

The Writing of Nation: Faulkner and the Postbellum South

By

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### **Abstract**

This dissertation argues that William Faulkner, drawing on a conversation begun by earlier Southern writers, writes his anxiety about the South's assimilation into the nation. Specifically, I argue that his early works show repulsion to the idea of the South's assimilation, while his later works show more comfort with assimilation, along with a greater willingness to participate in the national imperial project. I begin by establishing the conversation in writers who are active in the postbellum period, and then I explore the ways in which Faulkner draws on this conversation to present his own complicated and changing depiction of nation. Central to this discussion is recognition of an anxiety about the role of the South in the creation of national identity.

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## **Introduction: Faulkner's Public Narration of Nation**

### **I. Critical Overview of Faulkner's Statements about Race**

In his September 1956 letter to *Ebony* (titled "A Letter to the Leaders in the Negro Race"), William Faulkner addresses controversial statements he had been quoted as making in regards to the school integration crisis in the South.<sup>1</sup> He explains:

Recently I was quoted in several magazines with the statement that 'I...between the United States and Mississippi...would choose Mississippi...even (at the price or if it meant) shooting down Negroes in the street.' Each time I saw this statement, I corrected it by letter to this effect: That is a statement which no sober man would make nor any sane man believe, for the reason that it is not only foolish, but dangerous, since the moment for that choice and that subsequent act will never arise. (*Essays* 107)

This public apology is irksome for several reasons. First, Faulkner does not deny having made the statement; instead, he denies that he would have made the statement while sober. In fact, such a carefully worded apology from a man known for drunkenness perhaps raises more red flags than no apology at all. Second, Faulkner's reasoning why this statement is "dangerous" is troubling. He is less concerned with racial violence, and more concerned with the foolishness of believing that the circumstances which would justify such violence would arise. He argues that it is dangerous to believe in the possibility of a second Civil War, not that it would be dangerous

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<sup>1</sup> Recently, historians such as Elizabeth Jacoway have returned to the school integration crisis of the American South seeking to examine complexities that historical criticism has long overlooked. Specifically, they seek to explore the various and complex sociopolitical conditions that led initially to racial segregation and ultimately to the move for integration. Jacoway examines the incident at Little Rock's Central High School in which President Eisenhower called up the National Guard to force the integration Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus had sought to prevent. Rather than focusing the study on Faubus's racism (as most have done), Jacoway additionally explores the various external forces at work on Faubus, as well as his political opportunism, concluding that his primary motive was not his personal feelings about African Americans, but rather his attempt to appeal to a crucial part of the electorate. Such studies importantly highlight the political underpinnings of racism.

to “shoot down Negroes in the street” should sectional violence again erupt. Finally, Faulkner’s apology comes at the beginning of a letter than many leaders in the African-American community (as well as many critics over the past 50 years) have found troubling.

This letter, as well as many similar public statements by Faulkner, led to a vocal, public response from writers such as Ralph Ellison and W.E.B. Du Bois. According to Grace Elizabeth Hale and Robert Jackson, such statements resulted in Du Bois’s invitation for Faulkner to join him in a public debate: “Du Bois challenged Faulkner to debate integration. Insisting again on the need for more time, Faulkner replied by telegram: ‘I do not believe there is a debatable point between us’” (42). Despite Faulkner’s assurances that he supported gradual integration, he continued to be challenged for the contradictory nature of some of the statements about his gradualist approach. A clear example of this is his “Letter to a Northern Editor,” originally published in *Life* and titled more generally as “A Letter to the North.” In it, Faulkner seems initially to make his gradualist position clear:

From the beginning of this present phase of the race problem in the South, I have been on record as opposing the forces in my native country which would keep the condition out of which this present evil and trouble has grown. Now I must go on record as opposing the forces outside the South which would use legal or police compulsion to eradicate that evil overnight. I was against compulsory segregation. I am just as strongly against compulsory integration. (*Essays* 86).

While maintaining this gradualist position, however, Faulkner seems to not realize the difficulty of speaking for another group. On one hand, he says, “the Northerner, the liberal, does not know the South. He cant know it from his distance” (90). On the other hand, he entitles himself to speak on behalf of the African-American community, a fact seen as hypocritical by many, such

as Ellison. Ellison writes, “Bill Faulkner can write a million letters to the North as he recently did in LIFE, but for one thing he forgets that the people he is talking to are Negroes and they’re everywhere in the States and without sectional allegiance” (116-7). Ellison, then, objects to Faulkner’s speaking on behalf of another group, even if Faulkner’s intentions are benevolent.

The most egregious example of Faulkner’s speaking on behalf of the African American community immediately follows the apology cited above. In this letter, Faulkner says, “So if I were a Negro, I would say to my people: ‘Let us be always unflaggingly and inflexibly flexible. But always decently, quietly, courteously, with dignity and without violence. And above all, with patience. The white man has devoted three hundred years to teaching us to be patient’” (*Essays* 111). Faulkner’s speaking for African Americans is laced with a reappropriation of the traits that Southerners assigned to slaves. The description minimizes the needs of the African-American community (for education, for jobs) in favor of the traits that will not inconvenience whites. This reappropriation is not lost on Ellison: “Faulkner has delusions of grandeur because he really believes that he invented these characteristics which he ascribes to Negroes in his fiction and now he thinks he can end this great historical action just as he ends a dramatic action in one of his novels” (116-7). Ellison sees in Faulkner’s gradualist approach a latent paternalism.

While teaching at the University of Virginia later in his life, Faulkner attempts to explain his earlier statements and defend himself against claims of racism. Faulkner continues in his mistrust of the Supreme Court and of the NAACP. He says of integration, “It won’t come into Mississippi or anywhere else because of any decision by any court” (*University* 148). He further explains, “I myself think that integration as they mean it now will never occur, that the Negro doesn’t want it either” (215). Still evident is Faulkner’s presumption that he is able to

speak on behalf of African Americans, a belief that is central to his theory of integration. At the same time, however, Faulkner remains benevolent, wishing equality if not integration: "I think that the only thing that will solve that problem is not integration but equality, for the Negro to know that he has just as much and just as valid rights in this country as anybody else has" (227). Faulkner, then, seems to believe that the only difference concerning integration between him and Du Bois is a difference in what should be done to accomplish a common end. Ellison, however, points out a latent paternalism in Faulkner's statements, a paternalism which Ellison sees as a (perhaps benevolent) form of racism.

It would be easy at this point, as many critics have done, to dismiss Faulkner as a well-intentioned but oblivious racist and to celebrate the progressive and realistic vision of Ellison and Du Bois. Gene Bluestein is one such critic who has typified this vision of Faulkner. He says, "There is sufficient evidence in Faulkner's life and work that he could not abide the thought of total integration even though, like many of his characters, he was aware of the fact that blacks and whites are truly one family" (163). Bluestein bases this thesis on Faulkner's apparent understanding of the biological difference of race: "As a matter of fact, one of Faulkner's earliest and most characteristic views of miscegenation is based on a false zoological premise," a conclusion Bluestein draws from Faulkner's likening of miscegenation to the mating of a horse and donkey that results in a mule that is unable to reproduce (153). Bluestein hypothesizes that Faulkner similarly believed that the offspring of African American and white partners would eventually weaken the human race so much that it would be incapable of continuing to reproduce. Bluestein explains, "The experiment in breeding brings together elements meant to be segregated and the results are disastrous" (154-55). Bluestein, then, sees the anxiety over miscegenation that is central to many Faulkner novels as evidence of Faulkner's own racism.



Most critics have resisted equating Faulkner's paternalistic public statements with his fiction, concluding instead that his fiction shows a far more complex treatment of race than do his letters. Hale and Jackson point out that Faulkner was searching for a middle ground between progress and a romanticized notion of the antebellum South. This middle ground was problematic, however. First of all, the middle ground was becoming tenuous because of progressive historical forces; Hale and Jackson argue, "By the mid-1950s, Faulkner's middle ground, both the historical space out of which he worked and the imaginative space his fiction helped create and expand, was gone" (39). Further, Hale and Jackson point out that this middle ground never had room for individualized African Americans: "Faulkner's middle ground was never a thoroughly integrated place [...] it was a ground where liberal whites could turn blacks into symbols not of white supremacy but of white moral failings and even inhumanity, which in turn held out the opportunity for white redemption" (39). In other words, Faulkner's purpose in his fiction was not just to move forward, but to explain what happened in the past, to diagnose the reasons for the fall. He wants to believe in a prelapsarian South that never existed, but he also wants to believe in equality.

This is not to say Faulkner's vision of race in his fiction is simplistic; even though he is focused on the past, he recognizes race as a social construct and the need to move past "race" in order to achieve equality. Gena McKinley Diamant sees this as a key theme of *Light in August*, citing primarily the character Joe Christmas, whose racial heritage is ambivalent and socially constructed. She argues, "Faulkner offers a more complex explanation of how society comes to label particular individuals as 'black' or 'white.' He rejects, even ridicules, the notion that 'blood' could determine racial difference" (74). In addition, Diamant argues that Faulkner is aware that, though race is a social construct, it can still have devastating effects on individuals:

“Rather, by giving us someone who merely believes himself to be black and whose life is wholly and tragically altered because of this belief, Faulkner can reveal [...] the horrifying power of society to shape an individual's identity according to its own perverse distortions” (90). Aside from this recognition, however, Faulkner offers no path forward. At novel's end, Joe Christmas is lynched by Percy Grimm. Hale and Jackson conclude, “Whether by historical accident or artistic freedom (or both), Faulkner largely remained in that circumscribed space of Hightower's reverie in *Light in August* – gazing with ironic but tortured longing at an imagined communion between Percy Grimm and Joe Christmas – without ever moving beyond that vision” (44). Joe Christmas, then, represents both Faulkner's complex understanding of race and his focus on a romanticized past rather than a potential future.

Rather than set Faulkner apart from his contemporaries, however, these beliefs seem to place him squarely within the bounds of white Southern liberalism at the time. Joel Peckham argues that such focus on the past was not only a trait of Southern writers, but also made Southern writing a particularly rich terrain for commentary on race relations: “Ironically, then, it was the very backward glance, the resistance to integration and to the modern, industrial world that made the South such fertile ground for a highly transgressive literature” (35). Morton Sosna traces the complex history of the gradual stance toward integration and of the definition of liberalism in the South. Up until World War I, he claims that most progressive Southerners supported a gradual approach to integration. He points to Will Alexander, the chairman of the Interracial Commission, considered one of the most progressive Southern organizations who “emphasized that in order to be effective, a campaigner for racial justice could not remain too far ahead of the thinking of the man on the street” (26). Sosna claims that this general attitude began to change after World War II: “The wartime militancy of American blacks and their

sympathizers, plus the resulting white anxieties, particularly in the South, severely tested the racial liberalism” of Southern intellectuals (131). Sosna’s context is important in understanding Faulkner. Faulkner’s most famous works were written before this change in Southern intellectualism (though his letters and statements during the integration crisis were not). If Faulkner’s mindset was typical of his sociopolitical location, then his later works, such as *Go Down, Moses* should show a similar reevaluation of segregation.

Critics such as Leigh Anne Duck and Eric J. Sundquist do see an evolution in Faulkner’s career. Duck claims Faulkner’s growth stems from his ever-increasing desire to temporalize his works in the contemporary political climate: for example, “*Go Down, Moses* participates in this ‘temporal mapping,’ exploring the extent to which the residents of Jefferson, Mississippi, do and do not participate in national and global models of modernity” (173). Sundquist similarly sees Faulkner increasingly mapping his work in the contemporary terrain, though he focuses on Faulkner’s growing awareness of the power of his work to engage in political issues. He writes:

Faulkner did not, quite obviously, suddenly discover that the issue of race was at the center of the South’s troubled history and its convulsive contemporary experience; at the least, it was implicit in much of his earlier work. What he discovered were the visionary powers the problem of race was capable of engaging as it became, over the course of his career, the definitive crisis of twentieth-century American social history and the violently explicit subject of his fiction. (*House* 1983)

Sundquist sees Faulkner's shift to focusing on contemporary political issues as occurring late in his career, beginning around 1950.<sup>2</sup>

## II. Race and Nation in Faulkner

These critics' focus on Faulkner's portrayal of race has produced much useful, interesting criticism. I find Duck's and Sundquist's arguments that there is a shift in Faulkner's portrayal of race over time to be especially compelling. Within Faulkner's comments on the integration crisis, I would argue that Faulkner is additionally narrating American nationhood in seemingly contradictory ways. On one hand, his comments suggest that Southern sectionalism is more important than American nationalism. On the other hand, he shows concern that a divided American identity is a danger in light of Cold War threats. These depictions of nation are racially inflected; in both versions, Faulkner portrays the threat to the nation as nonwhite. Because of this inflection, I would argue that understanding Faulkner's shift in the depiction of nation throughout his career is important in beginning to understand how such contradiction can co-exist in Faulkner's texts.

