with gangrene. Jewel’s burns likewise turn black after he saves Addie’s coffin from a burning barn. In that scene, which we see through Darl’s eyes, Jewel’s own momentum hurls him through a wall of fire, “fling[ing] him forward and clear,” much like a soldier being thrown from a blast.³¹ As Darl tells us, when Jewel falls through the flames a neighbor “slaps at the widening crimson-edged holes that bloom like flowers in his undershirt.”³² Darl views his brothers’ injuries through his flashbacks to injured bodies on WWI battlefields. Yet Jewel’s and Cash’s blackened bodies also trigger another obvious if almost completely repressed scene of Southern violence. As Vardaman remarks, both Cash’s leg and Jewel’s back look “like a n----r’s.”³³ Indeed, if his brothers’ injuries jar Darl’s memories of war, they also recall racial violence against Blacks in the South. Cash’s blackened body lying on top of his mother’s coffin evokes bodies in a WWI trench, but also slavery’s unmarked graves. This history, which is unspoken but plainly present, is also evoked by Jewel’s image in the burning barn, “enclosed in a thin nimbus of fire.” The scene recalls a lynching as much as an explosion in a warzone.

³¹ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 222.

³² Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 222.

³³ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 224.

We can picture Darl in France looking out at a devastated landscape and imagine that for him, it represented not so much an initial shock, but a reminder, the original unidentified disturbance being his knowledge of, but his racist denial of his responsibility for, the murdered Black bodies contained in the Southern ground. Indeed, it makes sense that Faulkner's rendering of the Southern landscape and its violent history appropriates T. S. Eliot, especially in light of Eliot's own Missouri origins in St. Louis, home to the white racial mob violence of 1917, which serves as an implicit context for *The Waste Land*. As Anita Patterson has shown, Eliot's poem can be understood as "implicitly comparing the rise of racial nationalisms in Europe and violence on the World War I battlefields to the racial divide and violence of the East St. Louis massacre, situating what Du Bois calls 'the problem of the color line' in the global context of industrial capitalism and empire-building."³⁴ A similar dynamic is at work in *As I Lay Dying* where Darl's flickering between memories of violence in the Deep South and Europe suggests that what began in Mississippi was writ large in WWI. When we look at Darl through the historical lens provided by Du Bois, in other words, we see what he calls the "perfect fruit" of an economic system rooted in plantation colonialism. We see it in Darl's dread of routinized industrial labor systems, in his degraded economic condition, his traumatic memory of WWI, his psychology of white racism, and ultimately in his breakdown at the novel's end. When we understand with Du Bois' help that Darl's psychic "discontent" thus stems originally from American slavery and

³⁴ Anita Patterson, "Projections in the Haiku Manner": Richard Wright, T. S. Eliot, and Transpacific Modernism," forthcoming in *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, 14.

its aftermath, rather than simply his experiences in France, we can see how *As I Lay Dying* identifies plantation colonialism as the root source of modern traumas.

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The potential for the Bundrens to be swept up by the “dark current” of the South’s racialized labor systems and carried into semi-slavery is pervasive in *As I Lay Dying*.³⁵ The image of racial violence that Darl sees in his brothers’ blackened bodies disturbs him less by white guilt than by fear over being subjected to the same kinds of brutalizations leveled against Blacks. This racial anxiety is the other fear that Darl projects onto his family’s bodies and it is inseparable from his sense of dread surrounding a life of plantation labor. As the Bundren brothers lose contact with the river bottom and are nearly swept away by “the surging and heaving desolation” of the river, their bodies increasingly darken as their “slipping contact” with their class position jeopardizes their racial status.³⁶

Darl is not the only Bundren to express this fear of semi-slavery and its potential consequences for racial status. Anse’s famous refrain that he wouldn’t “be beholden” to his neighbors even as he depends on their assistance, while maddening, should be understood within the context of a South where the plantation systems of sharecropping and tenant farming often led to debt peonage. “We would be beholden to no man,” Anse says referring to himself and Addie, “We have never yet been, and she will rest quieter for knowing it.”³⁷

³⁵ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 141.

³⁶ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 147.

³⁷ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 19.

Although he and Addie have avoided debt, Anse indicates that it was always present as a threat, never entirely absent, just “never yet.” Cash’s worry that his mother’s coffin “aint on a balance,” another constant refrain in the novel, also uses the language of debt. Like Darl, Cash projects his fear of plantation systems onto his mother’s dead body and its coffin, which serves as a proxy for his own anxieties over slipping and falling out of balance and into debt. To be sure, Cash first broke his leg when he lost his balance and fell off Vernon Tull’s roof. It cannot be a coincidence, moreover, that when Cash first discusses Addie’s unbalanced coffin with Tull at Addie’s funeral, their conversation blends with that of the other men gathered outside, who discuss that year’s cotton crop and its destruction by flooding. Anse’s and Cash’s fears over becoming beholden and out of balance reflect their anxieties about falling into debt in the South’s neocolonial plantation economy.

