

Place, Race, and the Topography of American Literature

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Abstract

This dissertation enters a vibrant conversation in literary criticism and cultural geography about the changing nature of place, race, and identity in American literature. Drawing from a wide range of theoretical models, including neo-Marxist geography, critical race theory, and space and place theory, it explores interrelations between the spatial and the social and their co-joined impact on racial identity. Collectively, the novels in this study articulate a complicated relationship between capital systems, material culture, and cultural enunciation. I argue that each novel operates within the nexus of global capitalism, market economies, and spatial models of center and periphery, but that each novel shows a secondary, destabilizing narrative of American experience. In moving away from geographic and literary models that prioritize stasis, the imposition of boundaries, and simplistic agrarian appeals, this project illustrates a vibrant spatial history that is rooted in the experiential and the material. By distinguishing the difference between modernity and modernization, I draw out in each chapter the existence of two opposing narratives that wind through the main body of American literature and embroil in a paradoxical constitution of American imperialism and resistance. Relying on close reading of the texts, this project highlights the historical enunciation of these co-joined, spatially manifest narratives, and argues for a new understanding of place and space as components of the American literary canon.

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INTRODUCTION: Place, Race, and the Topography of American Literature

In a crucial scene from Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016), main character Cora, an escaped formerly enslaved woman, has just arrived in South Carolina from her first trip on the eponymous railroad, in this novel a literal though fantastic tangled web of stations and rails constructed underneath the entire 19th-century Southern United States. In Whitehead's incarnation of America, South Carolina exists in a contented state of paternalistic slavery. The state apparatus - not individual white citizens - owns all people of African descent and openly conducts mass sterilizations. It is in this context that Cora acquires a state-appointed domestic job with a white family in Columbia, but is soon transferred to the care of the "curator of Living History" at the "Museum of Natural Wonders" (109). The curator, Mr. Field, was hired from a museum in Boston to "update the local practices" and, in addition to renovating the displays of taxidermy and rare mineral specimens, insists on employing three formerly enslaved women as live exhibits for the museum's patrons. Over the course of their interactions in the novel, Mr. Field demonstrates to Cora that his primary responsibility is to control the narrative of the museum through acute attention to detail, much like an overseer would ensure an entire "field" of cotton was picked meticulously clean. He explains that "the focus was on American history," and that "some people never left the counties where they were born. Like a railroad, the museum permitted them to see the rest of the country beyond their small experience" (109). Likely questioning whether his "railroad" simile held any likeness to the one she'd just experienced, Cora comes to understand the objective of this mission, and observes the following about his practices: "Truth was a changing display in a shop window, manipulated by hands when you weren't looking" (116).

Cora rotates between three rooms in the slavery exhibit, but is particularly troubled by the set called “Typical Day on the Plantation” because she considers herself “an authority in this room” (110). Hoping to set the material narrative straight with her new boss, Cora offers a critique. Mr. Field’s response to Cora summarizes the consistent narrative tension this dissertation will address, a tension born from the relationship between place, identity, and competing historical narratives:

Mr. Field did concede that spinning wheels were not often used outdoors, at the foot of a slave’s cabin, but countered that while authenticity was their watchword, the dimensions of the room forced certain concessions. Would that he could fit an entire field of cotton in the display and had the budget for a dozen actors to work it. One day perhaps. (110)

This exchange reveals two key elements of place and place-making that have characterized the growth of American cultural ideals and the ever-expanding space of economic production under capital systems. First, Cora’s critique is rooted in the material and experiential. For example, we know that she contests the spatial location of the spinning wheel as it is portrayed in the exhibit with her knowledge of its use on a plantation: a piece of machinery so valuable to its owner would not be left in the slave quarters. It seems her knowledge far outweighs the curator’s own “small experience” of a plantation. She does not, however, criticize the wardrobe of the set, “which was made of coarse, authentic negro cloth. She burned with shame twice a day when she stripped and got into her costume” (110). The verisimilitude of that material was sufficient. Second, Mr. Field’s response is rooted in the ideological framework of capital markets and struggles to account for the spatial distribution of labour and the value of material objects. His audience likewise is uninformed and possesses no experiential knowledge of the museum’s

displays. Mr. Field's narrative version as documented in a museum exhibit cannot adequately portray the surplus space and labor value required to bring a commodity to market, despite the precise methods of procurement being well-documented (and apparently well-known to him, as his tinge of regret elucidates). Like a plantation overseer, his narrative misplaces material objects and misinterprets their full use-value; it also omits the surplus labor value of black bodies used to extract cotton from the ground.

In short, despite his feigned adherence to authenticity, Mr. Field frames a narrative and an ideological agenda not grounded in experience, consistent with the grand themes of American democracy founded in ideals of liberty yet achieved through the labor of enslaved people. This dichotomy automatically creates an environment where physical places and social spaces are exempt from the official narrative of western discourse, even if those places and spaces are readily apparent, accessible, or producible in the experience of its inhabitants. Mr. Field's framing narrative is fraudulent and minimizes the force required to bring the cotton to harvest. To quote Baptist's paraphrasing of a Mississippi overseer, "the whip was as important to making cotton grow as sunshine and rain." (121), and even if Mr. Field gained his wish of a field of cotton with a dozen actors, he'd still miss this requisite material adjunctive. Indeed, despite zero mechanical or technological advancements in cotton harvesting for over 65 years (1793-1860), the total gain in productivity per picker increased nearly 400% during that time period, a surplus productivity that can only be attributed to the pushing system of harvest, driven by the lash of the whip (128).

This passage is a string of DNA in the cosmological organism that is American literature. The opposed narratives of Cora and Mr. Field embroil in a paradoxical constitution of American imperialism and resistance. The overall effect is a constant shifting of spatiality that frequently

redefines the subject position dependent on text, environment, and relative levels of situational power. This shifting spatiality, and this passage, also elucidate the important difference between modernity and modernization. The ideological concept of modernity, which asserts a linear progression of human existence away from barbarism through the establishment of social orders curated by a standardized production of knowledge, does not and cannot take into consideration the actual conditions of its material existence as it proliferates on a global scale. As Samir Amin argues in *Eurocentricism*, capital systems function as the wheels of modernist ideology, and the symbiotic relationship between them can be traced to a concurrent emergence that immediately took global shape, first in Africa. Ideological modernity spreads through capital expansion, which is the material process of modernization, and often, as the literature of this project demonstrates, the process of modernization tells a different story than the ideological high ground purported by modernity. Marc Auge argues that this twin-inception in foreign capital markets created a gap – two separate narratives growing in opposite directions – between the “richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor,” and that time has increased this gap in both absolute and relative terms (x).

Mr. Field’s response also hints at what David Harvey calls the “spatial fix” inherent in capital systems. For Mr. Field to accurately represent the spatial features of the American South, and to decrease the time and distance between the far-flung spaces and places of America for his patrons, Mr. Field must create a new, permanent room for the museum. Harvey points out that the aim and objective of those engaged in the circulation of capital (in this case, intellectual capital) is to “command surplus labor time and convert it into profit within the socially necessary turnover time.” For the speedy circulation of capital (and for Mr. Field’s museum), “space is a barrier to be overcome.” This sets up the “fix”: the objective of speed can only be achieved

through the production of fixed, immobile spatial configurations. As Harvey argues, “spatial organization is necessary to overcome space” (328). For example, my chapter on Mark Twain demonstrates the startling consistency with which train depots were used as centering mechanisms for American expansion in the late 19th century. In order to speed up the transit of goods and services across a nation – in order to annihilate space – speculative capitalists seeking quick monetary gain transformed the space of the Midwest into small centers of commerce that ultimately report to and reflect the market demands of major East coast cities.

But the material affects and fixed spatial organization of market expansion tells a secondary narrative, too. Whitehead imagines a completely different system of railroads with an antithetical purpose to the “above ground” railroad of 19th-century expansion (and the metaphorical one described by Mr. Field in relation to his museum). For Whitehead, bringing the Underground Railroad to material life is more than a literary effort in magical realism: it quite literally cashes in three centuries of surplus labor value withheld from the historical black body. Whitehead draws material presence from absence (in actuality, a withheld surplus) in the same way Toni Morrison draws out the person of Beloved in her novel of the same name. Yet Whitehead breaches the threshold of individual experience; by intentionally moving outside a historical metanarrative, he can construct a materialized *system* of spatial resistance and response that draws on a real, measurable surplus value and tunnels through the very heart of the official, documented history of America.

In addition to the spatial organization of the Underground Railroad, Whitehead’s novel tells an alternative material history, too. Because market shifts especially reveal the attachment of value to objects through their notable and frequent changes, texts like Yaa Gyasi’s *Homegoing* and Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad*, which jump from market to market with

remarkable precision and frequency, compact the process of modernization and draw out specifically the material components of market capitalism. These material components often express an alternative use-value when reimagined by enslaved or otherwise oppressed peoples and are used to help reorganize their spatial orientation. In such a way, the enslaved person can create a space to express the African American self. This gap is the space between a system that asserts a value to labor or materials without concomitant knowledge of the experience of labor or use of materials. Ultimately, Whitehead connects the psychically explored and culturally productive space of the underground to the long arc of inverted cartographies specifically related to the movement of goods and capital across the globe, an arc in which diasporic bodies have played a defining role since the ideology became globally materialized in the market economies of West Africa.

Amidst these gaps of wealth and power and “spatial fixes” inherent in the spread of capitalism across the globe can be found a critical overlap of theoretical models that allows for precise insight into the relationship between personal identity and place. This project specifically notes these shifting spatialities and their effects on subject position in the context of racial identity, often linking the production of place and enunciation of race within the same spatial framework. This relationship between place and race has become increasingly important in the work of scholars and theorists, who broadly consent to the major overlapping characteristics of social space and the production of racial identity. Specifically, as noted by Neely and Samura in “Social Geographies of Race,” theories of place and race share the following tenets: 1. Place and race are often contested sites, where conflict, confrontation, and subversion are enacted in a struggle for resources and subjective identity formation; 2. Place and race are fluid, historical, and performative – not essentialized units; 3. Place and race are interactional and relational; and

4. Place and race are defined through inequality and difference, with dominant interest groups regulating and defining physical and social spaces as well as racial construction.

This project pauses on that intersection, attempting to locate the point of meeting between the seemingly naturalized and exclusionary forces of literary whiteness and that which it intends to implicitly regulate. This point of meeting in literature is a palimpsestic archive of social, political, and economic process. These historically layered American places often bear an outward, forward trajectory that asserts a hegemonic force of whiteness (the clear, innocuous fishbowl of Morrison's reckoning, one that contains all social life and literary production). It is within and around and sometimes in spite of these places that the formation of racial identity occurs, and social space becomes a space of race. These associatively thick places often take the form of a boundary with permeable borders. When these borders are obfuscated, blurred, or transgressed, a new kind of social space is formed, one that Katherine McKittrick simply refers to as a "black sense of place." This place, she argues, is the result of the "process of materially and imaginatively situating historical and contemporary [black] struggles against practices of domination and the difficult entanglements of racial encounter" (xi).

Differing definitions of place, space, and race abound. My analysis leans primarily on Doreen Massey's concept of a "global sense of place" and McKittrick's keen insight into the racialized components of place-making, both of which I summarize in the following paragraphs. Massey describes place as a process, defined from the outside but sensitive to interior voices. A place houses multiple identities and multiple histories and is regulated by interactions, flows, and connections outside its perceived boundaries. Place is grounded and material, yet porous and fluid. What Massey calls "the spatial" is the manifestation of social relations as they are stretched out through space. These social relations exist in a multiplicity of flows and connections that

“cross-cut, intersect, and align with one another, existing in relations of paradox or antagonism” (3). Massey advocates for a “*global* sense of place” as a nod to the particular state of time-space compression brought about by the global spread of capital systems and the subsequent stretching out of social relations through space. A particular locale is thus constructed from a unique constellation of social relations that meet and weave together at a specific locus, each flow originating from a different terminus. Because place is an amalgam and not a unified whole, it is not static or frozen in time, but rather exists as a constantly shifting process that reproduces the specificity of that locale. Thus, a seemingly insular place (such as the American South) is constructed from a convergence of flows and connections that have most likely crossed national and global borders.

This phenomenon results in what Massey refers to as “power geometry,” where different social groups or collectives of identity exist in quite distinct ways to the various flows and interconnections that are outwardly visible through differences in power, access, and control. It is here that Massey distinguishes between the existence of borders and boundaries, on the one hand, and the utter boundlessness of place on the other, as place exists only because it receives and sends flows and connections from the outside. Ultimately, Massey argues that the construction of place occurs not through the imposition of boundaries that act as counter-positions of one identity against another, but through interrelations with other places as they are stretched across space. The boundaries that do exist, erected primarily by dominant interest groups, follow the formation of place and are not antecedent to it. They exist asymmetrically and asynchronously to one another. The prevalence of boundaries stems from essentialist definitions of place, which require “place to remain unchanged” and are based “on delving into the past for

internalized origins (153). Massey encourages us to see boundaries as specific kinds of selectively permeable linkages to the outside instead of as static enclosures.

This definition, which fits boundaries and borders within a larger nexus of flows and connections, stands in sharp contrast to the associations of “sense of place,” which Massey argues privileges “memory, stasis, and nostalgia...an essentialist concept which held within it the temptation of relapsing into past traditions, of sinking back into the comfort of Being instead of forging ahead with the project of Becoming” (119). This distinction is important because it writes against an established tradition of “place” in Southern and American literature that is highly insular, rests on a vision of rural, agricultural society, and resists change or outside influence. This particular “sense of place” is set up as an easy oppositional binary, what Richard Gray calls a “familiar set of oppositions...southern vs. American/North, place vs. placelessness, past vs. pastlessness.” To these oppositions I would add the space of racial difference, white space vs. othered space. These oppositions set up the geographic and metaphorical South and North “like a photograph and its negative, in a mutually determining, reciprocally defining relationship” (4). The standard Southern literary-critical conception of “sense of place” assumes that place is highly retentive: Southern fiction tends to celebrate people who do not leave a place or their community, but rather integrate themselves into it – a characteristic problematized by the expansive body of literature produced by black Americans that highlights and privileges movement into and out of the regional South and the larger shifting spatialities evidenced by American history.

In recent years, scholars such as Michael Kreyling and Martyn Bone have begun to re-write the narrative of the Agrarians and Welty – and by consequence, the standard literary-critical conception of place – in a way that is particularly useful for this project. First, Kreyling

argues that the Agrarians *invented* the supposedly “natural” and “organic” South as a bulwark against capitalism. This means that the foundational principle of place in Southern literature is built on a reactive stance against movement and the manifestations of capital advancement (industrialization, urbanization, land speculation), despite white southerners’ own complicity in what Bone calls the industry of human capitalism, both before and after emancipation. Of course, if this is the case, if the South is *not* natural and organic in the sense promulgated by the Agrarians, the foundation of place-attachment and Southern social spaces is long overdue for a revisionary concept and theory. Second, understanding the Agrarians in this light helps us to more precisely understand what Welty means when she writes, in her foundational essay, “Place in Fiction,” of the danger of abstraction. Welty is ultimately writing against finance capitalism, specifically in the speculative land market. This practice transfers the value of land and place away from its own physical location and natural resources to a piece of paper that is easily moved or removed. The land is no longer valuable, only the paper – a phenomenon I explore in my chapter on William Faulkner and Mark Twain. Bone very effectively argues that our current understanding of place in Southern fiction is misguided, pointing to the “Post-southern South” (that is, the South post-1960) as a site for a radical recapitulation of place in fiction. He contends that scholars have ignored the physical, material geography of the South and that the dynamics implied by a traditional “sense of place” do not actually reflect the socio-spatial realities of the South nor correlate with the way sociologists and geographers articulate space and place in a globalized world.

As a critical response to this shortfall, McKittrick’s driving theory in *Demonic Grounds* reveals that the co-joined narratives of spatial domination and black women’s geographies produce a unique and readable social space that is profoundly present, even in its historical

literary absence. Her work shows that history represents black diasporic subjects through a primarily geographic narrative, “a story of material and conceptual placements and displacements...margins and centers” (*xiv*). This is a space characterized by “concealment, marginalization, and boundaries,” but importantly, black females “make concealment happen” (*xi*). This concealment, like Linda Brent’s “crevice of power,” allows black women to “manipulate and recast the meanings of slavery’s geographic terrain” (*xxvii*). McKittrick’s analysis points to the slave ship as an example of a material container that reflects the conjoined narratives of domination and subversion. She argues that the ship first encloses black subjects and transforms them into economic objects. Yet this is also the space in which a formation of an oppositional geography occurs, where the ship becomes the location of black subjectivity and terror, resistance, and possession (*xi*). Like Massey, McKittrick sees the slave ship as a material container that relies on “seemingly predetermined stabilities,” such as boundaries, fixed social spaces, infrastructure, roads, and buildings, while simultaneously being aligned with black geographies whose interplay works to reveal, rather than conceal, the “racial-sexual location of black cultures in the face of unfreedoms” (*xii*).

The literary configurations of place, space, and race explored in the succeeding chapters follow both these theoretical models and a basic geographic logic: each chapter connects to the one before it through rivers. Chapter 1 begins with a pause over the Mason Dixon Line and the Ohio River in the fiction of Toni Morrison. Following the Ohio River to its intersection with the Mississippi River at Cairo – the intersection Huck and Jim famously “miss” in the fog – I next explore the connection between land speculation and racial identity in the novels of Mark Twain. Their journey ends in the Mississippi Delta, where I pick up cartographic practice of William Faulkner. While Faulkner’s fiction does not always center on the Mississippi River, what he calls

the “umbilicus of America” (*Dust* 148), its indomitable presence provides the backdrop for nearly all economic activity in his fictional Yoknapatawpha County and feeds the two tributaries that act as edenic borders to his imagined universe. The project concludes with two chapters on contemporary black fiction. The first follows the spatial logic of a river delta as it fans out to meet the sea while the final chapter is literally set in the Mississippi delta. The first of these two concluding chapters delves into the recent fiction of Yaa Gyasi and Colson Whitehead, whose plots span out to cover multiple continents, generations, and historical epochs. The final chapter is situated in the backwoods of the Mississippi Delta amidst the fiction of Jesmyn Ward and poetry of Natasha Trethewey, where I unpack the terrible richness of material that is Hurricane Katrina.

Chapter 1 is primarily concerned with borders and boundaries in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*. Picture, if you will, 10 individual pieces of string pulled tight from end to end so that together they form a unified, solid line. Now compress the ends of that line. What happens? The various strands of string separate from one another, bowing out in the middle to reveal multiple lines and boundaries with spaces between. Such is the nature of the political, legal, cultural, and geographic barriers that separated enslaved black people from freedom. For example, when Sethe stands on the Southern border of the Ohio River and looks out over the Mason Dixon Line, she sees “one mile of dark water” spread out before her (83). But at no point within a 100-mile radius of Cincinnati does the Ohio River even begin to approach that width – in fact, it averages less than a quarter of that distance, between .2 and .3 miles in width. Perhaps Sethe visualizes such a great distance because she psychically knows that she must cross more than a single physical border – a border much larger than the span of the river channel. It is inside this border, on the banks of the river, that her first vision of freedom

occurs. This chapter unpacks the convergence of topographical resistance, economic barriers, and social subjugation – all simultaneously captured in Sethe’s first glimpse of the Ohio River and Cincinnati beyond.

Chapter 2 explores the relationship between capital expansion, land speculation, and the unique identities produced along the Mississippi River in the mid-19th century fiction of Mark Twain, most notably the infamous “Confidence Man” of *The Gilded Age* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. I begin with a revisionary analysis of the relationship between Huck and Jim. My reading of their relationship focuses on how Jim’s spatial positioning relative to Huck always influences Huck’s vision of the physical space of the river. Huck’s vision often moves from subjective perception to a particular value (177-178), a spatial pattern opposite to that of the larger geographic paradigm of the text. I argue that while the narrative elements of the text largely reflect Huck’s personal, moral dilemma, the geography of the novel reflects Jim’s spatial perception and subjectivity as he contends with the overlap between the East-West binary of Manifest Destiny and the North-South binary of slavery. This reading of Huck and Jim’s spatial interplay reinforces Toni Morrison’s assertion in *Playing in the Dark* that an Africanist figure prefigures and shapes whiteness, reinforces the “invention and implication of whiteness,” and “enhances the qualities of white characters.” Jim also embodies a racialized, alternative version of the 19th “Confidence Man,” from which I link to the ur-delusion of the Gilded Age, the character of Colonel Sellers in Twain and Charles Dudley Warner’s *The Gilded Age*. Jim and Colonel Sellers are two separate and distinct bodies that adopt similar personas, albeit for different purposes. Yet each reveals the inconsistencies and instability of place while also pointing to the possibility within. Jim’s identity is produced within the border space of the

Mississippi River valley, while the Colonel injects himself into it, a space open for exploitation and settlement and connected to the larger, nationalistic center of Washington, D.C.

Chapter 3 explores the center-periphery binary and its instability in the novels of William Faulkner. Building from an extended analysis of *As I Lay Dying*, I demonstrate the instability of this model of spatial organization through a wide-ranging examination of smaller centers across Faulkner's corpus (the Bundren cotton house, Joanna Burden and Reverend Hightower's house, Sutpen's Hundred, and Varner's store, to name a few), which often reveal a space that simultaneously enforces and transgresses the ultimate centering mechanism: the law. As an amalgam, these smaller centers provide a commentary on the nature of the ur-center itself, the Jefferson Courthouse. As reflected in the operating mechanisms of these smaller centers, the Courthouse is not an archetypal image of a sacred center or a standard of moral orientation for the townspeople of Jefferson; rather, it is a profane site from which economic disadvantage, racial subjugation, and deleterious social constructs all flow outward into the county. My reading of the text shows that Faulkner establishes a core-periphery binary in the spatial makeup of Yoknapatawpha County. This binary creates an organized grid of commerce that spreads into space by establishing smaller centers, which – in theory – practically carry out the demands of the law and enforce social order. Yet, while the core-periphery model is clearly evidenced in Yoknapatawpha County, its very existence is a geographic irony and its dominance over the region questionable. This chapter explores the prolific wheel imagery across Faulkner's corpus, argues for a revisionary analysis of Sutpen's grand design, and shows that Faulkner's cartographic practices are deeply incongruous, as they draw Yoknapatawpha County residents to its center before ushering them “around the back” of the proverbial courthouse.

Chapter 4 reimagines an argument proffered by Gertrude Stein: that America is the “oldest” country in the world because it has “lived in the modern period the longest.” Through a reading of Yaa Gyasi’s *Homegoing* and Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad*, I argue that African American culture and literary production are the “oldest” and most developed in their critical enunciation because they have experienced the global, modern period the longest. Additionally, through Marc Auge’s theory of the postmodern non-place, I argue that African American culture shares a similar relationship to postmodernity. Gyasi and Whitehead’s texts both move through multiple periods of American (and, for Gyasi, African) history, often documenting acute shifts in the market economy that offer compact literary packages of the process of modernization, drawing out both the primary and alternative use-value of the material components of market capitalism. By exploring these material components and how African Americans often express an alternative use-value with materials in order to reorganize their spatial orientation, I argue that Gyasi and Whitehead’s texts set against the privileged, unitary truth of western discourse a manifold black perspective, built from experience alongside Euro-modernization from the beginning. Their narratives destabilize presuppositions of freedom and liberty by wresting control away from the global metanarrative of capital expansion and European domination and destiny and show how space and place act as vehicles for defining the self, which is recorded in part through the production and use of material goods. Cora’s performance in the Museum of Natural History demonstrates an active negotiation with these presuppositions of American life, and her sly collaboration with the “official history” documented in each scene instigates an alternative narrative that moves modernity forward on the material – rather than ideological – scale. Ultimately, the Underground Railroad is an interstice in the time and space of capital systems. It mimics and undermines the aboveground

cartographies of transportation that reinforce racial and economic division while also wreaking havoc on those landscapes through its erections of permanent spatial fixtures. At the same time, the experience of the underground non-place is connected to the construction and experience of aboveground African American cartographies that replicate its determinative qualities of movement and angularity, rhythm and reciprocity.

The concluding chapter connects the spaces and places of Jesmyn Ward's novel *Salvage the Bones* and Natasha Trethewey's poem "Theories of Time and Place." Specifically, I argue that these texts locate the meaning and production of American social space in the experience of black Americans, particularly in the lived experience of black southerners and black women. In this chapter, I build on Kevin Quashie's driving theory in *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, which explores the "dynamic and ravishing" black interior, showing that quiet is an "expansive, voluptuous, creative; impulsive and dangerous" site of the black self that acts as a stay against the dominance of the social world. For Quashie, the quiet interior serves as a "frame for reading black culture" and can expose dimensions of black life "not already determined by narratives of the social world" (8). I argue that the framing concept of quiet has spatial contours, as well, proposing the concept of "quiet places." Ward's text reveals these quiet spaces as her novel engages the dual narratives of domination and subversion written on the American landscape. The space of the Pit, the name of the main character's family home, reveals a spatial precondition to which the lives of its inhabitants are inexorably tied: the precondition is the spread of capital systems over their land through the excavation of the swimming pit (not to be confused with "the Pit," a relationship this chapter explores in depth); the narrative voice of Esch, the main character of *Salvage the Bones*, engages the remnant bones of the system with her discovery and exploration of its hidden corners, the tiny crevices of power she finds teeming

with life and possibility. I close this chapter, and the larger project, with a comparative analysis of Ward's spatial consciousness and Faulkner's cartographic imperialism. Esch's spatialized narrative reveals Faulkner's grand geographic design as faulty, opaque, silencing, and often at odds with itself as he modulates the same tension under capital systems as does Mr. Fields in *The Underground Railroad*: authenticity, spatial dimensions, and material consciousness. I conclude that many instances across Faulkner's cannon, particularly the Bundrens' journey across Yoknapatawpha County, reveal a cartography of white privilege likewise reflected in the overall body of Faulkner criticism.

CHAPTER 1: Locating the Clearing: Contested Boundaries in *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*

Halfway through Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, as Milkman lies in Guitar's bed waiting for a potentially murderous Hagar to return, he recalls a recent conversation he'd had with his friend. This conversation was one installment of an extended, heated argument spread out over several days. The chief concern of the dispute was whether Milkman more belonged in "Honore," a place Guitar refers to as a "Nigger heaven" (103), or Montgomery, Alabama. This distinction was significant for a number of reasons, ranging from Milkman's immediate physical safety to his metaphysical concerns over his personal identity. Midway through the conversation, as Guitar begins to return to an old and somewhat worn line of reasoning, Milkman exclaims "Gimme the tea, Guitar. Just the tea. No geography." Guitar responds:

"No geography? Okay, no geography. What about some history in your tea? Or some sociopolitico -- No. That's still geography. Goddam, Milk, I do believe my whole life's geography...For example, I live in the North now. So the first questions come to mind is north of what? Why, north of the South. So North exists because South does. But does that mean North is different from South? No way! South is just south of North..." (114).

The context for Guitar's exasperation is Milkman's repeatedly jaded, veiled, and limited geographic knowledge. Guitar realizes that Milkman pays closer attention to the tone of his voice rather than the content of his analysis, and is thus desperate for his friend to understand what he believes to be a crucial component of his own identity, one that Milkman is missing. Guitar's exclamation that his *entire* life "is geography" is especially relevant to his concluding summation of Milkman's personal geographic associations. Guitar had earlier surmised that "You don't live nowhere. Not Not Doctor Street *or* Southside (103). Milkman is the opposite of Guitar: the only

definitive geographical component to his life is simply where he cannot live; he is a “man that refuses to live in Montgomery, Alabama” (104). He is defined geographically only by his limitations.

Guitar (and Morrison) establishes clear geographic zones that certain characters confront, exist in, and move between. But where we see specific places continually set up as oppositional referents, they are usually accompanied by a third, less pronounced locale that interacts and often destabilizes these oppositional places. For example, Guitar points to at least three spatial, politically and socially charged locations as possible sites for Milkman’s existence: a thoroughly suburbanized, gentrified black place (Honore) and a thoroughly marginalized and potentially violent place (Montgomery, Al). But if Milkman is in neither of those, then he must be in a third locale that exists in relation to the first two places. What is that third, unnamed place? What does it mean to exist in the place? What other places are like this? Similarly, Guitar also claims that Milkman did not live on “Not Doctor Street” or in the Southside of town, but somewhere between. Even Macon Dead, Milkman’s father and a successful real estate businessman, exclaims as he walks down 15th Street that the houses, some of which he owned, looked like “squat ghosts with hooded eyes...he felt as if the houses were in league with one another to make him feel like the outsider, the propertyless, landless wanderer” (27). Even with documented ownership, Macon is made to feel as if he is somehow out of place. And the novel also opens on a similar note: “The North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent promised to fly from Mercy to the other side of Lake Superior at three o’clock. Two days before...he tacked a note on the door of his little yellow house: ‘I will take off from Mercy and fly away on my own wings’” (3). Morrison has stated that this opening line “contains the information that the novel both centers on and radiates from” (*Unspeakable Things* 155). Morrison discloses that the

sentence moves from North Carolina to Lake Superior, “with the sly implication that the move from North Carolina (the south) to Lake Superior (the north) might not actually involve progress to some ‘superior state’ – which of course it does not.” (27). Morrison argues that the binaries of the north and south have already lost their associative qualities of economic, social, or political upward mobility – or oppression. She concludes of the flight of the agent that “although it carries the possibility of failure and the certainty of danger, is toward change, an alternative way, a cessation of things-as-they-are.” This is the penultimate flight of the novel, a nod to Milkman’s final leap, whose lifelong geography lesson leads him certainly towards change, and the option to choose an alternative way.

Guitar is not alone in his appreciation of geography. The lived embodiment of Guitar’s geography lesson is Pilate, Milkman’s aunt. Pilate spends nearly her entire life carrying on her person a 4th grade geography textbook, referencing it repeatedly at various stages of her life. One could easily argue that, like Guitar, her “whole life” is also about geography. Unlike Ruth, Milkman’s mother, who was “well read but ill traveled,” Pilate “had read only a geography book, but had been from one end of the country to another” (139). In fact, “it was as if her geography book had marked her to roam the country, planting her feet in each pink, yellow, blue, or green state” (148). Before the acquisition of her geography book, shortly after her father was shot “five feet into the air” and killed, Pilate “just walked around and lived in them woods” (40) without aim. For Pilate, the acquisition of the geography book acted as a guide for mobilization and opened up avenues of self-actualization: it set her in flight. But Pilate’s geography is remarkably grounded in the material world, and unlike the other characters in the novel, as Morrison elucidates in the Foreword, Pilate’s movements were a “conundrum” to Milkman because “without ever leaving the ground she could fly” (xiv). Geographic knowledge preempted

Pilate's spatial movement and subsequently unique historical-cultural perspective; it both revealed and diminished borders and boundaries.¹ Her book revealed to her a spatial reality that was heretofore unknown to her: geographic difference. At first, this knowledge exists for her only in the way each state was represented by different colors. But this small detail might prove to be significant, as the issue of geographic difference, place-making, and the development of racial identity will all eventually wrap into one another. I contend that the two spatially aware geographers in this novel - Guitar and Pilate - each articulate a geographic discourse that is keenly aware of the relationship between geographic difference and personal identity.

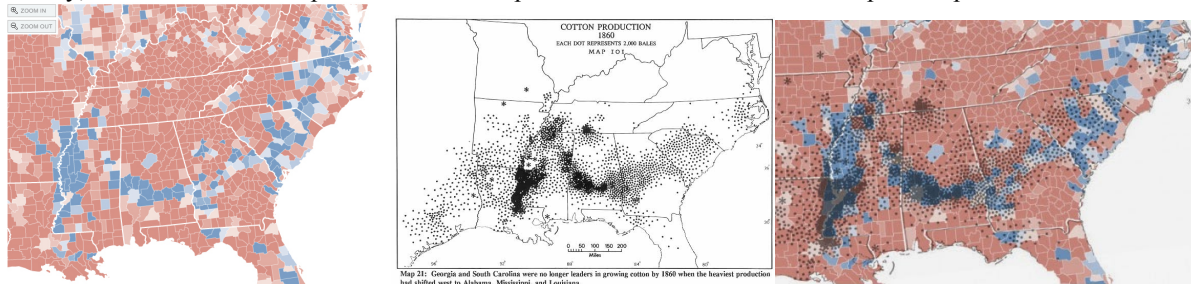
But not every character has the opportunity to carry a geography book with them, nor does every character in Morrison's work share the fortune of Milkman, whose friend thought it pertinent to share an insightful geography lesson with him. For example, the matriarch of *Beloved*, Baby Suggs, embodies a personal identity bereft of geographic identity. She "never had the map to discover what she was like" (140). Sweet Home was a "marked improvement" for her quality of life – the geographic move to Kentucky and away from the Deep South meant "there wasn't a rice field or tobacco patch in sight" (139). But Sweet Home was only a mild reprieve from the complete nadir of slavery she'd already experienced: the loss of six children by geographic separation. The geography of her enslavement – and her subsequent freedom at the hands of her last remaining son – carries immense weight on her identity and well-being. By the time she is lying on her deathbed, her only wish is to see more color in her life. This is a multifaceted desire, but my reading is that this desire to see different colors is akin to Pilate looking at the geography of differentiation in her textbook, which is marked by variances in

¹ The distinction between borders and boundaries will become more important as I move into a closer discussion of the text. In short, borders exclude, boundaries contain. Borders represent that which is meant to hold off, boundaries that which hold in. The boundary is the outer limit for one moving out from a center, a border the first line of contact with the center for one desiring to move within. They are not mutually exclusive, but they aren't always interchangeable.

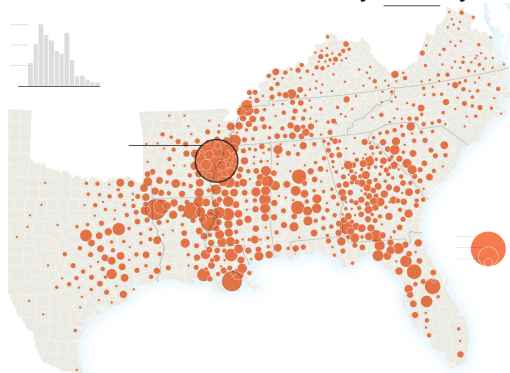
color. The geography of enslavement, which is a powerful form in which to consider the geography of the South as a whole², is layered in the consciousness of Baby Suggs in such a way that it cannot be obfuscated; instead, it is absorbed into the collective rememory of the community she preaches to and guides, albeit without the benefit of a guidebook. Baby Suggs' ability to consciously and retroactively reconnect with a landscape that for decades was limited to her echoes Morrison's own literary geographic consciousness. In her 1987 essay "Sites of Memory," Morrison notes how her process of "literary archeology" hinges on the idea of place, or the ability to mentally "journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply" (92).

Morrison's opening claim in her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), that within the "wider landscape" of American Literature she would "draw a map of a critical geography and use that map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual

² For example, Allen Gathman, professor of biology at Southeast Missouri State University, notes the following geographic patterns in the "black belt" region of Alabama. The first map shows the 2008 presidential election by county, while the second map illustrates cotton production in 1860. The final map overlaps the two:



Interestingly enough, this geographic distribution also aligns with a map produced by the New York Times and documents the distribution of 73 years of lynching in the United States, from 1877-1950:



adventure, and close exploration as did the original charting of the New World” (3), represents a more fully developed articulation of her geographic inklings in “Sites of Memory.” Morrison’s critical map famously and convincingly invites us to trace a different kind of lineage through American literature that has shaped “the body politic, the Constitution, and the entire history of the culture” (5). Her bold assertion recasts both geopolitical structures and cultural specificity across spatial scales, from the intimacy of home to national flows of commerce. Morrison’s geographic consistency is sometimes startling, and it occurs to me that we should read and study her work as artifacts of an extended spatial, cultural mapping project.

Thus there exists great continuity between Guitar and Pilate’s geography lesson and Morrison’s other novels, and as I’ve already begun to demonstrate, *Beloved* in particular. Morrison dedicates *Beloved* to the “Sixty Million and more” captured, displaced, and murdered Africans whose physical lives and cultural identity were terminated by the transatlantic slave trade. Morrison’s invocation of the transatlantic slave trade frames the story of *Beloved* within the context of spatialized violence – a complex, industrial and capitalistic endeavor that specifically targeted black identity. The belly of the slave ship, an image invoked in *Beloved*’s monologue, is a place that occupies the liminal space betwixt and between opposing binaries: this space is the borderland, the indefinable, a temporary and fluctuating zone governed by both regulatory and lawless forces. The slave ship was the first in a long line of spaces that the sixty million and more occupied. The plantation, the big house, the slave quarters, and the auction block were all locations where to varying degrees, as Katherine McKittrick notes, white hegemonic systems “situate black people and places outside modernity” (949). These were the locales where enslaved blacks were kept “in place” by virtue of legal and cultural placelessness.

The primary place-setting of *Beloved* follows suit. The Ohio River and its tributaries is a fluid space that nearly every character in the novel must engage, traverse, or cross over. This near exhaustive engagement with the River establishes this space as a hub for national flows of commerce and human capital. For example, when Mr. Garner takes Baby Suggs across the Ohio River and into Cincinnati, he proclaims that “this is a city of water... Everything travels by water and what the rivers can’t carry the canals take” (142). Much later in the narrative time-scale, Paul D decides to stay in Cincinnati because, among other reasons, during the winter the city “reassumed its status of slaughter and riverboat capital” and “all a Negro had to do was show up and there was work: poking, killing, cutting, skinning, case packing and saving offal” (155). Mr. Garner and Paul D’s similar pronouncements, albeit from drastically different perspectives, echo the sentiment of the prominent political geographer, Edward Soja, who notes that the “geography and history of capitalism intersect in a complex social process which creates a constantly evolving historical sequence of spatialities” (127).

Cincinnati, connected to the Ohio River by a complex web of canals, was socially partitioned according to economic precedence. And while Paul D’s observation that jobs were abundant even for the socially marginalized demonstrates that progress, development, and the building of a nation represents a potential route for upward mobility in the black community, Patricia Price reminds us that “geographers have long worked with concepts of inclusion and exclusion to contend that what, and who, is socially valued enjoys a presence in the landscape while that and those who are devalued are kept out of sight” (153). Thus the varying links to the city – the canals – represent a fluid network of capitalistic commerce that partitioned racial groups along unequal social and economic lines. In fact, even though 124 Bluestone *feels* relatively removed from the city limits of Cincinnati, it is actually close enough that the

inhabitants could *smell* the detritus of capitalism: when the thirty women decided to travel to 124 Bluestone in order to exorcise Beloved from the premise, the narrator notes that “wet and hot Cincinnati’s stench had traveled to the country: from the canal, from hanging meat and things rotting in jars, from small animals dead in the fields, town sewers and factories” (258). This dynamic, this feeling of closeness-yet-removal, this “keeping out of sight” yet near enough on the downwind side to smell the stench, captures the essence of this border zone. For while 124 Bluestone, its inhabitants, and its neighbors might appear to be removed from the process of city-building and empire, they are actually at work within it establishing a new and engaging social space.

I will return to 124 Bluestone in full, but to further scale down this larger image of Cincinnati to the opening portrait of this house further illustrates the unique social and geographic positioning of this border space. I’ve already noted the home’s locale in relation to the greater city of Cincinnati, but what about its interior? What might it tell us about the border space in terms of lived experience? Morrison begins with a portrait of the home in 1873. 124 “was spiteful. Full of baby’s venom.” The first spatial manifestation we are told about is not material, but ghostly. 124 is a site with an excess of identities. This ghostly identity leaves the imprint of its hands on cakes, throws food on the floor, shatters mirrors, shakes the walls. It is not separate or distinct from the interior space, but actively involved in shaping it. At the same time, it is not an open communal space – yet. When the novel begins, no visitors had been inside the home for twelve years (12). Sethe’s sons fled the home, yet Paul D found it and stayed. The Bodwins owned the home, but never entered. Sethe refuses to move elsewhere, though it is the source for constant conflict and painful memories. The house is responsible for both stability and flight, for permanence and shifting spatiality, for repression and regrowth, for absence and

presence. Significantly, Morrison's use of infinite, looping time and spatial structures collide within the walls of 124 Bluestone, where the history of selves becomes the history of the place, a physical manifestation of shared experience.

Though I'd prefer to avoid strict analogues between Morrison's personal geographic attachments and those shared by her characters, they cannot be separated entirely. Thus it is worth noting that the geographic center mass of Morrison's corpus is the Mason Dixon line, and this also seems to hold true for Morrison's personal life. Morrison's familial connections to the South have been clearly and thoroughly established, and her birth in Lorain, Ohio follows the familiar trajectory of northern migration for black families. By "geographic center mass," I do not necessarily mean that Morrison's life and work particularly highlights migration across this border – which it does – or that the average geographical center of all her novels is roughly around the Mason Dixon Line – which it might actually be. I am arguing that the key "place" as both a physical locale and as an ideological anchor in Morrison's fiction is the border space, and specifically the border between the North and the South. She draws attention to it not because so many black Americans have crossed over it, but because it is a place that is also existed in, situated between oppositional currents. It is not a line that divides, but rather a place that reckons with and confronts division. It is a contested site where the very act of contestation becomes a defining variable. In an interview conducted shortly before the publication of *Song of Solomon*,³ clearly drawing on both her own personal experience (note the use of "we") as well as her research for the novel, Morrison explains:

Ohio is right on the Kentucky border, so there's not much difference between it and the "South." It's an interesting state from the point of view of black people

³ At the time, Morrison referred to the manuscript title as "Milkman Dead."

because it is right there by the Ohio River, in the south, and at its northern tip is Canada. And there were these fantastic abolitionists there, and also the Ku Klux Klan lived there. And there is only really one large city. There are hundreds of small towns, and that's where most black people live. You know, in most books, they're always in New York or some exotic place, but most of our lives are spent in little towns, little towns all throughout this country. And that's where, you know, we live. And that's where the juices came from and that's where we made it, not made it in terms of success but made who we are" (Step 475).

Morrison and Guitar share twin sentiments concerning the geographic categorization of a place like Cincinnati. Because of its geographic proximity to the South, and specifically the legal and structural policies of the South that were easily enacted even in Cincinnati,⁴ the lived experience of black Americans defined it as a place that was simply "north of South," but not necessarily the idealized "North" of freedom and liberty

These appear to be contradictory elements, the sameness of the south and north, but I think Morrison, Guitar, and Pilate are pointing us less towards their similarities, and more towards the mutual difference they share with a third space outside of the geographically defined, categorically stable North-South binary. The sameness and difference meet at the border, and that is the site of a unique set of phenomena where flows and connections of a modernizing, globalizing world intersect with the lived experience of those particularly

⁴ For example, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 rendered, as Karla Holloway notes, an "always present and brutally policed potential; a consistent tear at the vulnerable threads of the community" (11). Holloway offers an insightful and powerful legal interpretation of this law specifically as it pertains to *Beloved*, noting that the legal execution of the concept of generation becomes a "narrative of how a mother's love could embrace infanticide in order to resist the law of generation that would make property of any child Sethe had. Her body mattered more than its geographies" (32).

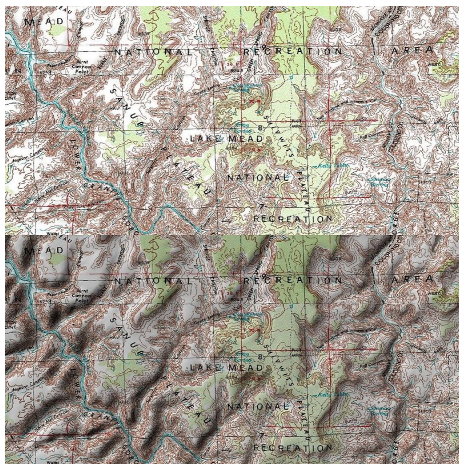
disenfranchised. These sites house unique tensions, varying material manifestations of power, and performances of identity.

Borders and Boundaries

In Morrison's novels, borders and boundaries exist asymmetrically and asynchronously. For example, the Mason Dixon Line – the spatial center of Morrison's imaginary – provides a well-defined, darkly inscribed border that is easily recognizable and carries a well-documented, layered political and spatial history. It is undeniably a legal and cultural meridian in the American landscape, a mooring place for the contestation of values and principles of liberty. However, other borders and boundaries intersect and engage with this meridian, limiting entry and access along various routes to this primary spatial division. The border space of *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* is comprised of varying boundaries that carry distinctive qualities and importance. Because boundaries are asymmetrical and function on different planes of existence (material boundaries are different than legal boundaries, which are different than social boundaries), a meridian such as the Mason Dixon line is often built out of a highly concentrated network of smaller boundaries and borders that cohabit across spatial scales. This concentration plays out in the lived experience of its inhabitants and significantly shapes notions of imagined and actualized identities.

Because both texts – and much of Morrison's corpus – encounter this dividing line or some variation of it, my contention is that the key spatial element for the lived experience of her characters is boundary negotiation. This project assumes that every text has a definable, quantitative spatiality – that there is a relationship between broader patterns of movement and the movement of individuals, between the exterior and interior of place. I'd like to begin with a few basic visual representations of this kind of spatiality before teasing out the textual implications.

