

Qui mbanda:

EXPLORATIONS OF IDENTITIES

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**IDENTITY
MYTH
FOLKLORE**

MARCH 2021



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Quimbandas

Explorations of Identities

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Quimbandas

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Quimbandas: Explorations of Identities is an interdisciplinary, fully refereed, online journal dedicated to publishing the finest scholarship related to the explorations of human identities, and human development issues—particularly as relates constructions and representations of African diasporic identities. *Quimbandas* invites the submission of original manuscripts on a full range of topics related to approaches to human identities and human development issues.

Quimbandas seeks to help transform our collective understandings of the delimiting categories of the human—specifically the feminine and the masculine—and to expose the consequences associated with parceling off aspects of our humanity in the furtherance of promoting normative social mores that may prove impediments to transcendence of the current condition. Underscored by conceptual understandings of the malungos—those same-type companions of the ship's hull whose allegiance and dedication to one another cut across lineage—the Journal fosters understandings of human beings and the identities that they promote. Working to eliminate, for example, the distinctions between that considered masculine and that considered feminine, *Quimbandas* seeks to promote the fullest of potentialities that could only be recognized as human.

The seventeenth-century image of the *quimbandas*. Image from the estate of Manoscritti Araldi di Padre Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi. Reproduced with the kind permission of Sr. M. Araldi. [Source: Bharat Mehra et al., published by De Gruyter. 2019. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Public License]

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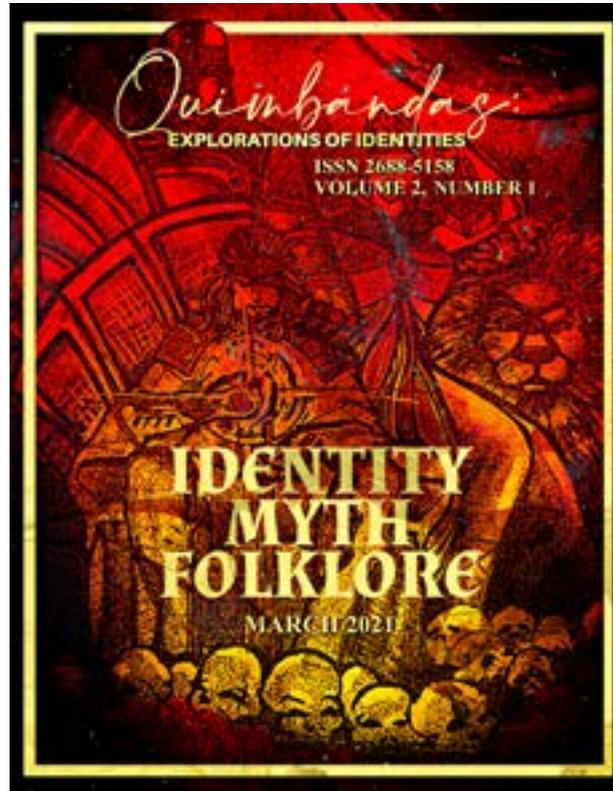
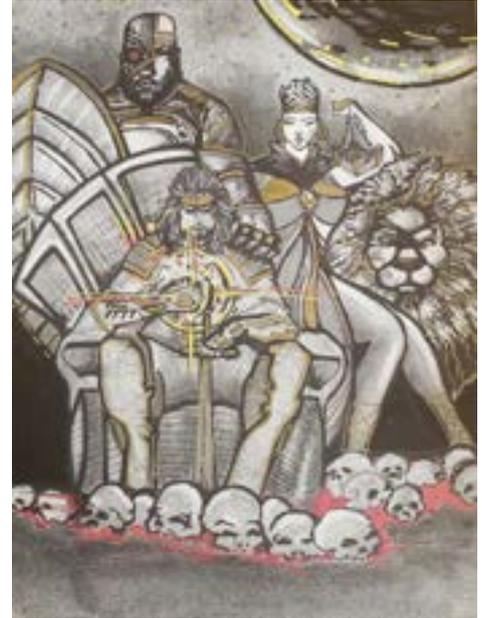


About the Cover

Translatio Imperii, dark
(I. Gemini/Labancamy)



Translatio Imperii, sepia
(I. Gemini/Labancamy)



Sable Mythopoetics
Quimbandas, Vol.2, No.1, cover
(Labancamy/A. West)

“... *I decided to go in the direction of Afrofuturism*”
 — Ivan Gemini

The cover art is an original composite visual image designed by graphic design artist Aaron West. The work is entitled, *Sable Mythopoetics*. It consists, primarily, of a drawing composed by Saint Louis artist Ivan Gemini. Gemini used charcoal pencils, felt markers, and paint markers in the construction of the piece. His works *Dunbar* and *Homer Winslow*—from the *A Blue Period* collection—are featured in the “Spotlight on Local Artists” section of the journal. When I set about looking to commission cover art for the “Identity, Myth, Folklore” issue, I thought of Ivan Gemini immediately. His works blur the boundaries between traditional and contemporary modes of representation. Even more, Matthew Sautman’s article on Don McGregor’s *Wakanda*—also found in the current issue—exposes the connection between the Black Panther canon and the increased interests as relates the genre of Afrofuturism. So, when Ivan informed me, “...I decided to go in the direction of Afrofuturism,” I felt serendipity on my side. Just the same, Ivan Gemini’s works signify on themes and approaches commonly aligned within African American artistic aesthetics—particularly those rooted in folkloric traditions.

Quimbandas: Explorations of Identities is greatly appreciative of Ivan Gemini and Aaron West for their contributions to Volume 2, Number 1: “Identity, Myth, Folklore.”

TRC

14 March 2021

Notes from the Editor

Gillian Bennett writes,

Academic folklorists today define their subject matter in a way which runs counter to popular conceptions of the field, both as regards the ‘lore’ and the ‘folk’ part of this old composite term. They see the ‘lore’ as a body of beliefs, activities, ways of making, saying and doing things and interacting with others that are acquired through informal, unofficial channels by the processes of socializing in family, occupational, or activity-related groups. The ‘folk’ in the old sense of a group of people distinguishable by class, education, or location therefore disappears from the modern equation, for it follows that we are all folk. As academic folklorists use the term nowadays, ‘folklore’ is best seen as a ‘cultural register’—on the analogy of a linguistic register—one of several options available to members of a cultural grouping for thought, activity, and interaction. It follows that ‘folklore’ can be found anywhere and among any group of people, urban as well as rural, professional as well as ‘peasant’. (Abstract, “Folklore Studies and the English Rural Myth”)

The current issue of *Quimbandas: Explorations of Identities*, entitled “Identity, Myth, Folklore,” reflects our wishes to explore contemporary understandings of myth and folklore as relates identity formation: “among any group of people, urban as well as rural, professional as well as peasant,” or lumpen. Myth and folklore are knowledge-sharing, identity-forming practices. Multiplicities of cultural groups utilize mythic and folkloric practices. Still—at least as regards folklore—many scholars deride its emphasis on orality and storytelling. Many practitioners of folklore stem from marginalized communities and cultures; for example both Pauline Hopkins and Colson Whitehead, two prominent twentieth- and twenty-first-century African American literary artists, respectively, use folklore for generative purposes as regards their respective approaches to craft. In doing so, both Hopkins and Whitehead recognize the value folklore has played in African American culture and they give voice to its rich complexities.

This issue works to address concerns raised by critics as regards the usefulness of myth and folklore with respect to artistic creation. More specifically, this issue works to address the aesthetic approaches of artists who employ the mythic and the folkloric in their works—authors who are generally ignored or overlooked precisely because the subject matter of their works center on the mythic and folkloric. For example, in “McGregor’s *Wakanda: Black Panther Volume 1* and the White Liberal Imagination,” Matthew Sautman argues that Don McGregor’s work on the Marvel anthology series *Jungle Action* provides a primary foundation for the mythology constituting the Black Panther canon, despite the Black Panther’s debut appearances in Stan Lee and Jack Kirby’s *Fantastic Four*.

Natalie Whitaker, in ““For Noble Britons Sprong From Trojans Bold”: *Omeros*, Mimicry, and New Troy,” explores Derek Walcott’s twentieth-century poem *Omeros*. Whitaker argues that *Omeros* melds multi-layered mimicry with subtle references to the medieval English myth of “New Troy,” providing a complex example of multicultural hybridity that undermines and deconstructs a notion of imperial right that has been part of English identity for a thousand years. Moreover, Whitaker’s analysis suggests that Walcott recognizes that Western myth, African forms,

epic poetry, and the picaresque all influence the African lore of the West Indies and the Caribbean. In doing so, Walcott—as facilitated by understandings of Whitaker’s analysis—creates a more complicated picture of African Caribbean folklore. Whitaker’s analysis reveals that myth communicates the heroic identity, African forms reinforce communal identity, epic poems provide relatable archetypes, and the picaresque promotes gender stereotypes.

In my own “Lumpen ‘Em All Together: African American Marxist Approaches to Colson Whitehead’s *John Henry Days*,” I explore the myths of John Henry and *Brown v. Board of Education*—particularly as regards analysis and interpretation of the characters presented in the novel *John Henry Days*. The psychological wounds of the novel’s protagonist—J. Sutter—foreshadow the physical wounds that he will experience, ultimately resulting in his death. I examine Sutter’s abhorrence of the American South and locate such psychic scarring in the history of black bodies in America, scarring, in part, engendered by the hoped-for racial progress ushered in by the *Brown* decision. I argue that the destruction of J. Sutter’s body signifies that the Dream—the myth—of African American full enfranchisement and integration into the fabric of American society remains deferred in many respects.

Lastly, in “Double Vision” Mia Jackson makes the case that *Contending Forces* and *Quicksand* should be understood and approached as Naturalist texts. In doing so, Jackson makes use of the myth and persona of the tragic mulatta and expands critical approaches to overlooked texts crafted by Black American female novelists.

Together, the original articles, research, short stories, songs, poems, drawings, paintings, and reviews reveal the ways in which oral culture, particularly folklore, pervades the texts of artists—especially literary artists.

T.R. Campbell
14 March 2021

McGregor's Wakanda: *Black Panther Volume 1* and the White Liberal Imagination

By Matthew Sautman

Abstract: Primarily comprising *Black Panther Volume 1*, Don McGregor's work on the Marvel anthology series *Jungle Action* provides a primary foundation for the mythology constituting the Black Panther canon, despite the character's debut appearances in Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's *Fantastic Four* #52-53. Considered amongst the original graphic novels—along the likes of Eisner's *A Contract with God*—McGregor's work on *Jungle Action* represents a milestone both in comics history and the Black Panther canon. At the same time, McGregor's vision elevated the Black Panther from side-character status into the first mainstream Black comic book superhero; still, McGregor's contributions to the Black Panther canon are tainted by the limitations of the white liberal imagination. This article draws on works by James Baldwin, Marc DiPaolo, Robert E. Fleming, Toni Morrison, and others in an exploration of how white liberalism undermines the radical nature of the Black Panther's earliest stories through Orientalism and sentimentality.

Contemporary portrayals of T'Challa, more commonly known as Black Panther, frequently associate the superhero with visual representations of Black empowerment due to the popularity of works like Ryan Coogler's 2018 Marvel Cinematic Universe film *Black Panther* and Ta-Nehesi Coates's *Black Panther* comics. Yet the character's history is fraught with problematic depictions of Black identity that seem antithetical to the Black Power messaging present in modern portrayals. T'Challa's earliest depictions, conceived by writers and artists like Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Roy Thomas—though foundational explorations of the Black Panther canon's mythos—present T'Challa as a lower-grade superhero, someone who, despite his wealth and rank as king of an independent African nation, consistently is bested or outperformed by his white compatriots. As Christopher Priest, the first Black author to write mainline Black Panther comics, observes, the Black Panther of these earliest depictions describes a “guy with no powers” who stands “in the back of the Avengers class photo, whose main job was to point and cry out, ‘LOOK—A BIG SCALY MONSTER! THOR—GO GET HIM!’” (“The Story So Far”).¹

Matthew Sautman received his Master of Fine Arts degree from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, where he previously earned an MA in both Literature and Teaching of Writing. His scholarship primarily centers around intersections of popular culture and counterhegemonic discourse. His most recent publications include “Domestic Bodies in Hell: The Significance of Gendered Embodiment in Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*” in the *Journal of Body Studies* and book chapters in *Spaces and Places of Horror* and *Mythopoeic Narrative in the Legend of Zelda*.

¹ Supplementary material Marvel includes in trade paperbacks do not always include pagination, consequently references to this material may only include author's name and/or article name.

Frequently, T'Challa's presence in these narratives is tokenistic and underwhelming. Nonetheless, the character garnered popularity despite T'Challa's comparative inability to execute super-heroics with the same efficacy as his white counterparts.

T'Challa's earliest depictions may not consistently portray him as a hero on par with characters like Thor or Captain America, yet, as Priest remarks, "Black Panther [was] the iconic superhero to the African American community."² However, T'Challa earned this iconic reputation with Black comic book readers from his status as the first Black superhero to appear in a mainstream comic, not from his ability to effectively represent Black empowerment in a primarily white medium. Although Black superheroes did exist prior to T'Challa's debut appearance in *Fantastic Four* #52 (1966)—for example, Geo Evans Jr.'s "Lion-Man" debuted in 1947's *All-Negro Comics*, a one-shot comic anthology that ran only for one issue—no Black superhero achieved wider success with American comic book readers until Lee and Kirby created T'Challa.

The Black Panther canon's earliest stories comprise what Marvel comics and Black Panther fans refer to as *Black Panther Volume 1*. Despite this name, only thirteen comics published under the *Black Panther* name are included in *Black Panther Volume 1*. This set of stories comprises the thirteen issues of *Black Panther* comics Kirby wrote and illustrated by himself, in addition to the two *Fantastic Four* issues that introduced T'Challa into Marvel comics and comics written by another white writer, Don McGregor. McGregor's contributions to *Black Panther Volume 1* consists of nineteen Black Panther stories published from 1973 until 1976 as part of the questionably titled comics anthology, *Jungle Action* (henceforth referred to as *JA*). McGregor's work thus comprises the bulk of the worldbuilding for the Black Panther canon, making it essential reading for anyone wanting to understand the character's origins.

Although Thomas's work on incorporating T'Challa into *The Avengers* predates McGregor's contributions to the Black Panther canon, Thomas's *Avengers* comics are not always considered as part of *Black Panther Volume 1* due to the secondary nature T'Challa plays in *Avengers*' stories. However, Thomas's contributions to the Black Panther canon do inform T'Challa's adventures in *Black Panther Volume 1*. Thomas's contributions include the introduction of M'baku, "the Man-Ape," and Wakanda's role in the suppression of the White Gorilla cult (*Avengers* #62 117),³ as well as T'Challa's love interest, Monica Lynne—a Black American singer with an "apolitical" stance insofar as she does not "feel it's [her] place to tell people what to believe" (#73 349). Notably, McGregor republished *Avengers* #62 as *JA* #5, transforming the issue into a direct prequel to the first of McGregor's *JA* arcs, "Panther's Rage."

"Don did the heavy lifting so far as Wakanda is concerned"⁴ — The Impact of McGregor's *Jungle Action* on Literary History

McGregor's impact on literary history, though significant in regard to the evolution of the Black Panther canon, never earned mainstream national attention. While the general American public's bias against the literary nature of comics that McCloud dubs "the curse of new media" may partially be responsible for lessening the scale of McGregor's impact, McGregor's legacy is likely hampered by at least two other factors

² "Christopher Priest on: Black Panther."

³ Page numbers for comic issues will refer to their pagination in Marvel Epic Collection but issue numbers are provided for those desiring to engage with these comics in their original publication.

⁴ Christopher Priest, qtd. in Jess Harrold's "Panther by Priest."

(*Understanding Comics* 151). *JA* did not sell well, preventing him from gaining the same name recognition afforded to Lee, Kirby, and Thomas. Even if McGregor were radical for the comic medium and innovative as a comic book writer, McGregor's *JA* stories mostly do not advocate for particularly radical positions on social justice that readers would consider controversial—even if McGregor's stories feature elements that are considered controversial behind the scenes by Marvel's editors.

Nonetheless, McGregor's innovative approach to *JA* anticipates the evolution of comics as media: from consumable print issues to larger arcs that compelled readers to follow novel length stories in comic form. Rather than approach *JA* stories sequentially where a writer introduces a problem that the protagonists solve in one or two issues, as is fairly common in Marvel comics of the era, McGregor wrote Black Panther “as a series of illustrated novels.” Consequently, the story arc of “Panther's Rage” in *JA*—specifically—is one of the earliest serialized graphic novels. McGregor completed the arc four years prior to Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978)—a book often miscredited as the first graphic novel due to Eisner's belief that he created the term (Mazur and Danner 181, Eisner x).

McGregor's second *JA* Black Panther arc, “Panther versus the Klan,” though unfinished, remains significant for transforming T'Challa from a character who happens to have Black skin into a character whose Blackness impacts how he interacts with the people around him. This arc transports T'Challa to Monica's hometown in Georgia after she learns her sister Angela has been murdered, possibly due to Klan involvement that local police complicity cover up as a suicide. Here, T'Challa learns about the Klan's existence and begins to come into conflict with the organization once they attempt to destroy Monica's family's home with Molotov cocktails. The ensuing narrative resurrects a tradition pioneered in the 1946 *Superman* radio show, wherein social justice is equivocated with anti-racism and the Klan is represented as an unredeemable, evil organization (Jones 242). Traces of McGregor's anti-racist influences also become more explicit in this arc, such as in *JA* #19, wherein Monica directly references James Baldwin and Eldridge Cleaver (279).

Perhaps most importantly, McGregor successfully resists problematic tropes set forth in preceding and subsequent Black Panther stories written by white liberal writers. McGregor's *Jungle Action* stories are, as Milestone Comics founder Dwayne McDuffie notes in the documentary, the first Black Panther stories where “everybody in the book... was Black, from the street-sweepers to the doctors and the lawyers to the king to the criminals.”⁶ Furthermore, other stories comprising *Black Panther Volume 1* cast T'Challa as someone who represents, according to Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, “dignity in service to a white supremacist state,”⁷ due to T'Challa consistently being bested by white heroes in superheroics and saving white people from villains who threaten them around the globe. McGregor revises this script. McGregor allows T'Challa to be a Black hero who saves Black people in and outside a Black nation, thus enabling T'Challa to resist narratives previously imposed upon the character.

“Marvel Comics' better-than-average Black Panther”⁸ The Limitations of Liberalism in Superhero Comics

McGregor's work on Black Panther stories from *JA* expands on the Black Panther canon's mythos that Lee, Kirby, and Thomas established by transforming T'Challa the Black

⁵ “To Follow the Track of the Great Cat” 3.

⁶ *White Scripts and Black Supermen* (documentary) 13:00.

⁷ *White Scripts and Black Supermen* (documentary) 14:00.

⁸ McCloud, *Reinventing Comics* 7.

Panther into an overtly political superhero infused with liberal sensibilities. Marc DiPaolo defines depictions of race in superhero narratives as liberal when stories feature a “non-white character [who] is presented [to readers] as a ‘real person,’ with graspable thoughts, feelings, and motivations, [who] is important to the plot, and does not seem to be behaving in a purely stereotypical fashion” (45). Contrary to this, DiPaolo describes conservative approaches to race in superhero narratives: “the non-white character is mere cannon fodder for action sequences, a smiling servant, a Satanic villain, or mere comic relief” (45). Although McGregor’s success at conveying race is hampered by inattention to the layered messaging in his comics, McGregor’s *JA* stories are the earliest entries into the Black Panther canon that successfully incorporate an arguably liberal depiction of race in superhero comics per DiPaolo’s framework.

While DiPaolo identifies Lee and Kirby as liberals (21), Lee and Kirby’s Black Panther stories fail to meet DiPaolo’s criteria for liberal narratives. Lee and Kirby’s Black Panther stories show comic book readers that Black people are not only capable of being superheroes, but that Black superheroes are capable of holding their own against white heroes like the Fantastic Four—ignoring the caveat that T’Challa holds his own against them only when he catches them off-guard by isolating each member of the team. Furthermore, even if certain narrative decisions Lee and Kirby make challenge stereotypical depictions of Black identity, such as conveying Wakanda as a more scientifically advanced nation than the United States, Kirby and Lee’s successes are limited. Neither creator explores Wakanda beyond using the setting as an Orientalist elsewhere opposed to the conventional New York setting that dominates many of Marvel’s most popular titles—e.g. *Spider-Man*, *The Avengers*, and *The Fantastic Four*—nor do they ground T’Challa’s characterization as a racialized identity. Instead, Lee and Kirby’s original Black Panther stories introduce T’Challa as an eccentric African “chieftain” who tricks the Fantastic Four to travel to Wakanda so he can first attempt to best them in combat then request their aid in defeating white colonist Ulysses Klaw, “the master of sound” (*FF*#53 32). Consequently, the first Black Panther stories do not succeed as liberal narratives, per DiPaolo’s framework, as T’Challa fails to emerge in *FF* as a “real person” whose lived experiences influence his motivations. Rather, T’Challa’s motivations in *FF* #52-3 principally seem to justify the inclusion of action scenes of him fighting the Fantastic Four before recruiting them to a cause he could not achieve by himself.

Unlike Lee and Kirby’s original stories, McGregor’s *JA* issues do meet DiPaolo’s criteria. Conflict in Wakanda stems from the consequences of T’Challa’s actions in *Avengers*. McGregor begins his *JA* Black Panther stories by investigating what becomes of an isolationist nation when their leader consistently abandons their responsibilities to travel around the world with outsiders, what may be understood as a subtle critique of Thomas’s decision to frequently displace T’Challa from his homeland. In fact, T’Challa’s primary antagonist in the “Panther’s Rage” arc, Erik Killmonger, is able to return to Wakanda solely because of T’Challa’s contact with the Avengers. However, though race comes up briefly as regards the single primary white character from the “Panther’s Rage” arc, Venomm, race mostly goes unscrutinized in McGregor’s Wakanda setting. Race in “Panther’s Rage” instead presents as a non-issue, since most of the characters are Black Africans.

In the sequel arc, where McGregor transplants T’Challa into a Georgia setting in an unfinished narrative spanning *JA* #19-24, T’Challa and his readership are forced to confront white racism once T’Challa finds himself in direct conflict with the Ku Klux

Klan. This arc emphasizes anti-racists' obligations to participate in direct action to prevent the spread of white supremacy and the violence it sanctions. *JA* #23, for example, presents readers with dual narratives that emphasize this theme. Narrative one depicts an oral history retelling the lynching of Monica's great-grandparents' cousin, Caleb, while its double shows a reality where T'Challa intervenes and saves Caleb's life—implying that Caleb's suffering could have been prevented if someone is able to defend him from the lynch mob. Despite this arc's successes, *JA* was cancelled before McGregor could further explore the significance of social justice work. This abrupt cancellation occurred so that Kirby—having just returned to Marvel from working temporarily for DC comics—could helm the first self-titled Black Panther series and reboot the character to make up for *JA*'s low sales (Khoury).

McGregor transformed T'Challa's political significance. Underneath Lee, Kirby, and Thomas, T'Challa is political simply because he is a superhero who is Black. McGregor revises T'Challa into a character whose Blackness places him on adventures that are explicitly political, oriented against signifiers of white supremacy in the United States. Consequently, the liberal elements of McGregor's *JA* stories are often lauded, especially given how predominately white American superhero comics are as media—a problem McCloud notes in *Reinventing Comics* (107).

However, while superhero comics offer a set of conventions for evaluating liberal writer's success at writing about social justice issues, particularly race, these conventions do not fully evade the limitations of the white liberal imagination. DiPaolo's three criteria—multi-dimensional characterization, significance, and ability to resist racial stereotypes—are useful insofar as they provide insight into how a comics writer conceptualizes race in their work. Yet, these criteria do not necessarily account for the limitations of the white liberal imagination. Such a framework elevates McGregor's contributions to *Black Panther Volume 1* at the expense of neglecting to subject his work to the critical analysis necessary to understand how the white liberal imagination infuses this iteration of T'Challa and Wakanda with problematic elements that undermine *JA*'s social commentary.

**“T'Challa has always been one of the easiest characters for me to write”⁸—
Conceptualizing the White Liberal Imagination of Don McGregor**

An understanding of how McGregor's Black Panther comics are infused with a problematic white liberalism requires an understanding of white liberalism as an ideology. Charles W. Mills defines white liberalism as “a liberal theory whose terms originally restrict full-personhood to whites (or, more accurately, white men) and relegated nonwhites to an inferior category” (31). White liberalism, per Mills's conceptualization, does not emerge as explicit racism, but rather as expressions of white supremacy that emerge from white liberals, often without an awareness that their actions and/or words support white supremacy. As Robert E. Fleming observes in his study of the trope in African American literary fiction, white liberalism commonly emerges in the form of “the insincere liberal, who pays lip service to high religious or political principles but fails to live up to them” (17), thus reflecting a disconnect that emerges between the ideologies white people profess and the ideologies they practice. In other words, white liberalism manifests when the white liberal imagination acts duplicitously, wherein the white liberal's actions serve to benefit themselves at the expense of non-white “others.”

⁹ McGregor, “To Follow the Track of the Great Cat” 1.

McGregor's commitment to diversity may be considered as duplicitous. While the first four *JA* stories McGregor oversaw were reprints of stories featuring white protagonists who were originally published by Atlas comics (Khoury), McGregor diversified *JA* by incorporating T'Challa into the series—first by including the *Avengers* #62 reprint as *JA* #5, then by continuing the narrative himself. Thus, the act of providing *JA* a Black protagonist reads as McGregor creating an economic opportunity for himself that enabled him to accrue additional writing credits on a title whose meager sales would grant him a level of creative control not available to Marvel writers on more mainstream titles (Khoury). This level of creative control thus reveals further duplicity in McGregor's actions as McGregor also ensured T'Challa and Wakanda remained an exotic "other" endemic to the comics' jungle settings, fitting with tropes present amongst the original *JA* reprints. Such a reading of McGregor's commitment to diversity may be harsh, especially given how McGregor evolves the series in the "Panther versus the Klan" arc. Yet, McGregor's activist impulses as a comic book writer are hindered by the joint influences of Orientalism and sentimentalism on his writing process, as well as McGregor's overconfidence in his abilities as a white author to convey stories with a Black African protagonist like T'Challa, resulting in the reinforcement of stereotypes in *JA* at the same time McGregor seemingly challenges them.

Liberal, white American writers may intend for their works to challenge white supremacy in Western media, but inattention to the limits of their imaginations has the potential to fulfill white savior narratives that remain counterintuitive to the ideal end-goals of their activism. McGregor is no exception. As Gregory Jay illustrates, white savior narratives, such as those present in works like Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, conventionally present readers with "a story of black impotence that provides whites an imaginary hero who absolves them of racial guilt and presumptively claims the right to define action" (30). McGregor's *JA* Black Panther stories avoid standard variations of the white savior narrative, insofar as T'Challa and the majority of the cast are Black. The Black hero takes action against Black and white villains alike to protect almost only Black people. T'Challa is not "impotent" in these narratives like the Black Panther Thomas depicts in *The Avengers*. However, McGregor's choices—as a writer who is a white American writing primarily about Black Africans—present readers with a book about Black identity without deconstructing tropes surrounding Black identities, including African identities. Consequently, McGregor's *JA* comics capitalize on diversity in such a way that readers can disengage the comics' commentary.

The "Panther's Rage" arc specifically produces comics that reinforce stereotypes and avoid any complex interrogation of white Americans' relationships to racism in meaningful ways that would enable readers to understand how the quotidian aspects of American life are entrenched in racist ideologies that many white Americans do not question—e.g. white suburbia (created by redlining), poor urban schools (created also by redlining, in addition to gerrymandering, and intergenerational wealth), and white country towns (as a result of sundown towns). For this reason, the "Panther's Rage" arc may be considered a form of Blacksploitation, insofar that the series uses signifiers of Blackness for entertainment without overtly challenging how Blackness is systemically marginalized by white socioeconomic systems whose roots trace back to European colonialists and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Even if McGregor wisely avoids presenting readers with a conventional white savior narrative, his approach to storytelling during this initial arc still "absolves [readers] of racial guilt" and fails to enable the self-reflection necessary to motivate meaningful anti-racist change (Jay 30).

That McGregor, a white liberal writer, approaches his Black Panther stories

problematically is not unique given the limitations of the white liberal imagination. While the white liberal imagination describes liberal white people's cognitive capacity (or lack thereof) to conceive of the world and its inhabitants beyond the range of their lived experiences, the significance of the white liberal imagination as relates storytelling is a legacy principally concerned with appropriation and misrepresentation of non-white peoples. As Toni Morrison writes regarding white writers who write about race ineffectively, "the consequence" of racial appropriation and misrepresentation is "a master narrative that [speaks] *for* Africans and their descendants, or of them" (50). These "master narratives" forsake true and lived experiences in favor of fictions and can manifest as a range of tropes that dehumanize non-white people, such as "the fetishizing of color, the transference to blackness of the power of illicit sexuality, chaos, madness, impropriety, anarchy, strangeness, and helpless, hapless desire" (Morrison 81). Even works that are explicitly written against existing systems of oppression can perpetuate master narratives.

"In this Fertile, Resplendent Jungle-Glade of the Wakandan Nation"¹⁰ — Understanding McGregor's Wakanda

McGregor's contributions to *Black Panther Volume 1* may resist a master narrative present across the respective works of Lee, Kirby, and Thomas that portrays T'Challa in service of whiteness, yet McGregor's *JA* stories do perpetuate master narratives that support white supremacy. A group of these master narratives pertain to McGregor's Orientalist depiction of Africa that inherently elevates the superiority of Western civilization. Orientalism, as Said conceives, "is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' [i.e. a fictionalized, exoticized version of a real-life elsewhere] and... 'the Occident' [i.e. Western Europe and its former colonies in America]" (2). Subsequently, this Other/Western binary informing this "style of thought" almost always informs a hierarchy wherein the Other nation in question is presented as somehow less civilized than the West.

The Orientalism that informs McGregor's Wakanda does not originate with McGregor or *JA*'s revival. This Orientalism, rather, is fairly ubiquitous in European depictions of Africa. As David Paterson Del Mar notes, Orientalist depictions of Africa in American media commonly signify "the place as savage, heathen, immoral, even sub-human, the foil against which the West define[s] its superiority" (1). The brief glimpses of Wakanda Lee and Kirby offer to readers in *FF* #52-3, along with the glimpses Thomas offers in *Avengers* #62 and #74, present Wakanda as an Orientalist construction. As Marc Singer notes in *White Scripts and Black Supermen*, this is a nation ruled by an "exotic African prince" (15:00). His people worship a panther god. The members of the rival religious faction worship a white gorilla. They are dark-skinned, half-naked with grass-skirts. They live in thatched-roof huts, wield spears, and perform ceremonies for the pleasure of white-guests. Consequently, while Lee and Kirby never present Wakandans as "immoral," the aforementioned visual iconography they and Thomas associate with Wakanda consistently emphasize the country's "Otherness" in contrast to Western norms, blending signifiers of "savagery" and "heathenism" with signifiers of advanced technology. T'Challa and Wakanda subsequently come to exist as foils to the white America that the Fantastic Four embody during the first appearances of the Black Panther.

McGregor's specific Orientalism emerges through his decision to underutilize Wakanda's technological prowess in his narratives. Whereas T'Challa's debut appearances in *FF* and Kir-

¹⁰ *JA* #6, 47.

by's solo *Black Panther* series, respectively, emphasize Wakanda's sophisticated technology—so much so that the aesthetic continues to retain resonance in the Afrofuturism art movement (Womack 140-1)—computers and other signifiers of high-tech modernity in McGregor's Wakanda are notably absent, resulting in comics that visually portray Wakanda as indistinguishable from other Orientalist depictions of Africa, such as those present in Edgar Rice Burrough's *Tarzan* novels and its subsequent film adaptations. Not until the last page of McGregor's fifth issue, *JA #10*, when T'Challa unintentionally recovers stolen weaponry (127), does any *JA* story reference Wakandan technology in a way that differentiates Wakanda society from a "more primitive" African tribe—a plot point McGregor does not interrogate in greater detail.

While references to Wakandan technology continue into *JA* in subsequent issues, technology never becomes a prime focus of McGregor's narratives as is the case in earlier and subsequent writers' contributions to the Black Panther canon. Arguably, most entries into the Black Panther canon are science fiction comics that feature superheroes, but *JA* is an exception. Not until the final issue in the "Panther's Rage" arc, *JA #18*, does McGregor emphasize the prowess of Wakanda's scientific advancements. In this issue, McGregor reveals, Wakabi, T'Challa's head of security, contending with guilt over having a robotic arm prosthetic as his relationship with his wife Chandra becomes "less personal" (263). However, McGregor limits this interrogation into how technology influences human relationships to this one issue. The following issue transposes T'Challa into an American setting.

The Wakanda McGregor features throughout *JA* rarely challenges conventions surrounding depictions of technologically "primitive" Africans present in Orientalist depictions of Black people in Africa. Thus, McGregor's Wakanda—despite its alleged status as a highly advanced African nation—still appears primitive as relates Western standards. When McGregor does reference their technology in *JA*, Wakandan technology instead appears as just another signifier of their exotic appeal, a sign of Wakanda's "Otherness." McGregor's general disregard for portraying a realistic African setting further reinforces Orientalism in *JA*'s depiction of Wakanda. Maps of Wakanda included in *JA #6* and *#8*, for example, reference "Piranha Cove" (60, 94), a location whose existence in Wakanda only makes sense if Wakanda were set in South America. Instead, this location's presence hints at McGregor's desire to amplify the Otherness of Wakanda through signifying on the danger *JA*'s readers would likely associate with flesh-eating Amazonian fish. Similarly, McGregor references objects usually associated with China and Japan without in-story explanations. Somehow, Wakanda—an isolationist country—has a pagoda (*JA #10* 116), while at least one Wakandan warrior T'Challa finds himself in conflict with uses a weapon that McGregor's narrator describes as "a combination of nunchaku and mace" (164). Aside from further reemphasizing that McGregor's imagination prohibits him from imagining an African nation that more accurately reflects any number of real African influences, the accumulation of these Orientalist signifiers gradually reveals that McGregor's worldbuilding is informed by absurdity rather than an attempt to tell realistic stories with Black African protagonists. This absurdity is most prominent during the arc's climax in *JA #17*—a plot point McGregor works towards across the span of two years—when Killmonger invades Wakanda using an army of dinosaurs (247).

“It’s almost as if you’ve forgotten that we’ve met before”¹¹ —

Erik Killmonger and the Absolution of Western Responsibility in Colonization

The presence of Orientalist appropriations in *JA* informs the sentimentality that undermines the characterization of Erik Killmonger, perhaps McGregor’s most enduring original character, and devalues Lee and Kirby’s most significant contribution to *Black Panther Volume 1* by revising Klaw’s original invasion of Wakanda. As suggested by Faye Halpern’s study of the rhetoric used in texts such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, sentimentality forsakes neutrality in favor of foregrounding the audience’s role in a narrative (52). McGregor employs sentimentality in *JA* through a combination of rhetorical techniques, including his appeals to an Orientalist Africa that juxtaposes itself as “Other” to Western readers; utilizing flashbacks that attempt to heighten the consequences of previous writers’ contributions to the Black Panther canon; and, relying on images of Black pain and trauma to direct readers to sympathize with T’Challa. McGregor’s use of sentimentality in portrayals of Killmonger may not exhaust the depictions of sentimentality in *JA*, yet an understanding of how sentimentality impacts Killmonger’s characterization proves an effective example of McGregor’s inability to transcend constraints of the white liberal imagination.

An understanding of events relayed in Lee and Kirby’s *FF #53* help foreground how McGregor’s decision to sentimentalize Killmonger through a backstory that revises the Black Panther canon exemplifies the problematic nature of McGregor’s contributions to *Black Panther Volume 1*. A pivotal sequence of events in *FF #53* revolves around a narrative that T’Challa reveals to the Fantastic Four regarding how his father, T’Chaka, was killed by Ulysses Klaw for refusing to relinquish Wakanda’s vibranium to Klaw’s forces of white colonizers (32). Consequently, even if Lee and Kirby fail to imbue T’Challa with complex characterization, the pair model this backstory on a script that symbolically correlates with innumerable stories of colonization wherein representatives of an outside, white Western nation impose violence on a nation when its inhabitants refuse to submit to those representatives’ will. By following this story arc, Lee and Kirby present readers with a realistic depiction of white colonial aggression. Klaw and his men are responsible for the ensuing violence. However, the character arc McGregor designs for Erik Killmonger contradicts the anti-colonialist messaging coded into T’Challa’s origin by shifting the blame for catalyzing this violence from Klaw onto T’Chaka.

McGregor does not initially frame Killmonger as someone opposed to T’Chaka. Making his debut appearance in McGregor’s first Black Panther story, *JA #6*, McGregor gradually transforms Killmonger from a revolutionary vying for control of Wakanda through civil war into a colonialist sympathizer motivated by a desire for power rather than the traumas he would have undergone as a result of Klaw’s failed attempt to conquer Wakanda. Sentimentality complicates McGregor’s development of Killmonger as McGregor attempts to use this expanded narrative to make readers sympathize with Killmonger. Consequently, McGregor implicitly asks readers to ignore the roles that white colonizers play in initiating Killmonger’s character arc and to accept the possibility that T’Chaka’s decision to refuse Klaw’s attempts at colonization was not in the best interests of the Wakandan people.

McGregor revises the Black Panther canon with each addition he makes to Killmonger’s backstory. Killmonger’s backstory in *JA #7*, for example, directly revises the canon from *FF #53*. In McGregor’s new version of events, Ulysses Klaw kidnaps Killmonger—known then as “N’Jadaka”—during his conflict with Wakanda. For reasons neither Killmonger nor McGre-

¹¹ Killmonger qtd in *JA #6*, p. 57.

gor explain, Klaw brings Killmonger and his other hostages to American shores, where Killmonger orchestrates his escape (70). The subsequent issue, *JA* #8, revises this canon further, revealing that after N’Jadaka adopts the name Erik Killmonger, he attends an American university. Here Killmonger recruits Venomm—a white man immune to snake venom and disfigured by acid high school bullies threw on his face, not the Spider-Man villain with a similar name—to join his cause, the conquering of Killmonger’s homeland. In this flashback, Killmonger remarks, “One day, Horatio [Venomm’s real name], I will take you to a place beyond your imagination—and we will take that place by force—and make it ours!” (87).

The sentimentality that McGregor encodes into Killmonger’s speech reveals that Killmonger is not the revolutionary suggested by T’Challa and other characters. Killmonger speaks of Wakanda, not as a homeland—a place where he lived until he was forcibly abducted—nor does he portray Wakanda as a nation of high-tech people with varied professions, detailed family histories, and cultures of its own. Rather, Killmonger speaks of his homeland as an outsider, as if he were a white colonist like Klaw rather than a Black diasporic subject. Yet, McGregor conceals Killmonger’s exact motive for conquering Wakanda until *JA* #16, which completes the revision of Killmonger from revolutionary to colonialist sympathizer while McGregor seemingly ignores the implications of his narrative choice.

The sentimentality in Killmonger’s characterization in *JA* #16, specifically, reveals McGregor’s inattention to how his revisions to the Black Panther canon enables readers to disengage from the real history of white Western colonizers in Africa. By characterizing Killmonger as someone who “always blamed that whole scene where he was kidnapped by Klaw’s men on... T’Challa’s old man” (226), the catalyst for Killmonger’s ascension into villainy stems from T’Chaka refusal to let Klaw colonize Wakanda. That Killmonger’s parents were killed by white Westerners who also displaced him from his homeland is irrelevant. Furthermore, although Killmonger’s arc may signify a reciprocity of Western violence that commonly immerses in nations where colonialism occurs—wherein colonialism is, as Frantz Fanon notes, “violence in its natural state” that “only yield[s] to greater violence” (61)—the absence of an explicit postcolonial narrative regarding Killmonger’s backstory supporting such a Fanonian interpretation, paired with McGregor’s sentimentality, suggests that any connection undergirding the importance of the reciprocity of postcolonial violence in *JA* is merely coincidental.

Killmonger’s characterization supports the interpretation that Klaw, regardless of his defeat by T’Challa with the Fantastic Four, bears no responsibility for catalyzing the violence that transforms Killmonger into a villain. Killmonger’s colonialist motivation for returning to Wakanda and his inability to deconstruct how colonialism catalyzes conflict in his life suggest that the character is implicitly designed for a white readership, one that is more interested in seeing Blackness represented on the page than seeing portrayals of Blackness that challenge the latent white supremacy informing many Western understandings of history and Western colonial projects. The Killmonger of the *JA* stories implicitly pardons the West for injustices imposed upon Africa as consequences of white colonialisms. The Killmonger of the *JA* stories does not explicitly challenge any conceptions of the status quo undergirded by white Western standards.