It is Vardaman, however, the youngest of the Bundren children, whose narrative sections do the most to locate his family within a transnational plantation system that includes not only the South as a source of raw materials, but also US corporate plantations in the Caribbean and Latin America. Understanding the Bundrens’ position within a transnational system is important because it shows how Faulkner figures their condition not as a predicament unique unto itself, but rather as one example within a much broader colonial pattern that underpinned the entire project of the modern United States. Picturing his mother nailed shut in her coffin, Vardaman recalls either a nightmare or an actual event in which he became trapped in his crib: “I got shut up in the crib the new door it was too heavy for me it went shut I couldn’t breathe because the rat was breathing up all the air.”³⁸

³⁸ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 65.

Like Darl and Cash, Vardaman writes his own experiences onto his mother's body, here seeing in her encoffined corpse his memory of being unable to breathe in his crib. Motivated by this memory, Vardaman attempts to allow Addie, or her corpse, to breathe by drilling holes into her coffin, in the process accidentally and grotesquely boring holes into his mother's face. To be sure, a major contribution to Addie's well-known resentment is the fact that she has lived with the combined weight of her sons' projected anxieties, to the point that even when dead her sons are still intruding into her person in a confused attempt to save themselves. For Vardaman, however, the episode reveals his own ongoing sense of confinement. After recalling his experience in the crib, Vardaman's next association is to an electric toy train he has seen in a store window in Jefferson. Compared to his cage-like crib, the train, which runs on its track, becomes a captivating symbol of mobility and escape. Reproducing Vardaman's claustrophobia, the escape represented by the train remains inaccessible to him "behind the glass" of the store window.³⁹

But what is responsible for Vardaman's sense of confinement? That Dewey Dell offers him bananas, a plantation crop, as an alternative to the inaccessible toy train is significant, as are Vardaman's further associations to other plantation commodities and his status as a "country boy." As Vardaman thinks to himself,

Dewey Dell said we will get some bananas. The train is behind the glass, red on the track. When it runs the track shines on and off. Pa said flour and sugar and coffee costs so much. Because I am a country boy because boys in town. Bicycles. Why do flour and sugar and coffee cost so much when he is a country boy. 'Wouldn't you ruther have some bananas instead?' Bananas are gone, eaten. Gone. When it runs on the track shines again. 'Why ain't I a town boy, pa?' I said God made me. I did not said to God to made me in the country. If He can make the train, why can't He make

³⁹ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 66.

them all in the town because flour and sugar and coffee. ‘Wouldn’t you ruther have bananas?’⁴⁰

It is as though Vardaman’s frenzied free association opens a door into his unconscious mind and the products of the plantation -- coffee, sugar, and bananas -- unexpectedly emerge as he struggles to understand his current circumstances. Looking for escape, he is offered bananas as a substitute. Indeed, Vardaman is trapped as a “country boy” on the periphery of the US empire, where a system of plantation agriculture precludes the social and economic mobility enjoyed by “boys in town.” Vardaman here senses what he cannot fully understand. His family’s exploited position within the US empire’s neocolonial economy produces the sense of constraint he seeks to escape, whether by way of the train, or through the air holes he drills into his mother’s coffin.

The commodities that Vardaman names, like Darl’s comparison of Jewel to a cigar store Indian, help bring into focus the Bundren’s position within a transnational plantation system, much of it controlled by US companies and investors. Their coffee, for instance, would have come from Latin American plantations, most likely in Brazil or Columbia.⁴¹ The Bundren’s sugar, moreover, would have come from US-owned plantations in Cuba, which supplied the United States with the majority of its sugar throughout most of the 1920s, or another US colonial dependency such as the Philippines, Hawaii, or Puerto Rico.⁴² Finally,

⁴⁰ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 65-66.

⁴¹ In 1921, for example, 97% of US coffee imports came from Latin America. Brazil supplied 62.50%, followed by Columbia at 18.50% and “Central America” at 8.80%. See William H. Ukers, *All About Coffee* (New York: The Tea and Coffee Trade Journal Company, 1922), 299-301.