In the apology above, Faulkner takes as a given the fundamental sectional differences that led to the Civil War. The U.S. is not a nation united by ideology, but is instead two warring sections, with the North controlling the South through force, not through assimilation of ideas. The North is the occupier, and the South is occupied. In his alleged initial statement, he clearly

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<sup>2</sup> Specifically, Sundquist sees the character of Gavin Stevens, who has a large role in many of Faulkner's late novels, as the strongest example of a Faulknerian liberal. In him, both Faulkner's desire to see equality and his fear of moving away from the past come to a head. His desire for equality comes in the form of his desire to raise money to bury Butch Beauchamp, the grandson of Mollie Beauchamp, a fixture in the African American community of Jefferson. M.C. Flannery and John G. Cawelti point out that Stevens is based on American lawyer figures that sought social justice, particularly Abraham Lincoln. Similarly, E. Grady Jolly explores the places where Stevens' stance overlaps with Southern progressive lawyers. Faulkner explicitly places Stevens in a larger American tradition of progressivism, calling Stevens, "Phi Beta Kappa, Harvard, Ph.D., Heidelberg, whose office was his hobby, although it made his living for him, and whose serious vocation was a twenty-two-year-old unfinished translation of the Old Testament back into classic Greek" (*Moses* 353).

sets up the South and the North as opposing military forces, suggesting that he would fight for his native Mississippi in the event of a second Civil War. In his apology, he reneges on this statement, but he does not renege on the crucial differences between South and North. In a 1956 letter on the apology, Faulkner explains, “The South is not armed to resist the United States that I know of, because the United States is neither going to force the South nor permit the South to resist or secede” (*Essays* 225). It is not that the South and the North are no longer different; it is that the North has taken from the South the power to resist.

Part of Faulkner’s distinction between South and North is his belief that the North has hindered the South in promoting racial equality. In his 1958 speech at the University of Virginia, he argues, “It is easy enough for the North to blame on us, the South, the fact that this problem is still unsolved. If I were a northerner, that’s what I would do” (*Essays* 156). Faulkner argues that the North is wrong in assigning this blame, however. He argues, “But I do know that we in the South, having grown up and lived among Negroes for generations, are capable in individual cases of liking and trusting individual Negroes, which the North can never do because the northerner only fears him” (157). Essentially, Faulkner argues that segregation is a Southern problem, one that the South could have solved had the North minded its own business. This echoes Faulkner’s “Letter to a Northern Editor” quoted above. In this argument, Faulkner casts the South as his “own country,” and the North as an outside force that would seek to meddle in its affairs. In fact, it is the compulsory nature of the South’s relationship to the North that seems to offend him, and that very nature which he believes is preventing improved race relations.

In addition to Faulkner's concerns about forced integration, he also expresses concern that the American melting pot will lead to the end of individuality. In his essay "On Privacy,"<sup>3</sup> he expresses the American dream not in terms of a melting pot, but in terms of individuality. He says, "This was the American Dream: a sanctuary on the earth for individual man: a condition in which he could be free not only of the old established closed-corporation hierarchies of arbitrary power which had oppressed him as a mass, but free from that mass into which the hierarchies of church and state had compressed and held him" (*Essays* 62). Faulkner suggests that the American Dream is not only to be free of oppressive governments, but to be free from the masses as well. He further argues that the America of the 1950s has betrayed the promise of the American Dream: "in our democracy bad taste has been converted into a marketable and therefore taxable and therefore lobbyable commodity by the merchandising federations which at the same simultaneous time create the market [...] and the product to serve it" (69). For Faulkner, such commodification results in a loss of individuality. His primary concern, however, is how this system results in a loss of individual privacy. He warns, "The American sky which was once the topless empyrean of freedom, the American air which was once the living breath of liberty, are now become one vast down-crowding pressure to abolish them both, by destroying man's individuality as a man" (72). He continues, "Then, privacy will indeed be gone; he who is individual enough to want it even to change his shirt or bathe in, will be cursed by one universal American voice as subversive to the American way of life and the American flag" (73). The threat, as Faulkner sees it, is "one universal American voice" that will drown out his individuality. He fears losing his individuality (and the South's distinctiveness) in the national aggregate. He fears that compulsory integration will be a tool of such loss. The "melting pot"

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<sup>3</sup> *Harper's*, July 1955.

and assimilation are threats, and America and race relations would be better off if the South remained unassimilated, free to treat its own people as only it knows best how to do.

At the same time Faulkner narrates a seemingly contradictory version of the American nation, one in which assimilation is not counter to the American Dream, but is instead essential for American survival. In his graduation address to University High School in 1951, Faulkner situates the forces threatening American privacy not in the North but abroad. He warns, “Our danger is the forces in the world today which are trying to use man’s fear to rob him of his individuality, his soul, trying to reduce him to an unthinking mass by fear and bribery” (*Essays* 123). Faulkner speaks at greater lengths about these forces elsewhere, dividing the world ideologically along Cold War lines. On one side is American democracy; on the other side is communist tyranny. In “To the Youth of Japan,”<sup>4</sup> he explains this division: “We think of the world today as being a helpless battleground in which two mighty forces face each other in the form of two irreconcilable ideologies. I do not believe they are two ideologies. I believe that only one of them is an ideology because the other is simply a human belief that no government shall exist immune to the check of the consent of the governed” (84). Faulkner’s use of the jargon of American political documents makes it clear that he sees America as being a part of this latter group, a bastion against overseas threats to freedom. In this narration of nation, Faulkner situates the threat to America with the Soviet Union, not with the loss of Southern individuality that could come from assimilation.

In fact, assimilation with the North is Faulkner’s proposed solution to this perceived communist threat. He argues for the necessity of union between all free peoples: “That what is important and necessary and urgent (urgent: we are reaching the point now where we haven’t

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<sup>4</sup> Published as a pamphlet by the U.S. Information Service, Tokyo, 1955.

time anymore) is that we federate together, show a common unified front not for dull peace and amity, but for survival as a people and a nation”<sup>5</sup> (*Essays* 230). He continues by emphasizing that, though such unity may mean uniting with other democracies, it is most important for Americans to unify as a nation. He says, “I decline to believe that in a crisis we cannot rally our national character to that same courage and toughness which the English people for instance did when as a nation they stood alone in Europe for the national principle that men shall and can be free” (230). Similarly, in his 1956 essay, “On Fear: Deep South in Labor: Mississippi,” he argues, “since our principal and perhaps desperate need in America today was that all Americans at least should be on the side of America; that if all Americans were on the same side, we would not need to fear that other nations and ideologies would doubt us when we talked of human freedom” (94). When confronting an outward communist threat, then, Faulkner argues that national assimilation, being one unified nation both politically and ideologically, is essential.

Importantly, Faulkner’s definition of American unity continues to be inflected by race. He describes the forces working for freedom in the world as “white” and the communist forces as “nonwhite.” In “On Fear,” he describes the liberation of former European colonies thusly: “in only ten years we have watched the nonwhite peoples expel, by bloody violence when necessary, the white man from all the portions of the Middle East and Asia which he once dominated, into which vacuum has already begun to move that other and inimical power which people who believe in freedom are at war with” (*Essays* 103). The result of this vacuum of power, he argues, is a slavery which can only be combatted by America: “We, America, have the best opportunity to do this because we can begin here, at home; we will not need to send costly freedom task-forces into alien and inimical nonwhite places already convinced that there

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<sup>5</sup> Letter to the *New York Times*, October 13, 1957.



is no such thing as freedom and liberty and equality and peace for nonwhite people too” (104). Though Faulkner’s stated purpose is liberating portions of the globe that have fallen to communist tyranny, his vision of national unification and resistance still presupposes that the good guys are white and the bad guys are nonwhite. We should unite as Americans, but the definition of America is one that excludes people of color.

What we see in Faulkner’s public statements surrounding the national integration crisis in the mid-1950s are two seemingly contradictory narrations of nation. On the one hand, assimilation (whether of the South into the nation or the African American into the South) is a threat to individuality, and therefore a threat to the American Dream. On the other hand, assimilation is a necessary tool in stopping the outward communist threat, which is essential to surviving as a nation. Assimilation will destroy the essence of the nation or will save it. Faulkner seems to hold these two contradictory ideas simultaneously. In this project, I will argue that Faulkner’s fiction is similarly filled with contradictory narrations of nation. Though these narrations often overlap and exist simultaneously, I see the beginning of the Cold War as an important transitional period for Faulkner’s fiction. Before World War II, I will argue, Faulkner’s fiction primarily shows anxiety about assimilation. After World War II, it begins to show a nation in need of assimilation against an outside threat. I do not mean to suggest that this trajectory indicates a complete shift. Clearly, Faulkner remains split in the 1950s, at times clinging to Southern separatism and at times embracing U.S. nationalism. Nevertheless, his fiction reveals that the Cold War creates an outside common enemy which can be used for national reunification.

### III. The Narration of Nation in the Late Nineteenth Century

Clearly, the sectional divisions of the U.S. predate the integration crisis of the 1950s, finding their most drastic climax in the American Civil War. Following this War, Americans wrestled with whether it was possible to have a unified national identity that could prevent future sectional conflicts, often using literature as a tool for narrating this identity. In this postbellum literature, the central question was whether the South could be re-integrated into the American whole, whether the South remained a national Other or whether it could become a part of the melting pot. Like Faulkner's writing, postbellum fictions frequently hold seemingly contradictory answers to these questions, some authors emphasizing Southern difference and other authors narrating national reunion.

Critics have argued that regionalism serves both as a means of literary nation-building and as a literary form that resists the dominant national myth. In framing one side of this debate, Richard Brodhead argues that regionalism's "public function was not just to mourn lost cultures but to purvey a certain story of contemporary cultures and of the relations between them: to tell local cultures into a history of their supersession" (121). Thus, regionalism becomes a part of U.S. nation-building, and the stories of regions become incorporated into a new hierarchy by the East Coast literati. This new hierarchy is a means of "social management on the elite's behalf" (135). Fetterley and Pryse, on the other hand, present a model for viewing texts that never enjoyed the favor of the elite. In their formulation, regionalist texts play a specific counterhegemonic role. They argue regionalism is a "discourse or a mode of analysis, a vantage point within the network of power relations that provides a location for critique and resistance" (11). Such critique is of a very specific kind: for Fetterley and Pryse, regionalism "marks that point where region becomes mobilized as a tool for critique of hierarchies based on gender as

well as race, class, age, and economic resources” (14). Likely, some texts fit more closely with Brodhead’s thesis and some more with Fetterley and Pryse’s. Thus, it is useful to explore the ways in which postbellum Southern literature both supports and resists narratives of national homogeneity.

In terms of postbellum literature, particularly the literature of the turn of the twentieth century, national identity was inseparable from America’s growing imperialistic aims. Though imperialism has always played a role in American development, many scholars point to the 1890s as a period of exceptional prevalence of imperialist discourse, arguing that imperial expansion was a goal that could be shared by both Southerner and Northerner, the first major national enterprise of a reunited country. This common goal was manifested (among other places) in the Spanish-American War, a war in which men from both South and North could literally fight for a common cause. This imperialist discourse is often narrated through a domestic metaphor. Amy Kaplan argues, “The idea of nation as home, I argue, is inextricable from the political, economic, and cultural movements of empire, movements that both erect and unsettle the ever-shifting boundaries between the domestic and the foreign, between ‘at home’ and ‘abroad’” (1). For Kaplan, the domestic sphere becomes the place in which the frontier is civilized, in which the cultural work of consent is completed. Settling the frontier is again plagued by anxiety at the presence of the Other. Kaplan explains, “American exceptionalism is in part an argument for boundless expansion, where national particularism and international universalism converge” (16). For Kaplan, this anxiety is most clearly revealed in the debate about the annexation of Puerto Rico following the Spanish-American War, a debate couched in the terms of whether Puerto Rico should be considered foreign or domestic.

Though critics such as Fetterley and Pryse and Brodhead had explored the ways in which regional literature both resists and helps to perpetuate the narration of American imperialism that was so central to this era, criticism that focuses specifically on Southern regionalism has often been less nuanced. Perhaps because of the violent history of the Civil War, Southern literature has long been looked at primarily in terms of Southern alterity. Recently, the role of Southern literature in creating imperial narratives that seek to unify and reconstruct a homogeneous national identity has become a matter of some critical attention. Jeremy Wells summarizes: “Until comparatively recently studies of the South have tended to explore the region in terms of a North-South dialectic and to regard it as the nation’s ‘other’—‘an American problem,’ ‘a mythic land apart,’ a ‘separate country,’ or a space of ‘aberration,’ to paraphrase the titles of four studies of the region published over the past two decades” (18).<sup>6</sup> Wells argues that such a focus on Southern difference obfuscates the narrative of American nation-building that was also going on at the same time. He concludes, “the South must also be seen as a crucible of narratives of national identity, a space that, whatever its pretensions toward difference and exclusivity, has simultaneously generated ways of conceptualizing ‘America’ and indeed the world in which it has seemed central” (18). It is the simultaneity of these conversations that I find most striking. Postbellum Southern writing does frequently narrate Southern difference, but it also (and often at the same time) narrates Southern assimilation into the nation. These authors find themselves both repulsed by the idea of losing Southern distinctiveness (which they frequently equate with racial and gender distinctiveness) within an American melting-pot and attracted to the narrative of American imperialism which emphasizes homogeneity.

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<sup>6</sup> The works to which Wells refers are Griffin and Doyle, eds., *The South as an American Problem*; Smith and Appleton, eds., *A Mythic Land Apart*; Binding, *Separate Country*; and Gray, *Southern Aberrations*.

The setting for Faulkner's fiction is most often the South in the aftermath of the Civil War. Despite this postbellum setting, until recently critics have often minimized Faulkner's connection to postbellum literary traditions. Wells is right to assert that Faulkner draws from postbellum authors, that he is a part of a tradition rather than a revolutionary. Wells explains:

While it is right to assert, as Eric Sundquist has, that much of the power of Faulkner's fiction results from its insistence that "the sins of the Southern fathers and the sins of the American fathers' were and are 'inextricably entangled,'" it is necessary also to recognize that Faulkner was not the first to behold "America" when he set out to "tell about the South." His preoccupation with the South as a locus of national sin represents less a revelation than a *revision*—a rewriting of the story of the South-as-national that had been going on for more than half a century by the time Faulkner, too, turned toward the South as a field for fiction.