**“Made of Flesh and Blood”¹² —
McGregor’s Appropriation of Black Pain**

Any exploration of sentimentality in *Black Panther Vol. 1* is seemingly incomplete without at least some space dedicated to how McGregor over-utilizes Black bodies to convey his narratives’ stakes. Like McGregor’s reliance on Orientalism and inattention to the consequences of his narrative decisions as regards Killmonger’s character development, the problematic implications of how McGregor utilizes the wounded Black body in the “Panther’s Rage” and “Panther vs. the Klan” suggest that McGregor appropriates Black pain in *JA* to satiate a white gaze, as if McGregor knows no other way to generate sympathy for T’Challa across his exploits. Violence towards Black bodies in the “Panther’s Rage” arc usually manifests on the pages through the gradual destruction of T’Challa’s costume. The earliest *JA* Black Panther stories make sparing use of this technique. Though *JA* #6 features Killmonger’s pet cheetah Preyy clawing at T’Challa’s chest, the scratches are minor and the tears are featured in few panels (58). McGregor does not utilize this trope again until *JA* #10, when T’Challa fights a gigantic crocodilian for reasons McGregor never specifies. While T’Challa’s costume appears intact throughout the fight, readers observe gash-like tears in T’Challa’s costume that run along both biceps and near his knees in a panel where T’Challa reflects on “Killmonger the magnificent rebel,” matching the vulnerability T’Challa presents in his dialogue (116). These moments do not feel exploitative in so much as McGregor uses this technique sparingly.

The sentimentality associated with McGregor’s destruction of T’Challa’s costume, however, begins to feel exploitative two issues later. *JA* #12-5, as well as #17-8, utilize the shredding of T’Challa’s costume to generate empathy for the character and to amplify the tension present in *JA*’s fight scenes, with each issue seeking to outdo the damage done in the last one. As is the case with Orientalism in this arc, McGregor’s usage of this approach reaches the point of parody towards the arc’s conclusion. After Killmonger’s grieving lover, Madam Slay, chains T’Challa to a pair of cheetahs as revenge for Killmonger’s death (274)—even though a young child, Kantu, is the person who kills Killmonger, not T’Challa—T’Challa’s costume is torn until all that remains are a half-mask, gloves, boots, and loin-cloth (242, 256).

The “Panther vs. the Klan” arc also utilizes sentimentality associated with the pain imposed onto Black bodies that comes across as exploitative. In perhaps the most iconic panel from this arc, *JA* #21 opens with T’Challa on a burning crucifix, paired with narration that asserts, “He is not a symbolic Christ! Forget about turning his flesh and blood into some esoteric allusion to the persecution of contemporary man. This is the Black Panther... And he is made of flesh and blood, and the flames which consume the cross and his body prove his humanity” (315). Rather than embrace a form of long-standing symbolism in Black liberatory traditions that draws upon parallels between Black suffering and the crucifixion of Jesus (e.g. Cone xii-iv, King 136), McGregor uses his prose to accent the horror in this imagery, drawing the violence across almost six pages, until T’Challa manages to free the cross from the ground and extinguish his burning body in a nearby swamp (320). Thus, McGregor’s use of sentimentality presents the scene as a moment about Black pain more than it is a scene trying to convince readers about the evils of white supremacy. This moment is anomalous; still, the moment betrays the majority of the “Panther vs. the Klan” arc, yet McGregor’s portrayal of T’Challa in this moment reveals that even when McGregor is at his most explicitly anti-racist, his messaging remains

¹²McGregor, *JA* #21 315.

problematic.

McGregor's overemphasis on T'Challa's suffering not only directs readers' attentions away from the arc's social justice commentary; McGregor's approach reveals *JA*'s intended audience implicitly consists of white readers—not people of color who have historical experiences with traumas (like the ones McGregor more effectively explores in *JA* #23). Arguably, many Black readers do not need to see intense images of Black pain to understand *JA*'s stakes, yet McGregor chooses to cater to an implicitly white gaze nonetheless. “The Panther vs. the Klan” may contain more overtly progressive commentary than “Panther’s Rage,” yet the former is just as oriented towards white subjectivities.

“A very definitive thrill of virtue”¹³ —

The Significance of the White Liberal Imagination in *Jungle Action*

In analyzing the white liberal imagination's impact on McGregor's contributions to *Black Panther Volume 1*, this article has approached *JA* as a protest novel rather than as a series of comics or graphic novels in order to contextualize *JA*'s limitations rather than simply praise its comparative successes that emerge when McGregor's work is analyzed alongside other works from the era. Nonetheless, McGregor's *JA* may not be a conventional protest novel, yet McGregor's reliance on sentimentalism and Orientalism renders *JA* susceptible to flaws inherent to the protest novel genre. As Baldwin notes in his infamous critique of Harriet Beecher-Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in “Everybody's Protest Novel,”

The ‘protest’ novel... is an accepted and comforting aspect of the American scene, ramifying whatever framework we believe to be so necessary. Whether unsettling questions are raised are evanescent, titillating; remote for this has nothing to do with us, it is safely ensconced in the social arena, where, indeed, it has nothing to do with anyone, so that finally we receive a very definitive thrill of virtue from the fact we are reading such a book at all. (15)

What undermines the protest novel's abilities to make sustainable change is that it—the protest novel—enables readers to disengage themselves from the social systems that shape our present reality and allows them to associate the act of feeling empathy towards those who experience oppression without the reader feeling a compulsion to change the systems initially responsible for the oppression. McGregor may prompt *JA* readers to envision progressive ideas—such as a comic book with a predominately Black cast or proactive readers who take action to bring about social change—but white liberalism, with its implicit valuing of white subjectivity and personhood over that of non-white peoples, injects a distance into McGregor's narratives that inhibits the readers abilities to fully challenge white supremacy. The presence of Orientalism alone calls attention to how *JA* continues to serve a white Western status quo, even if elements continue to challenge white reader's subjectivities. McGregor's contributions to *Black Panther Volume 1* may appear more liberal than contributions made by Lee, Kirby, and Thomas, yet for all the positive aims McGregor achieves with this series, *JA* makes a social justice impact at

¹³Baldwin 15.

the expense of Black reader's subjectivities.

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“For Noble Britons Sprong From Trojans Bold”: *Omeros*, Mimicry, and New Troy

By Natalie Whitaker

Abstract: Derek Walcott’s twentieth-century poem *Omeros* melds multi-layered mimicry with subtle references to the medieval English myth of “New Troy,” providing a complex example of multicultural hybridity that undermines and deconstructs a notion of imperial right that has been part of English identity for a thousand years. The New Troy myth originated to gain national and imperial authenticity, just like the colonial mimicry of which Homi Bhabha writes. In this article, I review the history of the New Troy myth to show how it is an example of Bhabha’s conceptualization of mimicry and to underscore the ways it has influenced the English imperial mission. I then apply this analysis to the three distinct narrative threads in *Omeros* that reflect various levels of mimicry as part of developing the identities of individual characters and the post-colonial Caribbean island of St. Lucia.

In Derek Walcott’s twentieth-century poem, *Omeros*, there are three distinct threads that reflect various levels of mimicry.¹ These are the *Iliad* inspired love triangle of Helen, Achille, and Hector, which is also an allegory for the struggle over the land; the very English Major Plunkett and his quest to give Helen/St. Helena/the Caribbean a history; and, the journey of Walcott-the-poet to understand the heritage of his people within the complexities of English empire and colonialism, and to apply this knowledge to tell his people’s story. Throughout the text there are allusions to the *Iliad* and the ancient city of Troy; some references are more obvious than others, such as the vocabulary that is at times distinctly Ancient Greek, and the references to horses on the beach that provoke images of clashing equestrians and wooden horses filled with men. However, a subtler reference within Walcott’s text is the medieval English belief that Britain was founded by the Trojans, a myth based on notions of English exceptionalism and right to imperial rule. Myths such as these that encouraged imperialism and colonization as an inherited right and duty, fed and evolved into the monstrosity of European driven white supremacy that is still battled across the globe today. In order to better combat white

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¹ Walcott openly discusses mimicry in a 1974 essay where he argues that culture is mimicry and celebrates mimicry as “‘an act of imagination’ which in the Caribbean has produced cultural forms that have originated in imitation but ended in invention” (Döring 193). Walcott writes in his essay “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry”: “Once the meridian of European civilization has been crossed... we have entered a mirror where there can only be simulations of self-discovery.... The Old World, whether it is represented by the light of Europe or of Asia or of Africa,

supremacy and racism, we must acknowledge and analyze these remnants of damaging medieval ideologies and medievalisms that have parasitically persisted in western culture. The New Troy myth originated to achieve national and imperial authenticity, just like the colonial mimicry of which Homi Bhabha writes. In this article, I will first review the history of the New Troy myth to show how it is an example of Bhabha's conceptualization of mimicry and to underscore the ways it has influenced the English imperial mission. Then, I apply this analysis to the three distinct narrative threads in *Omeros* that reflect various levels of mimicry as part of developing the identities of both individual characters and the post-colonial Caribbean island of St. Lucia. I argue in this article that Derek Walcott's twentieth-century poem *Omeros* melds multi-layered mimicry with subtle references to the medieval English myth of "New Troy," providing a complex example of multicultural hybridity that undermines and deconstructs a notion of imperial right that has been part of English identity for a thousand years.

According to Homi Bhabha, mimicry is a tool by which colonial and imperial authorities attempt to maintain control over their colonized subjects. Frequently, colonial authorities encouraged the colonized to imitate aspects of their hegemonic power, such as in manners and law; however, although this mimicry enabled the colonizers to assert their authority over the colonized, it also disrupted that power. In his essay, "Of Mimicry and Man," Bhabha states: "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other; as a subject of difference that is *almost the same but not quite*" (Bhabha 266). For English colonizers, the non-English colonized can never be English, only Anglicized, mimicry forcing an impassable chasm between the colonial authority and the colonized. For some of the non-English colonized, there is a desire to become English through mimicking the host country, but the mimicker will never be considered "authentically" English because mimicry grants power only to one side. For most of the non-English colonized, therefore, mimicry creates a gap between being English and being Anglicized, and this rupture subversively disrupts both colonial power and authority. Bhabha writes: "Mimicry does not merely destroy narcissistic authority throughout the repetitious slippage of difference... [but also] necessarily raises the question of the authorization of colonial representation" (270). So, although the colonized cannot overturn the power of the colonizer, he/she can subvert it via the "slippage" that mimicry provides. In *Omeros*, Walcott not only shows how colonized people can mimic hegemonic power in an attempt to gain some form of authenticity, but he also reveals how they may disrupt that power and question colonial authority and the foundation of imperial philosophies. In what follows, I analyze how Walcott accomplishes the first through his use of the mimicry of the *Iliad*; and, the second through his subtle allusions to the medieval English myth of New Troy. His references to England as New Troy suggest that England's desperate claims to imperial authority can only be realized through her mimicking of the Trojan myth, a myth grounded in the premise that the English were once a conquered, migrant, people.

Before examining the three interwoven threads in *Omeros*, it is helpful to outline some of the literary traditions of New Troy in England from the twelfth through the seventeenth centuries. The earliest example of this myth is in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*. The author is often considered anonymous, although Nennius, a Welsh monk, may have been the author. Here, there is a brief mention of Brutus, as the descendent

is the rhythm by which we remember. What we have carried over... is language. When language itself is condemned as mimicry, then the condition is hopeless and men are no more than jackdaws, parrots, myna birds, apes" (6-7).

of Aeneas and Lavinia (from Virgil's *Aeneid*), causing the English to be descended from both the Greeks and Romans. It is in the eleventh century that we have the popular early medieval reading of the New Troy myth in the Latin history of the Kings of England, the *Historia Regum* by Geoffrey of Monmouth. In this text Geoffrey writes a story that places England within the imperial tradition as an inheritor of the Roman Empire through Brutus, who is the grandson of the Trojan hero of Virgil's first-century heroic poem, *Aeneid*, and subsequently the namesake of Britain. During Brutus' travels he lands on an island where there is a temple of Diana. Here, he receives from the goddess Diana herself the *translatio imperii*—the transfer of empire—a medieval belief that right to empire is historically transferred from one entity to another. After this, Brutus and some Trojan refugees he has come across, and has become the leader of, travel to England, where he founds a city (later to become London) on the banks of the Thames and calls it "New Troy" (53-71). Geoffrey of Monmouth's work was popular and widely received, with new interpretations reiterating this tradition in Wace's French *Roman de Brut* only a generation later and in the late twelfth- and early thirteenth-centuries, Layamon's vernacular Middle English *Brut*.

The tradition of New Troy continues in later centuries, such as in *Saint Erkenwald*, a late fourteenth-century miracle tale. This poem, set in the seventh century, tells of how a dead pagan is unearthed from an ancient temple of Diana when a new Christian church was being built (there is a myth that St. Paul's Cathedral was actually built over a temple of Diana). The Christian bishop of London weeps over this pagan, and his tears not only save him from hell but also assert the church and London's control over England's pagan past. In the beginning, the poem states:

Now þat London is neuenyd – hatte þe New Troie–
 Þe metropol and þe mayster-toun hit evermore has bene
 [Now that London is of note – it had been called New Troy–
 The metropolis and the master-town it evermore has been] (25-6)

According to this passage, London, framed in the imperial context of New Troy and founded by the inheritors of the Trojan and Roman Empires, has inherited not only the position of being a great city, but also the responsibility of rewriting history by making converts out of pagans. We see this same ideology extended in the imperial push of nineteenth-century England and the racist concept of the "white-man's burden:" the idea that the superior white man has a duty to "save" the inferior, marginalized, and colonized people of color.²

At the same time that *Saint Erkenwald* was written, there was an historical and political movement to rename the city of London "New Troy," or "Little Troy," which was most likely an attempt to claim the mythological and imperial rights of England. In my view, the *translatio imperii* represented the relationship between ancient Troy and New Troy in terms of mimicry. As social historian Elizabeth J. Bellamy points out, "it represses and flees from the destruction of Troy, even as it nostalgically yearns to recuperate the tragic *Troiana fortuna* into a narcissistic revision of imperial 'wholeness'" (34). Sylvia Federico builds on this idea when she argues that the idea of New Troy is feminized as a form of otherness: "When these two London writers called their city a feminine New Troy, they were constructing an idea of the city and of the men in it—an ideology of masculine "self-knowledge and truth" based on feminine Otherness which, when controlled, could produce politically motivated exemplary or deviant identities" (129).

² Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands" (1899) expresses this concept.

One of the identities of New Troy is glorious, namely, the *translatio imperii*; the other, foreshadows destruction due to lust and sin. When Nicholas Brembre, London's mayor, was hanged in 1388, one of his crimes was that he wanted to rename London "Little Troy" which, according to the Lord Appellants sentencing him, was traitorous and promoted "sexual treachery" (Federico 123). It is this conflicted and ambivalent ideology of empire which, I would argue, appears throughout *Omeros*, especially in Walcott's representation of Helen as both the land and a woman, who is the object of both lust and desire, and who produces both "exemplary or deviant" behaviors in others. Walcott's use of a female figure to personify this tradition of connecting imperial and moral issues is not new but a part of the cycle of mimicry that started as far back as the Roman Empire. During the Roman Empire's colonization of England, they used the goddess Britannia to symbolize their subjugation of Britain. In the seventeenth century, the British began to use Britannia as a national symbol. When Queen Victoria came to the throne in the 1830s, this feminine symbolism had even more power—as Britannia was often depicted with Victoria's features. The goddess Britannia became a national symbol tied to the imperial rise of the British Empire. In addition, just as it has been feared that renaming London as New Troy would encourage a moral deviancy and Helen is depicted as influencing the moral responses of those around her, Britannia has "represented [not only] the English nation-state but [also] the British national character" (Matthews 814-19).

Britannia was first used during the reign of Elizabeth I, in 1572, and is representative of the continued use of neo-classical ideals and symbols that marked English national pride and imperialism. A little later in the sixteenth-century, William Shakespeare reiterates the fourteenth-century notion of empire as both exemplary and deviant in his historical play *Richard II* (1595). Shakespeare's play is only concerned with the last two years of Richard's reign, the downfall of Richard II, which was, in Shakespeare's conception, brought on by Richard's mismanagement of England (taxation, taking land, misuse of power, and focus on war in Ireland—arguably the first English colony). Toward the end of the play, Richard's wife, Queen Isabel, comes to bid him farewell as he is being led to the tower after he has been deposed, and she says:

But soft, but see, or rather do not see,
My fair rose wither: yet look up, behold,
That you in pity may dissolve to dew,
And wash him fresh again with true-love tears.
Ah, thou, the model where old Troy did stand,
Thou map of honour, thou King Richard's tomb (V.1.7-12)

The reference to Troy in this final act of the play reinforces the loss of Richard's power, the personal loss of the New Troy model under his reign, and his own loss of the *translatio imperii*. As Shakespeare sees it, it must fall to Elizabeth I in the sixteenth century to revive England and turn her into a rising colonial power. Europe had been battling over the rights to divide the world, and England needed to revisit these past mythologies to assert her own imperial rights.

The continuation of the myth in literature begs the question of whether the myth created the empire; did psychological and literary mimicry invite the actualization of empire and the mobilization of the country to colonize? Did the continuation of such a myth affect the consciousness of the nation for 800 years to such a degree that they could view empire as an inheritance and a birthright brought to them from the shores of Troy thousands of years before? And, is this why they considered the imposition of their own

language and customs over other cultures as a gift rather than a burden? In the mid-eighteenth century, England's territory had developed from their early tenebrous colonial holdings to a world-wide empire. In 1735, Jacob Hildebrand wrote his epic poem: *Brutus the Trojan, Founder of the British Empire*. The title alone indicates how the myth of Brutus and Troy continued to be connected to the success, power, and rise of London and the concept of the British Empire. The hundred-page epic poem recalls the Virgilian tradition, opening with:

I sing the Founder of the British Throne
Renowned Brutus, of the Race of Troy.
Say, Muse what Toils he bore, e'er he attain'd
To fix the lofting Seat of Albion's Kings. (1)

The first person narration immediately brings attention to the authority of the author through its mimicry of Virgil's *Aeneid*, whose opening lines are: "I sing of arms and the man of Troy,.... Muse, let the memories spill through me" (I.1-8). The introduction to Hildebrand's poem sets up this mimicry and, while mentioning the possibility that Brutus' existence could be disputed, nevertheless rejects this idea because he is so well-known universally (ix). Hildebrand uses mimicry to integrate Brutus' story into the framework of the history of England.

Later in Hildebrand's poem are references to England's connections to Diana, and decrees of fate, which Hildebrand uses to justify England's continuing western expansion of England into the Atlantic. Not only do these references link back to the myth of New Troy, but they also showcase England's attitude toward oceanic exploration:

By Dian[a] led, and urg'd by Fate's Decrees,
The Western World impatient to explore,
They plough their Way thro' the caerulean Plain.
Trembling beneath the Weight old Ocean foams (71)

The use of "impatient" and "explore" in the second line hints at the idea that the English have the right to own and even trespass upon unknown western lands under the guise of discovery. In the third line, the uses of "plough" and "plain" suggest the English can seize and own the land through farming and husbandry, occupations that belong to landowners. The references to cerulean blue water and the great ocean foams point to contemporary depictions of the Atlantic and Caribbean, which would, at that time, have been regarded as available for English and Europeans to explore and colonize. In the first book of *Omeros* there are references to a type of bird, a "Swift," which, I believe, symbolizes the colonized people of the Caribbean, that travels over a similar blue, foaming ocean, and yet is timorous: "Then he saw the swift crossing the cloud-surf, a small thing, far from its home, confused by the waves of blue hills" (6). So, while the colonized people of the Caribbean are, in Walcott's twentieth-century depiction, apprehensive about the power of the waves and what they bring, potential European colonizers view the ocean, in Hildebrand's eighteenth-century depiction, with confidence and the surety of conquest.

During this early-modern colonizing period, there was also a rising interest in antiquities, archaeology, mythology and folklore, and national monuments that began in the eighteenth century. These interests helped to buoy the continuance of the New Troy myth and to maintain its popularity during the colonial and imperial periods. In 1720, John Strype hypothesized that

³The London Stone is a historic landmark in London. It is unknown what the original purpose of the stone was, but it has been speculated upon and written of as the "London Stone" since the twelfth-century. A study in the late twentieth-century revealed the stone is limestone that was brought to London from Rutland, a district north of London in the middle counties of England, most likely during the Roman or Saxon periods (Merrifield 123-124).

the London Stone³ had been a “heathen” monument. This idea, along with Hildenbrand’s epic poem, influenced William Blake’s early nineteenth-century poem *Jerusalem*. In this poem, Blake references the London Stone twice. He writes that the London druids’ victims “groan’d aloud on London Stone” (33) and “in Stone-henge [and] on London Stone [and] in the Oak Groves of Malden, I have Slain him in my Sleep with the Knife of the Druid” (23-25). This, in turn, may have influenced E.O. Gordon’s theory, published in his 1914 text, *Prehistoric London*, that Brutus’ temple had been a stone circle (similar to Stonehenge) with the London Stone as a heel stone (a stone set outside of a circle for alignment purposes). In the mid-nineteenth century, this stone—known as the London Stone—was claimed to be a part of the original Trojan palladium. In the 1850s, Reverend R.W. Morgan, in his work *The British Kymry: or Britons of Cambria*, claims that the London Stone is transported by Brutus from Italy and is a part of the original Trojan Palladium. He further argues that Brutus would have placed it in Diana’s temple, which is the original, and current, location of the Tower of London and that “on it [the London Stone] the British kings [are] sworn to observe the Usages of Britain” (81). Furthermore, belief suggests that as long as the stone remains in its original location:

New Troy, or London, would continue to increase in wealth and power; with its disappearance, they would decrease and finally disappear. Faiths of this description were moral forces on the minds of our ancestors, impelling them sometimes to the wildest, sometimes to the sublimest achievements. The faith that the British Troy, or London, was destined to sway a wider Empire than either the Asiatic or Italian Troy (Home), had swayed, is one of the most ancient Traditions.... (81-82)

Here Morgan asserts that it is this myth of London (and therefore England) as a New Troy that has encouraged her imperial growth. Morgan provides no evidence to support his claims; however, these claims are reflective of the strength of the New Troy myth and the continuing belief of England’s destiny to be an Empire, and moral responsibility to colonize and subjugate other people.

From Nennius’ *Historia Brittonum* in the ninth century through to the “scientific” texts on monuments and mounds in the early twentieth century, this myth of New Troy has been infused throughout English society. This myth provides one of the philosophical pillars for England’s belief that they have a right to imperial rule, a belief that helped push the empire’s borders further and further out, and provides some of the ideological framework for England to colonize lands and subjugate people.⁴ As my summary of the New Troy myth indicates, the English created what I would call a “cycle of mimicry,” such that their colonial fantasies mimicked the imperial ideologies of ancient Troy, which may have led to the normalization of mimicry and, in turn, guided the mimicry in their own colonies. What is further interesting is how, through his own multi-layered mimicry, Walcott, in *Omeros*, reflects the paradoxes and hypocrisies of England’s mimicry of Troy, and thereby subverts it. In doing so, he empowers his own people. In the three narrative threads of *Omeros*, Walcott builds on this literary and cultural heritage of mimicry, and

⁴Of course, there were other instigators to these beliefs, such as church mandates through the Holy Roman Empire, Catholic Church, and the Anglican Church along with commercial and other interests. I am simply arguing that this myth is one, often overlooked and forgotten, component to the foundations of English imperial beliefs.

calls attention to its brutality and hypocrisy.

In *Omeros*, the first level of mimicry is the most transparent: the love triangle of Helen, the nearly silent beauty who causes so much disruption between the warring fishermen, Achilles and Hector. Helen represents not only a Caribbean version of the Greek Helen, whose love-affair started the Trojan war, but also the island, which was known as Helen (St. Helena), and the personification of contestable land, as warred over by the British and French (it changed hands thirteen times in very few years). Even in critical literature of the poem: Helen is distant. She is desired, viewed, objectified, the cause of analysis for others but not herself. She always remains outside the psychological games.⁵ In the poem, whether in the personification of land or a woman, Helen is primarily objectified and sexualized. She is even objectified in an animalistic sense, as she is often referred to as a “panther”:

[I] saw, through the caging wires of the noon sky,
A beach with its padding panther; now the mirage
dissolved to a woman with a madras head-tie,
but the head proud, although it was looking for work.

I felt like standing in homage to a beauty
that left, like a ship, widening eyes in its wake.
“Who the hell is that?” a tourist near my table
asked a waitress. The waitress said, “She? She too proud!” (23)

Here we see not only how she is referred to as a panther, but also the conflict between her reality and how she is objectified by those around her. She does not tell her own story, instead she is represented within the gazes of three observers—all of whom view her in sexual terms. The first observer, Walcott-the-poet, sees her in the first lines as a panther, and then as an object (a ship), removing her humanity, and then removing her mental capacity and agency as a living, breathing creature. The second observer is a tourist, who exhibits a tone of awe or lust when he asks who Helen is; the waitress (the third observer) then replies in a judgmental tone that implies jealousy of Helen’s beauty. But in these lines, Walcott hints at the realities of Helen: she is simply a young woman looking for a job. The initial line of this quote hints more to the truth of the situation; she exists in a cage made by the judgment and assumptions of those around her. We only get a quick glimpse of her truth later, and once again through the eyes of another, Achilles:

[...] He saw how she wished
for a peace beyond her beauty, past the tireless
quarrel over a face that was not her own fault
any more than the full moon’s grace sailing dark trees [...] (115)

⁵ For example, in *Epic of the Dispossessed*, Robert Hamner refers to Helen, her existence and affect, but does not delve deeply into her own psyche as he does with those around her. In his chapter “The Battle over Helen” Major Plunkett, Achilles, and Hector are all discussed and psychoanalyzed in their relationship to Helen, but Helen remains untouched (64-72). In Paul Breslin’s chapter on *Omeros* in *Nobody’s Nation*, he mentions Helen only in how she is the focus of Plunkett’s thwarted ennobling efforts and Walcott’s own claim that the last third of the book is a “total refutation of the efforts made by two characters.” Major Plunkett and the narrator (Walcott admits that you can view the narrator as himself if you like). The efforts are to ennoble the state of Helen, whether that be Helen the woman or Helen the island, yet, “the answer in terms of history, the answer in terms of literature –is that the woman doesn’t need it” (242). As Walcott himself puts it, Helen is only a “shadow” (*Omeros*, 17), which may be how she is able to elude the critique of the critics.

Helen never voices her own thoughts on what it is like to be born beautiful. Moreover, she has no control over the gaze of others or their assumptions and interpretations of her actions. They write a story of her in their mind and mythologize her, but none of these stories are based on who she actually is. In fact, the reader never really gets to know Helen; we primarily see her through the gaze of others, an issue feminists have noted of various postcolonial texts, which “offer[s] the ‘monolithic third world woman’ as the tautological name of a need to be spoken for” (Morris 3).⁶ And this issue with Helen depicts a problem with mimicry and myth, where the real and authentic body, whether human or land, becomes lost, hidden, and silenced under layers of others.

Helen has very little to say for herself, one way or the other. Walcott-the-poet even acknowledges that his “mimicked” Helen cannot ever be a real person when he states:

Names are not oars
That have to be laid side by side, nor are legends;
Slowly the foaming clouds have forgotten ours.
You were never in Troy, ...
... These Helens are different creatures
one marble, one ebony. (*Omeros* 312-13)

These lines confront the issues of the myth and legends that are part of this cycle of mimicry. Since the medieval period, England had encouraged the myth of Troy as part of their imperial right to rule, laying these legends and names “side by side” through mimicry, first by mimicking the Trojans and then by encouraging the same form of mimicking onto their own colonists, until the “clouds” of mimicry have caused them to forget their own legends. Part of what is implied in this quotation is that while Achille’s dream vision and journey to Africa breaks the colonial power over him by forcing him to acknowledge the importance of his own heritage; Helen’s real identity has been lost through the layers of mimicry. Even when she does speak, she shows no interest in knowing more about where her name comes from or about her history. In fact, the men around her are often interpreting her actions and placing their thoughts and desires on her, and in that sense colonizing her body and thoughts. For example, when Helen leaves Achille and moves in with Hector, she leaves a hairpin in a soap dish. Achille interprets her action as a sign that she will return. Walcott can be faulted for not giving Helen more of a voice or identity in the epic, arguably he under-develops her character as a way of showing the cycle of mimicry: how England has mimicked the Trojans, claims their imperial heritage as their own, and then forces those they have subsequently colonized to mimic their own behavior, but to do so in a way that causes them to forget their own identities.⁷ Helen, with her silences and cultural ignorance, is Walcott’s way of showing how England’s cycle of mimicry suppresses cultural heritage and voice.

The second thread in *Omeros* involves Major Plunkett. Plunkett’s complexities make for varying interpretations of who he is and his symbology. In Joseph Farrell’s essay arguing that *Omeros* is a part of the epic tradition, but an evolved epic that is between the European and African traditions, he argues that Plunkett’s obsession with his paternity

⁶ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, edited by Rosalind Morris. And also, especially dialogues surrounding Spivak’s sentence “white men are saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak 48-49).

⁷ Colonial education systems obliterated the cultural heritage of slaves by encouraging Caribbean people to

is a motif that ties the story to the European epic tradition while also representing the contemporary struggle of a multi-cultural world where ancestry is fragmented and people must “piece together fragments of a broken past in order to make sense of their existence and experiences” (287). Plunkett’s characterization and paternity take the form of his grief over a lack of heirs and his irrational obsession with a past midshipman named Plunkett, who also died without an heir. Plunkett both imagines this 200-year-old midshipman as an ancestor and as a son, cyclically placing himself into this history and tradition (286). Several critics remark on how Plunkett is representative of part of Walcott’s identity. Farrell’s essay comments on how, like Plunkett’s illogical cyclical ancestry with the midshipman Plunkett, Walcott’s narrator “stands in a similarly ambiguous relationship to his father, who died at an age younger than that of the narrator, who thus figures himself as “older” than his father as he tells the story of *Omeros*” (286). Robert D. Hamner in *Epic of the Dispossessed* similarly reflects on the connections between Plunkett and Walcott. First, that their inspiration to write comes from the same place, “the love of your own people,” which takes the form of the disembodied geographical Helen as a “tribute to St. Lucia, their ‘Helen of the West Indies’” (4). Second, and related to that latter point, the relation between Walcott and Plunkett comes together to the point that they both have destroyed Helen through their work:

Two-thirds of the way through their concerted efforts to immortalize Helen, both Walcott and Plunkett discover a fatal error in their project. Heretofore, their veneration of Helen has born the seed of self-aggrandizement. The essence of the woman diminishes as she is transformed into the object of their hegemonic designs. (7)

Plunkett is a paradox of imperial guilt coupled with historical mimicry. This paradox is exemplified in his inappropriate desires for Helen and his presumptuous belief that he can give her a history. As Bhabha suggests, colonizers believed that they could provide manners and “a sense of personal identity as we know it” to those they colonized (267); similarly, Plunkett believes that he can give Helen a history and an identity.

However, Plunkett has a hard time reconciling himself to the fact that England’s history is itself a paradox of mimicked medieval myths. Plunkett recognizes that “Empire was ebbing” but he conflates classical symbolism and imagery with colonial markers when he convinces himself that its death is similar to the medieval concept of *memento mori* (30). *Memento mori* (“remembering to die” or “to remember that you have to die”) is a medieval philosophy that embraces the idea that one needs to reflect on mortality and that earthly goods are transient. Plunkett, however, applies this idea to the transience of empire. This thought process triggers Plunkett’s attempt to give Helen a history. In Book X, he reflects:

... Her village was Troy,
its smoke obscuring soldiers fallen in battle.
... for her Gaul and Briton
had mounted fort and redoubt... (31)

Walcott/Plunkett’s reflections about Troy are a mimicry of sorts because they create mirrors

forget their own heritage and adopt the colonizer’s heritage through reading the western canon. Although the colonial education system was a more violent and invasive system, the results of this technique are similar to that of the medieval period’s use of the *Aeneid* as a primary educational text.

⁸ In Jahan Ramazani’s critical work on cultural hybridity in literature, the chapter on *Omeros* notes that Walcott’s

that reflect, for the reader, the cycle of imperial England/New Troy, its death and rebirth.⁸ When Plunkett refers to the eighteenth-century battles for the island, he does so by using medieval terminology: Gaul for France and Briton for Britain. This use of language implies that Plunkett/Walcott understands the myths as relates Brutus and his nomadic Trojans and the founding of settlements in France and England, respectively. Both claimed rights to those regions through mythological connections to Rome and Troy, as described in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Virgil's heroic poem about the founding of Rome by the Trojans was, after all, a beloved text for the medieval period.

Plunkett attempts to find Helen's history in the English "net of myths" (95) and is surprised when none of the historians he reads "noticed the Homeric repetition of details, their prophecy" (96). Plunkett tries to find Helen's history in English history, and in so doing tries to force her into the Homeric tradition, a tradition that had been grafted onto England through literary mimicry of a Trojan inheritance. However, there are points where Plunkett seems frustrated with London for thinking too much of herself, even cancelling a cruise to England because of it, noting how "London unnerved him" because of its "self-rapt adoration" (253). Similarly, when Walcott-the-poet visits London, he notes: "London rustled with Pride" (195). Both commentaries reflect the same hubris seen in the fourteenth-century *Saint Erkenwald* lines that call London a "Master Town" and a "Metropolis." Through Plunkett's historical research and thoughts on the repetition of history, there is a recognition and then disruption of the line of foundational imperial myths, from Troy to Rome to England, that have led to the belief in English exceptionalism and the right to colonial control through mimicry.

The final thread completes the cycle of mimicry in *Omeros*. In the characterization of Walcott-the-poet's personal journey, he must come to terms with his own use of the colonizer's language. In the first book we watch as Walcott-the-poet meets his dead father through a form of katabasis much like Aeneas' journey to the underworld in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Walcott-the-poet's father tells him that he is destined to mimic William Shakespeare, the author who perhaps most epitomizes the Western Canon:

"I was raised in this obscure Caribbean port,
where my bastard father christened me for his shire:
Warwick. The Bard's county. But never felt part

of the foreign machinery known as Literature.
I preferred verse to fame, but I wrote with the heart
of an amateur, It's that Will you inherit."

...

"What was Warwick doing, transplanting Warwickshire?" (68-69)

Clearly, Walcott-the-poet has inherited Shakespeare as these lines suggest, but he also questions why and how the bard /Warwick/Warwickshire has been transplanted into St. Lucia. The 'I' in the lines is Warwick Walcott, Walcott-the-poet's father, and that Warwick is the 'bastard child' raised in the 'obscure port' who passes down the Shakespearean tradition to his son, Derek. This transplanted heritage represents both the poet's racial as well as his poetic lineages: England and West Africa.⁹ Walcott mimics Shakespeare when he switches his meter in Book IV to rhyming couplets in tetrameter:

work "could be said...to remember, repeat, and work through the trauma of Afro-Caribbean history" (69-70). Through both Plunkett and Walcott's search for history they are also working through a cycle of death and rebirth, processing the trauma.

⁹ Derek Walcott was born and died in Saint Lucia (1930-2017). According to Paul Breslin's biographical

Omeros:

House of umbrage,
 house of fear,
 house of multiplying air
 House of memories that grow,
 like shadows out of Allan Poe (IV.III)

Macbeth:

Eye of newt and toe of frog,
 Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
 Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,
 Lizard's leg and owlet's wing (IV.I)

In *Macbeth*, the meter changes starkly only for this scene; in *Omeros*, the meter changes sharply only for this chapter. As we can see in the above comparison between the lines in *Omeros* and the lines in *Macbeth*, that besides the contents' eerie implications, there are similarities in form and tempo, connecting the witches, in an uncanny way, to Walcott-the-poet's trepidations about his own homecoming after his divorce (173-74). However, what is most interesting in the lines in which Walcott-the-poet meets his father's ghost is the questioning of the name Warwick within the Shakespearean frame. The sixteenth Earl of Warwick, Richard Neville, was made famously infamous in Shakespeare's history play, *Richard III*. This Earl of Warwick was a known traitor who betrayed the king and had to flee England during the War of the Roses in the late fifteenth-century. These lines imply that not only did Walcott inherit Shakespeare, but he also inherited the tarnish of betrayal, as he must be reminded to write about his own people, particularly the poor, female colliers who toil like ants, and do not have a voice.

The character of Walcott-the-poet eventually realizes the depths of his betrayal of his own people. Continuing to mimic without recognition of his own heritage is continuing a form of enslavement even two hundred years after English slavery has been abolished. One of the points of recognition is his statement:

But before you return, you must enter cities
 That open like The World's Classics, in which I dreamt
 I saw my shadow on their flagstones, histories
 That carried me over the bridge of self-contempt. (187)

Since *The World's Classics* are published by Oxford University Press, in invoking them, Walcott-the-poet recognizes how his travels around the various European cities are part of the same slavish attachment to the western canon that characterized his education and writing. Part of this recognition is the realization that these texts teach a self-contempt for his own otherness. Walcott-the-poet finally reclaims the tool of mimicry and the application of western canon and

sketch in *Nobody's Nation*: "Walcott's immediate grandfather—a Dutchman from Saint Martin on his mother's side and an Englishman from Barbados on his father's—were white and relatively wealthy, and his immediate grandmothers primarily of African descent and poor. He was, as he would later put it in his most famous early poem, racially "divided to the vein" (11). Literary critic and scholar Robert D. Hamner notes in *Epic of the Dispossessed* that "*Omeros* builds on Walcott's innate love for St. Lucia. It does not spring suddenly from his pen but is ultimately a culmination of the various influences that have permeated his career from the beginning. . . Undergirding the prosody and the narrative form of *Omeros* is always the controlling factor of Walcott's voice. In fact, he cites his unheroic participation in the action as reason enough to deny that the poem can be an epic. . . authorial intrusions incorporate the poet and his personal life into the poem" (3-7).

literature in a form of meta-mimicry, which he recognizes when he states: “But it was mine to make what I wanted of it, or / what I thought was wanted” (272). This final line is heart breaking: “what I thought was wanted” reflects an insecure desire to please, to make in a way that is desired by another. He seems torn, to make what he wants or to make what he thinks is wanted, to mimic in a way that will be accepted. Walcott’s own denial that *Omeros* is an epic, and his admittance that he “never really read the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*,” may reflect that while he acknowledges mimicry’s power and use, he also wants to take control of it and not feed into a tradition that has expectations of how one *should* mimic, or even should exist (Taplin 213). In the end, Walcott-the-poet fully recognizes the dual faces of mimicry and uses the traditions of the Trojan myths and transfer of imperial power to question the colonial power and to reveal the stories of his people, who are flesh and blood and not just nebulous myth.

Derek Walcott uses mimicry in *Omeros* not only in the traditional, imperial hegemonic form, but also as a way to confront his colonial inheritance. He does so by his references to the western canon, references reflecting the English myth of New Troy. In the three threads of *Omeros* he mimics: first, the *Iliad* and its love triangle, which he complicates further by comparing Helen as a nameless woman against Helen as conquerable land. Second, Walcott uses the character of Major Plunkett to mimic and mock medieval notions of the myth of New Troy and the exceptionalism of England. He complicates those notions by suggesting that Plunkett does seem to understand that there are conflicting notions of cultural identity and by showing how he struggles between the need to release these myths of imperialism and embrace the diversity of difference. Finally, in his third narrative thread, Walcott shows how Walcott-the-poet (a characterization of his own persona) inherits the traditions of the bard, only to recognize how in embracing that tradition he has betrayed his own people, a recognition that can only be dealt with by turning his mimicry on its head. *Omeros* confronts mimicry on many levels, and, in doing so, mirrors and complicates Bhabha’s “double vision” (268). Not only does Walcott utilize the *Iliad* myth in a unique way, but he also shows the effects that the English foundation myth of New Troy, the *translatio imperii*, has had on countries like St. Lucia and its people. Finding and analyzing these entrenched myths of exceptionalism are important in combatting the rise of racist, white supremacist movements and atrocities in western countries. I believe in order to help end these movements and atrocities, we must acknowledge, confront, and untangle medieval ideologies and medievalisms that have persevered, and continue to inform, racist, white supremacist, and inhumane ideologies and actions.