⁴² During the 1920s, Cuba supplied over 50% of the sugar in the United States every year except 1921 and 1928. In 1926, for example, 58% of total sugar deliveries in the US came from Cuba, 10.9% from Hawaii, 8.1% from Puerto Rico, and 5.5% from the Philippines. See Brian H. Pollitt, “The Cuban Sugar Economy and the Great Depression,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 3, no. 2 (1984): 8.

their bananas would have come from Central American plantations, almost certainly those owned by the United Fruit Company, which dominated the US banana market in the 1920s, its only major competitors being two other US companies.⁴³ Vardaman, as the youngest Bundren, appears to have the distance to sense what the older generations cannot, which is that the system they enabled even as it exploited them, now operates abroad and propels the United States to its new status as a modern global power.

This places the Bundrens in a very ambivalent position with respect to US modernity. The bananas, which appear throughout the novel, represent an especially important symbol here. Susan Willis reads the Bundren family's journey from country to town as a representation of the South's historical transition from an agricultural society to one structured by modern consumer capitalism. She argues that as a symbol for the "Third World," Faulkner's bananas signify the Bundren family's demise as producers and their transformation into consumers as agricultural production shifted from the First to the Third World.⁴⁴ Adam Fajardo likewise reads the bananas as a sign of the Bundrens' transition into a modern economy, even if the promises of consumption ultimately fail to address their material needs.⁴⁵ Willis and Fajardo, in other words, both read the bananas as symbolizing the Bundren's entrance into modernity. The Bundrens leave the agricultural South behind and enter into the modern world as consumers.

⁴³ Timothy G. Taylor, "Evolution of the Banana Multinationals," in *Banana Wars: The Anatomy of a Trade Dispute* (Cambridge MA: CABI Publishing, 2003), 76.

⁴⁴ Susan Willis, "Learning from the Banana," *American Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (Winter, 1987).

⁴⁵ Fajardo writes, "the Bundrens experience modernity by participating in consumer culture." The banana, in Fajardo's reading, represents "the ultimate failure of tropical consumption as a means for improving the life of the 'poor man' in America." Adam Fajardo, "How to Read a Banana: Global Modernism and Global Food Chains," *M/m Print Plus* 4, cycle 2 (May 9, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.26597/mod.0104>.

Yet the banana is an awkward symbol for a historical transition from agricultural to capitalist economies given that the banana is itself a plantation product, albeit produced by a giant multinational corporation that understood itself as a modernizing force in the hemisphere. With this in mind, where exactly does the banana belong? It belongs neither to the plantation past nor the capitalist future, but to both. Willis and Fajardo's readings obscure this ambivalence. In arguing that the banana represents the Southern farmer's entrance into modernity, both Willis and Fajardo end up reinforcing the contradistinction between Southern agriculture and modern capitalism that Du Bois works to refute in *Black Reconstruction*. To be sure, rather than marking modernity's break from the plantation past, the Bundrens' consumption of bananas signals modern capitalism's ongoing reliance on plantation-based modes of production. Thus, the bananas collapse rather than delineate the space between agricultural and capitalist economies.⁴⁶ They trigger, rather than resolve, an anxious ambivalence regarding where precisely the Bundrens fall on the line stretching between past and present, outmoded and modern economies, and First and Third Worlds.⁴⁷

Instead of signaling the South's passage into capitalist modernity, the Bundrens' ambivalent position subverts the discourses of progress and modernity surrounding US capitalism by reminding us of its dependence on plantation forms. This helps to explain why the Bundrens are such an unwelcome sight as they begin to enter the more populated areas

⁴⁶ In this way, the bananas mark an instance of Leigh Anne Duck calls "temporal multiplicity" in Faulkner's fiction. See Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006).

⁴⁷ On the US South's "uncanny hybridity," see Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn, "Introduction: Uncanny Hybridities" in *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies*, eds. Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

surrounding Jefferson. Heading into the town of Mottson, the Bundrens are a grotesque spectacle, forcing the townspeople to look away. As one resident tells us,

[F]olks couldn't stand it. It had been dead eight days...They came from some place out in Yoknapatawpha County, trying to get to Jefferson with it. It must have been like a piece of rotten cheese coming into an ant-hill, in that ramshackle wagon that Albert said folks were scared would fall all to pieces before they could get it out of town, with that home-made box and another fellow with a broken leg lying on a quilt on top of it, and the father and a little boy sitting on the seat and the marshal trying to get them out of town.⁴⁸

Like Addie's unburied corpse, for the townspeople in Mottson, the Bundrens represent a past life that should have been put to rest long ago, but somehow still remains above ground. Indeed, the Bundrens' arrival in town here resembles the trope of the postcolonial fantasy/nightmare, in which the repressed periphery unexpectedly appears in the colonial center. In this case, the injured and "blackened" Bundrens stand in for the colonial modes of production that the modern United States refuses to acknowledge even as it depends upon them.