(31)

Critics such as Wells have usefully expanded our understanding of the Southern narration of nation by looking at Faulkner as part of a tradition of nation-building, rather than as an author detached from earlier writers. I would argue, however, that the tradition that Faulkner is a part of is one that not only narrates the South-as-nation, but that often also narrates the South-as-Other.

Ultimately, I argue that the contradictions in Faulkner's own public statements and in his fiction mirror contradictions that have been a part of Southern literature since the Civil War. Because of this connection, I intend to use postbellum literary conversations about nation as a lens through which to explore Faulkner's narration of nation. Faulkner, I argue, responds to—uses and revises and re-invents—postbellum literary tropes in order to develop his own narration of nation. In so doing, he not only relates the same torn feelings about the loss of Southern

separateness that postbellum authors express, but he also, over the course of his career, modifies his national narrative, attempting to apply these mixed feelings to new national political situations. This trajectory, I will argue, shows Faulkner working in a dynamic tradition, not merely repeating the contradictory definitions of nation of the late nineteenth century, but reconsidering them and modifying them for the twentieth century.

#### **IV. The Trajectory of Faulkner's Depiction of Nation**

In my first three chapters, I explore Faulkner's anxiety about assimilation in his early career. In Chapter 1, I discuss *Light in August* in terms of nineteenth-century narratives of descent. I argue that Faulkner is highlighting the continued importance of racial descent through his passing character Joe Christmas in order to undercut the national myth of the melting-pot. In Chapters 2 and 3, I continue this discussion by highlighting the anxiety Faulkner shows about national assimilation. Though Faulkner shows in *Light in August* that assimilation remains a national myth, in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* I argue that he is showing anxiety about the idea of assimilation, even if it is not yet a reality. In Chapter 2, I look at Faulkner's anxiety over the assimilation of the racial Other into the national family in *Absalom, Absalom!*. In Chapter 3, I look at his anxiety over assimilation based on masculinity in *Go Down, Moses*. In both cases, Faulkner demonstrates a fear that Southern and individual distinctiveness will be lost in the national aggregate. These three chapters present Faulkner's early career as a site of his narration of nation that resists assimilation and the melting pot as central to American identity.

My last two chapters chart a change in this trajectory. I argue that late in his career Faulkner became more concerned with the need to assimilate in order to resist an external communist threat. While he still shows discomfort at the idea of assimilation, he now portrays it

as a necessity given the greater possible evil represented by communism. In Chapter 4, I argue that in *Intruder in the Dust* Faulkner shifts the primary threat away from the racial Other and onto a lack of assimilation within the community in the face of an external threat. In Chapter 5, I argue that Faulkner is using the Snopes trilogy to specifically identify this external threat as communist. Because of this new threat, Faulkner begins imagining the American nation as an assimilated melting pot. This shift in narration is ultimately incomplete, however. In my conclusion, I look briefly at Faulkner's Nobel acceptance speech, arguing that although Faulkner's emphasis shifts in his later career, he still shows anxiety about assimilation. His later works reveal assimilation as a necessity, not as a preference. Within the trajectory of Faulkner's career, then, anxiety about assimilation is a constant, but Faulkner's later career sees him narrating assimilation as a necessary trait of American nationhood.

**Chapter 1: The Undercutting of Narratives of Descent in Charles Chesnutt's *The House behind the Cedars* and William Faulkner's *Light in August***

Faulkner expressed one reason for his go-slow approach to integration in his 1956 "Letter to a Northern Editor," in which he stated his belief that the Northern national narrative was problematically oversimplified. He writes, "The rest of the United States assumes that this condition in the South is so simple and so uncomplex that it can be changed tomorrow by the simple will of the national majority backed by legal edict" (88). Central to this misunderstanding about the South is a misunderstanding about Southern attitudes toward race. Faulkner continues, "What the [Civil] war should have done, but failed to do, was to prove to the North that the South will go to any length, even that fatal and already doomed one, before it will accept alteration of its racial condition by mere forces of law or economic threat" (89). For Faulkner, the North had established a simplified narrative, casting the Northerner as the national savior. Slavery was a sin perpetrated by the South, and the Northern army was the redeemer which freed the nation from this sin. Faulkner suggests that Southerners were aware of this oversimplification, leading to the tensions in the integration crisis. In his public statements, Faulkner's focus is on the way in which this oversimplified narrative caused the North to react incorrectly to the integration crisis. In his early fiction, Faulkner further punches holes in these narratives. Specifically, I argue that Faulkner employs the popular postbellum trope of racial passing in order to show that the national myth of the "melting-pot" (that is, the myth that people of all descents can consensually partake in the "American dream") is false. Like Chesnutt's Rena Walden in *The House behind the Cedars* (1900), Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932) presents a passing character (Joe Christmas) who is unable to participate in the dominant national



narrative of consensual identity formation because of his unclear descent, thus exposing the power that narratives of descent continue to have despite the dominant national myth.

Critics of postbellum Southern writing have shown that the theme of race during this time period was used as a way to define the American nation in light of its growing imperialistic aims. Werner Sollors explores the ways in which race and ethnicity are used to create national identity. He explains, “I rely on, and develop, a less overtaxed terminology which takes the conflict between contractual and hereditary, self-made and ancestral, definitions of American identity—between *consent* and *descent*—as the central drama in American culture” (*Beyond* 5-6). In this drama, the dominant narrative of America is that it is a nation of consent rather than descent, nationality being determined not through inheritance (as in Europe) but by immigration. The lived experience of many Americans would contradict this narrative, however. Sollors argues:

America is a country which, from the times of Cotton Mather to the present, has placed great emphasis on consent at the expense of descent definitions. The widely shared public bias against hereditary privilege [...] has strongly favored *achieved* rather than *ascribed* identity, and supported “self-determination” and “independence” from ancestral, parental, and external definitions. Yet precisely the same cultural framework had room for, and needed, slavery, even years after most old-world countries had abolished it. And later this supposedly consent-focused culture also *produced*—not inherited—segregation, one of the most sharply formulated systems of descent-based discrimination in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (37)

In light of this contradiction, narratives that emphasize descent in American national identity have the potential to expose the ways in which American consent-based freedom has contradicted the lived experience of many American citizens.

Not surprisingly, race is a common narrative theme in works of postbellum nation building. After all, the Civil War was a literal conflict which brought the tension between narratives of consent and descent to the center of public conversation. David W. Blight argues that narratives of descent become more prevalent in response to this conflict. He draws on Sollors's terms to create three categories for the postbellum narration of nation: the "reconciliationist vision," the "white supremacist vision," and the "emancipationist vision" (2). The reconciliationist vision of the war seeks to reunite the South and North by focusing on the common manhood of the soldiers of both sides, soldiers who operated in a political vacuum. The war is recast as a family feud, brother versus brother. The white supremacist vision also uses the national family as a metaphor, suggesting that the cause of the War (the reason the family was torn apart) was the influence of those outside the family (namely abolitionists and slaves). If the reconciliationist vision focuses on the commonness of the family, the white supremacist vision focuses on the difference of the Other. These first two visions rely on narratives of descent, picturing the South or the entire nation as a family. The emancipationist vision, on the other hand, seeks not to obscure the history of slavery to foment reunion but rather to ensure that the history of slavery is remembered as a means of promoting racial equality in the future. In other words, it seeks to highlight how narratives of descent threaten to outweigh narratives of consent, hoping to eventually destroy narratives of descent by exposing them. Clearly, these three visions were not equally represented during this time period; Blight says, "In the end this is a story of how the forces of reconciliation overwhelmed the emancipationist vision of the national culture,

how the inexorable drive for reunion both used and trumped race” (2). In this definition, we should understand “reunion” to be equivalent to a unified national identity, one which is created by ignoring the reality of the importance of descent in favor of the narrative of the importance of consent.

For Blight, the increase in narratives of nation-building is a response to historical stimuli. The war brought these questions to the forefront, changing the conversation about how America defines itself. Walter Benn Michaels traces the way in which many authors attempted to resolve narratively the contradictions that the War exposed. Michaels argues that in order for family to exist, there must be something that is not-family: “What’s at stake in the desire to keep someone in the family is thus the sense that what is outside the family is also outside the race” (8). In a family that is determined by consent, it would seem that this not-family could become family by consenting (usually expressed through marriage, as opposed to parentage). But if not-family ceases to exist, the family has nothing to define itself against. Therefore, the dominant national narrative concludes that while some people (Western Europeans, for example) can consent to join the family, there must be some people who are so different that they could never consent to do so (African-Americans and Jews, for example). Michaels argues that this narrative problem is negotiated through the term “culture.” The Other is culturally different, the myth goes, so different that they would never wish or choose to consent to join the family. They would be welcomed if they chose to, but they never choose to. Such narratives, then, re-instantiate narratives of consent on top of narratives of descent, focusing on cultural homogeneity as a precursor to consent.

Because of the prevalence of the Civil War in highlighting the conflicting narratives of American nationhood, Southern writers play a unique role in negotiating this contradiction

through narratives. On the one hand, the South becomes the inassimilable national Other that cannot be reunited with the national family. Timothy Parrish explores some Southern writers who have promoted Southern exceptionalism, often by displacing slavery onto something inherited from Europe by the South. Parrish argues that this can be clearly seen in the critical response to Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!*: “Sutpen may be a New World exploiter, but his story resonates for Americans because it excuses Quentin and the Southern nobility from being responsible for the very historical situation from which they profited. Sutpen does not invent the slave caste system; he only copies it” (63). While it is easy to condemn this displacement, Parrish also notes the role that this displacement plays in explaining away the crime of slavery. He argues, “As history, *Absalom* lives even if its principal teller does not, and its greatest accomplishment for Union or Northern readers is to deceive them into believing the fiction that slavery (and its consequences) belong [sic] to the South alone” (77). Southern writing, then, becomes a site for the scapegoating necessary for exonerating the South for its racial crimes.

But Southern writers sometimes also narrate a version of Southern history which leads to an eventual reincorporation into the family. Leigh Anne Duck argues, “the United States was perceived, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as a collection of communities moving at different rates in trajectories characterized by different customs, goals, and belief systems” (5). Important in this understanding is the temporal difference between configurations of nation and region; the “modern national ‘chronotype,’ or collection of temporally coded traits, was positioned against those of regional cultures, which were understood to be shaped by tradition” (5). For Duck, the temporal difference between nation and region had political consequences:

In seeking to institutionalize apartheid, late nineteenth-century white southern elites mobilized a two-pronged temporal strategy, portraying southern African Americans as unprepared for full participation in U.S. political and economic life and also depicting southern society more generally as one shaped by traditional affiliative principles unassimilable to liberal paradigms. (6)

In terms of larger national narratives, slavery can be displaced onto the South, even to the extent of nostalgically celebrating slavery<sup>7</sup> because the South was a society that (while being politically restored to the American nation-state) had yet to evolve—as it surely eventually must—to the level of the nation as a whole. In Duck’s figuration, the nation could explain slavery as the product of a different time, thus making space for the eventual assimilation of a more modern South which has rejected these antiquated values.

Postbellum Southern writers, then, join a complex conversation about nation-building, one which often uses race as narrative currency to explore competing national narratives. On the one hand, the dominant American national narrative has focused on consent-based freedom. On the other hand, the Civil War dramatically highlighted how this narrative was not the lived experience of a great many Americans who were denied rights (and in the case of slavery, liberty altogether) because of their birth. In order to address this contradiction, some made the homogeneity of culture central to narratives of consent, just as others displaced narratives of descent onto a scapegoated South. I will argue that Faulkner and Chesnut contribute to this

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<sup>7</sup> In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym argues that nostalgia is always about returning to a different time rather than a different place. She says: “At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time [...] In a broader sense, nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress” (xv). Boym’s further argues, “While Europeans (with the exception of the British) reported frequent epidemics of nostalgia starting from the seventeenth century, American doctors proudly declared that the young nation remained healthy and didn’t succumb to the nostalgic vice until the American Civil War” (6). This would suggest that the conversation about time and nostalgia, like the conversation about race and nation, is importantly inflected by the Civil War.

conversation by exposing the contradictions in this dominant national narrative. Both Faulkner and Chesnutt show how descent still undergirds the national narrative, despite the dominant national myth, even after the Civil War. Both use passing characters as metaphorical representations of the “melting-pot.” Characters with no visible racial marker should, in a society determined by consent rather than descent, be able to be a part of the national family. Yet both Rena Walden’s and Joe Christmas’s fates remain determined by their racial heritage.

At the end of *The House behind the Cedars*, Rena Walden finds herself cornered on a road between two men who wish to abuse Rena in their own ways: “In one she recognized the eager and excited face of George Tryon, flushed with anticipation of their meeting, and yet grave with uncertainty of his reception. Advancing confidently along the other path she saw the face of Jeff Wain, drawn, as she imagined in her anguish, with evil passions which would stop at nothing” (271). Each man represents a narrative of nation to which Rena is being pressured to align her own identity. George, who has rejected Rena after finding out she is an octoroon, represents a narrative of descent, his concern with her race outweighing his otherwise firm resolve for a consensual marriage. Wain is a much more monstrous iteration of this narrative of descent; not only is his race ever present in limiting his role in society, but he desires to abuse Rena with physical force. Rena ultimately rejects both versions of this narrative, fleeing instead to the swamp, where she catches the sickness that kills her. Even in her flight, then, Rena is unable to escape her descent and consensually participate in the American Dream that her brother wants her to be able to find.