This argument follows the premise of Francesco Morreti’s influential *Graphs, Maps, and Trees*, that quantitative mapping and graphs are prerequisites for spatial analysis. This is important because, as scholars from Frederic Jameson to Georg Lukacs have noted,⁵ the modern novel will intentionally orient and disorient readers, and bear that tension throughout. This project draws on the mapping technique associated with topography,⁶ which depicts contour lines in a two dimensional plane. When read correctly, the contour lines tell a simple story: the location of changes in elevation. If one is able to orient themselves correctly, these contour lines can relay a great amount of information to the reader. Topographical maps can indicate the summits of hills, deep, winding valleys, saddles, benches, ridges, and the likely location of rivers. They meet the eye as a series of lines that cluster together in nodes, indicating intense changes in elevation, or stretch out with expanses of linear absence, indicating flat or undifferentiated space. Modern cartographers have begun to employ techniques that push the boundaries of two dimensional, Cartesian topography, with the use of a technique called “shaded relief.”

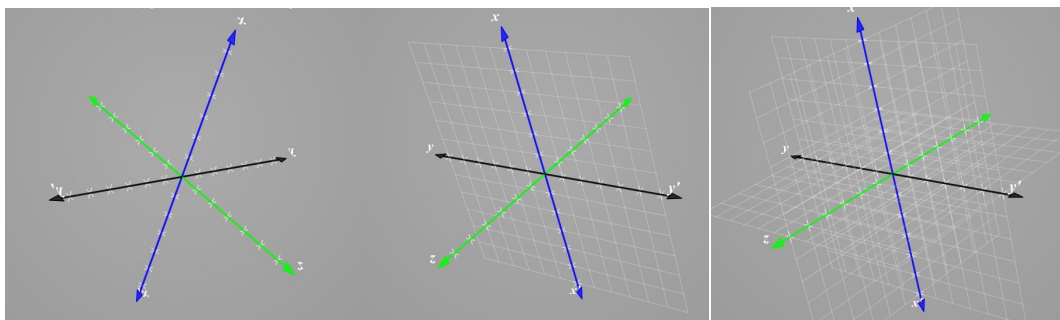


Top: Topography vs. Bottom: shaded relief topography

⁵ See Jameson’s *A Singular Modernity* (2002) or Lukacs’ *Theory of the Novel* (1971)

⁶ The word itself, “topography,” has increasingly made its way into literary and cultural analysis. For example, Bachelard considers his seminal book *Poetics of Space* a “topo-analysis” of the home, thinking of rooms and homes as semiotic topographies that guide readers and writers in their “analysis of intimacy” (9-12, 38).

In this chapter, I will use the basic Cartesian X/Y coordinate plane as a point of departure for mapping a text's broad topographical spatiality, where $x = \text{time}$ and $y = \text{space}$. Thus the $(0,0)$ intersection represents a specific moment in time at a specific location. Much like the more nuanced representation of topography one is able to achieve with shaded relief, I will add a third axis, the Z axis, to this representation. The Z axis is a variable axis that intersects with the (x,y) axis. It represents additional borders and boundaries that converge in the same moment of time and space as the (x,y) axis (see below). The addition of the Z axis supplies a 3rd dimension that, with the addition of grids, begins to form the basic outline of 3-dimensional shapes and spaces and is a rough correlative to the way that the intersection of borders and boundaries also creates and produces a border space. The greater the additional number of borders and boundaries (or Z axis), the more precisely defined the shape of that particular place becomes.



Before I demonstrate this graphic mapping from a textual point of view, I'd like to link the graphs above with Doreen Massey's concepts of "power geometry" and "global sense of place" and Toni Morrison's image of a fishbowl from *Playing in the Dark*. For Massey, space, place and gender (and I will later add race to this trio) are interrelated. In their very construction as culturally specific ideas, Massey argues that "the spatial" is the manifestation of social relations stretched out. This stretching out of social relations through space exhibits itself in the lived world through a simultaneous multiplicity of spatial flows that are "cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism" (3).

Thus the spatial organization of society is both antecedent to the production of the social and the end product of social forces: social relations exist *in* space and *across* space (168). For Massey, understanding a “global sense of place” begins with an understanding of time-space compression, which is the geographical stretching out of social relations through space. Place – as opposed to social space – is constructed out of a *particular* constellation of social relations that meet and weave together at a specific locus (145-146). Place is not static or frozen in time, but is a process that continually reproduces the specificity of that locale. This definition of place stands in sharp contrast to the associations of “sense of place,” which Massey argues privileges “memory, stasis and nostalgia. [This concept of place] was an essentialist concept which held within it the temptation of relapsing into past traditions, of sinking back into the comfort of Being instead of forging ahead with the project of Becoming” (119). Place, Massey argues, is not defined through internal histories, but by a specific locale’s constant interactions with external flows through space.

What is “global” about Massey’s idea of place? The stretching out of interrelations implies that flows and connections⁷ operate and meet at different scalar planes. Thus we understand that a seemingly local place is constructed from a convergence of flows and connections that have more than likely crossed national and global borders. What results from this phenomena is what Massey calls “power geometry,” where different social groups, individuals, or collectives of identity exist in very distinct ways to these varying flows and interconnections, often characterized by differences in power, control, and access. As she argues, “one crucial element of what ‘geography’ is all about is difference and specificity” (118), and

⁷ Massey cites “faxes, email, film distribution networks, financial flows and transactions...ships and trains, steam trains and...lorries and cars and buses” as examples of “flows and connections” (149). She also references legislative policy, capital flows, race, gender, and natural geographic divisions such as rivers as further examples of the “constellation” of spatial flows that might all converge in one place. And as a non-scholastic aside, my personal favorite “flow” that she references is the cultural appropriation of fried chicken, specifically KFC (8).

this gets at the heart of the issue. If the identity of a place is not fixed, and the construction of place fundamentally limits access to power and control, then all those who seek to name the identity of a place are only doing so in a particular moment and location within the space-time continuum. However, those that do not encounter significant barriers of entry to the place represent a particularly dominant claimant group that often insists on erecting and maintaining specific boundaries and borders. We understand this as an attempt to freeze time, to halt what is a dynamic process, to secure the identity of a place and stabilize meaning. Places are constantly and repeatedly the sites of these social contests.

Massey points repeatedly to the importance of contestation with place, as there is a tension between clearly evidenced boundaries in and around place and its – by nature – utter boundlessness.⁸ In other words, Massey advocates that the construction of place happens through interrelations with other places as they are stretched across space rather than through the imposition of boundaries that stand as counter positions of one identity against another. Yet boundaries do exist (or the appearance of boundaries exist), and Massey describes several reasons why. First, Massey argues there is a perceived need for boundaries, and that the need for such a “defensive and counter positional definition of identity is culturally masculine” (7). Simply put, boundaries exist because society places them there, not because they are constitutive components of place. Second, Massey argues that essentialist definitions of place require boundaries in order for the place to remain unchanged and for those defining terms to maintain verisimilitude. She argues that place, as is coded by masculine and (I would add) white rhetoric,

⁸ This tension between different boundaries has been explored in relation to *Beloved* previously, though within the context of community and identity. Doreen Fowler, for example, explores the paradox of how an individual can “maintain intact gender, ethnic, and other boundaries while at the same time eliding these boundaries to ally with others” (14). Fowler posits that a third party, usually the father figure, helps to form boundaries that distinguish between an autonomous subject and yet allows that subject to form alliances with others – this figure establishes boundaries that both “separate and connect” (15).

is constructed out of an introverted, inward looking history “based on delving into the past for internalized origins” (153). This, of course, is a fiction of place imposed by dominant social and cultural groups. For example, Massey argues that “community” should not be so closely associated with “place.” She argues that, on one hand, communities don’t have to exist in the same place simultaneously. Communities can connect to one another across space and in place. Furthermore, she argues that – for quite some time – the instances of one place housing single “communities” in the sense of coherent social groups are quite rare (153), even if boundaries exist. Instead of viewing boundaries as simple enclosures or as counter positions to the outside, Massey argues that boundaries and borders (if they exist at all – she only uses the term out of convenience) are specific kinds of linkages to the outside.

Massey looks at these imposed boundaries as particularly masculine and reflective of a patriarchal ordering of society. She does, of course, recognize other attributes of these boundaries, and I’d like to focus explicitly on how particular contestations of sites also reflects effort to create racial boundaries that exist as contemporaneous flows within the boundary space. In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison likens the American literary canon to a fishbowl. She argues that while looking at the “glide and flick of the golden scales,” the “life” inside the fishbowl (17), that one forgets to even notice the boundaries that enclose it. The transparent border that has long ordered life is a metaphor for the invisibility of whiteness. Whiteness provides that lens through which one views blackness; it is a boundary beyond which existence is seldom considered, for the life of the goldfish at least. Morrison’s text is, I believe, a “jumping out” point for the subject inhabiting the fishbowl – or at very least a call to add color to what has long been an innocuously clear, but dangerously confining boundary. The beauty of Massey’s “global sense of place” is that it still allows for specificity of place: it recognizes differentiation. If we

focus on the border space as a particularly contested, racially charged site, it begins to reveal the fishbowl for what it really is, and opens up critical space that reaches beyond the confines of cultural and literary whiteness.

Much recent scholarship has observed these connections, noting the ways in which space is organized along racial differentiation (and vice-versa). Morrison's acute attention to spatial construction in *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* follows the general outline offered by Brooke Neely and Michelle Samura in "Social Geographies of Race: Connecting Race and Space," which offers a useful summation of the connections between place-making and race. Neely and Samura note that specifically racialized moments involved in identity and subject formation also actively create and recreate the spaces inhabited by singular and collective identities. By drawing on both the fields of spatial and critical race theory, Neely and Samura articulate a theory whereby the social constructedness of space overlaps in key areas with the production of racial identities. This overlap is characterized by four tenets that signify the ways in which racial difference and struggles of inequality are spatially organized and enacted. A summary of these four tenets are as follows: 1. Space and race are contested places where conflict, confrontation, and subversion are enacted in a struggle for both resources and subjective identity formation 2. Space and race are not essentialized units; rather, they are fluid, historical, and performative 3. Space and race are interactional and relational in such a way that individuals, groups, and institutions create and disrupt spatial processes and 4. Space and race are defined by inequality and difference, with dominant interests groups regulating and defining both spaces and racial constructions.

This overlap between theoretical models allows critics a more precise way of understanding the implications of racial formation within and through spatial constructs.

Especially within the context of the urbanization and industrialization of late-19th and early 20th century America, during which Morrison's novels are set, spaces are often naturalized through constant economic and social forces, creating an illusion of spatial stability and coherence, stability not unlike the transparent boundaries that comprise Morrison's fishbowl. The key to understand the link between race and space is locating the point of meeting between the seemingly naturalized, exclusionary forces of whiteness and that which it intends to regulate (in this case, "othered" races; these borders are also imminently visible along sexual and gender lines). At this point of meeting, a specific space acts as a palimpsestic archive⁹ of social and political processes which have composed the formation of racial identity – an archive often characterized by oppressive, hegemonic forces of whiteness and an erasure of blackness. It is in these spaces that racial processes stake claims and create an organized social order. These spaces often take the form of a boundary and, during the moment(s) of contestation, become hybrid places with permeable borders. It is when this binary is obfuscated, blurred, or otherwise transgressed that we see the implications of a spatialized reading of race.

With the connections between race, place, and identity established, I'd like to return to the (x,y,z) graph, but this time place it within the context of *Beloved*, specifically the moment Sethe encounters the Ohio River as she flees Sweet Home Plantation. In the (x/y) coordinate system, (0,0) signifies the exact moment she stands on the Southern border of the Ohio River, gazing out over its "one mile of dark water" (83). An addition of a Z-axis represents the non-physical flows along the Ohio River that also define the Mason Dixon Line. This specific moment and location is significant because of the place's associative thickness, its well-defined

⁹ A "palimpsest," in its most literal definition, refers to marks on a page that have been erased, but whose original meaning can still be determined despite this erasure. Spatially, this term refers to the continual, historical layering and obfuscation of objects in space where one can (literally and figuratively) see the remnants of previous objects. As objects in space (buildings, roads, homes, ports) are destroyed and rebuilt, the visible and historical remnants of each previous object becomes archived in the collective memory and consciousness of those who encounter it.

natural, legislative, and social boundaries. It appears, visually and otherwise, as one well-defined boundary, but the Mason Dixon line is a complex web of boundaries that condense, concentrate, and bottleneck in particular locations – a concentration of Z-axis lines. My claim is that Sethe develops and envisions a national black identity,¹⁰ that she crosses over boundaries whose origins and spatial flow are national and even global, and that she contests not one boundary, but many across temporal and spatial scales.

Contending and Contesting

When Sethe encounters the Ohio River as she flees Sweet Home plantation, she finds herself amidst a space of national contestation as well as local subversion. The hybridity of this space reflects on both an oppressive whiteness and the act of re-visioning and remembering – the narrative of the oppressed – which is the home of counter-hegemonic practices and their spatial manifestation. In the following paragraphs, I will demonstrate the associative thickness of this border space by drawing out the various boundaries that Sethe contests, and this analysis will begin with an important textual and spatial orientation of the physical, topographical geography of the border between Ohio and Kentucky. This space is never described in complete detail, as each character that crosses or interacts with it does so under vastly different circumstances. However, we do know the following details: twice Sethe remembers significant changes of elevation as she approaches the river, once when Denver insists that they “get off this here hill. Come on. I’ll take you *down to the river*” (emphasis added, 88), and later she remembers this as

¹⁰ My denotation of “national” here and elsewhere in the chapter refers specifically to the ways in which Sethe’s experience is both reactive to and engaged within larger, institutionalized mechanisms that covered large swaths of 19th century America. McKittrick notes that this more collective sense of identity can be understood “as the process of materially and imaginatively situating historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination and the difficult entanglements of racial encounter. Racism and resistance to racism are therefore not the sole defining features of a black sense of place, but rather indicate how the relational violences of modernity produce a condition of being black in the Americas that is predicated on struggle” (949). Sethe’s “struggle,” then, is not confined to a few isolated events whose sole benefactor is herself; but rather, she is engaged in the larger narrative of struggle against an imperial modernity bent on erasure.

a “ridge of pine near the Ohio River” (127). Additionally, after being poled across the river by the old man and boy, they “helped her up the steep bank...to a brush-covered hutch” (91). Later in the narrative, shortly after her move into 124 Bluestone, we learn that Paul D walked from there “six miles to the riverbank; did a slide-run-slide down into a ravine made almost inaccessible by brush.” I contend that these small details are significant points of departure for an analysis of this border space because Sethe, and others, were forced to navigate the most topographically difficult portion of the border, unlike Baby Suggs, who rode across the bridge in a carriage after her son purchased her freedom. These spatial details are reflected in the real topography of the land surrounding Cincinnati. The following is the 1848 Daguerreotype of Cincinnati taken by Charles Fontayne and William Porter, which was photographed from a high knoll on the Kentucky border, looking across the river into Cincinnati, offering a similar view shared by Sethe and Denver as they stood atop the pine ridge:



One can easily notice the ring of hills surrounding the lower river plane in which Cincinnati is located. A broader, standard topographical map produced by the U.S. geological survey in 1898 is even more revealing:



Scaled down for detail:



The tightly compacted red-orange contour lines indicate major changes in elevation that form a ring around the city, with a narrow gap to the north that allows for the flow of the major canals (which, consequently, lead to the likely location of 124 Bluestone north of the city limits). This topographical shape, which bows out on both sides of the river, provides an excellent topographical visual of a border space. The natural shape indicates a bubble concentrated around the dividing line. Cincinnati is situated in the one place along this border without significant

topographical interference. The physical shape is, as Guitar seems to indicate in *Song of Solomon*, neither North or South, but a little bit of both as it extends across the river. But Sethe – and most runaway slaves – could not enter through the floodplain or across the bridge; instead, they were forced to engage the topographical boundaries of this border space. The text gives no indication that Sethe used the relatively famous “freedom stairway”¹¹ located just forty miles south and west of Cincinnati when Stamp Paid led her up the ravine and off the riverbank; however, this stairway does provide a compelling visual of the extreme topographical definition of this border, and points to the need for organization and community to overcome it. While it is textually unclear whether Sethe crossed to the east or west of Cincinnati, her brief boat journey with Stamp Paid and his boy seems to indicate that she approached from the west. She notes that they poled “upriver” for a while, which would indicate movement from west to east. Because she became afraid that she was being led back into slavery, one might infer that the move east and up the river was a move towards the port of Cincinnati, but only for a momentary spell. This is significant to the end that the old man’s intimate knowledge of the physical geography of the border space, against the grain of intuitive wisdom, leads her to freedom. This is vitally important because it demonstrates, on one level, a highly individualized, specifically local knowledge of topography, and at the same time, on a larger scale, a subversive organization that is capable of controlling and dictating the terms of the topography and by association, the border space.

But before this crossing and her encounter with Stamp Paid, when Sethe stands on the edge of the hill, she sees the physical, topographical borders meant to keep her out, but she also begins to sense the proliferation of other boundaries she must also cross, even if only in her

¹¹ This stairway, constructed by the abolitionist John Rankin, led to his home, which served as a temporary haven for fugitive slaves. See Appendix 1.

subconscious. For example, Sethe notes that she looks out over “one mile of dark water” (83). But at no point within a 100-mile radius of Cincinnati does the Ohio River even begin to approach that width – in fact, it averages less than a quarter of that distance, between .2 and .3 miles in width. Perhaps Sethe visualizes such a great distance because she also realizes that she must cross more than one, single physical barrier. Her mind begins stretching out the physical shape of the border, opening up the inside to allow more space for her presence – and literally, for the presence of her newborn child. This moment begins to reveal the multiplicity of boundaries, as social and cultural flows become increasingly noticeable within the geographic space laid out before her eyes.

This increasingly clear, complex and multiple border is further developed later in the narrative when Paul D contemplates the ethical quandary of removing Beloved from 124 Bluestone, where he thinks of the “territory infected by the Klan. Desperately thirsty for black blood, without which it could not live, *the dragon swam the Ohio at will*” (66, emphasis added). In the same moment that Sethe was “looking at one mile of dark water” that wasn’t actually a mile, the narrator also observes that the “current [was] dedicated to the Mississippi hundreds of miles away” (83), echoing Paul D’s sentiments and adding a second, definable layer of fear to the border space. The Ohio River, even as it creates the physical boundary between self-actualization and enslavement, is imbued with the fears of the oppressed and the signs of the oppressors, which are interpolated and conflated by the characters with natural movements in the water. Paul D invokes the immediate fear of the Ku Klux Klan, yet the importance of a current dedicated to the Mississippi promises perhaps even greater fear – the fear of being sold “down the river”¹² to the deep south, a place both physically further away from freedom as well as

¹² This sentiment is very clearly articulated in Twain’s *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson*, where a household of slaves lives in constant fear of being sold “down the river.”

notorious for housing the utter extremities of horrific slavery practices (if such a distinction can even be made). It is in this moment, however, when Sethe stands facing this doubling of fear, that we see most explicitly the signs of a national space of racial identity and uplift, because to Sethe, this view “looked like home” (83). Sethe stands at a bifurcated precipice: on one side is a home, a place of belonging; on the other side is the uncanny – an *unheimlich* horror of closed spaces and unrequited trauma, and immediately before her is the space of the river which is neither of these, though it borrows and embodies flows from both.

When Sethe engages in the act of crossing the river, she enters into the borderland. After Amy leaves her on the riverbank, she encounters two boys and an older man, Stamp Paid, and “begged him for water and he gave her some of the Ohio in a jar. Sethe drank it all and begged more” (90). In this moment, Sethe ingests all that the river connotes: she takes the fear of the Klan as a part of her being, willfully entering a space that is marked by contestation and fluidity. That Sethe vigorously ingests water from a place so marked by hybridity, immediately before crossing that water, only to enter a city *defined* by water, demonstrates the fluid, historical, and performative nature of the confluence of space and race. Katherine McKittrick expands this idea in her article “On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place” by defining a black sense of place “as the process of materially and imaginatively situating historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination and the difficult entanglements of racial encounter” (949). One such way that Sethe performs this process of struggle is first through her engagement with Stamp Paid as they cross the river, as he takes a route “contrary to what she expected.” Later, a woman sent to find her proclaims that she “saw the sign a while ago... Stamp leaves the old sty open when there’s a crossing. Knots a white rag on the post if it’s a child too” (91). Sethe benefits directly from practices that had developed outside the official tenets of mainstream

cartography. McKittrick notes that “fugitive and maroon maps, literacy maps, food-nourishment maps, family maps, [and] music maps” signified an alternative way of demarcating spaces among oppressed black people in the Americas. This alternative practice of mapping is seen variously throughout the text: Sixo’s many nightly journeys guided by the stars, the plan to leave Sweet Home when the corn stalks were high, and Paul D following the cherry blossoms North from Georgia to freedom.¹³ The prominent cartographic historian J.B. Harley has long noted the power-implications of cartographic practices, arguing that the very production of maps is an assertion of power and is embedded in a specific system of knowledge (286). These alternative maps, ostensibly ignoring the Cartesian coordinate system of imperial map-making practices, route social action and agency through a subversive spatial matrix that can only be interpreted by those who have been implicated in a subversive identity. These mapmaking processes, rather than disrupting the time-space continuum, as is often the case with the Cartesian methodology, demonstrate an acute understanding of the appropriation of the natural world into images and signs that reflect both an assertion of power and the subversion of the naturalizing power of maps produced largely by white men.

But while Sethe’s “heart started beating the minute she crossed the Ohio River” (147), her crossing signifies on more than one individual’s identity; rather, her individual encounter stands proxy for the experiences of countless other enslaved Africans bent on achieving self-actualization through a contestation of boundaries. Only hours before Sethe crossed the river and moments after giving birth, the narrator steps away from the immediate scene of mother-child-white woman and describes the physical texture of their surrounding in what can only be taken as a grand metaphor for the potential of existing within a border space:

¹³ Sethe’s scarred back also acts as a rather interesting alternative map, though the significance of which is beyond the scope of this essay.

Spores of bluefern growing in the hollows along the riverbank float toward the water in silver-blue lines hard to see unless you are in or near them, lying right at the river's edge when the sunshots are low and drained. Often they are mistook for insects – but they are seeds in which the whole generation sleeps confident of a future. And for a moment it is easy to believe each one has one – will become all what is contained in the spore: will live out its days as planned. This moment of certainty lasts no longer than that; longer, perhaps, than the spore itself. (84)

It is not explicitly clear whether Sethe and Amy are consciously aware of the “shower of silvery blue” hovering about them (84), which lends even further to a reading which places this metaphor on a national scale rather than an individual. Sethe and Amy, even while existing in a space that is embroiled in contestation and danger, are able to rest – find peace, even. It is by existing in a liminal, incoherent space where certainty is not guaranteed yet hope exists for future generations that Sethe and others before her develop a national black sense of place and belonging. However, Sethe's identity is in no way fully realized in this act of crossing and engagement with a hybrid space – for the earlier trauma of her physical and psychic abuse at the hands of schoolteacher never fully escapes her. Nevertheless, her life outside Sweet Home is marked by engagement with other contested space that continue to reflect on her racial identity and sense of self – namely 124 Bluestone and The Clearing. But her act of crossing is clearly a contestation of her racial identity as it confronts the established, historical narrative that has, to this point, defined her identity in terms that were ubiquitously marked by institutional and legal inequality. It is in this crossing that she enters a space that grants a more realistic opportunity to further define herself apart from and against the violence of whiteness.

If Sethe's act of crossing the Ohio River works within a national perspective on a black sense of place, then her subsequent movement into 124 Bluestone and the various spaces associated with the surrounding community offers a more localized portrait of black spaces. It should be noted, though, that these local spaces are always and at once subsumed within this national backdrop: the contestation of the local and of the home was being enacted all across the borders between slavery and freedom. These spaces share the common ground of confronting and living within white violence even under the guise of legal freedom and, as noted previously, even in a seemingly safe environment, the national is oft to invade: one only has to look at the tenets of the Fugitive Slave Act and schoolteacher's willingness to transgress the boundary between slavery and freedom to realize that a black sense of place and home was constantly in danger. The safe confines of community and individual identity were perched precariously on laws that bypassed both cartographic and social boundaries. Thus, when Sethe leaves the riverside and moves into 124 Bluestone, she is not moving *out* of the border zone; rather, she moves further *in*. That borderland expands from its most central site of contestation, the Ohio River, to the outworking of a more fully realized black community.

That 124 Bluestone still represents a borderland is most prescient within a capitalistic framework: it is possible to forget that Sethe and Baby Suggs never own 124 Bluestone and only exist there as tenants. The Bodwins only seem to act as bookends to any narrative that involves the house and are relatively forgotten until the culminating scene on the front porch. But this framework is important, as it continues to reinforce the borderland space that is 124 Bluestone. If both space and race are defined by inequality and difference, and dominant interest groups continually regulate and define spatial construction, then the importance of the home's ownership should remain at the forefront of any critique of the process of identity formation. It is

within this capitalistic, contractual confine that the novel's primary living space defines itself as an ulterior, organic space of human development and interaction. In "Black and 'Cause I'm Black I'm Blue': transverse racial geographies in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*," McKittrick notes, in reference to another border space in Morrison's *oeuvre*, that "consumerism, uneven development, thwarted opportunities and (in)consistent possibilities all demonstrate how the black community in Lorain moves through, against, and within a capitalistic framework" (130). This space in *The Bluest Eye* mirrors the development of the home space in *Beloved*. For example, the novel begins with a portrait of 124 Bluestone, but the house "didn't have a number then, because Cincinnati didn't stretch that far" (1). The house only stood as an emblem of the Bodwin's "goodwill" towards Baby Suggs and did not yet have enough value to be assigned a postal code. But the house's eventual address, 124, developed alongside its occupants and is as much a demarcation of Sethe's family unit and the missing third child as a numerical marker for a physical place. The house's naming and outward identity comes only after being inhabited by Baby Suggs and Sethe, only then is it a socially defined space.

The move from the global to the local and, more specifically, these lived-in spaces, provides a glimpse of the lived experiences of black identity within the border – experiences that often demonstrate an acute struggle against cultural and social hegemony. Part of the contractual agreement between Baby Suggs and the Bodwins was that "she was clean" (145) and that cleanliness would reflect itself in the maintenance of the house - a house that was bereft of color upon her arrival (1). The transformation from a whitewashed, stark home bereft of identity is perhaps most explicitly seen as Sethe remembers Baby Suggs on her deathbed. Baby Suggs was "starved for color" in 124 – an odd signifier of someone's identity. But taken within the context of racialized space, it seems all too fitting. Sethe notes that "there wasn't any [color] except for

two orange squares in a quilt that made the absence shout. The walls of the room were slate-colored, the floor earth-brown, the wooden dresser the color of itself, the curtains white, and the dominating feature, the quilt over an iron cot, was made up of scraps of blue serge, black, brown and gray wool” (38). Upon this act of re-memory (which, as noted previously, is the narrative of the oppressed in space), Sethe becomes “as color conscious as a hen” and purposely fills the void of the white-washed house with bright and vibrant colors – the space of 124 Bluestone, in direct contestation with the wishes of the Bodwins, takes on the colors and hues of its inhabitants.

This capital framework existing within the border space also carries important context for the division of labour and the unequal relationships that develop between those who control the modes of production and ownership and those who don't. Massey argues that there are three spatial manifestations of contested and unequal capitalist systems. First, she points to the basic inequalities that exist in the degree of attractiveness of a place that manifest itself in flows of economic activity (the more attractive the place, the greater the flow of wealth in and through the location). Second, Massey argues that capital inequality manifests itself in terms of overall social well-being (rate of unemployment, per capita income, degree of external control of production). Finally, Massey reminds us that geographic inequality is a historically relative phenomenon. This geographic inequality can shift when there is a change in modes of production that either requires a specific geographic feature (such as a move away from hydroelectricity to wind turbines) or when the requirements of production change and the local work force cannot meet those changes. One obvious example of the third phenomena has already been noted: Paul D's dependence on the spatially fluid, shifting pork industry, and Paul D is acutely aware of the geography of his labor prospects. In a conversation with Sethe, he asks her about the hog business. She reminds him: “White people better here than Kentucky but you may have to

scramble some.” He responds: “It ain’t whether I scramble; *its where*. You saying it’s all right to scramble here?” And Sethe reaffirms that this specific location is “better than all right” (41). But even this is temporary, as the narrative reminds us that as grain farming moved further west, “St. Louis and Chicago now ate up a lot of the [hog] business” (155)

Sethe’s job at Sawyer’s Restaurant, though, is particularly insightful because it bridges the spatial inequality of her job prospects with her own well-being in no uncertain terms. Her employment begins through the Bodwins, who “got her the cooking job” after moving into their rental home (204). I begin with this note simply to remind readers of the layers of contestation between Sethe and those who control her; whether that control stems from altruism or malevolence doesn’t strike me as particularly important, as the end result is still a loss of subjectivity. Sethe was also physically separated from the location of her job – we know it was more than a 30-minute walk, and likely closer to an hour though Sethe, admittedly, “couldn’t read clock time very well” (107) and temporal consistency is not a reliable attribute of this novel. Sethe must also subvert the terms of her employment on nearly a daily basis. She is constantly picking up “a little extra” from the restaurant in order to feed her family (39). She even verbally spars with her white boss, going so far as to tell him to “don’t say nothing to me this morning” (107). Her work provides an avenue of possibility for Sethe, but only if she contests the terms of her engagement. Perhaps that is why she conflates her work with much more serious concerns, like her former trauma. She muses one early morning to herself that when she begins working the dough with her hands, she is simultaneously “beating back the past” (73), though the chief site of contestation is still 124 Bluestone.

124 Bluestone acts as a primary space for contesting identity, and we see this in the lived experience of multiple individuals in *Beloved*. Beloved, after Denver fears she has left, exclaims

“I don’t want that place. This is the place I am” (123) and Sethe, after Paul D queries why she doesn’t leave 124 Bluestone, mentally notes that “this house he told her to leave as though a house was a little thing – a shirtwaist or a sewing basket you could walk off from or give away any old time. She who had never had one but this one” (22). Sethe, Beloved, Paul D, and Baby Suggs all experience a strong bond to that place even without outright ownership. But 124 Bluestone acts as more than an isolated space for individuals to create an identity; rather, the home is created through an amalgamation of multiple identities and serves as a “way station” for the entire community (249). Critics have long noted¹⁴ this communal aspect of the home and its implications on identity formation, so beleaguering this point seems unnecessary. However, what is noteworthy is the way in which the community becomes fractured over the contestation of this home only to come together at the end. Within the border zone, contestation does not just occur between opposing forces; rather, this contestation is scaled down to encapsulate even like-identities as representatives of those living within this border.

The fracturing of the community over 124 Bluestone as a communal gathering place works outward from the fracturing of the house as space. Baby Suggs notes that there is “not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief” (5), and this sentiment is extrapolated to its most extreme degree with 124 Bluestone. The confluence of space and race accounts for this fracturing in quite remarkable ways. The house represents the fluidity of space both in who might call it home at any given point as well as the unstable physicality of the house. The house “braced” and the floorboards “were grinding” and “the house

¹⁴ The following articles all bring attention to the communal nature of 124 Bluestone, albeit from different perspectives and theoretical fields: Dara Byrne’s “‘Yonder they do not love your flesh’: Community in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: The Limitations of Citizenship and Property in the American Public Sphere,” Nancy Jesser’s “Violence, Home, and Community in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” Andrew Hock Soon Ng’s “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: Space, Architecture, and Trauma,” and J. Miller’s “Boundaries in *Beloved*.” Doreen Fowler’s *Drawing the Line: The Father Reimagined in Faulkner, Wright, O’Conner, and Morrison* also explores the relationship between community and individual identity, though not explicitly through the context of the home as space.

itself was pitching” (15, 18). But space is also “interactional and relational” where “social actors...create, disrupt, and recreate spatial meanings through interaction with one another” (Neely & Samura 7). Because 124 Bluestone is the embodiment of fluidity, the extremities to which both individuals and the community go in order to respond to the home demonstrates the active, relational development of identity.

This relationship between space and race is also evident in the conversation between Denver and Sethe concerning Sweet Home. Sethe warns Denver of the dangers of remembering certain places that stand outside of the time-space continuum. I will quote the passage at length because it not only demonstrates the ultimate power of rememory and place and serves as an oppositional referent to 124 bluestone, it also exists in relation to a third space, The Clearing:

Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, its gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world...its when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It’s never going away. Even if the whole farm – every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what’s more, if you go there – you who never was there – if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you.

(36).

Sethe’s memory is explicitly imbricated with Sweet Home – the place that “wasn’t sweet and sure wasn’t home” (14). Sethe’s concern for Denver, that some places never disappear and wield a real and present threat of trauma, demonstrates the historical, relational weight of space in identity formation. But just as Sweet Home seems to possess an identity of its own, Sethe and all those associated with 124 – and most notably Baby Suggs – discover an alternative to Sweet

Home plantation in the Clearing. Sweet Home and the Clearing represent spaces that transcend dimensionality – they cannot be destroyed or forgotten by the simple act of leaving or the progression of linear time. They exist as real places as well as symbolic retreats and prisons of the mind. But the Clearing is an essential place for identity formation within the border, as it also provides a psychic clearing where individuals can re-imagine and re-create themselves.

Locating the Clearing

My analysis of the Clearing will follow a simple assertion, and rejoin itself to the spaces and places of *Song of Solomon*: the Clearing from *Beloved* and Solomon’s Leap, the space into which Milkman jumps at the end of *Song of Solomon*, are representative equals. Both places are highly dangerous – physically, socially, and spiritually – and both places offer moments of unrequited freedom and possibility. They both are imbued with voices in song, and both share borders made of human bodies (spectral and real). They both exist as real, physical locales – places that are tangible and accessible for those that know their coordinates. But both of these very real places are situated within physical grasp of transcendental places that defy temporal flow, seemingly separated only by a thin veil.¹⁵ Milkman is within leaping distance from the rock perch and Sethe, also on a rock perch, is physically grasped by Baby Suggs from beyond death, even leaving bruises on her throat. They are at first found and experienced by large groups (a hunting party and the black community of Cincinnati), before a trio of three characters later return and, to some degree, reenact previous events. These spaces seem to be unique to the border zone and represent the social and economic possibility afforded within. In their uniqueness, these spaces actively decolonize colonial bodies by divorcing, for example, the relationship between body and property, or by drawing out the rhythms of call-and-response

¹⁵ Perhaps the same “veiled over and shut away” border created by the arrival of the infant ghost at 124, which ostensibly separated Sethe and Denver from the rest of the community.

against the starkness of print newspapers that define and stratify identity. They ultimately become spaces where black individuals – and communities – reconstruct and critique the sociopolitical and geographic boundaries of the border space in all its evocations. This is the space where the collective experience of all external flows that converge in a boundary space are brought, sorted, and even potentially replaced.

There are two planes on which we might consider these spaces: the physical place and the experience of that place. The real, physical and material locale of the Clearing is significant in that it immediately decolonizes property ownership. As I've already elucidated, even as a site of potential identity formation, 124 Bluestone is still owned by white people, operates under the associative legal provisions, and holds Sethe and Denver captive under that external, systemic framework. This is not the case with the Clearing. The Clearing is described as “a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place” (51). The Clearing is excluded from processes of commerce and property ownership, and the very inaccessibility of the Clearing mirrors the larger, topographical barriers surrounding the greater border zone. A ring of trees surrounds the Clearing, with a large, flat rock in the center. This rock is the place where Baby Suggs “bowed her head and prayed silently” while “the people waited among the trees” (51) before stepping out one by one and forming a circle around her. The visual is not insignificant: it is a boundary, but one formed by black bodies that have temporarily replaced the legislative, social, and economic borders of the Mason Dixon line.

This boundary of bodies, encircled by a mute and cloaking ring of trees, enacts what Ingrid Reneau calls the formation of a kinship structure through the West African ritual of Ringshout. Reneau's analysis of the Clearing is tied to her larger claims about creating an

intellectual life and space in academia. But her analysis is also prescient in that it draws out the connections between community and spatial configurations. The Clearing is where Reneau suggests Baby Suggs calls the community to re-member themselves through the “polyrhythmic expression of their b/Body (where b indicates the individual body and B the collective body)” (322). In this rhythmic call and response, the individual shouts with herself as she shouts simultaneously with the b/Body, achieving a cathartic release, re-articulating words of empowerment, and envisioning limitless possibilities. Reneau ties this geographic, spiritual, and political space together, arguing that the Clearing “allows for transcendence of the disabling effects of cultural and political domination...resulting from the enslavement, colonization, neo-colonization, imperialism and their attenuating fixtures of capitalism, materialism, and consumerism” (323). But the Ringshout does more than marry the geographic, spiritual, and political together in a way that allows for transcendence. Reneau argues that this ritual articulates a philosophical system of balance and reciprocity between an array of dichotomies: “the individual and collective, the old and new world; the sacred and the secular, the oral and the written, the intellectual and the spiritual; the living, the dead and the unborn” (325). This system of balance and reciprocity, as it juggles these contradictions and dichotomies of the border space, “dismantles apparent divisions and boundaries between varying dimensions of our historical, intellectual and psychic existence” (325). In other words, the Clearing also constitutes a “clearing” in the psyche – not an erasure, but an open space in which to conceive of the course of history through the b/Body politic, or diaspora bodies of all kind as they exist outside of and separate from white, Western, colonizing and enslaving ideologies. The boundaries of the trees and their silence and the boundaries of the bodies and their call-and-response become the borders and boundaries that separate the “here” and “yonder” of Baby Suggs’ sermon. It is a space where

each individual calls out a new line or division between the immediate self and the “other” self of history that was defined by whiteness and enforced by legal and social boundaries – this new drawing of the line is reciprocated by the response of the community. In a sense, it is an oral cartography of a space where Western science and cartography has been unable to map, as it could only be created and formed in the complete absence of those parameters.

An example of characters re-drawing these lines occurs when Sethe, Denver, and Beloved revisit the Clearing, years after Baby Suggs’ death, and re-enact the Ringshout. Before this visit with her two daughters, Sethe expresses a desire “to be there now. At the least to listen to the spaces that the long-ago singing had left behind” (89). Sethe found this longing to be forceful enough to take her daughters back to the Clearing, leading her to “Baby’s old preaching rock” where she “remembered the smell of leaves simmering in the sun, thunderous feet and the shouts that ripped pods off the limbs of the chestnuts.” As she sat on the stone, “Denver and Beloved [were] watching her from the trees,” just as the community used to watch Baby Suggs before emerging one-by-one in song (56). Sethe longs for Baby Suggs, and soon feels her “caressing fingers” on her neck, fingers that become increasingly forceful in the amount of pressure applied. Textually, this uptick in force occurs when Sethe begins to remember Paul D and Halle, travelling to that specific mental space in her rememory. These “new pictures and old rememories” subsequently began to “break her heart.” While the narrator does not go into great detail about these particular rememories, they are articulated in poignantly spatial terms: this rememory is “the empty space of not knowing about Halle – a space sometimes colored with righteous resentment,” and the “empty place of no definite news” (56). With these traumatizing memories now in her psyche, the fingers “moved slowly around toward her windpipe” in a grip that would not let her breathe (57). Much like their predecessors who, upon hearing Baby Suggs’

calls would emerge from the trees, Denver and Beloved leave the ring of trees and rush towards Sethe, shouting. The two approach Sethe and become the embodied vision of Baby Suggs, who calls to the community to take their hands and “Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. You got to love it, you! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth...So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up.”

As the three women re-enact the Ringshout, the pressure on Sethe's neck is released and she is able to breathe again. Immediately, Beloved “reached out her hand and touched the splotches” on her neck, and her “fingers were heavenly. Under them and breathing evenly again, the anguish rolled down. The peace Sethe had come there to find crept into her” (57). Within the Clearing, enacting the Ringshout, Sethe rediscovers a psychic clearing. This psychic clearing is so profound that, after leaving, “Sethe was bothered, not because of the kiss, but because, just before it, when she was feeling so fine letting Beloved massage away the pain, the fingers she was loving and the ones that had soothed her before they strangled her had reminded her of something *that now slipped her mind*” (58, emphasis added). Of course the memory she can no longer remember was of Paul D and Halle, the very memory responsible for conjuring and instigating physical pain. The power of the Clearing is so significant that it does not just silence trauma, but converts it into an erotic event, where fingers that choke become “lips that kept on kissing” (58). In a text replete with the act of remembering as a signifier of past experiences with lived-in space, the Clearing offers the only example of a space that mutes past traumatic memories – effectively transforming them into something else entirely.¹⁶ Those that experience

¹⁶ This is significant for several reasons. For example, in Andrew Ng's excellent analysis of space, architecture, and trauma in *Beloved*, he surmises that “the house is the key to Sethe's healing” (231). Ng, drawing on Deleuze, argues that the house reflects the “pli,” or a site that liberates through entrapment, where the subject situated within the pli “encounters immobility and violence, but also finds redemption and freedom.” I argue that this is only a partially

the Clearing only seem to remember their previous experiences *within* the Clearing. The Clearing compresses time, even in some cases completely annihilating it. It becomes the space where memory collides with the presence and provides a clear spatial organization for the future.

In a similar fashion, though extrapolated a century (give or take) and with it the redrawing of many boundaries, we find a new Clearing: Solomon's Leap and the rock from which Milkman finally jumps into the air. One consequence of the temporal progression between the novels is that the redrawing of boundaries is done on smaller scales, in ways often veiled under capitalist, populist, or religious expressions or divisions – but no longer as overtly national in scale as the Mason Dixon Line. These nonlinear boundaries are often disorienting, especially for a character that resists geography lessons, like Milkman. But the overall geography of this novel reflects these shifting boundaries that defy spatial configuration and are, in some instances, even paradoxical. For example, as many have noted, there is a bit of geographic irony that Milkman lives on “Not Doctor Street” or the slippages between North Carolina (state) and North Caroline (insurance) and how that might affect travel to Lake Superior. But more paradoxically, it seems, are geographic slippages from the narrator. Consider this oddity, barely off the first page of the book:

Some of the city legislators, whose concern for appropriate names and the maintenance of the city's landmarks was the principal part of their political life...they had notices posted in the stores, barbershops, and restaurants in that part of the city saying that the avenue running northerly and southerly from Shore Road fronting the lake to the junction of routes 6 and 2 *leading to Pennsylvania,*

true assessment. 124 Bluestone is significant as a lived-in space that both traps and transforms, but it does not offer the psychic clearing – the open and clean mental space – obtained inside the Clearing, which becomes a necessary component of Sethe's reimagined self.

and also running parallel to and between Rutherford Avenue and Broadway... (4, emphasis added)

Is it not considerably odd that a public notice to the residents of a medium-sized city in Michigan would include a clause reminding the readers that the road was also leading them to Pennsylvania? It strikes me as even stranger that a road running north to south in Michigan would have any directional association with the state of Pennsylvania, far to the east, as opposed to Ohio, Indiana, or Wisconsin, its real southerly neighbors. And considering the intimation that Lake Superior is just to the north, then this fictional town might even be located in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, meaning this Michigan city legislator is reminding residents of a non-neighboring state at least several hundred miles away. It could just be a quirky city legislator, but I think it is more likely that these geographic slippages belong to the narrator, and they are indicative of the psychic pull of a border zone, one that does actually carry Milkman first to Pennsylvania, as the road sign forebodes, and later to Virginia.

Milkman spends much of the novel attempting to navigate the non-linear borders he encounters, which eventually leads him South to Shalimar, Virginia. Critics have spilled much ink over Milkman, Guitar, and Pilate's last moments at Solomon's leap, as such moments in literature rightly call for. I think, along with others, that the ending presents such openness that few, if any, of these claims are mutually exclusive. In conclusion, I'd like to make a few simple linkages back to the scene in the Clearing with Beloved, Denver, and Sethe. Immediately after Pilate is shot, she laughs; like Sethe, her pain is taken away. After she dies, and after Milkman sings, he begins the Ringshout ritual, standing on the rock and surrounded by the expanse of Solomon's leap. He is answered first by the echo of the hills, second by the echo of the rocks, and third by an unnamed source. This unnamed source, which echoes "life" again and again, is

perhaps first contact “across the veil” that exists simultaneously in the Clearing, pointing to a similar transcendence experienced by Sethe. The ending beckons readers to continue imagining Milkman’s flight. We witness his takeoff, his transcendence. What next? In the novel, it is just the open space of the remainder of the page itself, where readers continue that imaginative flight. That open space is representative of the clearing of the psyche. It is at that moment, and only at that moment, that Milkman *knows* something with a level of certainty – a certainty that is powerfully indicated by his leap into the clearing before him and the emptiness of the unwritten page. Milkman, to borrow Morrison’s imagery, leaps out of the fishbowl.

CHAPTER 2: “I Won’t Stay in this Dead Country”: Mark Twain and the Problem of Geography

Critics have reached near-consensus agreement on the observed geography of the Mississippi River in Mark Twain’s *Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*. The prevailing sentiment – which I support – points to two separate geographies, starkly distinct and in constant tension. Michael Miller describes this phenomenon in precise detail in “Geography and Structure in *Huckleberry Finn*,”¹⁷ noting that “an astonishing accuracy concerning travel time, river distances, and landscape description exists only through the Grangerford-Shepherdson episode of chapters 17 and 18. Thereafter the presence of realistic geographic detail and careful specification of travel time drops sharply and virtually disappears” (192). The Grangerford-Shepherdson episode is the first full “stop” in Huck and Jim’s journey after they miss Cairo and the Northerly route of the Ohio River. In fact, Miller notes that the first “lapse in geographic accuracy” (201) technically occurs even before they arrive at the Grangerford plantation, when the two emerge from the fog and continue on their journey, still unaware that they’d missed their intended target.