This skepticism about modern progress brings us back to the scene of the river crossing and Darl's uncanny sense that time now stands before him like a "looping string." If *As I Lay Dying* opens with the image of the cigar store Indian as an emblem of the first American plantations, it closes with a signifier of their new corporate form: the Bundrens sitting in Jefferson with their mouths "half open and half-et bananas in their hands."⁴⁹ We encounter this circular dynamic again in the new woman Anse finds in town. Having finally buried Addie, we are now asked by the father to "Meet Mrs Bundren." It is as though the

⁴⁸ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 203.

⁴⁹ Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 260.

plantation is the mother who hasn't been grieved and so cannot be put to rest, but rather is buried only to be resurrected again.

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Far from the “poor white” Bundrens, the Compsons represent a fallen planter class in the twentieth-century South. Yet, in *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner explores how the plantation system eventually threatens to dominate even its own one-time masters. Once powerful aristocrats, the Compsons now cling to the remnants of their former plantation in a modernizing world. Notably, Faulkner ties the novel's symbols of Northern power, including Wall Street and the Northern banker, Sydney Herbert Head, to the US empire in the wider Caribbean: Wall Street to Nicaragua and Head to Cuba. Like in *As I Lay Dying*, here again Faulkner emphasizes the South's position within the US empire's transnational plantation economy. Viewed from within the Agrarian version of Southern history, the Compsons appear as victims of a modern corporate empire originating in the US North. Yet, if we view the Compson family through the historical lens provided by Du Bois, we can see how Southern planter traditions helped to create the symbols of Northern corporate and financial power that now dominate them. Read through Du Bois, the Compsons' decline stems from the slave labor foundations of US imperial wealth, which now “loops” back against the planter classes that helped usher it into being.

Consider, for example, Jason Compson's comment about the US occupation of Nicaragua. After learning he has lost money while trading in cotton futures on the New York Cotton Exchange, Jason launches into an antisemitic tirade against Wall Street. "I don't see how a city no bigger than New York can hold enough people to take the money away from us country suckers," Jason fumes before turning his ire toward the US government.⁵⁰ Jason blames Washington for failing to protect Southern farmers against crop-destroying floods while at the same time spending money to deploy troops abroad: "Let it wash a man's crop out of the ground year after year, and them up there in Washington spending fifty thousand dollars a day keeping an army in Nicaragua [*sic*] or some place."⁵¹ Jason's resentment reiterates a Southern critique of Wall Street originating in the 1890s when populist critics identified the Cotton Exchange and Northern finance in general as major sources of the South's economic problems.⁵² As the historian Rupert B. Vance writes,

In the field of cotton economics the object of the farmer's particular wrath was the New York Cotton Exchange. It was believed that speculators established the prices ruinous to the cotton planters, and a particularly popular unwritten plank in the platform of the agrarian revolt was the extermination of the New York Cotton Exchange.⁵³

Jason's populist resentment toward the Cotton Exchange, moreover, needs to be understood within the broader context of what C. Vann Woodward has called the South's "colonial economy," in which Southern industry and infrastructure were largely owned and controlled

⁵⁰ William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 234.

⁵¹ Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 234

⁵² See Kenneth J. Lipartito, "The New York Cotton Exchange and the Development of the Cotton Futures Market," *The Business History Review* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1983), 63.

⁵³ Rupert B. Vance, *Human Factors in Cotton Culture: A Study in the Social Geography of the American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1929), 141.

by Northern industrialists.⁵⁴ Well into the twentieth century, furthermore, the South's economy followed a familiar colonial model in which its industries produced mostly raw materials for distant manufacturers in the Northeast and abroad.⁵⁵ Jason's resentment toward Wall Street and its manipulation of Southern "country suckers" emerges out of this semi-colonial relationship.

Although Jason's disdain for "Nicaragua" expresses racist nativism, his comment on the occupation comes just as he rages against his own semi-colonial status. Indeed, Jason's contempt compensates for his projective identification with an occupied country, the name of which he intentionally mispronounces in an attempt to assert colonial superiority. This is not to say that the conditions Jason faces as part of a fallen US planter class are actually equivalent with those in Nicaragua, but rather that it is worthwhile to explore why some part of Jason feels compelled to make the comparison. The United States occupied Nicaragua primarily to prevent other imperial powers from constructing a canal that would rival its own canal project in Panama.⁵⁶ Jason's narration in 1928 comes just after a civil war that culminated in a US military invasion and the renewed militarization of US imperial rule.⁵⁷ Prior to the invasion, however, the occupation was characterized by so-called "dollar diplomacy," which aimed to assert US influence via financial rather than military pressures by arranging private bank loans in exchange for financial supervision.⁵⁸ A central irony of

⁵⁴ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

⁵⁵ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 311.