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Lumpen ‘Em All Together: African American Marxist Approaches to Colson Whitehead’s *John Henry Days*

By Tarrell R. Campbell

Abstract: In Colson Whitehead’s *John Henry Days*, the psychological wounds of the novel’s protagonist—J. Sutter—foreshadow the physical wounds that he will experience, ultimately resulting in his death. I examine Sutter’s abhorrence of the American South and locate such psychic scarring in the history of Black bodies in America. As a result of the hoped-for racial progress ushered in by the *Brown* decision, Sutter is represented as an exemplary member of the List. The List functions as a metaphor for the colorblind society suggested by *Brown*. In furthering the desires of those who control the List, Sutter must confront his fears associated with traveling from the North to the South. Geographical location signifies a sense of woundedness and a sense of loss in some African American Marxist literary traditions centered on generative uses of the lumpenproletariat and transience. I examine the costs of such migratory movement within and without the South in *John Henry Days*. For Sutter, the movement South from the North leads to death. I juxtapose Sutter’s transience and death with the lumpen literary schema espoused by Richard Wright, Margaret Walker, and Ralph Ellison. I argue that the the destruction of J. Sutter’s body signifies that the Dream—the myth—of African American full enfranchisement and integration into the fabric of American society remains deferred in many respects. Such an understanding may be instructive in these more recent times when the destruction of Black bodies is routinely disseminated on visual platforms to whet voyeuristic appetites of an American populace whose hunger is seemingly never satisfied. I expand on African American literary traditions as regards generative approaches to and uses of the wounded Black male body highlighting the role of a body under destruction. This article is excerpted from the forthcoming work, *Wounded Brown Masculinities*.

Colson Whitehead is one of the most celebrated contemporary African American male novelists today. And while analyses of literary critics vary as regards the influences of Whitehead’s approach to literary aesthetics and the significance of his fictional works, most critics agree that Whitehead’s aesthetic distance from, and rejection of, the influences of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison account for Whitehead’s welcomed and warm reception within the American public sphere. For example, in *Understanding Colson Whitehead*, Derek Maus suggests that Whitehead’s appeal stems from the fact that he does not write in the protest tradition of Wright or Ellison nor does his writing advocate for a change in the status quo as regards race relations in America. Moreover, Whitehead’s writing is not formulaic like many past African American literatures; his writing, asserts Maus, “develops in idiosyncratic and unpredictable ways” (Maus 1). As one of only two book-length studies on Whitehead, Howard Rambsy II acknowledges that Maus’s work

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greatly extends the discourse on Whitehead and provides a blueprint for future book-length studies on contemporary African American writers. [Maus’s] analyses make us more aware of the *intricacy* of Whitehead’s writing and artistry. Ultimately, *Understanding Colson Whitehead* provides readers with satisfying and thorough interpretations of works by one of our most accomplished contemporary

novelists. (Rambsy 483; emphasis mine)

Still, Rambsy is concerned as regards of Maus's approach to Whitehead. Rambsy observes, and laments, that while

Understanding Colson Whitehead offers many important insights concerning the novelist's compositions...some scholars of African American literature might find fault with the fact that the book does not draw many connections between Whitehead's works and writings by a broad range of writers, including Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Ishmael Reed, Toni Morrison, Charles Johnson, and many others. After all, a major objective of African American literary studies over the last two decades has involved highlighting the *intertextuality* of black literary texts and authors, or, in short, the *existence* of African American expressive traditions...such intertextuality and traditions matter. (Rambsy 483; emphasis mine)

Nevertheless, critics tend to view Whitehead's work in alignment with Maus. William Ramsey refers to Whitehead's literary presence as "a most *dramatic* turn" as regards the "traditional burden... [of]...the black literary imagination," especially with relevance to the South (Ramsey 769; emphasis mine). Most revealingly, Ramón Saldivar argues that Whitehead "signals a radical turn to a postracial era in American literature" (Saldivar 1; emphasis mine). Éva Tettenborn, Peter Collins, and Kimberly Fain all suggest that Whitehead's appeal is centered on his use of "kaleidoscopic vision," which accounts for his fresh approach to literary racial representations of black masculinities, specifically, and his progressive approaches to subject matter throughout his literary works, generally (Tettenborn 272).¹ As regards Whitehead's 2001 novel *John Henry Days*,

¹ According to Keith Clark, in *Black Manhood in James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines, and August Wilson*, "the most notable trend in black men's writing since the 1960s has been the kaleidoscopic vision of authors who focus on male subjects. No longer bound by the discursive shackles of protest...such writers are influenced by the Wright-Ellison tradition while they simultaneously renounce the limiting configurations of subjectivity proffered in earlier fiction" (Clark 128). Tettenborn claims that the use of kaleidoscopic vision by postracial artists often results in "portrayal[s] of black men...[that] avoid emotional investment...in characters...[and] often sound cynical" (Tettenborn 272). While she highlights the positive characteristics and generative literary benefits as regards literary racial representations of black masculinities engendered by kaleidoscopic vision, she also references the inherent iconoclastic nature of kaleidoscopic vision as regards African American literary traditions as reflected in Whitehead's approach to literary aesthetics. She writes, in light of Whitehead's internalization of kaleidoscopic vision, "Whitehead undoubtedly writes in an iconoclastic fashion" (272). Such reasoning seems to be in response to Tettenborn's understanding of the roles, functions, and influences of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison as regards Whitehead's approach to literary aesthetic.

Interestingly, within some American Naturalist literary traditions, kaleidoscopic vision is understood as regendering white masculinity. For example, kaleidoscopic vision employed in literature with respect to white masculinity runs the risk of effeminizing white masculinity. For example, Stefan Brandt observes

[in *Männerblicke: Zur Konstruktion von "Männlichkeit" in der Literatur und Kultur der amerikanischen Jahrhundertwende* (1890-1914) that] the turn of the twentieth century coincided with a recovery, one might even speak of a revival, of masculinity in American literature. When the success of what Hawthorne had termed a 'mob of scribbling women' as well as the popularity of the sentimental novel was beginning to wane, American writers began to contemplate what was seen as a particular type of masculinity. A masculine age had come.' (qtd. in Banerjee 56n4)

While post-*Brown v. Board of Education* African American literary artists were celebrated for employing kaleidoscopic vision in efforts to temper the overdetermined characteristics of hypermasculinity, misogyny, and homophobia as regards some traditional literary racial representations of black male subjects, the use of kaleidoscopic vision as relates literary racial representations of white masculinities was thought effeminate and antithesis to turn-of-the-century American masculine literary ethos.

Maus, Fain, Ramsey, Saldívar, Collins, and Tettenborn collectively suggest that the novel is a radical, postracial exploration of American working-class men and signals an end to history as received.²

In this article, I confront the collective assertions of Maus, Fain, Ramsey, Saldívar, Collins, and Tettenborn. Whitehead's *John Henry Days* does not represent a radical turn of the black literary imagination; *John Henry Days* reflects Black Marxist approaches to the literary racial representations of the African American lumpenproletariat and a continuation of African American literary traditions—many centered on African American folkloric influences. As opposed to demonstrating aesthetic distance from the Wright/Elliott dyad, Whitehead's approach to literary aesthetics suggests heavy debts to, and fruitful inheritances from, the protest tradition. Moreover, the novel's ideal reader recognizes that *John Henry Days* initiates analyses of different ways to discuss African American histories and analyses of African American histories initiate different ways to talk about *John Henry Days*. The novel is a cautionary tale as regards the consequences of the roles of labor and stasis for post-*Brown* African American men as relates identity formation.

Whitehead emerged on the literary scene in 1999. His reception was tempered by the ambivalence of the times—as regards both the roles of the future and the *Brown v. Board of Education* case in American public life. In *Apocalyptic Dread*, Kristen Moana Thompson writes, “As the marker of a new year, decade, and millennium drew closer, long standing apocalyptic anxieties about the overdetermined year 2000 became evident in American popular culture, public policy, and journalism” (Thompson 1). The year 1999 not only represented the dawn of a new millennium for many, the precipice of the twenty-first century, and the arrival of new and different possibilities—all underscored by ambivalence and anxiety about the future and the end of the world drawing upon long-standing eschatological prophecies about Armageddon rooted in Revelations and other Christian texts—but also represented the forty-fifth anniversary of *Brown*. And while there were those, like Francis Fukuyama, who identified the apocalypse and the end of history with the arrival of modern liberal democracy, many who celebrated the forty-fifth anniversary of *Brown* measured the progress of black citizenship and full

² Saldívar argues that the main narrative mode of the postracial novelist is “speculative realism...a way of getting at the revisions of realism and fantasy into speculative forms that are seeming to shape the invention of new narrative modes in contemporary fiction” (Saldívar 3). Traditional forms of the novel are altered in the contemporary moment by postracial authors to represent a new stage in “American fiction, racial politics, and aesthetics of symbolization” (6). For example, inherited forms of the novel—realist, protest, *Bildungsroman*, historical, magical realist, postmodernist metafiction—are reworked and altered for purposes specific to each respective postracial novelist. Moreover, literary artists utilizing the postracial aesthetic: 1) are in critical dialogue with postmodern aesthetics; 2) draw on the history of literary genres and mix genres for generative purpose; 3) invest in speculative realism as an exploration of hegemony, refusing the prominence of postmodern metaphysics in literary craftsmanship; and, 4) explore the thematics of race in the twenty-first century, precisely because the writers missed out on “the heroic era for the struggle for Civil Rights” (5).

In order to truly appreciate the meanings of postracial novels—especially as regards historicity and historiography—Saldívar espouses “a distancing reading” (7). In contrast to a close reading, which requires thoughtful, critical analysis of a text that focuses on significant details or patterns in order to develop a deep, precise understanding of the text's internal elements—such as form, craft, and meaning—a distancing reading “describes the kind of critique that attempts to remain immune to the logical and rhetorical traps and dead ends that its own analysis reveals”—revelations usually resulting from close reading (7). In other words, distancing reading is required to accept the narrative cohesion of postracial novels; one must not question the logical and rhetorical gaps encountered for their very existences point to new generative possibilities centered on understanding and acceptance of certain truth-lies as regards race.

enfranchisement in relationship to the immersion of African Americans within the modern American liberal democratic project. As Ramsey acknowledges, “To say that history can end...is not to say that sequential, factual events stop happening. It means that...in the contest of political ideologies, one [political ideology] finally prevails” (Ramsey 769). Fukuyama states the matter more clearly: “history understood as a single, coherent, evolutionary process” is over (Fukuyama xii). While “factual events continue...they do not change historical presuppositions” (Ramsey 769). In 1999, the advocacy of an end to history intersected with a priori necessities of the recognition of certain historical narratives to create an ambivalent atmosphere of dread and hope as the new millennium approached. In such an atmosphere, the roles and functions of *Brown’s* historicity and historiography were bound to be contested. *John Henry Days* captures the ambivalence with which *Brown’s* historicity and historiography are approached at the dawning of the twenty-first century.

Whitehead made his literary debut in an atmosphere where “long standing apocalyptic anxieties about the overdetermined year 2000 became evident in American popular culture, public policy, and journalism” and became intertwined with desires to hold on to, and to commemorate, certain historical understandings in favor of a world rent asunder and began anew, particularly as regards issues of literary racial representations. In an atmosphere where many members of the reading public had grown weary of social protest literature, especially along the Realist and Naturalist veins, the appetite for African American novelists who reflected the possible benefits afforded black Americans since *Brown’s* inception without burdening those within the public sphere with the historical, systemic injustices committed against African Americans was wanting.³ With the advent of welfare reform and the Three Strikes Law, public policy legislators clearly signaled their advocacy in favor of understanding economic and criminal disparities among African Americans as rooted in the behaviors of individuals and not in the systemic racial and physical imprisonment of African Americans throughout their histories in the United States: the history of the Negro Problem as rooted in structural and historical biases reflective of white supremacy had come to an end by the close of the twentieth century.⁴ And, in an atmosphere excited by the infant technology of the Internet, the content of journalistic writing as a matter of importance was exchanged for the economic value of the number of clicks any one piece of writing received.⁵

³ Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, best exemplified and identified with Richard Wright’s literary aesthetic and the novel *Native Son*, many African American male novelists produced fiction reflective of social realism and social critique as relates the American system. As 1950 approached, such fiction—“protest fiction”—was “no longer fashionable,” to echo Edward Margolies in *Native Sons: A Critical Study of Twentieth-Century Negro American Authors* (87).

⁴ A summary of the welfare reform of 1996, officially known as “The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996,” can be found on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) website. According to HHS,

On August 22, President Clinton signed into law ‘The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193),’ a comprehensive bipartisan welfare reform plan that will dramatically change the nation’s welfare system into one that requires work in exchange for time-limited assistance. The law contains strong work requirements, a performance bonus to reward states for moving welfare recipients into jobs, state maintenance of effort requirements, comprehensive child support enforcement, and supports for families moving from welfare to work—including increased funding for child care and guaranteed medical coverage. (HHS) <https://aspe.hhs.gov/report/personal-responsibility-and-work-opportunity-reconciliation-act-1996>

The so-called Three Strikes and You’re Out Law went into effect on March 7, 1994 in the state of California. According to the San Diego County Office of the Public Defender, “Its purpose is to dramatically increase punishment for persons convicted of a felony who have previously been convicted of one or more ‘serious’ or ‘violent’ felonies. A ‘serious’ or ‘violent’ felony prior is commonly known as a ‘strike’ prior (“Three Strikes Law”). Although the law was seemingly a state initiative, on “March 13, 1995, [a] memorandum [was sent] to all United States Attorneys

Transience is the dominant trope of *John Henry Days*: movement through space, movement through time. J. Sutter, the novel's protagonist, is always on the move. As a junketeer, J.'s occupation routinely requires travel from city to city to report on events—ironically, he lives a life of stasis. Sutter's continuous movement reflects his desire to escape the constraining influences and inheritances associated with *Brown*, aspects of middle-class patriarchal masculinity and respectability politics, and responsibilities for leadership placed upon African American men of his generation. In short, he is searching for lines of escape as regards narratives of his life that others have written for him. He seeks consciousness of his own being; he seeks to write his own story; he seeks a street to transcendence.

J. practices an alienated, migratory, lumpenproletarian type of masculinity to escape laboring within masculine identities engendered by the legacies of *Brown*. While J.'s blossoming friendship with Pamela Street does generate an opportunity for J. to reimagine his future as one anchored in performances of masculinities that would not only be healthier and more helpful for J. but the communities of which he may find himself a part, that dream remains deferred as a result of the actions taken by Alphonse Miggs. *John Henry Days* serves as a cautionary tale for African American men of

from Assistant Attorney General Jo Ann Harris (Criminal Division) on the subject of the "Three Strikes" law ("Sentencing Enhancement"). The memorandum, in part, reads:

An important purpose of the Anti-Violent Crime Initiative is to work with our state and local counterparts to take violent criminals off the streets. When a firearm is involved, we have long used the Armed Career Criminal Act, 18 U.S.C. § 924(e), to achieve the prolonged incarceration of armed, violent offenders. Under the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, we have a powerful new federal tool, the so-called 'Three Strikes, You're Out' provision, to help us deal with violent repeat offenders...This provision should play a key role in every district's anti-violent crime strategy. To help us make the most effective use possible of this potential tool, please ensure that state and local prosecutors are aware of the federal 'Three Strikes' provision and your willingness to coordinate prosecutive decisions in cases that are 'Three Strikes'-eligible. You should have in place a referral mechanism, perhaps through your violent crime working group, to ensure that appropriate 'Three Strikes' cases are presented to you for potential prosecution. ("Sentencing Enhancement")

⁵ Pay-per-click (PPC) is an Internet advertising model used to direct traffic to websites in which advertisers pay publishers when the advertisement is clicked. Many websites utilizing the PPC model began to appear on the Internet in the mid-1990s. According to Bernard J. Jansen and Tracy Mullen, in "Sponsored Search: An Overview of the Concept, History, and Technology,"

The impact of sponsored search on the accessibility of information and services on the web has been enormous. Sponsored search has played a critical role in supporting access to the many free services (i.e., spell checking, currency conversion, flight times, desktop searching applications, etc.) provided by search engines that have rapidly become essential to so many web users. Without the workable business model of sponsored search, it is doubtful if the major web search engines could finance anything close to their current infrastructures. These infrastructures provide the capability to crawl billions of web pages, index several billion documents (e.g., textual, images, videos, newspapers, blogs, and audio files), accept millions of web queries per day, and present billions of links per week. (Jansen and Mullen 115)

Moreover, "The success of sponsored search has radically affected how people interact with the information, websites, and services on the web. Sponsored search provides the necessary revenue streams to web search engines and is critical to the success of many online businesses" (114).

the post-*Brown* generations who may have ignored or disregarded inheritances of pre-*Brown* approaches to practices of masculinities in the search for more meaningful methods of identity formation and self-fashioning. The ignorance of some post-*Brown* men is the result of the supposedly changing relations between race and social justice, race and identity, and race and history and African Americans' supposed liberation from state-sanctioned circumscription of blackness within the American public, social, and political spheres in the current moment. In *John Henry Days*, J. Sutter wastes a great deal of energy and time chasing—seeking—alternatives to prescribed African American masculine identities somewhat projected upon him as a result of the legacies of *Brown*; he spends a great deal of time proving his worth as a late-twentieth century laboring-class American citizen. The action of the novel suggests that J.'s time could have been better spent forming a union with the African American female presence as represented by Pamela Street. By the time J. becomes aware of such an alternative in the novel, it appears too late. The narrative's ending suggests that J. or Pamela or both have been murdered. The dream of finding healthier, more helpful alternatives to the practices of post-*Brown* masculinities erroneously chosen by J. and the stasis associated with his labor remains deferred at the narrative's end. The dream of conducting healthier, more helpful performances of post-*Brown* masculinities as engendered by a Sutter-Street union remains deferred at the narrative's end.

In the novel, J. transitions from one who practices a light, seeking, migratory masculinity to one who is on the cusp of understanding the heavy weightiness of enlightenment, transcendence, and consciousness.⁶ With many traditional, normative performances of African American masculinities no longer desirable or viable, many African American men of the post-*Brown* generations have sought understanding as regards what it means to be a man and a human being in contested areas requiring negotiation. J.'s occupation as a junketeer facilitates his transience and his abilities to seek and to negotiate the racialized territory of the United States in the last decade of the twentieth century. J.'s performance of an African American Marxist lumpen-style masculinity—a performance of masculinity not steeped in sacred or traditional or normative or overdetermined aspects of what it “means” to be a black man—affords him an ease of conscience and a lack of investment—existentially speaking—compared to masculine performances centered on sacred or traditional or normative or overdetermined conceptions of African American masculinities. However, he rarely expends the requisite time to reflect on his

⁶ In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Milan Kundera discusses lightness and weightiness as regards being. Moreover, according to John Hansen, in “The Ambiguity and Existentialism of Human Sexuality in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*,” Kundera

presents a complex theme of sexuality as it relates to his two primary characters, Tomáš and Tereza.

Although one could make a reasonable attempt in analyzing these characters in terms of human sexuality, it is submitted that the deeper undertones of Kundera's text can only be understood from a philosophical approach that views the sexuality of Kundera's characters as a metaphor of Friedrich Nietzsche's existentialism. That is to say, since Kundera's characters are largely embedded in the myth of Eternal Return, one cannot plausibly analyze the sexuality of his characters based upon human behavioral models, since by the very nature of Nietzsche's philosophy all life is incoherent and ambiguous—and should not be subjected to traditional philosophical or psychological analysis. (Hansen)

Confronting the myth of the eternal return, Kundera's analysis in the novel suggests the alternative: that each person has only one life to live and that which occurs in life occurs only once and never again—hence, the “lightness” of being. Even more, lightness signifies liberation and enlightenment. As opposed to the myth of eternal return and its imposition of “heaviness” on life and the decisions that are made offering “weight.” Nietzschean heaviness could be a tremendous burden—a Ramsey-like claim as regards the South and the black literary imagination—or a great benefit—a line of escape to communicate with the African American folk as in the case of Wright's “Blueprint.”

experiences to benefit from the possibility of attaining consciousness as engendered by his lumpen existence. Ironically, he does expend time peddling “puff” (*John Henry Days* 70). By expending the time and energy required of the three-month junket jag in the hope of escaping certain aspects of overdetermined African American masculinities, J. is complicit with promoting the oftentimes problematic concepts of strength and endurance associated with understandings of middle-class patriarchal masculinity and African American labor and stasis. In Margaret Walker’s revised Marxist schema as demonstrated in *For My People*, strength and endurance are associated with labor and stasis; additionally, labor and stasis are associated with death and routine.⁷ Whitehead signifies on Walker’s approach to labor and stasis in *John Henry Days*. Walker’s Marxist schema prompts us to consider how the stasis of labor leads to J.’s apparent death in the novel.

When we first encounter J. around “July 12, 1996,” we learn that he is an African American journalist from New York en route to another junket (16). He is transient and airy—aloof to the realities of his existence and the seriousness with which others approach life. J. is “always up in the air” (12). Moreover, “no matter how old and wise” J. looks, he knows “nothing at all” (137). He enjoys the lightness of life. “A sophisticated man” and “a real city boy,” he “possesses the standard amount of black Yankee scorn for the South, a studied disdain that attempts to make a callus of history” (98, 22, 14). J. displays a highly suppressed, deeply detached relationship to the importance of, and trauma associated with, African American histories. He prefers to cover over historical scars with a thick exterior. Although he is haunted by “the footprints of ghosts”—“Old World ghosts”—“he’s been very conscientious about staying from the forge of his race’s history” (155, 201, 15). And, “John Henry...[is] a ghost” that has haunted J. since fifth-grade adolescence (107). J. migrates and seeks alternatives to the performances of masculinities seemingly reserved for men like John Henry and himself, African American men precluded from the real American social sphere and offered only simulacra of reality: parts in movies for which they are ill-suited and for which the public devotes little fanfare, support, or discernment. He instinctively suspects that he is trapped in a mode of stasis, but he is entirely incapable of breaking free of his place and his routine status if left to his own devices. He wants to break free but does not know how. He projects the careful, nonchalant disposition of one who has not only broken free, but understands the path to

⁷ Walker’s 1942 volume of poetry, *For My People*, deserves particular attention as regards this study for the volume’s influences upon Whitehead’s approach to literary aesthetic. The incorporation of Walker’s poetic schema in *For My People* underscores Whitehead’s cross-generic approach to crafting fiction. *For My People* is divided into three parts and its construction reflects “the broad and significant historical context” of Walker’s works as relates African American experiences in general (Scott 1083). Part one questions the formal construction of historical knowledge and offers an understanding of the differences between the African American proletariat and the African American lumpenproletariat; part two analyzes examples of African American folk heroes and heroines—lumpen figures—whose revolutionary agency offers an escape from the uselessness of strength and ceaselessness of labor, both presented as concepts once valued by previous African American generations of proletarians; and part three internalizes, and reflects upon, the transition engendered between parts one and two—“the movement from historical knowledge to its production and depiction in examples” (1084). This internalization of the changes wrought between changing historical epochs is an approach to literary aesthetic utilized by Whitehead in *John Henry Days*; while Walker pursues a didactic program, underscored by corrective mimesis as relates the transition effected between antebellum and postbellum eras, Whitehead satirizes and parodies the transition effected between the pre-*Brown* and post-*Brown* eras. Also, Walker exposes African American feminist praxis throughout the volume; Whitehead’s focus upon the African Americanist female presence in the guise of Pamela Street in *John Henry Days* is often ignored by critics.

such liberation. In actuality, he has no clue. Still and all, J. desperately “want[s] to know if the world ha[s] progressed to the point where such a thing is possible” (20). Seemingly, if J. would only try to break out of the routine of peddling puff, then he could be free. Hence, movement and the symbolism of airports function in vital ways in the novel.

For J., continuous movement and the change of location offered by airports lessen the effects of surveillance and containment underscored by his overdetermined status as an African American. Airports offer J. simulacra of breaking free. “He blesses the certainty of airports,” for when he is feeling contained and restricted “he can always turn around and go someplace else” (15). J. Sutter is a representation of the late-twentieth century African American lumpenproletariat. Admittedly, he is an ironic literary representation of the lumpen. His lack of consciousness and aloof disposition expose his lumpenness, yet also expose his potential for transcendence.

As Nathaniel Mills points out in *Ragged Revolutionaries: The Lumpenproletariat and African American Marxism in Depression-Era Literature*, while “Marx and Engels coined the term *lumpenproletariat*...they didn’t explicitly theorize it” (21; emphasis original). In “The ‘Dangerous Class’ of Marx and Engels,” Robert Bussard conveys that Marx and Engels “expected readers to understand its connotations” although the two never offer a “consistent and clearly reasoned definition” of the term in their writings (Bussard 676-77). The term generally refers to “social types who subsist without waged labor and by extension lack class identity, dwelling on the margins and in the interstices of capitalist social formations. These types often resort to criminal or other illicit survival practices” (Mills 21). They are the proletariat in rags. Hal Draper, in “The Concept of the ‘Lumpenproletariat’ in Marx and Engels,” reasons that the “lumpen-class” is used to connote those who are “no longer functionally an integral part of society...[those who] fall out...drop out...[and have a] tendency toward illegality...aris[ing] from the scarcity of other choices” (“The Concept” 2309). The lumpen are society’s “discards” (Mills 19). Marx calls the lumpen “the lowest sediment”—matter that settles, grounds, remains, residuum (qtd. in *Theory of Revolution* 470). They are “a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue”; they are “a passively rotting mass...[with] no legitimate place in society manipulated and misdirected by [t]he finance aristocracy...[itself] nothing but the resurrection of the lumpen at the top of bourgeois society” (qtd. in *Theory of Revolution* 458; *Class Struggles* 36-37). The lumpen pursue *la bohème*—a frivolous, nonchalant, and oftentimes moneyless way of life; living in the present with no plans for the future. Lastly, Marx describes the lumpen-class as those who exist to be gazed upon and evaluated according to the perceptions of others. In *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx writes, “The swindler, the cheat, the beggar, the unemployed, the starving, the destitute and the criminal working man are *figures* which exist not for it, but only for others’ eyes—for the eyes of doctors, judges, grave-diggers, beadles, etc. Nebulous figures which do not belong within the province of political economy” (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* 85; emphasis original).

The definitional instability of Marx’s approach to the lumpen is apparent.⁸ And, while Richard Wright, Margaret Walker, and Ralph Ellison sought to “present an accurate and faithful reading of a deconstructed Marx and Engels” as regards the lumpenproletariat, they did seek to expand and revise traditional Marxist thought (Mills 20). The definitional instability and multiple ambiguities associated with Marx’s uses of and approaches to the ragged proletariat have inspired—and, annoyed or “ragged”—African American literary artists like Wright, Walker, and

⁸ Marx’s conceptions of the lumpen include a catalogue of figures: roués, offshoots of the middle-class, vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged prisoners, escaped galley-slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lazzaroni, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, maquereaux, brothel keepers, porters, literati, organ-grinders, rag pickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars, and *la bohème* (Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. International Publishers, 1963, p. 75; emphasis original).

Ellison (and, to a different degree, Lorraine Hansberry) to develop: “conceptual revisions to Marxism”; creative and interesting functions for the lumpen’s “figurative raggedness”; new approaches to the application of ragtime music; and, expressions for multiple “political, racial, and gender dynamics of exclusion” by Signifying on “the trope of the rag” as regards the construction of literary aesthetics that enact “explorations of marginality and resistance” in connection to and in conversation with the African American masses (17).⁹ A member of the African American middle-class and well-educated in private schools, J. has had a very sheltered upbringing, fostering an idealistic spirit. He has “been raised in a cocoon,” fostering a sense of detachment from the world and few allegiances to anything (*John Henry Days* 175). In the world in which J. has been raised, “[B]lack people are African Americans” (64). He recognizes that some of his “ancestors were owned” by other Americans, but he is a product of African Americans who settled in places like strivers’ row in Harlem. When one lived on strivers’ row, one had finally arrived.¹⁰ It is worth noting that having “arrived” in the early-twentieth century shares resonances with “being in the light” in the late-twentieth century.¹¹

J. is not the classical lumpen character; he is not a dis-carded member of society.

⁹ We must remember Ellison’s cautionary advice as regards the fluidity of African American social and economic classes in relation to generative literary uses of the lumpen. Ellison is very discriminating when employing an African American lumpenproletariat literary aesthetic. In a note advising literary critic Stanley Edgar Hyman as regards Hyman’s essay on blues music and the literary usefulness of those historically associated with the African American lumpen—“whores...pimps...gamblers...saloon people...musicians...entertainers”—Ellison writes:

I suggest...that you be very careful when applying Marxist concepts to American Negro experience—especially such terms as ‘lumpenproletariat.’ I would define the term carefully, remembering the fluidity of Negro class lines. For my own work I find an approach [that] defines the American Negro in terms of his consciousness much more exact. Most of us are still of the folk, poised between an American Negro working class outlook, and that of the Negro middle class. (qtd. in Mills 95)

¹⁰ Strivers’ row has been described as the desired destination for upwardly mobile, middle-class, aristocratic African American families during the 1920s—particularly during the days of the Harlem Renaissance. Most migrated to the North in efforts to escape the negative and confining aspects of race dominating Southern public, economic, and social spheres. Wallace Thurman writes, in 1927’s “Negro Life in New York’s Harlem: A Lively Picture of a Popular and Interesting Section,” that

[b]etween Seventh and Eighth Avenues, is 139th Street, known among Harlemites as ‘strivers’ row.’ It is the most *aristocratic* street in Harlem. Stanford White designed the houses for a wealthy white clientele. Moneyed African-Americans now own and inhabit them. When one lives on ‘strivers’ row’ *one has supposedly arrived*...a number of the leading...professional folk of Harlem...reside [there]. (Thurman 42; emphasis mine)

¹¹ In African diasporic aesthetic practices light represents the shine of signification, or the demonstration of reciprocal signification. In *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice*, Krista Thompson writes, “expressions...[and] displays...[of] shining effects are central among African diasporic communities...whether beaming from buses, animating miniature screens in taxis, radiating from local and foreign music-television channels, emanating from makeshift projector screens, or transmitted through cellophane-covered DVDs” (Thompson 1-2). As Joseph Roach makes clear in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, “Genealogies of performance attend not only to ‘the body,’ as [Michel] Foucault suggests, but also to bodies—to the reciprocal reflections they make on one another’s surfaces as they foreground their capacities for interaction” (Roach 25). Moreover, “[t]his is not counter-discourse but

He is carded. He has been integrated within the American liberal democratic project—after all, “he has his Social Security card in his pocket” (152). Nevertheless, he lives in “unlikely times” (149). For example, throughout American history it would be unlikely that someone like J.—an African American—would have a Social Security card in Talcott, West Virginia prior to the advent of *Brown*. Yet, in another sense, it is heartening that in 1996 someone like J. customarily has a Social Security card in Talcott, West Virginia. After all, he is an American citizen.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Social Security program are Depression-era creations of the United States federal government. Marxist analysis would consider the SSA’s creation as a bourgeois bribe used to manipulate the lumpenproletariat.¹² Marx, of course, would be wrong in the case of the African American lumpen because African Americans, historically, have fallen outside of the boundaries of America’s traditionally recognized lumpenproletarian class in pre-*Brown* America. They are lumpenproletarians of the lumpenproletariat: the marginalized of the marginalized. According to Ira Katznelson in *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Times*, the Social Security Act of 1935 might never have passed without support from the 141 Democrats from Southern states, like West Virginia. Moreover,

the book strongly implies, many of those Democrats only supported the bill after it got tweaked in committee so that it excluded farmworkers and maids—who represented two-thirds of black workers in the South at the time. As a result of the change, 65 percent of the African American workforce was excluded from the initial Social Security program...Many of these workers were covered only later on, when Social Security was expanded in 1950 and then in 1954. (Plumer)

a counterculture that defiantly reconstructs its own critical, intellectual, and moral genealogy in a partially hidden public sphere of its own” (Gilroy 37-38). The function of light to shine engenders motivated action and transformative agency. Thompson attests, “Since the late 1980s, the videographer wielding a large camera crowned with a searing bright white light...has become a fixture in...urban dancehall and club cultures. Performers often compete, performing creatively, agilely, or sexually, to attract the videographer’s attention and to bask in what is described... as the ‘video light’” (Thompson 5). “This visual practice [of shine],” continues Thompson, “has played a central role in the creation of local and African diasporic communities, which were formed around the distinct types of viewership that were produced through the rapidly moving video camera and its bright light” (7). Jack Sowah, a music producer from Kingston, Jamaica, informs, “Light can do so much for them [dancehall participants]. If not in the video light no one will see them...The more the light shines on you, the brighter you get” (qtd. in Thompson 6). Sowah’s comments highlight “the materiality of [the light and its apparent] reconfiguration in popular practices that emphasize the optical effect of the moment of being [in the light] as important in its own right” (7).

Being in the light aligns those in search of shine with Marx’s ragged proletariat who exist only for the gaze of the other: the doctor, the judge, the gravedigger, the spectator. Nevertheless, along the lines of the function of the rag to generate new literary possibilities, we are reminded by Thompson that “spectacle...so evident in video light, [has] restructured and reoriented more long-standing cultural sites and expressions...and [has] been central to the creation of new aesthetic practices” (6). Like the trope of the rag, the trope of shine engenders new literary aesthetic practices and interpretations. As regards light and shine, “lights, cameras, screens, backdrops... technology...often becomes a prop in performances of visibility rather than or in addition to being a tool that produces a physical representation. In these practices the process of being seen [in the light] constitutes its own ephemeral form of image-making” (7).

¹² The advent of Social Security and social security cards took place in 1935 as a result of the New Deal—two years before Wright’s “Blueprint for Negro Writing.” The “Social Security Administration began life as the Social Security Board (SSB). The SSB was created at the moment President Roosevelt inked his signature on the Social Security Act [on] August 14, 1935 at 3:30 p.m.” (“Organizational History”). Amazingly, the “SSB was an entirely new entity, with no staff, no facilities and no budget. The initial personnel were donated from existing agencies, and a temporary budget was obtained from the...Federal Emergency Relief Administration” (“Organizational History”). The SSA is the result of recycled and repurposed government resources. The SAA is lumpen in character.

“It is likely,” Katznelson writes, “that the southern wing of the party would have bolted if the legislation had taken the form initially proposed by the White House”—i.e., a bill that covered farmworkers and maids (Katznelson 260). Katznelson continues, “The main concerns for the Democratic Party...found no place for racial rectification” between white Americans and black Americans (158). Interestingly, “African American journalists,” men and women like J., “were excluded from both the president’s and Mrs. Roosevelt’s press conferences” on policies like social security (24). In the 1930s, African American journalists were barred from practicing their professions as relates questioning the federal government on policies like the newly minted Social Security program; workingmen like John Henry were barred from the benefits offered by the program. By 1996, African American journalists like J. labor to spread the propaganda of the federal government for programs like the Folk Heroes Series of postage stamps, featuring John Henry, as a result of their names being placed on Lucien’s List, at least within the narrative of *John Henry Days*.

Historically, some African Americans believed that Social Security Numbers (SSN) functioned to track the movements of those considered dangerous to the national security of the United States—not an unfounded suspicion in light of J. Edgar Hoover, HUAC, and the Red Scare. And, the SSA did not dissuade such thinking with its use of “group numbers.” As explained by the SSA, “due to the fact that the middle digits of the SSN are referred to as the ‘group number,’ some people have misconstrued this to mean that the ‘group number’ refers to racial groupings. So, a myth goes around from time-to-time that encoded in a person’s SSN is a key to their race. This simply is not true” (“A Myth”). Just the same, African American suspicion of group numbers reflects the function of metamyth and signifies an expansion upon the origin myth engendering the categorizing of black bodies in America: race.¹³ While there may be no truth to the group number myth, African Americans are keenly aware of the historical relationship between themselves and the SSA—as pointed out in Katznelson’s book. So, J.’s proclamation as relates his citizenship evinced by the fact the he has been issued a Social Security card by the United States federal government is both painfully humorous and historically critical at the same time. *John Henry Days* cannot be read without laughter. Not without laughter.

J. was born after the SSA began to expand Social Security coverage to include more African Americans than at any other time in American history. So, when J. ventures below the Mason-Dixon Line in the novel, in a sense he is an African American man returning to racialized territory once politically desirous of excluding men like J. from participation within the public sphere. As Austin Reed’s story attests, nevertheless, op-

¹³ According to Terry Duffey in “The Proserpinean Metamyth,” metamyth introduces a new structure “derived from the interaction and interrelationship of several works of literature. Such a structure derives from a comparative or analytic insight present long before the appearance of either literary product. This superstructure exploited by poets of the classical period and the Middle Ages suggests an evolutionary development of myth. For this reason the superstructure is called a ‘metamyth’” (Duffey 105). John Henry is a metamyth. Moreover,

Metamyth finds its origin in myth that is extrapolated and refined by tradition to produce an altogether new entity. This new creation possesses an intellectual substance, vitality, and validity independent of those of its parent, the original myth complex: its substance consists of a conceptual field or perspective superstructure; its vitality and validity are separate from that of its original parent system; and its ability to convince man of its truth, its rightness as an explication of reality, is unrelated to the appeal of the mythological roots from which it sprang. Furthermore,

portunities for men like J. have similarly been circumscribed in the North throughout periods of American history. In *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, editor Caleb Smith presents Austin Reed's autobiographical, firsthand account focused on Reed's life as an indentured youth and incarcerated adult in nineteenth-century New York *after* the state abolished slavery. The memoir "surfaced at a Rochester, New York estate sale," an uncanny similarity to the discovery of Richard T. Greener's diplomas (Smith xv).¹⁴ Reed's "manuscript," recounting his time as an "indentured servant, a juvenile delinquent, and a prisoner in New York state," consists of "a bound journal and two hand-sewn gatherings of loose paper" (xv). Reed's authorial use of "rags" of loose paper to record his coming-into-consciousness as a person of African descent living in America signifies on the trope of the rag. Reed was an African American literary lumpenproletarian.

In the narrative's Foreword, David Blight and Robert Stepto write that Reed's story is a "story about being orphaned from his home and his [African American] race" (Blight and Stepto vii). They describe Reed as a literary artist who creates "songs, poems, and stories [that] provide in helping him survive [alone] in his world" (ix). Blight and Stepto also highlight the similarities shared between Reed's story exposing the horrors of America's burgeoning penal system and Frederick Douglass's famous polemic against slavery. "All slaves are orphans and feel alienated from their surroundings," a Douglass aphorism used to conceptualized African American subjectivity and estrangement in America, is employed by Blight and Stepto to offer a point of entry for audience members looking to situate themselves within Reed's story (qtd. in Reed vii).

Reed, "who thought of himself as a fugitive...[and] a vagabond who lived in poverty," reflects the characteristics of the classic lumpenproletariat; however, the existence of his memoir

during the Middle Ages the credibility of classical myth was challenged by Christianity. However, this metamyth, viewed as an intellectual/philosophical kernel of truth embedded in mythological matter, was yet regarded as a valid insight into the construct of the natural order. Thus, it offers an important philosophical support for the significance of myth. (105)

Analysis of *John Henry Days* as a metamyth allows Maus to overlook "the original myth complex" of John Henry as centered in African American history and historiography in lieu of new John Henrys possessing "an intellectual substance, vitality, and validity independent of those of its parent," thereby adding a universal, more multicultural appeal to approaches to the John Henry legend centered within an analytical framework derived from medieval and Christian thought. Ezra Jack Keats's post-1970s John Henry—the dominant version of John Henry received within the public sphere in the latter twentieth century— illustrates this idea.