Rena’s relationship with George begins as Rena is attempting to redefine the way the nation shapes her. Her brother John, who has long been passing as a white lawyer, returns home to encourage his sister to return with him and also pass for white. Rena’s decision to pass is cast

in terms of a larger national struggle. John argues that Rena cannot stay in Patesville (where her descent is known), for if she does, her heritage will always control her place in society: he says, “The war has wrought great changes, has put the bottom rail on top, and all that—but it has n’t wiped *that* out. Nothing but death can remove that stain, if it does not follow us even beyond the grave” (26). On the other hand, John sees the possibility of leaving descent behind by moving to a new place, where his ancestry is not known. He considers himself one of the “Men who have elected to govern their lives by principles of abstract right and reason” (28). As a part of this transformation, he even chooses a new name (John Warwick) which signifies his changed identity, an identity of his own choosing. When Rena chooses to join John, she too participates in this consensual identity formation, becoming Rowena Warwick and having the opportunity to form a consensual marriage.

Her fiancée, however, is committed to descent as the determining factor in a partner. His focus on descent is first revealed in the tournament at which the couple first meets. This tournament is designed to replicate chivalric Europe in the South, narratively establishing the South as a feudal aristocracy along the lines of the societies of the novels of Sir Walter Scott. The narrator comments, “The influence of Walter Scott was strong upon the old South. The South before the war was essentially feudal and Scott’s novels of chivalry appealed forcefully to the feudal heart” (45). Not surprisingly, this Southern feudalism was inherently founded on differences in birth: “The best people gradually filled the grand stand, while the poorer white and colored folks found seats outside” (46). George is chief among this feudal company, winning the tournament and the right to declare one lady (he chooses Rena) the Queen of Love and Beauty. His victory is proclaimed by a herald in aristocratic terms: “‘Oyez! Oyez!’ cried the herald; ‘Sir George Tryon, the victor in the tournament, has chosen Miss Rowena Warwick

as the Queen of Love and Beauty, and she will be crowned at the feast to-night and receive the devoirs of all true knights'" (55). At the beginning of their relationship, George and Rowena are united by European forms of aristocracy, which are all predicated on descent.

Importantly, George believes this to be a just game. In his own self-assessment (which will later be exposed as untrue), George claims to believe that descent does not matter. He believes he is a part of a national identity which only values individual choice and worth. When Rena begins to worry that George will find out the secret of her racial heritage, she has John bring up the subject of ancestry to George to sound his opinions. John warns George "that she can bring you nothing but herself; that we have no connections of which you could boast, and no relatives to whom we should be glad to introduce you. You must take us for ourselves alone—we are new people" (83). George responds very amiably: "My dear John [...] there is a great deal of nonsense about families. If a man is noble and brave and strong, if a woman is beautiful and good and true, what matters it about his or her ancestry?" (83). Seemingly, while George participates in the game of European descent, he sees himself as not being concerned with ancestry and being far more concerned about individual choices.

He goes on, however, to belie these good intentions. He says, "All I care to know of Rowena's family is that she is your sister; and you'll pardon me, old fellow, if I add that she hardly needs even you, —she carries the stamp of her descent upon her face and in her heart" (84). What he seems to see on her face is a lack of visible signs of racial difference: "There was no mark upon her brow to brand her as less pure, less innocent, less desirable, less worthy to be loved, than these proud women of the past who had admired themselves in this old mirror" (76).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> John Sheehy interestingly explores scenes in which passing characters look in a mirror. He argues, "In order to understand fully the implications of 'passing' for identity formation, it may be useful to examine the passing figure's confrontation with the mirror from two similar, yet distinct, theoretical vantage points: first from the point of view



Tryon does prefer certain individual choices (what he would call acting nobly) over the prestige of family. On the other hand, he also cannot conceive of these noble actions being performed by someone outside of his own race. As mentioned above, Michaels argues that this association with race and culture is one way that narratives attempt to resolve the contradiction between consent and descent. He argues, “there must be some special relation between race and culture such that racial identity counts as importantly determining cultural identity, that is, as determining the cultural practices that you have a right to if not necessarily the cultural practices you in fact engage in” (129). For George, this is exactly the case. He sees race as determining cultural decisions, such that the noble actions taken, though seemingly choices, are not matters of consent but really matters of descent. Lest there be any doubt of George’s ultimate commitment to an identity based on descent, he pointedly rejects Rowena when he finds out her true racial heritage. In fact, he reacts to her in disgust: “When Rena’s eyes fell upon the young man in the buggy, she saw a face as pale as death, with starting eyes, in which love, which once had reigned there, had now given place to astonishment and horror” (140).<sup>9</sup> Rena’s reluctance to embrace George on the road, then, should come as no surprise, since it is also her reluctance to embrace a version of her identity in which her descent predetermines that she is monstrous.

After Rena and George’s relationship ends, Rena sets out to consensually remake herself again, this time within the terms of what a racist society will allow. Specifically, she wants to become a schoolteacher, and Wain presents her with an opportunity to take over a school. Rena

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of Lacan’s identity theory, and then from the more racially aware perspective of Henry Louis Gate’s theory of “Signification” (402). For Sheehy, not only do passing characters begin to form a distinct individual identity by looking in the mirror, but that identity also provides the opportunity for the passing character to “refigure—to Signify on—the white ‘ownership’ of meaning” (405).

<sup>9</sup> Sally Ann H. Ferguson further argues that were Rena to choose to return to George their relationship would recapitulate the relationship of Rena’s parents: “In her flight, she probably escapes both her own smoldering passion and a concubinage with George similar to one her mother Molly shared with Rena’s nameless white father (“Fowler” 50). Importantly, this relationship is like that between a master and slave.

sees this as an opportunity to choose a new path for herself. She is so focused, in fact, on her seeming free will in the matter that she fails to see the narrative of descent coloring this interaction as well; she fails to see that everyone else involved in the situation is concerned about a marriage based on bloodline rather than on a new career path. For example, “Rena’s interest in the prospect of employment at her chosen work was so great that she paid little attention to Wain’s compliments” (200). Importantly, Wain’s compliments are more than just innocent flirting, but are (as we will later learn) portents of his intention to force Rena into a relationship with him.

Descent is just as important to Rena’s mother Molly as to George, Molly wishing that Rena conform only to a relationship with someone who is by descent her equal. The narrator describes:

Mis’ Molly’s impression of Wain was favorable. His complexion was of a light brown—not quite so fair as Mis’ Molly would have preferred, but any deficiency in this regard, or in the matter of the stranger’s features, which, while not unpleasing, leaned toward the broad mulatto type, was more than compensated in her eyes by very straight black hair, and, as soon appeared, a great facility of complimentary speech. (198)

For Molly, Wain’s “white” features, especially his straight hair, were prerequisites for the match with Rena. Molly is not alone in this estimation: “In Mis’ Molly’s small circle, straight hair was the only palliative of a dark complexion” (209). Since Rena bears no visible markers of racial difference, it is important to both her mother and her mother’s friends that she find someone of similar birth.

But Wain is shown to be just as distasteful as George. The narrative questions whether he is in fact Rena's equal, a question raised primarily by his language. Though he flatters, his speech is always given in dialect, an outward marker of his difference from Rena. The narrator remarks, "It was much as though one, having acquired the vernacular of his native country, had lived in a foreign land long enough to lose the language of his childhood without acquiring fully that of his adopted country" (213). Both his appearance and the appearance of his plantation seem to also suggest that he is out of place, both being run down shadows of former glory. Most importantly, Wain's actions contradict the noble actions which Rena (along with George) associates with Southern aristocrats. Specifically, Wain tries to force himself on Rena, and when she sees him on the road she imagines his face "drawn [...] with evil passions which would stop at nothing" (271). Clearly, what is most revolting to Rena is the thought that she will be forced into a relationship, and when she meets George and Wain it is the lack of consent (forced out of a relationship in the former case and into one in the latter case) that causes her to flee.

But herein also lies one of the central tensions of the text. While Rena is concerned about the use of force, the text also seems to be accepting an understanding of race and culture as inherently linked. In other words, the text seems to be presenting descent as a determining factor for fate, despite national narratives that would say otherwise. Just as George assumes that Rena is white because only a white person could act as nobly as she does, the text seems to assume that Wain acts as he does as a matter of low-breeding. What is false is not, perhaps, the idea of descent but the failure to find an adequate match within a system of descent. Furthermore, though readers can condemn George for letting descent destroy an otherwise perfect relationship, this perfect relationship can only exist because of Rena's lack of visible racial markers. Even allowing Rena's seeming whiteness, by having George find out about Rena's past through a

series of improbable events, the text also seems to suggest that the (racial) truth will out. Thus, while Rena turns and flees in fear of two identities which both will constrain her to narratives of descent, the text seems to have trouble seeing a way to escape these narratives.

Frank Fowler presents himself as a possible alternative to George and Wain, though the text ultimately dismisses this possibility. When Rena flees from the confrontation on the road, it is Frank who finds her and rescues her. Further, Rena's dying words are "Frank [...] my good friend—my best friend—you loved me best of them all" (293). By comparing Frank with Rena's other suitors, Chesnutt seems to suggest he could have been a more appealing alternative. Frank is protective of Rena. As Rena rides away with Wain, Frank follows for a distance in order to guarantee her safety. The narrator presents Frank's protectiveness as an alternative to Wain, saying, "Look back, dear child, towards your home and those who love you! For who knows more than this faithful worshiper what threads of the past Fate is weaving into your future, or whether happiness or misery lies before you?" (227). This question is clearly ironic. Misery lies before her, suggesting that happiness (and Frank) lie behind her. Further, Frank repeatedly sacrifices of himself to help Rena and her family, frequently offering to help her family for free and finally even taking his mule to rescue Rena from Wain and George. His selfless love for Rena is expressed by the narrator's claim that "He would have given his life for Rena. A kind word was doubly sweet from her lips; no service would be too great to pay for her friendship" (186). Clearly, such an expression of love stands in stark contrast to the selfishness of both Wain and George.

Ultimately, however, Frank proves to be just another example (even if a less morally vicious one) of a narrative of descent. Frank is intricately tied to Rena's family history. He has lived across the street from Rena and is intimately familiar with her family; her racial history is

no secret to him. Further, it is Frank who plays the role of dutiful child to Molly in the absence of Rena and John, prompting John's buying a new mule for Frank. Frank does not help Molly out of desire for this gift, though, but out of a near-familial obligation. He says, "It'd be robbin' you ter take pay fer a little thing lack" the chores he's been doing. Finally, as Rena is leaving with Wain, Frank is equated with "home and those who love" Rena (227). Frank, then, is the relationship which for Rena most represents a relationship based on descent. He is the one most completely and most unambiguously connected to her family background. A union between Frank and Rena would be the union of two neighboring houses, even if the houses were less prestigious than the houses of Tryon and Warwick. In this case, however, the descent is not a secret, but is accepted as a given by all involved.

Introducing Frank as a third term in the road scene (as the place to which Rena runs when she is caught between the two extremes), seems to suggest that Chesnutt is not critiquing narratives of descent at all, but merely is trying to replace certain versions of descent with others. The alternative Rena seems to be given is not to reject descent (for descent is a given and follows her no matter what choices she makes) but to choose from within her given options the relationship that is least objectionable. In other words, Rena should learn to be happy with her predetermined lot. In this reading, Rena's unhappiness stems from John's offer to remove her to a new society. After all, he argues, "happiness is a relative term, and depends, I imagine, upon how nearly we think we get what we want" (23). Rena never seems to imagine that she could want anyone like Wain or George before John introduces her to society outside of Patesville. After he has done this, he concludes, "Her childish happiness had been that of ignorance; she could never be happy there again" (180). What seems to be preventing Rena's happiness is not Wain or Tryon at all, but the introduction of knowledge which causes her to aspire to something

other than the simple, selfless love offered by someone like Frank. If she had only accepted racial binaries rather than questioning them, she might have been happy.

None of Rena's matches, including Frank, seem to be possibilities that will ultimately make her happy, however. Sally Ann H. Ferguson argues:

Chesnutt's plot structure indicates that he indeed wants Rena at a sexual distance from Frank Fowler. In two parallel scenes involving handkerchiefs and lances at the annual tournament of the Clarence Social Club, Chesnutt contrasts Frank and George in order to portray the white man as Rena's dashing knight-in-shining armor and the black as a self-effacing, long suffering wimp no intelligent woman could want. ("Fowler" 49)

Furthermore, Frank's dialogue is always given in dialect, making him less appealing than mixed-race characters.<sup>10</sup> Frank's backwardness seems to parallel that of Patesville. John notes the unchanging decay of the town's square: "Warwick was unable to perceive much change in the market-house. Perhaps the surface of the red brick, long unpainted, had scaled off a little more here and there. There might have been a slight accretion of the moss and lichen on the shingled roof" (3). Other than decaying slightly more, the town still seems to be stuck in the Civil War. Patesville is a place where "Time seems to linger lovingly long" (1). Further, the narrator notes that "no one ever hurried in Patesville" (105). The association of Patesville with a different temporal period than the rest of the world is extended to Frank through a description of the mules in the town, mules being the animal with which Frank is constantly associated. The narrator describes "superannuated army mules," some branded with "C.S.A." and others with "U.S.A.,"

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<sup>10</sup> Ferguson notes that even Molly, who has no formal education, is not made to speak in dialect. This suggests to Ferguson that Frank is representative of "intellectual stagnation" ("Fowler" 49).

still literally bearing the marks of the Civil War. Thus, both Patesville and Frank exist in a different temporal sphere, one strongly associated with region.