The nature of these two geographies is accurately characterized, too. Miller broadly refers to Chapters 1-16 (the foot of Jackson’s Island – Cairo) as a stirring example of geographic realism, whereas the geography of Chapters 19-42 (Cairo – Pikesville) is “an eternal landscape, one in which man’s demarcation of the river yields to a Mississippi both uncharted and timeless”

¹⁷ Very few prolonged inquiries into the complex physical geography of the text have been published since 1980, I suspect because Miller’s article convincingly articulates the real geographic location and mapping of Twain’s Mississippi River. Miller demonstrates a wide variety of skills that extend beyond literary criticism (the likes of which include precise calculations of river speed and correlations between the summer solstice and latitude/longitude coordinates), and couples these with deep, thorough, historical research of river navigation to confirm his calculations. Despite earlier attempts that misplaced certain textual landmarks (Ensor, “The Location of the Phelps Farm in *Huckleberry Finn*” (1969); Wells, “More on the Geography of *Huckleberry Finn*” (1973); and Marx, “The Pilot and the Passenger” (1956)), nearly all critics recognize the formation of two distinct geographic representations of the river. I have included Miller’s table of calculations and map of the text in Appendix 2 & 3 for reference.

(192). David Wells seems to suggest a general apathy on the part of Twain, arguing that the second half of the novel, as it falls sharply away from realism, shows how if “the ex-pilot [Twain] was not surprisingly careless about distances on the real river, he became so in time...” and that Twain may have “manipulated the length of the river...as having become so amused with the rascals’ dodges that he forgot he had not allowed space for so many” (85). Leo Marx’s early analysis also points out the shift after Cairo, but posits instead that Huck’s growing attention to the metaphysical components of the river mirrors the more acute introspection of his personal, moral dilemma. Marx notes that Huck is “endowed with the knowledge of precisely those matters of fact which had seemed to impair the pilot’s sense of beauty” (140) in the first half of the novel, but then, just as chapter 19 begins, Marx also notes that Huck begins to accept the grace and beauty of the river. Miller further observes that another early analysis of the text’s geographic switch, Henry Nash Smith’s introduction to the 1958 Riverside edition of *Huckleberry Finn*, characterizes the post-Cairo river as “powerfully benign,” as opposed to its often threatening nature north of Cairo (Miller 205).

Miller sees this move from realism to an eternal landscape as indicative of a shift in cognitive perception between the raft and the shore, where the raft connotes freedom and security, the shore vulgarity and violence. In order to become free from the world, the raft must “first drift free from worldly limits of time and space...its course no longer bound and guided by a mental faculty in service of assertion and conquest, [the raft] can become a true antithesis to the debased society on the shore” (206). Because the opportunity for freedom is lost after Huck and Jim miss the Ohio River, the raft carries them “into an eternal landscape...a truer freedom than either could have found ‘amongst the free States’” (206). Miller’s conclusion to an otherwise attentive analysis seems to disregard a few salient features of this text: After missing

the Ohio River, Jim is held captive against his will for a lengthy amount of time. He is malnourished and abused, and his focus remains on attaining his own freedom in the geographic North. There is no sense of a “truer freedom” that exists within the space of the raft, beyond Huck’s own penchant to “light out for the territory.” Building from Miller’s painstaking charting of the geography of *Huck Finn*, I posit a simple hypothesis for the switch between geographic paradigms, and in so doing, establish a connection between the characteristically inconsistent geography of *Huck Finn* and the characteristically problematic geography of *The Gilded Age*.

Understanding this shift in geography begins with a simple observation about the narration of the text, which points to how Jim’s presence shapes Huck’s vision of the physical space around him. In the aftermath of the Grangerford episode, in their first moments back on the river, now with the knowledge that they’d missed Cairo, Huck describes an early morning on the river:

The first thing to see, looking away over the water, was a kind of dull line – that was the woods on t’other side – you couldn’t make nothing else out; then a pale place in the sky; then more paleness, spreading around; then the river softened up, away off, and warn’t black any more, but gray; you could see little dark spots drifting along, ever so far away – trading scows, and such things; and long black streaks – rafts. (177-178)

In the first extended scene back on the river, Huck’s narrative represents an inverse image of the larger geographic narrative. The novel’s geography moves from defined to undefined, traceable to untraceable, real to imaginary. Yet Huck’s vision works with opposite effect. Huck moves from subjective perception to particular value, from shapes, lines, and colors to rafts, barns, scows, and shorelines. The conclusion I draw from this mismatched vision is that while the

narrative elements of the text – and the larger plot features – largely reflect Huck’s moral dilemma and his ability to process events around him, the actual observed geography reflects Jim’s perception and subjectivity. A focus on Huck’s geography becomes a focus on Jim, and when Jim replaces Huck (or Clemens himself, as it is his vision of the Mississippi River that is so often associated with the geographic features of the text) as the mediator of the text’s spatial elements,¹⁸ the two separate geographies become much more simply defined, though more complex in their evocations. If Huck’s articulation of the geography of the Mississippi River is mediated through Jim’s gaze, then the primary spatial consideration of the “geographically real” section of their journey is Jim’s extended negotiation with a border space that is compressed by multiple and simultaneous spatial shifts that are in tension with one another and continental in scale – the East-West binary of Manifest Destiny and the North-South binary of slavery.

In the following passage, Huck connects the spatial elements of the text directly with Jim. In his second profoundly troubling moral quandary, both of which concern the state of Jim’s freedom, Huck pens a note to Miss Watson alerting her to the location and capture of “your runaway nigger Jim” (256). Immediately after writing the note, Huck “laid the paper down and set there thinking,” remembering and meditating on the following images:

And I see Jim ‘before me, all the time, in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a floating along, talking, and singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn’t seem to strike no places to harden me against him...I’d see him standing my watch on top of his’n, stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping and see him how glad he was when I come back out

¹⁸ I’ve observed a similar phenomenon in Chapter 1, where the narrator of *Song of Solomon* describes the city legislator’s road signs. The inconsistent geographic features of the road sign – even though written by a white character – actually reflect Milkman’s geographic psyche, or preempt his movement specifically, and not casual travellers through Michigan.

of the fog and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was and such-like times (257).

Huck remembers Jim in explicitly contiguous spatial and temporal terms: “before me, all the time.” Jim precedes Huck, Huck becomes the spatial antecedent and is largely defined by Jim’s spatial presence and positioning. Jim’s presence provides an uncanny calm center to Huck, a clear spatial referent amidst a fluctuating pattern of geographic expansion and contraction, whose goal I later show is to render the space-time continuum. Jim’s uncanny ability to appear in places before Huck himself extends even beyond Huck’s memory. Jim is seemingly waiting on Miss Watson’s porch when Huck and Tom try to escape the house, he is the first on Jackson’s Island, the first to board the wrecked steamer. And though Huck does not yet know this, Jim’s arrival at the Phelps plantation preempts the feeling of inevitability that brings Huck and Tom back together. This reading of Huck and Jim’s spatial interplay reinforces Toni Morrison’s assertion in *Playing in the Dark* that an Africanist figure prefigures and shapes whiteness, reinforces the “invention and implication of whiteness,” and “enhances the qualities of white characters.” This is why I question whether we should even entertain the idea that Huck and Jim find a “truer freedom” together on the raft below Cairo (Miller 206). As Morrison herself says of the text, freedom is without meaning to Huck without the “specter of enslavement, the signed, marked, informing, and mutating presence of a black slave.” That presence precedes Huck and performs the dual role of defining whiteness and the geographic spaces they traverse.

Huck’s vision of Jim, while placing Jim as Huck’s spatial and temporal precedent, also reverses time and space from his current solitary position on the raft near Pikesville. In order to regain that centering continuity of time and space, he projects mentally back, through the vague geographic territory of the South and into the specificity of the border space. Huck quite literally

remembers Jim in a different geographic world than the one he currently inhabits, as all of his memories occur either before missing Cairo, or before they've realized they missed Cairo, which is a significant – though technically indeterminable – distance away. Huck's cognitive ability to stretch his memory across worlds is on full display, yet the ease with which he does this belies its significance. Huck's recollection of these moments suggests backward movement, a reverse-course back towards Cairo, moving through the "paleness, spreading around" of the land South of Cairo, into the more defined territory to the North. This is also an act of psychic territorial control, and represents Huck's prolonged negotiation with the space of the river. This move from vagueness back to specificity and imagining Jim as his spatial precedent demonstrates Huck's re-creation of physical space into social space, which he does for his own psychological advantage – of re-centering himself within his moral dilemma. Huck's specific memories of Jim also point to the stretch of the Mississippi River that was the most dangerous to Huck¹⁹, though not necessarily for Jim. Miller makes a similar observation (203), but dismisses its import. In short, the northerly part of the river is more defined because the precise location of the fugitives carried more consequence. After Cairo and the Grangerford episode, Huck is far less exposed to danger, and while Jim is always in grave danger, while North of Cairo, there is at least the opportunity for freedom, and at best, an actual path to achieve it. Huck's remembering of his relative positioning towards Jim as a function of the river's geography points to the initial, precise plotting of the river as a function of Jim's consciousness, not Huck's or Clemens'. Both of these observations firmly point to the more geographically "real" world north of Cairo as a specific

¹⁹ I mean danger on two levels: The river itself was far more dangerous to navigate, and the two were in constant danger from riptides, steamers, snags, sandbars, and other river-travellers, whereas after leaving the Grangerford plantation, the river becomes slower and more docile. On a second level, the more distance Huck put between he and his home, the less likely his monetary or family troubles were to follow him. After passing Cairo, the storyline of Huck, Pap, and his money is all but forgotten.

kind of border space, one that represents a convergence of two spatially defined, cultural and legal dividing lines whose role were being played out on a national scale.

A dual reading of *Huck Finn* and *The Gilded Age* starkly highlights the convergence of these dividing lines that existed simultaneously in both novels, though each focuses more explicitly on one over the other: the North-South spatial binary of the institute of slavery and the East-West spatial binary of Manifest Destiny and westward expansion. But while critics of *Huck Finn* have clearly long-noted that this stretch of the river served as the complicated boundary between a free state and a slave state,²⁰ this boundary has not been placed into the context of a border space, and while the two are related, they must be differentiated. Jim is produced by and within this border space – not just his proximity to a boundary – and thus has unique access to its spatial constructs. In the following paragraphs, I will focus specifically on Jim’s attentiveness to matters of economy and value, as produced by and within a border space. As historians have often stated, slavery was, before and above all else, an economic institution that structured social and political discourse. A border space highlights this, as it is the space where a significant confluence of many disparate economic flows and connections converge – and unique to this convergence are the economically driven identities produced in the border space to control the

²⁰ In the New Riverside edition (2000), when Huck and Jim first meet on Jackson Island, Susan Harris observes that the Kansas-Nebraska Act (which nullified the Missouri Compromise), John Brown’s Raid, and, in particular, the Fugitive Slave Act all held significant influence over this stretch of river. Harris is also quick to note that “freedom for Jim is not as easy as swimming to Illinois, a state in which the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 was enforced. Rewards offered for fugitives attracted kidnappers and bounty hunters to the state...[and] without a registration certificate or “pass,” Jim faces the possibility of imprisonment and indentured servitude until claimed by his ‘rightful owner’” (107). James Tackach more fully explains how Illinois was never the goal for Jim, and that “During the 1840s, Illinois did not recognize the citizenship of African Americans; they could not vote, run for public office, attend public schools, own property, file a lawsuit, testify against white people in court, or join the state militia. In 1848, the voters of Illinois considered new articles to amend their state constitution. One amendment on the ballot would have made it illegal for African Americans, slave or free, to settle permanently in Illinois. Seventy percent of the voters chose to approve the amendment. Needless to say, even though the Fugitive Slave Act also applied to the border space of Ohio, it was also the location of the well-developed Underground Railroad (218). Additionally, each county in Missouri, particularly those that bordered the three neighboring free states, also established their own “patterollers,” which were independent patrol units designed specifically to enforce nighttime travel curfews for slaves, and also regularly visited slave quarters unannounced to check for unlawful assemblies of slaves (Greene, Kremer, and Holland, 28).

flow of black bodies, from patterlers to slave traders and bounty hunters. It is amidst these flows, so intricately tied to Jim's body, that Jim develops an identity that is, at times, separate from the immediate condition of his body. For much of the novel, Huck functions as a trickster figure, while Jim always *specifically* tricked people out of money, both in small-scale operations and with the value of his escaped body. Thus, in the same way that Jim acts as Huck's spatial precedent, Jim also precedes the emergence of the American confidence man in literature and culture. The figure of the Confidence man was always accompanied by an economic con, and the con was always ongoing. On a certain level, Jim's escape plays this same economic con out on a grandly singular scale. If *The Gilded Age's* Colonel Sellers represents the ur-confidence man of American exceptionalism, Jim is the prototype, the pre-confidence man whose bondage only further highlights the ideological power of the myth of exceptionalism; and Jim, created amidst this double-border space, sees it as one of possibility.

This pattern of spatial movement and its overlap is clearly and explicitly addressed in the anomalistic "raftsmen passage." Interestingly, this chapter that shows these spatial boundaries explicitly touching occurs in the precise moment that the two geographic worlds split. The chapter begins with an insistence that when the two rivers join together, "it would show" (142), and yet the two fugitives cannot locate it. It is after the fog episode that Huck and Jim are overtaken by a "monstrous long raft," and Jim recommends that Huck sneak on board to gather information, where he hides "amongst some bundles of shingles" – a woodpile, of sorts. Jim, understanding the value of information, instructs Huck to take on the role of a fugitive slave.²¹

²¹ I am reminded here (and in the following paragraph, as Jim views his body as cargo or freight), of a phrase employed by the narrator of *Absalom, Absalom!* in reference to how the townspeople of Jefferson viewed Thomas Sutpen. The narrator reminds Quentin that Jefferson "believed even yet that there was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere" (56). This pejorative phrase, "nigger in a woodpile," came into currency in the mid-19th century to refer to "some fact of importance [that had] not been disclosed" (Klerk 10). While no clear evidence for the origin of the

When Huck arrives on board, he listens to two men argue, and the terms of the argument seem lifted straight from *The Gilded Age*. Bob and the Child of Calamity cover the global spread of the “kingdom of sorrow,” using the “meridians of longitude and parallels of latitude for a seine” in what is essentially a treatise on the annihilation of space at the hands of American exceptionalism (145). The two describe nearly every corner of the earth, and relish the “massacre of isolated communities...the destruction of nationalities,” shouting that the “boundless vastness of the great American desert is my enclosed property” (145). But Huck implicitly racializes these moments, which Peter Schmidt acutely notes in “The ‘Raftsmen’s Passage’: Huck’s Crisis of Whiteness and *Huckleberry Finn* in U.S. Literary History.” While Huck spatially positions himself on the raft as a runaway slave – hiding in a woodpile – Schmidt also posits that Huck translates the events of the raft into racial terms, and begins to communicate with the raftsmen with language learned from Jim. For example, Huck’s use of the word “boss” when responding to the raftsmen is borrowed from Jim’s only use of the word just after Huck lies to him about being lost in the fog. Schmidt observes that Huck is mimicking Jim’s signifyin’, by “trying to reassert his superiority and his whiteness – for ‘boss’ was very much expected to be used by blacks to show deference to whites” (42). This passage serves as a juncture for the transition between two geographies, and this larger pattern has been observed by critics of Twain before as a transition between notions of nationalism and racial discourse. Barbara Ladd has observed numerous locations in Twain’s *oeuvre* where prototypically white, American voices that, in this case, represent the wildest imaginations of Manifest Destiny, are displaced by “black and extra-national or pre-national ones.” In this scene, the spatial trajectories of two warring ideologies collide, and one clearly gives way to the other, where, as Ladd asserts, the use of black voices

phrase is determinable, it is assumed that the phrase derived from the practice of smuggling slaves to free states by railroad and hiding them between the walls of freight cars.

“explodes the myth of the racially ‘pure’ or determinate and culturally innocent American” (130).

This geographic switch is bolstered through Jim’s growing awareness of his physical body as flesh – a commodity “wuth eight hund’d dollars” (110) that is as easily obtained as “picking money out’n the road” (255) – and soon becomes a way for him to view his body as capital, as something that he himself could barter for in order to negotiate the overlap between the recapitulations of westward expansion and the economic stratification of the institution of slavery. This bodily disassociation is evidenced in the text on a number of levels, but the most prominent and consistent is the technical status of Jim’s freedom. For most of the course of the novel, Jim’s status as a slave was legally changed by Miss Watson, yet his body – regardless of his legal state – remained a sought-after commodity. When Jim escapes, he understands that the way to control capital is to change its geography: to ship it, like freight. Jim’s con is hiding and disguising the value of his body so that its future value can be “cashed in” in the form of his family’s freedom.

Because Jim has long occupied this border space, he is already attuned to its economic possibilities and their spatial implications. He demonstrates this with a con that bears striking similarity to Colonel Sellers’ first con with turnips, which I detail later in the chapter. After Tom and Huck have their fun with a dozing Jim, he awakens and transforms his new five-cent coin and his “witch encounter” into a kind of currency itself. Jim’s story of the witches grows and grows, expanding geographically “down to New Orleans; and after that, every time he told it he spread it more and more, till by-and-by he said they rode him all over the world” (75). Jim surely observed the correlation between the scale of his story and its monetary value, and his presentation grew so confident and polished that “he wouldn’t hardly notice the other niggers”

listening from “miles around...with their mouths open and looking him all over, same as if he was a wonder” (75). Eventually, Jim’s enterprise was such that “niggers would come from all around there and give Jim anything they had” (75). Preempting Sellers’ con with turnips, the portrayal of Jim’s con seems to defy spatial limitations. In the face of patterollers and slave traders that limited movement of black bodies, enslaved Africans were suddenly moving across great distances, sometimes from miles and miles away, and appearing only to bear witness to a seemingly new wonder of the world. Jim even feigns to bring a global knowledge to his immediate circumstances, hinting at his knowledge of the growing interconnectedness of the global economy.

Jim performs various other cons, some as explicit as turning a fake coin with no value whose gilded exterior had been rubbed away into something that “anybody in town would take in a minute” (84). Jim even details one of the times he “tuck to speculat’n, en got busted out” (109), which serves as a comic analogue for the failure of financial systems to support non-white structures.²² However, at the end of Jim’s story of his failed speculation, he comes to the significant realization that, as an escaped slave whose body is a commodity, “I owns myself.” Jim, importantly, knows that he is not free; instead, by controlling the movement of the commodity, he could exploit, bend, and even break – as a confidence man would – the rules and legalities that governed his body. An emphasis on Jim’s body is, in large part, because his body itself is at once the object of value and the trick itself. But Jim’s body is also the site of larger contestations, and I will return to his story post-Cairo at the end of the chapter where he finds himself imprisoned, receiving a strange and devious kind of education. Jim and Colonel Sellers’ – two separate and distinct bodies that adopt similar personas – both reveal the inconsistencies

²² Susan Harris, noting the work of Victor Doyno, points to the failure of the National Freedman’s Bank in 1873, which lost upwards of 27 million dollars in black-owned deposits, as one of the more significant examples of financial systems whose failed structures effectively robbed black Americans a second time.

and instability of place, and yet also point to the possibility within. Unlike Jim, who was produced within the border space, the Colonel injects himself into this space of possibility, which is open for exploitation and settlement yet still connected to the larger, nationalistic center of Washington D.C.

Capital Expansion

In Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's *The Gilded Age* (1873), the Hawkins family is catapulted on a reckless adventure from their small town in Tennessee to Hawkeye, a "pretty large town for interior Missouri" (52). Over the next decade, Judge Hawkins and his family "made and lost two or three moderate fortunes" (42) until the Judge passed away, forcing his children to make difficult decisions about the affairs of his tenuous estate. Two months after the death of his father, Washington Hawkins returns to Hawkeye to resume his duties in the office of General Boswell. Having declined previous invitations to dine with the Sellers family after the death of his father, Washington decides to "give the Colonel a pleasant surprise" (81) and drop in for a casual dinner. After his unexpected arrival and exchanging the normal pleasantries, Washington is ushered into the kitchen where he "contemplated the banquet, and wondered if he were in his right mind. Was this the plain family dinner? And was it all present? It was soon apparent that this was indeed the dinner: it was all on the table: it consisted of abundance of clear, fresh water, and a basin of raw turnips – nothing more" (82). As is his custom, though, Colonel Sellers is untroubled by the scant victuals presented to his guest and immediately dives into a soaring monologue concerning the amazing properties of the "fruit," as he calls it. Pausing for a moment, Sellers passes Washington the bowl of water, assuring him that "there's plenty of it. – You'll find it pretty good" (83). As Washington begins to choke down the raw turnips, Sellers insists that he examine them and see how "perfectly firm and juicy they are."

He proclaims that he imported the turnips from New Jersey, and that it is a strain which cannot be produced anywhere in the world except one orchard. Again insisting that Washington take more water with his turnips, Sellers “lets the cat out of the bag” that the real reason for the over-indulgence in turnips is because the “Asiatic plague that nearly de-populated London” is following the Gulf Stream and within three months “ will be just waltzing through this land like a whirlwind!” (84).

Notwithstanding the immediate and unfortunate impact on Washington’s intestinal system, Colonel Sellers’ meal of turnips and water foregrounds three revelatory aspects of Twain and Warner’s *The Gilded Age* that signify on larger geographical paradigms of the 19th century American political economy. First, by connecting the turnips to New Jersey – a place far removed from the backwoods of Missouri – and later to the “Asiatic plague” that apparently swept through London, Sellers demonstrates the growing interconnectedness of a global, capitalist economy. That Twain and Warner composed this text in 1873 – a text that would come to name an era twenty seven years before that era had even expired – demonstrates an unbelievable prescience concerning the direction of both the American and global economy, especially when one considers that Twain and Warner accurately predicted America’s dependence on global capitalism rather than an overt imperialist agenda. While industrialization had begun to accelerate the commercial flow of goods in the earlier part of the 19th century, it was not until after the Civil War that new technology began to disseminate information and goods over huge distances with unprecedented speed. Twain and Warner, only eight years into this age of expansion, saw the vital dependency on foreign connections required to construct the infrastructure needed to transport these goods: in fact, European investments were responsible

for almost a third of the capital generated for the construction of the United States railways after 1865 (Ratner, et al 327).

The second issue foregrounded by Sellers' meal of turnips and water is the changing nature of place-attachment brought about by a global, capitalist economy. It cannot be said with absolute certainty, but the readers of the text should be fairly safe in assuming that the Colonel's turnips did not, in fact, come from New Jersey. The "Early Malcolm" strain of turnips so lauded by Sellers probably came from the merchant store down the street, or, even more likely, his own backyard. Yet Sellers goes so far as to not only up-root the origination of the turnips, but also to place their origin *within a specific orchard* far removed from their real geographic origin. The onset of global capitalism in a rapidly industrializing nation began to compress both time and space with unprecedented speed. Implicit in this compression is the potential for erasure of localized space. Robert Tally argues in *Spatiality* (2013) that this phenomenon resulting from the spread of capitalism "so revolutionizes the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world" (15). For Sellers, and subsequently Washington, the grounded features of place (in this case, turnips) become subsumed by a force capable of reorienting the very products of a given place, a force Sellers explicitly links to economics: "the supply is never up to the demand" for those remarkable turnips (83). But it is not only the location of the turnips that Sellers uproots. As he reveals to Washington, Sellers also transforms the turnips from a staple food product useful for daily sustenance into the absolute preventative cure for the "Asiatic Plague" – again, something we as readers know to be untrue. It is important to note Sellers claims the Asiatic plague swept through London "centuries ago"; yet now, according to a dubious contact in St. Louis, it is headed through the atmosphere (an atmosphere that just moments before Sellers exclaimed was "full of

money”) with frightening speed. This change in pace of the movement of the plague provides a useful analog for the compression and potential annihilation of space and time that Sellers seems all too aware of. What Sellers demonstrates in this moment is the unique, potentially dangerous impact that global capitalism has on the geography of the local and the way it functions to create and recreate new space (or, in this instance, it quite literally produces produce).

The final issue foregrounded by Sellers’ meal is deeply embedded in the geographical implications of the labor force. The prominent cultural geographer Doreen Massey argues that “when we take seriously the fact that the social processes involved in the development of capitalist relations of production take place ‘in a geographical world’, our analysis of them changes” (53) and that “industry...is the embodiment of the central capitalist social relation – the exploitation of labor in production” (17). Sellers makes no mention of the workforce responsible for producing and harvesting the turnips other than himself: “I imported them myself” (83). By shifting the geographic location of the production of turnips, even if this shift is only imaginary, Sellers creates a supply chain that connects vast distances and separates the consumers from the producers – a move that would inevitably drive up the price of the turnips, though not necessarily generate more profit for the laborers. But we have already established that these turnips were almost certainly not imported to Missouri from New Jersey. And if they did, in fact, come from a local garden, it is also safe to assume that Sellers did not himself harvest the turnips (Sellers never actually does *any* form of physical labor in the entirety of the novel). It might just be speculation, but likely sources of labor for the harvest of the turnips are either Mrs. Sellers, his three children, or enslaved Africans. And, of course, due to Washington’s presence, these three children end up leaving the table hungry. The advent of a money-driven market ultimately has a two-fold impact on the local labor force. First, global capitalism dissolves the relations that make

up a traditional community (or a family unit, in this case). Instead of depending on one's family or community to procure food, clothing, or the means to build shelter, one now must rely on impersonal relations with a distant "other." A second, interrelated point is that global capitalism creates a grossly imbalanced – and often unjust – social situation for the labor force.

Dependence on a foreign or even national market renders labor output arbitrary and dependent, often resulting in mass spatial movements of human capital. When resources in one place dry up, or the flow of capital to and from a small town becomes insolvent, the workforce is forced to relocate to urban centers where a critical mass of capital production results in easier access to profitable jobs.

The first issue foregrounded by Washington's meal with Sellers – the growing interconnectedness of the global economy – in many ways subsumes the latter two. The changing nature of place-attachments and the geographical imbalance of labor are both reactionary consequences of the emergence of global capitalism. This phenomenon resulted in small, independent Midwestern and Western farm towns becoming suddenly dependent on the demands of urban centers on the east coast. These connections, of course, were made possible by the most prominent driving force of the American economy: the expansion of the railroad. At the end of the Civil War, roughly thirty-three thousand miles of constructed railroad existed in the entirety of the United States: by 1874, one year after the publication of *The Gilded Age*, this number had doubled and would double again by 1880 (Ambrose 52). Period maps of the expanding railroad line reveal a great deal about the unique spatial situation of the Mississippi River valley in particular. The 1860 "Chapman Railroad Map" (see Appendix 4) demonstrates how the state of Missouri was portrayed from an economic, spatial standpoint. Even though the sub-heading of the map denotes Missouri as one of the primary states represented in the map, the

entire western half of the state is truncated. Only four rail lines enter the state, each stemming from the East, and each line fades into obscurity as it moves away from the critical mass of lines centered in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Even though Missouri would shortly after join the Confederacy, it was, even before the Civil War, a largely open (at least economically) space, lying in the path of a booming, albeit highly speculative, economy pushing west. It represents the near-frontier of East-coast politics and a territory ripe for the expanding capitalist gaze. Twain and Warner explicitly note this openness at several moments in the text. For example, when the Hawkineses leave Obedstown in a rush, they “flitted out into the *great mysterious blank* that lay beyond the Knobs of Tennessee” (emphasis added, 15). And perhaps most explicitly, when Sellers meets Harry and Phillip²³ in St. Louis, he exclaims that “the whole country is opening up, all we want is capital to develop it. Slap down the rails and bring the land to market” (99). By 1874, as seen in the “New County Railroad Map of the Western States and Valley of the Mississippi” (see Appendix 5), the lines crisscrossing the state of Missouri are nearly innumerable. The small, largely agrarian towns once existing in virtual isolation now contain, in some places, multiple rail lines intersecting the city from each cardinal direction.

But the issue of funding for these projects was problematic on a massive scale. The net capital stock of railroads in 1860 is estimated at just over one billion dollars: by 1909, this number had risen to \$10.5 billion. In the 1870s alone, over two billion dollars of gross investment capital was injected into the railroad business, with investments from the private sector comprising the majority of this sum total (Ratner, et al 326, 330). But these investments from both the public and the private sector were raised either through the sale of stocks or bonds

²³ Phillip is introduced with Harry as a fellow prospector, a young man looking for a get-rich-quick scheme. Phillip, after discovering the fraudulent nature of land speculation on the frontier, returns to the East Coast, and then retreats to the hills of Pennsylvania to run a small-scale mining operation. Phillip acts as a cleaner, proprietary reflection of Sellers and Harry, a character with ambition and desire, but bridled by conscience and contract.

– which themselves only held future value. This resulted in the market value of the shares exceeding the funds actually raised by the railroad companies: the stocks were thus “watered down” (Ratner, et al 327). Ellen Goldner²⁴ ties this phenomenon to another one of Sellers’ schemes concerning his development of curative eye-water. She argues that “Sellers’s liniment, nine-tenths water, is a comic analogue of the watered stock that financed most of the railroad construction satirized in *The Gilded Age*” (60). The same is true for Sellers’ meal of turnips and water: His continual insistence that Washington “take water” with his turnips is a rather ineffective way of making up for the one-dimensional meal on his table. While he builds the meal up with speculative hyperbole, the real, immediate outcome of the water only makes the bland, gas-inducing turnips slightly more palatable.

I draw this distinction between the first issue brought up by Sellers’ turnips and the latter two simply as a matter of structural integrity. The vast interconnectedness of global capitalism changed the shape of more than just our geographical sensibilities. As is also evident in *The Gilded Age*, post-Civil War politics and the larger social, cultural milieu struggled to adapt and keep abreast of the rapidly economizing world market. As Ellen Goldner notes, the events of this novel also reveal a striking prescience for both the onset of modernist culture and the epistemological foundations of a postmodern society: She argues that “Twain and Warner’s novel repeatedly grapples with the difficulty amid interconnections of global scope of grasping the economy as a whole...and that accelerating capitalism provokes a crisis in Western

²⁴ Outside of a flurry of articles published in the 1970s and 1980s (close to fifteen within a fifteen year period), there is a dearth of scholarship with *The Gilded Age* as its focus. In its current status, this novel is more important as a cultural artifact than an object of scholarly inquiry; however, I anticipate this will not be the case in the coming years. While establishing a broadly similar geographic paradigm that focuses on land speculation, Goldner also analyzes the novel’s joint authorship, the importance of “tall tales” in the spread of American culture, and the crucial role the “confidence man” plays in the novel, revealing what she calls a “full-blown crisis in the representation of the subject” (80). The recent move in academia to reconsider representations of place, space, and identity together, however, will find rich subject material both in the events of the novel and in their real-world analogs, Twain’s own lifelong obsession with his family’s Tennessee land.

representation” (64). The novel ostensibly follows the movement from independent regions to interdependent, contingent, divisions of a global market system. This interdependency wreaks havoc on individual and local place, leaving space open for those already in power to exercise control and grow exponentially under the guise of “nation building,” creating flows of capital and wealth that generate injustice and uneven spatial and social institutions. This overarching context both historically and theoretically buttresses the changing geographic dimension of both place-attachment and the distribution of labor while simultaneously revealing the inner contradictions of capitalist production.

Both texts, *The Gilded Age* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, reify a similar spatial pattern of both human and capital movement across and within a border space. This pattern appears as characters navigate both the border space between slavery and freedom and the border space between the East and its associative qualities and the seeming limitless possibilities of the American frontier. My contention is that this pattern, the literary topography of both texts, can be characterized as “speculative thrusts” into space. My choice of “thrust” as a description of these spatial patterns helps convey several characteristics of the characters’ engagement with space. The OED explains that the word connotes “a pushing force by one part of a structure upon another.” I find this helpful to think about Jim, Huck, and Sellers as they engaged and confronted larger structural patterns that exist in order to prevent such speculative movements in space, sometimes for nefarious purposes and sometimes for self-preservation. Some of those systems are born out through legislation, others through social normative behavior, others through the natural environment. “Thrust” also connotes force and danger; it is a non-neutral term whose definition invokes the alteration of place or space, often with force: “to cause (anything) to enter, pierce, or penetrate some thing or place by or as by pushing, to put,

drive, or force into some place or position.” I’ve already demonstrated Jim’s penchant for speculation, in the literal sense (106). But each of Huck and Jim’s ventures ashore, whether to steal food or to obtain information or to engage in a con, all represent temporary thrusts into – from their perspective – spaces of economic opportunity. And Colonel Sellers is nothing but the living, walking embodiment of the impulses of 19th-century land speculation.

Territorialization

Place-attachment refers simultaneously to the ways that individuals relate and connect to a bounded, geographic location as well as how that location is represented and connected to a larger geographic territory. In a pre-industrial, isolated and often rural locale, what D.H. Lawrence has called “the spirit of place” perhaps best epitomizes this relationship. Lawrence posits that “every people [group] is polarized in some particular locality, which is home, the homeland. Different places...have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation” (17). Notwithstanding Lawrence’s vagaries, this term carries all the connotations of the pastoral landscape, an ideal that Twain and Warner implicitly mourn the loss of throughout the novel.²⁵ The beginning of the novel, for example, establishes Obedstown in the “knobs” of East Tennessee as one such place. The transmission of information over distance is not of great concern to the inhabitants: “the mail was monthly, and sometimes amounted to as much as three or four letters at a single delivery” (8). The clothes are “homespun,” and everyone chewed “natural leaf tobacco prepared on his own premises, or smoked the same in a corn-cob pipe” (8). The “spirit of place” manifests itself through a community’s interaction with a locale that is undisturbed by industrialization. What is taken from the land is “natural” to that place –

²⁵ It is not my goal in this paper to elevate the agrarian community as necessarily a “better” or more productive lifestyle than an industrial society. While the thrust of this chapter is to demonstrate the geographic problems inherent in capitalist systems, the agrarian aesthetic is also riddled with both social and practical issues.

not artificial – and thus the inhabitants develop a symbiotic relationship with their locale and become, in many ways, naturalized themselves.

But *The Gilded Age* acts as a chronicle of the disappearance of such places from the American landscape. David Harvey, a neo-Marxist geographer whose work on the spatial component of capitalism has influenced the surge in geocriticism in the last three decades, summarizes this wholesale obfuscation of the rural American landscape and describes it with direct parallels to the major plot points of *The Gilded Age*. Summarizing Marx and Engel, Harvey argues that the “bourgeoisie has created a new internationalism via the world market, together with ‘subjection of nature’s forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to agriculture and industry, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground’” (*Condition* 99). Harvey argues that the new space formed by capitalism manifests itself as material objects (buildings, infrastructure, railroads), which become both the cause and effect of social life. In short, for Harvey, space is *produced* within capitalism and yet simultaneously reveals the inner contradictions of a capitalist system. For example, returning to Sellers’ turnips, by producing a new locale for the growth and distribution of these turnips, Sellers ostensibly creates a new space. However, even before the onset of the plague, the supply simply cannot keep up with the demand. The desire incited by a limited quantity (and the supposed quality) of these turnips works conversely to their availability. In fact, it is even hinted that these turnips, with the onset of the Asiatic plague, will become a commodity that potentially replaces even money itself.

Harvey refers to these contradictions by a number of names in his collected “best of” essays, *Spaces of Capital* (2001): the “fetishism of commodities,” the “crisis of over-

accumulation,” and the “spatial fix.” Inherent in each of these designations is the un-just movement of capital when an economic crisis occurs – a crisis likely caused by a switch in the production of material affects.²⁶ Harvey summarizes these contradictory elements:

The aim and objective of those engaged in the circulation of capital must be, after all, to command surplus labor *time* and convert it into profit within the *socially necessary turnover time*. From the standpoint of the circulation of capital...space is a barrier to be overcome. But it transpires that these objectives can be achieved only through the production of fixed and immobile spatial configurations...[which is where] we encounter the contradiction: spatial organization is necessary to overcome space. (328)

Harvey’s critique of global capitalism converges again with *The Gilded Age* as he notes the vital role speculation plays in a capitalist economy. When a territory has been exhausted of its resources (or when the proverbial train leaves town), he posits that “the struggle to maintain profitability sends capitalists racing off to explore all kinds of other possibilities” and this opens new spaces for territorial expansion (106). These forces all converge in Sellers’ first failed land speculation attempt: the city of Stone’s Landing. The Stone’s Landing venture serves as a model for the concept of “territorial expansion,” which refers to the way a state apparatus spreads its various influences across space. This generally occurs in a three-step process of territorialization, de-territorialization, and re-territorialization.²⁷

²⁶ An example would be the switch between railroads and the automobile in the early 20th century. Because labor, investments, and material capital were built up in an old system, it slowed the shift towards the automobile.

²⁷ Most cultural geographers give slightly varying definitions of this phenomenon. I will offer the following definitions, borrowed and summarized from Robert David Sack, Edward Soja, and David Harvey. “Territorialization” is the attempt to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships through the colonization of a geographical area (Sack). “De-territorialization” is the subsequent collapse or relinquishment of control over that area. It is the weakening of attachment to place and territorially defined communities (Soja). “Re-territorialization” is the response to de-territorialization. It is the (most often cultural) reconstituting of the geographic territory. Harvey articulates these terms as “space of flows” and “space of place.” The “space of place”

By examining the entire process of the development of Stone's Landing, from beginning to end, from initial concept to failed enterprise, we witness how the manner in which the inner contradictions of capitalism form and re-form the geographic landscape and fundamentally alter the way humans interact with it. The concept for the development of Stone's Landing begins with – no surprise here – the Colonel. Sellers, waxing poetic with Harry on the potential investments floating in the air, poses this situation: “What should you say, sir, to a city, built up like the rod of Aladdin had touched it, built up in two years, where now you wouldn't expect it... The Salt Lick Pacific Extension is going to run through Stone's Landing! The Almighty never laid out a cleaner piece of level prairie for a city; and it's the natural center of all that region of hemp and tobacco” (116-117). Harry, skeptical at first, queries “What makes you think the road will go there? It's twenty miles, on the map, off the straight line of the road?” (117). Sellers responds by deferring to the skills of Jeff Thompson, the division engineer for the state of Missouri, who “understands the wants of Stone's Landing, and the claims of the inhabitants – who are to be there. Jeff says that a railroad is for the accommodation of the people and not for the benefit of gophers” (117).

This exchange highlights several important factors in the process of territorialization, de-territorialization, and re-territorialization. First, I have often wondered why no one *seriously* questions Sellers' varying speculative interests. Christopher Morris maintains that Sellers “may be regarded as the embodiment of the *Ur*-delusion” the rest of the characters share in (231). But it is important, I think, to establish exactly *who* Sellers sees himself as, even if the readers are meant to see him as the embodiment of capitalist delusion in the novel. At varying points in the novel, Sellers' aligns himself with potentially powerful people, beginning, of course, with his

is “re-territorialization,” which is reflected by the restructuring of capital in a specific locale (fixed, physical infrastructure).

self-title of “Colonel.” But later, after re-locating to Washington, he thinks of himself as too important to even be the President, though he would settle for the title of “Grand Llama of the United States” (279). Though Sellers never claims this outright, he sees himself as nothing less than a deity. When he tells Harry that “the Almighty never laid out a cleaner piece of level prairie for a city,” we eventually come to understand that Sellers *is* the “Almighty” who plans to level the prairie (as it is most certainly *not* level on their surveying trip). But even more telling is that upon finally arriving at Stone’s Landing, Sellers, still on his wagon, exclaims “Welcome to Napoleon, gentlemen, welcome” (127). Up to this point, Stone’s Landing had remained just that: Stone’s Landing. But by granting himself the power to rename a place, or rather, conjure a new place out of the ground with the simple act of the spoken word, Sellers asserts himself as a territorial deity and begins immediately the process of colonizing the landscape. This alignment, of course, coincides with the way capitalism spreads. In a booming, capitalist economy, as Harvey notes, the person who is able to affect the spatial distribution of wealth via transportation, communication, or the erecting of physical infrastructure is often able to augment their social, economic power (233).

This first meeting between Sellers and Harry reveals the beginning stages of the process of territorialization. In a place where people have previously lived in a symbiotic relationship with the “gophers,” and is the *natural* center of hemp and tobacco, Sellers plans to reorient the lives of both the people already living there and the people that will eventually move there by reconstituting the natural center to an industrial center: the railroad. The ultimate territorializing entity – the political state – has a long history of this kind of spatial reorganization.²⁸ The state, represented at first in Stone’s Landing by an engineer, Jeff Thompson, begins to undermine the

²⁸ For example, the Fugitive Slave Act nullified state boundaries, reorganizing given geographic boundaries according to larger, political and legal devices.

structured spatial organization of a place even before a single piece of earth had been moved or land sold. Territorialization is a process of smaller steps, and Harvey observes that “the state, through planning mechanisms, likewise institutes normative programs for the production of new geographical configurations and in so doing becomes a major site for orchestrating the production of space, the definition of territoriality, the geographical distribution of population, economic activity, social services, wealth and wellbeing” (213). These normative programs are taken control of by Harry and the Colonel, the primary representatives of the state apparatus for the duration of Stone’s Landing.

The process of territorializing is extended from this initial meeting and into the surveying trip conducted by Harry. Harry’s brand of engineering, though, is inundated with a capitalist agenda and “not a great deal of scientific knowledge” (123). The chief object of this survey towards Stone’s Landing was merely to “get up excitement about the road, to interest every town in that part of the state in it, under the belief that the road would run through it” (123-124). Even the actual surveying aspect, carried out by Jeff Thompson, was haphazard at best. The crew “did not bother much about details or practicalities of location, but ran merrily along...over slues and branches, across bottoms and along divides” (124). This surveying trip demonstrates both the necessity to quickly reduce spatial barriers, or to annihilate space altogether, and to incite desire for the onset of capitalist space – it creates “wants” that previously did not exist.

The process of de-territorialization, or the loosening of place-attachments by the natural inhabitants, occurs nearly simultaneously with the arrival of the surveying crew in Stone’s Landing. This is, of course, due mostly to the excitement stirred up along the way by the surveying crew. The very first interaction between the surveying crew and the sleepy inhabitants of Stone’s Landing demonstrates the acute interworking of capitalist expansion. After Jeff greets

the first man to wander into their camp, his immediate response is “Good mawning...I allow thish-yers the railroad, I heern it was a-comin...I reckon you kin git all the rails you want outen my white oak timber over thar” (126). The townspeople is immediately willing to let go of his white oak for the purposes of the railroad expansion and the prospect of immediate capital gains.

While it appears that Stone’s Landing becomes de-territorialized overnight, the completion of that process does not have an exact ending point; rather, de-territorialization and re-territorialization bleed into one another over a span of time as the territory is reconstituted into a purely capitalized region. As I mentioned previously, Sellers arrives shortly after this exchange and re-names Stone’s Landing to Napoleon. Notwithstanding the implications of this act on Sellers’ own character, this name change also signifies on the process of de-territorialization and re-territorialization. “Stone’s Landing,” as a name, connotes the “spirit of the place,” using Lawrence’s term. It is a signifier of the natural, physical attributes of the town and the way humans have interacted with it: they quite literally “land” there from the river. “Napoleon,” on the other hand, a name of international significance that nearly automatically connotes the spread of imperial power and presence, signifies the growing interconnectedness of a global market economy. Sellers envisions a European city that absorbs Stone’s Landing into its essence – creating a new space of national and international commerce.

After Sellers renames the city, he begins an act of cognitive mapping that soon bleeds over into actual cartographic practices. Just that morning, before Sellers arrived, the narrator describes Stone’s Landing as:

A dozen log cabins, with stick and mud chimneys, irregularly disposed on either side of a not very well defined road, which did not seem to know its own mind exactly...wandering off over the rolling prairie in an uncertain way, as if it had

started for nowhere and was quite likely to reach its destination...In the principal street of the city [was] the chief cabin, which was the store and grocery of this mart of trade...Down by the stream was a dilapidated building which served for a hemp warehouse, and a shaky wharf extended out from it into the water. (125)

Sellers' cognitive mapping begins with the destruction of this unorganized structure: "these buildings will have to come down" (127). Pointing to the scene in front of him, Sellers pontificates:

That's the place for the public square, Court House, hotels, churches, jail...Down yonder the business streets, running to the wharves. The University up there, on rising ground, sightly place, see the river for miles. That's Columbus river, only forty-nine miles to the Missouri. You see what it is, placid, steady, no current to interfere with navigation, wants widening in places and dredging, dredge out the harbor and raise a levee in front of the town; made by nature on purpose for a mart...Look at all this country...lay of the land points right here; hemp, tobacco, corn, must come here. The railroad will do it. Napoleon won't know itself in a year. (127)

The excitement of Sellers' plans results in him and Harry sitting down and beginning to "roughly map out the city of Napoleon on a large piece of drawing paper" (128). This is an important first step in the re-territorialization of space. The cartographic historian J.B Harley notes the power implications embedded in the act of mapping. Harley argues that much of the power of a map operates behind a mask of benign scientific reproduction; the social dimensions of maps are often denied even as it legitimates them. Fortunately for the readers of this text, the narrators allow us to see completely through the surveying and mapping techniques of Sellers, Harry, and

Jeff: they at least offer a gilded version of cartographic accuracy, and at worse completely disregard the scientific, Cartesian methodology of mapping. However, Harley notes that an internal power is at work within cartography that has vital, social impact on those who inhabit the platted land because the very act of manufacturing a map also manufactures power relations. Harley argues that this power “intersects and is embedded in knowledge...and to catalogue the world is to appropriate it so that all these technical processes represent acts of control over its image which extend beyond the processed uses of cartography” (18). A map requires, then, that all social action flow through its spatial matrix, ostensibly stripping away the “variety of nature, the history of the landscape, and the space-time of human experience” (19).