¹⁴In *Uncompromising Activist*, Katherine Reynolds Chaddock discusses Greener's "1870 Harvard College diploma and [his] 1876 University of South Carolina Law School diploma," found in "[a] heavy old steamer trunk in [an] attic...[in an] abandoned row house in the Englewood area of Chicago's South Side in 2012 (Chaddock 1). On one level, the miraculous find is a real-life example of the serendipity of African American life required for personal and group survival and exploited by Whitehead as relates the characterization of Mr. Street's discoveries of random, yet unique, John Henry paraphernalia. On another level, the discovery of Greener's diplomas, in what had to be a ragged state in a steamer trunk, is insightful as regards Greener's transient, lumpenproletarian lifestyle resulting, in part, from America's nineteenth-century color schema. For, although Greener was a leading intellectual of his times—pushing elected officials for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and for federal action to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments—he could not have experienced a worse, more alienating time in American history to be "an eloquent and determined advocate for racial uplift" (5). He moved, or migrated, from one location and occupation to another. A steamer trunk would have been useful. The fact that his diplomas were found locked away in the trunk and discarded underscores the declining value of education for marginalized men like Greener within the American public sphere at the close of the nineteenth century. As Chaddock recounts,

During his [Greener's] adult life...the process he hoped to facilitate [as relates racial uplift] became more and more difficult to attain. Abolitionists had scored their triumph with the Emancipation Proclamation and the outcome of the Civil War. At the close of Reconstruction, however, rights and opportunities for newly freed blacks, most of whom were in the South [like John Henry], began a great and long-term regression. Although there were many individual achievements and successes, especially in the northern

suggests that Reed achieved a sense of enlightenment as regards his subjectivity transcending such self-deprecating descriptions as offered in the memoir (xvi). As Smith conveys, “From a position just beyond the boundaries of Southern slavery, [Reed] described the rise of the new penal system that would capture so many thousands of black men and women in later years...[offering] prophecy of a violent future” (xv). Reed would certainly recognize the irony and sarcasm inherent in labeling our current times postracial considering the rise of the New Jim Crow.

Reed’s “[story] begins...at the deathbed of his father...gasping his last breaths and giving his last fatherly advice” (vii). The image of Ellison’s invisible man’s grandfather rears its head, completing a circle with J.’s grandfather and his advice as regards *lippus maximus* (*John Henry Days* 271; emphasis original). Even more, the trope of the African American in bondage as orphan is a theme exploited by Whitehead in *The Underground Railroad*. The novel’s protagonist, Cora, is characterized as a “stray”—a slave without mother, father, or family. Whitehead writes, “When Mabel [Cora’s mother] vanished Cora became a stray” (*Underground Railroad* 14). Along with slave orphans, “those who had been crippled by the overseer’s punishments...broken by the labor in ways...[seen] and in ways [unseen and]...those who had lost their wits” are all classified as “strays” (16). Moreover, while not a nineteenth-century chattel slave or indentured servant, J. Sutter is estranged from African American history, making him a stray of sorts. Nevertheless, while J.’s parents may have come of age by the 1950s, after 1954 J. would have been considered a student of integration and a newly established and enfranchised citizen-type: a liminal member of the African American lumpenproletariat, itself a racialized grouping of people historically ostracized from most areas of American life, but supposedly integrated within the American social sphere proper in the current era—yet with no sense of self or real allegiance or connection to anyone or anything. In short, J. is an

and western states, the struggle waged by Greener...accomplished little in the way of widespread legal, economic, and social advancement for black Americans during that period. Education became legally separate and not at all equal, segregation heightened in the views of white superiority, voting became a gauntlet of poll taxes and tests, employment was no place for equal opportunity, and lynchings and burnings went unchecked. (5)

In our current post-*Brown* era, integrationists have scored their triumph with *Brown*, the Fair Housing Act, and Affirmative Action. At the close of the twentieth century, however, rights and opportunities for newly integrated African Americans, most of whom are settled in urban areas like J. Sutter’s Harlem, have been systematically eroded delimiting individual freedoms for a great number of Americans who happen to be black. Whitehead’s metonymic use of John Henry motivates us to think of people like Greener and Greener motivates us to think about John Henry. Just as J. Sutter is characterized as moving continuously in *John Henry Days*, resulting from his dramatic, personal relationship with African American history, Greener is characterized as forever on the move resulting from his dramatic, personal relationship with making, or the production of, African American history. Chaddock writes,

Personal dramas and changes in political sentiments led to stretches of underemployment or unemployment [for Greener]. He launched into seemingly attractive, but unsuccessful, business investments. His public speaking and political campaigning took time away from building his law practice and enjoying his family. And something always happened to shorten his professional stints. Integration ended at the University of South Carolina, and Greener was out. Howard University Law School suffered low enrollment during his time as dean, and Greener was out. The Grant Monument Association board experienced infighting and resignations, and Greener was out. After McKinley assassination, the new president Theodore Roosevelt had his own ideas and obligations for diplomatic patronage assignments. Once again, Greener was out. (3)

individual.

Nevertheless, J. is powerless and recognizes that “they [those in power] got a whole system over” African Americans; and, although he feels he has been “programmed for achievement,” he has yet to discover the street, or pathway, to such achievement in the face of overwhelming systemic power (*John Henry Days* 203, 175). He is a product of “the fifties...the new generation...[when] it all seemed possible” as regards racial integration and racial equality in America (88). Still and all, “those days are over,” and yet, J. is “the great black hope,” an “example that integration...work[s],” and an “inspiration” beyond the possibilities of *Brown* (87, 51, 75, 51). But, after becoming a journalist—accepting the responsibilities of telling the truth, making important declarations, changing lives, perhaps, raising the stigma of degradation associated with the Black race—J. quickly becomes disillusioned and begins junketeering and falls into routine and stasis. There are several instances throughout the book when he seems to confront a difficult truth or to reconsider the past history of African Americans only to avoid the issues at hand, particularly when focused on race—reminiscent of Austin Reed’s attempts to quiet his unceasing rebellion and Tillman’s attempt to address the “vague stirring” (Reed xviii; *Tillman and Tackhead* 7).¹⁵ J. treats the world as one big marketplace, and everything in it is available for use for the right price at the right time, including conceptions of self, race, and tales of John Henry. There is no need for conflict when everything is negotiable and one holds no allegiances. J. is alienated. J. is a wanderer. J. is a traveler. J. needs to break out of the routine post-*Brown* mold of standardized integration. J. needs enlightenment. His transience and marginality could function to open potential routes to transcendence. It did for many pre-*Brown* African American literary characters seeking escape routes to consciousness.

During the junket that establishes the novel’s plot, J. is tasked with “[w]riting an article about the [John Henry Days] festival” to be held in “Talcott, West Virginia” (16-19). The “first

¹⁵ According to Smith, “[a]fter leaving [New York City’s House of Refuge] in 1839, Reed spent most of the next twenty years in New York’s penal institutions, mainly at the world-famous Auburn State prison” (Smith xviii). Throughout his various periods of incarceration and bondage, Reed found it difficult to extinguish “an unceasing rebellion against the masters and wardens who tried to govern his conduct” and dominate his story (xviii). Reed’s “unceasing rebellion” sounds strikingly similar to Ellison’s “vague stirring” as described in *Tillman and Tackhead*. Two of Ellison’s 1930s-era fictions of note highlighting his literary uses of African American lumpenproletarian figures include *Tillman and Tackhead* and *Slick*. Not surprisingly, “*Tillman and Tackhead* and *Slick* resemble Wright’s Depression fiction in their themes and characterizations” (Mills 117). *Tillman and Tackhead* is set in a social club in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. In many respects, the club setting is reminiscent of the Banner Club in Paul Laurence Dunbar’s *Sport of the Gods*. Tillman is an African American waiter. The main narrative focuses on discernment of high art and the analysis of Winslow Homer’s painting *The Gulf Stream* from the perspectives of lower-class, lumpen figures like Tillman and Tackhead. The characters are taken aback by the supposed passivity of the “mose,” or black man, as he is alone on a boat in shark-infested waters: “That mose is tryin t play like he dont see them sharks” (*Tillman and Tackhead* 3). The interpretation and analysis of high art by those of the lower classes is a hallmark of African American lumpenproletarian literatures.

For example, Tillman’s analysis of the painting works to bring alive feelings of agency. Ellison’s narrator recounts, “The painting stirred something deep within him and a feeling of bitterness grew. As he watched the painting something *vague stirred* within him, which for a long time had tried to die away. Something he had tried to help die” (7; emphasis mine). Mills argues that for Tillman, “The painting...subtly reveals the agency of black men that is contained but not cancelled by the enforced subservience black men must perform to survive under Jim Crow” (Mills 120). The recognition of double-vision—double consciousness—as imposed onto the character by racialized rankings of human beings within the American public and social spheres engenders revolutionary agency and the “desire to create a new world, a world which he had not the strength to imagine” (*Tillman and Tackhead* 10). Ultimately, *Tillman and Tackhead* is a narrative of the “political possibilities inhering in lumpenproletarianization and a story of how freedom, dignity, and action are accessed by the subject who drops out of his stable socioeconomic and ideologically codified position into the margins and interstices of the social” (Mills 125).

Ellison’s *Slick* compares with Wright’s *Native Son* in its “treatment of the education of a politically unconscious black male protagonist” (117). And, like Walker’s *Goose Island*, Ellison’s *Slick* remains unfinished

annual John Henry Days festival...coincide[s] with the release of the U.S. Postal Service's Folk Heroes stamp series. John Henry has been extolled as [an African American] strong-man born with a hammer in his hands...[who] swung his hammers so hard that he beat...a steam drill...machine" (16). No machine drill would "beat this man down" (142). According to the narrator, John Henry is a "synonym for superstrength and superendurance... [and is] the standard of comparison" for the value of African American laborers (162). And, while John Henry is typically depicted as a man of southern origins, a particular John Henry of importance in the novel has his roots in the "nurture and care" of Harlem (115). Nevertheless, as a result of his display of superendurance and superstrength in the competition with the machine, John Henry "died...flat on his back in the dirt" (142). In line with Margaret Walker's lumpenproletarian schema, death is the ultimate cost of proletarian labor expended to beat the machine.

In his role as junketeering journalist, J. is a commodifier; J. is one who makes commodities of things. He functions in a manner similar to the lumpenproletariat at the top; he functions like the financier pulling the strings of society and manipulating the reception of puff. Nevertheless, the idea of J. traveling to West Virginia to chronicle the spectacular celebration of an African American man presumed to have lived in the 1870s—a liminal era embracing both Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction America—is intriguing on a number of levels. Ideas and meanings were in flux during Reconstruction. The whole era was transient and on the move, like the African American lumpenproletariat. J.'s commodification of the characteristics of superstrength and superendurance associated with an African American male human being for economic transaction is uncanny. The very uncanniness of his relationship to normative approaches to African American identity and American capitalism marginalizes and alienates J. from the forge of African American histories. Nevertheless, unless J. discovers lines of escape permitting enlightenment, the stasis associated with his labor will not only continue to engender disastrous results as regards his subjectivity but is complicit with the very structures resulting in J.'s function as a commodifier of human beings instead of as a fabulator of human beings. Unless J. discovers lines of flight permitting consciousness and awareness of his

in a state of eternal liminality. Slick focuses on a recently unemployed African American laborer named Slick Williams. Slick needs money to support his sick, pregnant wife Callie and their two children and to pay their landlord for housing; he is financially strained ("Birth" 326). The plotline of *Slick* is strikingly similar to another recent African American novel treated in this study; it foreshadows Michael Thomas's plotline in *Man Gone Down*. While *Man Gone Down* is set in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century Boston and New York, the unnamed setting of *Slick* could be representative of any Northern American industrial city of the first half of the twentieth century. In his efforts to earn money, Slick finds himself in trouble with the law, with the gangster underworld, confused, and under the tutelage of Booker Smalls—an ideologically misguided precursor to *Invisible Man*'s Ras. Nevertheless, Booker, writes Mills, "recasts the place of the lumpenproletariat within Marxist thought" (Mills 133). Booker initiates Slick into Marxism by aligning Marx with Frederick Douglass, noting: "Both were brilliant and eager to fight oppression on the international level" (133). Booker asserts, "They both looked like lions. If you go down to the library and ask for pictures of them [you, Slick, will] see that they both have big heads, thick manes of hair, with large beards and bushy eyebrows. And in the pictures I've seen of Marx he was almost as dark as a Negro" (133-34). Even more, Booker claims that Douglass "might have met Marx in Europe when [Douglass] met many of the other well-known revolutionists" (133). Douglass, Booker tells Slick, "was...a guy like you: mad and wanting to fight" (133). Ultimately, Slick acknowledges his own newfound agency: "It makes you feel proud. You can respect a guy like old Frederick Douglass" (133). Mills suggests that "[b]y imagining Marx and Douglass as both racially black, Booker seeks to empower Slick with a Marxism and a black political tradition both characterized by the lion-like strength of individuals who, like Slick..., are 'mad and wanting to fight'" (134). Moreover, "Booker...performs the work of creative leadership that Ellison requires of revolutionary institutions" (134).

relationship to the forge of the history of his race, the routine associated with his labor will never afford the liberation he seeks and the knowledge he desires to discover. He will never know.

J.'s junket to Talcott represents a reversal of the general route of the African American Great Migration. The importance of migration and movement to African Americans underscores Wright's motivation for revising Marxist conceptualizations of the lumpen for literary generative purposes in rethinking African American experiences in "Blueprint for Negro Writing"; the lumpenproletariat and African Americans share transient characteristics, historically.¹⁶ James Smethurst describes the importance of migration narratives within some African American literatures and this reverse movement along the North-South axis and the movement's probable meanings. Smethurst writes, "The impetus for the centrality of migration in black literature was significantly the result of a reconfiguration of the territory of race in the modern city of the Jim Crow era in the North and in the New South" (Smethurst 99). J.'s desire for continuous movement is a result of the reconfiguration of the territory of race in the latter half of the twentieth century, a time of globalization and greatly facilitated international interactions. Moreover, the post-9/11 era would witness an increased surveillance of Black bodies. If we are to agree with Smethurst when he writes, "[t]he master narrative of [the] journey north [in African American literatures]...is one of individual self-development and self-realization, with at least the potential of genuine citizenship in an ideal America, or a combination of that individual self-creation with group elevation," then we must query what the reverse journey may represent for J. in the world of *John Henry Days* (104).¹⁷

¹⁶ As early as 1937 and the publication of "Blueprint for Negro Writing," Wright placed African American writers on par with white writers and he espoused what were recognized as Marxist-influenced ideologies, particularly as regards approaches to literary aesthetic. In what has come to be recognized as Wright's manifesto on black writing, he argues for the development of a literary aesthetic that serves black interests. Wright calls for the development of a literary aesthetic acknowledging the desires and goals of early twentieth-century black workers' movements—"the struggle to free Herndon and the Scottsboro Boys, the drive towards unionism, the fight against lynching"—and revised approaches to Marxist attitudes, particularly as relates the lumpenproletariat (98). According to Wright, "Somewhere in his writings Lenin makes the observation that oppressed minorities often reflect the techniques of the bourgeoisie more brilliantly than some sections of the bourgeoisie themselves" (98). Moreover, he writes,

The workers of a minority people also strive to forge organizational forms of struggle to better their lot and they manifest the same restlessness. Lacking the handicaps of false ambition and property, they have access to a wide social vision and a deep social consciousness. They display a greater freedom and initiative in pushing their claims upon civilization than even the petty bourgeoisie. Their organizations show greater strength, adaptability, and efficiency than any other group in society. (98)

Wright continues, arguing that while "Negro workers have demonstrated this consciousness and mobility for political and economic action there can be no doubt," this consciousness has not been reflected in the work of African American writers. In order to tap into the collective consciousness of the African American masses, Wright suggests that it is imperative to continue and to deepen the literary representations of African American folk traditions and lore.

¹⁷ Madhu Dubey offers insight, in *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism*, as regards Whitehead's probable motivations for employing this reverse movement along the traditional Great Migration route in the novel. J.'s movement reflects Whitehead's use of the contemporary southern folk aesthetic in literature. According to Dubey,

The contemporary southern folk aesthetic seems puzzling because it reverses the geographical trajectory followed in African American literature for well over a century. This tradition...has entailed literal and symbolic journeys out of the rural South into the urban North. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the hope of gaining access to modernity was couched in emphatically urban terms and required aesthetic distance from the 'plantation traditions' of the rural South. In the postmodern era, when integration of African Americans into national public life remains incomplete and unevenly realized, disenchantment with the failed promise of modernity is propelling the reverse literary movement south. (*Signs and Cities* 145)

Robert Stepto acknowledges that “the immersion narrative recounting the journey from the North into the Black Belt of the South became an established trope in African American literature by the turn of the [twentieth] century...typically featur[ing] a sort of yo-yoing between South and North, between inside and outside the Black Belt that never really comes to rest” (qtd. in Smethurst 104). The immersion narrative is about liminality, about those on the margins of the North and South: the immersion narrative is inherently African Americanist lumpen in character. Moreover, adds Smethurst, “this story has some basis in objective fact insofar as Reconstruction saw many African American students, intellectuals, and professionals...travel from the North to the South to work in the schools [and] the government programs...serving the newly freed African American communit[ies]” (104-105). J., in a sense a newly freed American citizen-type testing the boundaries of his airy, individual freedoms, reenacts the immersion narrative by venturing to Talcott from New York. In addition, the idea that John Henry is the subject matter of the festival and the U.S. Postal stamp series underscores the influence of the federal government in J.s’ decision to travel south. Many African Americans were drawn south as a result of Reconstruction policies during the 1870s, the time in which the “actual” John Henry as vouched for by Barbara Foley supposedly lived. Foley’s John Henry was drawn South as a result of convict-leasing, a set of policies that, while not explicitly endorsed by the federal government, was permitted by local customs and cultures and members of law enforcement and structures of governance. J. has similarly been drawn south by the federal postal service’s influence in the guise of the John Henry stamp. J.’s transient, lapsed consciousness comes to rest finally once immersed in the soil of the South.

Whitehead’s use of reverse transit on the North-South axis symbolizes displeasure with the incomplete and unevenly realized promises of *Brown* as experienced by members of his generation and as highlighted by Colbert I. King on *Brown*’s forty-fifth anniversary.¹⁸ The narratives offered in *John Henry Days*—particularly those of Pamela and J.—support such a position

The typical immersion narrative is increasingly recognized as an aspect of black postmodern literature and value is often found in the manner in which African American protagonists return to the “South as citizens where they live and work with and among

¹⁸ Colbert I. King points out in a piece written in 1999 for *The Washington Post* that while “*Brown* still looms large as a great legal victory over the nation’s racial caste system...in the post-*Brown* period...a time when many public schools are as racially isolated and unequal as...when the Supreme Court spoke 45 years ago...[t]he close of the 20th century finds most black people and their children still clustered in the nation’s most racially separate, densely populated urban core” (King). According to Andrew Cuomo, the United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development on the eve of *Brown*’s forty-fifth anniversary,

The truth is we are moving to two education systems. And you can go into a city in a community and you see it. You can go into one school in a suburban district, and they have all the tools and all the equipment. They take the first-graders, they bring them in and they put them on the Internet. The other side of town, the urban school district, they don’t have a basketball net...that... is no accident. (qtd. in King).

King and Cuomo present views of *Brown* as regards the advancement of African Americans since the legislation’s inception—particularly as relates access to educational opportunities relative to their economically more viable white counterparts. King and Cuomo view the history of *Brown* through the lens of race as regards the progress of African Americans.

the folk for the elevation of the race and the preservation of black citizenship” (Smethurst 105). Ironically, J. travels to the South and while he meets a representation of the folk in the guise of Pamela Street, the representation of the folk he encounters is also participating in her own immersion narrative; neither are the “folk” whom the typical immersion narrative suggests would be encountered. They are representatives of the second generation to come referenced by Walker in *For My People*. They are African American lumpenproletarians poised to make purposive uses of their marginalized statuses in the furtherance of attaining enlightenment before death and stasis encroach upon their lives. Pamela represents the revitalized ethos of the southern peasant left for dead on the modern desert and isolated without any roots or guiding directions referenced by Toomer in allusion to 1923’s *Cane*. J. and Pamela’s aborted union represents the shattered, deferred, uncertain, and ambiguous state of the African American Dream as regards the elevation, preservation, and continuation of the African American race and as regards African American citizenship. The aborted Sutter-Street union functions in a manner similar to Hansberry’s questioning of Wright and its symbolic value as a rift between male and female African American literary artists during the Red Scare; the Hansberry-Wright rift symbolizes the ruination of a romanticized united Black Popular Front.¹⁹ Nevertheless, on the surface of the novel J. is an African American journalist who returns to the South to surveil and to record what he sees at the John Henry Days festival at the behest of Lucien Joyce, on whose List J.’s name is included.

Lucien Joyce is the head of “one of the most influential publicity firms in the country,” Lucien Joyce Associates (*John Henry Days* 41). At Lucien Joyce Associates, the members of the firm “have their hands in everything from home electronics to beauty products to independent

¹⁹Hansberry “joined the [Communist] Party as a student at the University of Wisconsin” (Anderson 264). According to Cheryl Higashida, “Hansberry began writing for Paul Robeson’s anti-imperialist and anticapitalist newspaper, *Freedom*,...soon after arriving in Harlem” (Higashida 899). *Freedom* “put Hansberry in the midst of a black anti-imperialist leftist network—including Robeson, W. E. B. Du Bois...Louis Burnham, Alice Childress, and Shirley Graham Du Bois—which connected domestic civil rights struggles to those for African liberation” (Higashida 899). The newspaper began “monthly publication in November 1950 and ran until August 1955, when it folded from lack of funds and under Cold War pressures” (Washington 144).

Nevertheless, Hansberry “reviewed CNA activities in *Freedom*” (91). The Committee for the Negro Arts “was a theater group founded by Rosa Guy after the Communist-affiliated American Negro Theatre, in which young actors like Harry Belafonte participated, became defunct. Its goal was to provide and expand the opportunities for blacks in the theater” (McGill 82). In 1952, for example, Hansberry reviewed the CNA-produced play *Gold Through the Trees*; the proceeds from the play were used to benefit the Civil Rights Congress, a leftist organization headed by Dave Brown—a character captured by Whitehead in *John Henry Days*. More importantly, Hansberry

wrote a review panning Richard Wright’s novel *The Outsider* in an April 1953 issue of *Freedom*.

Asserting that Wright’s protagonist, Cross Damon, ‘is someone you will never meet on the Southside of Chicago or in Harlem,’ and that ‘Wright has been away from home a long time,’ Hansberry reiterated wider critical views that the exilic Wright had applied foreign, inauthentic existentialist tenets to the black American experience—with aesthetically and politically disastrous results. (Higashida 899)

By 1953, Hansberry seems to have adapted the idea that Wright’s use of “foreign inauthentic existentialist tenets” reflected a reductive, mechanistic doctrine at odds with the complexities of U.S. contexts and African American experiences and was prepared to admonish her Chicago brethren accordingly. Moreover, Hansberry concludes, “[Wright] exalts brutality and nothingness; he negates the reality of our struggle for freedom and yet works energetically in behalf [sic] of our oppressors; he has lost his own dignity and destroyed his talent” (“*The Outsider*”).

In many ways Hansberry’s criticism of Wright and production of 1959’s *A Raisin in the Sun* serve to distance Hansberry from her own leftist politics. “In 1951,” Hansberry

was so far to the left that she was fully prepared for and expected to go to jail. But by 1953, with the Red Scare intensifying, Hansberry left her position at Robeson’s newspaper *Freedom* and applied for jobs at various [mainstream] publications...cautiously referring to *Freedom*...as ‘a small cultural monthly’...when Hansberry’s 1959 hit play *Raisin in the Sun* opened...even her FBI informant could find no evidence of Communist thought and concluded in the report, ‘The play contains no comments of any nature about Communism as such but deals essentially with negro [sic] aspirations. (qtd. in Washington 243)

movies, an interdisciplinary and gangster army of hype. They'd publicize the debut twitch of a bean sprout...if the money was right" (41). Lucien employs journalists like J. to place articles about selected products in the "right" media outlets to garner public attention. The List represents "an assemblage of likely suspects to get the word out. A group of men and women who could be called upon in times of need, individuals of good character and savvy, individuals who understood the pitch of the times. And the pitch of the *Times*" (54). More to the point, "The intent of the List is to have a reliable group of people on call who don't give a fuck...key Americans...exemplary citizens" (136-137). Lucien "controls the List" (41).

Moreover, "the List was just" (54). The List "saw a discoloration on its person, watched as the discoloration described a face, and the face was added to the List. The men and women on the List were astonished to find [themselves on the List and] if they wondered about the mechanism of the List, they kept their concerns to themselves, or voiced them in low tones...private moments" (54). More than anything, the men and women of the List "feared expulsion" from the List (54). The List was "aware of those in its charges...knew if writers moved, switched from this newspaper to that magazine, if they died or retired, and updated itself accordingly" (55). The listees "were surprised at the promptness of the List's readjustment, but only the first time. After that...they were surprised at nothing...the List rewarded the world...the List facilitated...the list was to no end" (55). J. describes the List as a "machine to keep the media-saturated society up and running" (235). In the airiness of a light life, J. is complicit with the List and its desires. J. is complicit with the machine. Moreover, J. is desirous, albeit ironically, of the light Lucien's List provides. The light of the List functions as a bribe or concession for J., prolonging the transcendence that could result from his lumpen existences and experiences.

J. is attracted to the shine of the light and inclusion on the light List of Lucien. He is rarely described as recognizing the transformative and agential capabilities of light and shine; his existence in the light usually functions to demonstrate reciprocal signification between the surface of his body and other bodies. Nevertheless, J.'s eventual enlightenment and apparent exclusion from the List by the novel's conclusion serve to denote not only his coming into consciousness, but Whitehead's attempted rehabilitation of the collective American consciousness as regards the centrality of the African American lumpenproletariat to John Henry in an era dominated by Ezra Jack Keats's version of John Henry.²⁰

²⁰ In *John Oliver Killens: A Life of Black Literary Activism*, Keith Gilyard analyzes Killens's *A Man Ain't Nothing But a Man: The Adventures of John Henry*. Gilyard's text is informative for it acknowledges that the most recognized narratives of the John Henry tale in the 1970s "paint the former slave as a proud and stubborn man who pitted his enormous strength and ability against a steam drill in the attempt to delay [capitalist-industrial] mechanization" (Gilyard 287). According to Gilyard, Killens was quite aware that "the dominant John Henry story" by the 1970s, Ezra Jack Keats's *John Henry: An American Legend*, "was not political with respect to the African American community" and was among the "most common and most tame John Henry tales" (287). In "John Henry: Then and Now," William Nikola-Lisa writes, "John Henry's death symbolizes for Keats the waning of the prized American ideal of individualism. It is in this respect Keats[s] John Henry gains widespread appeal, but at the price of ignoring the underlying racial tension inherent in the conflict between John Henry, an ex-slave, and white railroad bosses notorious for their exploitation of black laborers" (Nikola-Lisa 54). According to Gilyard, "Killens knew the Keats version" and desired to revise a version of John Henry inclusive of the folktale's political appeal to African American communities (Gilyard 287). In the efforts to confront Keats's whitewashing of the racial tension inherent in the John Henry tale—that is, Keats's re-appropriation of the tale for universal appeal—Killens depicts a "Black legendary working class hero" in *A Man Ain't Nothing But a Man* (qtd. in Gilyard 287).

J. shines in literal and metaphorical light during two pivotal occurrences in the novel: once, in reality when he is a fifth grader in a New York school enjoying the pastime of a movie projector and, again, when he is an adult accompanied by Pamela Street in the metaphorical light of life's movie projector in West Virginia. The two instances represent two periods of J.'s life: 1) the period of airy, light darkness—J.'s unconscious reception of alienation, marginalization, and isolation as circumscribed freedom; and, 2) the period of weighty, heavy enlightenment—J.'s conscious reflection on his lumpenproletarian existence and the potential for transcendence engendered. Moreover, J.'s transient movement towards transcendence aligns with the reading audience's progressive awareness of African Americanist John Henry traditions rooted in the African American folk and lumpenproletariat as presented in the novel. The nonlinear, oscillating narrative meanders and wanders until settling on the scene of J. and Pamela shining in the metaphorical projector's white Western light contemplating their next moves after Pamela's introduction of Street traditions of John Henry that function to provide J. with more insight as relates his own life and times and the lives of those around him.

While our first introduction to J. alerts us to his airy disposition, such a disposition has not precluded him from accessing and developing the tools necessary for his eventual transcendence. The same could be said of many Black bodies affected by the *Brown* legislation. While one may gain access to the tools needed to develop consciousness, the actual attainment of transcendence requires a type of labor more than likely unbeknownst and hidden in plain sight. For example, in the light of the projector in Mrs. Goodwin's fifth-grade English class, J. experiences the transgressive nature of generic boundary-crossing. Moreover, the function of signification associated with the projector's light and shine reinforces the correlation between J.'s body and transgressive border crossing, transience, and migration. After Mrs. Goodwin "wheeled in the projector at the start of class," J. and his fellow classmates—like Madeline Moses, Alex Minkow, Andrew Schneider, and Adam Horning—"anticipated...they were going to waste a nice chunk of an hour...[watching]...a cartoon" (137-40). The cartoon features Keats's John Henry. Considering the version of John Henry to which the students are introduced, Mary Helen Washington's point in *The Other Blacklist* that she, along with her fellow Red Scare-era classmates, "read anti-communist comic books" like *Superman* is apropos when discussing Keats's John Henry and its antiblack, antifeminist, antilumpenproletarian significance (Washington 1). Nevertheless, while wasting time reflecting on the cartoon, J. queries the generic classification of the John Henry to which he is privy. He "questions the purview of the class. Mrs. Goodwin taught English, but was this story [the John Henry story] English or History or Social Studies. What is the exact line of demarcation between History and Social Studies, for that matter?" (*John Henry Days* 137; punctuation original).

J. and his classmates are presented the post-1970s John Henry dominating the American public sphere advocated by Keats and whose archetype has been soundly ridiculed by Walker in *For My People*. His appetite is abundant—he over-consumes foodstuffs—and his enjoyment of plentiful abundance as an enslaved man-child is abruptly interrupted by labor and death. His immense strength offers no escape route—no street—to consciousness as presented in the cartoon. He is the proletarian John Henry of Walker's contempt. His labor signifies stasis and death. Interestingly, all of the other students with whom J. shares reciprocal signification also suggest transgressive, revolutionary potential when analyzed through the shine of the light and Black Marxist literary criticism in opposition to, and juxtaposed with, the submissive John Henry-type captured in the cartoon. For example, Moses, Minkow, Schneider, and Horning all signify on historical New York surnames associated with American Socialism and Revolutionary zeal. Moses, Minkow, and Schneider are all names found on the Board of Elections List of Enrolled

Voters for the borough of the Bronx in New York in 1918. There are two Minkows listed: Israel and Sadie, both Democrats; there are two Schneiders listed: Ida and Max, both Socialists. While Moses is not listed as a surname but as a first name for many listees, the name's implicit connotation and significant historical relationship with the moniker Israel cannot be ignored, allowing its logical grouping with the surnames of Minkow and Schneider, which are explicitly denoted (Board of Elections). Such a revelation may be missed if we ignore the gaps within the narrative. The irony underlying Whitehead's use of the historical association of Schneider with Socialism in New York and J.'s reference to his classmate Andrew Schneider as "Commodore Andrew Schneider" is not mistaken or inaccurate. They are members of a lumpenproletariat navy of sorts: transgressors, the marginalized, their histories the discards of the perfect American movie and fodder for the cutting room floor (*John Henry Days* 140).

J.'s classmate Adam Horning shares a surname with at least four historical Hornings who participated in the American Revolutionary War as enlisted men in the First Regiment of the New York Militia representing Tryon County (New York 173). Adam and the historical Hornings signify on the trope of the rag. When annoyed with the ragging they suffered at the hands of the tyrant King George III, the historical Hornings rebelled. The militiamen recycled actual rags, trees, laws, lands, tactics, and military strategies in their efforts to provide provisions for the Revolutionary soldiers and to defeat King George III and his forces. Adam Horning, too, recycles ragged paper in *John Henry Days*. According to J., during the John Henry cartoon Adam "had a nosebleed and tore off a piece of college rule loose leaf and stuck it up there [in his nose]" to stop the bleeding (*John Henry Days* 140). While the historical Hornings may have used rags to stop the flowing of Redcoats trespassing American borders, the fictional Adam Horning of *John Henry Days* uses rags to stop the flowing of red plasma shining in his visual register.

J.'s musings as relates the visual representations of the John Henry family depicted in the cartoon further signify on the Socialist sympathies shined upon fifth-grade J. The narrator recounts, "J. remembers the bold colors and blocky limbs of the people first...J. links them to Malevich in his peasant period...[T]he people just looked strong. People of the Earth" (138). J.'s thought experiment as relates Kazimir Malevich signifies on the Russian painter and art theoretician who died in 1935—additionally, the episode signifies on Walker's approach to strength and stasis as demonstrated in *For My People* and on Ellison's approach to mixing high and low culture as demonstrated in *Tillman and Tackhead* and *Slick*. According to Cathy Locke in "A Tragic Visionary: Kazimir Malevich," critics have derided Malevich's art as a negation of everything good and pure; in response to the critical derision his art has received Malevich has suggested, "[A]rt does not need us [human beings], and it never did" (Locke). In addition to signifying on Walker and Ellison, the reference to Malevich signifies on aspects of African Americanist literary histories in three other ways—all associated with the Wright School and Depression-era literary cultures. First, the critical derision leveled at Malevich shares an uncanny similarity with the criticism leveled at Wright, particularly the criticism of Hansberry. Second, Malevich's declaration signifies on Langston Hughes's famous proclamation in 1926's "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." In the essay, Hughes admonishes those who would censor the literary aesthetics of early twentieth-century African American literary artists and those who would "pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization...to be as little Negro and as much American as possible" (Hughes 32).²¹

²¹ After the publication of "The Negro-art Hokum" in *The Nation*, Langston Hughes was approached by one of the magazine's editors to write a response to Schuyler's article. And, while most sources suggest that Schuyler's article was the primary impetus for Hughes's "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,"

Third, J.'s association with Malevich signifies on long, rich African American literary traditions as relates influences with and connections to the Left dating back at least to the 1930s as outlined by Washington and Mills, respectively.

The distancing reading that is advocated by Ramón Saldívar is approached with ambivalence by J. the fifth-grader.²² J. is ambivalent about performing a distancing reading of the John Henry cartoon because he has to pretend to accept illogical ideas to make sense of the Keats-dominated tale presented in Mrs. Goodwin's class. J. is curious as regards the visual representation of abundant food shared by the cartoonish John Henry family. Once again, he muses: "...where did they get all that food. He [John Henry] was born a slave. His parents were slaves. Where did they get all that food?" (*John Henry Days* 138). Nevertheless, J. is a fifth-grade adolescent when he ponders these thoughts. While he is capable of the labor required to develop such inquiries as a fifth-grader, it is apparent that by 1996 J. has not made purposive use of such capabilities of analysis and deductive reasoning. In 1996, J. still lives an airy, light life. J.'s attraction to the lightness of life explains his attraction to Lucien and the List.

Lucien's List and the fear associated with expulsion represent ironic twists on the histories and real functions of some blacklists in American history. Oftentimes, marginalized people do not desire to have their names placed on blacklists by those in positions of power and authority. Particularly as regards some within African American and minority communities, finding

George Hutchinson provides other grounds for the ideas surrounding Hughes's declaration as regards an African American literary aesthetic and purposes for his article in the June 23, 1926 issue of *The Nation* magazine. According to Hutchinson in *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, "the publication of *Nigger Heaven* widened the breach between Hughes and [Jessie] Fauset. When she sent him the *Crisis* questionnaire for a series the magazine was to run on how the Negro should be portrayed" she elicited a response from Hughes that would be fleshed out in his article for *The Nation*. Fauset writes, "The problem as to what is acceptable material in the portrayal of the Negro is creating a pretty serious dilemma for those of us who are either actually creating or who are interested in the development of forms of Negro art" (qtd. in Hutchinson 156-57). While Hughes does not respond to Fauset directly, Hutchinson writes that Hughes records the following on the back of the letter from Fauset: "the true literary artist is going to write about anything he chooses regardless of outside opinions" (157). Adding credence to such a position, David Levering Lewis writes, in *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, that Hughes even broke from his most prized patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason (The Godmother), because she kept urging him to "be primitive" in his poetry (Lewis 257). According to Lewis, "Hughes asked her to release him from her empire, to try to accept his new ideas [about literature], but, above all, 'to let me retain her friendship and good will that had been so dear to me.' The old lady reviled him instead, heaped imprecations upon him, and cast him for all time from her Park Avenue Eden" (259). So, when Hughes was approached by an editor from *The Nation* to respond to Schuyler's article and the subject centered on the aesthetics of African American art, Hughes was responding to not only Schuyler, but Fauset, Mason and anyone else who sought to control the Negro literary artist. Hughes not only faced aesthetic surveillance, as evinced by Jessie Fauset's note to him, but physical and literary surveillance at the behest of Hoover and his team of ghost-readers.

²²In order to truly appreciate the meanings of postracial novels—especially as regards historicity and historiography—Saldívar espouses "a distancing reading" (7). In contrast to a close reading, which requires thoughtful, critical analysis of a text that focuses on significant details or patterns in order to develop a deep, precise understanding of the text's internal elements—such as form, craft, and meaning—a distancing reading "describes the kind of critique that attempts to remain immune to the logical and rhetorical traps and dead ends that its own analysis reveals"—revelations usually resulting from close reading (7). In other words, distancing reading is required to accept the narrative cohesion of postracial novels; one must not question the logical and rhetorical gaps encountered for their very existences point to new generative possibilities centered on understanding and acceptance of certain truth-lies as regards race. In Whitehead's novels, claims Saldívar, the reader becomes entrapped within a postracial parabasis, a kind of liminality as relates the realities and ironies of the truth-lies of race as performed in contemporary America. The postracial parabasis is a double impulse toward and against history and the utopian dream is what marks postrace novels as transformative, according to Saldívar: one sees the footprints of Du Boisian double-consciousness in Saldívar's speculation along with functions of Brown purposive plagiarism.

one's name on a blacklist often results in disastrous corporeal, economic, social, and cultural consequences for the listee.²³

In *John Henry Days*, J. is on the List; he is a member of Lucien's chosen gangsters of hype, part of the assemblage of suspects used to get the word out about any commodity requiring publicity and shine. He is an ironic literary racial representation, akin to one of J. Edgar Hoover's ghostwriters responsible for crafting propaganda about Lorraine Hansberry or Dr. King, for example. Under Lucien's guidance, J. and the members of the List are directed to various events throughout the country. These events, junkets, are the "gift[s]" of the List to the members, the junketeers (54). In exchange for "searching for outlets in which to deliver the word" about the latest products identified by Lucien, the listees attend banquets where they can "show up to eat" for free (54).²⁴

In J.'s case, he is a premium print journalist and an exemplary American type led by Lucien; J. agrees to publicize commodities in exchange for up-front agreements regarding incentives and expenses. The junkets represent bribes for propagandizing puff; J. has been tasked with infiltrating the Black Belt of Talcott in search of information about John Henry. For Lucien and J., John Henry represents just another piece of puff. John Henry is a commodity.

Just the same, J. is "on a three-month junket jag he is too unwilling or too scared to break. He thinks...people are liable to eat [him]" if he remains in any one place too long; and, in J.'s estimation "a black man has no business" in Talcott (15, 78-9). The thought of being eaten is all-encompassing for J.; he has fallen into the routine of eluding being consumed. He focuses his creative, liberatory, transient capabilities on the labor of submissive acquiescence to the List, masquerades such acquiescence as a survival strat-

²³ Take for example, the Custodial Detention List and the A-B-C classification matrix. Both the list and the matrix were "used to evaluate the 'dangerousness' of organizations and individuals and pre-designate those who would be later interned when the United States went to war against the Axis [forces during WWII]. In total, the United States interned 31,899 nationals of Japan, Germany, and Italy from the contiguous United States, Hawaii, Alaska, and Latin American countries as part of its Custodian Detention Program" ("Custodial Detention"). Innocent Americans were sometimes mistakenly, or carelessly, added to the Custodial Detention list or were erroneously indexed according to the matrix (F. B. Eyes 91). Or, one could consider COINTELPRO; many African Americans feared being associated with any lists created as a result of what would become revealed as COINTELPRO. COINTELPRO is an acronym for Counterintelligence Program. The Federal Bureau of Investigations "began COINTELPRO in 1956 to disrupt the activities of the Communist Party of the United States. In the 1960s, it was expanded to include a number of other domestic groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Socialist Workers Party, and the Black Panther Party" ("COINTELPRO"). Moreover, because those pressing for civil rights were often conflated with Communism, many advocating for African American full enfranchisement within the American liberal democratic project during the movements of the post-1956 era were very often surveilled by the FBI and the United States government. The FBI, particularly under the guidance of director Hoover, was afforded considerable latitude regarding names placed on lists for scrutiny by both the Custodial Detention Program and COINTELPRO.