As noted above, Duck argues that regions exist in different “chronotypes,” allowing national narrative to displace traits they wish to deny on a region, which represents the nation in an earlier stage of development. Here, Frank seems to represent this earlier time, and its backward and uneducated (albeit loyal) ways. On the one hand, the failure of narratives of consent in Rena’s relationship with George and Wain exposes the strong, contradictory hold that narratives of descent (in this case racism) hold over national narratives. On the other hand, the relationship between Rena and Frank exposes the inadequacy of regional nostalgia as an alternative to these narratives (and an acceptance of racial binaries). More than just exposing these narratives, however, Chesnutt also presents a character who seemingly embraces the national narrative of consent, becoming fully a self-made man as promised by the American Dream. Through the character of John Warwick, Chesnutt shows the difficulty and cost of a narrative of consent fully realized, suggesting that narratives of descent will ultimately catch up even with those who have been successfully passing for some time.

John is portrayed as an immigrant trying to realize the American Dream and thus as a prototype of the narrative of consent. He considers himself a “naturalized foreigner in the world of wide opportunity” who had been welcomed “into the populous loneliness of his adopted country” (66). Furthermore, this new country of which he has become a citizen is focused, not on descent (who one has been in the past), but on consent (what one will do in the future). Marriage, he says, “is a matter of the future, not of the past” (79). He considers himself and Rena to be “new people” (83). He becomes a part of this future by engaging in acts that are acceptable in this new nation. He speaks in a language of this new land (213) and also is able to

prosper economically within it, an important point given the American focus on economic prosperity as a byproduct of consensual democracy. His white father leaves John an inheritance (and John builds on this inheritance through a successful legal practice) based on the premise that “money will make [him] free of the world” (107). John understands himself to be an immigrant in a strange country, a country which will allow him to consensually re-create himself as a partaker in the American Dream.

John’s self-identification is specifically linked to his understanding of law, emphasizing how racism in the law is acting not in a vacuum, but as a tool of American nation-building. As a part of his law studies, John realizes that the law in the state of South Carolina is on his side, recognizing as white those who appear to be white and are known to others as such. The judge tells John, “As you have all the features of a white man, you would, at least in South Carolina, have simply to assume the place and exercise the privileges of a white man” (172). John takes the judge’s advice, laying no blame of racism on the law of the nation. He argues, “The law [...] made us white; but not the law, nor even love, can conquer prejudice” (178-9). While the law is on his side, he attributes racism to the backwardness of the region. The narrator claims, “Men who have elected to govern their lives by principles of abstract right and reason, which happen, perhaps, to be at variance with what society considers equally right and reasonable, should, for fear of complications, be careful about descending from the lofty heights of logic to the common level of impulse and affection” (28-9). John, like the nation as a whole, embraces a narrative of reason and justice. It is only the prejudice of his backwards region that threatens to expose this narrative.

John’s nation-making ultimately fails because descent continues to be the determining factor. John does not leave for a new country to start his new life. Instead, he just crosses the



state line to South Carolina. Of John's decision to stay in the South, the judge remarks, "It was too near home, even though the laws were with him" (35). The judge further cautions against John staying too long during his return to Patesville: "It's well enough. I would n't stay too long. The people of a small town are inquisitive about strangers, and some of them have long memories. I remember we went over the law, which was in your favor; but custom is stronger than law—in these matters custom *is* law" (34). Even with John's closeness to home, it is possible that his self re-creation may have succeeded if he had not renewed contact with his family. As John sails down the river with Rena, the judge comments, "My young friend John has builded, whether wisely or not, very well; but he has come back into the old life and carried away a part of it, and I fear that this addition will weaken the structure" (44). The success of John's reinvention lies in a complete severance from the past, a severance which he ultimately finds impossible. In both Rena and John, then, Chesnutt shows that narratives of descent still undercut the national "melting-pot" narrative. John cannot be an immigrant free to assimilate into the American nation. He and Rena are not "new people," because their racial identity will always catch up with them.

*Light in August* similarly uses a passing character to expose the narratives of descent that undercut the national narrative of consent. In this case, the subjectivity of racial identities is especially emphasized. Joe Christmas does not know his racial heritage. Joe is an orphan who must learn his identity from those around him.<sup>11</sup> When he first arrives in Jefferson, the people notice no particular outward signs of racial difference. The narrator says, "His face was gaunt,

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<sup>11</sup> In *Faulkner: The Return of the Repressed*, Doreen Fowler argues: "Joe is a man in the middle, caught between Law and Desire, between the symbolic and imaginary registers of being. He desires ego-identity; that is, he desires to be an I separate from an other [...] As a result, he is a subject adrift, and the outward sign of his psychic ambivalence is his racial indeterminacy" (74). Joe's parchment-colored skin is one of the clearest outward signs of this racial indeterminacy.

the flesh a level dead parchment color” (34). It does not occur to the town that Joe might be of mixed race until Joe himself introduces the idea to Brown. Then, once the idea is introduced, the town immediately takes hold of it, making Joe into a scapegoat. Joe is literally a *tabula rasa*. He is John Warwick, but with no dark secret able to tumble his house of cards. Under Chesnutt’s model, Joe Christmas would be the ideal character to consensually re-create himself. Ultimately, Joe fails to do so, raising questions about the validity of a national identity based on narrative of consent even in the absence of outward markers of descent.

Like Rena, Joe literally finds himself stuck between two narratives, between the racism of the town and the racial Other he fears he may be. Just before Joe kills Joanna Burden, he wanders around the area surrounding Jefferson, knowing that he will have to return to the house and do something. In the middle of his wandering, he finds himself on the road between the Jefferson square (the predominantly white part of town) and Freedman Town (the poorer African American part of town). As he wanders between these two neighborhoods, the text emphasizes that he also wanders between two ways of identifying himself: “He went on, not fast, away from the square. The street, a quiet one at all times, was deserted at this hour. It led down through the negro section, Freedman Town, to the station [...] He went on, passing still between the homes of white people, from street lamp to street lamp, the heavy shadow of oak and maple leaves sliding like scraps of black velvet across his white shirt” (114). Joe’s split identity is seen in this description; he’s neither black nor white, but both and neither. Ultimately, Joe feels at home in neither world, which is to say that Joe cannot consign himself to either narrative of identity (either as racist or as racial other) that each world offers. Neither world can offer Joe the narrative of consent that will allow him to re-create himself in the mold of John Warwick.

Not surprisingly, the ironically named Freedman Town represents for Joe the constraint of identity formed by descent. Inherent in the name of this neighborhood is the residents' descent from freed slaves. For Joe, the neighborhood is constrictive: "As from the bottom of a thick black pit he saw himself enclosed by cabinshapes, vague, kerosenelit" (114). This pit has hellish overtones; it "might have been the original quarry, abyss itself" (116). Joe imagines himself within this pit. It is not only the physical surroundings that suffocate Joe, but also the foreignness of the people who surround him: "They seemed to enclose him like bodiless voices murmuring talking laughing in a language not his" (114). At the heart of Joe's negative physical reaction to this place is his racism, which causes him to run back toward the white part of town: He began to run, glaring, his teeth glaring, his inbreath cold on his dry teeth and lips [...] Then he became cool. The negro smell, the negro voices, were behind and below him now" (115). For Joe, Freedman Town is a tomb (or a womb) from which he must escape, and the square represents that escape. It is clean, cool, and light, not "primogenitive," primordial, and hellish (115).

Joe's racism is not only seen in his negative reaction to Freedman Town, but also through his relationship with women. Joe is initiated into sexuality when he and three friends take a young African American girl into a barn to take turns having sex with her. When Joe's turn comes, he replaces sex with violence, violently lashing out at the girl: "He was moving, because his foot touched her. Then it touched her again because he kicked her. He kicked her hard, kicking into and through a choked wail of surprise and fear. She began to scream, he jerking her up [...] enclosed by the womanshenegro and the haste" (157). Joe is unable to see her as a viable sexual partner, but instead can only see her as a racial reduction. Joe's racism extends to his own perception; he hates the fact that his own racial identity is unknown. Later in his life, he

regularly hires prostitutes and uses his race as an excuse not to pay them. Once, though, he meets a woman who does not care that he might not be white, and Joe reacts violently: “He was sick after that. He did not know until then that there were white women who would take a man with a black skin. He stayed sick for two years” (225). Just as Joe reacts violently towards the young girl in the barn, he reacts violently to a woman who would willingly sleep with him, even knowing he may not be white. Joe is racist and hates himself because of his own racial ambiguity.

While Joe at times embraces a narrative of descent, in which his supposed African American heritage determines his later violence, he also can never fully embrace (and indeed reacts violently against) this narrative. After all, he cannot say with certainty (and given evidence seems to contradict) that his biological descent is causing him to do the things which he does. While Joe is on the run from the law late in the novel, he even enters the pulpit to declare his racial hatred. He interrupts a revival meeting in an African American church, and begins “to curse, hollering it out, at the folks, and he cursed God louder than the women screaming” (323). On the one hand, in cursing God, Joe performs the role projected upon him, becoming the ultimate “shadow” figure for the congregation, whose members begin to project their racial hatreds or fears onto Joe, calling him “the devil” and “Satan himself” (322). He embodies the racial hatred of the community, which sees the slightest drop of black blood as a corrupting influence. Yet Joe’s performance remains incomplete, for his race remains ambiguous: the African American congregants see him as “not black” (322), thus white, while his white face nevertheless appears “black with whiskers” (323). Thus Joe cannot fully become the embodiment of the racialized “shadow.”

But Joe assumes that his descent does matter largely because he is taught that it does by society around him. He learns his racism from an early age, when Doc Hines (Joe's grandfather who serves as the janitor at Joe's orphanage) singles Joe out. First, Hines kills both of Joe's parents, denying Joe the normal models for developing identity and replacing them with himself as the primary parental figure. Then, he repeats the crime, as Laura Doyle rightly argues, symbolically "kill[ing] Joe's parents [again] by marrying his identity" (341). Finally, Hines completes the task by projecting a new racialized identity onto Joe. Hines is the one who says "That that child, that Christmas boy, is a nigger" (132), and Hines is responsible for Joe's being called a "nigger" by the other children. After Hines gives Joe this label, it sticks. For Hines, of course, the label is intricately tied to a hatred of African Americans, and Hines intends for this hatred to also be imprinted on Joe. Hines says, "I have put the mark on him and now I am going to put the knowledge" (371). Hines, then, teaches Joe to care about race and to self-identify as an Other to be hated.

Joe's casting of his own identity in the light of racial descent is mirrored by the behavior of the community that is ready to quickly incorporate the uncertainty surrounding Joe into a larger racialized narrative, Joe ultimately becoming the protagonist in a Southern account of a lynching. After Joe escapes from the sheriff, a posse under Percy Grimm forms to capture him. Ultimately, Grimm kills and castrates Joe. Faulkner describes Joe's death: "Then Grimm too sprang back, flinging behind him the bloody butcher knife. 'Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell,' he said. But the man on the floor had not moved. He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth" (464). While Grimm's actions may have been isolated rather than a result of a mob, they equally clearly bear the traits of Southern racial lynching. Grimm is not trying to bring a felon to

justice, but to kill a perceived racial threat in a way that makes a public lesson. He is concerned not with Joe's crime, but with the "shadow" that covers him.

Joe is intricately tied to a narrative of descent, which is the dominant narrative of Southern racism. He learns to participate in this narrative, even to the point of hating himself, becoming ultimately both racist and racialized scapegoat. Thus, it is no surprise when Joe recoils from Freedman Town and the square; they remind him of both what he hates and what he might be. The alternative to this would seem to be a narrative free of descent, a possibility to which he flees, leaving the road and returning to Joanna. Outwardly, Joanna and Joe have formed a consensual relationship,<sup>12</sup> one which allows Joe the possibility to remake himself in Memphis. But he recoils from this option as well, a reaction which Faulkner explains by highlighting the narratives of descent that undercut that ability to consent. Specifically, Faulkner ties this critique of this narrative to a very specific vision of American national identity.

The racism of a small Southern town which creates Joe and in which he participates is compared to the racism of a particular larger national narrative, one which is rooted in the New England Puritanism of the Burdens and is connected to anti-slavery struggles and westward expansion. This Northern, Puritan racism is revealed in sermons of McEachern and the Burdens, sermons which parallel the sermons of Joe and Hines. Thus, these two versions of racism are linked through parallel scenes of characters entering a pulpit. When Joe preaches racial hatred from the pulpit, he is recapitulating the sermons of his grandfather. Hines interrupts services in country churches with African American congregations and enters "the pulpit and in his harsh, dead voice and at times with violent obscenity, preach[es] to them humility before all skins

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<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that Joe and Joanna's relationship is not fueled by violence and power dynamics. They frequently act out the violence and hatred they see around them. For instance, Joanna enlists Joe to act out what seem to be rape fantasies. Nevertheless, Joe does not rape her. Instead, she remains in power, determining the time and place for these encounters.

lighter than theirs” (343). Embedded in Hines’s sermons is a violent response to racial difference. He is “one quarter violent conviction and three quarters physical hardihood” (343), and the town is unsurprised that he is “preaching in negro churches; not even when a year later they learned what his subject [white supremacy] was” (343). Though Hines’s sermons parallel what Joe has learned about race, they are not tied to a specific religious narrative. Hines is not a pastor nor affiliated with any church, instead violently forcing his way into whatever church might be handy.