As the scheme for Stone’s Landing/Napoleon progresses, so too does the development of the map until it reaches a finished, physical state. In its final form, Napoleon is depicted with a “noble stream and [a] harbor, with a perfect net-work of railroads centering in it, pictures of wharves, crowded with steamboats, and of huge grain-elevators on the bank” (159). Attached to the map is a petition “with a glowing description of Napoleon and the adjacent country, and a statement of the absolute necessity to the prosperity of that region and of one of the stations on the great through route to the Pacific” (139). Speculative maps of this kind were common during this era of expansion and represented the primary selling point for lenders (see Appendix 6 for a period example of one such speculative map). In fact, they were absolutely necessary creations in order to secure the funds necessary to begin the actual, physical spatial transformation – which Seller’s map accomplishes.

Though we are not, unfortunately, privy to see this particular map, a few key elements in its description reveal the changing spatial structure of capitalism and how the inhabitants of this new city are meant to attach themselves to place in a different way. Harry and Sellers take

Senator Dillworthy to Stone's Landing to "sell" the prospect of Napoleon. Dillworthy queries, "Is this Napoleon?" The Colonel responds, "This is the nucleus, the nucleus...Here is the deepo, the church, the City Hall and so on" (149). With Dillworthy still skeptical, Harry and Sellers unfold the map and regale the Senator with all of the notable attributes of the region. Rather than the natural and organic, albeit dilapidated, setting of Stone's Landing, the town now has a "nucleus," or a well-defined center.²⁹ The rest of the town is structured on a grid, which directs the flow of people, goods, and services towards the center with nearly mechanized speed. And, of course, the ultimate centering mechanism is the "depo" and the "perfect network of railroads centering it" (159). By centering the town on the "depo," Sellers explodes the previously local, organic center of habitation. The new center is a site of speed, transit, and the flow of goods and capital. In fact, this kind of centering ultimately de-centers the larger territory: the implications for Napoleon and other such towns is that they become an interconnected grid of smaller "centers" that exist solely to connect to the ultimate territorial entity, the state apparatus.

This is not the only map Sellers constructs. Sellers' wife, one of the few outspoken skeptics of his schemes, questions whether or not Sellers will be able to provide their next meal, much less a massive payoff from the Napoleon speculation. Sellers, flustered that she would even suggest such a thing, reminds her of the railroad – the emblem of profitability – and settles into the table to map out again why Napoleon stands to offer so much. Sellers creates this new map by arbitrarily grabbing objects from the table and laying them out in a line (see Appendix 7). He exclaims, "And we'll lay this fork (representing the railroad) from St Louis to this potato, which is Slouchburg: Then with the carving knife we'll continue the railroad from Slouchburg to Doodleville, shown by the black pepper..." and so on (194). By the end, Sellers has filled the

²⁹ This centering harkens back to one of the inconsistencies of capitalist expansion. As Harvey notes, in an effort to minimize distance – erase space – capitalism inevitably *produces* new space, which results in small strings of false centers.

table with inanimate objects that stand proxy for towns, bridges, rail-stations, and rivers before assuring his wife that “there’s a good time coming, and it’ll be right along before you know what you’re about, too” (196). Christopher Morris argues that the map “is a bold anticipation of the world of the Derridian ‘postal,’ where all signs are arbitrary and anything can represent anything” (231). It is hard to argue with this conclusion, though I find this map drawn by Sellers deeply ironic beyond a mere representation of deconstruction. Sellers’ wife’s argument is grounded in the effects of their immediate place (or what is left of them). She recognizes the dangerous shift that Sellers’ vision represents. But Sellers’ rebuttal, the drawing of the map, takes the very place-connections in front of them and re-purposes them as analogues for a new, capitalist world order. Not only does Sellers continue the motif of irreducibly reconstructing the spatial organization of both the social and geographic world he lives in, he does so on such a subconscious level that he cannot see the folly in the very map he draws. Of course, the irony of this map is multi-faceted: before Sellers can even finish his speech of assurance, a messenger delivers the letter that will prove ruinous for the Napoleon venture. Harry’s letter describes how the congressional appropriation was “never intended for anything but a mere nest egg for the future and real appropriations to cluster around” (200). In fact, it turns out, Sellers’ himself owed \$118,254.42 to his creditors for money spent in Washington by congressional representatives on parties and fundraisers.

Ultimately, the speculative attempt to direct the railway through Napoleon fails. But even the speculative nature of the venture *still* reoriented the spatial configuration of Stone’s Landing. The river will always bear the mark of the canal cut through its loop, and Sellers and Harry both “threw a lot or two on the market...and they sold well” (180). One of the consequences of this failure, though, falls on the shoulders of the workforce hired to construct this city. Because of the

delay of the \$200,000 appropriation (and ultimately because that money was bribed away), the workforce forms a mob and forces Sellers' hand, which he appeases temporarily by giving them a "lot in the suburbs of the city of Stone's Landing" (182). Sellers, always selling futures, escapes with his hide intact, but leaves the men with "no money, and nothing to live on" (182). But their willingness to "buy in" to Sellers' schemes even amidst their own exploitation reveals a thoroughly re-territorialized mentality because the spread of capitalism restructures both the spatial and social paradigm of the local, unorganized work force. The men accept future plots in a town despite that town's tenuous existence. They are responsible for constructing it without funds for materials, even while knowing they cannot be paid.

The exploitation of the laborers of Napoleon demonstrates on a small scale the un-just spatial and social implications of capitalist expansion. Sellers' next speculative attempt, one that becomes embroiled in national politics and catches the attention of the entire nation, is the sale of the Hawkins' Tennessee land. These concluding pages will address this land sale while linking back to the conclusion of *Huckleberry Finn*, with a focus on Jim's imprisonment at the hands of Huck and Tom. Sellers' final speculative enterprise has one key difference from the Napoleon campaign: the primary selling point is the building up of a class of laborers in the South. Under the guise of altruism, Senator Dillworthy plans to establish the "Knobs Industrial University" through a purchase of land by the United States Government. The proponents of the bill argue that:

What the South needed...was skilled labor. Without that it would be unable to develop its mines, build its roads, work to advantage and without great waste its fruitful land...Its laborers were almost altogether unskilled. Change them into intelligent, trained workmen, and you increased at once the capital, the resources

of the entire South...God had given us the care of the colored millions, should we leave them without tools? (319).

After the Civil War, Southern landowners held formerly enslaved Africans in a sharecropping system that exploited an unorganized labor force, coercing them into what was, essentially, another method of slavery. An opportunity to “make good” on purported humanistic qualities seemed like a good political move for Dillworthy, but larger issues underlie this Tennessee Knobs bill. In Doreen Massey’s *Spatial Divisions of Labour* (1984), she posits that “different regions have allotted to them, in different spatial structures, particular bundles of functions within the overall relations of production. It is what is often referred to as ‘the role of the region’ in the country as a whole. And this in turn means that the geography of dominance and subordination can take many forms” (99). It is important to note that the politics of Washington D.C. and the Northern United States in general envisioned this project as fundamentally *industrial*. Altruism aside, the gaze of the industrial North could only be swayed to the South if it offered room for industrial growth – a regional role it had previously left unfulfilled. In a sense, this bill represents a cosmic carpet-bagging scheme, devised simply under the guise of “labor improvement.”

Why build a University then? Why increase the labor output of the locals when sending swarms of workers South would also do the trick? In short, as David Harvey notes, capitalists prefer a stable, reliable, and *captive* labor supply (*Spaces* 331). By establishing a University, the local labor force can partake in a basic, socially reproductive process that primes the region for enduring production. Thus, the region of East Tennessee is ultimately not serving itself, but fulfilling the national desires of industrial output (and filling the pockets of the already wealthy robber-barons). This is where, again, the capitalist fix, the great conundrum of capitalist

expansion, comes into play: capital and labor power must be frozen in space through the construction of spatial fixtures (in this case, a University) in order to facilitate a steady flow of goods and services that further perpetuates the annihilation of space. By grounding the exploitable labor force to a specific locale, Dillworthy and his congressional comrades are free to continue chasing other capital ventures.

This scheme from *The Gilded Age* and Jim's capture in Pikesville from *Huck Finn*, when Tom and Huck artificially draw out Jim's imprisonment in order to educate him in the "proper" way to be a prisoner, seem to be different only in matters of scale. In the same way that the plot of *The Gilded Age* returns to an insulated, isolated, and prototypically Southern setting, so too does Twain carry his fugitives out of a border space and into the ethereal, strangely benign setting of the Deep South. Huck and Tom's extended engagement with Jim's imprisonment represents a far more localized effort to contain and define blackness. How Huck and Tom devise a scheme for Jim's escape is similar in two significant ways to the Knobs Industrial Bill, and each point to a similar structural consequence. First, Huck and Tom go to great lengths to assure themselves that their extended scheme for freeing Jim is altruistic – that they themselves are righteous and their prolonged imprisonment of Jim, where they admittedly "invent all the difficulties," has a purpose. Despite Huck's misgivings, he eventually concedes that "one thing was dead sure and that was, that Tom Sawyer was in earnest and was actually going to help steal that nigger out of slavery" (272). And this, for Huck, was the only affirmation of his altruism needed. The second similarity is that their plan to draw out Jim's imprisonment, to give it a "meaning" that they ascribe, is to provide him an education. This education is benign enough – at first Tom sets out to teach Jim to write. But it quickly devolves, even working to further

criminalize Jim as Tom tells him he has a “perfect right to steal anything on the property” (279) and encourages him to slip trinkets away from visitors to his cell.

Jim’s jail scene continues a long string of similar moments where Huck affirms Jim’s value, both morally and ethically, and then immediately participates in actions that either limit Jim’s personhood or jeopardize his physical safety. My insistence earlier in the chapter that Jim separates his identity from his own body had two-fold implication. On one hand, an insistence on the physical body allowed Jim to contextualize his freedom within a separate but parallel narrative of manifest destiny – he viewed his body as cargo that had to overcome the limitations and dangers of geographic confinement and mobility. Jim’s body became the trick. But Jim’s body, especially in the case of his jail scene, also reveals an almost inherent impulse to confine black bodies and subject them to gross mistreatment and assault, all while morally and intellectually maintaining a perception of righteousness. This pattern – and the pattern is reaffirmed with the Knobs Bill – is a manifestation of the construct of whiteness, which holds the power of domination and exclusion. These captive, enslaved bodies, contemporary writer and cultural critic Ta-Nehisi Coates argues, were turned to fuel for the American machine, their confined bodies subjected to both direct executions of this power through the various manifestations of the institutions of slavery and later, lynching, and indirect, insidious manifestations, such as redlining (70) and, I’d argue, the Knobs University Bill.

The Knobs University Bill is a risky business for the Senators, indeed. On one hand, the erection of the University ensures the grounded locality of a labor population, but it also brings the potential for the labor force to organize, gain power, and move beyond their exploitation. This can result in a “chronic instability to regional and spatial configurations, a tension within the geography of accumulation between fixity and motion, between the rising power to overcome

space and the immobile spatial structures required for such purpose” (*Spaces* 332). But this speculative enterprise also fails and the Knobs Industrial University never comes to fruition. The novel ends on an odd note, with the introduction of a new character and the conclusion of a long, speculative venture completely separated from Sellers and his troop. The final three chapters of the novel point to both Twain and Warner’s growing concern over the interconnectedness of a national, capitalist economy as well as a portrayal of the ideal of American exceptionalism separated from capitalist strictures. After Laura Hawkins’ death, the narrator shifts abruptly to Clay Hawkins, the long-lost brother of Washington and Laura. We find out that following the “migratory and speculative instinct of our age and our people, [Clay] had wandered further and further westward upon trading ventures. Settling finally in Melbourne, Australia, he ceased to roam, became a steady-going substantial merchant, and prospered greatly” (433). As I argued in the introduction, Twain and Warner foresaw not an imperialist, territorial conquest in the politics of American foreign policy, but the slow, creeping fingers of capitalism spreading outward into the rest of the world. Without going into the detail of Clay’s business pursuits, we are led to believe that Clay established a paradigm of capitalist ventures equally as phony and self-serving to that of Sellers, Washington, and Harry.

But the concluding images are most striking in their divergence from the patterns of the novel affirmed again and again by Sellers, Washington, Clay, and Harry. Phillip physically separates himself from both the larger centers of production on the East coast as well as the endless politicking involved in land speculation. Phillip’s version of industrialization maintains an agrarian ideal, where he reads the “Charming landscape [and] woody ridges” (442) like a textbook, searching for veins of coal and swinging his pick “with hearty good will” (443). Casting off all semblances of capitalist industrialization, Phillip leaves behind his workers and

demonstrates a rugged individualism exemplary of the myth of American exceptionalism as he mines by himself in the hills of Pennsylvania. The narrator notes that Philip was “born into a time when all young men of his age caught the fever of speculation, and expected to get on in the world by the omission of some of the regular processes which have been appointed from old” (358). Phillip undeniably contracted this fever, but saw through the great “omission” of the rest of his peers – the actual, physical labor required to procure material wealth. The final exchange between Philip and Ruth bears striking parallels to the scene of Sellers and his wife at the table. After the mine is secured and begins producing coal – an amount that will be “a fortune to them all” (448) – Phillip and Ruth read a letter from their friend, Alice. Instead of bearing ruinous news – as the letter for Sellers did – Phil and Ruth simply conclude from the letter from Alice that “our own lives are so full” (449).

I find Twain and Warner’s conclusion both troublesome and unsatisfactory on several levels. While their fear of a global capitalist economy highlights the danger posed by the annihilation of both time and space for the local economy and the labor market, their portrayal of the idyllic Phillip is just that: an ideal. A half-century later, a group of scholars at Vanderbilt, *The Southern Agrarians*, would proffer a similar response to industrialization that was equally troublesome in both its racial implications and its practical application.³⁰ Above all else, the Agrarian ideal idolized local production, local education, and a local sense of place. In the end, Philip’s very localized venture brings forth real, tangible capital, but only for himself and select

³⁰ For example, the official position of the Agrarians on race is found in Robert Penn Warren’s essay “The Briar Patch,” published in the manifesto *I’ll Take My Stand*. Warren asserts that “the hope and safety of everyone concerned rested in the education of the negro,” though he argues that this education should only point black Southerners to trades, making them “competent workmen or artisans... and giv[ing] him a vocation” (Warren 250). Sold as progress though barely even bothering to obscure racist ideologies, Warren reminds readers that black Southerners are “creatures of the small town and farm. That is where he still chiefly belongs, *by temperament and capacity*” (emphasis added, 260).

others, furthering the familiar pattern of flows of wealth and capital that passed over most and landed on very few. And while casting off his crew of laborers is implicitly lauded in this context, they are left no better off than the laborers of Napoleon (or the fictitious laborers of Knobs Industrial University, or the imaginary black tradesmen of the Southern Agrarians' fantasy). In short, the rapid onset of global capitalism in the late 19th century also globalized cultural production in such a way that an Agrarian ideal was no longer attainable. The new global market created an environment where space was rapidly shrinking. When this new marketplace encountered a sharp, physical rise in population, from nearly 40 million in 1870 to 80 million at the turn of the century, America began running out of both physical and cultural space to preserve an Agrarian ideal on the scale Twain and Warner advocate and the Southern Agrarians eventually call for.

Twain and Warner's concerns, though, are well grounded, as they both recognize the ebb and flow of wealth and power amidst periods of massive spatial redistribution and organization. Returning to the Knobs Industrial University reveals an ideology as gilded as the robber barons and members of Congress attempting to pass it. The end desire of an education system for black Southerners (one that ostensibly creates "adequate" workers) was not to set them up for "a prosperous industrial career" (319), but to create a space with a captive labor force that could efficiently mine the "valuable property...full of iron ore, copper, coal, – everything you can think of" (45). The failure to amass appropriate funding for the University signals a clear and distinct discomfort on the part of Twain and Warner, though the seeming antithesis of the Knobs Industrial University, Philip, still reveals a relationship with place and space that is fraught with tension and competing ideologies. Even Philip's integrity, work ethic, and ultimate success falls under the all-encompassing nomenclature of "gilded." The narrator, describing Philip as a

“person of consideration,” observes that “the words of the proprietor of a rich coal mine have a golden sound, and his common sayings are repeated as if they were solid wisdom” (444). This phrasing causes us to question whether Philip’s wisdom is, in fact, solid, or whether he is simply followed without question. While Twain and Warner clearly elevate the image of Philip, his last name, “Sterling,” still implies the shiny avarice of a capitalist economy.

CHAPTER 3: Frenetic Space and Faulkner's Design

Plumb-Lines

Darl's narration of the opening scene in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* suggests a specific pattern of movement, demonstrated by a precise description of him and his brother Jewel walking through a cotton field and around a cottonhouse. This pattern is a subtle overture of the key spatial features of the novel and an engagement with Faulkner's larger topographic project of Yoknapatawpha County. The scene reveals a powerful mapping of place and suggests a complex relationship between that place and its inhabitants. I will quote the passage at length:

Jewel and I come up from the field, following the path in single file. Although I am fifteen feet ahead of him, anyone watching us from the cottonhouse can see Jewel's frayed and broken straw hat a full head above my own. The path runs straight as a plumb-line, worn smooth by feet and baked brick-hard by July, between the green rows of laidby cotton, to the cottonhouse in the center of the field, where it turns and circles the cottonhouse at four soft right angles and goes on across the field again, worn so by feet in fading precision. The cottonhouse is of rough logs, from between which the chinking has long fallen. Square, with a broken roof set at a single pitch, it leans in empty and shimmering dilapidation in the sunlight, a single broad window in two opposite walls giving onto the approaches of the path. When we reach it I turn and follow the path which circles the house. Jewel, fifteen feet behind me, looking straight ahead, steps in a single stride through the window. Still staring straight ahead, his pale eyes like wood set into his wooden face, he crosses the floor in four strides with the rigid gravity of a cigar store Indian in patched overalls and endued with life from the hips down, and steps in a single stride through the opposite window and into the path again just as I come around the corner. In single file and five feet apart and Jewel now in front, we go on up the path toward the foot of the bluff. (3-4)

Darl describes a path that runs directly to a center, "straight as a plumb-line." A plumb line is a very indicative metaphor, as it is both a figure of speech for a "means of testing or judging" as well as an actual instrument used for determining vertical distances, comprised of a "line or cord with a weight at one end" (OED). The spatial rhetoric used to describe the brothers' location relative to one another – "ahead...above...behind...and Jewel now in front" implies a race or test between them, based on the transitions in their relative positioning along the plumb-line. And as

with an actual plumb-line, the center-mass of the weight pulls the cord into a straight line, allowing for precise measurements. If the cord is “the path” through the laidby cotton, the cottonhouse is the center mass of weight, the object that strikes order to the surrounding landscape and straightens the path for efficient movement. It is spatially heavy, thick.

The two brothers follow the path between laidby cotton. This is cotton in its final stages of growth, having been cultivated, hoed, and protected against weeds and grasses repeatedly for several months. The material and labor investment of laidby cotton is already quite high, and these final growth stages determine the size of the cotton boll and ultimately the crop yield. These smaller rows follow the same pattern as the footpath, forming a grid of well-maintained structure and order that ultimately flow through the cottonhouse. When the path encounters the cottonhouse, it forms a traffic circle, encircling the central building “at four soft right angles” before exiting behind it along the same line as it entered. Despite the streamlined flow of traffic around the building, it is Jewel’s ability to better navigate the center mass of the cottonhouse which allows him to leave the scene in front of Darl, as opposed to behind. Interestingly, the cottonhouse seems to be without a door;³¹ only two parallel windows grant access to the interior. This served a functional purpose for cotton storage, but it also means that this space was largely

³¹ Cottonhouses were located in the center of fields for efficiency. Larger storage facilities were sometimes used, but these smaller cottonhouses usually consisted of a scale for weighing bags of cotton, and 1-2 small windows that could be opened to empty the sacks of cotton. This photo features day laborers weighing sacks of cotton at a doorless cotton house at the Marcella Plantation in the Mississippi Delta:



meant to exclude human traffic. The cottonhouse draws and directs traffic to itself but then precludes itself from direct contact, unless someone familiar enough with its features is able to bisect, or otherwise transgress, this rule of order.³²

The design of the cottonhouse and its associative flows of traffic and commerce should sound familiar, as it also describes the main road running South to North towards Jefferson – a road that runs directly into the Courthouse before taking four soft corners as it circles about the center and continues on in straight precision out the north side of town.³³ Both roads are worn down by human traffic, and travelers must learn the best way to navigate around the center before reaching their own destination. These two traffic patterns, with corners shaved off to decrease travel-time, reveal a constant theme across Faulkner’s stories of tension between time and space. For example, Darl connects the path through the laidby cotton with the passage of time, noting it is “worn smooth by feet and baked brick-hard by July.” These footprints are left in “fading precision” as physical markers of different moments in time. Critic John Simon has observed that these footprints give the impression that “time seems contained in the land” (6). Later in the text, when Vardaman sits outside the drug store on the edge of the square, he looks up and notices the “lights in the trees around the courthouse,” and connects those moving lights – both in the trees and their reflection in the store windows – with the clock on the courthouse, “which is not dark” (249). This image of circular lights and the constant passage of time are

³² The act of jumping in and out of windows seems to always carry significance in the Faulkner cosmos, and many times these window-crossings act as portals into other spatial configurations. For example, in *Light in August*, Lena “could have used the door” to escape, but instead, she jumped out of the window and thus propelled herself away from Doane’s Mill and towards Jefferson. Joe Christmas first enters Joanna Burden’s home through a window, and does so repeatedly as he crosses from the shed to the big house, and he later attacks Hightower by jumping through his house window.

³³ In a brief essay, “The Geometric Design of *As I Lay Dying*,” Darryl Hattenhauer argues that “the cottonhouse is analogous to the coffin.” To this observation, he supplies a footnote, noting an alternative reading, “the center of Oxford’s town square might also have inspired the cottonhouse in the opening scene.” (147). Similarly, Gabriele Gutting has argued that the “Bundren place is strongly evocative of the wheel image formed by Yoknapatawpha with its central county seat and its four main roads” (24). While critics have noted these similarities in passing, I believe they call for in-depth review.

repeated twice before “the light winks out” of the interior room occupied by the pharmacist and Dewey Dell (250). At this moment, time slows down considerably. This change of pace is measured in a decrease of visual markers around the square and an increase in auditory cues. Vardaman can apparently no longer see the light of the courthouse clock, which is darkened now. Instead of bright lights, he hears a cow “clopping” for a “long time.” The onomatopoeic “clopping” tics off three times in the short paragraph, almost as if it is a metronome sounding the passage of time, while Vardaman repeats in five straight sentences variations of the phrase “a long time.” However, as soon as Dewey Dell emerges, the cow disappears, and time seems to catch back up to the moment, as she remarks that “it’s late.”³⁴ Perhaps the most clear textual parallel between the two loci is the brothers’ varying ability to navigate the center: if the cottonhouse stands proxy for the courthouse, then Jewel’s ability to come from behind Darl (a position he often holds as the family travels along the road) and overtake him by manipulating the center culminates in their arrival in Jefferson, as Jewell manipulates the justice system, has Darl arrested, and sends him to an insane asylum while the rest of the family gains access to their material wants.

The inter-textual evidence that links the small cotton house and the county Courthouse is also compelling. In an oft-cited passage from *Requiem for A Nun*, the narrator gives a historical, layered rendering of the formation of Jefferson, Mississippi. The story begins in pre-colonial, possibly even pre-human history, but quickly develops into a portrait of the formative days of the city. The history lesson culminates with a description of the city center, designed and plotted by Sutpen’s French architect: “a square, the courthouse in its groove the center; quadrangular around it, the stores, two storey, the offices...each in its ordered place; the four broad diverging

³⁴ Critics of *The Sound and the Fury* have noted a similar phenomenon, that Benjy’s habitual drive around the courthouse occurs in a counter-clockwise motion, indicating his less than normal experience of time as it is measured in spatial movement.

avenues straight as plumb-lines in the four directions, becoming the network of roads and by-roads until the whole county would be covered with it” (200). Much like the opening scene of *As I Lay Dying*, this description of Jefferson begins with measured, straight lines. Sutpen’s architect plotted out the square and foundations with “stakes and hanks of fishline.” The design is ergonomically shaped to suit traffic, and the main roads extend from the center using the same material metaphor: a “plumb-line.” This time, instead of the small cottonhouse straightening out the paths leading to and from its center, the courthouse provides the adequate metaphorical weight to impose a grid of order and meaning on the entire county. This design, much like the rows of laidby cotton that echo the design of the walking path, straightens what is actually curved, streamlines movement rather than impeding.

Unpacking this short encounter reveals a great deal about the rest of *As I Lay Dying*, a novel chiefly concerned with the difficulty of spatial movement. It also foreshadows Faulkner’s cartographic impulses as evidenced in his first mapping project of Yoknapatawpha County, published in the 1936 edition of *Absalom, Absalom!* (see Appendix 8,9, & 10 for the three versions of Faulkner’s map). Before turning to Faulkner’s cartography and back to the texts, I’d like to summarize the key elements of the opening scene in *As I Lay Dying* as a way of establishing a broad, theoretical underpinning of the spatial patterns of movement I’ve suggested. To begin, I’d like to make a simple observation that the cottonhouse, in this instance, is also a similar spatial structure as “the Jar” from Wallace Stevens poem, “Anecdote of the Jar”.³⁵ The

³⁵ “I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

jar's roundness is emphasized, and this shape seems to spread out from that compact center in a centripetal motion as the wilderness is made to "surround the hill." This spatial movement is a centering mechanism for the environment, extending characteristics of the center into seeming undifferentiated space in order to take dominion. The sprawling wilderness is brought to order by the presence of the jar, just as the rows of laidby cotton are ordered in accordance to the placement of the cottonhouse. This relationship suggests that not only is human history implicated in the environment, but that the environment is a process – not a constant, fixed attribute - alongside the development of human activity. Faulkner nearly states this phenomenon directly in *RFN*, noting that cotton is "a commodity in the land now which until now had dealt first in Indians, then in acres and sections and boundaries: - an economy: Cotton: a king: omnipotent and omnipresent" (304). But the jar is also a manufactured item, not derivative of the Tennessee environment, and the same is true for the Cottonhouse. Both are centering mechanisms acting as smaller avatars of a more dominant center, their attributes stemming either from where they were produced or where they were purchased. But the ordering function of the jar is also largely the matter of perspective; the order imposed on the land is given in the poem from the point of view of the jar (or the hand placing the jar): it is still an arbitrary, relative quality of being centered. For example, the wilderness is presented as unordered, but the very act of setting the poem in a particular region, describing it as sprawling and slovenly, and referencing the flora and fauna implies an established form and order to the region already, just one separate from the jar. The poem seems to give primacy to the jar, but the third stanza reveals a tension between the manufactured object, its purpose, and the environment. The jar is pure

It took dominion everywhere.
 The jar was gray and bare.
 It did not give of bird or bush,
 Like nothing else in Tennessee."

form and principle, it does not change shape or reproduce itself; instead, it influences the structure and shape of the environment around it, projecting its form onto the built and natural world. The jar has an effect on the environment, but it is not able to internalize the reproductive energy of the world that surrounds it. The two exist in uneasy tension.

Both the jar and the cotton house exist as small centering mechanisms for their immediate environment, each sharing attributes with a larger center. But the scale of influence of each smaller center is clearly limited. For example, the opening scene frames the cottonhouse as the center of the field, but by the end of the scene, the two brothers stand at the edge of the field looking up at a bluff that blocks their path towards the Bundren home. The cottonhouse centers the paths through the field and the rows of cotton, but it is not the center of even the Bundren farm. A literal wall separates the spatial center of the cottonhouse and the rest of their property. The bluff seems like a clear indication that the sphere of influence the cotton house might have on spatial movement is no longer relevant. This kind of false centering, or scalular deception, also mimics its larger center, the courthouse. In a similar fashion, the courthouse is clearly centered on Faulkner's map – and each map he produced locates the courthouse roughly as “the center, the focus, the hub” (*RFN* 201) of the county. The legend of the map also indicates that Yoknapatawpha County is 2,400 square miles.³⁶ The map shows an area less than half that number, and assuming the county is not an exact geometric shape, the courthouse is almost definitely not the geographic center of the county, though the map would lead one to that assumption. This false centering is reinforced with the reprinting of the *Absalom, Absalom!* text and map in 1951 for the Modern Library, which added – among other things – hard, fast borders to the map edges that mean nothing within the context of the borders of the county. The original

³⁶ As a useful analog, the area of Lafayette, MS is roughly 650 miles.

map produced by Faulkner and published in the 1936 text did not contain these boundary markings and left the edges of the map open to space.

The Courthouse

The Cottonhouse and the Courthouse are clearly two related centers, one with more dominance over the region than the other. But they are different, and the false centering of the cottonhouse works on multiple levels. The cottonhouse reflects a flow from the center that is chiefly concerned with commerce and economics. But even as it imitates the center, it fails in this regard: the real center, the ordering mechanism that radiates out from the hub, is the law. The larger center acts as a regulatory mechanism on this smaller center, even if the mode of production of the smaller center is different, because the law is not always a material flow,³⁷ it regulates material flows. Cinzia Scarpino identifies “chronotopes of law,” arguing that in Faulkner’s South, “race, gender, and class are fixed in juridical practices quite impervious to social change...[his novels] evoke the prominent role of customary law in ruling class, race and gender disputes within the local communities.” This kind of customary law extends out from the ruling center, but often “operates below (or above) courtrooms and jails, through violent actions such as burnings at the stake, lynching, castrations, and rapes” (99). Scarpino observes that Faulkner’s use of time – looping, circling, repeating – creates a system where the law is represented under a static, historical framework. Drawing on the work of legal scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Scarpino describes the legal system as a sedimented terrain, a “geological construct made of different laws composing different layers” (100). She argues that these layers –in Faulkner and in the South – are often the same repetitions of judicial law, while their associative new spatial and cultural layers are not. The law doesn’t develop alongside social

³⁷ Law enforcement officers, patrollers, marshals, and official agents of the law represent material flows of the law.

progress evenly, and the legal system is “impervious to juridical adjustment...resistant to incorporating new layers of law” (102).

Again, pointing to the image of a plumb line and its associative quality of “testing or judging,” the plumb line that leads to the cottonhouse also leads to the cotton scale, a material reminder of both judicial and customary law, where sacks of cotton are weighed, tallied, and sorted, theoretically ensuring laborers and land owners a fair deal. The center exists to support the law, and this is problematic because the law is, as Karla Holliday argues, fictitious.³⁸ Holliday writes specifically within the context of racial identity in America, but her observations are far-reaching. She argues, for example, that racial identitarianism, stemming from its origins within the law, has a “persistent and social iteration that gains a substantive and familiar presence through its consistent and evolving engagements even, and especially, when these are fiction” (5). Holliday argues that this slow evolution manifests itself in such a way that freedom and enslavement become equivalent to states of being as well as geographic locations: the fictions of the law become manifest on the environment, echoing too the work of de Sousa Santos. Because the law variously regulates race, gender, social contracts of all kinds, economics, and trade, it spreads its influence outward into other smaller centers. However, in Faulkner’s world, smaller centers often highlight a space where a specific aspect of the law is both being enforced and transgressed, simultaneously. Jay Watson summarizes this dynamic of the law well, arguing that the law in Faulkner is a “vast and multidimensional affair: at once a deeply normative cultural system, a vehicle of ideology (in its constructive and destructive manifestations), a force of social stability and control, an entrenched and often blindly self-

³⁸ Thadious Davis’ *Games of Property* (2003) offers a compelling analysis of the function of law and property ownership in *Go Down, Moses*.

interested institution...the practice of law...extends from the official space of the courtroom to the farthest reaches of the community” (3).

I am interested in how the law manifests itself spatially, coming to dominate the entire county. It does so by establishing many smaller centers analogous to the cottonhouse in the Bundren field; other examples include Joanna Burden’s house, Varner’s store, Sutpen’s Hundred, and Hightower’s house. An image that often accompanies these smaller centers – which I will address in detail later in the text – is the image of the hub and the wheel. This image is also used repeatedly throughout Faulkner’s corpus to describe the courthouse center (most notably by Gavin Stevens in *The Town*). It is also used, significantly, to describe the dark Burden house perched on a hill from *Light in August*. At the beginning of the “second phase” of their relationship, Christmas muses, conjuring up images of her “sitting for that unvarying period at the scarred desk, or talking, listening, to the negro women who came to the house from both directions up and down the road, following paths which had been years in the wearing and which radiated from the house like wheelspokes” (257). All the hallmarks of a center are found in this compact mental image: a central hub that draws and directs social life, layered on the earth over periods of time. Much like the cottonhouse, and the courthouse, the Burden home arrests motion. It is the endpoint for the spoke-paths leading towards and away from the house. Doreen Fowler observes in *Faulkner: The Return of the Repressed* that Lena and Hightower form “concentric circles around a horrific center, the murder of Joanna Burden, as if the dark narrative at the novel’s core needed somehow to be contained.” This horrific center has a spatial analog: the shuttered Burden home, whose interior contains the acts of transgression (until it is burned, like the courthouse). The Burden home, much like Hightower’s, Sutpen’s, or Pettibone’s, is selectively open to penetration. For Christmas to take part in the center, he must transgress its

boundary by jumping through windows. Also like its larger center, even though it is largely cut off from human contact, the Burden home directs and facilitates flows of information. With great consistency, Burden engages in a constant stream of contact with “fifty different postmarks” across the country, and she subsequently believes that Christmas’ best opportunity for upward mobility lay in the pursuit of the law. Access to the law, for Christmas, is a way of “helping [other Negroes] out of darkness,” but it is also a tool to fend off the danger of the law itself and insulate against the manifestations of legal structures born out of a desire to protect whiteness.

My case for linking smaller centers with the act of transgression and crossing boundaries is a way of commenting on the nature of the ur-center itself, the Courthouse. My assertion is that the courthouse is far from a holy site, the “Archetypal image of the sacred center” (57) as put forward by Gutting, or the “standard supreme moral orientation for generations of Jeffersonians” (20) as argued by Kenny Crane in “The Jefferson Courthouse”; instead, the courthouse is a site of profanity, and its subsequent impact on the smaller centers it inspires is also profane.³⁹ These smaller centers often reveal patterns of economic disadvantage and act as spatial containers for moments when social contracts fall apart. Lafe and Dewey Dell must “pick on down the row” long enough to fill a sack full of cotton before they can engage in sexual relations – the demands of the center have to be satisfied before anything else can happen. They are contained by the imperial grid of cotton, but feel compelled to hide from the regulating eye of the center, even after ensuring Dewey Dell’s sack is full. Jewel, too, is failed by this smaller center. While he is able to overtake Darl on the plumb line path, he is only able to do so because the cottonhouse is

³⁹ Crane utilizes Eliade’s concept of “sacred” and “profane” from his 1957 text *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion* to place the courthouse as the righteous *axis mundi* of the county. I will use the same concept to complicate that assertion. Eliade asserts that sacred space represents the possibility for differentiation, heterogeneousness, and differing purpose. These possibilities are oriented around a sacred center and represent a common set of communal values. The profane space remains disintegrated, unorganized, and homogeneous. Eliade notes that the profane space often produces or is occupied by demons or demonic, perverse people. (Summarized from Chapter 1).

empty, holding nothing. The cottonhouse represents economic order and stability, but Jewell must secretly work a neighbor's field at night in order to obtain enough money to purchase a horse. And, to return to *LIA*, Joanna and Christmas' various interactions within the house provide a glimpse into the assorted social contracts that are profaned within the walls of her home: she violates virtually all regulations of her puritanical heritage, which are supported by the socially legislative laws prohibiting miscegenation. She holds Christmas at gunpoint, paradoxically threatening him with violence unless he prays. In her quest for racial reconciliation, she turns Christmas into an othered subject, constructing his blackness as an exotic object for her pleasure. From the outside, the home orders and centers social life; yet the interior is hollow, void of meaning and demarcation, the site of profanity and transgression.

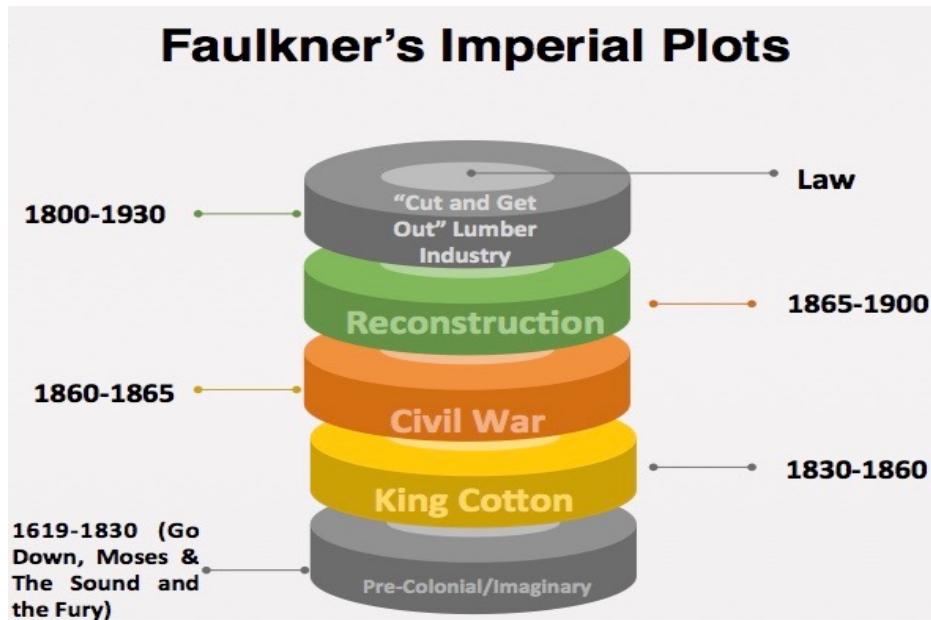
I'd like to take a moment to summarize the introduction, as the previous paragraph signals a pivot. My reading of the text shows that Faulkner establishes a core-periphery binary in the spatial makeup of Yoknapatawpha County. This binary creates an organized grid of commerce that spreads into space by establishing smaller centers that – in theory – practically carry out the demands of the law and enforce social order. This pattern is reminiscent of the westward spatial expansion I examined in Chapter 2 with Mark Twain and *The Gilded Age*. In that particular spatio-temporal frame, the ultimate spatial centering mechanism was the train depot, as opposed to the courthouse. These depots connected smaller centers together, organizing life according to the flow of material wealth. Critics have noted this center-periphery pattern before in Faulkner's work. For example, Nicole Moulinoux argues in her essay "From Mapmaker to Geographer" that "the core-periphery model used by Faulkner to characterize Jefferson in 1833 is that of the domination of a frontier village reigning over zones of virgin land" (57). Drawing on the work of John Friedman, Moulinoux divides Yoknapatawpha into four

types of regions: “core regions, with a high potential for innovation and growth; the upward transition regions; the resource-frontier region open to settlement; and finally downward-transition regions, peripheral zones with declining rural economies” (56). Moulinoux argues that this model is “not to be questioned” until the arrival of Sutpen, who “will deny the supremacy of Jefferson” (57). Gabrielle Gutting also places the courthouse within this binary, noting the many attributes of the “community’s sacred center” and its spreading influence on the space of Yoknapatawpha County (57).

At first glance it appears that this model not only exists in the layout of the county, but that it does indeed exert a near total authority over the region. This chapter will assert, however, that although the first part – the core-periphery model – is clearly evidenced in Yoknapatawpha County, its very existence is a geographic irony and its dominance over the region questionable. Barbara Ladd has noted the danger in imposing the core-periphery model on Faulkner’s world, as it is “a paradigm that underwrites the idea of regionalism” (5), a reading of place and space that severely limits the possibilities of Faulkner’s universe. She notes – correctly – that “centers and peripheries are themselves shifting” (5,6) on temporal and spatial scales and thus resist such hard and fast structures of order and meaning. Taylor Haygood echoes this sentiment in his excellent appraisal of Faulknerian space, *Faulkner’s Imperialism*. Haygood observes that the relationship between the center and the periphery and their relative position of power are arbitrary, temporal, and capable of reshaping themselves into previously unrecognizable configurations. Haygood approaches the text with this instability in mind, noting that Faulkner’s mythic places are “plots made up of stacks of plots, something like a stack of transparencies on an overhead projector...this opaque space renders each layer visible at the same time that it otherwise is invisible” (16). One place (or overhead slide) contains a center-periphery

configuration, but that center might also connect vertically, through mythic plots, to a periphery from a different configuration in a new slice of time. These simultaneous configurations and shifting positions creates situations where Haygood argues, “the oppressor can also be oppressed, or the oppressed can be the oppressor” and that a cultural center can be a cultural periphery, according to its temporal configuration (16). Faulkner’s world bears the tension of these shifting configurations. It is almost as if his landscape groans as it shifts underneath these liminal, binaric constraints that enable movement yet bind progress⁴⁰. Because Faulkner’s canon spans over a century, these changing spatial plots over the same latitudinal points factor prominently in the shifting hierarchies of social life, and these shifts are often marked by changes in material production or ownership, like the old Compson place, which is transformed from physical, static property into movable sums of money, or the virginal forest of Sutpen’s Hundred – until it runs against the “cut and get out” phase of the lumber industry in Mississippi 70 years later. These plots could be organized historically by their modes of production, all supported and regulated by the law, which cuts through the center of each spatial paradigm:

⁴⁰ I’m reminded again of Doreen Massey’s concept of power geometry, helpful for understanding power dynamics in relation to flows of movement and ideas of progress. She notes that models of power create unequal flows of access and movement along social classes. Her example of “movement without progress” centers on *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She observes how these *favelas* have produced some of the world’s greatest futbol players, invented the Samba, and contributed globally to music and dance, yet the people themselves are imprisoned in place by a powerful configuration of center-periphery dynamics, even as they exert influence over the geometric grid of global culture.



In order to begin breaking down the hegemonic design, I'd like to return to the image of the cottonhouse, this time noting its composition. The cottonhouse roof is caving in, while the walls are constructed of "rough logs, from between which the chinking has long fallen." The structure acts as a veneer, a false covering for an empty center. This points not only to the immediate structure's instability, but also to the volatility of the organizing structure of the core-periphery model. The instability of the empty center is displayed as soon as Jewell steps into its hollow cavity. His identity is completely transformed, for a moment becoming a "cigar store Indian dressed in patched overalls and endowed with life from the hips down" (4) under the "shimmering dilapidation" of refracted light. Haygood notes of this scene that Jewell is "the silent and silenced wooden Indian, the iconic incarnation of the colonized subject" (42). The hollow, unorganized interior unhinges its own social and racial boundaries. Jewell is racially and socially othered when occupying this center, which seemingly cannot support its own weight, collapsing its own constructions. Later in this essay, I will draw similarities between Jewell's othering and Thomas Sutpen, whose collapse in identity is similar, though on a much grander

scale. Following the logic of this argument, if smaller avatars reflect the characteristics of the ur-center, then evidence should point to the courthouse's own profane interior.

As mentioned previously, critics have perhaps hastily allowed the courthouse to assume a certain righteous primacy in the county due partly to the primacy of an entrenched idea of "sense of place" across the broader field of southern and place studies. In fact, ironically, the burning of the courthouse has been explicitly pointed to as a symbol of its enduring strength, both by characters in *RFN* and by critics. In *RFN*, the burning of the courthouse (erroneously placed in the year 1863) was hardly even a matter to be concerned with: "the courthouse survived...gutted of course and roofless, but immune, not one hair even out of the Paris Architect's almost forgotten plumb..." (*RFN* 203). Gutting argues that because the brick walls of the courthouse are still standing after the fire, "then Jefferson courthouse as a spatial object weathers the vicissitudes of history...the values it embodies defy the flames of destruction" (226). In the sense that the law is immaterial, perhaps the strength and affect of the courthouse does carry on, and the Architects' metaphorical plumb-line is still readily apparent. But reading past the complete destruction of the spatial object (which still took 25 years to restore) only to notice the walls still standing hardly conjures images of strength and stability. The foundation to rebuild the structure may be intact, but it is nevertheless exposed. In fact, the burning of the courthouse seems to reveal the exact opposite, what was there the entire time: a hollow center supported by a façade of strength and geometric precision.

When the courthouse was first constructed, it was an annex of the jail, a "log-and-mud-chinking" structure (23). As Peabody describes the plans for construction, he reminds Pettigrew that "we've already got something to put in it to make it a courthouse: that iron box that's been

in Ratcliffe's way in the store for the last ten years. Then we'll have a town" (23). Earlier in the text, this box and its contents were described in detail. The box held:

Meager, fading, dogeared, uncorrelated, at times illiterate sheaf of land grants and patents and transfers and deeds, and tax- and militia-rolls and bills of sale for slaves, and counting-house lists of spurious currency and exchange rates, and liens and mortgages, and listed rewards for escaped or stolen Negroes and other livestock, and diary-like annotations of births and marriages and deaths and public hangings and land-auctions...the box was removed to a small new leanto room like a wood- or tool-shed...and thus was born the Yoknapawpha County courthouse: by simple fortuity, not only less old than even the jail, but come into existence at all by chance and accident: the box containing the documents not moved from any place, but simply to one. (3-4)

These two brief passages are the only times in Faulkner's corpus that reference this black box, "a sort of iron pirate's chest" (3) that, for all intents and purposes, sinks to the bottom of Faulkner's world forgotten and never found. This disremembered object is powerful enough to transform a mud-chinked annex building into a courthouse, yet apparently insignificant enough to never be mentioned again. Locked away with a fifteen-pound iron padlock, it holds an amalgam of useless papers, inert, obsolete, and without reference, and this isolation and security is apparently what gives the courthouse viability. The box functions in a similar way to Emily Grierson's upstairs room, which contains the decomposing body of Homer Barron. The outer walls of Emily's home still stood as a reminder of order and justice, which put the town at ease, even if the majority of Jefferson felt unease with Homer's disappearance and Emily's subsequent recusal from public spaces. But when his body was found years later, there is no hint of surprise. The fact that his body was contained meant that it could be forgotten, despite the evidence of foul play. This is a space which scholars have associated with Kristeva's abject. In a similar fashion, the walls, portico, and columns: the structure of the courthouse itself supports the symbolic order, brings about meaning and order in the community. But the center holds the small black box which the entire community forgets about; it persists through time and, paraphrasing Kristeva, actually

draws one toward a place where all meaning collapses (*Powers* 2). The abject “disturbs identity, system, order...does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). The assorted contents of the box all variously established means of difference and reflect the imposed boundaries of social and racial order; these break down inside the box, fade into obscurity, become uncorrelated and illiterate – they cannot be read and meaning can no longer be derived from them. The courthouse “made” the city, but the box “made” the courthouse, and nobody knows where it is and that is meant to be where it remains.