²⁴ Junkets are promotional trips, usually made at the expense of someone other than the junketeers. Since the 1960's, for example, some Las Vegas properties have used junkets and junket representatives to drive more business for the casinos. Patrick Pharris writes, in "Television Press Junkets Guaranteed Results," that "[i]n its earliest form, press junkets were mostly conducted by major film studios. Typically, the studios would invite television, radio and print reporters to attend the junket. They were flown to Los Angeles or New York and shuttled to a swank hotel room where they would find the filmmaker and prominent cast members holed up for hours, doing one interview after the other" (Pharris). Junketeers are the television, radio, and print reporters, led by an independent representative, who agree to cover an event in exchange for up-front agreements regarding incentives and expenses.

egy, and negates any chances of attaining the very transcendence that may allow him to escape feelings of being eaten. His fear of breaking his three-month junket jag centers on labor, reflecting the stasis-like influence of proletarian labor that Walker warns leads to death. While attending an event a day furnishes J. with opportunities to escape being eaten too often and to literally eat by taking advantage of the free banquets he is afforded as a junketeer, the abundance of food and opportunities are always eventually interrupted by the labor of shining light on puff. J. seems reluctant to avail himself to potential lines of flight to consciousness afforded by the routine of the junkets.

All the same, J. decides he is unwilling to break his personal three-month consecutive junket jag for he wishes to break the record held by Bobby Figgis. Bobby Figgis was once a member of the List who “one day...bet another member...that he could do an event every day for a year” (110). Figgis represents a Walker-type proletarian suffering from the stasis associated with submissive labor foreshadowing death. Figgis attended an event recognized by the List every day for nine months. During the “ninth month [Figgis]...attended a video game convention” in Arizona where he was “urged into a black body suit equipped with sensors...and...a heavy black helmet. The screen inside the helmet blazed brilliantly into his eyes, describing a high resolution dream that did not seem to end” (111). Figgis never filed that story. Figgis would never file a story again at the behest of the List; “[h]e stopped filing all stories” and quietly escaped from the List (111).

According to Walker’s Marxist schema, by breaking the nine-month junket jag Figgis chooses a path to transcendence permitting him that place in the light sought while performing continuous labor. Figgis chooses life and the possibilities offered by an unemployed, List(less), marginalized existence over continued submissive labor, (en)Listed stasis, and death. In an ironic twist: Figgis, his literary career, and his reputation as a junketeer are considered dead within the socius dominated by the List. After experiencing “being” as an everlasting dream-like virtual reality within a black body, Figgis is awakened to the slave-like stasis of his life as relates labor. Although “Bobby Figgis...establishes a record of nonstop junketeering that no one dared match,” it is not until Figgis reflects on his labor as performed in a black body suit that he is able to discover a path to transcendence that makes use of a lumpenproletarian minority subject-position in manners advocated by Wright, Walker, and Ellison (111). While Figgis recognizes the dangers associated with individual achievement and advancement and that he will never attain the liberation that he seeks as a member of the List—particularly stuck in a nightmarish black body—J. remains aloof and airy. Sometime around March 1996, J. begins his three-month consecutive junket streak. For three months, J. demonstrates superendurance and superstrength in his efforts to best the Figgis record for reasons centered on spectacular individual acclaim.

In the lightness of life, J. entertains the junket record and travels by airplane all around the United States—including the South—publicizing everything from beauty aids to the latest independent movies. There is never any mention in the narrative of the rash of African American church burnings taking place in 1996.²⁵ There is never any mention that western Virginia, partic-

²⁵ Beginning in 1990, “federal investigators...probed the burning or vandalization of more than 200 places of worship...The attacks were carried out in 35 states, from California to Maine” to West Virginia—and in “[a] number of Southern states, where high concentrations of these crimes occur[red]” (Harrison). In “A Test of Faith: Black Church Burnings and America’s Enduring Crucible of ‘Race,’” Timothy P. McCarthy examines the wave of black church burnings that occurred in the United States in the 1990s...Drawing from [McCarthy’s] personal experiences as a young college teacher taking his students down South on ‘alternative’ spring break trips to help rebuild these churches, [the] essay examines the complex social, cultural, and political forces that have both framed the issue in the public consciousness and shaped the nation’s response to it. (McCarthy 12)

In the essay, McCarthy references Wheeling, West Virginia—a town four hours from Talcott and located on the

ularly near the border with West Virginia, contains the largest percentage of Americans who most frequently search racist terminology on the Internet at the close of the twentieth century.²⁶ J. does suggest, in a period of reflection when he is contemplating the existential threat that is Black reality historically in the South, that “the FBI will verify that I was on the flight to Yeager Airport” (21). Such a reference is a subtle allusion to the racialized violence suffered by lumpenproletarians like James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner and investigated by the FBI and immortalized in motion-picture dramas like *Mississippi Burning* and literary case studies composed by the FBI. A critique of the racialized traumas suffered by African Americans historically in the United States, along with the requisite investigations into such traumas by entities like the FBI well after the fact, is captured—albeit, rather indirectly—by Whitehead. And, while *John Henry Days* is not set in “Mississippi in the fifties...It’s always Mississippi in the fifties” for some African Americans who cannot escape the always, already overdetermined status and psychologically damaging stasis of being identified as Black in America (127).²⁷

The approach to such representations of literary racial conflict is so subtle as to almost avoid detection and reflects Whitehead’s attempts to signify on Ellison’s approach to representations of literary racial conflict in his post-1950s works. Just as the breadcrumbs of many Depression-era Leftist African Americanist concerns are evident in *Invisible Man* just beneath the surface of the narrative as pointed out by Foley, the breadcrumbs of many post-Reconstruction and post-*Brown* African Americanist concerns are apparent in *John Henry Days*. As Katherine Chaddock makes clear in *Uncompromising Activist: the lynching and burning of African Americans and their property went unabated during the liminal times associated with the origins of John Henry in Reconstruction-era America*. By restricting the intensity of the light that refracts from J. as relates the burning of African American churches during the 1990s in the novel, Whitehead further underscores J.’s distance from traumatic African American histories and exposes J.’s continued non-purposeful transience in the dark, unbearable lightness of being. Still and all, the intersection of concerns about lynching, burnings, and African American corporeality reflected in the post-Reconstruction, Depression, and post-*Brown* eras of African Americanist literary histories require querying of the topics as relates *John Henry Days*, particularly burnings.

Lucien does not charge J. with publicizing the contemporary state of Black churchgoers in West Virginia; Lucien charges J. with surveilling and recording information about a possibly mythical black man as relates the American South of the 1870s. The

northernmost border of the Mason-Dixon Line. If church burnings were symbolically and literally taking place so close to the Northern United States in West Virginia, then one can only imagine that the situation may have been similar, or at least noteworthy, in the Southern portion of West Virginia in 1996.

²⁶ In *We Were Eight Years In Power*, Ta-Nehisi Coates attempts to explain the sudden onset of his disillusionment as regards the postracial era in American society. More to the point, Coates has discovered that “the lies of the Civil War and the lies of the postracial years resonate with each other” (*Eight Years* 69). In explaining the supposedly sudden rise in racial animus among white Americans in the early-twenty first century, particularly as evinced on the Internet, Coates writes: “The areas with the highest rates of racially charged search terms were western Virginia...eastern Ohio, upstate New York, and southern Mississippi” (132).

²⁷ Coates writes, “Between 1882 and 1968, more black people were lynched in Mississippi than in any other state” (*Eight Years* 164). In addition to the physical violence suffered by many pre-*Brown* blacks, those who had been reduced to sharecropping and forms of menial labor just a cut above slavery were doggedly surveilled. A former southern peasant, Isabel Wilkerson, asserts: “you had to *sneak away*” from Mississippi (qtd. in *Eight Years* 165; emphasis mine).

concern within the American public sphere with which the existential realities of some African Americans are addressed in 1996 seems to move with no deliberate speed, in a fashion similar to the enforcement of the *Brown* legislation as explained by Andrew Cuomo on the eve of the legislation's forty-fifth anniversary.

The explicit purpose of J.'s junket to Talcott is to report on the John Henry Days festival. Implicitly, one is left protesting: there is little about which to be festive when African American communities are being besieged by the actions of white supremacist forces. J. is not quite off the mark when asserting, "This place will fucking kill him me" (78). Moreover, "They know how to watch a nigger die" (86). Over 200 church burnings from 1990 to 1996 attest to the spectatorial nature of the American public sphere as suggested by the surveillance of the destruction of African American places of worship in post-*Brown* America. As J. lightly challenges the Figgis record, churches keep burning.

Dave Brown "quer[ies]" J. as regards why J. is "going for the [Figgis] record"; J. responds, "To see if I can. To prove I can" (236). J.'s goal is steeped in proving his worth as an American laborer and signifies on corrective mimesis as regards the capabilities of African American workingmen and admonitions against African Americanist literary practices incorporating racial corrective mimesis as espoused by Wright, Hughes, and Madhu Dubey, respectively.²⁸ Like Walker's use of the word "nature" in *For My People*, the words "Dave Brown" register on multiple levels in *John Henry Days*. The name Dave Brown opens the interpretive field of the novel in many ways; there are at least three understandings of the name suggested in the novel: one explicitly, two implicitly.

First, Dave Brown is explicitly described as a member of the List within the text of the novel. On December 6, 1969, Dave Brown was "twenty-six" years old; by 1996, he is a somewhat reformed "hippie" and a "lost [baby] boomer" (90, 94). In many respects, Dave Brown represents a white American male lumpenproletarian who has exchanged his transient, transgressive, peace and love lifestyle for one of proletarian submissive labor and stasis. He is the reformed hippie of the 1960s who has exchanged the liberatory potential unleashed in the 1960s for the corporatist circumscription of the 1990s. For example, the infamous Rolling Stones' Altamont Speedway Free Festival, which Dave attends as a budding journalist, is remembered as the Woodstock of the west, a "peace and love" festival—"good fun...and good times" (91). It was the time of "the good old days...the summer of sixty-nine [before] all those screaming girls had stopped cutting their hair" (88). The misogyny inherent in the description of Brown's recollection betrays just how fun the times were and for whom. Dave Brown and his generational cohort were "playing at something," just what they knew not (94). While Dave Brown is represented as having been as airy as J. Sutter at particular points in his life reflecting the personal drama and changing political sentiments of the 1960s and the 1990s, Dave "did [believe] or... wanted to...believe" in the zeitgeist of the freedom loving decade of the 1960s and its desires for a colorblind, egalitarian American society (94).

Dave shares a story about his participation in the spectacularity of the Altamont Speedway Free Festival. While in observance, Dave witnesses the violent murder of a Black man

²⁸ According to Dubey, in "Racecraft on American Fiction," American contemporary African Americanist approaches to literary aesthetics reflect a "loss of faith in earlier twentieth-century consensus" regarding the use of corrective mimesis to expose and combat the "lies of race"; does not deny the rationality of those who have accepted race as truth about the world; is interested in what makes race plausible; is generative as relates formal analysis of literary racial representation; demands detailed analysis of metaphor; recognizes blood as its "core fiction"; is historically anachronistic; and, provides analysis that functions as a "guided tour" of race, laying bare the manifold ways in which metaphors becloud and misdirect rational thought ("Racecraft" 368-369). In an attempt to combat the various "post-post" approaches to race in contemporary novels, she labels her approach to analysis of literary racial representation in contemporary literature "racecraft."

with an afro. The man is murdered in front of thousands of festival goers by members of the Hells Angels hired to provide security for the venue; no one attempts to come to the man's aid as he is stabbed and kicked and pummeled. He is treated as a member of a discarded demographic. When one young man does attempt to go to the man's aid, Dave admonishes the young man: "You can't do anything" (99). Fearing for his life and well-being at the hands of the Hells Angels, Dave confesses that they would have "killed him [the young man] and me too if we dared do anything" (99). It is quite possible that Dave and the young man would have also been killed while aiding the young black man in his quarrel with the three to four Hells Angels members; after all, the Hells Angels are known for "cracking skulls" of innocent people who happen to have the bad luck of being within their proximity (96). They represent Marx's more illicit lumpenproletarian demographic. Dave, along with thousands of festival goers, stands idly by as a Black man with an afro is murdered at the hands of a group of violent white men who roam the American interstate highways and routes on motorcycles raging havoc everywhere they go. Dave Brown does nothing: "Dave Brown—what could [one] do with Dave Brown" (51)? For the young black man attending the free concert in Altamont Park in 1969, Dave Brown is worthless. The young man exists as a spectacle to be gazed upon by Brown. He is a disposable and flickering image. He is treated as ragged, lumpen waste.

The second interpretation of Dave Brown—one more implicitly understood—centers on the real-life African American Leftist figure David Brown.²⁹ David Brown served as the secretary and as the chairman of the Los Angeles chapter of the Civil Rights Congress (CRC).³⁰ David Brown also served as an FBI Confidential Informant of Known Reliability from 1950 to 1954 after "he had contrived to become a member of the [CRC] in Los Angeles" (Lamont 151). While testifying before the Subversive Activities Control Board for the CRC in May 1955, Brown claims that "he had made so many reports to the FBI that were without foundation that he could not recall having made one that had a foundation in fact" ("Group Expels"). He mysteriously disappeared in early January 1955 after faking his own kidnapping ("Weird Tale"). Soon after, he unsuccessfully attempted suicide in a hotel room. Brown "had temporarily cracked up because of his emotional disturbance over the dirty business," as he describes it, "in which he was engaged" (Lam-

²⁹ In this study, I elucidate some Leftist literary approaches and influences as evinced in *John Henry Days* and highlighted by Washington in *The Other Blacklists*. For example, Washington discusses the "the militant role of the communists to...stop evictions [and] protest police violence...in industrial cities where blacks were at the bottom of industry's discrimination structures" (5); the interchange and cooperation between "the CP...and a range of black organizations...[including the] Civil Rights Congress" (6); and, Paul Robeson, his affiliation with the Communist Party, and his role in assisting black pilots and black flight attendants achieve equality as regards the hiring policies of the airline industry. Whitehead explores issues of eviction in the guise of the Eleanor Bumpurs case; the Civil Rights Congress and Dave Brown; and, Robeson—all in relation to the industries of knowledge and literary production in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

³⁰ The Leftist organization was founded in Detroit, Michigan in 1946. The CRC arose out of the merger of three groups with ties to the Communist Party USA: the International Labor Defense, the National Negro Congress, and the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties. Embodying the spirit and tactics of all three of its predecessors, the CRC concentrated on legal defense and mass political action on behalf of victims of legal frame-ups. It briefly became a major force in post-WWII battles for civil rights for African Americans, and civil liberties for white and black labor movement radicals, before becoming a victim of Cold War anticommunism and government repression. (Salter)

ont 151). The dirty business refers to his infiltration and surveillance of the CRC and its members. The scandalous events left Brown psychologically scarred and wounded. He said he felt ashamed and suicidal for being a “stool pigeon...[and for having] betrayed the working people generally; all of the American people, including [his] friends, co-workers, family—everybody who ever trusted [him] and had confidence in [him]” (“Group Expels”). According to Brown’s testimony, he “resorted to fabrications so that he could go on drawing pay, ranging from \$25 a week to \$250 a month, as an informer” (Lamont 151).

Understanding Dave Brown as an allusion to, or an example of signifying on, the actual David Brown of the CRC reorients one to the question posed earlier—what could one do with Dave Brown? If one were an advocate for the attainment of full civil rights for African American people, then there would be nothing one could do with Brown; Brown represents a liability and an enemy to the cause of social, political, and racial justice on behalf of African American people. He has been bribed and his revolutionary potential dimensioned. He has not made purposive uses of his transience. Unlike the white Dave Brown, the CRC’s Dave Brown literally sold his birthright for a very small mess of pottage. One could not trust in Brown. One could not have pride in the accomplishments associated with Brown. Moreover, David’s surname draws attention to the modern civil rights movement and the 1954 *Brown* legislation. So, when in jest members of the List suggest that J. is the great black hope and their inspiration, in comparison to and, perhaps, beyond Dave Brown, a third potential register of the name Dave Brown can be inferred, for the episode represents the polyphonic characteristics of Whitehead’s prose in *John Henry Days*.

The first interpretation suggests that J. Sutter functions as an inspiration beyond Dave Brown, the former hippie. Sutter represents a chance for someone within his post-*Brown* generation to venture beyond indulging in peace and love for fun and good times while being of no assistance to an African American man being publicly murdered in the presence of thousands of his fellow American citizens. The simulacra of such real events occurring on television and cable news broadcasts with increased frequency in the late-twentieth century and early-twenty first century underscore the ineffectiveness and spectacular American cultural logic inherent in misdirected uses of the light and the shine by the Dave Browns of 1960s America. According to the second interpretation, J. functions as an inspiration, an idea, and a vision for African American political and cultural leadership beyond that of David Brown, the former FBI informant and chairman of the Los Angeles chapter of the CRC. Sutter represents the opportunity to demonstrate performances of post-*Brown* masculinities centered on loyalty to the folk—the lumpenproletariat—and the attainment of consciousness. As a vision beyond Brown he would not betray those working on behalf of the African American folk—family, friends, comrades, fellow patriotic citizens—at the behest of the FBI. Sutter functions as an inspiration not to sell one’s “birth-right for a mess of pottage” (Johnson 100). Going beyond David Brown allows one to envision a version of African American masculine service leadership that does not surveil and that does not record the activities of African Americans leading to the names of some African Americans being placed on the FBI’s blacklists of potential national security threats to the United States of America. Going beyond Brown suggests that as a writer, J. would not betray the cause advocated by so many who fight on behalf of the attainment of full civil rights for African Americans. After all, the “prose” offered by Brown “is resistible” (*John Henry Days* 51). At least the FBI should have resisted the complete fabrications offered by Brown as concerns the activities of those advocating for civil rights in the post-*Brown* era.

Lastly, the name Dave Brown signifies on the *Brown* legislation of 1954. In such an instance, to go beyond *Brown* and to be recognized as the great black hope or to be an inspiration in light of *Brown* is to suggest that J., even in his black bodysuit, is an American with a Social

Security card in his pocket. Although it is possible that J.'s "ancestors were owned... maybe," to go beyond *Brown* would be "to know if the world had progressed to the point where such a thing [the commodification of human beings]" could be eliminated (21, 20). To fight for such a cause on the international level would align J. with the respective conceptions of lumpenproletarian leadership advocated by Marx, Douglass, and Ellison. To go beyond *Brown* reconfigures racial territory to the extent that the underlying metric used in the configuration of global, international territory—race—is rendered null and void—but not excised, elided, or forgotten—and has no impact on the exercise of J.'s human rights within the global public sphere.

Still and all, J. is not constructed to endure an assessment of America's progress on race. America does not seem quite ready to recognize the citizenship and human rights of African Americans in all of their many manifestations. Elite class status and private school education seemingly are not enough to compensate for the powerful attraction that J.'s African racial heritage—his Otherness—holds in the imagination of the dominant culture. Judge Sawyer highlights the strong attraction of race in the *Ah Yup* case, along with understandings of the construction of race within the public sphere.³¹ Ah Yup's attempt to naturalize as a white man—an identity barred to him—while never considering naturalizing as a person of African nativity or origin—an identity not recorded as barred to him—attests to the privileged status of whiteness alluded to by Judge Sawyer. In the lightness of American life, it is less than surprising that J. has "been very conscientious about staying from the forge of his race's history."

³¹ The major thrust of the impact of the case centers on defining who is and who is not eligible for naturalization as a United States citizen in 1878. The case centers on evaluating whether or not U.S. law authorizes the naturalization of native of Chinese persons of the "Mongolian race" as white persons (In re Ah Yup 1). At issue are "the acts of congress relating to the naturalization of aliens" (1). In all Congressional acts from that of April 14, 1802, down to the Revised Statutes, the language has been 'that any alien, being a free white person, may be admitted to become a citizen,' etc. After the adoption of the thirteenth and fourteenth amendments to the national constitution; the former prohibiting slavery, and the latter declaring who shall be citizens, congress in the act of July 14, 1870, amending the naturalization laws, added the following provision: 'That the naturalization laws are hereby extended to aliens of African nativity, and to persons of African descent.' (1)

Ah Yup sought clarification from the court as regards his status and naturalization as a United States citizen under the criteria of a "white man," because he was not of African descent, but was of Chinese origins. The court itself sought an explanation and clarification as regards the criteria of whiteness and looked toward literature for the answer. The court found that Ah Yup did not meet the criteria of a white man. According to Judge Sawyer,

The words 'white person,' as well argued by petitioner's [Ah Yup's] counsel, taken in a strictly literal sense, constitute a very indefinite description of a class of persons, where none can be said to be literally white, and those called white may be found of every shade from the lightest blonde to the most swarthy brunette. But these words in this country, at least, have undoubtedly acquired a well settled meaning in common popular speech, and they are constantly used in the sense so acquired in the literature of the country, as well as in common parlance. As ordinarily used everywhere in the United States, one would scarcely fail to understand that the party employing the words 'white person' would intend a person of the Caucasian race. (2)

In Sawyer's legal rendering, the literature of the country records the common sense—common popular speech—of what it means to be white at the turn of the twentieth-century. Judge Sawyer's understanding of literature's role in elucidating and explicating race seems to anticipate Martin Heidegger as regards the role of Dasein, or being in the "it" of one's life, by about half a century.

J.'s reluctance to engage with African American history begins to change once J. meets Pamela Street. The depiction of Pamela reflects the southern peasant aesthetic. Moreover, she is Mr. Street's daughter and the one, legitimate inheritor of his John Henry memorabilia, legacies, and traditions; she also serves as an option, as a street, and as a route to the possibilities of the attainment of consciousness and transcendence for J. and post-*Brown* men like him. Throughout the course of the novel, the relationship between J. and Pamela is characterized as one on the cusp of a budding intimate relationship—they seem to date. The potential of a Sutter-Street union provides great insight as regards interpretations of some of the more pivotal arguments of the novel as a whole, namely: the deferral of African American dreams of racial equality and full enfranchisement within the American liberal democratic project in the post-*Brown* era.

Pamela Street is introduced fairly early in the novel. Prior to her introduction, J. could simply be understood as an exemplary representation of an African American male within the kaleidoscope of discoloration offered by the light of Lucien's List. Once the members of the reading audience, and J., recognize "[s]he's coming with them," we recognize that J. "isn't the only black person" in the group of junketeers (50). For her presence, "J. is grateful" (50). As the two African Americans within a group of predominantly white citizens, the combination of J. and Pamela suggests an African American community capable of sustaining itself and reproducing itself, possibly securing African American citizenship into the twenty-first century with deep connection to and in communication with the folk.

Pamela Street is "from New York City...[H]er walk, a rapid skitter" betraying her origins (48). Her father died some six months ago according to the narrative—about three months before J. began his consecutive junkets jag. She is not a junketeer like J. and the members of the List. Pamela is a temporary workingwoman within the American landscape of labor; her employment opportunities are whimsical and at the behest of the oscillating winds of economic activity in New York. She lives on the margins; she is an African American lumpenproletariat.³² When the services of those like Pamela suggest high demand, employment is probable; when they suggest low demand, employment is not probable. In many respects, Pamela is reminiscent of the African American southern workingwomen of Walker's *For My People* whose economic viability and employment are solely dependent upon the desires of the southern white matriarchs who have controlled the domestic economies of many homes in the South. As the inheritor of her father's John Henry museum, which he housed in his home in Harlem, Pamela has been invited to Talcott by the town's mayor. The mayor hopes to purchase the collection from Pamela, for she has provided shelter and care to a version of John Henry nurtured and sustained in Harlem.

For her part, Pamela suffers from John Henry fatigue. Her father's obsession with John Henry has overshadowed her childhood and has robbed her and her mother of time better spent with her father. The descriptions and consequences of Mr. Street's labor are similar to those used to describe Richard T. Greener's labor. On the surface of things, Mr. Street's labor appears to have led to only stasis and death—his routine absence from Pamela's life and permanent expul-

³² Interestingly, there was an actual Pamela Street who attended university near Whitehead in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The real-life Pamela Street was a member of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's graduating class of 1993 (*The Tech*). An even more interesting discovery: Pamela Street was a member of the photography staff at *The Tech*, MIT's campus newspaper. The discovery is uncanny when one compares the idea of Pamela as a photographer to one of the reflections about a woman traveler that the narrator shares. In reference to the woman traveler, the narrator states, "When opens...her eyes in a completely dark environment, the first sensation generated is often one of anxious dislocation" (*John Henry Days* 6). One cannot help but imagine that Whitehead and the actual Pamela Street may have known one another; after all, Whitehead spent plenty of time around newsrooms and photographers before settling in his role as novelist. Moreover, the actual Pamela Street seems cloaked in darkness and dislocated, both characteristics associated with the lumpen on the path to consciousness as captured by Whitehead in *John Henry Days*.

sion from the socius. Since her father's death, Pamela has been responsible for storing his belongings, including his John Henry memorabilia, and "[t]he monthly storage fees are a bitch" (43). She hopes to sell the items from her father's museum to the citizens of Talcott. She is not particularly interested in celebrating her father, nor John Henry. However, her emotional and economic attachment to her father and to her father's John Henry collection betray her outward displays of displeasure with the subjects.

During her first prolonged interaction with J.—an exchange which took approximately four seconds—she analyzes J. as potentially homosexual; not as sophisticated as perhaps thought; one who dates interracially predominantly; and, a potential sexual mate. The kaleidoscopic-influenced characteristics projected onto J. by Pamela are uncannily similar to the complaints waged by Black feminist and womanist literary artists towards current African American male novelists as regards the African American male protagonists who inhabit the worlds of their novels and also signifies on the purposive uses of African American stereotypes as demonstrated in the literatures of William Wells Brown and George C. Wolfe.³³ While in a local diner, J. and Pamela discuss why Pamela has traveled to Talcott and if she has ever visited before. While explaining that her "father used to come [to West Virginia] a lot to find stuff for his [John Henry] collection," Pamela continues a line of questioning relayed by the narrator (185). We are informed:

She asks him how long he's been a journalist and thinks, gay? The way he talks reminds her of Royce. Whenever she and Royce went out he'd look around the room and pick out the waffling straight boys...she'd forgiven him for what happened when she'd introduced him to the new fellow she'd started seeing. Forgiven him and him: it was her luck. J.'s not bad-looking. That Hawaiian shirt is pretty loud, makes him stick out more than he does already. Black people around here are pretty country from what she's seen so far. What room is he staying in?...Haven't been laid in—He does live in New York though. She shakes her head. That kind of thinking leads nowhere...Blond girls or he's gay. Maybe introduce him to Royce when they get back to New York so he can do his trick. (It takes her four seconds to concoct this narrative.). (186)

³³ The advent of some post-*Brown* literary and cultural movements, while of great value regarding African American social, political, cultural, and literary histories, have also exposed a great rift within African American literary communities as regards gender roles, patriarchy, and the American Dream: critically speaking, some black men and black women have separated into competing camps, exposing a great intellectual divide within the production of African American literatures and literary criticisms. Sherley Anne Williams refers to such a situation as "the separatist tendency" in African American literatures. In the attempt to find resolution to the separatist tendency, Williams addresses the importance of examining African American male protagonists and the worlds that they inhabit. In a post-*Brown* world, "What is needed is a thoroughgoing examination of male images in the works of black male writers" (Williams 222). Erica Edwards notes, "'black' writers like...Colson Whitehead either parody or shy away from stories about the black community, exposing race to postmodernist play and philosophical questioning while, at the same time, reinvoking a specifically black cultural production" (Edwards 194). In the episode involving Pamela and J., Whitehead exposes the separatist tendency to parody. However, he confronts it face-on, highlighting the irony and ridiculousness of the situation denoting a lack of knowledge of the Other and a lack of knowledge of the Self—on behalf of BOTH parties—as the primary drivers for the separatist tendency in the productions of African American literatures. For example, in the scene captured in *John Henry Days* Whitehead highlights the arrogance with which Pamela estimates J. in four seconds; nevertheless, her quick estimations of J. reflect stereotypical images of the contemporary African American male prevalent in the American public sphere. Whitehead's use of African American stereotypes for purposive literary and political reasons signifies on William Wells Brown and particular African American literary histories.

Pamela considers herself more sophisticated than J.—he is folkier than the black folks of Talcott in his loud-colored shirt—and Pamela is skeptical of J.’s viability as a sexual partner. Whitehead’s use of the trope of the effeminate black male to illustrate the scene signifies on William Wells Brown and George C. Wolfe as regards the use of racial stereotypes for purposive political ends in African American literary histories.

In *Laughing Fit to Kill: Black Humor in the Fictions of Slavery*, Glenda Carpio suggests that Brown’s use of racial stereotypes highlights certain aspects of racial stereotypes, such as their theatricality; status as masks; internally-critical functionality; and, metatheatrical recognition of their own ragged natures and exploitation of such. In Carpio’s estimation, “Although they [racial stereotypes] were (and are) too often used to deny the humanity of his brethren, Brown knew that they could also be used as the means to freedom” (Carpio 33). Like literary uses of the trope of the ragged proletariat, Brown’s uses of racial stereotypes reflect the dual functions of delimiting Black freedom and engendering Black freedom. Moreover, according to Christina Knight in “Fasten Your Shackles’: Remembering Slavery and Laughing about It in George C. Wolfe’s *The Colored Museum*,” Wolfe utilizes “humor...[to] engage the history of slavery” in America (Knight 356). By using humor and poignancy to explore “the complexities of [contemporary post-*Brown*] black life,...Wolfe joins a long line of black writers and artists who have employed satire to political ends...the clearest predecessor of Wolfe’s work in the nineteenth century is William Wells Brown” (355-56).

Like Brown, Wolfe makes purposive use of racial stereotypes in *The Colored Museum*. “By structuring his play about modern life in relationship to the legacy of slavery,” writes Knight, “Wolfe engages in a debate about what role that historical wound should play in the ways that contemporary blacks conceive themselves” (355). Wolfe argues, “Blacks [must] ‘claim’ [this] historical injury” (355). Underscoring Wolfe’s desire for collective African American recognition and ownership of the wounds suffered and engendered while in bondage are the generative potentials of Black experiences as relates chattel bondage for literary purposes. Whitehead uses the racial stereotypes of the effeminate Black male and the sexually aggressive Black female, respectively, as evinced in American minstrelsy and Plantation traditions to exaggerate the consequences of the separatist tendency, particularly for those who advocate for a metaphorical Sutter-Street union for African Americans in general. No matter one’s gender identity and class position in contemporary America, the historical baggage and trauma of racial stereotypes continue to psychologically haunt and wound many African Americans and to dominate the American public’s imagination as relates the humanity of Americans of African descent, inhibiting more purposive human social interactions.

Pamela’s beheeling, stereotypical, minstrel-like analysis of J. notwithstanding, he is the one possible partner who represents the potential for African American community building presented in the novel as reflecting the weightiness and gravitas of African American histories. As the novel progresses, she tells J. of her father’s method of self-fashioning and of making sense of the world. Her father was a composer of sorts. A *bricoleur*, a revision of Charles Baudelaire’s rag-picker, a precursor to the contemporary hip-hop disc jockey—Mr. Street approaches John Henry as regards the construction of his Harlem museum in a fashion similar to Whitehead as regards his construction of John Henry in the novel. For example, Mr. Street would make up words to John Henry songs to which he had forgotten the lyrics. Pamela relates, “[F]ather used to say that what you put in those gaps was you...You mix it up, cut a verse or two and stick to the verses that you like or remember or mean something to you. Then you’ve assembled your own John Henry”

(373). Mr. Street practices “an exuberantly fictive instance of stylistic one-upsmanship” (Sanborn 7). So, too, did the FBI’s Depression-era Confidential Informants of Known Reliability. So, too, does Whitehead.³⁴

For example, Derek Maus highlights Whitehead’s use of fourteen testimonies concerning John Henry and the rags, blues, and ballads written about him. All of the testimonies about John Henry reflect African American Marxist lumpenproletarian characteristics: narratives about a wandering laborer defeated in his quest for consciousness and eventually erased from the socius for attempts at self-fashioning. Although Maus recognizes such African American lumpen characteristics in the testimonies, he cannot reconcile their collective existences within the structure of John Henry. Maus writes, “The testimonies about [John Henry’s] physical person contain claims that are impossible to reconcile with one another. Some place him in Alabama in the 1880s, while others have him in West Virginia in the early 1870s. Some claim he died in his contest with the steam drill, whereas others claim that he was hanged for murder, even as another set denies his existence altogether” (Maus 41). Nevertheless, Maus unwittingly highlights Whitehead’s use of purposive plagiarism in alignment with William Wells Brown. Although Whitehead acknowledges in the Prologue that twelve of the testimonies contained in the novel are from the actual historical record on the copyright page of *John Henry Days*, “[i]t is significant,” writes Maus, “that Whitehead makes no distinction whatsoever for his reader between the two that he has created and the twelve that he has reproduced from other real-life sources” (41). For Maus, the lack of distinction on Whitehead’s part facilitates democratizing John Henry and the neoliberalism inherent in Whitehead’s supposed failure to delineate the truth-lie distinctions of the tale rendering the meanings of all fourteen tales null and void yet “real” as fictions.

While Pamela may have deluded herself into believing that she is seeking to rid herself of the baggage and weightiness of her father’s memory and history and property, the manner in which her father’s directives work to structure and to guide her outlook on life suggests that she does not desire to embrace the unbearable lightness of being and to ostracize herself from the histories and traditions associated with her father and his projections of being. Despite her uneasiness with her father, and his detachment from Pamela’s stray, transient reality, Pamela inherits, retains, and transfers her father’s knowledge and understanding of the structure of the universe—his epistemology and cosmology—to a waiting world as derived from his interactions with the multiple African Americanist traditions of John Henry encountered during the transience associated with his John Henry research.

Moreover, Pamela represents the “soil” in the novel, the African American female

³⁴ In *Plagiarama!: William Wells Brown and the Aesthetic of Attractions*, Geoffrey Sanborn infers that Brown’s literary use of racial stereotypes reflects an aspect of Brown’s purposive plagiarism, “an exuberantly fictive instance of stylistic one-upsmanship” (Sanborn 7). In many respects, what I label purposive plagiarism is akin to intensive signification, a way to acknowledge those who have come before you and to demonstrate improvements upon previous designs. Postracialism signifies on a number of historically African Americanist approaches to literary aesthetics. Sanborn describes Brown’s “lush, louche plagiarism” of over 87,000 borrowed words from over 282 texts as the performance of “getting up” (10). “Getting up,” or “exhibiting a signifier of selfhood that is one trick removed from a series of flourishes with no meaning,” is an aesthetic approach to literary self-representation in opposition to the approach of Douglass. Whereas Douglass approaches literacy, and literature, seriously and approaches its mastery as an escape to “phallic mastery”—particularly as regards selfhood—Brown’s approach is described as “a campy travesty of mastery, an unserious hyperbolization of selfhood” (10). Brown is described as approaching the literary representation of selfhood with an airy disposition akin to the lightness with which J. Sutter approaches life in *John Henry Days*.

presence in touch with the Earth and with “hands in the dirt” (*John Henry Days* 388). Although she shares similarities with the workingwomen of *For My People*, she is a member of Walker’s second generation of African American women who are “not as they”—the women who are overdetermined by their apparently organic connection to labor and the stasis of death (“Lineage” 21). And, while “[c]onjure women and oracular witches...don’t just fall off trees...these days,” Pamela’s folk connections and communications are no simulacra (*John Henry Days* 123). Reflective of the sage knowledge and personal characteristics facilitating self-fashioning inherited from her father, Pamela is the closest approximation to the southern African American peasant captured so beautifully by Jean Toomer in *Cane* and feared dead on the landscape of modernity and nothing but a facsimile of the real thing in a world of postmodern petite narratives. Pamela is a representation of the real and “the real is so hard to come by these days” (107). While with J. in the tunnel dug by John Henry, Pamela experiences an epiphany of sorts as regards her relationship to her father, John Henry, and African American literary and cultural histories. She makes purposive use of her lumpen transience; she transcends.

Seeing the location of John Henry’s impossible task gives her a new appreciation for her father’s impossible task of creating a John Henry museum in his Harlem home. Pamela migrates emotionally from perspectives on selling her father’s collection to the town of Talcott—thereby parting with her birthright for a mess of pottage and ridding herself of the weight of her father’s memory—to perspectives on keeping the collection—thereby escaping the individualistic, unbearable lightness of being and continuing her responsibility as the repository and containment vessel for aspects of African American histories, systems of knowledge, and cultures. Pamela ultimately realizes that *she* is such a repository and that her father’s knowledge lives within her soul, her body, and her mind. Commodities and symbols are only invested with the meanings one confers upon them. Commodities are empty signifiers whose meanings are developed in conjunction with self-fashioning. And, as her father’s “remix” of John Henry suggests, self-fashioning is only limited by one’s imagination. Her transient existence has generated the necessary context for Pamela to re-imagine herself. Moreover, by finally selling her father’s belongings to the town of Talcott, her father’s ultimate purpose will be fulfilled: fellow American citizens and citizens of the world will be afforded opportunities to encounter a multiplicity of African American histories and traditions that have given birth to John Henry. John Henry will remain a way to talk about African American histories and traditions and African American histories and traditions will remain ways to talk about John Henry. In discussing the intended audience for *John Henry Days*, Whitehead suggests, “John Henry becomes a way to talk about different things and different things become a way to talk about John Henry. It goes back and forth...My ideal reader sees how both play and interact” (“Post Office”).

Through Pamela, the audience—including J.—is also introduced to perspectives on John Henry in biblical, Christ-like terms, exposing the value of John Henry beyond conceptions of physical strength and physical endurance and anchoring the folkloric values of John Henry in the other African American institution highlighted by Wright in “Blueprint for Negro Writing” as regards sustaining the African American folk conception of self: the Church. Pamela says,

You could look at it [the John Henry tunnel] and think the fight [for transcendence, for humanity, and for racial equality] continued, that you could resist and fight the forces and you could win and it would not cost you *your life* because he had given *his life* for you. John Henry’s [sacrificial agency] enables you to endure without having to give your life to your struggle, whatever name you give to it. (378; emphasis mine)

For the reading audience and for J., Pamela offers a method of synthesizing performanc-

es of “being” engendered by inherited conceptions of pre-*Brown* masculinities without pouring one’s individuality into a standardized mold of what it means to be a man in the post-*Brown* era through spiritual connection with John Henry. Moreover, the synthesized approach to “being” and masculinities suggested by Pamela affords lines of escape from more obvious existential threats that are sure to ensue when one attempts radical forms of transgressing meaning and order in contested areas as regards race and identity within the American public sphere. In the light of Pamela’s internal struggle—reified by being in the tunnel of the John Henry contest that Mr. Street’s research unearths—J. traverses significant psychological terrain as regards his role as a commodifier and as one who negotiates for outlets to publicize puff. J. begins to understand that not everything should be commodified. Pamela helps J. to confront the forge of African American histories and to recognize that “[t]he daily battles that have lost meaning are clearly drawn again, the opponents and objectives named and understood. The true differences between you and them. And it” (322). For the first time in the novel, J. reflects on the *something* of his many travels and migrations, drawing lines in the sand between popular culture, the List, and his fellow junketeers and himself, or who he could be: a hero of sorts. The current post-*Brown* times call for reimagining heroes breathing life, fluidity, and transience not martyrs acknowledging death, rigidity, and stasis. He begins to consider the Dasein that projects onto the screen of his body and how he reflects and refracts such projections back into the world. Returning to the Western white light of the projector referenced earlier, J. shines in the glow of enlightenment. He recognizes that he and Pamela have been “bit players [in the game of life and]...have spent their whole lives rehearsing” *Brown* performances that have prolonged their transcendence and attainment of consciousness. Moreover, “all that rehearsing is cutting-room discard, the outtakes from the perfect American movie no one will ever see. In the middle rows are J. and Pamela. If they did what the audience never does and turn in their seats, they would see the light of the projector, the white flickering projector that is the light of the other end of the tunnel. A dream projecting itself from the west” (322).

J. recognizes that a “hero”—whether himself or John Henry—“needs a woman... the love of a good woman” (102). The cathartic, intimate experience of being part of Pamela’s healing process connects J. to his humanity and allows for connections with understandings of lumpen traditions of John Henry as discussed by Foley; when Pamela’s father’s spirit is put to rest, J. seemingly buries a wounded, tormented part of himself. He buries his own John Henry during the experience, the John Henry of his fifth-grade adolescence. He buries superendurance, superstrength, labor, and stasis. He is so moved by the experience that he begins, of his own volition, to consider leaving junketeering to do something more meaningful. The stasis of laboring for puff must be excised as in Walker’s lumpenproletarian literary schema. J. knows “[h]e has a story but it is not the one he planned...He had put on paper some of the things [Pamela] had said the day before but now he thought that what happened today [in the tunnel] was the real story...He doesn’t even know if it a story. He only knows it is worth telling” (387). It is a rag worth recycling and retelling.