These sermons parallel with other, more specifically defined, religious beliefs throughout the novel, allowing us to understand this religious identity as a major shaping influence in Joe’s life. Like Hines, McEachern uses religious forums to convey racism and violence. Edwin Yoder rightly calls McEachern “a ranting fundamentalist preacher, who treats [Joe] as an Ishmael, an outcast” (572). Though McEachern does not literally enter the pulpits of churches like Hines, he shares Hines’ twisted, self-righteous religiosity, revealing it most dramatically in the stable scene. When Joe resists McEachern’s demand that he learn his catechism, McEachern beats him and says, “You would believe that a stable floor, the stamping place of beasts, is the proper place for the word of God” (149). In this comment, Faulkner exposes the misunderstanding at the heart of McEachern’s interpretation of religion. The fact that the scene takes place in a stable recalls the nativity, in which “the stamping place for beasts” became the proper place for the Christ child. McEachern conveys this misunderstanding to Joe in a scene of sexualized violence: the boy stood, his trousers collapsed about his feet, his legs revealed beneath his brief shirt. He stood, slight and erect. When the strap fell he did not flinch, no quiver passed over his face” (149). Through this interchange, McEachern represents a certain type of religiosity, one supported by violence and associated particularly with New England Calvinism.

The Burden family represents a form of extreme Calvinism similar to McEachern and Hines, and their family history ties this extreme Calvinism to the dominant myths of American expansionism. André Bleikasten says, “Joanna’s father and grandfather represent a religion as extreme as Hines’” (85). Joanna is from a strong Calvinist background; Joanna’s extreme religion has a distinct racist twist. Her father told her, “You must struggle, rise. But in order to rise, you must raise the shadow with you. But you can never lift it to your level [...] The curse of the black race is God’s curse” (253). Though she works to improve the lives of African Americans, Joanna clearly believes them eternally doomed to inferiority to whites. When Joanna tries to “raise” Joe by sending him study law in an African-American lawyer’s practice and thus encouraging him to live as an African American, she is at the same time projecting an eternal inferiority onto him. She says, “Then you can go to Memphis. You can read law in Peebles’ office. He will teach you law. Then you can take charge of all the legal business” (276). Though Joe rejects her offer out of hand, he finds it much more difficult to reject her projection. Ultimately, it is this iteration of the religious hatred which Joe outwardly responds to, repeating over and over that “She ought not to started praying over me” (112).

Importantly, Joanna’s religion is tied to a larger national narrative of self-identity. In fact, for her the South is “foreign land” to her people (240). Her family are New England Puritans and pioneers: “Calvin Burden was the son of a minister named Nathaniel Burrington,” who had, in his younger years, lived the stereotypical life of the isolated American frontiersman, exploring the West for ten years before he decides to settle down (241). Upon marrying and having children, Calvin “set about to imbue the child with the religion of his New England



forbears” (242).<sup>13</sup> The son, named after his grandfather, repeats his father’s frontier story, spending his youth in “Old Mexico,” but ultimately returning to Missouri to participate on the abolitionist side in the “Kansas fighting” (243, 244). The younger Nathaniel is later killed in Jefferson by Colonel Sartoris over a dispute about black voting rights, and his daughter Joanna is left as an outsider in the community. This history creates a picture of the Burdens as American pioneers not only refusing to participate in the racism of the South (at this point still formalized in the institution of slavery) but being separate from the South entirely.

Rather than present Joe with a way to escape the racialized narratives of descent, however, this Calvinist narrative merely reinscribes a version of descent of its own. Joanna is of similar racial heritage as Joe. Her father marries a Mexican woman,<sup>14</sup> and her grandfather reacts negatively to the threat of racial impurity: “‘Another damn black Burden,’ he said. ‘Folks will think I bred to a damn slaver’” (247). Joanna is presumably named after this woman, Juana. For Burden, the threat of racial impurity comes from the encounter with the frontier, and is still present in the person of Joanna. When Joanna responds with racial hatred towards Joe, her hatred is reflected back on herself in a reiteration of Joe’s self-hate. This can be seen in the way that she accepts the family’s blame for her father’s murder, attributing it to “his French blood” (254). She accepts the narrative wherein her father was a foreign invader worthy of death and in doing so accepts a narrative which allows for her own racial self-hatred.

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<sup>13</sup> The names are no doubt significant. “Calvin” alludes (not subtly) to the religious views held by the family, views tied in the text specifically to American expansionism. Similarly, “Nathaniel Burrington” is an almost comically overblown stereotype of a New England name.

<sup>14</sup> Joe’s father is initially also identified as Mexican, though this might be as much a racial slur as a statement of probably heritage. Given Faulkner’s parallels between the racism inherent in American expansionism and the racism of the American South, it is not surprising that racial identities other than African American come to represent “blackness” to the characters of the novel.

The Burdens, then, are not able to reshape themselves on the American frontier. Two generations try, and two generations return to narratives of descent. The frontier, for the Burdens, becomes a place of racial mixing and changing traditions, and each Burden ultimately rejects it and returns east, returning to a racism that is specifically juxtaposed against the racism of the town of Jefferson. When Joe stands on the road between two seeming choices, he really stands like Rena between two iterations of the same idea. Joe must either conform to the racism represented by the segregated town or be the racial other, the only two options in a segregated South. Even to flee this binary to return to Joanna's patronizing racism is to lack the ability to consent. Thus Faulkner, like Chesnut, uses narratives of passing to expose the narratives of descent that undergird the dominant American identity formed on consent.

Joe Christmas's story is bookended by Lena Grove, an unwed mother travelling with the purported reason of finding the father of her child. This child at first seems to be an alternative to Joe. Unlike Joe, it seems as though he might be able to escape descent. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Lena is well aware that she will not find the father, but is really using this excuse to create a new identity for herself. In both the beginning and ending chapter, we see Lena through the eyes of the men who give her a ride while she is hitchhiking. The second of these concludes, "I think she was just travelling. I dont think she had any idea of finding whoever it was she was following. I dont think she had ever aimed to" (506). As a part of her re-creation, she is travelling with Byron Bunch, a man completely committed to her having volition in the relationship. His commitment is so exaggerated that it surprises the driver. After he has proposed to Lena and been refused, the driver cannot believe that he decides to stick with her, hoping that she will change her mind in the future. She seems to be relishing her ability to be asked to join a relationship, encouraging Byron to continue pursuing her. She says,

“Aint nobody never said for you to quit” (506). Further, Lena is travelling with her baby, who has earlier been confused by Mrs. Hines with Joe and now takes the narrative place of Joe reborn. This child, though, is happy and seems to have the committed mother and soon-to-be father that can provide him with a stable identity.

But it is this fact which is the most troubling. If Lena’s child is supposed to represent a version of Joe with hope, his hope seems to be based on the presence of Lena and Byron. On the one hand, this is promising, as Lena and Byron seem to form the only consensual relationship in the entire novel. Perhaps, the fact that the child is born to a family of consent creates an imaginative alternative to the false options Joe experienced. On the other hand, the transmission of this happiness to the child would seemingly be predicated on his knowing his mother. So, if the reborn Joe is more successful, it is because he is more in touch with parentage. Finally, any sort of consensual relationship seems to presuppose no visible signs of racial difference. So, though it is easy to imagine Lena’s child’s life not being filled with violence like Joe’s, this is only because he has the caring parents that Joe was denied. Thus, descent and parentage remain the determining example.

In these two examples, we see Southern writers using passing characters to expose the contradictory nature of the dominant national narrative. These characters become metaphors for the national Other, the citizens within America whose descent would make it impossible for them to assimilate. If America promises freedom regardless of birthright to all of those who will consent to re-create themselves in accordance with America’s ideals, these novels show the inability of characters (even those lacking visible signs of racial difference) to participate in consent because of the power of the narratives of descent that undergird and undercut these

national narratives. Such skepticism of dominant national narratives dominates Faulkner's early career, just as it dominates his stance on integration.

## Chapter 2: Miscegenation and Regional Assimilation in *Absalom, Absalom!* and George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes*

In addition to undercutting national narratives of consent, Faulkner's public statements show anxiety about the possibility of assimilation. On the one hand, he exposes the narratives of descent that undercut the national myths of assimilation. On the other hand, he nevertheless shows anxiety about the possibility of assimilation. In his 1955 article in *Harper's*, he expressed his concern that American assimilation will result in the loss of distinctiveness of the individual: "Then privacy will indeed be gone; he who is individual enough to want it [...] will be cursed by one universal American voice as subversive to the American way of life and the American flag" (*Essays* 73). His fiction mirrors this anxiety that individual (and regional) distinctiveness might be lost in the act of assimilation. This fear is manifested most often in his text in the microcosm of the family. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner repeats and revises a postbellum conversation about the national family. In George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes* (1880), cultural difference with the nation is represented as racial difference within a single family. For Cable, the assimilation of difference is possible by accepting the mixed-race members within the family. In *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), the family is similarly threatened by difference. For Faulkner, however, assimilation remains untenable, remains a terribly frightening alternative that leaves his characters paralyzed in fear.

Amy Kaplan has convincingly argued that home and family is used in postbellum literature as a metaphorical representation of the nation. She says, "The idea of nation as home, I argue, is inextricable from the political, economic, and cultural movements of empire, movements that both erect and unsettle the ever-shifting boundaries between the domestic and the foreign, between 'at home' and 'abroad'" (1). For Kaplan, the domestic sphere becomes the

place where the frontier is civilized, where the cultural work of consent is completed. Settling the frontier is plagued by anxiety about the presence of the Other. Kaplan explains, “American exceptionalism is in part an argument for boundless expansion, where national particularism and international universalism converge” (16). For Kaplan, this convergence is most clearly revealed in the debate about the annexation of Puerto Rico following the Spanish-American War, a debate couched in the terms of whether Puerto Rico should be considered foreign or domestic, a part of the family or outside the family. While the Spanish-American War remains an important flashpoint in the creation of American national identity, the domestic metaphor which Kaplan describes can also be usefully employed in exploring other encounters with the Other as America expanded.

In Southern literature, miscegenation (and the threat that miscegenation possibly represents to the family) is at the heart of this domestic metaphor. On the one hand, the mixed-race character represents the encounter with a racial Other, and thus is frequently a dramatization of the encounter between ex-slaveholders and ex-slaves. In white versions of this configuration, the mixed-race character frequently becomes a sexual threat to the family, often raping innocent white women. In Thomas Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots*, one of the major conflicts is the raping of a white woman by an ex-slave. Though this ex-slave does not appear to be literally a mulatto<sup>15</sup>, the community reacts to him as such. The racial conflict in the novel is described not as black versus white, but as “a conflict of races that would determine whether this Republic would be Mulatto or Anglo-Saxon” (48). The conflict is between homogeneity and

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<sup>15</sup>Dixon seems to be describing a character associated with the Caribbean Rim rather than a child of a slaveholder and slave. The carpetbaggers in Dixon’s novel claim that they “will drive the white man out of this country [...] In San Domingo no white man is allowed to vote, hold office or hold a foot of land. We will make this mighty South a more glorious San Domingo” (45). As will be seen later in this section, the Caribbean Rim (particularly after the Haitian Revolution) frequently serves as the background for the fear of miscegenation.

heterogeneity, a fact acknowledged in the response to the rape: “In a moment, the white race had fused into a homogeneous mass of love, sympathy, hate and revenge. The rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the banker and the blacksmith, the great and the small, they were all one now” (182).

Not only does Dixon see miscegenation as a threat to homogeneity, he sees it as a direct threat to American nation-building in light of the Civil War. For the characters, the fear of difference is inherently connected to nation-building; the preacher asks, “Can you build, in a Democracy, a nation inside a nation of two hostile races? We must do this or become mulatto, and that is death.” (119). Furthermore, the characters see the Southern loss in the Civil War not just as possibly causing racial mixing due to the loss of strict plantation hierarchies, but also allowing radical elements in the North to mandate this mixing. The character Tim Shelby says, “He [the commanding general] told me then he was going to set aside that decision of the Supreme Court in a ringing order permitting the marriage of Negroes to white women, and commanding its enforcement on every military post” (73). The narrator emphasizes the obligatory nature of the decision: “It apparently commanded intermarriage, and ordered the military to enforce the command at the point of the bayonet” (73). Despite this portrayal of Union occupation, Dixon does not associate the union army with the nation, instead defining nation in racial terms. For him, the true America is not the United States that won the Civil War, but the United States that won the Spanish-American War. In the latter, he suggests, the nation finally realizes its racial superiority: “America, united at last and invincible, waked to the consciousness of her resistless power. And, most marvelous of all, this hundred days of war had reunited the Anglo-Saxon race. This sudden union of the English-speaking people in friendly alliance disturbed the equilibrium of the world, and confirmed the Anglo-Saxon in his title to the

primacy of racial sway” (202).<sup>16</sup> For Dixon, the nation is a racial family, and miscegenation is a threat to its continuance.