The Wheel

The remainder of this essay builds on a simple premise: in the same way that the influence of the geometric precision of the courthouse building extends out into the county, so too does the influence of the black box, and it manifests itself spatially in flashes and shimmers of frenetic movement. These moments of freneticism reveal slippages in the imperial design, offer counter-narratives to the spatial makeup of social life; they reflect the instability of the core-periphery binary, invert and distort boundary lines. The end effect of this homogenizing force might be pointed to in Shreve’s final proclamation over the story of Thomas Sutpen: that “as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do, so they wont show up so sharp against the snow” (302). Shreve implies a homogenizing, blurring force on a global scale, but the tension is manifest on the local level first. Turning this time to *The Town*, an oft-quoted passage from Gavin Stevens reveals both forces at work simultaneously. I specifically note “oft-quoted,” but only part of this passage falls into that category. Using the Google Books digital collection of Faulkner criticism, I performed word searches to discover which parts and how often this passage was quoted in published, academic books. That number itself was high (at least 40), but choosing a random sample of 20 books of

criticism that contained this passage, I found that all but two begin with the iconic “First is Jefferson, the center” passage, or omit the passage before it with ellipses. The critical silencing of the “myriad and frenetic, random and frantic” movement through space that preempts the image of the grand design signals an elevation, even if only subtly, of the core-periphery model of spatial construction in Yoknapatwpha without offering adequate criticism of it.

Yet it is as though light were not being subtracted from earth, drained from earth backward and upward into that cooling green, but rather had gathered, pooling for an unmoving moment yet, among the low places of the ground so that ground, earth itself is luminous and only the dense clumps of trees are dark, standing darkly and immobile—immobile out of it.

Then, as though at signal, the fireflies—lightning-bugs of the Mississippi child's vernacular—myriad and frenetic, random and frantic, pulsing; not questing, not quiring, but choiring as if they were tiny incessant appeaseless voices, cries, words. And you stand suzerain and solitary above the whole sum of your life beneath that incessant ephemeral spangling. First is Jefferson, the center, radiating weakly its puny glow into space; beyond it, enclosing it, spreads the County, tied by the diverging roads to that center as is the rim to the hub by its spokes...the record and chronicle of your native land proffered for your perusal in ring by concentric ring like the ripples on living water above the dreamless slumber of your past (330, 331)

The scene unfolds as a new telling of the Genesis creation myth. The first image is of light, separating itself from darkness. The light pools in the earth as if it is water, echoing the biblical division of dry ground and oceans. Plants, then animals follow suit. Here is where Gavin turns away from the traditional narrative. Instead of the act of creation culminating in the singular person, the individual human, the crowning achievement is the design of the county. It is not until the design has been established, which binds like an iron web, that the individual takes form. Significantly, it does so amidst “frail dust and the phantoms: - the rich alluvial river-bottom land” (331). The phrase “First is Jefferson” acts as a bit of a misnomer – a red herring that distracts from the “signal” before it, which connects the design of the city to its landscape, and the vision from atop cemetery hill is incomplete without both elements.

This passage is bookended by frenetic space, an appearance or emergence of a natural element that homogenizes the surrounding space or an individual, performing the same function as the black box. The lightning bugs appear without pattern and seemingly fill up organically the space before him, and their movement is reminiscent of the lights in the trees around the square observed by Vardaman – yet another preemptory freneticism.⁴¹ This acts as a prism on top of which the structure of the wheel is superimposed. Once the wheel is firmly in place, figures emerge amidst its grid from the “frail dust,” that seems to rise from its construction, from being dropped down on top of an existing landscape – a new, modern, faintly industrial source for the “dust of creation” from which man was made. The image of the wheel is nearly ubiquitous with the layout of Jefferson, across the Faulkner canon and Faulkner criticism. The wheel implies motion and change, and criticism generally surmises that the constant use of this image reinforces the importance of movement for Faulkner’s characters. But this particular wheel is fixed, motion arrested. It is tied and locked in place like a “web, iron thin” (331). Even Hightower’s final vision of the wheel in the sky bears forth this paradox: it “turns on...spins now, fading without progress” (*LIA* 492). Hightower’s wheel also bears the tension between the imperial design and its environment. The wheel is - much like the frail dust of Stevens’ wheel – “run in sand” (196) and later, “sand clutched” (197). Observing the image, the narrator notes: “progress now is still progress, yet it is now indistinguishable from the recent past like the already traversed inches of sand which cling to the turning wheel.”

Similar phenomenon can be observed across Faulkner’s work, where either an individual is moving, but no progress is happening, or an individual is still, and the world moves about him or her, just as the wheel spins without forward movement. For example, in *LIA*, after Lena takes

⁴¹ Even though the wheel is not described in relation to the cotton house from *AILD*, the shape and design is the same, and the “shimmering” light through the walls acts as the frenetic element that interacts with the center and reveals Jewel’s alternative identity.

out on the road from Doane's Mill, she observes a wagon "mounting the hill" toward her, and "though the mules plod in a steady and unflagging hypnosis, the vehicle does not seem to progress. It seems to hang suspended in the middle distance forever and forever, so infinitesimal is its progress" (6). Similarly, the Bundren family's entire journey to Jefferson is marked by the ongoing tension between the imperial design and the elements of the environment, between moving forward and not moving at all, drug down by laws that change too slowly for the culture around it. Their story ultimately de-centers the wheel image, showing it to be a docile, material substitute for the imperial impulse. The design promises movement, but it is fixed, bounded by the centripetal and centrifugal movement of the center-periphery design. The image of the wheel is, as Addie Bundren might say, "a shape to fill a lack." The wheel streamlines movement, but it also contains it, "enclosing it," rendering the concept of "movement" arbitrary, completely dependent on scale and perspective.

As the Bundrens begin their journey, Dewey Dell observes the signposts along the road: "The signboard comes in sight. It is looking out at the road now, because it can wait. New Hope. 3 mi. it will say. New Hope. 3 mi. New Hope. 3 mi. And then the road will begin, curving away into the trees, empty with waiting, saying New Hope three miles" (120). The center-periphery binary maps a separation in time and space. It asserts that what has been will always be, just as Gavin Stevens implies by placing the center-periphery design as the crown jewel of creation. What Dewey Dell observes is a fight against this separation, where markers of distance are "waiting" but space is not decreasing – the repetition of "3 mi." implies a stoppage of motion, even though the wagon still carries on. Darl observes the same phenomenon with his typical poetic flourishes in a scene that begins with the frenetic "mud flying beneath the flicking drive of hooves...and mud whispering on the wheels" before coalescing with an image of the wheel:

We go on, with a motion so soporific, so dreamlike as to be uninferant of progress, as though time and not space were decreasing between us and it. It turns off at right angles, the wheel marks of last Sunday healed away now: a smooth, red scoriation curving away into the pines; a white signboard with faded lettering: New Hope Church. 3 mi. It wheels up like a motionless hand lifted above the profound desolation of the ocean; beyond it the red road lies like a spoke of which Addie Bundren is the rim. (108)

Time is, again, “contained in the land” by the wheel marks of previous journeys; the only way to mark its passage is reading the faded ruts of repeated attempts at the same journey. And then an interesting exchange occurs: first, the road is described as “curving away” before it is likened to a wheelspoke – a straight, fixed line. How does one account for these two descriptors at odds with one another? Anse has offered his own version of an answer – that men had “come and switched the land around longways” (36). Anse imagines a perpendicular switch, rather than a complete change of direction. This simple mental map recreates a rudimentary cartesian grid, which divides the county into four quadrants, “lengthways and longways,” to use his terminology. Anse also observes that the men who came and “switched the land” were agents of the law (37), pointing again to the law’s regulatory power in shaping and shifting the landscape and people’s experience of it.⁴²

Most conspicuously in this scene, Darl reverts back to the image of the wheel. Whereas previous uses of this image presented a clear mental picture of a wheel often hinged on an obvious center, this wheel’s center is buried in a sea of pronouns and brought to life with a misleading verb. The “hub” of this wheel is the signboard itself, which – though fixed to the ground and made of quadrangular components, “wheels up.” The road connects the rim, Addie, directly to this center. But again, this center has proven to be false already, as it promises in a confused “tranquil assertion” a distance to their destination that does not correlate to their

⁴² This analysis of Anse is also relevant to my final argument about Faulkner’s maps, which points to the increasing prominence of vertical spatial structures, as opposed to horizontal.

experience of time. For the Bundrens who directly experience movement along the wheel spoke, this tension seems transparent. It occurs to me to revisit the alter-image of the center-periphery model, the “plumb line,” a symbol that also helps understand the “two-ness” of Faulknerian space. The fact that the string “needs straightening” by a weighted object in order to lend itself a useful tool tells us that the string itself is not straight, but it can be made so, even if its properties remain the same. I see the curved road and its corresponding “straight” metaphors operating in a similar fashion: It’s physical qualities are winding, its metaphysical qualities are streamlined and rigid; the Bundrens, in varying degrees, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes separate, experience both qualities of place and space. They are reduced to measuring time by the degree to which Addie’s corpse smells. In fact, it is not until the Bundrens finally close in on Jefferson that the signboards express movement instead of stasis. Darl observes that “we have been passing the signs for sometime now: the drug stores, the clothing stores, the patent medicine and the garages and cafes, and the mile-boards diminishing, becoming more starkly reaccruent: 3 mi. 2mi.” (226). The mile-marker signs become imbued with meaning only as they specify the material goods of the center. As Jefferson comes into view from the top of the hill, Darl observes the vultures, which followed them the entire journey, “hang in narrowing circles, like the smoke, with an outward semblance of form and purpose, but with no inference of motion, progress or retrograde” (227). As the Bundren’s journey literally does straighten out, the echoing form of circling the center follows them to the center itself, intersecting the final straight line of their progress.

The presence of the wheel as a dominating model also complicates the ways we understand the formation of place. Perspectives on place and space theory as varied as Yi-Fu Tuan’s phenomenology or Harvey’s neo-Marxist geography each stress the absolute necessity of

stasis, pauses, or permanences in order for space to become place. The image of the wheel, turning on one axis, but fixed on another, creates a false sense of place. It infers motion, but prevents progress. At the same time, it can infer a pause without ever really stopping. Both scenarios, experienced variously by members of the Bundren family, create artificial feelings of stasis that are disorienting and misleading. As Darl describes the final approach into Jefferson, he calls attention to an increasingly mechanized, industry-laden landscape. It begins with the road signs advertising material goods before Anse, Darl, and Jewell argue about whether or not they should have used a telephone. Interrupting their argument, a car comes over the hill behind them - the first sighting of an automobile in a novel that takes place almost entirely on the road. The telephone lines now run parallel to the road, and the “clock on the courthouse” comes into view (229). The hill itself then becomes mechanized, the road bordered by vertical “negro cabins” and telephone poles while the ground itself moves against them: Darl observes that they “descend as the hill commences to rise,” almost as if the Bundrens are walking down an escalator against its upward movement. The landscape’s constant shaping and reshaping of itself perpetually redefines the position of the subject, which is either locked within the borders of the wheel, or by acts of transgression moves outside its boundaries.

Sutpen’s Grand Design

The interior of the cottonhouse scrambles Jewel’s social and racial identity, revealing in a shimmering flash an “othered” portrait of a familiar shape. Thomas Sutpen is subjected to similar interiors, with similar effect on his carefully constructed identity. Earlier in this text I linked Sutpen’s Hundred to the ur-center, the courthouse. The design of the courthouse and the design of his own home are cast from the same architect’s hand and bear identical geometric designs (*AA* 10, 30). They challenge one another even as they uphold the base, impervious divisions of

the law. I won't beleaguer this point, as I think it is well-established already; instead, I'd like to pause on small, specific moments when the instability of Sutpen's "Grand Design" is revealed in spatial terms, when the wheels of its progress grind to a halt, when the interior disrupts identity as an extending effect of the courthouse black box, and when the stability of the boundaries he erects crumble. Sutpen's design, Scott Romine observes, "depends upon a highly abstracted and future-oriented use of space" (22). This design does not culminate with material goods – a house, clothes, books, belongings: these are things that are "adjunctive or incremental" to his design, components of a metaphysical super structure locked in place by material objects.⁴³ Rather, it depends on what Romine refers to as a "culturally specific articulation of spatial and institutional localizations," which operate like shadowy countersites to the broader exterior and larger center from which it desires to generate contact and relations. The end design is the ability to erect selectively permeable boundaries, thereby creating and occupying an interior, of securing spatial fixtures against what is "outside" of his boundaries. Romine's analysis concludes that, by imitation and sheer force of will, "Sutpen moves toward the fantasy of being inside, not outside, the white door, he secures certain spatial fictions and disrupts others" (24). Fowler perceives a similar connection between interiors and exteriors, noting the pivotal scene where Sutpen is turned away at the door and initiated into a model of patriarchy, order, and authority. Adopting this model, he "elects to be the planter at the door, and turns away, one after another..." (*Drawing* 32). Not without coincidence, Sutpen's embarrassment at the Pettibone door is also the first glimpse at the pattern of movement invoked by the courthouse: he is instructed to walk around to the rear of the mansion in the same pattern as the traffic circle around the square.

Haygood invokes Yi-Fu Tuan for a spatially similar moment in *The Unvaquished* where Bayard

⁴³ David Harvey also influences my thinking here, who postulates that in order for the flows of capitalism to overcome space and to triumph against the time-space continuum, one must erect permanent spatial fixtures. Put another way, to overcome space, one must put boundaries around it, hence creating new space.

and Ringo construct a map behind, rather than in front, of the smokehouse. Tuan notes that “the rear is profane...maintenance men and janitors enter through service doors at the back and move along the guts of [a] building” (2). Sutpen, disregarding the need for refined language, propriety, adherence to social norms, or even the need for narrative itself, understood at least the spatial organization of Yoknapatawpha: an imperial design with the wheel binding and locking progress in place, invoking movement and protecting the center. His center, Sutpen’s Hundred, both imitates and retaliates against the Jefferson courthouse and is “necessary to concealment” of his design.

Thinking about Sutpen as insulated, inside, and bounded finds a parallel in the many layers of narration that shape his story, which insulate his past by their continual recapitulation, allowing time to loop through spatial plots like the ruts left in the roads around Jefferson or the winding string Darl observes in the flooded Yoknapatawpha river. The narrative elements themselves also conceal, and virtually all of what we know of Sutpen is filtered through multiple layers of narration, and these narratives come from vastly different temporal positions that reflect both spatial motion and stasis. For example, in *The Hamlet*, Ratliff, Bookwright, and Armstid ride out to the decaying remains of Sutpen’s Hundred. The “old lane” that leads from the road into the plantation was marked by “prints of Varner’s old white horse and, for a brief time, by the wheels of the parasol-topped runabout,” another moment where time is held within the physical earth. The narrator remembers this from a moment located in the past, but now observes “there was nothing to show of that...there was hardly a road; where the sand darkened into the branch and then rose again, there was no trace left of the bridge. Now the scar ran straight as a plumb-line along a shaggy hedge row of spaced cedars decreed there by the same nameless architect who had planned and built the house” (373). This scene highlights the shifting spatial

configurations of Yoknapatawpha, and yet the original connecting plumb line (which also divides) is still present, a nameless skeleton, a spoke of a wheel ground to a halt. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Rosa's narration is notoriously scathing, and it begins with a descent from one imperial plot to another, passing vertically downward through time and through the latticed "yellow slashes full of dust motes" (3). In her narration, Rosa also passes through the spatial borders erected by Sutpen, peering in through his edifice of respectability. Rosa's virulent, unrepentant and literal demonization⁴⁴ of him almost inadvertently deconstructs his exterior, especially in moments when her memory of Sutpen involves open and closed spaces, revealing a center that is homogenous, without borders, lacking the dividing lines Sutpen so carefully designs. Despite her seeming hyper-subjective position in relation to Sutpen-as-family member, Rosa's narration is not unreliable for this task. Barbara Ladd argues Rosa's experience of race teaches her not to construct a consistent storyline in her narration like Jason, Quentin, or Shreve, but to substantially decontextualize Sutpen. Ladd observes that in a text where nearly all speaking characters continue a narrative "consistent with the South's continuing commitment to segregation, Rosa and Clytie touch" ("Local"13), and so Rosa's encounter with Clytie was characterized by direct contact in the middle of the stairwell, sharing a middle space. This experience deconstructs the "eggshell shibboleth of caste and color" (AA 112) that surrounds them, and it can extend and inform her narration of Sutpen as well.

Rosa's narration of Sutpen reveals the instability of the center. One of the significant "adjunctive" measures of Sutpen's design is combating blackness, containing and controlling the bodies he owns and uses in order to establish difference. Rosa notes that Sutpen "called it Sutpen's Hundred as if it had been a King's grant in unbroken perpetuity from his great

⁴⁴ Recalling Eliade, who observes that monsters, demons, and undesirable people often occupy profane space.

grandfather – a home, position: a wife and family which, being necessary to concealment, he accepted along with the rest of respectability” (10). Sutpen establishes a lineage – more than just an established presence – but the respectability that comes from an unbroken line of the highest kind of whiteness, one that will conceal and distort whatever it is he is hiding from. He constructs a self-image with “land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with” (238). He does so with spatial division, following the base paradigm of interiors and exteriors: his slaves sleep in the mud, without blankets, completely exposed, nearly indistinguishable from the natural world. But Sutpen cannot maintain the separation that he creates. Three times Rosa explicitly deconstructs Sutpen’s race, his physical body – reducing him even further below the social status of a poor white. In a scene witnessed by his wife and passed on to Rosa, Sutpen finds himself in the heart of his own concealed center – a square within a square.⁴⁵ He enters a “hollow square of faces in the lantern light, the white faces on three sides, the black ones on the fourth...and Ellen seeing not the two black beasts she had expected to see but instead a white one and a black one, both naked to the waist and gauging at one another’s eyes as if their skins should not only have been the same color but should have been covered with fur too” (20). This square of human flesh has the same effect as the black box of the courthouse; dissolving and diminishing division, rules, legal constructs (the “proper” way to fight); like Jewell, Sutpen’s constructed identity as white is reversed, turned on its head, revealed in a flash to be a charade. The mud and dust – frenetic, disorienting natural elements – nearly always accompany these moments and occupy the space around Sutpen for the duration of the novel, who always will abrupt on a scene in a cloud of dust. Later, Mr. Compson recalls Rosa’s description of Sutpen, and returns to the center of Sutpen’s Hundred as he erects his mansion: “he and the twenty negroes worked together,

⁴⁵ Sutpen’s Hundred is supposedly a perfect, geometrically square plot of land.

plastered over with mud against the mosquitos and as Miss Coldfield told Quentin, distinguishable one from another by his beard and eyes alone” (28).

My claim is not that Sutpen is passing, or biologically black, non-white, or racially “other.” Instead, I am drawing out the specific instability of the racial boundaries that he inscribes around himself, where his race is deconstructed by a collective voice no different than those that deconstruct Joe Christmas’ in *LIA*. Interestingly, his red hair and beard (certainly a remnant of his “Anglo-Saxon descent”) is later described as “iron-riddled hair” (281), and Sutpen’s first wife, Eulalia, is also said to have a “rope of lank iron-colored hair” (233). This is a unique descriptor linking the two, one of which is ubiquitously understood to be of mixed-race ancestry. The very first time Rosa sees Sutpen, not even on his property but on the road between, he approached “like the forefront of a tornado,” a dizzying approach of frenetic elements. Ellen and the children are contained in the interior of the carriage, their “high white faces” shielded from the homogenizing dust. But Sutpen, in the in-between of centers, travelling the plumb-line, testing the means of his design, is exposed. He sat “on the front seat, the face and teeth of the wild negro who was driving, and he, his face exactly like the negro’s save for the teeth (this because of his beard, doubtless) – all in a thunder and a fury of wildeyed horses and of galloping and of dust.” Outside the protective barrier of the carriage, Sutpen becomes indistinguishable from his slave, his only pair of clothes soiled, his identity transmogrified into an extension of the blackness next to him.

Even without Rosa’s racializing narration, Sutpen clearly fights against his own design. Sutpen’s actions make him complicit in token and pejorative depictions of the behavior of slaves, often encouraged by slave-owners to reify their own moral and social authority. For example, Frederick Douglass observes that his fellow slaves “engaged in such sports and merriments as

wrestling, running foot-races...and drinking whiskey...[which was] most agreeable to the feelings of our master” (2104). When Douglass attempts to hold a church service instead of “wrestling, boxing, and drinking whiskey,” his master “rushed upon [the slaves] with sticks and stone” because they would much rather “see [the slaves] engaged in those degrading sports, than to see [them] behave like intellectual, moral, and accountable beings” (2107). By all accounts, Sutpen joins the ranks of his slaves, unable to suppress an urge to join in the fights. He encounters a psychological confusion that Marjorie Garber defines as a “category crisis”: “a failure of definitive distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable” (18). Sutpen’s body as a borderline that fails distinction is seen in virtually every description of his physical body. Unlike Ellen’s “high white” and “unblemished” face,⁴⁶ Sutpen’s “had the appearance of pottery, of having been colored by that oven’s fever either of soul or environment” (24). Similar to Joe Christmas’ “parchment” skin, where the townspeople of Jefferson inscribe his race, Sutpen’s is molded like clay, shaped and drawn up by external forces: colored physically and socially.

The slips and glitches in Sutpen’s socio-spatial makeup appear to also surface in the town’s collective reaction to him, and this is significant because the narrative echoes are related to racial legislation and violence. After invoking “our neighbors and the people we lived among,” and then “anyone” (11) to signal a collective response, Rosa comments that the entire community knew he wasn’t truthful about his past, but that it was something opposite respect “too dark to talk about.” She then recreates in vast, broad swaths his possible geographic path to arrive in Jefferson, which hinges on a descent “down the river,” before surmising that “anyone

⁴⁶ Other descriptions of faces in *AA!*: Clytie’s is “coffee colored” (109), Judith and Henry’s are “out-of doors faces” (51) that were “two replicas of his [Sutpen’s] face in miniature (16), Bon’s octoroon mistress’s is “magnolia faced” and her son’s is “smooth ivory” (157), the “monkey nigger” is “another balloon face, slick and distended” (189), the French architect’s is a “grim, harried Latin face” (26), Shreve’s is “moonlike [and] rubicund” (147), Charles Etienne de Saint Valery Bon’s has a “faint olive tinge” (161), Wash’s is “gaunt [and] malaria-ridden...a face that might have been any age between twenty-five and sixty” (69), and Bon’s is a “shadow” (118).

could have looked once at his face and known that he would have chosen the River and even the certainty of the hemp rope to undertaking what he undertook” (11). His face is shaped, as pottery, to reflect a specific kind of escape – for the townspeople, it invokes the image of a fugitive, and one that is lynched upon capture. Before this encounter (though later in the narrative), Sutpen is arrested in public fashion before the eyes of “ladies and children and house niggers” (36). Mr. Compson recalls that upon arriving at the city center and being arraigned before a justice in the courthouse, Sutpen “had a larger following than if he actually had been the runaway slave.” After the town attempts to enact their judicial boundaries around Sutpen and failing to do so, five years pass during which Sutpen physically and metaphorically “filled in his clothes,” marrying Ellen Coldfield and moving out to a finished home. Even after this period of time, even after “accepting” him, the town still believed “that there was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere, ranging from the ones who believed that the plantation was just a blind to his actual dark avocation, through the ones who believed that he had found some way to juggle the cotton market itself” (56, 57). The harsh phrase “nigger in a woodpile” came into currency in the mid-19th century to refer to “some fact of importance [that had] not been disclosed” (Klerk 10). While no clear evidence for the origin of the phrase is known, it is assumed that it came from the practice of smuggling slaves to free states in railroad cars. And the matter not disclosed? The townspeople do not know, but their rhetoric used to talk around the unknown is racially coded, invoking the image of lynching as the legal consequence, and this is directed at the physical body and self-constructed image of Sutpen.

Faulkner's Cartography

Now he seemed to see his whole native land, his home – the dirt, the earth which had bred his bones and those of his fathers for six generations and was still shaping him...unfolding beneath him like a map in one slow soundless explosion: to the east ridge on green ridge tumbling away toward Alabama and to the west and south the checkered fields and the woods flowing on into the blue and gauzed horizon beyond which lay at last like a cloud the long wall of the levee and the great River itself flowing not merely from the north but out of the North circumscribing and outland – the umbilicus of America – Intruder in the Dust, 147-48

Gavin Stevens' vision of Yoknapatawpha reflects a similar cartographic impulse as Faulkner. Stevens' vision shows both the order of the imperial grid and the experience of place as felt by the local populace. This place is complexly related to both external superstructures and internal drives of self-determination and self-rule. The two occupants of the car – Gavin and his nephew – ascend the same hill the Bundrens descended decades earlier, and still the landscape reflects these two paradigms: their car whined “against the motionless upress of the main ridge and the strong constant resinous downflow of the pines” (147). Stevens' summarizing comment expands the boundaries of Yoknapatawpha, as he looks “not north but North, outland and circumscribing, and not even a geographical place but an emotional idea.” This recapitulation of Sutpen's childhood geography lesson, when he learned not where Haiti is but what kind of place it was, leads Gavin likewise to the far reach of his geographic imagination, past the “long barrier of Canada” (149). At the very outer boundary, now on a global scale, Stevens sees a “curving, semicircular wall...from the top of which...there looked down upon him and his countless row on row of faces which resembled his face and spoke the same language...” (149). Stevens sees an organizational pattern that circles, draws borders, and streamlines movement, where different geographical location implies a different epistemological position. The material elements of Faulkner's world destabilize this. They appear in the intensity of border crossings and boundary drawings and around the screeching and grinding wheel, defying their divisions spatially and

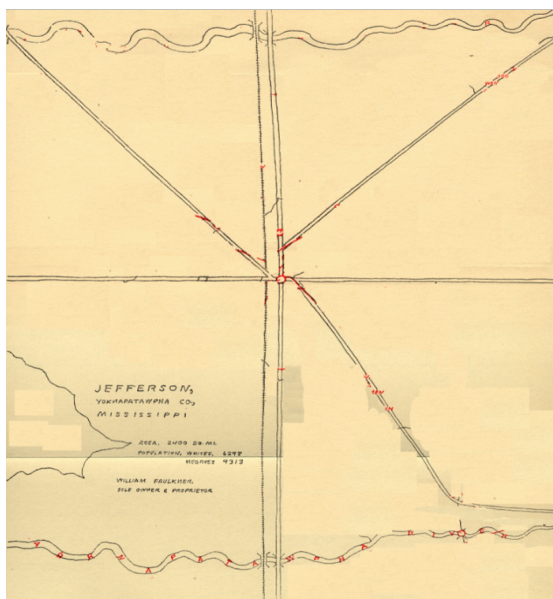
temporally. There is an impulse to create divisions, to live within the safety of the wheel, to replicate the imposed order of the center, and to approach it but not touch. The imposed order draws and attracts people to the center, but like Sutpen who must go around the back of the house, the center keeps one in motion, directing outward into the “rich teeming never-ravaged land” (149).

Faulkner’s original map bears this tension throughout. In the 1936 edition of *Absalom, Absalom!*, readers were greeted with a multi-colored foldout map of Yoknapatawpha County⁴⁷ to which Faulkner signs himself “Sole owner and proprietor.” Despite the various modernist appeals of the text, where individual autonomy and European ideals of self-determinacy were constantly challenged and uprooted, such a pronouncement invokes an imperial impulse in his cartographic impulse. The OED recognizes “proprietor” as a derivative of “proprietary,” first used in the 17th century to describe the functional equivalent of sovereign lords in the North American Colonies and defined as “one who holds something as property; one who has the exclusive right or title to the use or disposal of a thing; an owner” (OED). In a novel obsessed with rights of ownership and possession and the revelation of those rights’ instability, this seems to be a not-so-subtle, ironic nod towards the imperial bind on the counties’ geography. Two rivers border the county on the North and South ends: the Tallahatchie and Yoknapatawpha, between which nearly all markings of civilization and commercial interests lie. These rivers, which flow West to East, bisecting the general flow of commerce from North to South, create, as Elizabeth Kerr notes in *Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner’s Little Postage Stamp of Soil*, boundaries akin to the biblical edenic rivers (31). Between these two borders, a grid-like outline emerges with the geometric precision of an x/y coordinate system. In the same way that Faulkner presents two

⁴⁷ For a detailed, thorough explanation of the different progressions of Faulkner’s maps, see Gutting’s first chapter, specifically 13-22.

dominant metaphors (wheels and plumb-lines) across his *corpus* for the center-periphery layout of the county, his maps demonstrate multiple iterations and spatial configurations of the center-periphery model.

I've taken the liberty of removing certain elements of Faulkner's map to highlight various properties within, and I'll begin with a specific reading of the map's elements before commenting more broadly on the design. I'd first like to make the observation that Faulkner's map is not best thought of as a temporal solid, one sheet of paper upon which every element exists in a one-dimensional relation to the next. Instead, Faulkner's map is like a series of (to use Haygood's imagery, applied to cartography) transparent overhead projector slides, each layer representing a different temporal slice that bisects several novels at once, though not the entirety of each novel. These slices, laid on top of one another in succession, build towards the finished (though never complete) map. Adding and removing layers can tell one a great deal about his cartographic impulse. Below is a stripped down version of his map, leaving only the roads, drawing attention to the county as a superstructure:



This clearly invokes the image of a wheel: hub, rim, and spokes – albeit a broken one. More tellingly, the image also echoes the spatial pattern of a spiral staircase, beginning in the SE corner before wrapping around and upwards through the NE, then NW quadrants then finishing on the top level, marked “Jefferson.” The pattern of movement adopted by so many characters and invoked by the geometric precision of the courthouse follows suit: the staircase circles around the center just as the traffic pattern of the Jefferson square. It is significant that each road (or spoke) approaches the center but never touches it, slightly off-centered. The staircase is supported by a structure that binds each quadrant to the center, passing upward, vertically, as the stairs move upwards and around it. This staircase that covers the entirety of the map is the spatial location where difference is both broken down and reinforced, where the demands of the center are experienced in various temporal situations. Of course, the obvious parallel to this image is the scene with Clytie and Rosa on the staircase at Sutpen’s Hundred. Rosa, hearing that Henry had shot Bon, enters the front hall of Sutpen’s mansion calling for Judith, but is met by Clytie instead. Rosa begins to mount the stairs but is stopped by Clytie, telling her “wait... don’t you go up there” (111). After the two touch, creating a bond, Rosa recoils, abrogating their connection by rhetorically reinforcing racial difference: “take your hand off me, nigger!” (112). Faulkner’s map bears this racial tension, specifically. While the population totals reflect a racial balance tilted heavily toward “negroes,” the only specific reference to a black character associates him with violence and the law: “Reverend Hightower’s Where Christmas Was Killed” and “Miss Joanna Burden’s, Where Christmas Killed Miss Burden.”

This pattern, approaching the center without touching, calls to mind a mathematical function, the asymptote. Because Faulkner’s map so clearly creates a Cartesian grid, I think this connection, and the properties of an asymptote, are relevant. An asymptote approaches (0,0) on a

Cartesian grid to infinity, but never makes contact; its Greek derivative meaning “not falling together.” If an asymptote ever touches (0,0), then its properties as an asymptote fall apart: it never was one in the first place. The roads represent these functions and approach the center, forming a spiraling vortex that culminates in the traffic circle around the square. This concept also applies to the smaller centers scattered throughout the county, as people attempt to recreate the center, they also recreate its spatial properties. The material goods and spatial constructs of the center draw in life and also reproduce it. But if Faulkner’s map implies an imperialist agenda, the various denotations of individual movement operate as an immediate counter-stance to imperial modes of mapping and cartography. Within the grid, moving about it, is a representation of places made known only by those that experienced them – places that came into being through a social, collective mapping rather than Faulkner’s own individual epistemology or the center’s determinacy. Faulkner’s map, then, stands simultaneously as a representation of a colonizing production of knowledge and its antithesis. The grid suggests spaces that are open and closed to production, predicated by dominant interest groups that regulate these flows of commerce – always directing them towards the center. The grid of roads and the edenic borders separate the time and space continuum, naturalizing the flow of commerce, suggesting that what is displayed has been known since time immemorial – the roads quite literally “lay straight” the spaces of Yoknapatawpha.

If the center of Faulkner’s map represents a hub of economic production, then the flow of material goods into and out of Jefferson acts as a channeling measure of desire upon the periphery. The desire for material goods is implicitly found in many of the denotations on Faulkner’s map; for example, in the marker “Sawmill where Byron Bunch first saw Lena Grove.” Implicated within this marker is what Lawrence Buell has called the “cut and get out

phase of the timber industry in the Deep South” (2). Buell, citing the historian Thomas Clark, notes that the lumber industry in 1930s Mississippi “acts as social and economic safety valves by drawing away from cotton tenancy surplus laborers who had no alternative source of employment” and that this provides the “social frame in terms of which to understand a great many things about the characters to whom Faulkner introduces us” (2-3). This framework is what drew Lucas Burch, Lena’s vagabond lover in *Light in August*, to Jefferson in the first place – and later, Lena herself. The sawmill, coincidentally, might as well be denoted as the place where “Byron Bunch first *desired* Lena Grove,” as his obsession with her ostensibly began at first sight. The sawmill, as a physical archive of economic production, draws to itself through the desire for material gain those existing on the liminal periphery.

“Laying straight” what is not – the function of this map – calls to mind the paradox encountered by the Bundrens: the road curves away before them while it is also the straightened spoke of a wheel. I see a similar tension in Faulkner’s map through his inclusion of topographic lines (these are more clearly seen as topography lines in the 2nd version of the *AA* text. Interestingly, the Viking portable removes the topography lines and places them outside the map as decorative flourishes. They now function as a map border rather than real elements contained within the map). I find it significant that the major topography lines echo the pattern of the roads: they also approach the center at diagonal angles without touching the center. These topography lines are reminiscent of the dust that echoes at various points about the imperial design. The lines mimic and coalesce around the shape, asserting their profound silence on the realm. The topographic lines in the SW corner imply a barrier, while all the other topography marks echo the path and pattern of the roads, directing the eye towards the center. The openness of the SW quadrant, accompanied by the barrier, seems to imply a resistance to that direction, perhaps

specifically to the cosmopolitan New Orleans, or more broadly to the global south and the “little island set in a smiling and fury-lurked and incredible indigo sea, which was the halfway point between what we call the jungle and what we call civilization” (AA 202).

This conclusion points in two directions: First, as I just stated, it directs us to New Orleans and the Global South, which I will take up in the final two chapters. The second direction that this conclusion points towards is the modern metropolis, towards urbanization and modern urban theory. To return to the image of a staircase superimposed on Faulkner’s map: the staircase’s center is the courthouse, yet the staircase ascends vertically through and away from it. Thomas Heise’s *Urban Underworlds* pays close attention to the spatial makeup of modern cities, and his analysis begins with this differentiation: “the new vertical architecture of corporate capitalism made possible a way of seeing that the older, horizontal civic architecture of court houses and city halls could not” (2). The introduction of vertical height positions one to look down on the city, and the vertical structures that made this vision possible (a new kind of knowledge) are concrete fixtures of a supersystem set up to control the dynamics of the center, but from a new plane of existence; the modern equivalent of “inside” now being “above.” This ascendancy creates a counterpart: what Heise calls an underworld. The underworld exists within the city center, a manifestation of uneven development and geographic polarization. He argues with familiar imagery, recalling that the marginalized people have been “centripetally gathered by the whirlwinds of change and dropped into the city’s center, into its slums, ghettos, and vice districts as a reserve supply of excessively cheap, overabundant labor (8). These are the “lower” or “under” urban geographies, where sexual, racial, and moral geographies contain aberrant populations. A remote hamlet in rural Mississippi does indeed point to this phenomenon. Just as the Bundrens are drawn to the center by material want and opportunity, so too does the modern

metropolis incite movement and desire, developing areas at the expense of others and continuing the cycle of over accumulation. Heise argues, “moving on in a cycle of over accumulation, followed by crisis and then by economic and spatial restricting which in turn creates new types of spaces (or redefines existing ones) to advance further accumulation...the wheel spins...and as capitalist urbanization creates unequal geographies, over time it erodes them, too” (20).

CHAPTER 4: “America Remained Her Warden”: The Material and the Non-Place in
Yaa Gyasi and Colson Whitehead”

Modernity and Modernization

This chapter will begin with a broad distinction between modernity and modernization, and their relationship to capitalism, specifically. The goal of drawing this distinction is to invert the usual order given to the *process* of modernity. In doing so, I will chart an alternative thread of economic and spatial production in the novels of Yaa Gyasi and Colson Whitehead.

Beginning with Gyasi’s 2016 novel, *Homegoing*, I will draw out the process of modernization through her use of cultural and spatial islands and demonstrate how capital markets – and specifically material culture – linked these islands together. These islands of experience are located in the same global nexus more explicitly articulated in Whitehead’s 2016 novel, *The Underground Railroad*. Tying the two novels together through their use of material objects in the production of social space reveals not only specific, local iterations of modernization, but also demonstrates their preemptive, postmodern sensibilities. This reimagines an argument similar to one asserted famously by Gertrude Stein. She suggested that America was the “oldest” country in the world because it had “lived in the modern period the longest.” By her account, with the one-two punch of the Civil War and the rapid industrialization of the Gilded Age, America became by default the 20th century’s dominant cultural and economic producer. My reading of these texts ascribes a similar value base to a different originator: African American culture and literary production are both the “oldest” and most developed in their enunciation because they have experienced the global, modern period the longest. In fact, the dual reading of these texts will posit a similar relationship to postmodernity.

Western, Euro-centric social theory and discourse see Enlightenment reasoning as *a priori* to modernity and is held as its irrefutable genesis. It views the global South as little more

than a pool of resources on which to test its theories. This view of modernity sidesteps entirely or simply places parochial value on quantifiable economic production in the global South and has long viewed the engines of economic progress to lie in the global North. Similar to this dismissal of economic production, Achille Mbembe argues that Euro-centric modernity relegates global South cultural production to little more than a performance of otherness (Mbembe 239-272). Euro-centric modernism creates space for non-Western cultures only insofar as they integrate themselves into Western capital systems. This historical, ideological narrative, as noted by Mbembe and also Chakrabarty, expects and demands that global South discourse translate itself into the universal language of Western capitalism under the banner of “First in Europe, then elsewhere” (Chakrabarty 7).

Euro-centric modernism, as characterized by David Harvey, is positivistic, technocentric, and rationalistic. Modernism asserts a linear progression of human existence away from barbarism through the establishment of social orders that were curated by a standardized production of knowledge. Enlightenment thinkers saw the accumulation of knowledge generated by individuals working freely and creatively as a pursuit of human emancipation and enrichment of daily life. Scientific advancements could solve the problems of scarcity, social organization could liberate subjects from oppressive religion, and “doctrines of equality, liberty, faith in human intelligence, and universal reason abounded” (12-13). However, modernity stands in stark contrast to modernization because the concept of “modernity” does not and in fact cannot take into consideration the actual conditions of its material existence as it proliferates on a global scale. Jean and John Comaroff detail this distinction in their 2012 article published in *Anthropological Forum*, “Theory from the South: Or, how Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa.” Instead of the doctrines of modernity dictating the terms of the global South, Comaroff

and Comaroff point to the complex, global formations created through the relationships between metropole and colony as mutually constitutive elements of modernization. A history that asserts a totalizing influence of the metropole and ignores this reciprocal relationship offers an incomplete portrait of the development of a globally connected, modern world. Thus, the two suggest that modernity – or rather modernization, the concrete form of the abstract *telos* of modernity – “was, almost from the start, a North-South collaboration – indeed, a world-historical production – albeit a sharply asymmetrical one” (116).

Even as an ideology, modernity cannot be disassociated from capitalism. Samir Amin argues that Enlightenment thought as the ideological formation of modernity and the concurrent emergence of capitalism are symbiotic, requiring one another for their genesis. Enlightenment thought weds reason and freedom of the individual at its core. At the same time, freedom is first limited and then (in all phases) completely defined by what capitalism allows and its markets demand. Thus an ahistorical promise of freedom continually collides against a material world that is demonstrably historical and uneven (13-17). This dialectic turns the material wheels of modernity. That modernity is inseparable from capitalism is a fact of history and informs its very core ideology: because modernity requires a totalizing assertion of influence, it must spread spatially and take material form. If and when material is ascribed value, it will invariably be met with an ideological and sometimes at-odds cocktail of freedom and reason and the results of this interchange play out on a global scale. Ideological modernity spreads through capital expansion, which is the material process of modernization.

I will define “material” here and elsewhere specifically through the lens of Christopher Matthews’ historical archaeology of capitalism. Examining the physical archeology of early American habitation sites, Matthews explores how capital theory becomes a material reality in a

process he argues often happens “out of thin air.” Matthews specifically connects capitalism to material objects by tracking shifts in markets, which trigger new means of production that still focus ultimately on private gain and the individual. Thus all objects in a new market are transformed (“out of thin air”) into varying degrees of “enriching commodities” towards the ultimate end of self-improvement and advancement of liberty (227). An historical example is the fact that the embryo companies that drove industrialization in Europe – England⁴⁸ in particular – would have failed without the growth of the cotton industry in North America. The turn of the 18th century, with the invention of the cotton gin and the opening up of the Mississippi river valley for territorial expansion, revealed a vast resource pool by which to feed the demand for cotton fiber in the modernizing – and now connected – world. This particular market happened to be what economists call “perfect competition.” This means, Edward Baptist⁴⁹ observes, that the cotton fiber market was so large that not a single producer could control even 1% of the total production. Because of this, cotton producers would freely share innovations that increased production without fear their competitor would eat into their profits. Increased production on a

⁴⁸ England’s dependence on American cotton was spectacular. In order to replace the amount of cotton fiber imported from America with an equivalent amount of wool fiber from sheep, by 1830 Britain would have had to devote 23 million acres just to sheep pasture, which surpasses all available agricultural land on the entire island (Baptist 128).

⁴⁹ In the acknowledgements, Whitehead lists Baptist among his many scholarly sources that were helpful for the novel, thus it would explain some of the resonance between the texts. However, Baptist’s book is not composed as a typical historical academic text or book of criticism, sometimes blurring the line between a prototypical historical analysis and life-writing, as Baptist allows long-silenced voices to speak as clearly as possible. Baptist admits that he was stuck for a long time on “how to tell the story of this muscular, dynamic process in a single book” (xxii). But, Baptist writes, he wanted to avoid a topical approach because it “cut the beating heart out of the story.” Because the topic was, in large part, one grand narrative, Baptist decided to compose this book by telling stories, all connected through one body. He does so one body part at a time and each chapter, through meticulous historical research, provides a very authentic, historical narrative of individual, former slaves – often in their own words. In the following passage he summarizes his intent. The quote demonstrates in miniature the rich combination of narrative and research that fill this exhaustive book. It also demonstrates the quality and power of his writing style. He explains, “Their story can do so for us as well. To hear it, we must stand as Lorenzo Ivy had stood as a boy in Danville- watching the chained lines going over the hills, or as Frank Baker and others had stood, watching the ships going down the James from the Richmond docks, bound for the Mississippi. Then turn and go with the marching feet, and listen for the breath of the half that has never been told” (xxvii). What I hope to suggest is that as much as a resource Baptist’s historical research was for this chapter, it also shared an acute intertextual relationship with *The Underground Railroad*, and in that way, their relationship in this chapter is characterized both by critical and creative influence.

cotton plantation could only be obtained by an increase in the efficiency of human labor, and to extract this efficiency, the production owners turned to developing methods of violence against the body of the enslaved using material objects (117). The cotton industry drove the plantation system's cultural and material legacy. The material objects needed for this industry to maximize efficiency gain new and differing cultural and economic value in relation to the efficiency they extract from new objects (including human bodies); examples relevant to this chapter include the whip, chains, or a shovel.

These value-gained material objects document three competing levels of meaning, all of which provide an archeological record of the emergence, expansion, and dominance of capitalism as it spread on the physical landscape. Matthews, following Marx, notes that all material objects reflect:

1. "Use value," or value based on the object's constitution and/or its intended use, which includes the labor of human beings.
2. "Exchange value," or the value of that object in relation to other objects in terms of their monetary worth, which includes the labor of individuals that can be exchanged in the market.
3. "Commodity fetishism," or the phenomenon that occurs when an object's value can stand in for humans or its use-value to the market surpasses human value, mostly based on its production attributes alone. (3)

Because market shifts especially reveal the attachment of value to objects (because that value often noticeably changes), texts like Gyasi and Whitehead's, which jump from market to market with remarkable precision and frequency, compact the process of modernization and draw out specifically the material components of market capitalism. These material components often express an alternative use-value when reimagined by enslaved or otherwise oppressed peoples and are used to help reorganize their spatial orientation. In such a way, the enslaved person can create a space to express the African American self.