J. and Pamela form the only honest, genuine, and purposive relationship in the novel—the Sutter-Street union. J. wants to acknowledge Pamela’s reality, and, in so doing, forms an attachment that can lead him to a future where both he and Pamela continue to contribute to, provide understanding for, and value the forge of African American histories. The Sutter-Street union represents a possible nurturing for and continuation of a healthier, more helpful African American community of the twentieth and twenty-first

centuries. The Dream, made difficult and deferred for so many African Americans, is given life and possibility by the Sutter-Street union.

Alphonse Miggs and his actions render this possibility impossible, however. Either J. or Pamela, or both have been murdered by the novel's close. We are told early in the novel, according to its nonlinear sequence of events, that "[a]fter the killing is over, the gunman...slid to the ground" (24). The ambiguity as regards who is killed results from Whitehead's migrating, transient lumpen-like narrative approach—reflective of *la bohème*, with seemingly no care for order and planning for what is to come next in the narrative's sequence. Interestingly, Whitehead positions the ambiguous ending early in the novel's presentation of the narrative, a fun and playful twist on the formulaic ending of many novels associated with the Wright School. In novels like *Native Son*, *The Street*, and *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, the ambiguous ending is usually chronologically located at the end of the presentation of the narrative. Nevertheless, we eventually learn that the shooter is Miggs. The murder of J. suggests that the dream of full enfranchisement as American citizens for African American people continues to be deferred in 1996 and continues to be unevenly realized, at least as regards the Sutter-Street union. The narrator relays through a conversation between postal workers that those killed and wounded in the shooting are journalists. Additionally, we are told that the journalists—innocent bystanders—have been killed by incompetent police officers attempting to shoot Miggs. The narrator never relays the names of the journalists killed. We are left to assume that J. is among the dead and wounded journalists. His death signifies on a long history of police killings of unarmed, innocent black men; his death signifies on the discarded lumpen of society.

Interestingly, the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre was located on Sutter Street in San Francisco at the time of the novel's publication. It was moved from the 620 Sutter Street location in 2007; it had been located there since 1988. The theater is named after the iconic African American playwright Lorraine Hansberry who is best known for her drama, *A Raisin in the Sun*. Her fellow African American playwright George C. Wolfe negatively and ironically criticizes Hansberry and *Raisin* in *The Colored Museum*. The title of the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, is an allusion to Hughes's poem, "Harlem: A Dream Deferred." As one of the major Harlem Renaissance poets and writers in the 1920's and early 1930's, Hughes, like Hansberry later, helped lay the groundwork for Black cultural producers who worked alongside him and followed in his footsteps. They were also both victims of J. Edgar Hoover's ghostreaders and appeared on the FBI's lists and indices of subversive African American literary figures during the Red Scare. It was in the wake of the Harlem Renaissance and its subsequent demise that Hughes wrote "Harlem." In his ruminations on deferred dreams, Hughes implores the audience to evaluate what it means to set one's aspirations aside—in large part due to the truth-lies of race (Baker).³⁵

³⁵ Hughes's poem reads,
 What happens to a dream deferred?
 Does it dry up
 Like a raisin in the sun?
 Or fester like a sore—
 And then run?
 Does it stink like rotten meat?
 Or crust and sugar over—
 like a syrupy sweet?
 Maybe it just sags
 like a heavy load.
Or does it explode? (Hughes; emphasis original)

In the poem, the speaker contemplates the fate of suppressed dreams (Baker). The speaker's discussion of suppressed dreams resonates with the fate of J.'s suppression of African American histories. Dreams begin to fester and shrivel up inside, much like a grape drying out to become a raisin in the sun. Perhaps, too, African American histories will fester and dry and disappear if not attended to, cultivated, nourished, and acknowledged. The poem addresses racial inequality in the sense that the concerns of Black people—like the churches of Black people in the 1990s and like the influences of African American literary histories as regards analyses of Whitehead's *John Henry Days*—are unimportant and stifled in American society by structures influenced by white supremacy, such as Jim Crow and legalized racial segregation—and postracial literary analysis. "Harlem's" closing line most beautifully queries a deferred dream: Does the deferred dream explode? Does suppressed history explode and disappear into nothingness? The possibility of an explosion suggests that the suppression of a black dream might result in a type of violent outburst. This potential eruption, or potential for transformative agency that presents in a multiplicity of forms, has often taken the form of a riot or instance of social protest in American histories and has often been reflected in African American literatures. Living always, already on the brink of explosion, the lives of the lumpen present quite the psychological perspectives on existence. There exists an uneasiness between one's desires and the physical and psychological manifestations of how one may react when the acquisition of those desires is thwarted based on the truth-lies of race. The probability that one would be unable to control such an explosion often concerns some African Americans.

Many African Americans suffered from deferred dreams in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Consider the young man at the Rolling Stones concert in Altamont, for example. By signifying on Hughes's poem in the title of her iconic play, Hansberry reminds us of the rich literary histories found within African American literary histories. The African American literary technique of signifying also points to the importance of dreams in *Raisin*, alluding to the struggles of the characters. Hansberry equates the characters' attempts to strive for their dreams with the long-suffering plights of African Americans striving for the promise of equality in America (Baker). The murder of J. in *John Henry Days* serves as a reminder to African American men of the post-*Brown* generations who take for granted that they are American citizens simply because they attend integrated private schools and have social security cards in their pockets that history has often proven otherwise. Of course, the "daily battles that have lost meaning are clearly drawn again, the opponents and objectives named and understood. The true differences between you and them" and it have surfaced once again. For many African Americans, the Dream—the myth—of full racial equality and enfranchisement is still deferred in the late-twentieth century. The attempts to attain equality and enfranchisement in general and consciousness in particular are tasks that still may end in one's death in the twenty-first century. The arsonists tormenting black churches have seen to this in reality; Alphonse Miggs, in the world of *John Henry Days*.

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Double Vision: A Reading of Pauline Hopkins' s *Contending Forces* and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* as American Literary Naturalistic Texts

By Mia Jackson

"It's an elusive something," he went on. Perhaps I can best explain it by the use of that trite phrase "You're a lady. You have dignity and breeding."

... "If you're speaking of family, Dr. Anderson, why I haven't any. I was born in a Chicago slum."
The man chose his words, carefully he thought.

"That doesn't at all matter, Miss Crane. Financial, economic circumstances can't destroy tendencies inherited from good stock. You yourself prove that!"

... "The joke is on you, Dr. Anderson. My father was a gambler who deserted my mother, a white immigrant. It is even uncertain that they were married. As I said first, I don't belong here."

(*Quicksand* 21).

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Helga Crane, Nella Larsen's troubled protagonist in the novel *Quicksand*, articulates how Americans during the early-twentieth century defined virtue in relation to African American women. Crane, a fair-skinned, educated mulatta is a paragon of virtue according to those around her, whether or not they are aware of her lineage. By challenging this assumption of superiority—in part, based upon Victorian middle-class codes and mythical ethos—Crane suggests that she does not belong in the ranks of the Black bourgeoisie, the African American middle-class. In these simple statements, three critical issues regarding African American women are brought into focus:

- the myth of the virtuous, educated woman;
- the Social Darwinistic forces embedded in American culture; and,
- the alienation of the mulatta.

These three themes are central in writings by African American women after the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to the advent of the Harlem Renaissance, many writings of, and by, African American women were virtually buried—or ignored—until recent unearthings by contemporary authors and critics. Two novels in particular, *Contending Forces* (1900) by Pauline Hopkins and *Quicksand* (1928) by Nella Larsen, have been uncovered as gems worthy of critical analysis. Though written and presented from dif-

ferent historical viewpoints, the novels share certain aesthetic and thematic similarities. Each novel portrays as its protagonist an African American woman struggling to control her own life: battling against racist, sexist societal norms and stereotypes—to which the respective female protagonists do not wish to conform. Moreover, the novels reflect the times in which they were originally published. That is, the novels seemingly capture times gone-by, times no longer with us. Just the same, the central themes of the respective novels suggest certain consistencies as regards the oppression of African American women not affected by differences of time and space.

It would be almost impossible for Hopkins and Larsen to author literary works that did not bear some resemblance to other authors during the same time period. Hopkins's *Contending Forces*, on the surface, adheres to Romantic literary aesthetics, yielding to the "trials to triumph" theme common to other writers during this period. Critics generally place Larsen's *Quicksand* within the bowels of American Realism. That writers at the turn of the century utilized Romantic and Realist literary aesthetics is not surprising. The crucial differences—as regards Hopkins's uses of Romanticism and Larsen's uses of Realism, respectively, and more mainstream literary artists—lies in the subject matter chosen by writers like Hopkins and Larsen. The centering of African American female protagonists lends to the novels much more complex underlying themes as regards the unresolved tension of black women's struggles for identities as women *and* African Americans within systems that seek to degrade and to destroy them. The two novels explore and expose—for literary generative purposes—the mythos undergirding the "tragic mulatta" as alienated from African American and white communities.

The myth of race, according to the cultural logics of American racial schema, require knowledge of one's ancestry. Throughout American historical documents, the importance of determining the exact quantity of black blood within any one body has been exposed. For example, "...in the 1890 census, enumerators were supposed to have the acumen to determine the exact proportion of African ancestry" detected within members of the American population (Wright 187). Moreover, census takers were warned:

Be particularly careful to distinguish between blacks, mulattoes, quadroons and octoroons. The word "black" should be used to describe those persons who have three-fourths or more black blood; "mulatto," those persons who have three eighths to five-eighths black blood; "quadroon," those persons who have one fourth black blood; and "octoroon," those persons who have one-eighth or any trace of black blood. (Bahr et al. 28)

Whether or not a person of African descent had an ounce of white blood in their veins determined much about their place in society during this time period. Whereas many whites viewed mixing the races as somehow tainting the purity of the white race, the physical evidence in the form of a significant interracial population dispelled the myth that there was no attraction between the two—blacks and whites. Sociologists commented on the tendency of the races to intermingle and questioned the blanket statements as relates black-white sexual relationships. Max Weber, noted sociologist, discusses the phenomenon of interracial relationships, using the United States mulatto as proof that myths as regards repulsion according to difference exist as biological factors, rather than socially constructed preferences:

If the degree of objective racial indifference can be determined by purely physiological criteria—for instance, by ascertaining whether the reproduction rate of hybrids is roughly normal—then the intensity of subjective feelings of attraction and repulsion between races might be measured accordingly. It could be established, for instance, whether the members of the groups concerned formed sexual relationships willingly or

only rarely and whether such relationships were normally permanent or in essence merely temporary and irregular liaisons. The presence or absence of intermarriage would then be a normal consequence of racial attraction or repulsion between communities with a developed sense of 'ethnic' separateness... There is not the slightest doubt that factors connected with race, and so resulting from the common descent, do play a part, and sometimes the decisive part, in determining frequency of sexual relationships and the rate of intermarriage between members of different groups. But that sexual repulsion based on race is not 'primitive', even amongst races who are sharply differentiated from each other, is shown plainly enough by the example of the several million Mulattoes to be found in the United States. Not only the direct prohibition of intermarriage in the Southern States, but also the sense of horror at any kind of sexual relationships between the two races (now felt on both sides, since the Negroes too have recently come to share it) are socially determined. They result from the claims made by the Negroes, since the emancipation of the slaves, to be treated as equal citizens with equal rights. In other words, they result from the tendency, with which we are already familiar in outline, to monopolise social power and status—a tendency which happens in this case to be associated with racial differences. (Weber 360)

Weber's discussion of the impact of racial difference on marriage, social power, and status illustrates how deeply embedded the myth of race has become in the American consciousness. As post-Emancipation era black women searched to find their voices, they began to recognize the narrow spaces they were afforded in the country. The Great Migration tended to reflect notions that there were better conditions of existence in the North, where middle-class blacks could educate their children and live according to the standards of other privileged Americans. Quickly, many African Americans began to realize that this was merely an imaginary construction. Black women began to mobilize on issues centered on their communities and their genders. The intersection of the triad of constraints—race, class, and gender—prompted post-Emancipation black women to mobilize around issues as regards their subjugations. While contemporary white women were concerned with breaking out of the mold of the scribbling, docile wife, black women were seeking their recognition as moral, gentle beings.

Elizbeth Ammons, in *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*, highlights that,

the two largest groups of women organizing themselves to act in concert—socially and politically—at the turn of the century were middle-class white women and black women. As the historian Paula Giddings explains, by the 1900s African American women in general were marrying later; and one-half of all married educated black women at the turn of the century had no children. Statistics on 108 of the first generation of black clubwomen—those surveyed were born between 1850 and 1885 and thus were in the same generation as Smith-Rosenberg's New Women—confirm their strong career orientation... Moreover, some of the best-known, interestingly, delayed marrying. "Mary Church Terrell, for example, was twentyeight when she tied the wedding knot; Margaret Murray Washington was thirtyone, and Ida Wells Barnett, thirty-three. All three had to resolve the conflicts between what they wanted for themselves as women and what middle-class society expected of them as women."

These accomplished, ambitious black women at the turn of the century, in many respects, resembled their white counterparts. However, the historical context that produced them contained profound differences. Middle-class black women at the turn of the century were not the daughters of restless matrons rebelling against a restrictive Victorian ideal of True Womanhood. Most were the daughters or granddaughters of slaves. They descended from women whom racist America had defined as the complete antithesis of the True Woman—the female not as pure moral paragon, but as animal: woman as laborer and breeder... The middle-class black woman was not busy casting off a constricting ideal of Victorian femininity. She had never been included in the first place. Indeed, acquiring at least some of the benefits of that elevated definition of womanhood—respect, freedom from constant menial labor, interpretation as a morally pure human being sexually—represented an essential part of her emancipation as a woman. (8-9)

The black women's club movement rallied around the breeding of the black woman as well as issues of liberation. Given the histories of the sexual conquests of black women, as a group these educated ladies set out to prove their intelligence, virtue and respectability. Both Larsen and Hopkins pay particular attention to the issues of virtue and self-respect in African American communities, as well as the white community at-large. Both discuss openly the degradation of the female and the isolation felt by mixed-race individuals. Again, both authors, in some way, ascribe to Social Darwinism, but adding a peculiar twist to the theory. That is, both authors practice *repetition-with-a-difference*. While the general American public perceived the adding of black blood to the gene pool as leading to the eventual demise of American people, Hopkins traces the roots of the brutish characters found in *Contending Forces* back to their source—a white, plantation owner. Similarly, Larsen's protagonist in *Quicksand* leaves the white world where she feels she is simply a show piece only to find little comfort within black communities. We know nothing of the financial status of Larsen's protagonist's father, but we do know her mother is a poor immigrant, the least desirable of the white race. Still, the "central mulatta" is very important to discussions of the texts. Neither texts can find a workable solution to the problem of living the three-pronged existence of being female, black, and poor. Within literatures, the

mulatta served as a paradox and ultimate representation of the "Black American" who, by mere definition, asserted the inferiority of Blacks and the Supremacy of White Americans. The Mulatta character embodied simultaneously the emasculation of Black men, the rape of Black women, and the demythologizing of the white male as savior... It presumes the alienation of anyone who tried to reconcile the two... Hopkins's and Larsen's characters Helga and Sappho are plagued by biological and social determinism. (Shockley 433)

Given these complex and disturbing themes, both literary texts could be classified as Literary Naturalism under the most recent, revised, and reevaluated aesthetics of American Literary Naturalism—particularly as advocated by June Howard. In efforts to understand how deep and penetrating the effects of this subjugation are on many African American females, one must examine each work to expose the significance of the bodies existing at the intersection of racial, gender, and sexual oppression. Moreover, the intersectional aesthetics undergirding the approaches to the texts' constructions mandate that *Contending Forces* and *Quicksand* fall within the confines of American Literary Naturalism, regardless of when the texts were published.

Hopkins and Naturalism

The turn of the century represented a total transformation of American society. The country, having struggled to recover from a bloody Civil War, began to grow and to prosper economically and physically. The victory of the North allowed for the industrialization of the American economy. The body of literature produced during this period—from the post-Reconstruction era to the World War I era—is most commonly referred to as Naturalism. Most authors associated with this period are white, middle- to upper-class males. Some specific authors associated with this genre are Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Jack London.

Although most noted literary critics agree that these men belong to this genre, many differ greatly on the “true” definition of Naturalism as well as the actual time period in which we could confine naturalistic texts. June Howard—Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of English, American Culture, and Women’s and Gender Studies at University of Michigan—introduced a theory that brings to the literary critic a new definition of American Literary Naturalism. In the preface to her text, *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*, Howard defines Naturalism as “a literary form that struggles to accommodate that sense of discomfort and danger, a form that unremittingly attends to the large social questions of its period...the form itself is an immanent ideology” (Howard ix). She goes on further to suggest that Naturalism is a way of “making sense...out of the comforts and discomforts of the historical moment” (ix). Howard’s theory of American Literary Naturalism also contends that market relations and class struggle are the two factors in American society that most concern authors of naturalistic texts. In order to provide better insight into the historical moment, Howard discloses many facts and figures that demonstrate the remarkable transformation of American society—such as the expansion of the railroad, the great influx of European immigrants, and the rapid population growth in America’s urban areas—all of which caused incredible fear and discomfort among the middle-class (12). Naturalistic writers accommodate this instability and this search for order into their writing, thus these factors are reflected consistently in the theme and content of most texts recognized as adhering to naturalistic aesthetics. Howard’s theory has been received as somewhat revolutionary for its time; it introduces a literary genre as an ideology in and of itself.

Although Howard’s definition is unique, she does not break from Western custom; she does not extend her theory to populations outside of what could best be termed white Anglo-Saxon America. Thus, it is somewhat easy to understand why there is little to no discussion of works by women and/or people of color. Yet, in order to fully understand the historical moment in which naturalistic texts are formed, it is crucial to examine a more exhaustive body of American literatures produced during this era whenever possible. African American female writers—particularly those publishing the numerous books and essays focused specifically on the sociocultural matrices in which they lived during the post-Reconstruction era to the World War I era—fall outside the dominant culture as regards classifications of naturalistic texts. As one would expect, the white male and black female perceptions of reality and society vary greatly, as these two groups are each other’s antithesis within the context of the cultural logics of American racial schema, societal norms, and class stratifications.

Many naturalistic texts written during this period deal with the impacts of industry and the mechanization of American society. Very few, if any, deal with the effects of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 or the thirteenth, fourteenth, or fifteenth Amend-

ments to the *Constitution*. For African Americans, the abolition of slavery not only represented a shift in the means of production for many industries within the American economy, but it also granted self-ownership and a newly found sense of self-determination to many former slaves and their children. Still, some argued that the Emancipation Proclamation donned a completely different meaning for the White power structure. Ida B. Wells “knew that emancipation meant that white men lost their vested interests in the body of the Negro and that lynching and rape of the black woman were attempts to regain control” (Gates 308). Though the system of slavery was legally dismantled, the institution of white supremacy—masked by fear engendered by the myth of the Negro “brute”—secured its place in American society while simultaneously philosophers and authors began to ascribe to the doctrine of Social Darwinism. Yet and still, to the noncritical and purposely ignorant any acknowledgment of White supremacy remains undetectable to the naked eye in naturalistic literature. Hazel Carby notes:

there were strangely contradictory sides to the Social Darwinist and imperialist positions... but...[t]he thread that unified these disparate positions was the ideology of white supremacy. No matter how the prevailing arguments for and against Social Darwinism and imperialism were manipulated, adherence to white supremacy stands out as a consistent theme which ran through most of them. The turn of the century was a time of excited debate and agitation, and although white supremacy shades and slanted every debate, it was so intrinsic to white thinking that it was seldom itself the subject of debate. (140)

The conceptions of white supremacy that were overlooked by most naturalistic authors were the main topics of discussion in many examples of African American women’s literatures. Additionally, the “woman question” also emerges as a dominant theme in their literatures. At the turn of the century, many African American female naturalist writers were also victims of sexual oppression. The voices of women needed to be heard. The voices of black women needed to be heard. Many of these women viewed the opportunities to publish literature as an avenue allowing them to reclaim ownership of their physical selves, to create their own identities—while simultaneously speaking to racial issues and women’s issues. Anna Julia Cooper—a dominant figure in the struggles of African American women as regards respect, recognition, and freedom during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries—writes of the crucial need for women’s activism in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. The Preface, penned by Henry Louis Gates, captures one of the prevailing arguments permeating the text:

It is not the intelligent woman vs. the ignorant woman; nor the white woman vs. the black, the brown, and the red—it is not even the cause of woman vs. man. Nay, ‘tis woman’s strongest vindication for speaking that the world needs to hear her voice. It would be subversive of every human interest that the cry of one-half the human family be stifled. Woman in stepping from the pedestal of statue-like inactivity in the domestic shrine, and daring to think and move and speak—to undertake to help shape, mold, and direct the thought of her age, is merely completing the circle of the world’s vision. Hers is every interest that has lacked an interpreter and a defender. Her cause is linked with that of every agony that has been dumb—every wrong that needs a voice. It is no fault of man’s that he has not been able to see truth from her standpoint. It does credit both to his head and heart that no greater mistakes have been committed or even wrongs perpetrated while she sat snipping paper flowers. Man’s own innate chivalry and the mutual interdependence of their interests have insured his treating her cause, in the main

at least, as his own. And he is pardonably surprised and even a little chagrined, perhaps, to find his legislation not considered “perfectly lovely” in respect. But in any case, his work is only impoverished by her remaining dumb. The world has had to limp along with the wobbling gait and one-sided hesitancy of a man with one eye. Suddenly the bandage is removed from the other eye and the whole body is filled with light. It sees a circle where before it saw a segment. The darkened eye restored, every member rejoices it. (Gates xiv)

In the main of the text, Cooper provides deeper analysis. Cooper asserts that just as man cannot speak for woman, Black men cannot—alone—address the race question: especially as regards any conceptions of a monolithic African American community. The inability of the “body” of male America to see its infection and defects can be better understood in terms of Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser’s definition of ideology based on the notion that “we must completely reorganize the idea we have of knowledge, we must abandon the mirror myths of immediate vision and reading, and conceive knowledge as a production” (qtd. in Jay 374).

Accordingly, Althusser defines ideology as “not the relation between...[men] and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an imaginary lived relation” (qtd. in Howard 70). This definition is the basis of Howard’s definition of American Literary Naturalism. But when this concept of a naturalistic ideology is extended to bodies of African American women’s literatures, its implications are dramatically altered. The perceptions, or “imaginary lived relations,” of women subvert the notion of a civilized middle-class American white male and transforms him into the exact bestial creature he fears. He no longer represents the ultimate intelligent being but instead assumes the position of the animalistic, libidinal brute—all the while maintaining power and controlling societal norms. He allows no room for a process of proletarianization. Hazel Carby suggests that the works of Anna Julia Cooper, Francine Harper, and Pauline Hopkins function to dismantle the so-called “imperialist beast.” Moreover, their writings

reassessed the mythology of the founding fathers in terms of rampant lust, greed, and destruction: they portray white male rule as bestial in its actual and potential power to devour lands and peoples. Cooper developed a complex analysis of social, political, and economic forces as being either distinctly masculine or feminine in their orientations and consequences. She saw an intimate link between internal and external colonization, between domestic racial oppression and imperialism. (Gates 304)

Pauline Hopkins intentionally uses fiction to represent the voices of African American women in response to this brutish white American male image. The application of June Howard’s definition of naturalism to Hopkins’s most well-known novel, *Contending Forces*, illustrates extreme delimitation and rigidity as regards generic literary classifications and their constructions—so much so that even the most revolutionary definition will not provide an avenue for the discussion of noncanonical texts written during the same time period. Hopkins articulates the demands of African American communities, the political debates in which all citizens were engaged, and the injustices of the American legal system. She also writes candidly of the constant fear and racial and sexual oppressions under which many African American women were forced to live. Still, her literatures cannot find space within the genre of American Literary Naturalism other than as an

antithesis to the accepted texts even though it speaks to an equally “real” historical moment. In the Preface to her novel, she states:

Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs—religious, political and social. It is a record of growth and development from generation to generation. No one will do this for us; we must ourselves develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history, and as yet, unrecognized by writers of the Anglo-Saxon race. (Hopkins 13-14)

Thus, she explicitly addresses the exclusion of African Americans as valid subjects for the literature of the time and challenges African American communities to impart their knowledges and wisdoms upon the future generations.

Contending Forces begins in 1790 on the British colony of Bermuda, where Charles Montfort, a wealthy plantation owner, decides to move to America in order to escape the economic devastation he faces as a result of the abolition of slavery on the British isle. Hopkins purposely shies away from any negative, animalistic behaviors on the part of Charles Montfort. Instead she refers to him as:

...neither a cruel man, nor an avaricious one; but like most men in commercial life, or traders doing business in their own productions, he lost sight of the individual right or wrong of the matter, or might we say with more truth, that he perverted right to be conducive to his interests, and felt that by owning slaves he did no man a wrong, since it was a common practice of those all about him, and he had been accustomed to this peculiar institution all his life. (22)

Consistent with June Howard’s definition of the brute as “the Other who is imagined as necessarily articulate, incapable of reciprocal naming since he is unable to achieve self-awareness or self-expressive speech,” Montfort does not recognize the error of his ways (Howard 81). He actually “perverts right” to conform to his personal philosophy, which the majority of American society did in order to justify the institution of slavery. Even after Montfort is warned by several of his friends and colleagues about the dangers of moving to the United States, he moves his wife, children, and the entire plantation from Bermuda to Newbern, North Carolina where he plans to gradually free all the slaves on his plantation after his fortune is secure.

Upon arrival in the United States, the Montforts are well-received as the members of the community extend to his family their gracious Southern hospitality. Montfort befriends Anson Pollock, another slaveowner from whom he purchases his American home. Montfort’s wife, Grace, soon becomes the object of Pollock’s attention and he informs her of his desire for her, which she dismisses with the grace of a True Woman. Grace Montfort is described as “a dream of beauty even among beautiful women...a most lovely type of Southern beauty” (Hopkins 40). As Pollock becomes the most trusted companion of Charles Montfort, Pollock’s jealousy and lust for Grace Montfort increases. He is unable to act upon these emotions until a rumor circulates throughout the Newbern community that Grace Montfort is a descendant of Africa—even though her appearance is that of a True Woman. The rumor grants Pollock legitimate cause to kill Charles Montfort, to dominate Grace Montfort, and to place the Montfort children into chattel slavery in adherence with the cultural logics of American racial schema.

According to Carby, although Hopkins does not write explicitly that Grace is raped, the rape is implicitly suggested through the imagery employed by Hopkins. Carby writes:

In a graphic and tortured two-page scene, Hopkins represented the brutal rape of Grace in the displaced form of a whipping by the two vigilantes. Her clothes were ripped from her body and she was whipped alternately ‘by the two strong, savage men.’ Hopkins’s metaphoric replacement of the ‘snaky, leather thong’ for the phallus was a crude but effective device, and ‘the blood which stood in a pool about her feet’ was the final evidence that the outrage that had been committed was rape. (Carby 132)

The circumstances surrounding the rape of Grace Montfort are important, both in terms of the text itself and in relation to the history of African American women. During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries—some women argue that the standard still exists today—the image of the Black woman directly opposed that of the virtuous white True Woman. The end of the nineteenth century found women suffragettes fighting to dismantle this model of the ideal woman. Moreover,

The concept of the ‘true woman’ emphasized innocence, modesty, piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity... This ‘true womanhood’ model was based upon and designed for the upper and middle-class white woman, although poorer white women could aspire to this status... The emphasis upon women’s purity, submissiveness, and natural fragility was the antithesis of the reality of most black women’s lives during slavery and for many years thereafter. (Smith and Stewart 18)

The harsh realities of Black women’s lives were such that many Black women felt that, in America’s eyes, “a colored woman, no matter how respectable, is lower than the white prostitute” (Lerner 166). In *Contending Forces*, Grace Montfort remains untouchable until the rumor circulates linking her to the African race, at which time she becomes suitable prey for any White man who desires her. Anson Pollock leads a group to the Montfort home to rape and ravage, prompted only by a rumor based in no factual evidence whatsoever. The rape so devastates Grace Montfort that she commits suicide and Anson Pollock takes Lucy, Grace’s handmaid, as his concubine in Grace’s place. Here, Hopkins describes the African American woman as a colonized entity whose body is used as a tool to control and to contain any threat to the existing social order and who is devastated and distraught over the gross injustices committed against her. At the beginning of the following passage, the downfall of Charles Montfort is presented:

‘Kismet,’ says the Oriental, when unaccountable evils beset his path; ‘It is fate,’ says the Anglo-Saxon, under like circumstances; but fate is the will of Providence after all. Nature avenges herself upon us for every law violated in the mad rush for wealth or position or personal comfort where the rights of others of the human family are not respected. (Hopkins 65)

Here, Hopkins illustrates approaches to craft based in pessimistic biological determinism—principles upon which many definitions of naturalism are based. Recognition of aesthetic approaches to craft employed by Hopkins is crucial as regards analysis centered on the development of the text. Charles Montfort, though not represented as a cruel or indecent person, commits a sin against nature when he values material wealth over human life.

Montfort's two children are dominated and chattelized almost immediately upon the demise of the patriarch. The narrative follows Jesse and Charles Montfort, Jr. to their respective destinations—one as an enslaved human who escapes bondage and experiences life under surveillance as a black man, Jesse, and the other, Charles, Jr., who is purchased by a mineralogist, moves to Europe, and grows up as a white man. The two never reunite. The assumed racial identities of both Charles, Jr. and Jesse are important: regardless of their biological backgrounds, the men could live as either white or black; their skin color could not be used as a standard measurement against which to evaluate whiteness or blackness. Such has been the case with many mulattos, many who passed for White and have been condemned for their actions within and without African American communities. Some critics argue that Hopkins advocates miscegenation by exposing the thin line separating blackness and whiteness—who is black and who is white—within the narrative of *Contending Forces*. Still, the character Will Smith states that “miscegenation, either lawful or unlawful, we [presumably African Americans] do not want” (Hopkins 264). Upon a closer reading, instead of compliance with the American concept of miscegenation—underscored by the cultural logics of American racial schema—Hopkins demonstrates the awesome inevitability of racial mixing among human beings.

Nevertheless, the story moves forward one hundred years to a setting within a New England community where Ma Smith's boarding house is the center of social activity. Hopkins introduces all new characters, most of whom live in the boarding house and are tied to the Montfort-Pollock tragedy. Ma Smith's two children, Dora Grace Montfort Smith and Will Jesse Montfort Smith, are presented as stereotypical Boston African Americans during this era: New Negroes. Two other characters, Sappho Clark and John P. Langley (Dora's fiancé) are also boarders in the Smith home. Through highlighting the lives of the boarders and the events that take place at the boarding house, Hopkins provides a detailed analysis of members of an educated African American community who are trying to create spaces for themselves within turn of the century American society. The narratives centered on the boarders also works to expose a repetition-with-a-difference: the “sins of the fathers” visited upon the futures of the sons and daughters. June Howard suggests that themes of naturalistic texts lie between thematic antinomies, or binary oppositions, that often represent the tensions between reformism and determinism. In this reading of *Contending Forces*, her theory works as the characters and the content of the novel are examples of such oppositions and their tensions—tensions rooted firmly in African American history. One such example of oppositional forces found within the narrative centers on the portrayal of the polemics between W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington as represented by Will Smith and Dr. Arthur Lewis, respectively.

At the turn of the century, Washington imparted upon African American communities his philosophy of industrial training rather than the traditional liberal arts educational curriculum, as espoused by Du Bois. In the novel, Dr. Arthur Lewis, president of an industrial and technological institute like Washington, argues that African Americans have no place in politics. Will, on the other hand, becomes a Harvard-trained philosopher, who, like Du Bois, continues his education in Germany. In the novel, Hopkins seemingly sides with Will, yet she is benevolent and understanding of Lewis's position and sheds light on the accomplishments and services that the institution provides for the African Americans.

The historical record suggests that Hopkins strongly disagreed with turn of the century Washingtonian philosophy. So openly did she display her disdain for his style and her disagreement as regards his theoretical foundations that Washington forced Hopkins from her position as literary editor of the *Colored American Magazine*—over which she had much influence until her resignation in 1904. The portrayal of the Washington/Du Bois debate is important to the text. Still, Hopkins's representation of the polemics separating Washington and Du Bois lacks the

intensity of effect symbolized by the life and characterization of Sappho Clark.

Sappho Clark arrives at the Smith boarding house and remains fairly aloof and very secretive until she develops a close relationship with Dora. Sappho is a mulatta who works for a white man as a stenographer out of her room; turn of the century New England was not yet liberal enough to allow an African American to hold a semi-professional position within the public sphere. Sappho's image is of great significance for three reasons: her family lineage and history of physical abuse; her representation as an educated, yet oppressed black female; and, her image as a sexual being and, therefore, unvirtuous woman. First, Sappho Clark's real name is Mabelle Beaubean. Her true identity remains a secret from everyone in the community until she is accidentally outted by John P. Langley. Mabelle Beaubean is the daughter of a mulatto Louisiana planter who is bequeathed, upon his father's death, half of his white father's property—which his white half-brother does not refute. Unfortunately, Mabelle is raped and kidnapped by her white uncle for three weeks. When Mabelle's father confronts his half-brother, he simply replies: "What does a woman of mixed blood, or any Negress for that matter, know of virtue? It is my belief that they were a direct creation by God to be the pleasant companions of men of my race" (Hopkins 261). He then offers his mulatto half-brother one thousand dollars for the injuries inflicted upon Mabelle, which he throws in his face. Mabelle's father swears to press for justice in federal court. He would never have the chance as a mob burns his home to the ground. Miraculously, a neighbor, Luke Sawyer, who is also a victim of mob violence, rescues Mabelle from the home and drives her to the Convent for Colored Girls in New Orleans where she gives birth to a son. Sawyer is eventually informed that Mabelle has died in childbirth; however, she has changed her identity and has left her son in New Orleans to be raised by her aunt while she works in Boston. Having discussed the question of her virtue with two women in the Boston community whom she deeply respects, she accepts Will Smith's proposal of marriage. John P. Langley, however, discovers Sappho's secret and requests that she become his concubine. Devastated, Sappho decides to move away and writes Will a letter explaining the chain of events that have led to her departure. In order to resolve the conflict, Hopkins reveals the family lineage of both Will and John P. Langley.

As it turns out, Dora and Will are descendants of Jesse Montfort (son of Charles and Grace Montfort) and John Pollock Langley is a descendant of Anson Pollock and Lucy, Grace Montfort's handmaid. Their characters are portrayed in such a way as to apply the concept of biological determinism to human personalities. In a grotesque analog, Langley uses underhanded tactics to gain the affections of Sappho who is engaged to Will just as Anson Pollock uses rumor and speculation to discredit Grace who is married to Charles Montfort. Both Grace and Sappho are viewed as unvirtuous women because they are raped and brutalized against their wills simply because they are, or, are suspected to be, of the African race. The stories align with the exception of time and place, until Sappho escapes the stigma and degradation of the crimes committed against her and marries Will—who accepts her past and her child as well. Langley, who represents the ultimate brute, as does his grandfather Anson Pollock, dies a horrible death.

This reversal of fortune suggests acceptance of African American women within the American public sphere—regardless of past injuries—as virtuous beings. Some critics argue that Hopkins acquiesces to the idea of the cult of domesticity. On the surface, this appears to be so. However, upon closer examination, Hopkins works to subvert the notion that Black women are inordinately sexual beings to be used whenever opportunity, or fate, presents by white men for the sexual pleasures of white men. Hopkins's subversion

rhetoric aligns with contemporary writings by post-Emancipation Black women writers. In *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, Gerda Lerner presents what is considered an open secret at Southern dinner tables:

It is commonly said that no girl or woman receives a certain kind of insult unless she invites it. That does not apply to a colored girl in the South. The color of her face alone is sufficient invitation to the Southern white man—these same men who profess horror that a white gentleman can entertain a colored one at his table...Where the white girl has one temptation, mine will have many. Where the white body has every opportunity and protection, mine will have few opportunities and no protection. It does not matter how good or wise my children may be. They are colored. When I have said that, all is said. Everything is forgiven in the South except color. (Lerner 158- 59)

This statement as regards the ethos of African American women living in a post-Emancipation South supports Hopkins's assertions as relates the simultaneous degradation of the African American female and the emasculation of the African American male. Analysis of Hopkins's text suggests that the rape of African American women by white men—though certainly sexual in injury—should be understood as political. That is, as we are reminded by Gates: “the black woman positioned outside the ‘protection’ of the ideology of womanhood” can seek no protection as the legal system is blind to their plight and their men are powerless (Gates 309). Consider Luke Sawyer's neighbor and father: it seems that any black man—particularly in the South— trying to protect his family is lynched, or brutalized to the point of compliance with the desires of those who dominate the public sphere.

To further illustrate the powerlessness of men within Black communities in turn of the century America, Hopkins establishes all family structures absent the traditional, Victorian patriarch. The effects of this absence of the black male patriarch are viewed primarily through the eyes of the female characters. All of the African Americans within the novel are women with children whom are either widowed or unmarried and are forced to earn a living for themselves from the limited opportunities presented within the racial schema of America. Not until the end of the novel—the romance—is the audience presented with a legitimate marriage between an African American man and an African American woman, suggesting an ultimate reconstruction of an African American family within a post-Reconstruction setting.

Although the subject matter is rather disturbing and the accounts of rape and lynching are portrayed within modes of realism, the ending of the *Contending Forces* is rather sentimental. I would argue that the employment of the sentimental mode reflects the times in which Hopkins writes, when she is forced by the determinants of economics to provide immediate closure to the situation: the collective lot of African American women. Still, too, the novel is inherently postmodern, as Hopkins incorporates many fragmented styles of writing in the furtherance of conveying her arguments. At some points, the writing is clearly fiction; at others, journalistic in tone and approach; and, still more, at other points, autobiographical. Hopkins's own life closely parallels that of Sappho Clark, who is represented as an educated, sex- and race-conscious woman who unfortunately cannot express her obvious intelligence and critical thinking skills because of the oppressive and delimiting confines of the cultural logics of America's racial schema—schema detrimental to the fullest developments of bodies considered Black and White, male and female. Just the same, *Contending Forces* serves as a vivid account of the historical moment, in turn of the century America, according to the critical analysis and literary craftsmanship of Pauline Hopkins, a black woman. And for that, we are ever grateful.

Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*

Really striking differences in the conduct of economic life have played a role in creating a feeling of ethnic affinity, as also have at all times such forms of external self-expression as differences in type of dress, types of housing and food, the customary form of division of labour between the sexes and the division between the free and the unfree. All these things belong to areas of life in which questions arise about standards of 'propriety' and, above all, about matters to do with the individual's feeling of his own status and worth.

Generally speaking, 'racial characteristics' are only important in the formation of a belief in 'ethnic' identity, as limiting factors, in cases where the external type is so different as to be aesthetically unacceptable: they do not play a positive part in forming a community. (Weber 367-8)

Although Nella Larsen writes much later than Pauline Hopkins, her literatures reflect many of the same issues presented in Hopkins's *Contending Forces*. But, she deals with the issues with seemingly different approaches as compares Hopkins. Whereas Hopkins utilizes Sappho's life as an entry-point to discussions centered on the race question in America, Larsen employs issues of race and class to discuss the impact of these forces upon the individual. Larsen addresses black women's concerns more aggressively than does Hopkins, reflecting, perhaps, the increased presence of African American female writers within the American public sphere. With the Harlem Renaissance in full swing, Larsen constructed her fictions in an environment that praised and celebrated blackness—never before had Africa, Africanness, and blackness been celebrated in positive terms within the American public sphere prior to the Renaissance. New Negroes were making the music and literature and making history, facilitated by exploring and exposing those traits that made them Black for artistic generative purposes.

The first manifestation of the Great Migration afforded many, like Larsen, opportunities for in-depth study and analysis as regards the search for Black identities in what was rapidly becoming a modern era. Throughout Nella Larsen's novel *Quicksand*, the protagonist—Helga Crane—searches and travels, attempting to locate her space in the world, her identity as a mixed-race woman. As Weber has eloquently suggested, the many factors that comprise society's definitions of ethnicity and race often leave individuals outside the sphere of the accepted community. Of mixed lineage and confused mental state is Helga Crane.