In both Faulkner and Chesnutt, the threat of miscegenation comes not from characters with visible racial difference, but from members of white families who might be “tainted” with black blood. In discussing the role that the theme of miscegenation has played in Southern literature, Barbara Ladd argues that some Southern writers have seen the miscegenated character as a stand-in for the ex-slaveholder rather than for the ex-slave. She suggests “that the former slaveholder was [...] tragically touched—morally if not genetically—by the history of colonialism and slavery, *i.e.*, compromised by his intimacy with the savage and the senile” (30). In this reading, the threat to the family has already come to fruition, and the white Southerner is left possibly never being able to assimilate within the American nation because of his (and it usually is *his*) connection to slavery. Ladd summarizes, “authors construct the southerner as a dangerous border figure, someone who might look like an American and claim to be so (with greater fervor than other Americans at times) but who carries within him- or herself traces of the displaced and who might at some point act traitorously to undermine the progressive nation” (*Nationalism* 36). For Southern writers, the miscegenated white ex-slaveowner represents the Southerner’s own fear of assimilation. On the one hand, he represents the threat to the national family that the racial Other poses. On the other hand, he represents the fear that Southern society has already become so intermingled with difference that it is already beyond assimilation.

Perhaps this latter fear helps to explain the seemingly odd frequency with which miscegenated characters are associated with incest. Werner Sollors notes this repeated theme in

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<sup>16</sup> One might compare Dixon’s version of an Anglo-Saxon race unified in imperialistic goals to Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden.”



literature. He notes the frequency of the pairing of incest and miscegenation despite “the perception of a symmetrical opposition between incest (a form of exaggerated endogamy, or forming a union with someone ‘too close’) and miscegenation (a socially censured version of exogamy, or uniting with someone ‘too far’)” (*Neither* 313). Despite this seeming contradiction, Sollors follows numerous examples of these two clustered themes throughout American literature: “There are, as we shall see, abundant instances of juxtapositions, comparisons, and confluences between incest and miscegenation, and there is much evidence for it in literature, law books, historical documents, and other sources, starting at least in the eighteenth century and extending to the twentieth” (287). The pairing of these two themes seems to mirror the dual nature of the miscegenated character. On the one hand, the miscegenated character is represented as “too far,” a racial Other who is an outside threat to the family. On the other hand, the miscegenated character is represented as “too close,” as a possible stand-in for the defeated Southerner’s ability to re-assimilate into the nation.

Walter Benn Michaels ties the themes of incest and miscegenation back into the conversation about nation. For Michaels, the domestic metaphor for nation is often explored through the thematic device of marriage, a consensual relationship that stands in contrast to parentage (a relationship which, by definition, is tied to descent). Michaels argues, “At the same time, however, this rewriting of both race and nation as family corresponded to two important shifts in racial logic, one that emphasized not the inferiority of ‘alien’ races but their ‘difference,’ and a second that began to represent difference in cultural instead of political (and in addition to racial terms)” (11). If marriage represents forming a nation by consent, the taboo of miscegenation represents the fear that the family will be diluted by those who are too different (too far). On the other hand, incest represents marriage as a metaphor for consent taken to the

extreme. Michaels argues, “If, in other words, the purely American family must be the nonreproductive family, and if the nonreproductive family is the homosexual family, then the purest American is the homosexual [...] The homosexual family and the incestuous family thus emerge as parallel technologies in the effort to prevent half-breeds” (49). Such a family is not viable, however, not able to produce progeny and continue, a fact which completely emphasizes consensual formation of relationships but which also becomes a practical anxiety for Americans. How can a family continue as a family if the relationships are only those of marriage? The clustering of miscegenated and incestuous families questions the boundaries of defining the domestic metaphor for nation.

In this domestic metaphor, Southern writers often use the possibly miscegenated character to test the boundaries of the national family. Both *The Grandissimes* and *Absalom, Absalom!* have at their center a miscegenated character who threatens to undermine the family in the present. In both, the story of the miscegenated character is recounted by different characters numerous times for different motives, revealing the centrality of miscegenation to their consciousness as well as underlying the fact that miscegenation is being used as a narrative tool. In both texts, the threat of miscegenation comes at a historical moment of significant nation-building. Finally, both texts have as a primary theme the fear of too much mixing, which is directly connected to the theme of miscegenation. Despite these similarities, the novels arrive at significantly different conclusions. Cable seemingly embraces the miscegenated character as a way of bridging past rifts in the family. In contrast, Faulkner’s characters cling to their rigidity and their fears of mixing, leaving them paralyzed or destroyed by the influence of possible miscegenation.

*The Grandissimes* is set in 1803, a moment of significant nation-building. Because of the recent American annexation of Louisiana (and thus New Orleans), the characters are explicitly and publicly concerned with creating an acceptable narration of nation: “The Cession had become an accomplished fact. With due drum-beating and act-reading, flag-raising, cannonading, and galloping of aides-de-camp, Nouvelle Orleans had become New Orleans, and Louisiane was Louisiana” (45). Besides a concern about language and land titles, the characters are concerned by the frequent re-alignment of Louisiana with various nation-states; the characters remember Louisiana under the rule of Spain and Napoleonic France, and now suspect that American rule will be cut short by an invasion by Great Britain: “‘Mark my words,’ said one, ‘the British flag will be floating over this town within ninety days!’” (46). This frequent political change leaves the characters wondering how to self-identify and how to politically align themselves in an unstable political state. The narrator asks, “would this provisional governor-general himself be able to stand fast? Had not a man better temporize a while, and see what Ex-Governor-general Casa Calvo and Trudeau were going to do? [...] suppose Spain or France should get the province back” (46). While the maintenance of land and political appointments clearly influence the characters’ concern about political stability, the question of self-identity remains very important. Doctor Keane summarizes, “One of the things I pity most in this vain world [...] is a hive of patriots who don’t know where to swarm” (46). These patriots want to feel like they are part of a nation, but the changing landscape of competing nation-states makes such self-identification impossible.

Amidst this political confusion (and perhaps because of it), the characters of the novel share a common creation myth, a story which is retold by different characters for different reasons throughout the novel. The different iterations of this common story become the way the

characters negotiate the conversation about nation. This myth centers on a slave, Bras-Coupé, and his wife Palmyre. His story is summarized by the narrator, who does “not exactly follow the words of any one” of the three characters who tell the story on the same night (169). Bras-Coupé was an African king become slave, his name a reminder that he is “a type of all Slavery, turning into flesh and blood the truth that all Slavery is maiming” (171). Bras-Coupé sees his capture as the logical outcome to his losing a battle, so he bears the captivity. He refuses to do manual labor, though, seeing it as beneath his caste. Instead, he is made a foreman on the plantation of one of the many branches of the Grandissime family. He then falls in love with Palmyre Philosophe, and she is forced to marry him. On his wedding day, Bras-Coupé becomes drunk and hits his master. He runs away to escape execution, and while he is on the run, the plantation stops producing, as though it is cursed. The members of the household believe this to be some sort of voodoo curse and fear for the destruction of the plantation. Ultimately, Bras-Coupé is recaptured and then punished so severely he ultimately dies. Before his death, though, Bras-Coupé lifts the curse on the plantation.

The complexities of the different iterations of this story reveal the various and conflicting ways in which the national domestic metaphor is employed. First, the Grandissime family narrates the story as a way to solidify their own racial dominance. Then, Honoré, f.m.c. (one of the Grandissime brothers whose mother is black and who therefore is considered a “free man of color”), narrates the story as a parallel of his own racial exclusion. Finally, Honoré (the white half-brother of the f.m.c.) lays out the story as a foundation for the eventual reunion of the family. For the Grandissime family, hearing the story told by Raoul, the story of Bras-Coupé is a tragedy, but one caused by fate, not by societal flaws: “The fair Grandissimes all agreed, at the close, that it was pitiful. Specially, that it was a great pity to have hamstrung Bras-Coupé, a man

who even in his cursing had made an exception in favor of the ladies. True, they could suggest no alternative; it was undeniable that he had deserved his fate; still, it seemed a pity” (194). For the Grandissimes, the need to protect the caste system against change has been so internalized that they do not question it, assigning the decisions of their elder Grandissimes as an inevitable decision of fate. Indeed, it is the pride of the elder Grandissimes that is emphasized in this telling. The family has gathered for the party to honor the patriarch of the Grandissimes clan, and the entire family has gathered to celebrate the family’s legacy. At the end of this party, “the youth and beauty of the Grandissimes were gathered in an expansive semicircle around a languishing fire, waiting to hear a story” (167). The story they insist upon is that of Bras-Coupé. For the Grandissimes clan, the re-telling of this myth is acknowledged as central to their self-identity.

The Grandissimes’ iteration of this story is an affirmation of the caste system; the glory of the family is emphasized (and perhaps narratively created) by the degradation of Bras-Coupé. For Agricola (the patriarch of the Grandissimes clan), the emphasis in the story is on place. Quoting the *code noir*, Agricola says, “these ‘bossals’ must be taught their place” (190). In fact, Agricola stands for hard class distinctions and punishments throughout the narrative, a fact which he believes would have brought Bras-Coupé to heel. Agricola is also self-interested in this matter. He has recently acquired the plantation of a rival household, disinheritting the De Grapion women who serve as the romantic interests in the novel’s plot. Agricola wins the estate gambling, but De Grapion accuses him of cheating. Agricola subsequently challenges De Grapion to a duel and kills him, after which he offers to give the estate back to the women if they will only affirm he has acted honorably. Longstanding prejudices between the two houses prevent them from doing so. The narrator condemns this pride: “Did you ever hear of a more

perfect specimen of Creole pride? That is the way with all of them. Show me any Creole, or any number of Creoles, in any sort of contest, and right at the foundation of it all, I will find you this same preposterous, apathetic, fantastic, suicidal pride” (32).<sup>17</sup> The act that make Agricola head of the De Grapion estate is part of a longstanding feud, however, not a matter of Agricola’s superior skill as an overseer of slaves, as the Grandissimes version of the Bras-Coupé story would suggest.

The Grandissimes family feud also exposes the falseness of the central assumption of racial difference which the family supports, an exposure which the retelling of the Bras-Coupé myth seeks to erase. The Grandissimes believe in an essential racial difference. Even Honoré (the Grandissime with the most liberal racial beliefs) explains, “when we say, ‘we people,’ we *always* mean we white people. The non-mention of color always implies pure white; and whatever is not pure white is to all intents and purposes pure black” (59). This statement seems contradictory from a people who identify themselves as descending from mixed European and Native American ancestries. In fact, the initial source of the family feud between the Fusilier-Grandissimes and the De Grapions is a matter of intermarriage with Native Americans, the patriarchs of the two families having fought over Lufki-Humma, a Tchoupitoulas princess. This intermarriage has introduced racial difference even within the family which believes itself to be white. The Grandissimes must narratively navigate this contradiction. What is white Creole and what is black Creole (that is, what is pure and what is miscegenated)? How is the marriage to Lufki-Humma not a threat when the marriage between Bras-Coupé and Palmyre is?

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<sup>17</sup> Agricola is using the term “Creole” to distinguish his family’s French descent. He uses this term to highlight the family’s purity. Authors (including Faulkner as discussed below) frequently use this term less specifically, using it to imply racial mixing. No racial mixing is suggested by Agricola’s statement. The Grandissimes are, to him, pure and mulattoes such as Palmyre represent the threat of miscegenation (the threat of the Creole being blackened) and cannot be included in the white Creole definition.

The Grandissimes' iteration of the story erases this contradiction by making the Native American a part of the domestic metaphor. The description of Lufki-Humma emphasizes both unity and caste:

As for the flesh, it was indeed only some of that "one flesh" of which we all are made; but the blood—to go into finer distinctions—the blood, as distinguished from the milk of her Alibamon foster-mother, was the blood of the royal caste of the great Toltec mother-race, which before it yielded its Mexican splendors to the conquering Aztec, throned the jeweled and gold-laden Inca in the South, and sent the sacred fire of its temples into the North by the hand of the Natchez. (18)

Not only is Lufki-Humma part of the "one flesh," but she is also of a superior bloodline, one in which the Grandissimes can take pride<sup>18</sup>: "Thus, while the pilgrim fathers of the Mississippi Delta with Gallic recklessness were taking wives and moot-wives from the ill specimens of three races, arose, with the church's benediction, the royal house of the Fusiliers" (22). Lufki-Humma's blood is narratively created as not just acceptable, but superior to other bloodlines. In contrast, the Grandissimes cast Bras-Coupé as bestial. Despite Bras-Coupé's royal African lineage, the Grandissimes see him (and Palmyre) as a superstitious voodoo rustic. The narrator highlights the prejudice at the heart of Agricola's fear of Palmyre, calling the voodoo objects attributed to Palmyre as "meaningless" rather than the "terrible engines of mischief" the other Grandissimes believe them to be, a belief which almost sparks a lynching of Palmyre (307).

Palmyre and Bras-Coupé are far from the image of racial and caste purity. For Agricola and his

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<sup>18</sup> Michaels suggests that Native Americans can be brought into the American domestic metaphor as family primarily because they are dying out. Figures that are "the last of their kind," he argues, are not threats to destroying the family and in fact are frequently portrayed as noble. After all, their racial existence no longer is inflected by descent, since there is no one left to marry. They are the epitome of racial purity, then, even though this purity means they will die out. Thus, the native character allows the writer to portray extreme racial purity from a safe distance. See the chapter "Aboriginal America" in *Our America*.

clan they are frightening exotics in touch with some arcane power. They may be powerful, but they are “black devils” (181). Thus, the origin of these characters inflects the Grandissimes’ iteration of the Bras-Coupé myth, allowing the family to justify the contradictions inherent in its racial and caste beliefs.