An example of the alternative use of a material object and its shifting exchange value is that of chains in Whitehead's text. On one hand, the slave-catcher Ridgeway speculates that "if niggers were supposed to have their freedom, they wouldn't be in chains" (80). For Ridgeway, chains are the mechanism by which he can display and proclaim a popular notion of Manifest Destiny, that the "divine thread connecting all human endeavors" is the belief that "if you can keep it, it is yours. Your property, slave or continent" (80). Place and person both wed together as connected property in this singular material object: what is chained is held in place. Indeed, much of slavery's power was built on a process of territorial, market expansion, so that the ever-expanding frontier could always be a place where social boundaries were pushed to their limits and destroyed on the altar of production. Thus, torture becomes a widely accepted and justified method of increasing production, families were split for profit, and the law was determined and enforced by the owner of both land and slave with impunity. Chains held together the relationship between land and slave. The two exist in a close, symbiotic relationship, and is summarized by the abolitionist named Martin who protects Cora in North Carolina: "The pistons of this engine moved without relent. More slaves led to more cotton, which led to more money to buy more land to farm more cotton" (161).

Chains also add psychological stability to Ridgeway. They save Ridgeway and other whites from worry because they take away individual and collective mobility. The chains exert this control even in their absence, as a cultural symbol of power. On the night of her escape from the Georgia plantation, Cora remembers the many times that fellow slaves had gone into the swamp to hunt otter and beaver, but were always "yanked back to the plantation by invisible chains" (55). Indeed, when musing that she and Caesar should have run all the way to free states instead of remaining in Columbia, SC, Cora recognizes that despite the missing presence of iron

shackles, the paternalistic culture produces metaphorical binds made “of a new manufacture – the keys and tumblers marked by regional design – but accomplished the purpose of chains” (145). The chain’s value for enforcing white supremacy had long ago surpassed the labor value gone into their making. As objects they were imprinted on the psyche of the enslaved. Homer, the young black boy that Ridgeway purchases and then frees, only to permit him to become the driver of his pateroller gang, would each night go through a horrifying ritual. Despite being free, relatively educated, and full of wit, every night “Homer opened his satchel and removed a set of manacles. He locked himself to the driver’s seat, put the key in his pocket, and closed his eyes” (203). This was the only way he could fall asleep.

The chain’s dominant use-value for white American culture is simultaneously appropriated by African Americans to create a different social space. As a psychological example, when Cora works in the museum she envisioned the patrons as links of a chain, and would use her “evil-eye” to single out white patrons “to seek the imperfection in the chain that keeps you in bondage.” The chain becomes a symbol itself for a system that is noticeably imperfect, and Cora’s phenomenology of that material object becomes a more powerful force than the chain itself, capable of deconstructing its physical and metaphorical elements. When Cora and Caesar enter Lumby’s barn, a hidden station for the Underground Railroad, she is met with a shocking and elaborate collection of chains numbering in the thousands, including ornate manacles, fetters, muzzles, and shackles, “some souvenirs” of Lumby’s devotion to freeing enslaved Africans. That a material object is memorialized at all shows a shift in use-value. Many of these chains likely came from South Carolina, which had largely disposed of chains, but took up instead scientific ones. Cora herself uses the chains around her wrists to choke Ridgeway when Royal and his gang show up to free her, and in the moment a scream “came from deep

inside her, a train whistle echoing in a tunnel” (226). Later, at the novel’s end, descending a stairwell into the Underground Railroad and again held captive by Ridgeway, Cora spun and “locked her arms around him like a chain of iron” (302). As her body became a chain itself, her attack knocks Ridgeway off balance, who falls, lands on his head, and becomes incoherent and incapacitated. As Homer tends to Ridgeway, Cora scrambles onto a handcar sitting on the tracks and uses her labor to literally pump her way toward freedom. In the darkness of the tunnel, “she discovered a rhythm, pumping her arms, throwing all of herself into movement. Into northness” (303). Cora is able to wrest control of the material metanarrative away from Ridgeway, her use of chains exposing the fractal gap in the logic of capital-modernity. This gap is the space between a system that asserts a value to labor or materials without consenting knowledge of the experience of labor or use of materials.

Because Enlightenment thinkers saw space and place as observable facts of nature, the conquest and subsequent ordering of space was a key component of modernization. In ordering the material, political, and cultural spaces of the world, the global South “other” was secured in place and made an unambiguous character in the global theatre. European colonial ventures exported versions of modernity at a great discount to its global peripheries, turning nation-states into little more than holding companies for Euro-modernity’s capital march across the globe. Harvey argues the problem is less situated in the created existence of “the other,” but more that “the other” was ideologically and physically forced within a spatial construct “ethnocentrically conceived to have homogeneous and absolute qualities” (252). Yet because modernity is a totalizing process, it has no real “outside” or exterior and thus exists only in varying degrees of heterogeneous and relative qualities. A modernist-capital system cannot create an outside; rather, it creates many peripheries, which is a necessary condition of the growth of the center.

These peripheries then are not anti-modern or outside its relational sphere; instead, the periphery has long held a distinct and unique modernist trajectory in its production of material goods and in its production of global-South knowledge. This decentered modernity has proliferated across the world in various ensembles of discourse and practice, and the material conditions are products of a dialectical relationship with the global North and a long line of localized, temporal constructions, many of which are found in the global South. These localized iterations of modernization fashion their own version of modernity, even as the people in the periphery live with its inherent contradictions. It is from this perspective that Comaroff and Comaroff summarize their argument: “There is good reason to think...that, in the here and now, it is regions in the South that tend first to feel the concrete effects of world-historical process as they play themselves out, thus to prefigure the future of the former metropole” (121).

Inverting influence and relationship orders in this way shows an alternative rapport between the metropole and the colony specifically, and all iterations of the center and periphery globally⁵⁰. Despite uneven development, the global South actively participates with, alters, and influences the global modern-capitalist world order as a constitutive element of it, not as an outsider. While the metropole recognized the colony as a source of value, it excluded the colonized from citizenship and sustained its power through acts of violence, acts that counter their very own laws of liberty and civility that are held in check within the boundaries of the home nation-state. These contradictions are felt in the lived experience of the colonized: Comaroff and Comaroff quickly recognize that much of what the colonized subject desires is influenced by the promises of a totalizing modernity, yet to the degree that they can, the colonized subject must invent their own versions of it through informal commerce, economies

⁵⁰ Comaroff and Comaroff cite the work of George Orwell and W.E.B. Du Bois as reminders of “life stories of those within the metropole- Southerners in the North, so to speak – who are largely excluded from its human fellowship” (115).

built on mimicry, and the creation of new modes of service. In fact, it is often the people most adversely affected by modernization that most creatively recommission it for their own use (120, 125).

Comaroff and Comaroff argue rightfully that the making of modernity should be narrated as much from its underside as its self-proclaimed center (117). Other global South scholars agree; Deleuze and Guattari characterize this relationship as a “double capture, an encounter that transforms the disparate entities that enter into a joint becoming” (cited in Comaroff and Comaroff 116). Jointing the two together, so that – staying with the carpentry rhetoric – a material structure capable of supporting its own weight is formed strikes at the heart of this argument. I want to use this imagery to open up the text, first by establishing a general spatial paradigm of cultural islands in both texts, then specifically by showing this inter-world jointing in Gyasi’s novel through her use of narrative structure and the varying value she ascribes to material objects.

Island-States

Both Gyasi and Whitehead’s texts create spatial islands of experience through their structure, the epochal span of their plots, and use of segmented history. For Gyasi’s in particular, the chapters themselves act as spatial islands because each one occurs in a significantly different time or place than the one before. Even for chapters that return to the same place, because of the passage of time, circumstances that dictate experience of place shift so dramatically that each chapter remains cut off from the one that came before. Similarly, Whitehead’s novel chronicles great jumps in historical periods, but the plot is not bound by linear time, even as Cora travels through the American landscape. Each time she descends into the Underground Railroad, she

emerges in a totally different period of American culture. Both texts work collectively to create a stunning image of an American, capitalist megalopolis as perceived from the underside.

Whitehead's novel is perhaps more conspicuous in its creation of islands. Whitehead has noted in interviews that he was inspired directly by *Gulliver's Travels*, specifically in the spatial segmentation of Gulliver's experience as he travels from island to island. Thus as Gulliver travels to each new island, every state Cora travels to is a "different state of American possibility...the book is rebooting every time [she] goes to a different state" (NPR Interview). *Gulliver's Travels* makes an appearance in the text, too. Caesar, an escaped slave, recalls life on the Randall plantation and the book he kept buried behind the schoolhouse. Caesar treasured his copy of *Gulliver's Travels*, a souvenir from when he had access to an entire library to read. The passage he commits to memory importantly draws attention to the space between islands, its perilous mode of transport, and the memory of loss: "What became of my companions in the boat, as well as those who escaped on the rock, or were left in the vessel, I cannot tell; but conclude they were all lost" (Whitehead 235). *Gulliver's Travels* also captured the attention of Ralph Ellison, but his analysis focuses much more on the black body – solely, in fact. In an essay published in *Shadow and Act* in 1964, Ellison gives the following analogy: "On the moral level I propose we view the whole of American life as a drama enacted on the body of a Negro giant who, lying trussed up like Gulliver, forms the stage and the scene upon which and within which the action unfolds." Ellison draws nearly exclusive attention to a captive black body and equates it to the landscape of human activity. He also seems to reference specifically Gulliver's experience on the island of Lilliput, where Gulliver is tied up upon his arrival. This is the exact passage referenced by Caesar in *The Underground Railroad*. Certainly, Ellison's analysis holds true, even in this novel: the Georgia plantation extracts surplus labor value through torture to the

body, South Carolina extracts from the body the ability to reproduce through forced sterilization, North Carolina simply killed the body at every chance possible. But still, instead of committing the passage to memory of Gulliver's body trussed up against the earth, which emphasizes a captive or earth-bound body, Caesar recalls a passage committed to movement and survival. For much of modernization, Ellison's analogy rings true. Yet Whitehead seems to imagine there might also be a space where this is not true, that the black body has somehow made it ashore and whose body is at the moment unharmed. I will conclude this chapter with an exploration of this space.

In this way, though the story begins in early 1800s Georgia with a relatively accurate historical account of the Southern plantation monolith, when Cora arrives in South Carolina from the Underground Railroad she is in another time entirely. South Carolina's culture is characterized by overt paternalism. Cora must learn to survive amidst eugenics and sterilization programs intermingled with educational systems purportedly devoted to black uplift – a time and culture more closely matched to the one responsible for producing the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment in the mid-20th century. Different also, North Carolina is an island of white nationalism, Tennessee a scorched-earth, post-apocalyptic countryside, Indiana the testing grounds of the turn-of-the-century debates between Washington and Du Bois, and finally the vague and distant “North.” Each of these “states” chronicles the “full biblical lifespan” of the American political economy from 1780-1950, where, as Baptiste articulates, enslaved people were “marched and shipped south and west. African Americans' hands and creativity, turned against themselves and even against each other at times, made commodities and built an archipelago of slave labor camps, a literal organism of economic production” (411).

These narrative islands – an archipelago of American culture – are indeed avatars of real-world historical process and experience, as euro-modernity literally island-hopped for nearly two centuries. Baptist observes that by 1807, 80% of people who arrived in the New World had come from Africa and their bodies were used to build and implement the foundation of chattel slavery first in the Caribbean islands. Baptiste argues that this “huddled mass” significantly predates waves of immigration from Ireland, Italy, and Russia both in time and cultural influence: their labor shaped the entire new world by establishing a “sugar-island process of destruction and implantation” (42). On each new island in the Caribbean, slavers and plantation owners grew immensely wealthy until “the richest crowded out the others” and sent entrepreneurs and investors off to a new island. The process would continue: natives were annihilated, “slave ships appeared on the horizon, and cane sprouted in the fields” and this process shaped the politics, economics, and production of culture for centuries, specifically in North America. Baptist argues “Virginia and South Carolina were different from the islands, yet they were channels of the same current. The northern colonies were irrelevant until they evolved trades that the islands needed – shipbuilding, grain growing, and livestock raising – and started distilling sugarcane molasses into rum, carrying slaves, and trading in slave-made products” (42). In this case also, we see the simultaneous spread and influence of two competing versions of modernity, of history being written from its underside by the actual labor and production of subjugated bodies.

Both texts also highlight the near impossibility of individual movement between the islands, and the danger associated with the modes of transportation that do connect culturally or spatially specific places. These metaphorical islands are located both in the metropole and the colony, in the center and the periphery, but a common people whose identity originates from the margin must make both livable. They are best thought of as islands because the spatial center

each chapter establishes is associatively thick with the material and cultural affects of Western modernity or with the material and cultural affects of the periphery. In Gyasi's novel, the Cape Coast castle reflects a euro-centric material modernity situated in the global South, as does the inland city of Kumasi a century later, where "people sold their wares in the middle of the town, things she had never seen before, relics from the old days of steady trade with the British and the Dutch" (138). At the same time (1890s) the African city of Kumasi continues to trade in the material affects of Western modernity, on the American side, the ex-con H moves to Pratt City, Alabama during the Reconstruction period of the Deep South. Yet, Pratt City is where "white men and their families [were] next door to black men and theirs. Both colors joining the same unions, fighting for the same things" (169), which in this case and not without coincidence is the fair valuation of their labor output as reflected in their wages. It is a collective renegotiation of the value of the body's production capability. The commune-turned-city was constructed as a forward-facing reflection of the dominant representation of modernity.

The space between these centers is often the source of great disadvantage and the site of abuse and subjugation. The islands are connected through the modes of production and transport created to assist and expedite the spatial spread of capitalism, and this plays out variously through forced migration, market slavery, imperial paternalism and sometimes, as I argue with Whitehead's *Underground Railroad*, through counter systems that carve out space from the margin and open spaces of cultural enunciation. Frederick Douglass draws on the relationship between capitalism, slavery, and modes of transport when he describes Col. Lloyd's sloop in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. He observes in the river a "large sloop – the *Sally Lloyd*; called by that name in honor of a favorite daughter of the colonel. The sloop and the mill were wondrous things, full of thoughts and ideas. A child cannot well look at such objects without *thinking* (51).

For Douglass, the sloop was an object that represented the ideological tension between restriction and possibility under capital systems. On one hand, the sloop is an object owned by his master, no different than himself, and thus reinforcing the boundaries of the system that owns him. On the other, he stands in genuine awe at the sloop's ingenious construction and this spurs his imagination to re-appropriate the object for his own use. While the sloop's name reflects a docile paternalism that protects and harbors, it is also reminiscent of the legacy of slave ships, whose holds were anything but safe. Douglass picks up on this tension between identity and material objects and in doing so draws our attention to the two parallel narratives – one told through an ideology and the other through experience – that have played out on the American landscape. Colson Whitehead opens *The Underground Railroad* by establishing similar tension as he introduces Cora's mother, Ajarry. Ajarry, who is transported across the Atlantic as a young girl, is raped repeatedly, attempts suicide twice, and is chained head-to-toe for months, all while being held in a ship innocuously named the *Nanny*, which is how the ship is recorded in official historical records.

In the following section, I will demonstrate that Gyasi's text ties movement between spatial islands together by reconstituting material culture. She does so through her narrative structure and the historically shifting value-base of material objects in the specifically American-centered narrative line. This line connects acute economic disadvantage with the renegotiation of material value. Gyasi's text also shows through a material, cultural process the massive surplus labor value generated by black bodies. This surplus labor provides another bridge to Whitehead, connecting them beyond their epochal coinciding plots. Whitehead's novel shares the theme of surplus labor value generated by diasporic bodies, except through the genre of magical realism,

he intentionally cashes in this surplus value through the construction of a literal Underground Railroad.

Material Culture

Homegoing opens with two chapters whose plot sets into motion the genealogical storylines of two half-sisters in West Africa, Effia Otcher and Esi Asare. These two storylines run parallel trajectories, swapping evenly back and forth over the course of 7 generations, 250 years, and three continents. Effia, born in the coastal Fanteland in the 1760s, is chosen to be the new wife of the freshly arrived British governor of the Cape Coast Castle, James Collins. The leader of her Fante village, Abeeku, agrees to the marriage despite his desire to marry Effia himself, because the arrangement is “better for our business with them. All the better for the village” (15). Just two years after moving to the castle, Effia becomes pregnant by Governor James and travels back home to visit her family. Abeeku’s vision of prosperity and trade seems to hold true: “everything in the village looked different,” and the village had become “so prosperous that they would forever be known as one of the leading slave markets in all of the Gold Coast” (26). The first chapter ends quickly after her arrival with an image of Effia’s pregnant body and little resolution to her story, except that her social and physical place in the Castle has become permanent.

The second chapter specifically dovetails with the image of Effia’s pregnancy, opening with the scene of a naked woman holding an infant back in the Cape Coast Castle, this time imprisoned in the women’s dungeon. Esi, Effia’s half sister, was born in the inland Asanteland but captured when she was 14 by Fante traders. Once imprisoned, she “learned to split her life into Before the Castle and Now.” Like Effia’s village, Esi remembers that her own small village had grown steadily in the years “Before the Castle,” which occur in roughly the same time-span

as Effia's chapter. She reminisces that "In the first year of their walks, it wouldn't take but twenty minutes to reach the forest edge that cut them off from the rest of Asanteland, but that forest had been pushed farther and farther back until by the 5th year the journey there took nearly an hour" (31). Esi's chapter ends also at the hands of Governor James. James enters the dungeon of the castle, physically examines each woman's body, and escorts them towards the ocean. It is not until the beginning of Ness's chapter (Esi's daughter) some 25 years later that Esi's story comes to a conclusion: she endured the middle passage and was unceremoniously sold into slavery in Mississippi, becoming known as "Frowny" (70). The plot of this family line remains in America for the next five generations.

The novel's opening chapters generate substantial storylines that ripple clearly through multiple generations. These storylines form an attenuated and partial but blistering fast historical march that demonstrates a remarkable continuity in the process of modernization. Gyasi's text requires the reader to work to remember each brief and attenuated experience of this modernizing process. Sometimes the characters possess more knowledge of their past than the reader, other times that balance is flipped. And the text both complicates and assists this march on the structural level as her organization of narrative elements frame and connect these parallel storylines. For example, I note that the two opening chapters form a joint between the last paragraph of the first chapter and the first paragraph of the next. In this first instance, the two are jointed by material and biological likeness: an image of mother and child. Similarly, the Quey chapter gives way to Ness's with metaphors of eating and drinking, Ness to James with the recitation of the words of a song and prayer, H's chapter ends with a pan of food being scraped clean and Akua's begins with a quartered yam being dropped into a hot cooking pan. Some chapters dovetail with starkly opposing images: Yaw's ends with an admonition to "be free" and

Sonny's begins with the word "jail," while Marjorie's chapter gives way to Marcus' with wildly differing images of the ocean. This interlocking plays out subtly through the course of the novel,⁵¹ even as the narratives experience continental separation. Because of this jointing effect, the chapters are in explicit conversation with one another, and to understand the dual storylines one is forced to decipher where and how each chapter connects both temporally and spatially. In other words, her use of structure forces the reader to remember a story or genealogy in ways not dissimilar from the actual characters. The aggregate affect of this framework is an accumulation of cultural and narrative richness,⁵² And like some of the branches of this story, her dovetails can also lead nowhere and force one to feel the sometimes fiercely arbitrary reality of family lines.

The structural joints work in unison with the historical islands of experience each chapter generates and details as the plot meanders through the centuries. As a result of this careful continuity, the parallel storylines generated in these opening chapters clearly establish a few foundational components of the systems and experiences that were present at the genesis of African colonization in the 1770s. The most substantial component of these storylines for this chapter is a clear economic backdrop of market capitalism and its conjoined birth with chattel slavery. Effia, after her tour of the castle with James, reflects on the system of economics introduced to the region. She observes that Asantes had at first been introduced to market

⁵¹ This use of structure that ties together disparate times or places is reminiscent of Gayl Jones' *Eva's Man*, where she signaled shifts in time and place with odd paragraph breaks conjoined by similar images: "Most women who look like you do wear earrings.' 'What's that supposed to mean?' He didn't answer. // I put my finger inside Miss Billie's hoop and made a circle" (Jones 18), "'What about once you close them?' She asked. // I sat squeezing my legs together, holding my knees..." (17), or "There was something in your eyes that let me know I could talk to you.' 'Didn't see anything in the other women's eyes?' 'Naw,' Davis said // "There was something in your eyes" (46). Likewise, in the concluding chapter, I draw attention to the exact same literary tool employed by Jesmyn Ward.

⁵² I don't want "richness" to serve as a misnomer here. I do not mean to suggest that both narratives accumulate material richness or wealth. Rather, despite even the clear absence of material wealth in the American storyline, each side of this story accumulates cultural and historical richness simply through the continuity of each narrative. Why is this important? Part of the strategy to delegitimize and alienate African American culture has been to sever these kinds of connections. When a people-group's collective narrative continuity is divorced from itself, when its own historical advance is subsumed into an ideology that supposes itself ahistorical, then it is subjected to the hegemonic control of an economic system that requires a captive, controlled labor force.

capitalism through trafficking “beasts...Monkeys and chimpanzees, even a few leopards” and all were brought to the castle and “ascribed worth” (25). During this phase of colonization, the Fante and Assante were both indoctrinated into market capitalism, introduced as partners in this new and exciting market, and given different production and transportation roles. The value of these beasts would soon be replaced with human life. Capitalism is geared explicitly towards the creation of private profit, which helps institute its ideals of individualism and accomplish its goals of objectifying social relations. As it spreads, it works to erode alternative forms of production and their ties to social life and space that are based in a collective or local tradition of production and exchange. One phenomenon of the spread of capitalism that is immediately apparent for the experience of Esi and Effia is the simultaneous contraction and stretching out of place and its affect on travel and production time. This reflects the classic, contradictory way capitalism spreads: in order to overcome space (and decrease communication and production time), it must erect permanent spatial fixtures that in turn grow and spread (Harvey 272). Governor James closes the spatial gap between England and West Africa through the introduction of ships, letters, correspondence, and trade. This connection must be sustained by erecting permanent fixtures in the West African landscape and enforcing the production of market goods for export.

Just a few years after the arrival of the first European, Esi’s village has expanded exponentially (31). In just three generations, villages were no longer measured by the time it took one person to walk from end to end but by their standardized width in miles. The villages expanded as they entered new commodity markets, and this fundamentally changed the inland farmland, too. When Abena first visits Kumasi, she notes that “she had never been to a farm that she could not measure with her own eye, so small was each family’s plot. Here, the farmlands

were large and luscious and filled with men to work them” (138). Later, after their village’s crops had not produced for several years, Ohene travels back to the city and returns with seeds for a new commodity, cocoa, because “the Akuapem people in the Eastern Region were already reaping the benefits of the new plant, selling it to the white men overseas at a rate that was reminiscent of the old [slave] trade” (148). Ohene’s village, like other places in the African line of this story, become dependent on foreign market demands when local resources dry up. Even after the slave trade comes to an end, its specific economic impact lingers. James muses that the abolition of slavery just meant “they would trade one type of shackles for another, trade physical ones that wrapped around wrists and ankles for the invisible ones that wrapped around your mind...the British owned the castle and they intended to own the land as well” (93).

Another feature of the text’s plot that contributes to the built, cumulative history also appears in these seminal chapters, and that is the material presence and absence of the two family heirlooms passed to Esi and Effia, the golden-black stones. These stones are material continuities that span generations and like the narrative structure, explicitly tie together both the ever-widening storylines while also grounding cultural experience to a material object. As the stakes of each chapter increase, the stone’s relative value does as well, both in the lack of Esi’s stone and the compounding richness of Effia’s. “Value” is the word I hope to emphasize, as these symbolic stones are each closely tied to storylines of stark material want versus a sometimes overabundance of resources. The stones-as-cultural-legacy thus play out on a grand scale the compounded value loss of material absence and the compounded value gain of material presence. Marjorie (Effia’s great, great, great, great granddaughter) summarizes the history of one stone in

a chapter set variously in Alabama and Ghana. When her grandmother, Akua, asks if she is wearing the stone, the narrator⁵³ quickly recites the stone's historical, familial march:

Her father had given it to her only a year before, saying that she was finally old enough to care for it. It had belonged to Old Lady [Akua] and to Abena before her, and to James, and Quey, and Effia the Beauty before that. It had begun with Maame, the woman who had set a great fire, Her father had told her that the necklace was a part of their family history and she was to never take it off, never give it away. (267)

This recitation is useful, but a bit misleading in its straightforwardness. The path of both stones through the narrative is truncated and, at times probably intentionally, confusing.

Esi and Effia only know of their relation to one another through brief, secondhand stories and never know of their potential⁵⁴ proximity in the castle. When receiving her official tour of the castle from James, Effia is led from the ground floor where the apartments, parade ground, and soldiers quarters are located, to the stockyard, pond and hospital. The entire castle is a self-contained village, and Effia is momentarily smitten. In a moment of repose, she leans against a cannon guarding the stairwell to James's private loft and catches a breeze through the floor of the castle. She asks James what is below and his answer is simply "cargo" (17). When Effia hears a faint wailing from below and realizes that the cargo is human flesh, she becomes panicked, screaming at James who reminds her that now her "home is no better" than the prison below. The two sisters and the two stones are tantalizingly close, and this moment presents a clear vertical

⁵³ The narrative voice shifts with each chapter and reflects either explicitly the voice of the primary character of the chapter or Gyasi's voice acting as an amanuensis for her ancestors, and sometimes both at once as is the case in Marjorie's chapter.

⁵⁴ "Potential" because the text simply does not verify this, one way or the other. The moment described in this paragraph lends itself to be read in such a way that Effia and Esi are there together, but the intentional vague use of time and place in this novel resists a totalizing narrative or assertion of authority on the details of its plot, reflecting in a way the difficulty the characters experience themselves.

and horizontal spatial hierarchy that reverberates through a long, elliptical arc and culminates at the end of the novel with the descendant of Effia returning her stone to the descendent of Esi while swimming in the ocean outside the same castle in Ghana.

Esi receives her stone from Maame as their village is being burned and pillaged by a neighboring tribe. She is captured and carried to the castle prison, where she buries her stone in a “river of shit” just before she’s taken to a ship on the coast, the stone never to surface again. The memory of this loss persists across the ocean, as Esi (called “Frowny” on the plantation) would “mutter as she swept, left without her mother’s stone” (70). This stands in stark contrast to Effia’s matching stone. Unlike Esi, Effia received the stone from her stepmother, Baaba (16). The stone then remains silent in the narrative for 3 generations until it is literally unearthed in Abena’s chapter by her father, James (now called “Unlucky”). James, who had disavowed his slave-trading family, had moved to their remote farm and buried the stone in his hearth (153) before giving it to Abena himself. We don’t know so fluidly, as Marjorie indicates, how and under what circumstance the stone passed from Effia to Quey to James. The stone’s journey resurfaces again, three chapters and one generation later, when Yaw reunites with his mother, Akua. He finds out the stone had been in the hands of a white missionary for years until his mother came into possession of it. The penultimate passage concerning the stone tells us that Akua gave the stone to Yaw, who gave it to Marjorie. Finally, as mentioned previously, the two lines come together in the end with Marcus and Marjorie sharing possession of the one remaining stone.

The disparate trajectory of the stones tells a cultural and economic story of underdevelopment that traces from Africa to the North American continent. By “underdevelopment,” I do not just refer to a specific lack of development in a geographic region.

Instead, that there is an inevitable spatial and ideological product when an oppressed population is integrated into the world market economy, an integration that occurred forcibly for Esi and was paid for with the cultural and economic legacy of her gold-black stone. The lost stone reveals what Manning Marable calls the “two essential and integral factors” of capital systems, particularly those tied to the slave trade: fraud and force (106). The system is fraudulent because it promises success is available for all who work hard, accumulate capital, and participate in the political process, all the while dictating terms of labor, controlling flows of wealth, and flat out preventing access to the political process. Capitalism maintains this transparent fraud through the use of force, specifically the kind of force used to extract surplus labor value from the worker through the commodification of the body, legalizing its sale, and enacting brutal forms of physical, social, and economic punishment upon it to maximize productivity. David Harvey posits a similar thesis, that Enlightenment rationality hides logic of “domination and oppression.” Paraphrasing Bernstein, Harvey argues that an inbred drive to dominate nature likewise entailed the domination of human beings, leading to a “nightmare condition of self-domination” (13).

Esi’s stone represents material loss, and this loss is highlighted in compounding fashion through her line. But the American storyline, which I will focus on here, replaces the material loss of the stone with a different set of material continuities that reflect both a process of uneven modernization as well as an alternative relationship to the production and valuation of material goods.

In the very first sentence of the novel set in North America, this alternative material relationship is made clear⁵⁵: “There was no drinking gourd, no spiritual soothing enough to mend

⁵⁵ Esi’s experience of the middle passage is left to the “in-between” of her chapter and Ness’s. I will address the significance of this later, but it points to a larger, collective experience tied to hyper-modernity and non-places.

a broken spirit. Even the Northern Star was a hoax” (70).⁵⁶ The absence of the gourd precludes the availability of water at all. The value of water is culturally rooted in notions of freedom, too. For example, Kojo, Ness’s son, later notes that he’d often observed Ma Aku, the enslaved Asante woman who smuggles Kojo to freedom in Baltimore, “looking out at the water, looking as if she would jump in, try to find her way home” (113). The double-value of water as physical and spiritual nourishment is clearly stated, and both factor into the value of the material object that is required to experience this relief, but has been intentionally withheld. Effia’s stone, as it surfaced and resurfaced in the African storyline, always provided some form of ontological security or familial stability. Its value was both collective and historical. Esi’s loss narrates the island hopping process of shifting markets that individualized experience and wiped away history, following the trajectory expanding capital markets assume by sweeping away the historical value of a material object and redirecting its use towards individual gain.

Ma Aku draws out this distinction between material values when she observes the change in brooms from Africa to America. She reminds Kojo that “in the Gold Coast brooms had no handles. The body was the handle, and it moved and bent much easier than a stick ever could” (113). This description seems like deliberate play on words. First, Ma Aku clearly creates a different kind of relationship to the broom – one where her body itself acts in unison with and as an extension of the material object. More importantly, she correlates the ease and use of the body in relation to a stick or hard object, a relationship to the material world that is completely inverted in the system of slavery. Whereas her body once bent and moved freely in unison with a material object, it now moves and bends at the application of force through material objects. The

⁵⁶ Whitehead’s outlook is likewise pessimistic, and Cora’s description of the state of Tennessee provides an apt description: “No chains fastened Cora’s misfortunes to her character or actions. Her skin was black and this was how the world treated black people...If Tennessee had a temperament, it took after the dark personality of the world, with a taste for arbitrary’ punishment. No one was spared, regardless of the shape of their dreams or the color of their skin” (216).

relationship between the body and the object reflects the change in markets and the modes and methods of production. Even objects that exist to bring relief – a drinking gourd – are no where to be found in the reader’s (and Ness’s) introduction to the newest capital market, the use and exchange value of its material objects, and their fetishization. The Northern Star promises more than relief; its value as a physical object is based in its association with liberty, yet it is likewise seen as fraudulent and misleading.

The whip receives similar attention in Gyasi’s American narrative. The value of the whip was fetishized because it ordered the social relations held in place by the exchange value of goods on the global market. It performs the dual role of devaluing the black body while adding value to the production of material goods. Ness’s introduction to the whip performed two specific functions: it taught her a new form of communication while denying access to her own and introduced a new system of accounting. Ness remembers that her mother’s old master caught Esi speaking to her in Twi. “He’d given Esi five lashes for every Twi word Ness spoke, and when Ness, seeing her battered mother, had become too scared to speak, he gave Esi five lashes for each minute of Ness’s silence” (71). Ness learns that torture is an acceptable means of extracting surplus labor value, that there is a 1-1 relationship between the two, and that there is a consequence enacted on the body for choosing not to participate in the new system. Baptist recounts nearly identical descriptions in the autobiography of Israel Campbell. Campbell remembers when his overseer “Belfer” told a new slave that he would have exactly “as many lashes as there were pounds short” in the official draft of cotton recorded in his ledger (131-32). It is because torture is acceptable that despite advances in some aspects of cotton technology, the whip was still the greatest driver of efficiency. Baptiste explores the ramifications of this kind of accounting in slavery with his analysis of the “push system” on plantations and its nearly

singular dependence on the whip (121-134). Slavers made detailed calculations to calibrate the exact amount of torture to enact on their slaves in order to achieve the tripartite balance of production speed, fear, and violence. From 1790, after the invention of the cotton gin, to 1860 and the start of the Civil War, the last remaining bottleneck to cotton production was the picking and harvest time. To address this, the pushing system assigned a unique, individual quota of production per day to each slave. Were a slave to weigh in short of that quota he or she would receive a correlating amount of lashes. The enslaved person knew this number and was keenly aware of their body's production capabilities and worth. Once a person, under the constant threat of torture, learned to reach their daily pound quota, the quota was raised again and the process repeated: the whip would forcibly extract greater and greater amounts of productivity. Baptist, paraphrasing a Mississippi overseer, observes that in this system, "the whip was as important to making cotton grow as sunshine and rain" (121). These methods were shared widely and spread freely. From 1800 to 1860 the total gain in productivity per picker was nearly 400%, this without a single mechanical advancement that increased the efficiency of cotton harvest (128).⁵⁷

Because of the whip's fetishized, cultural value, its use-value to the market endured even beyond the abolition of slavery. While production shifted from cotton to coal in certain areas of the South immediately after the war, its method of efficiently extracting labor did not. Two generations after Ness, H's chapter brings the narrative back from Baltimore to Alabama and into the convict-leasing system. After emancipation, H left his plantation in Georgia but was arrested on his way to Alabama for looking at a white woman. He was eventually sold by the state of Alabama to work in the coal mines outside of Birmingham, Al. The whip is reintroduced to the narrative when a young black boy walks into the pit boss's office on the first day of work in the mines of Pratt City. H narrates, "the boy peed himself, tears running down his face...he'd

⁵⁷ The first mechanical cotton picker was not developed until the 1930s.

probably never seen a whip like the one the pit boss had laid out on his desk, only heard about them in the nightmarish stories his parents told” (160). The whip, as it did in the cotton fields, was the primary driver of efficient labor. In front of the whip, H regularly shoveled 14,000 pounds of coal per day, 2,000 more than the daily quota. He remembers that more than once a miner had been whipped for not reaching the 10-ton quota. H had even seen a man “shovel 11,829 pounds of coal...and when the pit boss had seen the missing 171 pounds, he made the man put his hands up against the cave wall, and then he’d whipped him until he died” (161).

While the whip drove this efficiency, H added his own and different exchange-value to the shovel. Referred to as “shovel arm,” an object-body relationship reminiscent of Ma Aku’s with a broom in Africa, H once found himself chained to a “3rd class white man” named Thomas. Thomas, despite his race, had “already heard that if you didn’t make your quota, you and your buddy would be whipped, sometimes to death” (163). Yet even after scooping just a few shovelfuls, Thomas collapses to the ground shaking with anxiety. Before the pit boss could descend, “wordlessly, H had taken up Thomas’s shovel. With his own shovel in one hand and Thomas’s shovel in another, H had filled both men’s quotas, the pit boss watching all the while” (163). Even under shackles, H is able to use the surplus labor value he can generate with a shovel to purchase the life of another person. The shovel itself gains liberatory value, which he continues to develop as a free black man. But this autonomous use of his own surplus labor value also puts him at risk – the next day he wakes up to find his arms are spent and he cannot lift a shovel at all. When H finds himself unable to work but still responsible for producing his quota, Thomas, Joecy, and his third-class man all chip in and scoop his quota for him. H has used his shovel to barter his surplus value for protection by securing social bonds, all the while maintaining production at his usual efficient rate. These value-added associations made in the

depths of the mines and their connection to personal well-being prefigure the coalition that forms in Pratt City, where entire groups of ex-convicts collectively barter their labor value for greater mobility and freedom. H's ultimate goal is also realized at the end of his chapter and is explained in relation to the shovel: remembering her father, Willie says the "best part of his day was when he could put that shovel down and walk inside to see his girls waiting for him" (221). His ability to increase the use-value of the tool secured familial bonds, allowed him to lay aside the tool outside his home, and enter a psychically safer place.

Gyasi's text highlights the cumulative impact of the establishment and growth of the American political and economic system on African American cultural enunciation. Her novel shows that, despite shifting time and place on national and local levels, African American labor built America; even more, African Americans have long contributed a grossly imbalanced *surplus* labor value to the American economy. This surplus labor value is largely unrecognized, in historical records and in the popular understanding of the American dream with its ideals of expansive economic opportunity, social mobility, and liberty. This surplus labor value can be measured in real, economic terms⁵⁸ as well as through the alternative and distinct use-value African Americans layer onto the material products of capital expansion. Their surplus use-value constructs space alongside, underneath, and within the dominant economic and ideological constructs of modernity. In this way, Gyasi's text sets against the privileged, unitary truth of western discourse a manifold black perspective, built from experience alongside Euro-modernization from the beginning. Her dual narrative wrests control of the global metanarrative

⁵⁸ For example, citing a study of planter account books, Baptiste notes that daily picking totals for individual enslaved people in labor camps increased their yields by an average of 2.1 percent per year for over 60 years. This kind of labor efficiency confounds the Euro-centric view that systematic gains in labor efficiency must come at the hands of new machine technology.

of European domination and destiny. It destabilizes its presuppositions of freedom and individual acts of self-actualization.

It is in this way that space is a vehicle for defining the self, recorded in part through its production of material goods. It is also why African American cultural enunciation is now so distinctively pronounced and influential on a global scale: it has been developing these spaces and its modes of production and distribution since before the inception of America. Enslaved Africans gave flesh to “American” before its nationalistic colors were even conceived, in the same way that African Americans “defined the south” through their slave narratives before the Southern Renaissance “raged to explain” the South in the 1920s. It is how the very most isolated and dangerous corners of the plantation system could also produce the most unique contribution America has made to music with the Blues. African Americans were modernists before the modernist movement, responsible for floods of innovation on the frontier of American plantations. They existed in a world where only individual creativity could improve your circumstance, and their art also was one of mimicry and deception, of slyly drawing out the vagaries of a totalizing ideology.

The Museum

The remainder of this chapter will focus on *The Underground Railroad*, specifically Cora’s experience working for the Museum of Natural Wonders in South Carolina and her encounters with Whitehead’s construction of a real, material Underground Railroad. Having already exposed the privileged, unitary truth of western history as a myth created to support the growth and spread of capitalism, bringing the Underground Railroad to material life cashes in three centuries of surplus labor value generated by black bodies. Each time Cora descends into a new station of the Underground Railroad, she is taken aback at the sheer magnitude of its

construction. Her first time down, she and Caesar question Lumbly about who was behind its construction. He responds: “who builds anything in this country?” The implication, of course, is that black bodies built it. And when asked how they were able to, he answers: “With their hands, how else?” (67). In fact, after multiple descents into the underground, “Cora knew better than to ask who built it. All the railroad men, from Lumbly to Royal, countered with a variation of ‘Who do you think made it? Who makes everything?’” Whitehead draws material presence from absence – which is in actuality a withheld surplus – in the same way Toni Morrison draws out the person of Beloved. Yet Whitehead breaches the threshold of individual experience; by intentionally moving outside a historical metanarrative, he can construct a materialized *system* of spatial resistance and response that draws on a real, measurable surplus value and tunnels through the very heart of the official, documented history of America.

When Cora emerges from the Underground Railroad after escaping from Georgia to South Carolina, she steps into the sunlight and “looked up at the skyscraper and reeled, wondering how far she had travelled” (70). She would come to find out that the skyscraper – one of the “tallest buildings in the nation” at twelve stories (86) – was also home to the medical facility responsible for sterilizing African American women. This version of South Carolina is a world of overt paternalism – former slaves are “property of the United States Government” and the state offered generous tax incentives for whites and blacks to relocate to the region. The state provided “good jobs, too, not slave work” (93). The experience of that world tells otherwise. As I referenced earlier, Cora herself describes this system as one that still came with chains, just of a different make and manufacture.

When Cora is assigned a new job in the city, she discovers that while it is still not “slave work,” her new job is a literal stage performance of slave labor for white patrons of a museum.

Her new boss at the Museum of Natural Wonders informs her that she is to bring to life for the patrons the history of America. He explains:

There was so much to educate the public about. The untamed flora and fauna...the minerals and other splendors...some people never left the counties where they were born. Like a railroad, the museum permitted them to see the rest of the country beyond their small experience, from Florida to Maine to the western frontier. And to see its people. ‘People like you.’ (109)⁵⁹

Her duties are to perform her otherness – reminiscent of Mbembe’s summation – and this performance has been carefully contained and monetized. The curator spells out an official American history for Cora whose narrator is industrial and material – a train of a different sort than her recent experience underground. The curator’s description of this rail line stands in stark contrast to the running joke from the conductors of the Underground Railroad about truly “seeing” America. On Cora’s first ride, just before take off, Lumbly “peered between the gaps of the wood” on the boxcar and told them, “If you want to see what this nation is all about, I always say, you have to ride the rails. Look outside as you speed through and you’ll find the true face of America” (69). This is a mantra Cora repeats to herself twice more in her travels through America (262, 304). Of course, Cora realizes eventually that this was a joke from the start – that “there was only darkness outside the windows on her journeys, and only ever would be darkness” (263). This interchange is a material analog for the dual narratives of these texts and the larger dual narratives of America, as realized in the explosive movement of two rail lines with different use-value. These narratives exist in tension, and this tension informs the spatial dynamics of the Underground Railroad.⁶⁰

The railroad system described by the curator is one that at the beginning of the 19th

⁵⁹ This museum demonstrates clearly American culture’s eagerness to consume racialized images of the ghetto, and that its history is nothing if not the ritualized killing of black bodies.

⁶⁰ On page 39, I begin an analysis of these two grand narratives. In spatial terms, I refer to these narratives simply as “above ground cartography” and “below ground cartography.”

century boasted barely 10 miles of rail but at its end well over 150,000 miles (U.S. Census Bureau). It was this burst of historical growth and movement, chronicled by a railroad, that the curator so hoped for the patrons to “see from the window”; this is a view afforded only on board the American industrial version of modernity. The curator knows this, must enforce the rules of the museum with his actresses, and is responsible for teaching them the narrative from the “correct” train window. Isis (a former slave and Cora’s work partner) once asks the curator to explain the “final window” where an “Indian received a piece of parchment from three white men who stood in noble postures, their hands open in gestures of negotiation” (116). When she asks, “What’s that?” it is unclear what precise aspect of the scene Isis asks the curator to explain, the implication is that she is asking what a negotiation is, rather than who the characters are. The curator’s response is both funny⁶¹ and telling. Given the context of the subject matter and the culture this museum memorializes, it perhaps makes sense that a former slave does not understand the concept of negotiation at all. This cultural layer of American history, as it realized itself materially, was not built on mutual acts of negotiation but physical force. “Negotiation” never happened between settlers and Native Americans, and stripping the power of negotiation from enslaved Africans was the auction block’s first order of business. Seeking to divert from this question and reassert the common myth, the curator responds by describing something completely different. ““That’s a real tepee,’ Mr. Field said. ‘We like to tell a story in each one, to illuminate the American experience. Everyone⁶² knows the truth of the historic encounter, but to see it before you –’” (116). The curator draws attention to the material rather than the idea, and

⁶¹ Whitehead has also said in interviews that there are no jokes in this book. While there are no overt jokes, there is a current of humor that runs underneath much of the dialogue of this book, which is often delivered in “deadpan” fashion, where the commentary is funny but the subject is not. No one is smiling despite how ridiculous a circumstance might be. This is one such case.

⁶² Clearly dripping in irony (and enforcing that Isis is not “everyone”), this statement is humorous only in the enormous audacity of confidence by which a transparently false condition is delivered.

in so doing reveals the ulterior narrative depicted behind the window. By its very nature as a museum prop, the tepee as the site of a home now shows the utter lack of negotiation the scene depicts. The material survived intact, but was stripped away from its heavy anthropological associations, and now resides behind a narrative of euro-modernity where people pay a small fee to marvel at its otherness. It can be looked at only through a transparent fishbowl of whiteness. Its existence in that space alone confirms the lack of negotiation.

The curator's rhetoric and his spatial organization of the museum mimic the cultural and spatial narrative of America as told from a euro-centric perspective of modernity. Cora's experience of the museum, and her role within it, reveals a different one. Cora is brought to the museum to act out different scenes of African American experience from the relative short history of America. She is rotated between three rooms. The first room is called "Scenes from Darkest Africa." It contained a hut made of poles and a thatch roof, an animated fire of red glass, and several small household items. The second room is "Life on the Slave Ship." This room is painted with "soothing blue walls" and here she moves about the ship's deck as an African deckhand. On deck, she continually walks around a white sailor leaning against the gunwale. Every white character in the museum is made of wax, the actresses in the museum are all former slaves. The final scene was called "Typical Day on the Plantation." There, Cora sat at a spinning wheel outside of the slave quarters, feeding seed to stuffed chickens that roamed the dirt (110).