Social, biological, and environmental determinants are predictive factors in the life of Helga Crane; in many ways, the characterizations of Hopkins's Sappho Clark and Larsen's Helga Crane are similar. Helga's downward spiral into a virtual abyss—interestingly, the title aptly chosen by Larsen for the novel's last chapter—is akin to that of several characters in more recognized naturalistic texts, such as Frank Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* and Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. In the beginning of the novel, Larsen introduces the heroine as a self-proclaimed separatist who teaches at a Naxos, a prominent school for African Americans. Helga Crane ever feels DuBois's twoness. Like the Black female characters of *Contending Forces*, Helga introduces a third intersecting leg to Du Bois's two-pronged double-consciousness. While Du Boisian double-consciousness focuses on nationality and race and is read as inherently masculine and male and supportive of manhood in approach, Helga Crane—along with characters like

Sappho Clark—motivates readers to consider triple-consciousness—as introduced by orators like Sojourner Truth and furthered by writers like Hopkins and Larsen—focusing on the intersecting oppressions of nationality and race AND gender and is read as inherently human, accounting for the multiplicity of oppressions governing any body within the confines of the cultural logics of America’s racial schema. Larsen tackles issues of sexism and misogyny head-on, departing from the tendency of earlier Black women writers to omit, or occlude, discussions of sexism and misogyny within African American communities in their literary works. The ending of *Quicksand*, I would argue, supports Larsen’s frustration with the sexism contemporary with her life and times. In the Introduction for the 1986 Rutgers University Press edition of *Quicksand and Passing*, Deborah McDowell writes,

Critics of Larsen have been rightly perplexed by these abrupt and contradictory endings. But if examined through the prism of black female sexuality, not only do they make more sense, they also illuminate the peculiar pressures on Larsen as a woman writer during the male-dominated Harlem Renaissance. They show her grappling with the conflicting demands of her racial and sexual identities and the contradictions of a black and feminine aesthetic. (xii)

Given these conflicting demands, we find in Helga Crane a character consistent with the aesthetics of American Literary Naturalism, destined to be forced outside of society for lack of a proper place within. According to Howard, the Naturalist Movement had two distinct periods: the former and the latter. The former period occurred between 1870 and 1900. The latter period occurred between 1900 and 1940 and included writers such as Dreiser, Steinbeck and Lewis. Although most discussions of the period dismiss authors other than white males, analysis of Larsen’s texts in accordance to the primary functions of naturalistic texts has, seemingly, served her well—particularly as regards highlighting and exposing, that is, queering, approaches to Black female social criticisms. Moreover, American Literary Naturalism “was not primarily a literary concept; it was a view of man in society and a style of writing in consonance with the age” (Furst and Skrine 36)

A style that aims for the “truth” rather than focusing on artistry, Larsen uses naturalistic aesthetics in her literatures that accurately work to reflect and capture the plight of a woman who has no home—Larsen makes use of naturalistic aesthetics so convincingly that *Quicksand* is often read as an autobiography depicting aspects of Larsen’s personal history. Larsen is described as a restless soul, ever searching for the missing piece that would make her whole. She travels, as does Helga Crane, from one end of the globe to the other, seeking to make sense of the discomfort of displacement.

Larsen’s characters find no comfort in the white; they find no comfort in the Black. Moreover, her characters often criticize the pretentiousness of the Black world and the condescending nature of the white one. Larsen not only introduces Helga Crane as set apart from all others at the fictional Naxos school for prominent Blacks, but she allows Helga to voice her disgust at the religious tenets preached by elderly white pastors to eager Blacks. Additionally, Helga is set apart from the rest of the community as relates the practice of self-love: granting herself desires of the heart. Helga is characterized as an individual attempting to fit into a structure that has no space for her. For example, although Helga is accepted by a man who admires her, James Vayle, she is aware that she would never be accepted, and fully embraced, by his family. She does not quite adhere to the Victorian codes of proper decorum and womanhood. She has no one to speak of, no family, and, therefore, she has no value:

No family. That was the crux of the whole matter. For Helga, it accounted for everything,

her failure here in Naxos, her former loneliness in Nashville. It even accounted for her engagement to James. Negro society, she had learned, was as complicated and as rigid in its ramifications as the highest strata of white society. If you couldn't prove your ancestry and connections, you were tolerated, but you didn't "belong." You could be queer, or even attractive, or bad, if you were a Rankin, or a Leslie, or a Scoville; in other words, if you had family. But if you were just plain Helga Crane, of whom nobody had ever heard, it was presumptuous of you to be anything but inconspicuous and comfortable. (Larsen 8)

Twenty years further removed from the antebellum era as compares the times in which Pauline Hopkins writes, the adaptation of the community to the ways of the white power structure in *Quicksand* presents problems for those who lack the abilities to trace their heritage to important, freed blacks who have impacted their respective communities. Also, the erection of several higher education institutions provided space for these upper-crust blacks to send their children to learn with others of their class. The aesthetics of race shift according to the cultural logics of American racial schema; the logics of race shift according to an individual's place within and without African American communities. As Judith Stein suggests in "Defining the Race 1890-1930,"

...different names and meanings undermine the common belief that racial identity or consciousness is fixed. The ways people define themselves are determined by their history, politics, and class. They change. The same words have conveyed vastly different meanings and encouraged diverse actions. They mean less and more than they seem. People employ strategic fictions that can be understood only in a context. They always must be understood as one element with other ideological beliefs that have nothing to do with race. And they interact with definitions made by other people, especially those who exercise power. (Stein 78)

Stein provides an analytical structure by which to gauge, and, somewhat understand, shifts as regards the ways that Black communities developed relations within postbellum settings. As Hopkins's character is accepted despite the tragic rape in her past, Larsen's character is plagued by the notion that she cannot overcome any of her biological determinants—determinants that in her mind destine her to live alone and/or unhappy. While at Naxos surrounded by Blacks, we find Helga meditating on the memory of her dead mother. Having been abandoned by Helga's father, her mother marries a black man. She recalls her childhood with sadness and "aching misery of soul" until she is rescued by a gracious uncle who sent her to a school for Black children, where she could consider herself normal and not brutish simply because of her supposed, perceived skin color (Larsen 23). After thinking on her unfulfilled childhood and her six happy years at Naxos, she recognizes a yearning within that she cannot describe. She travels away from Naxos to gain a different perspective on life. Having once depended upon her uncle for support, she travels back to Chicago in order to receive money for sustenance and also security. Sadly, she finds that her white uncle has married and wants no part of his colored niece. Having been unsuccessful at her uncle's house, she opts to sojourn to New York.

The time period and setting signal aspects of the Great Migration North. Helga joins a great number of Blacks who moved to the northern environs of the United States from the South in search of equality and enhanced social status denied them in their

Southern places of birth. Her arrival in New York marks another leg of her journey towards self-discovery. There she feels initially that she has found a home. Larsen writes,

She [Helga] did not analyze this contentment, this happiness, but vaguely, without putting it into words or even so tangible a thing as a thought, she knew it sprang from a sense of freedom, a release from the feeling of smallness which had hedged her in, first during her sorry, unchildlike childhood among hostile white folk in Chicago, and later during her uncomfortable sojourn among snobbish black folk in Naxos. But it didn't last long, this happiness of Helga Crane's. (46-7)

While in New York, Helga spends a considerable amount of time with Mrs. Hayes-Rare, a character fashioned after the likes of Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell. Mrs. Hayes-Rare spoke at the annual convention of the Negro Women's League Clubs. Helga is quick to criticize the women's clubs as pedantic, verbose representatives for the prominent race men of the day, like Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass. In order to be fully accepted, she is instructed by Mrs. Hayes-Rare to make no mention of her white heritage for she would be immediately shunned by the Black community because "colored people won't understand it" (41). Denying her mother makes her feel like a criminal, yet she remains quiet about the situation as the need for the security offered by Mrs. Hayes-Rare takes precedence over pride. She moves in with Anne Gray, niece of Mrs. Hayes-Rare, who soon becomes a dear friend. With Anne, she watches and comments on these prominent race women as they contradict themselves. Helga's character observes the oxymoronic stances presented by Anne and underscored by American cultural racial logics:

"To me," asserted Anne Grey, "the most wretched Negro prostitute that walks One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street is more than any president of these United States, excepting Abraham Lincoln"...She hated white people with a deep and burning hatred... But she aped their clothes, their manners, and their gracious ways of living...Like the despised people of the white race, she preferred Pavlova to Florence Mills, John McCormack to Taylor Gordon, Walter Hampton to Paul Robeson. (48-9)

Although Helga quietly ridicules Anne Grey's inconsistency, she soon tires of the familiar ranting about whites. She realizes it is time to move forward, but lacks the resources to do so. Ironically, her uncle writes to her and sends her money to go visit her aunt. He makes it very clear that her Aunt Katrina had always accepted and wanted her.

With her money, she purchases a ticket to Denmark. As she travels along the seas, she feels freed from the oppression felt in the states. For a short period of time, she feels as though she belongs exclusively to herself and not to any particular race. The changing structure of the economy, and the increasing travel between continents allowed for fewer physical boundaries. Expansion of world trade markets allowed Americans to be exposed to a variety of different cultures. Still, Judith Stein reminds us that

Industrialist capitalism, national markets, and international migration now connected people who had once lived apart with minimal contact. The more interdependent they became, the greater the differences seemed to be...The word race came to mean a biological community with shared characteristics...Race and racism were metonyms for culture and class. Because racial ideology always intersected with other ideologies and more mundane interests, its impact was not uniform. But joined with the other

characteristics of the new industrial system, the new racism threatened the status and future of northern blacks, too. (80)

At once, the poor mulatta could afford to travel. Having finally connected with her mother's family, she feels that she would not have the same pressures as compares her tenure at Naxos, and her stay in New York. Upon initial contact with her aunt, she once again feels at home. She feels she has come home. Her aunt and her family are welcoming and friendly. She is surrounded by wealth, which she has always enjoyed. It is not too long, however, before she begins to recognize her difference. Even among her aunt and her mother's family members, she recognizes that she is simply another exotic item. She looks inside and feels she must hide all of the primal urgings within, as she always has, in order to maintain a level of self-respect—ideas undergirded by the politics of respectability. Yet, one evening, while at a dinner party, she recognizes her status there as a “peacock” (Larsen 73).

After feeling objectified, as if she is paraded around within this new milieu, we find Helga visiting a circus with her friend, Olsen. While there she watches the Blacks on stage and feels two emotions at once:

[She] was not amused. Instead, she was filled with a fierce hatred for these cavorting Negroes on the stage. She felt shamed, betrayed, as if these pale pink and white people among whom she had lived had suddenly been invited to look upon something in her which she had hidden away and wanted to forget. But later, when she was alone, it became clear to her that all along they had divined its presence, had known that in her was something, some characteristic, different from any that they themselves possessed...she returned again to the Circus, always alone, gazing intently and solemnly at the gesticulating Black figures, an ironical and silently speculative spectator. For she knew that into her plan for her life had thrust itself a suspensive conflict in which were fused doubts, rebellion, expediency, and urgent longings. (83)

After her excursion, Helga returns to her aunt Katrina's home. After much deliberation, she realizes she is homesick—not for a particular land, but a particular people. It is here we find Helga's first discussion of her father with an emotion other than contempt. She turns down the marriage proposal of Olsen and decides to return to the States.

Back in the states, she stays in New York. Her old friend, James Vayle, visits. They discuss the issues of marriage and children. She, again, sounds resolved not to marry nor give birth to children, and—in a double-voiced wink to the contemporary climate of the Sanger factions—she questions: “why do Negroes have children?” (103). She angers James and runs into the arms of Anne's husband, Dr. Anderson, whom had long been the object of her affection. Dr. Anderson kisses her, awakening intense desire and emotion within. She avoids him until he finally bumps into her and makes known his wish to see her alone, to be with her. She agrees. During their meeting, he apologizes for his actions. Deep inside, Helga wishes he has come to make even more advances toward her. When this does not occur, she slaps him with all her power. She sinks into a depression for weeks. She becomes aware of her sexuality. Hazel Carby argues,

Helga recognized a long-repressed sexual attraction to Dr. Anderson, and in response to his encouragement determined to finally acknowledge her sexuality and sleep with him. Anderson's awkward rebuff shattered Helga's new acceptance

of her sexual self, and when she accidentally met a hedonistic Southern preacher in a storefront church, she slept with him. (169)

Helga walks the streets of New York and is led into a mission, where a Southern Baptist church service occurs. She is beckoned and surrounded by the shouting crowd, while the preacher prays over her lost soul. She is, in one instant, “lost—or saved” (Larsen 113). Upon leaving the mission, she meets her future husband, the Reverend Pleasant Green. After submitting to her desires, she completes her circular journey and returns to the South a married, saved woman.

Within Helga Crane, we find the thematic antinomies discussed as relates the study of naturalism. At once, Helga embodies two individuals: a Black woman and a White woman; a soulful sister and a virtuous, educated woman; a rebel who rejects the Black bourgeoisie and a connoisseur of the good life. She asks, “why can’t [I] have two lives?” (93). But this is impossible. She cannot reconcile her two selves into one whole, healthy individual.

Throughout various points in the text, writes Carby

she is alienated from her sex, her race, her class. Alienation is often represented as a state of consciousness, a frame of mind. Implied in this definition is the assumption that alienation can be eliminated or replaced by another state of consciousness, a purely individual transformation unrelated to necessary social or historical change...Larsen placed an alternative reading of Helga’s progress, that her alienation was not just in her head but was produced by existing forms of social relations and therefore subject to elimination only by a change in those social relations. (169)

Herein are found the factors that place *Quicksand* within the genre of American Literary Naturalism. The inabilities of Helga Crane to overcome the socially determined factors she inherits at birth lead to her regression into an eventual abyss. Having yielded to the temptation of sexuality, Helga acquiesces to the demands of the institution of marriage. To represent the identity of a Black, or mixed-race, female character otherwise during the Renaissance would have been anathema to contemporary and accepted literary aesthetics. Larsen’s production of a mixed character who performs a healthy sexuality and who maintains relatively high social status is intensely delimited. As Helga gives in to her desire, she is stripped of all she has known of the life as regards the Black social elite. She is deposited, seemingly permanently, into a jungle she has previously allowed herself to enjoy for only brief moments. Once she submits to her instincts, she has to relinquish her claim to material goods and prestige. Helga Crane’s demise is also consistent with the anticipated result of a text according to Donald Pizer’s definition of naturalism:

The distinctiveness of the form of the naturalistic novel lies in the attempt of that form to persuade us, in the context of a fully depicted concrete world, that only the questioning, seeking, timeless self is real, that the temporal world outside the self is often treacherous and always apparent. The naturalistic novel thus reflects our doubts about conventional notions of character and experience while continuing to affirm through its symbolism both the sanctity of the self and the bedrock emotional reality of our basic physical nature and acts. (39)

Quicksand is true to each of these outlined characteristics. We leave Helga in the pain and misery of childbirth. The cosmopolitan woman, who throughout the text, questions the need to marry and to bear children has become consumed in a backwoods Southern community. Throughout the novel, she hates the South and all that comes with it. She looks back through her

past and longs for the comfort and serenity of her former lives. They are gone, and there could be no reconciliation. She sinks deeper into her brutish existence with no hope of leaving without considerable remorse for the children whom she would leave behind. We are led to believe that the differences between her life and her imagined existences are irreconcilable.

Parting Shots

Howard's text *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* is useful in opening up certain texts to the application of naturalistic analysis, yet falls short in its ability to place the literature of Black women on an equal plane as White male literature during the same period. The basic premise of naturalistic aesthetics assumes that White middle-class men are civilized—a view held in opposition by many Black women contemporary with the literatures produced at the turn of the twentieth century. This occlusion, however, is a function of the limitations of the genre of American Literary Naturalism as centered around a certain body of texts and dismissive of those texts falling outside such generic considerations. To include the literary works of women and people of color would so broaden the definition and aesthetic criteria undergirding approaches to American Literary Naturalism. Naturalistic approaches to craftsmanship and analysis would lose their abilities to assert the truth/myth of the White male perspective and would ultimately challenge the literary world to seek out more democratic methods by which all the American texts written during this period could be considered—without resorting to the delimiting tactics undergirded by the cultural logics of America's racial schema as regards the problematics of contemporary approaches to generic literary classification. Just the same, the criteria espoused by Howard and Pizer as regards naturalistic texts are key in gaining greater insight and understanding as relates the structures and contents of Pauline Hopkins's novel, *Contending Forces*, and Nella Larsen's novel, *Quicksand*.

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UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Self-Fashioning, Portraiture, and Identity—Douglass's Frontispiece

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In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), Frederick Douglass details his life experiences in slavery and his escape from bondage, along with his journey to becoming literate. On the frontispiece, he includes a portrait of himself, partially drawn and by an unknown artist. When viewed juxtaposed against the text and the time period of slavery, the space of the page creates a contrast between Douglass's dismal enslaved societal status and his proud, liberated self-image. Douglass includes his signature on the frontispiece and is portrayed with an emphasized forehead. The portrait also shows him dressed in expensive clothing while looking directly at the reader. Douglass uses these features in the space of the frontispiece to not only take ownership of his cognitive abilities, but also to demonstrate the confidence that he derives from his intellect and to combat the mythical image of the Black male brute.

Douglass demonstrates his cognitive abilities by including his signature within the space of the frontispiece. Because enslaved Americans were denied education and, many were therefore illiterate, Douglass's ability to sign his own name was an extremely notable accomplishment. He takes ownership of this feat and expresses pride in his literacy and intelligence with the signature. Douglass's cognitive abilities are also illustrated with the slight exaggeration of his forehead in the space of the portrait. Not only is his forehead drawn to be rather tall, but it is also emphasized with light. Although the artist of the portrait is unknown and it can be assumed that Douglass himself did not draw it, artists throughout history have used a similar technique in self-portraits to emphasize their intelligence. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Albrecht Dürer and Artemisia Gentileschi both emphasized their foreheads with light in their respective self-portraits to display their cognitive abilities and intellects. Both the inclusion of Douglass's signature as well as the prominence of his forehead exhibit his intellectual capabilities—working to demythologize overdetermined understandings of African American cognitive abilities—and it is clear that his abilities are a source of pride for him.

Furthermore, within the space of the frontispiece, Douglass is dressed in expensive clothing, which signifies his success and high societal status. These garments, typical of a distinguished member of society, are indicative of Douglass's sense of pride; he finds confidence in his intelligence and portrays his own sense of importance. He further exudes pride in his cognitive abilities within the portrait's space by looking directly at the reader. With this interaction, he owns his literacy, declares himself an equal to the reader, and commands respect. Douglass challenges the reader by making eye contact with them, compelling them to acknowledge him as an intellectual and as the author of the text they are reading. The clothing he wears and eye contact he makes with the read-

er both show the success and pride he derives from his intellect.

By using the space of the frontispiece to portray his literacy and success, Douglass not only owns his cognitive abilities but also exudes confidence in them. Douglass uses the space of the frontispiece to draw a contrast between the way he sees himself, as a valuable, intelligent human being and contributing member of society, with the way that most white people at the time saw him, as a slave and as a Black male brute. With this contrast, the space challenges the reader to understand that Black people are equals with great capabilities, and Douglass himself challenges the reader to question the system that advances white supremacist ideologies at the expense of Black people.

Frederick Douglass, Frontispiece, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself (1845). Courtesy: Wikipedia.



Albrecht Dürer (l.); Artemisia Gentileschi (below). Courtesy: Wikipedia



Harmonizing with the Veil: Repetition in “Rock Me Baby” and the Blues as a Fifth Step

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Lightnin’ Hopkins, firmly in the tradition of the spirituals and the Blues, and firmly inside the Veil, pines for his lover to please him in the sad but beautiful “Rock Me Baby.” While the song itself has a long and interesting history, as does the singer himself, it will not be the aim of this discussion to dissect those. Instead, I will focus on fashioning the song as an example of the Blues era, as it can demonstrate how the Blues are what W.E.B. Du Bois might call the elusive and mythical fifth step. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, not only does Du Bois express what it means to live within the Veil, “the shadowy yet substantial line that separates whites from persons of African descent,” but he also delineates a clear roadmap from African music (step one) and African American music (step two) to “a blending of Negro music with the music heard in the foster land” (step three) and country music (step four), “where the songs of white America have been distinctly influenced by the slave songs or have incorporated whole phrases of Negro melody” (Du Bois 754).

Therefore, the repetition of sorrowful lyricism and instrumentation heard in “Rock Me Baby” is an extension of the Sorrow Songs heard first during the antebellum era and a representation of the ability to harmonize with the Veil, that mysterious entity separating African Americans from white Americans and their true selves. Because “Rock Me Baby” represents a fifth step in the development of African American music, one that has been blended with traditional African music and slave spirituals—as well as the music of the American South, which in itself has derived at least partially from African music as well—it is the perfect exemplification of how music can be used to both illuminate the shadowy depths of the Veil as well as harmonize *with* the Veil in order to break the mysterious powers of the Veil.

Before looking at how songs like “Rock Me Baby” can begin to harmonize with the Veil, it is essential to look at how the song is firmly in the tradition of prior slave spirituals and how Hopkins uses repetition to highlight this. In *Souls*, Du Bois notes that the Sorrow Songs (slave spirituals) were “the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways” (754). In “Rock Me Baby,” we see some of these same leanings toward being “children of disappointment,” as Hopkins says, “You gotta get down now here children” before leading into an extended instrumental break, after which the song slides into an ending. These “children” Hopkins refers to are those wanderers who are simply looking for a night of fun, who listen to the music almost passively but who also feel it deep inside their bones. This repetition of instrumentation finds itself mirrored by repetition of lyrics as well, such as Hopkins’s repetition of “I want you to rock me baby” several times, and his almost demanding towards the middle of the song, “Go get your rockin’ chair” (Hopkins). One could see this as a modified version of the slave spirituals, but instead of asking God to provide freedom, it is a much more secular (and sexually expressive) version of freedom. Therefore, the repetition highlights how African Americans once had to repress their sexual desires and the idea that the Blues facilitate African Americans abilities and desires to express those feelings.

In addition to reflecting the yearning for freedom, this secular/spiritual divide between the older generation of musicians and those in the Blues era (and as exemplified through “Rock Me Baby”) also highlights the idea of double-consciousness. For example, Burton Peretti notes in the third chapter of *Lift Every Voice: The History of African American Music*, entitled “The Rise of Ragtime and the Blues,” that the blues are “the first widely broadcast secular musical expression of authentic African American emotions and tribulations” (58). Therefore, the Blues genre represents African Americans double-consciousness, “the crux of black Americans’ struggle to identify themselves and the crucible in which their African and American identities could be merged into a unity of which they and the nation could be proud” (Edwards 682). The repetition Hopkins uses in “Rock Me Baby” thus flaunts a new outcropping of freedom but also recognizes the futility in being free from that legacy. While ragtime musicians “sought to put the legacies of slavery behind them,” blotting them out totally from memory, slave spirituals and field hollers are, seemingly, integral parts of the creation of the Blues, if not in lyrical content certainly as regards instrumentation (Peretti 58).

One can look at Hopkins’s use of sorrowful instrumentation and repetition of uncertainty to further determine how the repeating instrumentation of “Rock Me Baby” demonstrates an understanding of the Veil. Undergirding the whole song is a sorrowful harmonica, representing the tradition of slave spirituals, the moaning of those in bondage, and those African Americans still treated as second-class citizens because of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and laws and customs promoting separate and unequal facilities. The protest comes in with the piano, which Peretti notes “had become a central component of American middle-class culture” (59). By blending both the wailing of African Americans in bondage with the desire of being a middle-class citizen, Hopkins perfectly demonstrates the double-consciousness of African Americans during this period. The repetition of that uncertainty is consistent with how uncertainty multiplied after Reconstruction and the myriad ways in which motifs of protest manifested themselves in African American music.

If Erik Nielson, in his “‘Go in de Wilderness’: Evading the ‘Eyes of Others’ in the Slave Songs,” is correct in implying that songs are veils through which African Americans speak to the world in a way that shields them from the inescapable gaze of “the eyes of others,” then Hopkins does just that when he very clearly pines for a woman’s midnight touch while also exemplifying the suppressed (and seemingly futile) desires for freedom from the suffering of daily lives. Repeating the lines of “rock me baby all night long” over and over again helps the listener to hear the stress on the word “all,” which each time increases in forcefulness and vigor (Hopkins). It also makes the listener question whether Hopkins is not only yearning for a woman but also a change that could impact him in a much larger way than a night with a woman could.

This is exemplified in how Hopkins repeats, “Rock me baby, rock me all night long.” The first time that Hopkins sings it, there is an air of hope and gratitude for being in the right place, at the right time. The second time, though, there is a much more aggressive and also hopeless attitude. He does this both through how he sings the word “all” and the instrumentation heard in the background (Hopkins). The piano repeatedly flits between two notes almost as if there is a double-consciousness in its very soul. Inherent in this middle-class instrument’s musicality is the desire to be someone of a different racial and social class, mixed inextricably with the consciousness of who one is—the African Americanness that makes one special (Hopkins). The repetition of the harmonica’s somber notes and the guitar’s flat, “blue” notes are not higher (or more hopeful) even though the key in which Hopkins sings goes up a step or two. As soon as Hopkins changes key, though, going into higher (more hopeful) territory, he immediately goes back down, sliding down the scale as an African American might slide down the social ladder after 1877, the end of the so-called Reconstruction Era.

This backsliding is repeated throughout the song, but with even more force, because each

time Hopkins crescendos and the piano signifies a change in tempo, the hope dissipates as soon as it has appeared. However, the harmonica signifies a continuation of bygone eras and never wavers from its lonely wailing, seemingly disconnected but yet inextricably linked to the rest of the song (Hopkins). There is an inherent protest in this continuation, though it might be just as veiled as when in the wilderness. According to Nielsen, the opacity of slave spirituals was that resistive mechanism that could conceal itself in its public and open expression by making the image of the slave visible but unreadable (Nielsen 112). Therefore, hiding this harmonica behind a frenzy of guitar and piano, the hopes and dreams of all the freed slaves, signifies a key change in how African Americans viewed themselves. Through this swirling chaos of music undergirded by a long heritage of sorrow, is it possible to bring the Veil into clarity by harmonizing with it?

To find the answer, we turn to Du Bois's *Souls* yet, again, and see that "in all the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope—a faith in the ultimate justice of things" (Du Bois 758). This faith can be seen in the repetition of Hopkins's jarring lyrics as well as he croons, "Go get your rockin' chair": uncertain but hopeful that Hopkins will convey the message to his lover that she will make his night memorable and to his listeners that they can "get down" to the beat. But there is a hidden third audience here as well. Those inside the Veil may see this as a sort of protest, may collectively remember that singing in this manner has been seen as a protest; that is, they may see these overtly sexual connotations as something more. Du Bois claims that the Veil needs to be rent asunder for there to be freedom, saying that "if somewhere in this whirl and chaos of things there dwells Eternal Good, pitiful yet masterful, then anon in His good time America shall rend the Veil, and the prisoned shall go free" (Edwards 759). On the other hand, Hopkins's lyrics and instrumentation tell a story of one who has found freedom in living each day with the recognition of life's joys and sorrows, while never forgetting one's past as well.

As Hopkins shows his listeners, this freedom can come through an active attempt to live fully in each moment rather than passively accept the way things are. By repeating his message and making his audience listen carefully to his message, Hopkins seems to echo Nielsen's claim that songs are veils through which African Americans speak to the world in a way that shields them from the inescapable gaze of "the eyes of others." Therefore, by hiding one's true motives (to be free and to escape the plight of one's situation), one can find true peace and acceptance, losing oneself in the harmonious music. Although the eyes of others (as Peretti informs us, "those white minstrels who have made disproportionate profits and who have gained fame from a style based on African American musical sources") are still there, we now know, through Hopkins, that using God to save oneself from bondage is transformed in the Blues era by living in the moment, by combining one's history and experience, and by using the mirage of sexual desire to harmonize with the Veil.

The repetition in "Rock Me Baby" demonstrates the notion that the Blues serve as a fifth step in the progression of African American music and protest against delimited opportunities of the contemporary moment. Flocking to the cities in droves and destined to put their pasts behind them, the Blues era did the next best thing in the progression of African Americans; it helped African Americans to live in harmony with the Veil by acknowledging, celebrating, and opening up the past to listeners by accepting all manners of desire, from spiritual to sexual. The Blues, however, is not the final step in this progression. What one can (and should) argue is how R&B (and, by extension Hip Hop genres, which can be considered two sides of the same musical coin) can act as a sixth step in this progression of African American music and protest. In so doing, one can find out if the Veil is indeed rent, or if there are still areas where African Americans must hide

themselves to truly “evade the eyes of others.”

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View Hopkins performing “Rock Me Baby” [here](#).

SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL ARTISTS

Selections from *People Are Funny*

By Marci Daniels

Abstract: *People Are Funny* is a collection of short stories drawn from the lives of everyday folk. Each day, life is fascinating, mythical in many ways. “Shoes,” “Falling,” “Forgotten,” “Firecrackers,” and “Keep Your Eyes Open” take the quotidian and expose seemingly folkloric realities found within the normalcy of life.

Shoes

The child has no shoes. She will always have no shoes in this story. Her nose is running. She has a jacket on, but it’s not a heavy one, not as heavy as it should be for this time of year. I know he’s thinking about the coat he bought her, the heavy winter coat he’s imagining I left off of her in a fit of negligence. He’s not remembering that it was over a year ago that he bought that coat. He hasn’t noticed that she’s doubled in size since then. It won’t do for me to remind him of this fact just now, since he’s handing me a bag of groceries, food to get us through the next week or two until my husband gets his paycheck from his new job. “You should take her to the doctor,” he says, nodding toward the child, toward the trails of snot coating and crusting her upper lip. “No money,” I chant. He knows this song. He pulls out his wallet, hands me four bills, three twenties and a ten. “Take her to see a doctor.” He doesn’t know yet, but will find out, that my husband will use some of this money for beer. When he finds this out, and that I do not take her to see a doctor—I buy cough syrup and pay the light bill instead—I will become trapped in my father’s story, a story about an irresponsible mother, an alcoholic father, and a child who has no shoes.

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Falling

We remembered the song: ...when the bough breaks the cradle will...

It did.

Fall.

We looked at each other in shock and heard the footsteps coming back from the room

they had just disappeared to. The baby's scream yelled at us until the mommy rescued it. Rescued it from all those straps and turned to us. Her eyes made us wrap up tighter and press into the corner. The mommy cuddled the baby and touched the baby everywhere. Her foot kicked the basinet out of the way and she walked into the other room, the room with the TV. We sat there until our knees hurt from crouching. We stood up together, quietly, and skittered across the yellow and brown floor to the edge of the TV room carpet, little dark faces peeking in. The mommy was on the couch, still touching the baby all over, then rocking it, then touching it. We scooted back out, holding hands, and snuck to our room at the back of the trailer. We went to our dollies, dollies that looked like the baby, and rocked them and touched them. And rocked them.

I honestly can't remember if it was you or me who couldn't wait, who couldn't resist the kicking bouncing of that blue-socked chubby pink foot. I don't remember if it was an accident.

Forgotten

There were times when she would forget about us, but I have no memory of any of them. Do you?

M. told me we would be waiting there and watching out the top window. We would watch for the red spot we knew would turn into the red pickup and beige camper as it followed the road that wrapped around the mountain that brought her from whatever job or house she was coming from to get us. But she wouldn't show and all of the red spots we'd see would not turn into her red truck with the beige camper.

Why have I forgotten these times?

I remember so vividly when she didn't forget to come get us. When the red spot we were watching followed the road that circled the mountain and then turned right by the church with the field where we played softball the one summer that we played softball. It followed that road all the way up toward us where it went under the ski resort and then disappeared in the scrub oak trees that hid her from our view and we wondered if we had been mistaken and if it wasn't her but some other red spot that would turn off at the street that was hiding in all of those trees, but the red spot did come out of the trees and was still on the road that would bring her to us and now it was close enough for us to see that it was a small red pickup and it did have a beige camper on it and we were confident enough to step away from the window and scramble to put on our coats and stuff our overnight bags which we had resisted packing and run downstairs and out the basement into the long driveway so that when she pulled up she would know--she just had to know--how happy we were to see her.

Do you think she ever knew?

Firecrackers

Far as I know, no one has ever gotten her own sister pregnant, but when she was sixteen and we all found out she was, I blamed myself. It was the firecrackers. When my sister was four and I was six, the babysitter and I would throw firecrackers at the bedroom wall to scare my sister and make her cry. I don't remember if it was my idea or Tony's, the babysitter, but it was probably mine. Tony was not pretty, girls named Tony are never pretty. They are the opposite of girls named Lisa, which was the name of the pretty girl who lived across the street from us and who also sometimes babysat my sister and me. Lisa was pretty and thin and had green eyes and hair that feathered like Blair's from "The Facts of Life", but we preferred Tony with her badly cut, not curly but poofy dark hair and her big squishy thighs and arms that she packed into knee-length cut-off black jean shorts and faded concert tees. Tony had a big nice doughy face and lived in one those houses that when you stepped inside the first thing you noticed is that it smelled a lot like cheese. Now that I think of it, it was probably the brothers that made it stink like that. Tony had four, all older. We only went to her house once. She always came to ours and we loved her because she would really get down and play with us. She would dance with us in the unfinished basement. She taught us how to modify Barbie's clothes so she was more punk rock, and she knew how the Barbie and Ken and Barbie's ugly best friend—the one who was missing a head—plot line was supposed to go. She liked me better than my sister, but everyone did because my sister was the hard kid but Tony was mostly nice to both of us. At bedtime though, Tony would put my sister in bed and turn the lights off for pitch darkness so I wouldn't be seen when I snuck into my sister's room while Tony sang Culture Club's "Karma Chameleon," which was my signal to throw the Snap Pop firecrackers against the wall. The noise and the gunpowder smell and the flashes would be followed by my sister's wail and then sniffles, while Tony would comfort her and pretend she hadn't seen or heard what was upsetting to my sister. My sister never told on us. I still don't know if it's because at the time she actually believed Tony, or if she just didn't want to get us in trouble. More likely she'd just forgotten it by morning. Even more likely that she'd forgotten it because that was the beginning of the loud year between our parents. My sister was probably still too young to understand that something was ending, and anyway by the time our parents would come home and pay Tony for watching us, and by the time the bickering between them escalated to yelling and to slamming doors, and by the time things, not Snap Pops, were hitting the walls my sister would be fast asleep, exhausted from crying because of the firecrackers.

Keep Your Eyes Open

You sit in the cold room of the mortuary trying not to be bothered by the scene of your friend, the widow, caressing the plasticine skin of a face, also your friend, now alien in its un-quickenened non-responsiveness. But you are watching. You leave comfort to the widow's mother, even now resting her hand on that shuddering back. It occurs to you

to wonder how many times that hand has been placed just on that spot of your friend's back. Hundreds? Could that hand distill information from those quakes that your eyes would never be able to perceive? Which convulsions were for anger, for shared moments that would now not be had, for the jokes no one else would ever find funny or understand. Was it a giving hand, one that provided support, a talisman that offset the blows just sustained and the ones still to come. Does the hand hope to be all of those things? And even if it was all of those things would that be enough? You watch the hand and the way it doesn't move, or rather, the way it does move but how those movements are in perfect sync with the quaking of the back so that in that alternate world of back and hand there is stillness. You see this and you decide that it must be enough. In the inadequate way that things that can never be sufficient must be enough, it will be. That back will eventually stop quaking and the pressure of the hand in it's together stillness with back will have been one factor that made it possible.

Your watching will have been another.

Teeth's Story

By Ron A. Austin

Abstract: “Teeth’s Story” is an excerpt from Ron A. Austin’s 2019 award-winning novel, *Avery Colt Is a Snake, a Thief, a Liar*. “Teeth’s Story” explores the myth of the “cool” associated with the picaresque elements of Saint Louis’s Northside. The short story serves as a cautionary tale as relates the romanticization of the street life.

Ron A. Austin holds an MFA from the University of Missouri–St. Louis and is a 2016 Regional Arts Commission Fellow. *Avery Colt Is a Snake, a Thief, a Liar*, his first collection of linked stories, won the 2017 Nilsen Prize. Austin’s short stories have been placed in *Boulevard*, *Pleiades*, *Story Quarterly*, *Ninth Letter*, *Black Warrior Review*, and other journals.

FRAILTY AND FLAB didn’t keep neighborhood elders from demanding respect. They upheld social order on sagging shoulders and corrected trifling, ungrateful slobbs with threats of old-school punishment. Grizzly, retired men threatened to rap knuckles and slash switches across backs. Mean, goat-bearded women promised to slap lying tongues into the stratosphere. I was afraid of walking past their porches with nappy hair and wrinkled jeans. Their anvil-headed judgment squashed ignorant-ass punks like me.

Neighborhood elders claimed to practice tough love, but they held a special, unforgiving contempt for dope dealers. They had seen crack ravage generations. Hot pipes split lips, chemical clouds suffocated kinfolks, avalanched, crushed sons and daughters.

When a dope dealer got shot, nobody sang praises at his funeral. When he got out of prison, nobody baked him peach cobbler, welcomed him home. When his mind turned on itself, nobody counseled him. They watched as paranoia and guilt turned feral, grew wing and talon, savaged skull and breast. When a dope dealer’s family withered, neighborhood elders grunted and said That’s what them lousy motherfuckers get.

So you have to understand my dread when I found a pickle jar full of crack hidden in my dead uncle’s closet. I feared his death wasn’t enough to clear the karmic debt he had charged to our bloodline. I imagined elders chewing iron nails, banging hammers, erecting crosses of:shame to crucify me and my folks.

Mom never talked about her brother, as if the mention of him would beg hellfire to fry our sorry asses. If I asked her anything about him, she’d stomp and cuss me bald. If I told her I had touched That Shit, she’d chop off my hand, boil it, feed fingers to pigeons. Nobody would discuss Grown Folks Business with me except for Teeth.

Old dude was a defunct dope dealer and prison mystic who rocked gold fangs. He claimed that my uncle had burned out whole blocks beside him back in the day. After coming home from a long prison stint, Teeth tried to revive his drug game. But that shit didn’t work. He came out dusty and broke. Young thundercats feared that his failure would infect them, rot the gold around their necks, raise lesions on their limited-edition sneakers. They shamed him. Neighborhood elders mocked him, told him *White Castles is always hiring. They love shitbirds. They sho’ll do*. So Teeth switched up his grind and earned bread selling junk and tall tales to chumps. For real.

He’d post up at Fairground Park, raise a busted pair of clippers, holler I know this don’t look like much, but this thing right here sheared Samson’s hair, made him bald as a baby’s backside, weak as a kitten, ripe for the butcher-you hear me? He sold bus passes

that never expired, sardine tins that multiplied overnight, boom boxes that blasted God's voice.

Most folks laughed at him or cursed him out-but the folks who spent money-they listened for a hot minute and walked away with a dazzled look in their eyes, as if they had stumbled out of a crypt and couldn't adjust to that new light.

Baby Keith from around the corner got conned into buying a pair of cheetah print sunglasses for twenty dollars. The fool said those sunglasses let him see bad news before it hit. A grizzly, retired man snatched the sunglasses off his face, crushed them in a fist, and said A blind man can see trouble coming, if he know where to look.

Now I didn't believe Teeth's bullshit, but after hiding that pickle jar full of crack in a crawl space, and having stress dreams where neighborhood elders circled me, stripped me rnt-kcd, and dobbercd me with red bricks, I slanged that shit in my backpack and searched for him that very next day, hoping I could snatch raw, bloody answers from his fangs.

I COULDN'T FIND Teeth fast enough. That pickle jar full of crack felt like a boulder in my backpack. Anxiety squeezed air out of my lungs as I entertained grim visions of neighborhood elders leaping off their porches to serve me reckoning. I thought Mr. Simons; the master landscaper and botanist, would drop his garden shears and grind my bones under his riding mower; I thought Miss Jacqueline, the caterer and historic food scholar, would drop-kick me into a bubbling vat of hot canola oil.

I biked to Fairground Park without trouble, but I didn't find Teeth by that track where middle-aged women powerwalked and curled jugs of water. I didn't find him near the cement rink where roller skate kings and queens busted disco moves and cut neat curlicues. I didn't find him by the abandoned pool where a riot once broke out.

Mean, goat-bearded old women told stories of square-headed white boys brandishing crow bars and baseball bats, cracking heads, cracking backs. Once it was over, those women carried their sons, their cousins, and brothers back home, rubbed frozen peas on swollen faces, Soothed bruises with cool hands and soft voices.

I found Teeth smoking a cigarette by the lake, near the medieval-looking stone bridge. He sat on a worn leather trunk and bobbed his head to the static rasp of a beat-up little radio set between his feet. He snapped out of his mellow vibe and burned through me with a glare.