⁵⁶ Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua Under U.S. Imperial Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 125.

⁵⁷ Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 141.

⁵⁸ On dollar diplomacy in Nicaragua, see Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 125. On dollar diplomacy, see Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Jason's comment, coming in the midst of his tirade against Wall Street, is that leading up to the civil war, Wall Street banks played a leading role in the occupation of Nicaragua and came to symbolize the US presence in the country. Nationalist insurgents characterized their fight as a battle to free Nicaragua from "onerous and irresponsible banker rule," beginning the revolt that would lead to civil war by attacking symbols of Wall Street such as the National Bank.⁵⁹

Faulkner was likely aware of Wall Street's role in Nicaragua, given growing opposition to dollar diplomacy and the power of financial institutions generally in the US at the time.⁶⁰ However, while Faulkner invokes Nicaragua to highlight the South's peripheral status in relation to Northeastern corporate power, this is not a connection that Jason will easily admit to. Instead, furious at his family's decline, Jason projects his colonial status onto Nicaragua in order to recuperate his sense of himself as belonging to a master class. Yet, Jason also manages to maintain a victimized self-image, denying his role, and the role of the South's planter class, in facilitating his own decline. Jason, for example, is not a cotton farmer devastated by changes in a distant market about which he understands little. On the contrary, Jason himself speculates on the cotton market before casting himself as an innocent victim of its fluctuations. This pretense of innocence parallels that of the Bundrens, further illustrating a dynamic in which Faulkner's whites express anxiety over being colonized by the very systems they continually endorse and enable. Indeed, Jason's sense of himself as cheated by the Cotton Exchange even as he voluntarily participates in the futures market is emblematic of the broader historical tension that he evades, which is the Southern

⁵⁹ Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream*, 141.

⁶⁰ On domestic opposition to dollar diplomacy, see Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World*.

planter class' fundamental contributions to the emergence of New York as a global financial power. David Quigley writes that Southern trade was central to New York's antebellum economy and that "Alongside the opening of the Erie Canal in the 1820s, local merchants' success in establishing and maintaining long term business ties to the Southern planter class fueled New York's financial ascendancy."⁶¹ Tiya Miles, building on Quigley, writes, "It was in this moment — the early decades of the 1800s — that New York City gained its status as a financial behemoth through shipping raw cotton to Europe and bankrolling the boom industry that slavery made."⁶² Beaten by Wall Street, Jason grasps at the memory of his family's former stature as planters. "I says my people owned slaves here" he recalls bragging to townspeople in Jefferson, "when you all were running little shirt tail country stores."⁶³ Yet it is possible, even likely, that the slave-produced cotton of the Compsons' Mississippi plantation, first established circa 1811 by Jason's Great-Great-Grandfather, Jason Lycurgus Compson, went through New York, fueling the rise of Wall Street as a financial giant, which now overpowers Jason Compson IV in 1928.⁶⁴ The slave-owning past that Jason glorifies, in other words, is actually the root source of his current predicaments, although he doesn't realize it. Rather than protecting him from further decline, Jason's attempts to reclaim his family's slaveholding past work to preserve the sources of his own degradation.

⁶¹ David Quigley, "Southern Slavery in a Free City: Economy, Politics, and Culture," in *Slavery in New York*, eds. Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris (New York: The New Press, 2005), 266.

⁶² Tiya Miles, "How Slavery Made Wall Street," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/slavery-capitalism.html> (accessed 4/23/2021).

⁶³ Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 239.

⁶⁴ For Jason Lycurgus Compson, see Faulkner's 1945 Appendix to *The Sound and the Fury*. According to the Appendix, Jason Lycurgus Compson "rode up the Natchez Trace one day in 1811" and "in the next year...owned the solid square mile of land," which twenty years later was "rather a park than a forest by that time, with its slavequarters and stables and kitchengardens and the formal lawns and promenades and pavilions." William Faulkner, "Appendix Compson, 1699-1945," in William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, ed. David Minter, Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1994), 205-206.