In Cora's nightmares she often returns to these museum scenes but this time as a "customer of pain" who visits the museum at night. In her dreams, she strolls back and forth before the glass and watches herself perform the real narrative the glass walls hide: hundreds of wails accompany her from below deck in the slave ship scene, Miss Lucy performs crude surgery

on her body in the plantation scene,⁶³ and she is simultaneously sterilized and raped by nurses and slave masters in another (144). Cora has physically and psychically explored these spaces already, and her trauma manifests itself by re-contextualizing the moment of trauma within spaces of representation that are patronizing to her inner self. She learns to associate the real experience of trauma inflicted on her body as a narrative also replicated in the spatial structures that surround her. This is why, as she reflects on her experience in America, she surmises, “whether in the fields or underground or in an attic room, America remained her warden” (172). Yet Cora actively deconstructs these scenes nearly from the moment she first steps behind the glass. She does so behind closed doors with Isis and Betty, where on their breaks they “discussed the merits and disadvantages of their new position” and questioned whether each display was “the truth of [their] historic encounter” (116). Cora intentionally confronts the gaze of the patrons and does so with remarkable efficiency. She would “select one patron per hour to evil eye...chipping away at weak links wherever she found them” (125-6). Her goal was that the patrons “learn that the slave, the African in your midst, is looking at you, too” (126). Together, Cora, Iris, and Betty learn that as they related and oriented themselves within each scene they could also reveal the instability of the overall display. They come to believe that “truth was a changing display in a show window” (116).

And Cora learns to change the displays herself, to integrate her narrative just as she learned that “putting on a show for the master was a familiar skill, [with] the small angles and advantages of the mask.” In performance with the mask, even in front of the ruthless Randall brothers, Cora and her peers “shook off their fear” (33). Cora’s performance, echoing Comaroff

⁶³ This surgery appears to be a crude abortion procedure, in which she cut her stomach open with a letter opener and “a thousand black spiders spilled from her guts” (144). This is most likely tied to the trauma of her gang rape at the Randall plantation. The entire scene unfolds in two sentences: “If anyone heard or saw, they did not intervene. The Hob women sewed her up” (21).

and Comaroff, shows an active negotiation with these presuppositions of American life, and her collaboration with each scene instigates an alternative narrative that moves modernity forward on the material scale. In one instance, she critiques the contours of the plantation room to the curator, as she considered herself an experiential expert on the subject. After listening to her critique, the curator “did concede that the spinning wheels were not often used outdoors...but countered that while authenticity was their watchword, the dimensions of the room forced certain concessions” (110). He considered these concessions unfortunate. He concludes that he wishes he “could fit an entire field of cotton in the display and had the budget for a dozen actors to work it. One day perhaps.” His response shows the spatial dissonance between productions of modernity and its material proliferation. When he responds that there is not enough room for the cotton fields, he echoes the rhetoric of western discourse, which likewise excludes the labor put forth to bring that commodity to market. And his afterthought – another moment of deadpan humor where the ease of the statement belies its agenda – dreams to display a fully working farm, just as it had once been on the plantation. His response reaffirms that the “North” cannot account spatially for how modernity spread, because it is at odds with its own ideological tenets. Its actual materialization will not “fit” within the historical or economic space allocated for its westernized narrative, just as a full cotton field would not fit into the space of the display.

The Underground Railroad

Of the many characters, materials, and social spaces that exist but do not fit within the normative space allotted by modernity, the materialized Underground Railroad is primary in this text. Whitehead’s materialization of this space draws attention to the way that global South knowledge and African American cultural enunciation has “prefigured the future of the former metropole,” because the space of the Underground Railroad prefigures spaces of postmodernity.

In the remainder of this chapter, working under Marc Auge's theory of "triple decentering," I will argue that the Underground Railroad represents a "non-place" that constitutes part of "supermodernity," the materialized form of postmodernity. In this way, the materialized railroad gives dimension to an already-carved-out non-place, a psychically explored and appropriated element of a spatial organization that has proliferated under late-capitalism, but was felt in the lived experience of African Americans in the earliest days of chattel slavery. The underground resists rationalism and nationalism with myth and individual experience, and undermines notions of progress and benevolence with fantasy and the uncanny. If African American cultural enunciation prefigured modernism by its feats of individual innovation and built modernism's foundations with its labor, through the Underground Railroad it also prefigures postmodernism by its utilization of the space of non-place and the individualization of experience, a move away from essence. If Modernism required the creation of economic and spatial peripheries in order to spread, postmodernism now requires these spatial peripheries be connected in supermodern spaces of transit and speed.

First, Auge echoes the theoretical (Comaroff, Harvey) and critical narrative built from the beginning of this chapter that the inception of modernity in foreign capital markets created a gap – two separate narratives growing in opposite direction – between the "richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor" (*x*). Auge contends that, as markets have grown, so too has this gap increased in both absolute and relative terms. Auge's formulation of triple decentering is built on the supposition that our current social and political system functions as a part of a fully integrated and globalized economy. Globalization is the material existence of an allegedly free market and of a technological network that covers the earth. Some people have access to this network, though for many people, access is prohibited. In this way, much like the work these

novels accomplish in their creation of an American megalopolis, Auge writes, “every big town is a world, even though *it is a recapitulation, a summary of the world* with its ethnic, cultural, religious, social, and economic diversity” (xii). In a globalized world, centers are connected to other centers and the circulation of goods and knowledge has made the human race entirely interdependent. These connected markets survive based on the accelerated exchange and circulation of goods, and like Modernity, still direct towards the precondition of economic prosperity. As a result of economic globalization, Auge contends that we exist in a state of “supermodernity,” which forms a reciprocal relationship to Postmodernity similar to that of Modernity and modernization.

Supermodernity refers to the major change in global society brought about by the rapid and interdependent circulation of goods and ideas. This rapid circulation has a three-fold impact on the organization and characterization of social life: it creates an excess of events in time, an excess of space, and an individualization of references, which produce an overabundance of ego. Auge contends that events in time are in excess because in supermodernity, “the recent past...becomes history as soon as it has been lived” (22). The urgency of the “here and now” dictates supermodernity and thus each event is a singular contingency rather than a connected narrative. In supermodernity, space is in excess, somewhat paradoxically, because of the shrinking nature of the planet. The concrete outcome of a shrinking planet is the creation and concentration of urban spaces built to facilitate the movements of populations between places, and these spaces are in excess. In other words, a new network of built spaces has been constructed within a system that requires the existence of accelerated circulation of passengers and goods. This has produced remarkably defined physical places that reproduce the qualities of speed, transit, and the movement of things and people. In these supermodern spaces, people are

reduced to the individual, where the person interprets the information delivered to him or herself as only meant for him or herself in that moment. It is the individualization of excessive events that produce an excess of ego. And it is this production of postmodernism – the instantaneous circulation of ideas and the formation of hyper-transit systems – that Auge argues produces the spatial components of supermodernity.

The spatial organization and material components of postmodernity consist of both social, anthropological places and non-places. The two never exist in pure form – places and non-places reconstitute themselves and the layering of social relations restore or resume even after this continual reconstitution (63). Anthropological places are places of identity, relations, and history. These places are associatively thick, defined, and historical. Auge contends they are also “geometric” in the sense that they are mapped into institutional arrangements that form social space. He draws this picture: anthropological places consist of “the line, the intersection of lines, and the point of intersection” (46). These correspond to routes, axes, or paths that lead from one place to another and have been traced by people over time. At their intersection is a pause, a halt in movement that produces place as it accumulates history. Supermodernity is also composed of non-places. Non-places exist on a continuum with anthropological places, and the two act almost as opposed polarities (64). If an anthropological place is relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a non-place is devoid of those associations. A non-place is born where there is a dense network of means of transport, which are also temporarily habituated places. The non-place is the fleeting, the momentary, and the ephemeral – the “here and now.” In a non-place, the associative world surrenders to a solitary individuality. When a person passes through a non-place, they submit to anonymity and enter into a contractual relationship with the non-place, giving in to its properties of speed, transit, and mobility. The only relationship present

is that specific contract with the non-place, and the space of non-place “creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude” (83). So while the experience of the non-place is reduced down to the individual, the non-place also draws out empty, flattened concepts of individual identity.

In a non-place, there is no room for historical discourse unless transformed into an element of spectacle. History does not reign in a non-place; instead, what reigns is “actuality, the urgency of the present moment” (83). The urgency of the present moment reigns because non-places exist to be passed through. Time is present, but limited solely to the present. Thus non-places annihilate the associative time-space continuum even as they reinforce and measure time through itineraries and timetables that hold transportation accountable to its purposes. The experience of the non-place, then, concerns itself only with the presence of the individual in the moment. Augé demonstrates this with an analogy to air-travel. Augé notes that when the captain of the plane draws the passenger’s attention to the location of a city outside a window, there is really “nothing to be seen: the spectacle is only an idea, only a word” (84). Thus non-places avoid all the principal markings of the places to which it transports one, yet it also comments on their nature. For Augé, a magazine owned by an airline company that advertises hotels (which in turn advertise the airline company) represents a cosmology both universal and familiar. For an individual that enters into a non-place, the images he or she sees “outlines a world of consumption that every individual can make his own.” At the same time, Augé contends that the cosmology of the non-place produces “effects of recognition.” And this he calls the paradox of the non-place: “a foreigner lost in a country he does not know can feel at home there only in the anonymity of motorways, service stations, big stores or hotel chains” (86). In Cora’s case, the anonymity of a subterranean railroad becomes a space of self; it replicates the dark void, without

referent, outside her window. Upon the admonition of the conductor to “look out the window and see the true face of America,” Cora looks out and of course sees nothing but darkness. Yet, the darkness becomes a significant part of her being. The tunnels were a “private secret about yourself it never occurred to you to share...an intimacy so much a part of who you were that it could not be made separate” (266). Perhaps for Cora it is in the darkness, the anonymity, that the mask comes off. Her existence when in the underground is no longer dramatized, as she only exists in the temporary moment, the speed and intensity of which evacuate history.

A non-place exists where there is a dense network of means of transport that are at the same time variously inhabited. It is a space where transactions between inhabitants are limited to the present moment; often happen wordlessly, or through gestures (62-63). The Underground Railroad demonstrates these qualities. When Royal, an agent of the Underground Railroad, frees Cora from the slave-catcher, Ridgeway, and returns with her to the hidden Indiana station, he muses on the vast, connected system of the Underground Railroad. Nearing the end of their journey, he tells Cora that:

The underground railroad is bigger than its operators – it’s all of you, too. The small spurs, the big trunk lines. We have the newest locomotives and the obsolete engines, and we have hand-cars like that one. It goes everywhere, to places we know and those we don’t. We got this tunnel right here, running beneath us, and no one knows where it leads. (267)

Royal’s first-hand experience of the railroad highlights a key spatial element: it is everywhere, at once. The narrator summarizes these properties, noting the “barn of shackles, the hole in the earth, this broke-down boxcar – the heading of the underground railroad was laid in the direction of the bizarre” (90). It is dense as a network, but thin in its relative associations. Cora’s very first

experience of the Railroad teaches her this lesson. On her descent she “marvels at the sheer industry that had made such a project possible...two steel rails ran the visible length of the tunnel...springing from some inconceivable source and shooting toward a miraculous terminus” (67).

The Underground Railroad is an interstice in the time and space of capital systems. It mimics and undermines the above-ground cartographies of transportation that reinforce racial and economic division while also wreaking havoc on those landscapes through its erections of permanent spatial fixtures. At the same time, the experience of the underground non-place is connected to the construction and experience of above-ground African American cartographies that replicate its determinative qualities of movement and angularity, rhythm and reciprocity. For example, there is a strong parallel between the materialized, subterranean railroad and Zora Neale Hurston’s concepts of angularity and asymmetry. In the design of homes, art, and song, Hurston argues that African Americans always avoid the “simple straight line.” It is through angularity that African Americans adopt existing spaces to express the African American self. The same is true for “Asymmetry,” which is the paradoxical juxtaposition of rhythm with an absence of linear symmetry in African American art. In the same way, Cora discovered a rhythm while pumping the coal cart down the winding underground rail lines (303).

Just as the materialized railroad replicates Hurston’s analysis of above-ground African American cartographies, it also bears similar spatial structures to Houston Baker’s blues matrix, the black hole, and vernacular expression. It seems no coincidence that Baker’s first example of the blues matrix as a specifically spatial construct is the image of W.C. Handy “at a railroad juncture deep in the southern night.” As a source of the blues matrix as enunciated above ground, Baker notes the “black hole” is a space in African American culture which operates as the

“subsurface force of the black underground” (151). As a trope, the black hole is an invisible, attractive force – “a massive concentration of energy that draws all objects to its center. It reduces matter that passes its event horizon to zero sum” (145). The confinement and limitation of the black hole (and the flattening characteristic of the underground railroad) generates energy directly because of this act of compression. Baker argues that in this space, the “hole is the domain of *Wholeness*, an achieved relationality of black community...to be *Black* and *Whole* is to escape incarcerating restraints of a white world and to engage the concentrated, underground singularity of experience” (152). From the energy of this black hole issues forth the blues matrix, a realized cultural cohesion in the above-ground cartographies of racial division and economic stratification. Similarly, the materialized Underground Railroad is a reversal of the spatial settings of its above-ground cartography, its inversion demonstrating an appropriation of existing cartography for the autonomous self.

There is a difference, it seems, in Baker’s “black hole” and the function of the UR. Houston’s subterranean black hole “draws all objects to its center” but is itself stationary, though it seems sometimes quivering in its energy. While the blues matrix is a more integrated concept of African American spatial constructs in the above-ground cartography and is often related to movement, it doesn’t share the same qualities and characteristics with its stationary source. Instead, looking to postmodernism and to its spaces whose material qualities are just now being seen *en masse* – Whitehead connects the psychically explored and culturally productive space of the underground to the long arc of inverted cartographies specifically related to the movement of goods and capital across the globe, an arc in which diasporic bodies have played a defining role

since this ideology became material in West Africa.⁶⁴ This is not an arc that Baker disregards. He notes that the “size and arrangements of black dwellings...stand as signs for the continuing impoverishment of blacks in the United States,” and that spaces of African American culture signify directly on the economics of slavery (30). In fact, Baker articulates the material underpinning of this chapter. To wit: the specific material conditions of slavery resulted in an ideology that foregrounds expression. Unlike a stationary black hole, Whitehead’s Underground Railroad is not a space that draws the self to its own center, but rather directs movement of the self in all directions. It directs flows to and from above-ground centers; in so doing, as it relates with and subverts the dominant spaces of late capitalism, it enables the construction of an authentic African American space. It operates as a postmodern blues matrix that builds now from a mobilized underground – a source of energy that harnesses the ubiquitous speed of transport in a globalized world. Thus, in a now totally globalized world, we see the actual materialization of non-places and can recognize their spatial forbearers.

Whitehead expertly materializes something that is not at odds with the historical surplus labor value needed to generate its construction, and also replicates qualities of places so associatively thin we now understand them to be non-places. In fact, when marveling at the labor needed to go into its construction, Cora shows her acute awareness of this surplus value generated in the cotton field and that its value is payment in the construction of the line:

She thought of the picking, how it raced down the furrows at harvest, the African bodies working as one, as fast as their strength permitted. The vast fields bust with hundreds of thousands of white bolls, strung like stars in the sky on the clearest of clear nights. When the slaves finished, they had stripped the fields of their color. It was a magnificent operation, from seed to bale, but not one of them could be prideful of their labor. It had been stolen from them. Bled from them. The tunnel, the tracks, the desperate souls who found salvation in the coordination

⁶⁴ This is the same vertical hierarchy established in the scene from *Homegoing* where Effia stands atop the castle and listens to the wails from below, where Esi is held imprisoned. This vertical hierarchy maintains its spatial division in the American strain of the African diaspora.

of its stations and timetables – this was a marvel to be proud of. She wondered if those who had built this thing had received their proper reward. (68)

And though this payment is a transaction in the context of a magical realist novel, the historical (non-magical realist) Underground Railroad likewise created a dense network of movement amidst and around the real, aboveground cartography whose ideological foundations were built by the same, subjugated black bodies. The historical Underground Railroad functioned materially in the present moment, too, because the always-immediate presence of danger temporarily eliminated history. The Underground Railroad communicated via nonverbal methods (maps, flags, signs, lights). The individual experience of constantly being on the run reduced one's identity, flattened a person into compressed and compacted spaces, much like Cora's experience confined in a North Carolina attic, a similar one to that of Harriet Jacobs flattened in her garret.

The non-place evacuates history, as does the Underground Railroad for Cora. During her escape from Georgia, Cora encounters a crew of white men hunting pigs at night. In the confusion of their encounter, she becomes entangled with a young boy and smashes a rock over his head, killing him. She escapes and spends several more days running before she first descends into the Underground, during which time the boy's death preoccupies her thoughts (64). However, once she emerges from the Underground Railroad in South Carolina, she suddenly realizes that she "hadn't thought of the boy since they stepped underground" (92). In fact, their very first act upon emerging above ground is to change their names and assume new identities. Halfway through the novel, after her second pass through the Underground Railroad, Cora "rarely thought of the boy she had killed" (172).

Auge notes that the non-place is a world where "transit points and temporary abodes proliferate under luxurious or inhuman conditions" (63). Much like postmodernism's turn from

essence, Whitehead's Underground Railroad lacks a defining essence, even with its collection of shifting material affects. These non-places range from hotel chains, airline clubs, and first class accommodations to hostels, detention centers, and shantytowns. Even in the mid-19th century cotton economy, African Americans experienced the same polarized gap in wealth and income inequality that we see currently in the 21st century. This gap was directly related to above-ground railroads and their pronounced affects on the landscape. Even as the railroad opened more of the South and West to agriculture, it pushed subsistence farmers off the land and raised the barrier of entry into large-scale cotton production. As a result, over the course of the 1850s, "cotton production and slave ownership become increasingly concentrated among those who own fifteen or more slaves" (Baptist 365).

Like a non-place, the stations Cora experiences in the Underground Railroad all reflect odd counterpoints to their above-ground analogs. Yet they often bear little semblance to one another, which denies them any uniform essence. For example, the South Carolina station begins with Lumbly's gothic collection of chains before Cora opens a cellar door to descend a "stairwell lined with stones and a sour smell emanated from below" (66). The station she departs from in South Carolina is burned while she hides underneath (131), and she waits for days in total darkness, turning the twenty-eight pace platform into a temporary home. With sparing use of her one candle, she walks around the platform with a broom and "used it to tap the ground like the blind lady in town" (143). She is also in imminent danger, both from the threat of discovery and because the train is late. When it finally arrives, she finds herself in a station decorated with wooden slabs rather than the colored stones of Lumbly's station. At this station, the builders had "hacked and blasted it from the unforgiving earth and made no attempt at adornment." In the deserted North Carolina station, "Crates of gear and mining equipment crowded the platform,

making it a workshop.” Instead of chairs, “passengers chose their seating from empty cases of explosive powder” (149). The tunnel held the remnants of rusty tools, “chisels, sledges, and picks – weaponry for battling mountains” (150). The third trip in the Underground Railroad, in what seems a possible spatial reimagining of the birth of Jesus, Cora descends “beneath a stable” and finds herself in a Tennessee train station covered in pristine, white tile – itself a stark contrast to the dark landscape of the state that had been burned to a crisp by fires and upended by plague. On the platform was a “table covered with a white tablecloth, sitting in heavy chairs upholstered in crimson. Fresh flowers jutted from a case and paintings of farmland hung on the wall” (259). The train itself was “splendid...its shiny red paint returning the light even through the shroud of soot.” On this train there were seats enough for thirty, “lavish and soft, and brass fixtures gleamed.” Cora’s immediate action is to lie down and sleep (262). The Underground Railroad is sometimes luxurious and finished and also remarkably unfinished and inhumane, and temporary abodes abound.

In a non-place, as in the Underground Railroad, the urgency of the moment prevails over historical narratives. Enslaved Africans, under the whip, frequently experienced such compressions of time, especially under the “pushing system.” When Cora is trapped in the North Carolina tunnel in the complete dark, she thinks to herself, “best to measure time now with one of the Randall plantation’s cotton scales, her hunger and fear piling on one side while her hopes were removed from the other in increments” (143). This compression of time spatially allows the Underground Railroad to cut through the cultural layers of American history. But the compressed time, which prevails over historical discourse, ultimately has a flattening effect on the individual. On arriving in South Carolina, Cora and Caesar thought they’d move North again quickly, but didn’t. For Cora, “the thought of starving again on the run was not attractive, nor was the

prospect of leaving behind the things they had purchased with their toil” (104). Albeit under oppressive surveillance, Cora did experience her body’s value as represented by material accumulation, which was her own to keep. She knew, having experienced it already, that the Underground Railroad would reduce her identity to just her self.

On their first ride, Cora and Caesar cling flat to the boxcar floor, and she remembers “the darkness of the tunnel quickly turned the boxcar into a grave” (90), which indicates a permanently flattened position. Indeed, on this first trip in total darkness, they emerge from the underground in South Carolina as if they had truly been reborn. On her next ride, the flattening is even more pronounced. The engine of this train pulls a single flatcar, a “plane of wooden planks riveted to the undercarriage, without walls or ceiling.” Lengths of rope were fastened to the flat to hold down oversized cargo. At first, Cora “sat in the center...wrapped one [rope] around her waist three times, [and] grabbed another two and fashioned reins.” But this train was different – “the engineer was more reckless than his predecessor, going faster, goading the machine into velocity.” The rushing air made her unable to speak to the conductor, and her only way to communicate if she “flapped the reins.” A supermodern non-space exists entirely based on speed and transit, and that is perhaps why this moment most clearly and simply represents the flattening characteristics of a non-place. Unable to stand the wind, Cora “gave up and lay on her stomach, fingers into the seams.” By the halfway point, Cora forgets even to ask where they were going next (147-148). Even her last trip, in pleasant company and on a “spectacular pleasure” of a railcar, Cora boards and immediately lays flat and falls asleep “across three seats, free from chains and attic gloom for the first time in months” (262).

The only value attachment to Cora’s body that is not evacuated by her travel between islands is the value noted in the ledger book of the slave catcher, Ridgeway. This value follows

her above ground even as she descends below. Her extraordinary value finds root in Randall's unusually personal obsession with her and because she kills a white boy, both simultaneously increasing her reward value. As a result, Cora's body is widely advertised, and with that comes the particular attention of a notoriously ruthless slave catcher. In a strange way, Ridgeway's presence still adds to Cora's compounded and surplus value, as the bounty accumulates the longer she is on the run. So while her escape through the underground interrupts the above-ground historical march, flattens her identity, and squeezes her through to different time periods, the specifically economic value of her body remains, and follows. Ridgeway is the only character that travels as consistently as Cora from island-state to island-state, and his presence is a reminder that the law also cuts through American history with impunity, its presence specifically turned towards enforcing the regulations of a capital economy and its captive labor force.⁶⁵ In fact, Ridgeway's narrative briefly reveals multiple other island-states not visited by Cora, showing the expansive connections of the American archipelago. Opening small glimpses into the island states of Washington, D.C, New Jersey, Maryland, New York, and Virginia, Ridgeway remembers, "How big the country was! Each town more lunatic and complicated than the last...he sought out the cheapest taverns and turned the stories of the men over in his mind as he scratched at lice. Even the shortest ferry ride delivered him to a new island nation, garish and

⁶⁵ Ridgeway's band of slave-catchers, his mission, and the chapters devoted to his travels bear striking resemblance to Colonel Glanton, Judge Holden and his gang of scalp-hunters from Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. In fact, Whitehead's Tennessee chapter reads like a pastiche of the post-apocalyptic landscape of *The Road* as travelled by Judge Holden's gang in *Blood Meridian*. Homer, the young black boy described as an "odd little imp," is endlessly devoted to Ridgeway and also handles his ledger. Homer mirrors the developmentally disabled boy that follows by the Judge's side, sometimes holding his journal as well. Boseman, a "rambler out of South Carolina," was, like virtually all members of the gang, from a hardscrabble background and carried a penchant for mindless violence. Boseman represents the grotesque elements of *Blood Meridian*, as he wore a necklace made of a dry and shriveled ear that attracted flies in the heat. And like the kid, who serves as a time-lapse camera and records the events around him, Cora too observes and records while her chains intend to limit her participation. On the road, she "caught on that they were heading West instead of South" though she "seldom spoke the first days after leaving North Carolina." (207). Within the context of the two grand narratives in tension, I find that Whitehead's recasting of Glanton's gang questions the overtly symbolic literary narrative of America's westward expansion. As Cora herself notes, she knew "West" without being told and while blindfolded.

imposing” (77). In each state, Ridgeway followed a singular purpose: patrol work. As Ridgeway describes this work, he remembers it “was not difficult...they stopped niggers they knew to be free, for their amusement but also to remind the Africans of the forces arrayed against them” (75). Ridgeway’s methods of enforcement were carried out through bodily harm. Everyone knew, “in another country [Ridgeway and his gang] would have been criminals, but this was America” (76).

Whitehead’s novel tells two co-current national narratives. These narratives show binary discourse of history linked in continual tension. These double narratives are current and still in tension. As recent examples, one thinks of the rhetorical interplay between “black lives matter” and “blue lives matter,” or the narrative of the confederate flag as “heritage not hate” and “hate not heritage.” With the character of Ridgeway, Whitehead develops an authentic narrative from a representative of the dominant ideological construction of white, American modernity that materializes the enforcement of rules and boundaries. His book highlights, with exquisite interchange, a dynamic interplay between individual experience and a historically continuous system. So, for example, Cora was taught once that “the declaration is like a map. You trust it’s right, but you only know by going out and testing it yourself” (240). It is after her experience, testing the above ground cartographies of Enlightenment ideology as expressed and produced by the Declaration of Independence, that she rather concludes, “America remained her warden” (172). She points to a national system that was punitive during the novel’s historical setting(s), and remains so today.

In this novel, Whitehead is explicitly pointing to the spaces of postmodernity as already prefigured by the experience of African Americans. This space seems full of potential for Whitehead because, as I’ve shown with his and Gyasi’s texts, the system of American capitalism

remains a warden, and thus the knowledge of this space is future-turning. To return to Gyasi's text: in the same way Marjorie rattled off the material narrative of her gold-black stone through her family's generations, Marcus also gives a summarized narrative of the American experience through his family line. Marcus grew up listening to his father, Sonny, describe how "America used to lock up black men off the sidewalks for labor or how redlining kept banks from investing in black neighborhoods, preventing mortgages or business loans. So was it a wonder that prisons were still full of them? Was it a wonder that the ghetto was the ghetto?" (285). Marcus never forgot these "alternative history lessons," and so when he began researching for Graduate school, he ran into a problem. His research was initially focused on the convict leasing system that "had stolen years off of his great-grandpa H's life...but how could he talk about H's story without also talking about his grandma Willie and the millions of other black people who had migrated north, fleeing Jim Crow?" He continues down the list, citing the convergence and growth of Harlem, his father's heroin addiction, his stints in prison, the availability of crack in the 80s and the war on drugs, which had resulted in "the harshest prison system in the world" (289).

Yet Gyasi's text ends with Marcus utilizing a global network of transportation and returning to the West African shore, reminiscent of the passage Whitehead included from *Gulliver's Travels*. The focus is on Gulliver standing, rather than lying bound on the island and wondering where his companions are. It indicates he had access to a space of liberation and movement that others did not, or that he navigated it correctly while others could not. In a world that operates now on seamless connectivity, in which barriers between commerce are limitations to be avoided, the non-place of supermodernity has become a vital operational space of postmodern life. There are real places now – called non-places – that connect centers, and the centers rely on them to do so. Yet whoever enters them is reduced to their individual experience,

and in these spaces communication and understanding operate with different meaning. Individuals bear witness to “the coexistence of distinct individualities, perceived as equivalent and unconnected” (89), yet meaning in the non-space still derives through the unique set of relations that each individual has with the space. For example, the museum of natural history presents a connected, material rendering of history. It reflects modernity in art, which preserves the temporalities of place, while privileging the connection of time between each display. Cora, based on her experience, questions the individual value of each space and thus the connected narrative. She deconstructs the narrative based on her own spatial orientation that is built on individual experience. Through the primary, individual spatial components of the museum’s narrative, Cora’s experience works to deconstruct its linkages of time by forcing her individual experience on the moment. In this way, non-places mediate themselves a mass of relations between the self and between selves, and these mediations are at most indirectly related to shared ends or purpose (76-77).

Postmodernism is strongly linked to globalism and those spaces of transport it necessitates. Gyasi and Whitehead’s texts show how African American culture has enunciated itself historically by utilizing these kinds of non-places as they slowly developed in a world becoming globally connected over the span of three centuries. Many if not most of the spaces of transport are punitive. The belly of the slave ship, Hob house (the institutionalized part of the slave quarters reserved for women experiencing psychic trauma and breakdown), prisons, and detention centers all reveal themselves as such. Because of their flattening characteristics, these spaces draw and highlight individual experience, which are also collective and exist in time-space compression. Thus, while the system that produces these spaces bends toward violence and subjugation, African Americans culture is built on an experiential knowledge that has long

negotiated and renegotiated its base of signs and language in the non-places it produces.

I've referenced only once the obvious fact that Whitehead's text is firmly planted in magical realism. But given the context of supermodern non-places, even the choice to write in this genre frames a positive construction of the postmodern turn from essence, and questions American history as an empirically supportable certainty. African American culture has long turned away from notions of essence. Even as the labor of black bodies built the material world of modernity, their modes of production undermined directly its core ideals of liberty and the progress of humanity. As Marable concludes, the "motor of modern capitalist world accumulation was driven by the labor power of Afro-American slaves" (24). Augé even relents to this phenomenon, noting that "certain places exist only through the words that evoke them, and in this sense they are non-places" (77). Augé notes that the spoken word does not separate the functionality of the everyday and a lost myth from the past. Instead, much like Whitehead's *Railroad*, the spoken word "creates the image, produces the myth and at the same stroke make[s] it work" (77). Magical realism erases the boundary between the normal and supernatural, and thus serves to re-present history from a different spatial perspective, one that operates on individual experience, time-space compression, and the individualization of signs and referents. Perhaps, even as it looks to the past, Whitehead's novel is also prescribing a spatial orientation and cultural enunciation that is tailor-made to negotiate and utilize postmodern spaces.

This era of postmodernism is thoroughly inscribed by the material world of late capitalism. And returning to Comaroff and Comaroff demonstrates the importance of texts like Whitehead's and Gyasi's, each of which set a privileged narrative of history against a narrative from its underside. This narrative dialectic from the underside affords a privileged insight into the workings of the current and future postmodern world. Comaroff and Comaroff argue that this

future world is one where “Euro-America evolves toward the world of its former colonies” (127). And we currently bear witness to this next phase of geopolitical evolution. We see this in the recent moves that reflect a contracting nation-state, pulling back from multi-vectored global partnerships, like Brexit. Large populist movements that develop through sectarian and nationalistic lenses come to dominate. Fascist rhetoric, with religious undertones, and the rise of new far-right parties are on the rise in virtually all western, euro-centric continental spaces.

At the same time, there is tension because Postmodernism’s structural articulations and means of transport have created a world of financial capillaries that “Defy any attempt to unravel them along geopolitical axes.” The link between economy and governance is a massive web that “reinforces and eradicates, both sharpens and ambiguates” (128). The connectedness of the world – and the inability to reverse many of those connections – has made a space for the rise of Donald Trump in American politics, which is a logical extension of the trajectory of the above-ground narrative crafted in Whitehead’s novel. The self-proclaimed “law and order candidate,” reinforcing the truth that America remains a warden, President Trump’s entire geopolitical strategy is spatial and economic. Beginning in his early political years by driving the “birther” narrative, Trump separated President Obama’s place of birth from its origin, playing on fears of the distant global South “other.” Trump has carefully turned the narrative of economic profit and stability into one that is fundamentally bent on religion and race and their spatial parameters in relation to American ideology. By drawing attention to the danger of connectivity, Trump can stir fear of the intimately connected global South other. In so doing, he points to himself as the source for protection and stability, thereby obtaining domination. This ideology has already begun to manifest itself spatially. In order to keep out the influence of the global South, President

Trump proposes to build a wall. He bans travel from middle-eastern countries⁶⁶. He cuts out multi-vectored trade deals. He's turned his eyes variously from Kenya to Mexico to China and to the Middle East. These barriers are erected even amidst the non-places of supermodernity that connect them.

The way to subvert this overtly punitive geopolitical regressiveness has been demonstrated already, explored and enunciated by African American culture. The spaces of the non-place will become the spaces of resistance, of movement beneath the surface of restrictive ideology. It is in this space that I draw a final conclusion about Whitehead's text. He foregrounds each new island-state with a historical advertisement for a runaway slave. In doing so, he reinforces the continuation of an old narrative: the dominant ideological power was and is still looking for the black body, attempting to control its value. But the black body – and African American culture more broadly – remains elusive, the front of every page, utilizing the space of the non-place to maintain freedom and assert a different narrative, carving out a space from the dominant narrative for its self to occupy.

⁶⁶ But only countries where he doesn't profit via personal business interests or from expanding capital systems.

CHAPTER 5: Quiet Places in Jesmyn Ward and Natasha Trethewey

This project has shown how an economic and spatial narrative have played out side-by-side in American fiction, and that these dual narratives speak and bespeak cultural enunciation, produce social space, and reveal the mechanisms of capital production. My analysis of Morrison's fiction shows the production of social space as black Americans crossed political and economic boundaries, the moment of engagement revealing an in-between space of racial construction that concurrently produces black social space. My reading of Twain shows Huck Finn navigating the Mississippi river, but doing so relying on the geographic knowledge of Jim, such that the narrative's acute spatial awareness of the Mississippi river actually reflects Jim's vision and a use of alternative knowledge. Faulkner's maps show that the social and spatial organization of the South relies on imperial impulses that attempt to restrict and control economic commerce through structures of law, yet the very elements of Faulkner's county work to destabilize this primacy. Whitehead and Gyasi offer narratives that reveal the close relationship between American cultural and economic expansion and the material, cultural, and social subjugation of the institute of slavery. This conclusion will invoke these broader themes, and specifically the themes of economic isolation and black social space through a comparative analysis of Natasha Trethewey's poetry and Jesmyn Ward's novel, *Salvage the Bones*.

Ward has long been noted for her strong use of place, one bolstered by her own admission, "I think that place is character and character is place." For her, the relationship between identity and the spatial is closer even than a 1:1 correspondence or metaphorical relationship. According to Ward, they are indistinguishable, the same. This has caused me to wonder again about the role of certain spaces in the novels addressed by this project. For example, the space Sethe occupies amongst the "spores of bluefern" after crossing the Ohio

River is remarkable because of the way it speaks to her about the potential for resistance and the possibility afforded to future generations, yet that space is overwhelmingly quiet. How might we begin to understand the space in which that silence⁶⁷ speaks? To reverse this course, what if we dwell on the enormous quiet inside the barn as Sethe hides with her children before the slave catcher finds her? In that quiet broods an impossible decision, a choice between death and death – does it speak, too? I’m curious about Joe Christmas, who leaves Joanna Burden’s dark house in contemplation and as he moved “the crickets [kept] a little island of silence about him like a thin yellow shadow of small voices.” What is the source of that silent cone and why does it seem to contain Christmas? I’m reminded of Jim hiding quietly on the raft, listening to Huck spin a yarn. Jim lies quiet, poised and tense as a steel coil, ready to explode with physical strength should Huck’s spool fall apart. Despite his quiet, his hidden presence overwhelms the scene. From Whitehead, I think of the powerful quiet of Cora hiding in an attic (and Harriet Jacobs, and all fugitive slaves), watching through the cracks a town and its people bent on her destruction seek to find her location. In that quiet space, Cora observes and dissects every social ideology represented by the dominant white culture. Even more explicit – how might we think about Cora’s continual silence while riding the Underground Railroad as an internal position of quiet

⁶⁷ “Quiet” and “Silence” are used frequently in this essay, are connected in meaning, but are not the same. I will use “quiet” when referring to the larger, metaphysical qualities assigned to the word by Kevin Quashie, namely that “quiet” is a ““a metaphor for the full range of one’s inner life.” This is detailed on pages 201-202 of this chapter. In reference to physical locations or material conditions, “Silent/Silence” is used. Silent spaces possess characteristics of quiet, but quiet is not entirely spatial and refers to a condition of the black interior. Quashie also distinguishes these words, noting that “the two terms are sometimes used synonymously...especially when the silence is not performative, not withholding, but instead is an expressiveness that is not entirely legible in a discourse of publicness” (35). This distinction connects the black interior to the spatial. As an example, when Booker T. Washington hides beneath the boardwalk in Baltimore, he is able to achieve mental, emotional, and physical rest – he is quiet. The space itself is not quiet – in fact, it is the opposite, which Washington even utilizes to inform himself of the walking patterns of the city. That space hidden under the boardwalk is a silent space because it allows Washington to process events, reach better understanding of his environment, and truly rest. It is outside the context of white social space and capital enterprise, though close enough to hear its patterns. He reveals that this is specifically a black social space when he compares his original resting spot underneath the boardwalk to the white assembly hall down the street that he occupies years later. The silent space feeds the strength and fortitude of his inner, expressive quiet, and Washington prefers the boardwalk to the stuffy assembly hall.

absorbed from the space of the underground? All of these spaces are silent and yet all of them speak boldly and with clear messages. This is an expressive quiet. In the same way, Jesmyn Ward and Natasha Trethewey produce silent spaces. The narrator of Ward's *Salvage the Bones*, Esch, notices with regularity the location and production of silent spaces; her ability to see and seek out silent spaces during Hurricane Katrina shows when and how silent spaces speak. As these spaces speak through her novel, Ward writes against the grand narrative of Southern history and literature, as well as the political and social narrative imposed on black southerners in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Different from Ward, Trethewey highlights silent spaces through her use of still photography. Photography was commonly used in Fugitive Slave Bills to freeze the identity of a black person in place, silencing their voice and memorializing their identity so that their body is first attached to an economic value and then reduced to purely that. Trethewey grabs hold of the camera and wrests the power of the photograph away, forcing a tilt-shift in perspective that reveals silent and silenced spaces.

A Quiet Place

Natasha Trethewey's poem "Theories of Time and Space" shows conscious interplay with the two distinct narratives of economic and spatial experience that characterize American literary production. Originally published in *Native Guard*, Trethewey also included the poem as the epigraph to her 2010 blended genre collection *Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast*. Thadious Davis writes of Natasha Trethewey's "Theories of Time and Space" that the poem "telescopes" her poetic investment into photography, the mnemonic, the spatial, and the temporal. Davis understands the prominent emphasis on the photograph as a commentary on Trethewey's ability to see ahead to changes in representation and experience while casting a backwards glance at "past formations of self" (2). Similarly, Giorgia De Cenzo

writes that “the fundamental element” of Trethewey’s poem “is the idea of continuity between past and present” (1). Analyzing the poem from the context of its original publication in *Native Guard*, De Cenzo argues that “Theories of Time and Space” is a poem written from the eyes of the poet, “who decides to go back to her origins, to investigate her own past and history, as if the boat transporting her to Ship Island would allow her to reach the most unfathomable corners of her personal intimate memory” (3).

Not only does the body of criticism on this poem reflect an abiding interest in vision and perspective, but the poem itself has undergone significant “re-visioning.” Trethewey writes that she decided to revive the poem in *Beyond Katrina* because after Katrina, much of what she’d known of her home was gone. She notes in the Prologue, “After Katrina the words I had looked to for their figurative values gave way to the reality they came to represent. For me the poem no longer meant what it had before – even as the words remained the same. In this way, the poem undergoes a kind of revision” (2). Davis’ analysis of Trethewey’s poetry attaches itself to this particular notion of “revision,” noting that it is more akin to a “re-seeing, a mapping of the words onto a context that has changed and onto a perception that has been altered by new insight” (4). Davis goes on to explore the motif of “vision” in Trethewey’s *oeuvre*, noting her use of ekphrasis, which links visual sight to a photograph or painting and folds “her own social autobiography and familial history” into the poem’s vision of self, society, history and culture (39). Meta Duewa Jones echoes Davis’ analysis by showing that Trethewey’s ekphrasis “restores humanity to the women...by manipulating the observer’s field of view” (413). Each critic’s focus on visual subjects and perspective shows Trethewey’s incredible control over form – both poetic form and material form(s) found in the physical environment. Jones summarizes the affect of Trethewey’s ekphrasticism as “forms of enclosure [that] resist and reverse – through an

image-imaginative realm – other restrictive enclosures, including the conditions of (over) exposure to which the female body within literary and visual culture has been subjected” (414).

As a form of resistance and engagement with the dominant narrative, Trethewey frames the poem in second person. In so doing, Trethewey turns the camera completely around and takes a picture of the reader, presenting the very act of being photographed as didactic and intimately revealing about the nature of time and place in cultural enunciation. This analysis builds from Davis’ focus on image and “re-vision” and Jones’ assertion that the poem can actively influence the observer’s field of view in such a way that an alternative narrative can be seen or heard. All three critics offer excellent analyses of Trethewey’s poems as forms controlled by the poet that work to manipulate an aperture into the material world as experienced by black women. All three argue that “Theories of Time and Space” ultimately present Trethewey’s perspective, or an image-picture as viewed through her eyes. Indeed, Trethewey’s poem tightly controls vision and ultimately works to articulate a different narrative of place and an alternative historical perspective informed by the experiential and the spatial. I’d like to suggest yet another re-visioning of Trethewey’s poem such that the poem’s ekphrasis qualities are not telescoped on a place or an object, and where the deftness and precision of the telescoping hand (Trethewey’s) is not the primary revealing quality of the poem. While still presenting the place-based qualities of the poem through her own eye, Trethewey offers an exercise in spatial empathy and historical discourse to her readers by inverting the narrative power position of white capital discourse and colonizing knowledge systems. While still controlling the direction of the camera, this poem intentionally engages the omniscient white narrator of American exceptionalism and manifest destiny – the dominant narrative perspective against which Trethewey proffers intersectionality and multiplicity: *theor(ies)* of time and space.

The poem begins as if it is answering a question or series of questions – unspoken, unwritten, and left off the page. Its initial tone is conversational, and thus the question seems innocuous, even simple: “How do you get there?” Given the answer Trethewey presents, its referents (“ship island”), and its material specificities, the “there” of the question refers to a specific place (the South) and a larger socio-historical context (America) at the same time. I’d like to posit that the impetus behind the unwritten question that precipitates this poem is very similar in content and character to that which Shreve asks Quentin Compson in *Absalom, Absalom!*, a question Quentin ultimately struggles to answer: “Tell about the south. What’s it like there? What do they do there? Why do they live there? Why do they live at all?” (363). Shreve’s line of questioning comes in the middle of a long dialogue about the defining narratives of American and Southern history, and that Shreve and Quentin are both white within the context of this poem is significantly appropriate. Trethewey’s poem proffers response to these questions and others like them that have been asked repeatedly since America was founded on principals of liberty yet built on the backs of slavery, and she answers through an act of re-visioning. “Theories of Time and Space” locates the meaning and production of American space in the experience of black Americans, specifically in the lived experience of black southerners and black women. Trethewey responds to this question by turning the camera on the readers of the poem and setting up a call-and-response, where she re-visions a journey through the southern landscape. Her poem says, assertively, that the answer to that question can only be found if *she* holds the camera, pointing its lens at elements of the material world as defined from her perspective.

The poem asserts a simple-but-provocative idea from the beginning: there are multiple theories of time and space – certainly more than one, existing simultaneously, and none with

clear primacy in affect. This does not sound profound if not for the documented history in which alternative perspectives and global South theory were not just denied entrance into the academy, but whose very existence was called into question or relegated to provincial folklore. This duality is reflected in the tension between the poem's formal simplicity and its narrative influences. Using the phrase coined by Jones to describe Trethewey's form, the poem's couplets act (here and elsewhere in her work) as a "tool of restraint" in order to quarantine traumatic experience. Trethewey refers to the formal constraints of her poems – in this case the understated couplet – as "silences around certain things" that themselves can speak volumes. But Trethewey's formality is coupled with alternative narrative expression whose origin is in the oral tradition: call-and-response. Her "call" is encapsulated in a simple phrase: "try this." In so doing, she works to decolonize formal poetics by answering the question with an alternative narrative form. In that moment she invites the "you" to follow a visual journey, but also to partake in a different narrative construction of social and physical space. This is the moment when the camera turns back on the identity of the questioner. In doing so, Trethewey asserts her individual role of camera-holder as a black, female Southerner. Coupled with Trethewey's material reconstitution, the formal restraints of the poem begin to act as a controlled aperture that drifts in focus between the polychromatic images of material and spatial features that provide subtle answers to the unwritten question. She uses the phrase "try this" to also test if "you" can recognize decentered perspective and decentered western narrative forms as both valid and truth-bearing. By structuring her answer as a call-and-response, Trethewey decolonizes language and narrative form and so begins to re-vision the material and spatial from its foundational representation.

Trethewey asks the “you” to begin a journey that is evocative in theme of the transatlantic slave trade, yet is clearly one taken by white southerners. The final destination, “Ship Island,” is a real place off the coast of Mississippi that once served as a prison for white confederate soldiers – a prison guarded by freed black men.⁶⁸ The poem begins with a displacement, a departure from home that is permanent. Trethewey’s couplets tick off just as the mile-markers tick off on Mississippi Highway 49 as the “you” heads southward, “one-by-one.” Between this couplet and the next, Trethewey utilizes enjambment to firmly connect the spatial “ticking off” of miles and the “minutes of your life” and so offering her first observation about time and space: the two exist on a continuum. In fact, every couplet besides the first and last two utilize formal enjambment. To that end, Trethewey’s formal restraints demonstrate the tension and possibility of two competing narratives. With her use of enjambment, she shows that two different and opposing narratives can be formed from simultaneous observations about the same set of material realities. In this way throughout the poem, mile markers are also measurements of time, a dead end highway becomes a gulf-coast peer, shrimp boats are contained in the sky, 26 miles of sand rests on top of 26 miles of mangroves that “you” can’t see, and what “you” physically carry is in fact nothing more than a “tome of memory.” Trethewey’s use of “tome” in place of “book” – a word nearly homophonic with tomb and certainly evocative of its qualities – underscores the psychological rendering of this journey.