I propped my bike up against a tree, shifted my backpack, approached him. He studied my frown, cut off his radio, tapped ashes in his palm. He told me, "Boy, you been waiting on me? Yes you was. You been waiting on me your whole life. Don't hide your face now. Don't holler. Don't run."

TEETH LAID HIS game on me before I could even ask him about my uncle or that pickle jar full of dope. He told me, "Young man, burdens trouble your heart—that's plain for everybody to see, but I'll get your mind right. Sho'll will. All I ask is that you listen—can you do that much? Just listen, and I'll make those burdens lighter than a feather. You'll fly high, once we through. You'll see. You'll fly high—but don't block out my light."

He licked his thumb, pinched the cherry off his cigarette, tucked the butt behind his ear. That hard shine on his gold fangs made me think of him in a past life, raiding pyramids and shucking bracelets off bleached bone.

"Now when you jammed up for ten, fifteen years, there ain't much to do but lift weights and read. You sho'll can get your hands dirty if you want to, but even a chump like me know better. I seen them cats swindling and killing each other like they ain't had enough nonsense out in the streets.

"So I'd lay up on my cot and watch them cats bust heads and slash throats over soda

pops and candy bars, and I say to myself N ‘all. I don’t want no part of that. I’m too damn old. Too damn beat. N’all Lemme me just go’n head here and read this damn book. And that’s all I did. Read and read and read.

“I set down and read the Bible ‘bout a hundred times—sho’ll did—and more than that, I read stories from all over the world, picked the brains of poets and prophets from China, India, Africa, and they all had one thing in common to say: you don’t ever come back home empty handed. I took that to heart and trained my eye to spot treasures men forget. Now I’ma’ show you one not everybody gets to see.”

Teeth hopped up and snapped open the brass buckles on his trunk. He rummaged through the junk. I was expecting a hot deal on Cleopatra’s comb or a panther’s eye—I expected him to pull out anything except an ornamental hunting knife. Red fur covered the bone-handle. Bright sunlight banked off the blade’s tip.

“Bad, ain’t it? You might think you need a nasty son of a bitch like this. Keep them wild niggas up off you—but that ain’t my point. You go running ‘round swinging this motherfucker at just anybody, and it’ll end up in your own damn back, sooner or later.” He ran his nail along the knife’s edge. It sang an eerie note.

“Oh yeah—I ain’t lying. This motherfucker is guaranteed to take a thousand lives once it taste blood—and you know what the bitch is? The last death will be yours. Now shut up and lemme tell you something about it.”

TEETH’S EPIC SAGA

BUT FIRST, I gotta tell you ‘bout these folks who mastered all creation. They had the game licked. Bees brought honey to the lips of our people. Animals bowed beneath blades. The sky wept at songs, soaked the earth in that good, good rain. Yams and wild flowers came popping clean out the dirt. Common rocks yielded gold and jewels. Men stood tall, brawny backed and strong in the trunk. The women were so damn beautiful, you’d turn to pudding trying to look them in the eye-boy, I ain’t lying! They was honey-dipped and thick.

Now whenever you on top, there always go’n be somebody’s hating-ass waiting ‘round the corner to knock you down. So don’t act surprised when I say a tribe of giants became jealous of how the Masters of Creation were blessed. They waged war, stripped power from our people, and left them in the cold and dark. You can master creation, but that don’t mean you can’t get that ass whooped.

Quicker than I can snap my fingers, life became hard. Bees coveted honey and stung lips. Animals grew wild, broke blades under claw and hoof. The sky ignored the songs of our people. The earth dried up and cracked. Homes buckled and collapsed. Men lost faith and became weak. Women withered under all that sorrow. Charms broke. Our good people suffered God’s wrath.

You best believe that cold took a tighter hold, settled damp in lungs and bones. Brothers killed brothers. Men whored they wives. Women shamed they children—and more than that. The ancestors jumped up out they graves, wandered that wasteland, and questioned each and every descendant.

What the Hell is wrong with y’all? How in the Hell y’all let this mess happen? After everything we been through. After everything we done did far y’all. Shit. After every-

thing we done. Goddamn, goddamn, goddamn. . . .

II.

SO THE ELDERS put their hands together and prayed for heroes. Folks say a star flashed bright in the sky that same night-and soon after-five virgins found themselves with child. Three days later, each woman gave birth to a healthy baby boy. They fed them boys milk and stew-and in just one night they all grew into full-grown men, big and strong, long woolly hair, hot coals in their eyes, all that. You already know they were blessed with sacred powers.

Zabari had a hide of iron. He could bust boulders with his fist and wrestle tigers to a stalemate. Tuma could hurl his club over the horizon and call yams out the ground with a slow, sweet song. Cayman could bust through three shields with his spear, whistle, and change the course of rivers. Khari could stitch wounds with the life lines from his palm and hit an ant's eye with his arrow. Akachi could snatch humming birds out the sky with his net and turn gristle into good meat. Goat, chicken, jack rabbit-whatever you want.

So the elders gathered their youngbloods and told them about a mighty, gold bull that lived in the Badlands. If those boys could hunt the gold bull and take his meat, hide, and bones, they could bring a new age of plenty. Zabari, Tuma, Cayman, Khari, and Akachi thumped chests and accepted that challenge. They were cocky as could be-you hear me? Dead cocky.

But the wisest elder warned them boys and said *We know you bad as they come, but we ain't never seen you struggle a day in your life. Not a goddamn day in your life. What do y'all think you can do for us without knowing pain and the seduction of death?*

I die when they shear my hair. I die when they cut me with a look. I die when they call me out my name. I die when the groceries is high. I die when the lights cut out. I die when they spit on my brother, turn a cold shoulder to my plight. If you love me like you say you do, you'll suffer. Child, you'll suffer with me and not say a damn word.

III.

ZABARI, TUMA, CAYMAN, Khari, and Akachi tracked that gold bull to the Badlands-and I ain't got to say it. You already know bad news was coming 'round the corner. Now that bull was no ordinary beast. He was ornery, strong, and cunning as I don't know what. juked and jived, led those boys to death, one by one -

That gold bull led Akachi into a cave full of sharp rocks and spiders. That boy got lost and never saw the light of day again. That gold bull led Khari into brambles, growing thicker and meaner with every step, ripping flesh clean off that boy's bones 'til he was nothing but string and gristle. That gold bull outmatched Cayman, blunted that boy's spear tip with his invulnerable hide. When that boy went to the river to drink and summon his strength, a great lizard bit him, dragged him down into that deep, dark water. That bull made Tuma eat mud 'til he couldn't breathe no more. Now finally, that gold bull went toe-to-toe with Zabari—but he couldn't best that boy—Hell n'all!

Zabari grappled the bull, took him by his horns, lifted him high in the air, and body slammed him-BAM! Knocked the piss out that motherfucker! Dropped him so hard the earth shook. That gold bull lay defeated, but like I said, he was no ordinary beast. So before Zabari could break his neck and avenge his brothers, that bull spoke, talked all that shit.

That bull snorted and told him *Boy, you may eat of my flesh, drink of my blood and gain incredible willpower. You may use my bones to build homes that cannot be demolished by nature or man. You may use my hide and craft charms that protect you from vengeful gods. You may take the fire from my heart and light the dark. You may break my ribs, fashion a knife, and reign as king.*

You might do all that, but some day, after you think the battle's won, and there's no enemy in sight, folks will come to fear your power. Power will change you—don't think it won't. You will turn your knife on your brothers. They will call you arrogant and ruthless. The men you rely on will stab you in the back, take power for themselves. They will beat their drums with your bones, drink broth from your skull, pull scriptures from your tongue. Burn them. They will do evil until they too are struck down. Knowing all that, you still want to break my damn neck?

TO BE CONTINUED....

TEETH TOLD ME, “That’s all I know. I can’t say if the boy was successful or not, but I do know that this same story gets told in a lot of different ways. In some stories it’s not a gold bull that them boys chase, but it’s a fox, a bird, or a shooting star—though that ain’t the point.” He laid the Dagger of One Thousand Deaths on his thigh, relit his cigarette, and took a long drag. “N’all, that ain’t the point.”

I folded my arms and told him, “That’s the dumbest thing I have ever heard. You can’t end on a cliffhanger like that, and plus, what do you mean you don’t know what he did? How else would you have that dagger if he didn’t kill the bull?”

“What do you want me to tell you?”

“Zabari or whoever put up with a lot bullshit for a little bit of power he couldn’t use.”

“But at least he had choices.”

“Right, and they both sucked.”

“You ever heard the saying ‘act like a motherfucking fool, and I’m a’ treat you like a motherfucking fool’?”

“Sounds familiar.”

“See, boy, that’s your problem. You think you smart, but you don’t know shit.”

Teeth finished his cigarette, picked up the dagger off his thigh, and pointed it at me. “Now is you go’n buy this knife or not?”

“Man, please. Do I look like I have money?”

Teeth laughed. “N’all—boy you look raggedy as fuck, like you just fell off the back of a pumpkin truck, with your country, baloney eating-ass—but that ain’t my problem.” He picked his fingernails with the dagger and glared at me. “You can’t be wasting my time. I ain’t got shit else. You need to buck up, beg, borrow, steal, and pay tribute. Knowledge ain’t free. Niggas died for this shit.

Teeth kept pushing me, and so I gave him the only thing of value I had. I unzipped my backpack and tossed him that pickle jar full of crack. He caught it. His eyes bugged out as if I had thrown a troll’s head in his lap. He held it up to the light. The rocks shone dingy white and jagged, like the splintered teeth of rodents.

Teeth asked me, “What the fuck you want me to do with this?”

I shrugged and told him, “You know better than me.”

Teeth searched his pockets for another cigarette, but he couldn't find one. He lowered his head, looked up at me with a furrowed brow, and said, “Boy, let me tell you something. You know I was walking down the street the other day, and Miss Annette—you know Miss Anette—the sweet thing who be selling candy apples and sno-cones? She seen me the other day, and you know what she did? She spat dead in my motherfucking face. Dead in my face. Snot and everything.

“Her cousin smoked up his job, his house, his car—and guess who she blames? Like I can break anybody's back by my lonesome. The bitch is everybody loves you when you handing out loans, paying tuition, feeding folks. But then you fall flat on your ass, where they at? You just a oldhead then. You just the scum of the motherfucking earth . Now tell me—am I right or wrong?”

I shrugged. “I really don't know.”

Hurt broke Teeth's face as he jabbed a finger at me. “Now you been standing here for 'bout an hour, staring me dead in my face, nodding your head on some UNH-HUNH, UNH-H UNH shit, and you ain't heard a goddamn word I said, lil' brother. Not a goddamn word. I said I'm through. I already told you—I'm through.”

He stood, thrust the pickle jar of crack in my face, and said, “This shit right here, it ain't nothing. It ain't what folks think it is. But this shit—it ain't nothing at all.” He chucked That Shit high and far. We both watched as it turned in the air and hit the lake's surface with an explosive, depth-charge splash.

Teeth turned to me, put his hand on my shoulder, leaned his weight on me and said, “Lil' brother, don't play games with me. Listen when I say this—I'm through.”

Poems

By Alicia Janette

Abstract: The mythic has been called at once an external reality and the resonance of the internal vicissitudes of the human condition. The poetic offerings of Alicia Janette expose the aesthetic possibilities of the mythic as regards bringing the imagined world into conflict with the world as objectified.

Alicia Janette is a native of Saint Louis's Northside . She received her BA from DePauw University and her JD from Florida A & M University College of Law. Her poetry highlights the mythical aspects of life and love

Midday Thoughts Adrift

I wilt and wither for a drop of rain, forgetting I am the ocean
Ocean:

As an invisible hand moving, so the waves wax and wane following the moon

Moon:

Chasing the sun come a thousand sunrises to sunsets spread across the horizon

Horizon:

My chest heaves and caves responding to my breath, forgetting that this IS life
Life:

Ever steady momentum

The sound of calm in my ears

Leading of my soul as days turn to years

The Mythos of Education

Christmas came early this year. Children are finally the focus of education.

Corporations providing the infrastructure

Children educated according to individual plans and times

Broader curriculum, not set to a test—

No test anxiety

Community resources and involvement supporting parents, offering resources,
expanded platforms to learn

Schools without walls-virtual space and complete range of topics, spaces, tools
to facilitate a well rounded curriculum and life skills is back!

Children's interest, creativity, not contained
 Learning is learning again—the global classroom
 Parents are the first teachers again
 Children given the individual assistance, smaller classroom sizes
 NO cries from districts asking for more money or what to do with teachers
 No teacher's unions restricting parental choices or even having a dog in this fight! Hindering
 progress and total imaginative, creative solutions emerging
 Teachers are assisting parents in being the advocates, leaders
 Child feeding centers available, creative ways to entertain, teach, exercise, support all learners
 where they are and not herded to a building
 Now no child left behind, seen as the individual they are
 Children are able to be industrious, independent and interdependent, creative, imaginative,
 self entertain—soft skills, life skills, and are at the table contributing to their learning path

May we never return to business as usual.

Untitled...Hair

Behold a declaration has been made
 And many others are pursuing
 So let it be
 So as I Am
 I Am fearfully and wonderfully made
 No more will hours be spent stretching, perming, hiding the lambs wool sprouting, budding,
 growing from this golden crown
 I will finally Glo Up!
 Released from the shackles
 Free from the socially constructed ideas of feminine beauty
 Daughters of the night
 Radiate brightly
 All in formation
 Such a glorious sight
 Breathe it in
 Breath is life
 Can't you see it
 Rows upon rows of lambs wool
 Curly tresses and there in between
 Reign supreme Goddess of Nature
 Just be
 Because from where I sit
 Freedom has no cost
 The bonds have been paid
 Your soul is now free

A Blue Period

By Ivan Gemini

Abstract: The two offerings presented here by Ivan Gemini signify on the Blues—as reflected in African American artistic aesthetics. The pieces are included the collection entitled, *A Blue Period*. *Dunbar* is an intertextual riff on “We Wear the Mask” by Paul Laurence Dunbar. *Homer Winslow* reinterprets Winslow Homer’s *The Gulf Stream*.

*Dunbar (I. Gemini;
acrylic paint, epoxy resin)*



Ivan Gemini was born and raised on the Northside in the City of St Louis. The eldest of twelve siblings, Gemini spent most of his childhood at the Saint Louis Public Library among the books that would fuel his passion for the arts—under the guidance of his mother, a school teacher and scholar. While attending Central Visual and Performing Arts High School, Gemini was exposed to different art media. Creating art works has always served as a way to address life’s stressors for Gemini. After his studies at Saint Louis University, Gemini rediscovered his artistic gifts

*Homer Winslow (I. Gemini;
acrylic paint, tempera paint,
spray paint, glitter,
epoxy resin)*



BARS AND LYRICS

You Will See

By Ave the Fox

What is the price of exceeding your own expectations?

She grabbed my chain as if patient
Like there is a story.
Waiting...

In my experience
Heroes don't always beat the villain

From my existence
The passion of vandals, match my feelings

She looking puzzled as if the words wasn't put together
Maybe she thought that the story ended with us together
Maybe with us forever

I looked to window as If I wondered what was the weather.
Really, I am thinking
If I survive, what might make this better?

My mind was buzzing.
Like flies that hover a corpse of free man.

She really thought that the life we living resemble freedom (free-dem)
Silly I think

While we covered in mink, she watch me think.
She hang from me, like a decoration from festive tree.

Another winter, with celebration expect to see
But once again
I am wondering, why we even be?

Ave the Fox is an artist from St. Louis, Missouri. He is co-founder of the independent entertainment label Fox Only Entertainment

She found me buzzed at the mourning sink.

Morning the thoughts of me
Felt I was drowning
But out of water
How can it be?

I am losing track of reality.
What do I even see?
I (Aint) felt a thing in forever.
What does she feel for me?

I am coming home after shift in office, still depressed.
Walk in the door and greeting me...with a knife to chest.

I pull her in, embrace the Blade, like a Marvel writer.
It start to bend, as if, Ave is built up from shards of iron.

She want it, but I am not trying.
She is living, but I am dying
She gas, and I am igniting
This fire lasting for I am, Fighting, lasting for ions

Weight is lifted, this iron
Baby pushing, she is trying
I am livid, I am rising
The tide is high.

Do not see how this can be...
Seem like this is just a part of me
Fight with her when she is not present see
Nightmare was the dream.

Listen to Ave the Fox perform ["You Will See"](#)

REVIEWS

Stagolee Shot Billy. Cecil Brown. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003. pp. 304.

By Tarrell R. Campbell

Lee Shelton—also referred to as Stagolee, Stagger Lee, Stack Lee, or Stag—is an icon within African American traditions and is recognized as an archetypal bad-man or social bandit or anti-hero in juxtaposition to the conceptions of African American masculinities championed by advocates of white supremacy and respectability politics. Shelton has been relatively unknown outside of St. Louis’s vice district of Deep Morgan. But, on a cold Christmas night in 1895, he shot William “Billy” Lyons in a fight over a Stetson hat. A myth was born. A legend was made. Today, Stagolee remains an urban legend more than a century later. Despite the diversity of the legend’s variations in oral traditions and in mass media, Stagolee remains a powerful symbolic archetype that shapes African American culture in both literature and politics, especially among African Americans living at the bottom of the social ladder.

In 2003’s *Stagolee Shot Billy*, Cecil Brown explores the myths and legends associated with Stagolee. During the days of Lee Shelton, St. Louis was referred to as the second city of America, the Paris on the Mississippi. It was the gateway between East and West and North and South. The book is an amazing compilation of researched scholarship, journalism, literary craftsmanship, and analyses of nineteenth- and twentieth-century popular cultural. The tripart construction of the book—signifying on the tripart constructions of works like Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*—consists of twenty-seven chapters organized under the major headings of: Stagolee and St. Louis; The Thousand Faces of Stagolee; and, Mamma-Made: Stagolee and American Identity. *Stagolee Shot Billy* captures post-Reconstruction narratives of one of the first generations of free African American men navigating the Victorian, genteel codes of Black and White America. *Stagolee Shot Billy* captures St. Louis in its wild adolescence during turn-of-the-century America.

While prostitution was legal in nineteenth-century St. Louis, many African American *madames* and prostitutes faced a horrible problem. In the midst of drunken nighttime raves, white American men would “talk openly about ‘storming the Castle’” (Brown 89). Brown relates in *Stagolee Shot Billy* that storming the castle refers to instances when white men would enter Black owned brothels where they would rape the women and steal the proceeds and alcohol. This was done as a form of entertainment—of “making fun”—during times of boredom. In the effort to protect themselves and their legal business ventures, Black *madames* and prostitutes paid men like Stagolee to live in their brothels and to provide protection. And so, the *maquereau*, or pimp, was engendered in St. Louis’s African American brothels and neighborhoods. Stagolee is one of the legendary, folkloric *maquereaux* of St. Louis’s nineteenth century and an iconic

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fixture of St. Louis's Deep Morgan—a legendary African American section of the now extant third ward where the demographics have been described as eerily similar to those of Washington, D.C.'s Adams-Morgan neighborhood. In Brown's folkloric version, Stagolee's involvement in pimping is entrenched in more nuanced communitarian and feminist concerns and his bootlegging activities are anchored in more nuanced Republican political concerns during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in St. Louis, Missouri.

African American literary artists have long used tales associated with Stagolee for generative purposes. The Stagolee-type, like Wright's Bigger-type, has been embraced as "the bearer of antiracist and anticapitalist possibility" in African American literary racial representations (Mills 4). For example, in Margaret Walker's 1942 volume of poetry *For My People*, Stagolee is portrayed positively as regards marginalized African Americans and their approaches to exploitative American labor systems, such as slavery. Walker utilizes the "exploits of tricksters, conjurers, gamblers, bootleggers, pimps, and laborers... [to] accentuat[e] the nuanced lives of [the] African American folk" (144). In *Ragged Revolutionaries: The Lumpenproletariat and African American Marxism in Depression-era Literature*, Nathaniel Mills notes: "the figures that find empowerment [in *For My People*] are nonworking black[s]...presented as legendary outlaws. They opt for occult, illegitimate, or criminal tactics to survive and thrive on the margins of racist, capitalist, and patriarchal social formations....[T]hese legendary black [folk figures] perform resistance to normative structures of oppression" (163). Their collective experiences point toward possibilities for effecting the status quo and engendering a "better way" and "new earth" (Walker 7). Work and labor elicit suspicion in many of the poems of *For My People*.

The poems that are of particular interests include: "Bad-Man Stagolee" and "Kissie Lee." "Bad-Man Stagolee" once again revives and revises the archetypal African American social bandit Stagolee. A pimp, a hustler, a gambler, and an all-around criminal-type according to mainstream racialized clichés, Stag has existed in the rebellious dreams of African Americans at least since the days of field hollers, according to some authorities.¹ Kissie Lee is a regendered revision of the Stagolee archetype. Kissie Lee means what she says, has a mean disposition, is no mean African American woman—she is different compared to previous generations of Black women—and recognizes that the ends justify the means in any given situation. She usually means to end any situation with her trusty knife, a reappropriation of masculine phallic authority for feminist purposes. In "Indivisible Man," Ralph Ellison writes of the literary value of African American Southern folk culture as regards figures like Stagolee.² "What we have in the South," writes Ellison,

¹ See also, *Hear My Sad Story: The True Tales That Inspired "Stagolee" "John Henry," and Other Traditional American Folk Songs* by Richard Polenberg, Cornell University Press, 2015.

² As regards the use and function of the Southern black literary imagination in general, Ellison writes, "As for the possibility of deeper understanding of cultural values and institutions on the part of Southern blacks, I would just say that it is dangerous to generalize in this area. One man brought up in the North who has done his homework as far as reading is concerned and who has *respect* for the mysteries [the unclassified residuum] of black cultural experiences in the South—to which he is not necessarily superior because he enjoyed a broader social freedom in the North—might well make more of that Southern experience than a writer who is so caught up in it that he doesn't achieve objectivity. On the other hand, I believe that a writer who does know his traditions has some of the advantages which William Faulkner or other Southern writers have had: the advantage of contact with a long accumulation of history in a given place; an experience that has been projected in other forms of artistic expression, which has traditional values and variants, and which has been refined by being *defined* by generations of people who have told what it

is an oral tradition which extends right back into slavery and which has been projected in terms of archetypal characters: John the Slave, John Henry, Stagolee, a whole group of them, and they're real-life versions of local characters. People know them by word of mouth rather than their having been written about. For example, a man like Kingsberry who shot up a whole bunch of Texas Rangers in Oklahoma City when Jimmy Rushing was a little boy. People still talk about Kingsberry. And fabulous fisherman, fabulous hunters, fabulous bootleggers, fabulous cooks, fabulous headwaiters, fabulous hustling bellhops, fabulous evangelists. ("Indivisible Man" 395)

Well, Brown writes about Stagolee. Well. His *Stagolee Shot Billy* has been described as "a comprehensive study of a myth in the making" (Diallo 240). The work is a great example of blending popular approaches to analysis with more scholarly and theoretical perspectives. According to Brown, Stagolee is a metaphor for the seemingly endless struggles of African American men in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American societies. *Stagolee Shot Billy* is a diligent account of the actual events of Christmas day in the Deep Morgan section of St. Louis in 1895; Brown's literary narrative style utilizes authentic facts taken from legal renderings, oral histories and folklores, and newspaper accounts. Quite simply, Brown makes use of the realities of nineteenth-century Deep Morgan for literary generative purposes: the dissolution of reality into fiction. In addition to thinkers like Jean Baudrillard, the theoretical positions of Walter Benjamin, Walter Burkert, and Richard Bauman are employed as Brown attempts to separate fact from fiction in this seminal accounting of the life of Lee Shelton. In his review of Brown's work, David Diallo writes,

Considering narrative structure, Brown reminds us that binary opposition, which Claude Lévi-Strauss considers basic to myths and folktales, established Lee Shelton and Billy Lyons as polar opposites, though it altered the actual facts and distorted the original event. "Allomotives" (details that may fluctuate to make the story consistent with the cultural grammar of its audience) have transformed the original narrative through time (for example, in a 1927 variant, a pimp takes out his bamboo and smokes his opium; in a 1903 version, the drug of choice is cocaine), but Stagolee has preserved approximately the same archetypal structure. (240-1)

Just the same, while popular, one-sided interpretations and understandings of Stagolee present him as a pimp and bootlegger, more nuanced understandings offer interpretations of Stagolee as an alternative post-Reconstruction version of the black conservative masculinist service leader. The folk version of Stagolee presented by Brown in *Stagolee Shot Billy* underscores such a perspective.

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seemed to be. *'This is the life of black men here. These are the variants. This type of character turns up over and over again.'* For example, you get many guys who nickname themselves Jack the Bear or Peter Wheatstraw. ("Indivisible Man" 394-95; original emphasis)

Far from Finished. Tatjana Ring and Salman.

By Tarrell R. Campbell

*Far from Finished (l.),
Ring and Salman/courtesy
Big Piph;
Frederick Douglass,
Frontispiece, Narrative
of the Life of Frederick
Douglass, an American
Slave. (1845)/Courte-
sy: Wikipedia. (below).*



In “A Visual Call to Arms against the ‘Caracature [*sic*] of My Own Face,’ from Fugitive Slave to Fugitive Image in Frederick Douglass’s Theory of Portraiture,” Celeste-Marie Bernier writes,

Self-emancipated author, activist, and philosopher turned art historian, Frederick Douglass spent a lifetime visualizing back to a white dominant schema intent on trading in racist grotesques of socially determinist and politically reductive contortions of black bodies and souls. Across his photographic and fine-art portraits, he endorsed a revisionist aesthetic theory and carved out an alternative iconographic space within which to

expose, debunk and demythologize the racist claim that “Negroes look all like.” Douglass’s visual aesthetic took as its starting point the formal, political, and ideological importance of representing black subjects as psychologically complex individuals rather than as generic types. At the heart of Douglass’s theory of portraiture was his conviction that all likenesses of African American subjects must do justice to “the face of the fugitive slave” by conveying the “inner” via the “outer man,” and thereby privilege emotional depth rather than physical surface in order to extrapolate a full gamut of lived realities otherwise annihilated out of existence. Douglass worked extensively with the signifying possibilities of his own physiognomy as a representative test case by which to bear witness to the interior complexities of black subjects missing from, or remaining fugitives at large within, white artists’ surface-only renderings. (323)

Historically, many representations of Black human beings within the Western paradigm have approached blackness according to theoretical positions that “associate with the Negro face, high cheek bones, distended nostril, depressed nose, thick lips, and retreating foreheads” (Douglass 379). Frederick Douglass very well understood that such an approach to theoretical positions “impressed strongly upon the mind of an artist exercises a powerful influence over his pencil, and very naturally leads him to distort and exaggerate those peculiarities, even when they scarcely exist in the original” (380).

In many ways, like Douglass, Epiphany “Big Piph” Morrow presents—in *Far from Finished*—a powerful contrast to reductive appearances of African Americans within the American public sphere. Like Douglass’s Frontispiece from the 1845 edition of *Narrative*, Ring and Salman’s rendition of the Global Hip Hop Ambassador and communitarian known as Big Piph escapes representation of the “commonest sort,” representations that seemingly trade in white supremacist fantasies of face and body. Douglass generated “a radically revisionist series of portraits in which he cultivated a self-consciously dramatic and psychologically charged use of his own physical expression” (Bernier 326). In *Far from Finished*, the composition of Big Piph revisits, revises, and reevaluates—that is, *signifies* on—Douglass’s approach to portraiture for contemporary generative purposes centered on the possibilities within blackness. Like Douglass, the theory of portraiture utilized to capture this rendition of Big Piph undergirds a practice of choreographed use of one’s representation to produce projections of self over which Big Piph exerts control as a powerful art-historical and cultural corrective.

The similarities and, quite truthfully, the differences between Douglass’s 1845 Frontispiece and Ring and Salman’s 2021 *Far from Finished* are rather apparent—both superficially speaking and upon closer examination. Both portraits are “unfinished”—literally. While Douglass seemingly separates the mental, cognitive parts of himself from the physical, material parts of himself—the thinking mind vs. the laboring body—Big Piph is presented with the right side of his body completed, intact, and with the left side: far from finished, incomplete. As Maddy Kadish points out in “Self-Fashioning, Portraiture, and Identity—Douglass’s Frontispiece,” Douglass engages in self-reflexive strategies of self-masking, performance, staging, and stylization in the 1845 Frontispiece. Ring and Salman’s composition featuring Big Piph engages in self-reflexive strategies of self-masking, performance, staging, and stylization, as well. While the political principles undergirding Douglass’s strategies are well-documented, one might ask what are the political principles undergirding the strategies of self-imaging at work within Big Piph’s visual archive, at least as presented in *Far from Finished*?

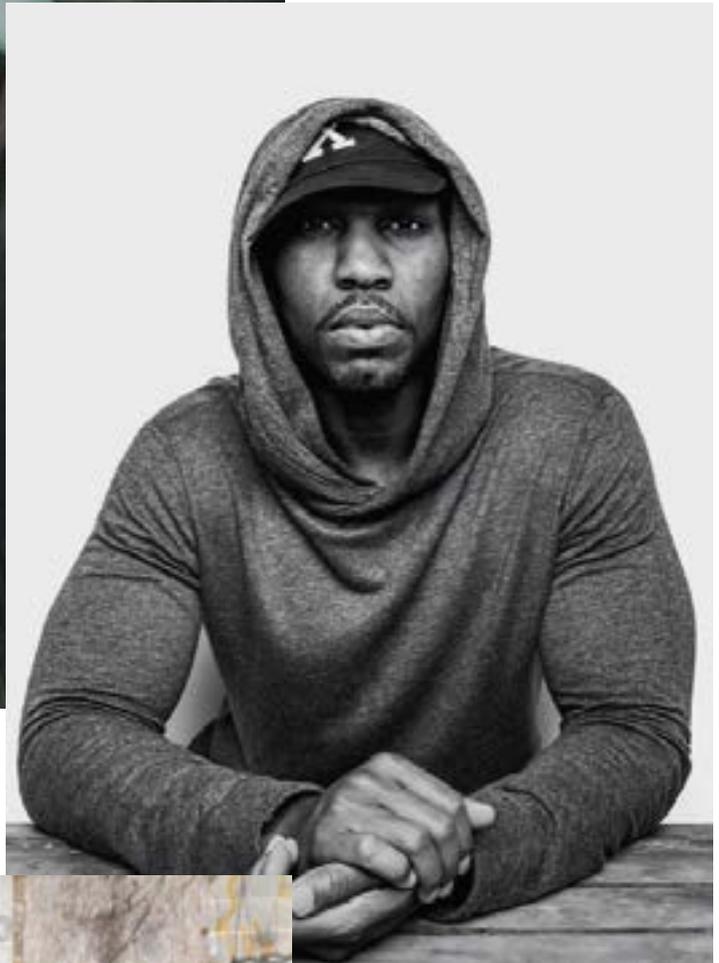
I argue that the archetypal “face of the fugitive slave” is reimagined in *Far from Finished*. Just as Douglass “sought to speak for—or image for—the vast number of unrepresented

lives” of Black Americans during the nineteenth century, Big Piph speaks to those of the contemporary moment (330). Just the same—and, rather importantly, Big Piph is NOT them. Working to signify beyond the parameters of his own life’s story, Big Piph’s sense of a private and fallible selfhood is transformed into a public and mythological touchstone by generating an approach to self-representation that ensures his circulation as “the ur-image or quintessentially representative icon powerfully suited to encapsulating the plight of untold, and as yet unimaged, millions” (330). *Repetition-with-a-difference*. For, once again, we must remember: Big Piph is NOT them. Moreover, *Far from Finished* displays Big Piph’s commitment to translating the liminal position of the “fugitive slave” into the liberatory potential of the fugitive image. And, most importantly, *Far from Finished* joins the tradition of laying

claim to the black subject’s right to appear not in fixed visual representations trading in racist types—and so on, as offered in cartoons, scientific diagrams, medical drawings, and political iconography, among much more—but in fugitive images celebrating black individualism and humanity which were defined by the right to freedom of physiognomic expression in specifically commissioned photographs, frontispieces, and fineart portraits. (331)

For more on Big Piph and his Visual Archive, please visit bigpiph.com

Douglass, Frederick. “A Tribute for the Negro” (1849), repr. in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Philip S. Foner, Volume I (New York: International Publishers, (1950).



Images courtesy Big Piph/Far from Finished, bigpiph.com

We Aren't Who We Think We Are

By Nicole Dugger

Code Switch is THE podcast for the fearless conversations about race for which you have been waiting. Hosted by journalists of color, the podcast tackles the subject of race head-on. *Code Switch* explores how race impacts every part of society—from politics and pop culture to history, sports and everything in between. This podcast makes ALL OF US part of the conversation—because we are all part of the story.

Hosted by Shereen Marisol Meraji and Gene Demby, *Code Switch* was launched in 2016. The duo tackles issues of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity through frank one-on-one discussions and analysis of incisive non-fiction. Moreover, the pair offers diverse and empathetic personal perspectives to a broad audience. The episode entitled, “We Aren't Who We Think We Are” centers on understandings of familial myths and the chaos, confusion, and, sometimes, joy engendered by the establishment and maintenance of such myths—particularly within communities of color. As noted by Leah Donnelly,

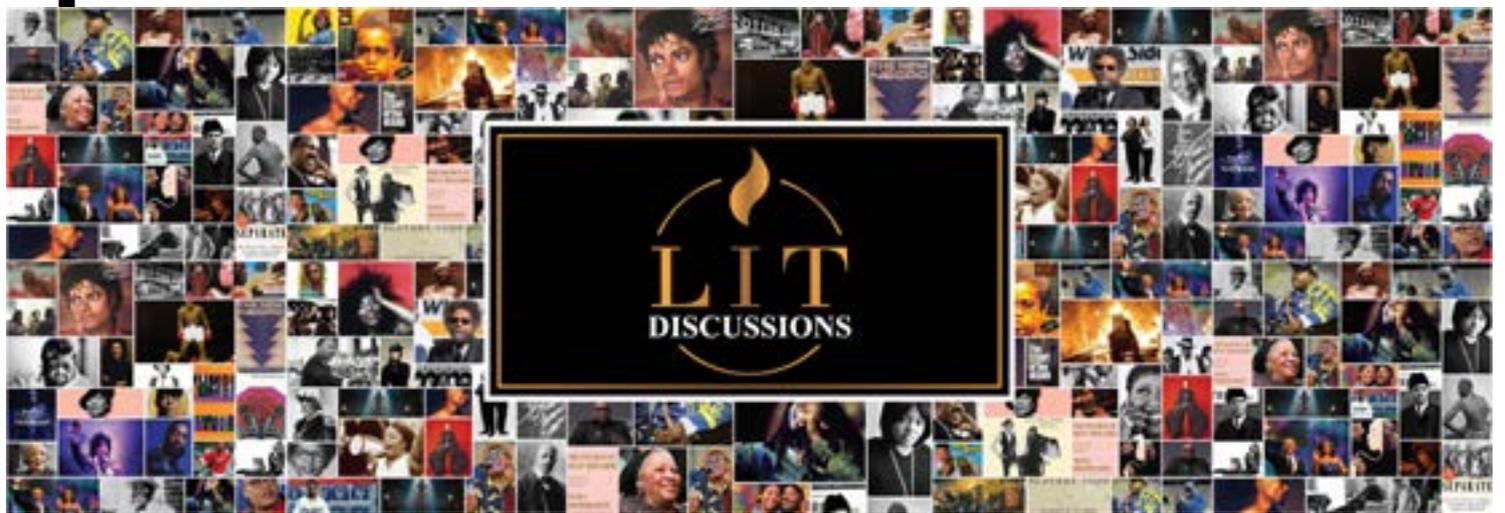
Every family has a myth—in some cases, an entire mythology—about where they came from and who they are. And there are a lot of reasons people tell these stories. Sometimes it's because they genuinely don't know the truth, so they exaggerate, or make something up. Sometimes it's to make your family seem like they were part of an important historical event. Sometimes it's to skirt around a shameful history. And other times, it's to hide something that is too painful to talk about.

To hear more of Leah's story and to listen to other episodes of *Code Switch*, visit the link below:

[Code Switch podcast](#)

Nicole Dugger holds an MA in English and teaches rhetoric, composition, and literature class at Maryville University.

LIT Discussions



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CALL-FOR-PAPERS: FORTHCOMING ISSUE

“Novel Coronavirus: Plague and the Performances of Identities”

In response to the current situation, this issue of *Quimbandas: Explorations of Identities* will focus on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis as relates performances of human identities—many of which we have often taken for granted in times past. As an interdisciplinary journal interrogating human conceptions of identities, we endeavor to explore the social, economic, political, and cultural implications of this unprecedented moment.

There are serious concerns as regards whether COVID-19, or the impacts that it has upon human performances of identities, can be stopped at all. The virus, seemingly, has significant implications for clinical and public health medical professionals, students and teachers, bus drivers, mothers and uncles...the whole of humanity. The impact of the novel coronavirus outbreak can be felt globally. Countries around the world continue to close their borders. Cities, and economies, continue to shut down. Human performances have become ever more forceful—particularly as some politicians attempt to motivate populations to comply with restrictions of movement. While we attempt to adjust to the changes that COVID-19 have wrought, let us consider how our very performances of the identities that we hold so dear have been impacted. What does such impacts mean for the performances of human identities now—and in the future.

We welcome submissions addressing issues, aspects, and explorations of identities in the following areas:

division of labor in the workforce (esp. health and social sectors)
 equality in the economic downturn
 economy and entrepreneurship
 sexual and reproductive health and rights
 domestic violence
 artists and cultures (musicians, social media artists, authors, etc.)
 social media
 politics and voice
 education
 prohibitions and prejudice
 environmental issues
 international relations and country-specific differences
 conceptions of authority
 the values and functions of rebellion

If you are interested in publishing in *Quimbandas: Explorations of Identities*, then please submit an abstract to submissions@quimbandas.org by 18 JUN 2021.

Notes for Contributors

Quimbandas is published four times a year, usually as themed, guest-edited issues. The Journal's editors will consider proposals for themed issues AND individual essays. If accepted, the latter will be published in one of the Journal's issues on the website. Print copies will be made available for purchase.

Information about forthcoming themed issues, together with details of the guest editors, is available via the "Forthcoming Issues" tab found under the "Issues" tab.

If you have a suggestion for or would like to guest-edit a themed issue, or would like to discuss the appropriateness of an article for an open issue prior to submission, please contact the Journal's editor, Tarrell R. Campbell.

General Submission Guidelines

Authors wishing to submit to the Journal should first submit an abstract to submission@quimbandas.org. After acceptance of the abstract, authors will be contacted by the editor as relates how to submit full manuscripts. Information about the guest editors of forthcoming issues can also be found under the "Forthcoming Issues" tab.

Once contacted for submission of full manuscript, please submit the following:

1. Author contact details and biography:

- the title of the article
- the author(s)' names and affiliations
- a short biography of no more than 80 words for each author
full contact details (including email, postal address, and phone number) for the corresponding author

2. Article:

- the title of the article
- a summary or abstract of not more than 150 words in length outlining the aims and subject matter
- the article in full, including references
- If images or text in the article require permissions for use, please add evidence that permissions have been secured (receipts, licenses, emails, etc.). We are not able to send out articles for review without these.

Please note: If you are including the details of more than one author on your paper, please ensure that the first-named author is prepared to be "corresponding" author, responsible for communication with Production and handling the proof of your manuscript, if it were to be accepted. If you are unsure of how to order your names, please contact the editors, or the publisher.

Manuscripts should be in English, preferably in Word format. Manuscripts should follow *MLA Handbook*, 8th edition. Please double-space the entire manuscript, including all notes and bibliographical references, and make sure all pages are numbered consecutively.

Articles may not exceed 8,000 words in length. *Quimbandas* uses footnotes; we encourage authors to keep notes to a minimum, using their discretion of course. Please print a word count at the end of your manuscript. Word counts should include abstract, all notes and references, and author biographies.

Quimbandas supports an open-review process. We believe in the open and transparent review of scholarly production. Generally, the names of authors will be known to reviewers and the names of reviewers will be known to authors. When requested, the open-review process can be addressed.

Book Review Essays

Each issue of *Quimbandas* contains a book review essay. Book review essays will be coordinated with the theme of the issue. *Quimbandas* does not accept unsolicited book review essays, and does not publish individual book reviews. If you would like to suggest a theme for a book review essay in an open issue, please contact the Book Reviews Editor, Alex Wulff.

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