If Jason is dominated by a neocolonial version of Wall Street that, in his mind, treats the South like “Nicaragua or some place,” a similar dynamic characterizes Quentin Compson’s relationship with his sister Caddy’s short-lived husband, Sydney Herbert Head. As a banker from South Bend, Indiana, and a former student at Harvard, Head personifies Northern financial power much like the symbol of Wall Street in Jason’s section. Bringing the Compsons’ decline and the South’s peripheral status into relief, Head promises Jason a job at his bank and buys Caddy a car, among the first to be seen by the “country people” of Jefferson.⁶⁵ Introducing Head to Quentin, Quentin’s mother hints that he should be deferential to Head’s association with Northern power, calling him “My Harvard boy” and suggesting that he “will be a big brother,” an idea that Quentin clearly feels the need to resist.⁶⁶ After learning that Head was expelled from Harvard for cheating, Quentin refuses Head’s bribes to keep the expulsion a secret and attempts to convince Caddy not to marry him. Quentin’s concerns, however, have less to do with Caddy than with his intense doubts over his own abilities as the oldest Compson son and heir to a crumbling Southern planter tradition. Quentin becomes obsessed with his sister, in other words, because for him she represents the image of Southern “honor” that he is tasked with preserving, even as that becomes impossible in a changing modern world.⁶⁷ To be sure, Quentin attempts to assume the role of Southern patriarch by “protecting” his sister from Head. His powerlessness in this role, however, stands in for the Southern planter’s demise in a world seemingly controlled by the symbols of Northern finance.

⁶⁵ Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 94.

⁶⁶ Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 93.

⁶⁷ In the Appendix, Faulkner writes that Quentin, “loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honor.” Faulkner, “Appendix Compson,” 207.

Like Wall Street in Jason's section, moreover, Faulkner casts the Northern financial power represented by Head in specifically colonial terms. At the Compson home in Jefferson, Head offers Quentin a cigar he bought from a friend in Havana. Cuba was essentially a US dependency at the time of Quentin's narration in 1910 and its tobacco industry was dominated by US-owned corporations. Head's "worldly" status, moreover, also associates him with the US empire. Indeed, Head asserts his worldly experience over Quentin's naive provincialism. "I've been out in the world now for ten years things don't matter so much then you'll find that out" Head says before remarking on Quentin's lily-white hand, "just out of convent look not a blemish not even been creased yet you see."⁶⁸ Head, in other words, is associated with the US North, not just as a national hegemon, but also as a transnational, neocolonial power.

It follows that the banker's Havana cigar represents the patriarchal and economic power operating at levels of empire, nation, and family that Jason craves and Quentin ambivalently avoids. Although Quentin twice refuses Head's offer of a cigar, saying "I dont [*sic*] smoke," in Cambridge a month or so later on the day of his suicide, Quentin buys the best cigar available at a local store, takes "a couple of puffs," and then gives it away to two "bootblacks" who accost him on the street.⁶⁹ Quentin here attempts to perform the patriarchal role represented by the cigar, but ultimately evades the part without ever fully renouncing it. This is because Quentin's self-doubt regarding his status as patriarch-in-waiting has less to do with personal choice than with historical changes that make the role of Southern patriarch increasingly untenable. Caddy's sexual "promiscuity," for example,

⁶⁸ Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 110.

⁶⁹ Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 107, 108, 83.

reflects on changes in gender relations that underpinned the planter tradition. Changes in race relations also weigh heavily on Quentin's mind as heir to the Compson legacy. In fact, Quentin buys the cigar in Cambridge after recalling that he had seen "the Deacon" smoking a cigar at a Memorial Day parade just days before. An African American Southerner, Deacon plays on stereotypes to manipulate incoming Harvard students from the South. According to Quentin, Deacon first greets students at the train station in "a sort of Uncle Tom's cabin outfit, patches and all," and soon has them "completely subjugated."⁷⁰ A Black Southerner living in the North, marching in a parade, and smoking a cigar, Deacon represents the increasing Black political power and mobility that threatens the planter tradition Quentin is tasked with upholding.

More than the Southern patriarchs of his family tree, Quentin sees himself in the young immigrant girl he encounters outside Harvard's campus, who functions for Quentin much like Nicaragua does for Jason. Quentin first meets the girl, who cannot speak English, in a Boston area bakery attempting to buy bread. "Land of the kike home of the wop" Quentin thinks to himself before helping the girl to place her order.⁷¹ However, like Jason's relationship to "Nicaragua or some place," Quentin's projective identification with the girl is clear. Repeatedly referred to as his "shadow," for Quentin the girl holds a mirror up to his own disorientation, illiteracy, and foreignness in a Northeastern center of economic and political power. Alongside Jason's disdain for Nicaragua, Quentin's racist nativism compensates for his family's diminished status next to Northern institutions and bankers like Head, now the face of the US empire.

⁷⁰ Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 97.

⁷¹ Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 125.