Trethewey uses enjambment to highlight two narratives and reverse subject position, creating an exercise of empathetic imagination so that an imaginative journey – initiated by the “try this” – utilizes the material, lived, and shared experience of the transatlantic slave trade to

⁶⁸ This is not to say that Trethewey assigns a 1-1 relationship between the experience of this prison for white confederate prisoners of war and the experience of the transatlantic slave trade. Rather, she inverts American power dynamics using a documented narrative found in the “official” narrative of American history, which itself is a metaphor for the kind of revisioning Trethewey’s work performs: demonstrating the simultaneous existence of constantly competing narratives.

provide a different answer to the question of “what is the south.” Each couplet reads like an inverted, backwards marching trip of enslavement. After initiating spatial movement and permanent displacement from home in the first two stanzas, Trethewey uses phrases such as “dead end” and “natural conclusion” to invoke images of physical death. In doing so, Trethewey signals “you” to carry the knowledge of your impending social, cultural, and physical death with you, thus adding to the agony and sense of dread. Arriving in a port city where slave auctions were once held, Trethewey describes shrimp boats of “loose stiches” that evoke images of bodily harm and the whip. The landscape’s backdrop is dramatic, rainy, and threatening.

The poem concludes with direct reference to photography and pictures: “someone will take your picture. / The photograph – who you were – / will be waiting when you return.” The final line contrasts with the first stanza, as the poem reminds “you” at the beginning “there’s no going home.” Both stanzas bookend the temporally bound characteristics of place and place-making. Simultaneously contrasting the fluidity of time and space, Trethewey invokes still-photography and its affect on identity in such a way that recalls Sethe, whose identity was frozen in the time and space of her infanticide by a picture in the newspaper. Trethewey’s ending shows the staying power of visual rhetoric on a person’s identity, but also that a trip to Ship Island – or a plantation – invoked immediate and marked change in “who you were.” One can return to a point of departure, but never to home. Within the context of the poem, the photograph of the white man can now be viewed differently, seeing its blatant inconsistencies, after exposure to Ship Island and Trethewey’s re-vision.

The poem’s strongest visual commentary on the production of space that provides insight into Trethewey’s representation of an alternative geographic vision occurs when the journey leaves behind the pavement and arrives at the coast. Here, at the border between land and sea,

Trethewey instructs the “you” to “Cross over / the man-made beach, 26 miles of sand / dumped on the mangrove swamp – buried / terrain of the past.” This “buried terrain of the past” located conspicuously within a border zone eventually links my analysis of Trethewey to Jesmyn Ward’s *Salvage the Bones*. In order to secure that link, I will demonstrate how Katherine McKittrick’s driving theory in *Demonic Grounds* underscores this specific image from Trethewey’s poem, and reveals that the co-joined narratives of spatial domination and black women’s geographies produce a unique space, one where “concealment, marginalization, and boundaries are important social processes.” McKittrick asserts that this is an active and chosen process: “We [black females] *make* concealment happen.” (emphasis added, *xi*). Later, invoking Jacobs, McKittrick describes this space of concealment as a “crevice of power” through which enslaved women “were able to manipulate and recast the meanings of slavery’s geographic terrain” (*xxviii*). Thus, as black people inhabited American social space, they constantly gave new meaning to their material, 3-dimensional surroundings. In such a way, the American landscape became a location – an active conduit, even – through which black people could articulate hardship, triumph, suffering, and joy, echoing Ward’s assertion and underscoring its veracity: “place is character and character is place.” This McKittrick demonstrates by locating the slave ship as a material container of the conjoined narratives of domination and subversion. She demonstrates that “while materially and ideologically enclosing black subjects – economic objects inside and often bound to the ship’s walls – also contribute to the formation of an oppositional geography: the ship as a location of black subjectivity and human terror, black resistance, and in some cases, black possession.” (*x*). Rather than swallowing up black subjectivity, the slave ship becomes “a location through which a moving technology can create differential and contextual histories” (*xii*). McKittrick’s meticulous exploration of this space reveals that black subjects in the diaspora

are represented by a history that is told through a geographic narrative, “a story of material and conceptual placements and displacements...margins and centers” (xiv). This alternative geographic history suggests that black feminist theory and politics speaks from a spatial location, and that the concept of “where” or “there” within the context of black femininity actively disrupts metanarratives. McKittrick observes that the “where” of black femininity “locates and demands all sorts of political positions and connections without distorting the theoretical possibilities and material realities of spaces unheard, silenced, and erased” (56).

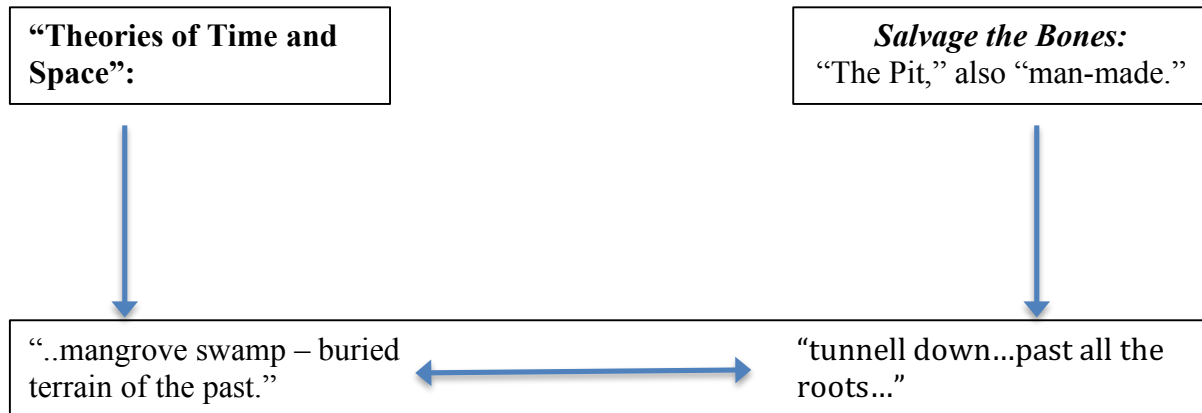
These same spaces McKittrick observes in the historical narratives of black women are written into the folds of Trethewey’s poem. After arriving at the coast and leaving the pavement behind, Trethewey instructs the “you” to “Cross over / the man-made beach, 26 miles of sand / dumped on the mangrove swamp – buried / terrain of the past.” To “cross-over” is a rhetorically and theoretically loaded instruction. This is a key spatial moment. The beach represents a boundary or dividing line between the journey on the road and the journey on the boat. While the poem instructs “you” to move across the boundary line, Trethewey momentarily pauses the constant horizontal movement presented in the poem and considers the vertical arrangement of the beach. This second-sight, or presenting the composition of the boundary line from her experience, shows the reader that perspective and experience often reveals unseen agendas or material reality in the composition and ordering of the physical world. In Trethewey’s poem, the beaches created from “man” swallow an ecosystem that was once abundant with life. Her use of the word “dump” reaffirms the association with trash and detritus despite its tranquil appeal. Presumably the skeletons of this ecosystem are frozen in time and space underneath the “dump” but their contours are still familiar to Trethewey. The use of the word “terrain” implies the topographical dynamic of place (and thus more resistant to human influence) that is written on

the landscape from natural forces – glaciers, tides, and geologic movements. Serving a two-fold purpose, Trethewey reveals that this is linked to the temporal – “terrain of the past.” Trethewey’s inclusion of this vertical vision is different than any other in the poem. She doesn’t invite the “you” to explore the terrain of the past. She merely acknowledges its existence, and that its existence informs her vision. It is inaccessible within the context of the poem, but its existence and her knowledge of it exposes a space she utilizes to offer re-visioning of the material world around her. Trethewey’s buried terrain of the past surfaces more explicitly in *Salvage the Bones*, just as a beach might become eroded by a Hurricane.

On “The Eleventh Day” of Ward’s novel, Hurricane Katrina hits the Mississippi coast. Esch, the narrator of the story, begins the day by reminiscing on how her “Momma first explained to me what a hurricane was.” Esch confesses that she once thought all the animals simply “ran away, that they fled the storms before they came.” But as Katrina approaches and Esch reaches into her “tome of memory” that is her mother’s haunting presence, she realizes that she was wrong – the animals did not use horizontal flight to escape the storm, but vertical. Esch describes their flight:

Maybe the small don’t run...they tunnel down through the red clay and the sand, down until the earth turns black and cold, down past all the roots, until they have dug great halls so deep that they sit right above the underground reservoirs we tap into with our wells, and during the hurricane, they hear water lapping above and below while they sit safe in the hand of the earth. (216).

In this passage, Esch recalls the same spatial elements as Trethewey’s poem, and layered in identical ways.



Beneath the compact (and we later find out, man-made) sand and clay of Esch’s world exists a safe environment, constructed with intention from natural materials. This underneath environment is the central spatial construction of the novel and the source for Ward’s re-visioning of the South. It is also the imagined spatial analog to that of quiet – the unconscious; the rich interior of black expression. The space is central and unique because of its characteristic silence. There is a strong association between these spaces and its inhabitants choosing silence as an active way of speaking. Even in Esch’s imagination, she describes the quiet of the rabbit’s “great halls.” The rabbits, in their silence, listen to the dangerous but softly lapping water and are safe in that quiet. Given the context, the quiet speaks safety. In other moments, such as when Esch describes Hurricane Katrina as a “quiet voice” (159), we begin to understand the grand potential of quiet. The remainder of this essay will focus on such spaces and draw out the relationship between layered, hidden spaces and the concept of quiet. My assertion is that the “buried terrain of the past” is accessible to black southerners and is also a space of silence. But this is not a repressed or submissive silence; rather, drawing on Kevin Quashie, the silence of these spaces is an active and expressive form of quiet.

Quashie demonstrates a powerful moment of quiet in his analysis of a photograph that features Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. In that analysis,

Quashie draws out the central characteristics of quiet: intimacy even in public protest, intentional political gestures demonstrated with a “sense of inwardness,” and the two men simultaneously acting as “soldiers in a larger war against oppression but also as two people in a moment of deep spirituality, in prayer” (3). This, Quashie articulates, becomes “a metaphor for the full range of one’s inner life,” of desires and ambitions and also vulnerabilities and fear (6). Quashie pushes back against the near ubiquitous characterization of black identity and subjecthood as inherently public-facing, or that black identities are articulated only through public resistance (8).

Ultimately, the quiet interior, “dynamic and ravishing,” is a “stay against the dominance of the social world.” Quashie shows quiet to be a state of being, almost a manner of expression not unlike joy or sorrow. And, in a sentence reminiscent of Esch’s understanding of her own pregnancy, suggests that quiet is the “expansive, voluptuous, creative; impulsive and dangerous” interior that is not subject to one’s control “but instead has to be taken on its own terms” (21).

Ultimately, the quiet interior is not discursive and is largely indescribable; however, for Quashie, “quiet” acts as a “frame for reading black culture [and] exposes life that is not already determined by narratives of the social world” (8). This framing quiet has spatial contours, too.

Silence Speaks

Ward’s spatial layering is featured most prominently in “The Pit,” a place central to the action of the plot and the lived experience of the characters in *Salvage the Bones*. To be more precise, “The Pit” where Esch and her family live is both a pit and a pit inside of a pit. This redundant spatial layout is even the point of some narrative word play by the narrator, who observes that “the only real clearing on the Pit is by the pit” (190). Esch’s precise observational tendencies as a narrator extends the layering a step further when she comments that the family “dumps our garbage in a shallow ditch next to the pit,” which technically means this Russian-

doll landscape is a pit beside a pit⁶⁹ within a pit. “The Pit” (capital “P”) is a “gap in the woods [Papa Joseph] cleared and built on” outside of Bois Savage, Mississippi. The pit (lowercase “p”) has a much different origin, and serves as an economic, spatial precondition upon which the life of the characters is played out.⁷⁰ Esch describes the formation of the pit:

It was...Papa Joseph who let the white men he work with dig for clay that they used to lay the foundation for houses, let them excavate the side of a hill in a clearing near the back of the property where he used to plant corn for feed. Papa Joseph let them take all the dirt they wanted until their digging had created a cliff over a dry lake in the backyard, and the small stream that had run around and down the hill and diverted and pooled into the dry lake, making it into a pond.

(14)

The spatial precondition of the 12-day span of the novel, one where the land has been ransacked of its economic value, initiates Jesmyn Ward’s engagement with dual narratives written on the American landscape. The precondition is the spread of capital systems over the American landscape; Esch’s narrative shapes the remnant bones of the system into life and so contests the grand narrative even through the quiet of the detritus-laden landscape. This is a precondition similar to other spaces in the Mississippi landscape familiar to Esch. In fact, spaces shaped in such a way as the Pit exist across the text and often serve as the central sites inside which black culture is enunciated, outside (or adjacent, underneath) the purview of dominant

⁶⁹ I suspect the layering goes even further. Once when describing the Pit, Esch says this about the local tadpoles: “in the springtime the ditches around the property are alive with them” (23). Esch describes a landscape littered with water-filled ditches and crevasses that hold small pockets of abundant, concentrated life. The presence of life (chicken eggs, squirrels, and tadpoles are all similarly described as inhabitants of these ditches) in the pocked landscape runs a direct analog with the crevasses of social space this project explores.

⁷⁰ This insular, spatial layering complete with an economic precondition of white capital systems corresponds with Hurston’s description of Missie May and Joe’s home in “The Gilded Six-Bits”: “It was a Negro yard around a Negro house in a Negro settlement that looked to the payroll of the G and G Fertilizer works for its support.” (1)

white culture. For example, Esch calls attention to the “pitted streets of the sunken city of New Orleans” (12) where the “loudest Mardi Gras dancing Indian” shouts and dances. In a climactic scene of the novel, China participates in a dogfight hidden in the woods. The ring for the fight is “a wide oval bowl, which must be a dried-up pond that grows wide and deep when it rains” (159).

The landscape of the Pit is filled with the quiet skeletons of material waste; yet Esch knows to listen to the quiet, having observed from her youth that “quiet comes and goes here on the Pit” (20). Esch quickly explains her observation with a simile, and so begins to give her own definition to the quiet of the Pit. Esch connects the coming and going of “quiet” to “the pack of stray dogs that Daddy used to run off with his gun before Skeetah brought China here to stay” (20). Conspicuously, the arrival of China coincides with the arrival of a forceful and profound quiet – a stay more powerful than a gun against the noise and chaos of the stray dogs that had once called the Pit home. It remains so as long as China’s presence dominates the Pit. China’s relationship with the entire cast of the Batiste family members is worthy of further study,⁷¹ but I will focus on a few instances where China speaks, even as her presence is characterized by profound quiet.

China’s presence often intrudes through Esch’s internal narration in noticeably audible ways. This intrusion usually crosses through temporal, spatial, and even mythological barriers. One such moment occurs when Esch remembers her first sexual experience with Manny. As she describes the encounter in a lengthy internal monologue, she remembers how she would dip into and out of her own mythological imagination, recalling and appropriating Psyche, Eurydice, and Daphne. What transpires next is a glitch in the narrative time-space continuum. I will quote the

⁷¹ Brown, HC. “Figuring Giorgio Agamben’s “Bare Life” in the Post-Katrina Works of Jesmyn Ward and Kara Walker.” *Journal of American Studies*, 2016.

passage with preserved line-breaks to illustrate how Ward signals these significant moments through her narrative structure. In an internal monologue, Esch remembers:

My hair my pillow in the red dirt. My breasts hurt. I wanted him to lean down, to touch me every where. He wouldn't, but his hips would. China barked, knife sharp. I was bold as a Greek; I was making him hot with love, and Manny was loving me.

China is licking the puppies. I've never seen her so gentle. (16-17)

Esch recalls a moment in time from years before. As she remembers the moment, China's current presence makes itself audibly known, interjecting through both the veil of narration and memory – China speaks. Her voice issues a sharp change in Esch's narration of the love scene, moving Esch from "he wouldn't" to "Manny was...". China's speaking voice is Esch's internal power of quiet (though Esch does not learn this herself until the end of the novel). After China speaks, the scene reaches its narrative climax and a paragraph break signals a temporal shift to the present moment. Echoing China's profoundly audible intrusion into a temporally disconnected memory, Esch's narration flips to the present moment where China is physically performing a silencing act – licking and soothing her squirming puppies. Quiet is almost simultaneously in this scene shown as an erotic force and as a mother's tenderness; this rich continuum is expressed variously in the novel through China.

Another similar moment with associative qualities of silence, speaking, and climax occurs as Esch and Skeetah race out the house on their run to the neighbor's farm: "We run out the door, scatter the chickens before us, and they whirl about like crape myrtle petals blown loose by summer rain. Brown and rust red and white, the only sound the swish of their wings. China interrupts, barks. // Away from the Pit, the pine trees reach skyward, their green-needled tops stand perfectly still" (66). Here, when Esch and Skeetah run out the door, Esch-the-narrator observes for a brief moment an environment startled from its hushed quiet, one presided over by

China. When China barks, her voice clips together narrative scenes of silence: in Esch's new location, the trees stood quiet and still against the windless sun. China asserts her presence on the environment throughout the text, despite temporal shifts, spatial dissonance, and narrative breaks (159). Once, Esch describes a day when China was "breath-barking. Every time she inhales, she exhales with a bark" (138). As she barks, she is joined by other dogs "on the other side of the Pit" that bark with her and "ring her like a chorus." The ruckus continues until "China gives a great shout, and all at once, they are silent. // Randall's game is today."

Perhaps most conspicuously at the novel's end and after China is swept away during the Hurricane, Esch states that "China will bark and call me sister. In the star-suffocated sky, there is a great waiting silence. / She will know that I am a mother." (258). Finally, Esch co-joins herself to China and internalizes her quiet, the word "suffocating" interring the two together and granting her access to the full spectrum of quiet. Invoking sisterhood and then motherhood nearly simultaneously, Esch fills out the "interior of her womb" whose mysteries she struggled to access with only the memory of her mother to guide her. Of the few articles currently published on *STB*, Holly Brown's recent "Figuring Agamben's 'Bare Life' in the post-Katrina works of Ward and Walker" recognizes this significant pairing as a relationship that "resists the social allegory in which comparing a human to a dog inherently reduces the former's status" (Brown 8). Brown argues that Esch – prevented from observing the changing state and shape of her body because the only full-length mirror hangs in the public living room – instead "recognizes herself in the pregnant China" (8). Skeetah, too, understands the broader relationship between humans and animals, and that "between man and dog is a relationship...equal" (29). The character of China and her relationship to the Batiste children helps us better understand Esch-the-narrator.

Having learned of the existence of quiet spaces from her mother, she constantly notices and observes both who and what inhabits these small spaces, often teeming with life.

Esch exists in a place where people often inhabit quiet spaces, not just animals: Junior under the house or in “his holes” (5, 89), Daddy “secreted like a snake” under a dump truck (88), and Skeetah in the muted underwater of the pit (108). When Esch and Skeetah sneak through their neighbor’s property, Esch says they “worm their way through the woods...slide on our stomachs under bushes...slither like snakes, grab dirt and pine straw with our elbows” (69). She later wonders if the kids that live in town “have their own Skeetahs and Esches crawling around the edges of their fields, like ants under the floorboard” (71). Esch knows to look for quiet spaces and their hidden treasures from watching her mother search for chicken eggs. These eggs were notoriously difficult to find, even for Esch’s mother. In fact, even when visually located they were often so concealed that they couldn’t be reached. Junior, with the smallest hands, was called upon to “gather” the found eggs that resided “in the elbows of the dump truck’s engine, between the bottom of the an old stinking refrigerator and the earth, wedged into the coils of a mattress chewed bare by animals” (199). When Esch describes how she learned to find eggs, she remembers following closely behind her mother through the “empty cars” and “reaching oak trees” of the Pit. The scene is so quiet that Esch doesn’t even mention the possibility of verbal communication and even goes a step beyond. Because her mother’s “olive and black and nut brown” clothes so matched her environment, Esch “could hardly see her...so I followed behind her by touch, not by sight, my hand tugged at her pants, her skirt, and that’s how we walked in the room made by the oaks, looking for eggs” (22). The quiet space necessitates intimate physical connection, requires that Esch read her mother’s intentions only by the way she moves through the Pit, feeling her silent movement as she searches for tiny pockets with hidden eggs.

Esch's mother moves with such ease and familiarity that the "reaching oaks" become a comfortable room. Later, to sound out the often-pestering voices of "Daddy and Junior," Esch knows she can enter the forest and move in the same way her mother once moved, and so "feel like the quiet and the wind" of the Pit (22). In this way, Esch learns the hidden potential of the Pit's geography and how to move about its contours in order to access quiet spaces.

Ward's text shows that hidden spaces exist within the dominant representation of a landscape and within its very material properties. Further, she characterizes hidden spaces as actively quiet and variably inhabited, both by animals and the Batiste family. These spaces become conduits of expression, resistance, and connection. When inhabited, they offer an angle of perspective and vision on the built environment that resists dominant narratives, when the dominant material and social narratives are at best exclusionary and at worst intentionally malignant. Skeetah is a notably quiet character who devotes much of his existence to China's dog shed, a veritable temple of quiet. Sensitive to these spaces, his close friendship with Esch places him fully within the crosshairs of her narrative lens. For example, just after Manny, Big Henry, Randall, and Skeetah finish swimming in the pit, Esch finds herself alone in the water. Submerged under water, she surfaces and sees that "Skeetah is the only one left, and he is silent" (57). Given the way Skeetah looks at Esch and then walks away towards the house, we understand that his silence is a knowing quiet – that he knows her secret and knows what just occurred with Manny and that he is telling her with his silence. Skeetah's silence speaks. The pit (the water-filled pit inside the Pit) is the sight of each child's first self-exploration of a hidden, quiet space. It is the shared, common ground where each develops an understanding of the features of the world that enclose them and learns to articulate the details of its prismatic contours. On the sixth day, with Esch waiting for Skeetah to wake up and emerge from his

slumber inside China's dog shed, she describes the feeling of waiting as the same as if "Skeet had not surfaced" (108) from a dive under water. Drawing instant psychic similarities between the inside of China's shed and the bottom of the water-filled pit, Esch remembers how Skeetah would always "crouch on the silty, junk-reefed bottom; we would circle him like anxious boats, calling him to the surface, but he would remain still and bubbling below." From this position, largely inaccessible and undesirable, Skeetah observes the world as it unfolds above him. Like the underground halls Esch describes inhabited by rabbits, the pit is a safe space but also close to danger.

This is often the dynamic of quiet places. Like the ones inhabited by Harriet Jacobs or Cora, these nooks and crevasses are often quiet precisely because of their close proximity to danger. Even as the pit acts as the central sight of cultural enunciation in the novel for the Batiste children, it brings with itself associative danger – the deep end is lined with sharp, cutting oyster shells (27) and there's a constant threat of water moccasins for the swimmers (53). But because of this proximity, when inhabited, quiet places offer exceptional perspective on the outside world. McKittrick offers a compelling analysis (39-44) of Linda Brent's hidden garret as "a place for Brent to articulate her lived experiences and emancipatory desires, without losing sight of the dehumanizing forces of slavery" (40). Like Junior boring holes in the windows of the home as Katrina approaches, Linda's bored holes in the attic allow her to create the meaning of the space itself outside the confines of western geographic knowledge – she does so through her memories, experiences, and observations (41). McKittrick describes this kind of space as positioned "across slavery" rather than inside or outside or bound to it. It is from this space that McKittrick says Brent could "see within and across the plantation – quietly critiques and undoes traditional geographies" so that she can tell "a different story" (43). In such a way, Skeetah, still

and bubbling below the surface, gazes upward and examines the world through the spatial prism of the pit, and so offers the reader a re-vision of the material world as it is constructed from a quiet place.

Quiet places are a stay against the grinding machine of American capital systems. As their locations are discovered, their contours are explored until they become defined social space (the oak trees transform into a room). Each in their own way, the Batiste family knows that these folds in the material and physical landscape exist all around. Through their collective familiarity with the contours of these spaces, the Batiste family is able to create or access them in times of great need, actively carving out their own social space in a dangerous physical environment, allowing for self-preservation and self-actualization. During the heightened frenzy of the Hurricane, the Batiste family find themselves hiding in the attic and yet the rising waters still threaten them. Desperate to escape, Randall grabs a chainsaw and moves towards the ceiling. “He shoves it through the finger-wide opening, cuts a jagged line, draws it back out, cuts another jagged line, a parentheses, before it chugs to a stop...he swings [the saw] again, and the closed eyelid he drew with the saw...flutters, and the roof opens. The storm screams” (230). Here, Esch supplies a narrative anecdote that helps us understand immediately what kind of escape route is being created, “a parentheses.” Reminiscent of Jamaica Kincaid’s use of parentheses in *A Small Place*, or Trethewey’s “forms of enclosure [that] resist and reverse,” the “eyelid” parenthesis becomes a material portal through which the Batiste family can escape the rising waters, a fold in time and space that they create for themselves.

Of course, once outside the attic, the Batistes find themselves completely exposed to Katrina’s wrath. However, they immediately rely on their past experience with hidden and quiet spaces to move to safety amidst the chaos of the storm. Before jumping from the roof to the tree

whose branches span the gap from the Batiste house to their abandoned grandparent's house, Randall yells out to Junior to jump, "just like the first time we swam in the pit!" (232). Jumping from tree branch to tree branch, the Batiste's method of escape is notable in that it re-writes another familiar literary narrative that involves rising Mississippi floodwaters and a tree. In a way similar to Trethewey's ekphrasis, where the poem itself acts as a camera that re-visions the material world, Ward's text becomes a device by which she re-writes William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and in so doing turns the proverbial camera around to revision American literary production. Sinead Moynihan's excellent appraisal of the similarities between the two novels demonstrates the depth to which Ward engages Faulkner's construction of the South. Moynihan resists analysis that uses existing models of parody, revision, or rewriting, arguing "rewriting effectively reifies the authority of the canon at the same time that it attempts to undermine it" (2). Instead, Moynihan demonstrates that *AILD* is "the vehicle for, rather than the target of, her critique" (2).

This kind of rewriting places the social present on equal footing with the literary past, which is a more "politically engaged model of rewriting" that Moynihan refers to as "recycling" (3). For Moynihan, this positions Ward's novel as more outward looking as opposed to the sometimes esoteric textual world that is created with more simple revisions of canonical texts. Moynihan's article establishes clear connections between *AILD* and Ward's text that constitute a social, political rewriting using Faulkner's text as a vehicle. This rewrite significantly challenges Faulkner's narrative vision in the same way that Trethewey's poem uses the camera to force a tilt-shift as she takes the reader on an imaginative journey to Ship island. Perhaps the simplest evidence of this is the most striking divergence between the two: *AILD* employs 15 different narrators and Darl's use of third person narrative in the conclusion famously calls into question

the primacy of the omniscient narrator while *STB* maintains the remarkably consistent, singular, and clear narrative perspective of Esch.

The key dramatic moment of both texts is decidedly material and spatial – their differing narrative perspectives still must contend with rain, rising river water, and the dangerous and unpredictable detritus associated with intense flooding. The Bundrens, halfway across an old ford in the Yoknapatawpha River, encounter a log that “surged up out of the water and stood for an instant upright...as if it had rocketed suddenly from the bottom of the river.” The log catches on the mule team’s ropes and then, dragging the mules under water, “the wagon sheers crosswise, poised on the crest of the ford as the log strikes it, tilting it up and on” and dumping out the contents of wagon into the broiling river (148). On the other hand, as the rising floodwaters of Katrina sweep through the Pit, the Batiste family looks to a tree as an alternative path to safety, as familiar as jumping into the pit to swim. The Bundren’s ability to contend with the raging river is tied to the use of tools and their ability to maintain “balance” in the time-space continuum. Cash, upon approaching the river, rightfully obsesses over the wagon’s balance (145) and conspicuously reaches into his toolbox in order to gird the family against the current (147). Of course, the toolbox is spilled out as the wagon capsizes, showing the tools to be powerless against that environment. On the other hand, the Batistes’ locked arms and created a human chain, relying on one another to maintain balance while crossing the flooded pit.

One of Moynihan’s more resonating points of analysis concerns the automated call from the Mississippi state government issuing a mandatory evacuation. The call sounds out this warning: “if you choose to stay in your home and have not evacuated by this time, we are not responsible. You have been warned” (217). She observes that not evacuating is framed in terms of the neoliberal discourse of choice. Thus, not evacuating is characterized as bad, rather than

“an effect of poverty, lack of transportation, and no access to alternative accommodations elsewhere.” By this logic, the state apparatus privileges movement and awards those who listen to its discourse. This announcement is also racially encoded, and works to normalize the narrative that to be white is “right.” The Batistes’ clearly contest this mandate and do so through the strength of their family bonds and through their nuanced, practiced abilities to seek out safe and quiet spaces. Thus, not only do they contest the mandate in a material fashion they also contest the political narratives in the aftermath of Katrina that perpetuated myths about the black family. Given this logic, one would think that the Bundrens’ journey would affirm the opposite, that “to move is good.” Yet rather than reinforcing this binary, the Bundrens’ movement actually destabilizes the entire premise of neoliberal discourse by exposing the fault lines of its spatial logic.

After the Bundrens cross the river, they soon realize that despite now being on the right side of the river, “the levee through Haley Bottom had done gone for two miles and that the only way to get to Jefferson would be to go around by Mottson” (185). This presents the Bundrens with a huge geographic problem: they are trapped between the raging and swollen river behind them that just capsized everything they own and the flooded lowlands of Hayley Bottom in front – ostensibly stranded on an island, unable to move backwards or forwards. And yet, after Anse acquires a new team of mules, the Bundrens decide to head to Mottson – which is not a feasible option given their geographic location. Fortunately for the Bundrens, the narrative shifts to young Vardaman, who cannot supply accurate material or geographic observations about their journey except that they all walked hard up a hill, and so his narrative is one of spatial silence (197). Immediately after Vardaman’s geographically silent narration ends, Dewey Dell abruptly into the front window of a Mottson drug store, transported through the narrative plot and

Yoknapatawpha County and into the view of the nefarious Moseley (198). Before leaving the town, a more acute observer of the spatial organization of the county, Anse, summarizes the steps of their journey thus far with “a long tale” that meanders from one washed out bridge to the next, to swimming the ford until they found that the “road was washed out and they had to come clean around by Mottson” (204). “Clean” is an appropriate word, as it can only be described as a cleaned-up route around a plot hole in the novel. I cannot characterize this element of Faulkner’s novel as anything more than cartographic white privilege. Not only is it a significantly insufficient escape from their perilous circumstances, but Faulkner criticism has never drawn a critical inference from this clear spatial fault beyond anecdotal notes about its existence. This too reflects a bias in the spatial privilege given to Faulkner’s created universe and its correlation to the real space and place of Mississippi and the South.

What the geographic lapse in the Bundrens’ journey shows is a privileging of a system and its organization across all levels over the lived experience of Yoknapatawpha and the limitations the place entails. Faulkner’s Mississippi is one that fits into a grand design, yet the grand design carries an imperial impulse rooted in ideologies that actively undermine the production of certain kinds of social space. The design is faulty in concept and, as the plot of *AILD* shows, practice. Jesmyn Ward has affirmed repeatedly Faulkner’s significantly positive impact on her as a writer while simultaneously affirming that she finds his black characters lacking, they “aren’t fully realized.” Faulkner’s map bears out this tension. The SE, NE, and NW corners of the map are fully filled out, rich in detail and description. A full three-quarters of the map bears the marks of the narratives Faulkner brought to life, but the SW corner is not. In fact, very little in Faulkner’s huge corpus takes place in the SW quadrant and it is barely ever mentioned in detail. Gavin Stevens once describes the SW quadrant when standing on cemetery

hill, and his description carries with it a telling implication. Stevens says “to the west and south the checkered fields and the woods flowing on into the blue and gauzed horizon beyond which lay at last like a cloud the long wall of the levee and the great River itself” (*Intruder* 151). Here, Faulkner clearly associates this geographic region of the county with the Mississippi Delta and New Orleans. His cartographic portrayal of that region can best be described as opaque, and perhaps more accurately as resistant and silencing to that geographic region. In fact, his inclusion of the population of the county, broken down by race, and his insistence to call himself “proprietor,” a word whose etymology is rooted in American colonial power, demonstrates a clearly visible conflict in his cartographic impulse. As a remedy to Faulkner’s silencing, rather than conceptually “filling in” this missing quadrant of Mississippi geography, Ward’s rewrite of *As I Lay Dying* works to undercut the very imperial narrative that supports Faulkner’s entire cartographic premise – and she does so quietly.

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Appendix 1



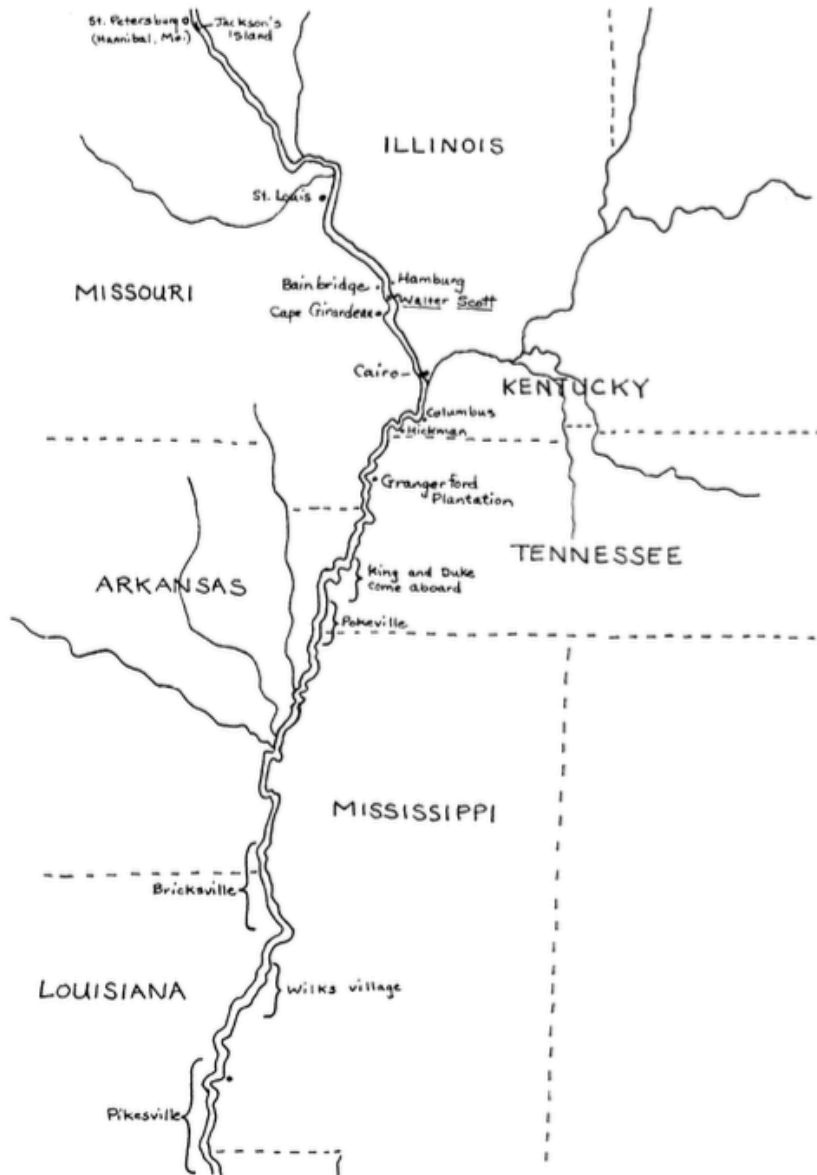
Appendix 2

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Location or episode (actual counterpart in parentheses)	Mileage from foot of Jackson's Island (mileage on actual river in parentheses)	Mileage from previous location	Travel time from previous location	Elapsed time of journey
St. Petersburg (Hannibal, Mo.)				
Jackson's Island (Glasscock's I.)	0	0		
St. Louis, Mo.	139½ (139½)	139½	31 hrs.	4 days
Booth's Landing (Bainbridge, Mo.)	267½ (263½)	128	28½ hrs.	8 days
<i>Walter Scott</i>	269½	2	½ hr.	8 days
Village on west bank (Cape Girardeau, Mo.)	277½ (273½)	8	2 hrs.	8 days
Cairo, Ill.	322½ (314+)	approx. 45	approx. 10 hrs.	10 days
Village on e. bank (Columbus, Ky.)	384½ (334)	approx. 62	approx. 14 hrs.	12 days
Village on hill on e. bank (Hickman, Ky.)	404½ (354)	approx. 20	approx. 4 hrs.	13 days
Grangerford plantation (Tennessee)	434½	approx. 30	approx. 6 hrs.	14 days (Grangerford interlude uncertain; perhaps 3 weeks)
King and Duke come aboard	approx. 550	100-130	3-4 days	
Pokeville	approx. 590	34	1 day	
Brickville, Ark. (almost certainly Louisiana)			at least 4 days and nights	
Wilks village (Miss.)			1 day and night	
Pikesville (La. or Miss.)			"days and days"	

Appendix 3

HUCKLEBERRY FINN / 197



Appendix 4



Appendix 5



Appendix 6

MAGANN'S BIRDS EYE VIEW
OF PETTIS COUNTY, MISSOURI
 Showing Plats of the Rail road towns & Sectional County Map, 1872.

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MAGANN'S PLAT OF THE CITY OF SEDALIA.
 J. FITZGERALD Surveyor & Engineer

PLAT OF SMITHTON.

PLAT OF HOUSTONIA.

PLAT OF DRESDEN.

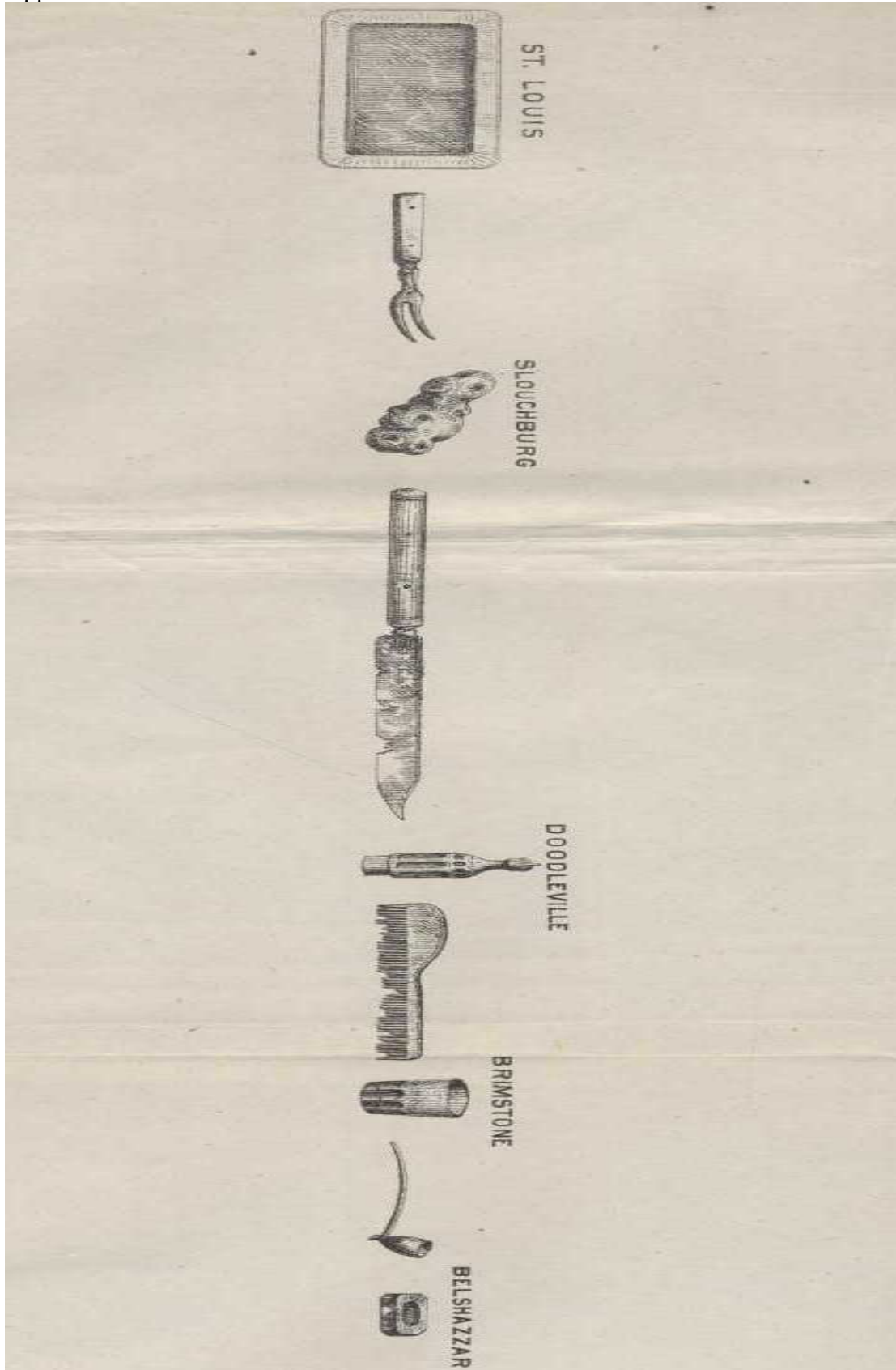
PLAT OF GREEN RIDGE.

PLAT OF GEORGETOWN.

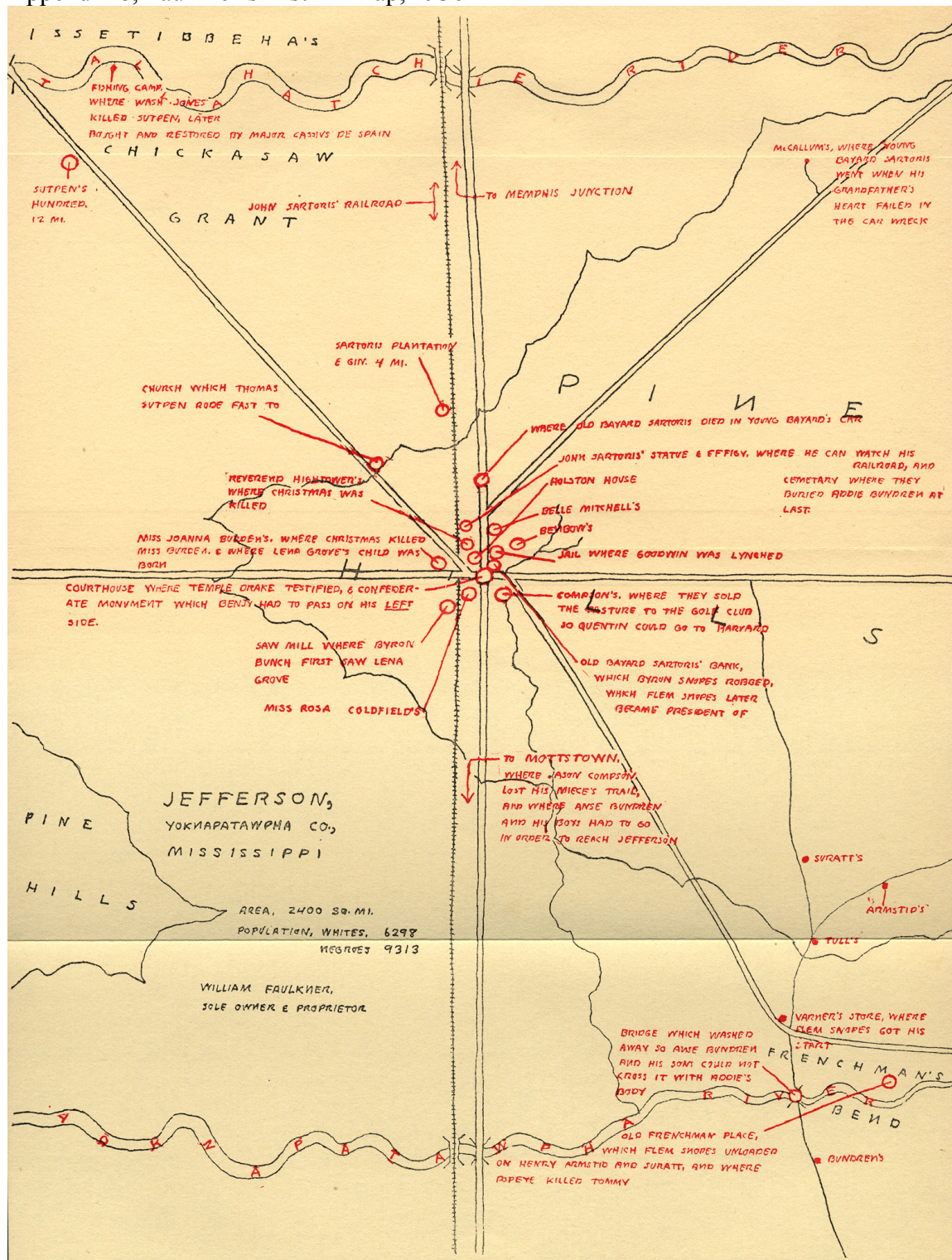
Sectional Map
PETTIS COUNTY, MO.

ORDERS BY MAIL PROMPTLY FILLED.
ADDRESS J. G. MAGANN,
SEDALIA, MO.

Appendix 7



Appendix 8, Faulkner's first AA map, 1936



Appendix 9, Viking Portable Faulkner, 1946



Appendix 10, Revised 1936 AA map