Yet, as I have tried to show, while from an Agrarian perspective Quentin appears alienated by a Northern-derived modernity, such a view denies the white South's role in producing the imperial power that now confronts Southern planters like the Compsons. To be sure, Du Bois' perspective, in contrast, helps us to see what Quentin never fully grasps, which is the planter class' role in generating, through slavery, the symbols of modern empire that alienate him. Like Faulkner's poor white Bundrens and his younger brother Jason, Quentin also faces the US empire's plantation economy in bankers like Head, institutions like Harvard, and Northern capitals like Boston.⁷² Quentin, for instance, destroys the watch his father gives him only to be reminded of the time by the bell in Harvard Yard. Outside Harvard's campus, Quentin then searches for a "factory," so that he can learn the time by its "whistle." This unconscious linking of Southern watches with Harvard's bell and the factory whistle reproduces the deep ties between Southern and Caribbean plantations and US industrial and political power. Quentin's ambivalent relationship to time as a signifier of national and family history, moreover, illustrates how the links between the plantation watch and the factory whistle inform his psychic crisis. To be sure, if in *As I Lay Dying*, Darl's free association represents an attempt to break free of the linear and routinized labor systems emerging out of the plantation, Faulkner's use of stream of consciousness in Quentin's

⁷² On Harvard and the slave-based plantation economy, see Sven Beckert, Balraj Gill, Jim Henle, and Katherine Stevens, "Harvard and Slavery" *Transition* Issue 122 (2017). Their research on Harvard necessarily touched on Boston's ties to slavery. As the authors write, "Economically, Boston merchants, manufacturers, and others benefited greatly from trading in slave-grown agricultural commodities and processing these commodities in New England cities. Supplying the slave economies of the Caribbean with lumber, food, and livestock was another profitable branch of local enterprise. It was thus entirely implausible to assume that the oldest and, by many measures, most influential institution of higher learning in the United States would not have been involved with slavery. And, indeed, the students' research established that Harvard was maintained in part by slave labor; that it benefited from the profits accrued directly or indirectly from slavery; that Harvard accommodated slavery and even helped sustain it" (202-203).

section also seeks to throw off the linear pressures of the Compsons' plantation lineage represented by the father's watch and the factory whistle.⁷³ For Quentin, however, such pressures ultimately appear inescapable whether in Jefferson or Boston. Indeed, unlike Jason, Quentin vaguely senses his family's role in their own demise even if he never fully discerns the connection. Contemplating his suicide, Quentin famously associates to the Deep South and New England, "*Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum.* Somewhere I heard bells once. Mississippi or Massachusetts. I was. I am not. Massachusetts or Mississippi."⁷⁴ While we might read these thoughts as evidence of Quentin's estrangement from the seemingly opposed orders of both the Old South (represented by Mississippi) and the modern US (represented by Massachusetts), we should also consider that Quentin's alienation stems from the intimate relationship between Mississippi and Massachusetts, his family's slaveholding past, and the United States' new status as a global economic power.

Just after contemplating the relation of Mississippi to Massachusetts, Quentin associates to the announcement of Caddy's wedding and the fact that his family has sold "Benjy's pasture."⁷⁵ The land that Quentin's youngest brother loved has financed Caddy's marriage to Head and Quentin's education in the North. What goes unidentified in Quentin's thoughts, but is nevertheless important to understand, is that what is now called

⁷³ Glissant's distinction between *atavistic* and *composite* cultures may be helpful in elucidating how Quentin's stream of consciousness attempts to throw off the linear pressures of the South's plantation history. Whereas atavistic cultures are characterized by an "uninterrupted lineage from father to son," composite cultures emerge "out of the mingling of many contradictory atavistic cultures." Yoknapatawpha, Glissant writes, is "A composite culture that suffers from wanting to become an atavistic one and suffers in not being able to achieve that goal." With Glissant's insights in mind, we can see how in its intermixings and interruptions Quentin's stream of consciousness attempts to find an alternative to the South's atavistic myth of "uninterrupted lineage" represented principally by the father's watch. Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, 114-115.

⁷⁴ Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 174.

⁷⁵ Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 174.

Benjy's "pasture" is the last remaining land of what was once the Compsons' slave plantation. As Faulkner writes in the Appendix, "the remaining piece of the old Compson mile" which had once been home to "slavequarters and stables and kitchengardens and the formal lawns and promenades and pavilions" has now "been sold to pay for his sister's wedding and his year at Harvard."⁷⁶ The Compson mile bankrolls Northern institutions represented by Head and Harvard, replicating the Southern plantation's role in producing the United States as an empire. Quentin's dilemma, in other words, derives at least in part from his sense of himself as colonized by the financial imperial power that his planter family helped usher into being. Indeed, if Quentin, like Darl, suffers modern anxieties and psychic "discontent," Faulkner locates their sources in the slaveholding South, and reveals them as Quentin's true inheritance.

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⁷⁶ Faulkner, "Appendix Compson," 208, 206.

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Conclusion: From “Modern System” to Plantationocene

In the same Appendix in which he wrote that the 18th century Haitian sugar plantation represented a “modern system,” James wrote that in the twentieth century, “The Caribbean is now an American Sea.”¹ There were significant differences, James acknowledged, between 18th and 20th century forms of colonialism in the Caribbean, but “the fundamentals...have not changed.”² The Caribbean’s “dominant industrial structure” set in place by European powers -- the plantation system -- had remained constant under US neo-imperialism.³ Indeed, because James and other Caribbean critics understood the slave plantation as a “modern system” and a modernizing force in world history, they were able to grasp what is largely repressed in mainstream US discourses, and until recently, dominant US scholarship, which is the plantation’s fundamental importance to the modern United States. In *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969*, Eric Williams, for instance, points to the modern United States’ debt to the plantation when he quotes from a 1930 report by no less than Washington D.C.’s influential Brookings Institution entitled *Porto Rico and its Problems*:

From a strictly technical standpoint, sugar can be produced more efficiently and cheaply where both cane growing and sugar manufacturing are under a single administration... The highest cane and sugar yield per acre, the best qualities of cane, and the maximum recovery of sugar per ton of cane, are found in countries where all operations from plowing the field to bagging the sugar are under one management.⁴

¹ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Overture and the San Domingo Revolution*. Second Edition, Revised (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 392, 409.

² James, *The Black Jacobins*, 406.

³ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 405.

⁴ Quoted in Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 429.

As Williams observed, “The period between 1897 and 1930 saw the enormous concentration of latifundia in the Caribbean under the stimulus of American capital investment.”⁵ Fernando Ortiz had chronicled this development in Cuba, where the plantations established under Spain were only further developed by the infusion of US capital. “Cuba will never be really independent,” Ortiz wrote, “until it can free itself from the coils of the serpent colonial economy that fattens on its soil but strangles its inhabitants and winds itself about the palm tree of our republican coat of arms, converting it into the sign of the Yankee dollar.”⁶ It was Du Bois, however, who saw most clearly that the United States’ modern empire was built on Southern foundations, emerging as it did in the wake of Reconstruction’s democratic failures and the subsequent increases in Southern political power. The United States, Du Bois argued, only reinforced its Southern plantation models in the post-Reconstruction period and “became the cornerstone of that new imperialism which is subjecting the labor of yellow, brown and black peoples to the dictation of capitalism organized on a world basis.”⁷

As these critics suggest, it is because the plantation so fundamentally enabled the rise of Western empires that it was rendered archaic and peculiar within orthodox historical scripts. Yet, as I have tried to convey, writings by Wright, Hemingway, Walrond, and Faulkner show that the emergence of the US as a global empire sent cracks through this dynamic of repression. I have been arguing that in the case of these modern writers, US colonial expansion into the wider Caribbean brought the South’s complex enmeshment with

⁵ Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, 429.

⁶ Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet De Onís (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 65.

⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Russel and Russel, Inc. 1962), 631.

Plantation America to the surface, and that this uncovered an array of repressed doubts and disturbances about US and Western modernity at large given its historical and ongoing dependence on the plantation system. In these chapters I have tried to convey these writers' varied responses to the plantation not just as an institution, but as an assortment of beliefs and ideas, or what Wilson Harris calls "plantation psychologies," that have structured the formation of the modern United States.⁸ We have seen, for example, how Wright, Hemingway, Walrond, and Faulkner responded to the plantation as a driver of racial capitalism and industrialized labor regimes, a blueprint for modern empires, a crucial site for the growth and repression of cross-culturality, and a root source for traumatic forms of psychic and spiritual alienation associated with modern subjecthood. Moreover, I have tried to show how these writers' formal innovations not only sought to reflect modern plantation conditions, but, more importantly, attempted to break free of the multiple forms of physical and psychological destruction generated by plantation models.

With such arguments, I have tried to demonstrate that the more we understand, with help from the Caribbean critical tradition, how slavery made the modern world, the more we will see how the central problems found in these modern writers' works respond to historical forces set in motion by the slave-based plantation system. As I described in the introduction, scholars are increasingly turning toward the Plantationocene as a model that figures the slave plantation as the historical inflection point leading to the multiple and intersecting existential crises of the contemporary world. As we try to understand the plantation's impacts and to envision alternatives, we need to return to modern writers and artists and to the Black and

⁸ Wilson Harris, *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 120.

Caribbean critical discourse on the plantation to better understand their insights into the plantation complex and their attempts to overcome and transform its modern legacies.

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