Honoré Grandissime, f.m.c., also tells a version of the Bras-Coupé myth on this night. The f.m.c. was planning to marry Palmyre before she was forced to marry Bras-Coupé, so for him the story is a personal one, one that affects his personal domestic situation. Even after the death of Bras-Coupé, he and Palmyre are unable to marry for a variety of reasons. Thus, the domestic curses of the Bras-Coupé story are literally visited upon him. Just as the plantation home was supposedly cursed by Bras-Coupé, his home was literally cursed. For the f.m.c., the story of Bras-Coupé represents his inability to participate in the national domestic metaphor: “reduced to the meanings which he vainly tried to convey in words, his statement was this: that *that people was not a people*. Their cause—was in Africa. They upheld it there—they lost it there—and to those that are here the struggle was over; they were one and all, prisoners of war” (195, emphasis mine). The f.m.c. is maimed by his inability to become part of a “people,” a nation. This inability is, for him, embodied in the character of Bras-Coupé, who “made himself a type of all Slavery, turning into flesh and blood the truth that all Slavery is maiming” (171).

Just as the f.m.c. cannot be part of the American national family, he is also unable to create for himself a counternarrative that would allow him to belong to “a people.” The f.m.c. says, “Ah cannod be one Toussaint l’Ouverture. Ah cannod trah to be. Hiv I trah, I h-only s’ all soogceed to be one Bras-Coupé” (196). The f.m.c.’s comparison of Bras-Coupé and L’Ouverture is telling. Barbara Ladd notes the anxiety created in the South by the Haitian Revolution:



No firm distinction between West Indian rebels and Louisiana fugitives would have been drawn during these years, particularly during the Haitian revolution of 1791-1804 (approximately the time spanned in *The Grandissimes*) when fugitives, black and white, sought asylum in New Orleans. Among Louisianians there was, of course, a perception that revolt could be “imported” from Haiti. (*Nationalism* 69)<sup>19</sup>

The f.m.c. does not believe that this importation is possible, believing instead that any attempt to develop a new national identity outside of the system that excludes him would result only in his martyrdom. Instead of resisting, he has embraced the *Grandissimes*' interpretation, becoming the violent savage that Agricola would paint him as by fulfilling Bras-Coupé's curse to kill Agricola.

The only person perhaps capable of bridging these two stubborn sides is the white Honoré who tells the Bras-Coupé myth a final time, using the narrative to envision a new national narrative in which the family is more broadly inclusive (that is, includes not just the “white” Creoles but all of them). Honoré casts his telling of the story in terms of an attempt at reconciliation of a civil war. Honoré points to a stone on the ground with his cane and says, “this stone is Bras-Coupé—we cast it aside because it turns the edge of our tools” (198). Honoré, however, is unwilling to dismiss Bras-Coupé so cavalierly. Neither is he willing to let the Bras-Coupé narrative continue to be used as fuel for the two sides of this family feud; when Frowenfeld says, “You tell me it revived a war where you had made a peace,” Honoré replies, “Yes—yes—that is his results” (198). Honoré recognizes the role that the Bras-Coupé narrative has played in creating the rigid identities that have framed the two sides of the feud. It is to this

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<sup>19</sup> Ladd also explores the possible historical antecedents of the Bras-Coupé story by looking at various contemporaneous newspaper stories which Cable may be using as sources.

practical effect of the myth that Honoré responds. He says, “You may ponder the philosophy of Bras-Coupé in your study, but *I* have got to get rid of his results” (198). Importantly, though Honoré rejects the rigid ways in which the Bras-Coupé narrative is being used by his family, he sees the effects of Bras-Coupé very profoundly in his own life, telling Frowenfeld “that negro’s death changed the whole channel of my convictions” (38).

Honoré’s convictions now center on the necessity of reconciliation through de-emphasizing race and bloodline as central to national identity. Honoré continues to understand the nation as a family, but his version of the family is more widely inclusive. He warns Frowenfeld, “You must get acclimated [...] not in body only, that you have done; but in mind—in taste—in conversation—and in convictions too” (37). Frowenfeld’s physical acclimatization has been represented in the text through his bout of yellow fever, which almost kills him when he first arrives in Louisiana. Honoré suggests that just as an immune system needs exposure to disease, Frowenfeld’s mind needs exposure to other ideas: “You cannot afford to be *entirely* different to the community in which you live” (37). Key to Honoré’s philosophy is a lack of rigidity in relationships. As he reminds Frowenfeld, “the water must expect to take the shape of the bucket” (37). In other words, relationships are more determined by being in the same bucket (in this case New Orleans) than in being of the same kind of water.

Honoré acts on this belief system at the end of the novel, using his influence to literally heal the rifts in the family that the story of Bras-Coupé had been covering. First, Honoré endorses a series of marriages that heals the various rifts in the community. Both he and Frowenfeld marry with De Grapions, healing not only the De Grapion/Grandissime feud but also bringing the American outsider into the Creole family. Also, the f.m.c. and Palmyre marry, allowing the legacy of Bras-Coupé to end in happiness. In addition, Honoré joins his business

ventures with the f.m.c. to restore the family's solvency. This act not only restores another rift in the family, but also writes a new ending to the Bras-Coupé story. If the f.m.c. is a potential martyr like Bras-Coupé, his inclusion in the family represents a new potential for the racial outsider in this society. In the end, the united company is known as Grandissimes Frères, a public acknowledgement of the familial ties between the two. Honoré, then, in recasting the Bras-Coupé narrative into one of inclusion (by repeating it with new consequences) has extended the Grandissimes family to include essentially all of the characters, erasing the previous racial rigidity which had made the family exclusionary.

Importantly, Honoré sees his actions not as a critique of the Creole, but as the properly Creole action. He sees himself as “a Creole of the Creoles” (38). We are prepared to accept Honoré's understanding of Creole through the narrator's lack of narrative rigidity. Rather than just recounting facts, the narrator frequently wanders in and out, making jokes and idly musing, often satirizing the rigidity of others. He begins with a digression about the fluidity of New Orleans: “Under the twinkle of numberless candles, and in a perfumed air thrilled with the wailing ecstasy of violins, the little Creole capital's proudest and best were offering up the first cool night of the languidly departing summer [...] For summer there, bear in mind, is a loitering gossip” (1). New Orleans, for him, is best represented as a gossip, a casual storyteller without the formal constraints of a novelist. After this observation, he starts again from the beginning, reluctantly adhering more closely to narrative conventions this second time around. This does not prevent his frequent interjection of nonlinear storytelling, such as when he concludes a chapter on the outcome of Palmyre and the f.m.c. by suggesting that “we have wandered” (331). The narrator frequently uses this wandering and his playful tone as a tool to lampoon the more

rigid. For instance, in the account of Bras-Coupé (which we only ever fully get in the narrator's voice), the narrator lampoons the slave trade by satirizing a business order for Bras-Coupé:

Passing out of first hands in barter for a looking-glass, he was shipped in good order and condition on board the good schooner *Egalité*, where of Blank was master to be delivered without delay at the port of Nouvelle Orleans (the dangers of fire and navigation excepted), unto Blank Blank. In witness whereof, He that made men's skins of different colors, but all blood of one, hath entered the same upon His book and sealed it to the day of judgment. (169).

Not only does this passage emphasize the commodification of humans at the heart of slavery, but it also questions the ways in which religious (in the final oath) and national (in the name *Egalité*, which unmistakably brings to mind both the American and French revolutions) narratives are used to justify this commodification. The narrator, then, is doing what Honoré does with the myth of Bras-Coupé, questioning the way that narratives are used to promote an exclusionary national metaphor.

There are, however, unsettling elements even in Honoré's more broadly conceived family metaphor. The f.m.c. though acknowledged by Honoré, is not able to participate in the community at novel's end, but is instead transplanted (along with Palmyre) to continental Europe. Sollors notes that this displacement of multiracial couples is a repeated theme in American literature: "The migratory logic of '*there* it could work, and *here* it's so doomed' may have helped to generate a broader plot ambiguity and to bring into the open a widespread ambivalence in the literature" (*Neither* 348). In Cable, this ambivalence seems to undercut the

possibility of Honoré's more inclusive family metaphor.<sup>20</sup> Though Honoré lives happily ever after, and though his decisions are seemingly vindicated by the narrator, his brother's story can only have a peaceful resolution elsewhere. It may be that an inclusive family metaphor is less harmful in creating nation (as Cable would seem to suggest), but it is impossible to realize that potential here in America, perhaps due to the very real scarring of slavery, a scarring embodied in the maimed personage of Bras-Coupé.

In Cable, the miscegenated character represents both the threat to the national family and a possible means of negotiating a family construed of people of many backgrounds. On the one hand, the myth of Bras-Coupé serves as a threat. Bras-Coupé is associated with miscegenation (Palmyre and the f.m.c.) and is presented as exotic and dangerous. On the other hand, Honoré recognizes how these narratives attempt to erase the caste system that is the root of his society's problems. For Honoré, Bras-Coupé becomes a symbol for what is wrong with the caste system, and he takes it upon himself to right these wrongs. In so doing, he reconstitutes the national domestic metaphor to include a variety of races and classes, a reconfiguration that the reader is prepared for by the narrator's own lack of rigidity. Though Honoré's actions are endorsed by the text, his solution is portrayed as overly-romantic, as an impossibility in America, something that must be displaced to some other time and place.

*Absalom, Absalom!* similarly uses a miscegenated character to explore the metaphor of family-as-nation. Edouard Glissant examines Faulkner's connection with the Caribbean and use of Creole characters. Glissant specifically defines his use of the word "Creole," suggesting that

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<sup>20</sup> Blight suggests that such displacement of interracial marriage is a product of the triumph of a reconciliationist narrative of the Civil War. He argues, "The intersectional wedding that became such a staple of mainstream popular culture, especially in the plantation school of literature, had no interracial counterpart in the popular imagination. Quite the opposite: race was so deeply at the root of the war's causes and consequences, and so powerful a source of division in American social psychology, that it served as the antithesis of a culture of reconciliation" (4).

the Creole implies something very different for Faulkner than it did for Cable. While for Cable the white Creole family was pure and the black Creole (or mulatto) threatened to destroy this purity, for Faulkner creolization is itself a metaphor for miscegenation. While Cable deals with the specific racial hierarchy of New Orleans, Faulkner sees all Creoles as separate from the white Southern family. Regarding *Absalom, Absalom!*, Glissant suggests, "Creolization is the very thing that offends Faulkner: *métissage* and miscegenation, plus their unforeseeable consequences" (83). As Barbara Ladd suggests, however, Glissant does not see Faulkner as a racist. Rather Faulkner merges his concerns with miscegenation into his identification with the Creole. Ladd says, "For Glissant, William Faulkner is creole, despite his U.S. citizenship and predominantly British ancestry, by virtue of his identification with the Other America of the U.S. South and his immersion in its own process of cultural and racial regeneration" ("Poetics" 32). Quentin certainly struggles with a similar identification in *Absalom, Absalom!*. He first creates Bon as a miscegenated character and seems to identify with him. Then, his fear of mixing is revealed to be too strong, and he turns Bon into a character with whom he cannot identify. Narratively, he blackens Bon to ensure he cannot be assimilated into the white family.

For Quentin, the character of Charles Bon serves as a narrative puzzle which he cannot solve. This puzzle becomes an obsession which ultimately destroys Quentin. As such, the story of Charles Bon represents a greater anxiety for Quentin, who fears not just the creolization of Bon, but the creolization of society more generally and of himself. Ladd argues, "Under the circumstances Faulkner's decision to embed the truth in the drama of performance, to bind information so tightly to interpretation, leads the reader to ask not only who or what Charles Bon was—whether he was black or white, possible son or would-be husband—but to ask who and what the speakers are with respect to the Charles Bon they construct" ("Direction" 233). Ladd

suggests that Quentin's failure is his inability to develop a future (in the sense of a Hegelian vision of History<sup>21</sup> in a colonial setting driven by "creole poetics"). She says, "Quentin and Shreve (like the other speakers in the novel) fail to the extent that they fail to rewrite the old stories in a way that provides Quentin with a future" ("Poetics" 35). The alternative to their failure would be what Ladd calls a "creole poetics," which she defines as follows: "A creole poetics is defined in terms of simultaneity rather than chronology or succession, in terms of irruption rather than development, in terms of exile and return rather than origin and departure" (34). In other words, Ladd understands Quentin's storytelling as an attempt to negotiate strict binaries by mixing, an attempt which ultimately fails. I argue that when Quentin sees Henry, he relates to him, seeing him as a vision of his own destruction. In an attempt to avoid this destruction, Quentin works through his fear of miscegenation, using the character of Bon as the embodiment of racial mixing. First, he creates a Creole Bon, a racial Other who can possibly be integrated into the family. Ultimately, however, he balks at this mixing, reverting to the strict binaries of black and white and making Bon not a Creole but a black man (and thus not a possibility for marrying into the family).

Fundamental to the understanding of Quentin's inability to reject strict binaries is recognition of the centrality of the events at Sutpen's Hundred as a dramatic turning point for Quentin. In terms of the form of the novel, Quentin's experiences at Sutpen's Hundred are the delayed climax. Rosa calls Quentin to her house and begins telling him the story of Thomas Sutpen, the prototypical antebellum planter and her ex-brother-in-law. She wants Quentin to correct the legend of Sutpen. Mr. Compson then corrects and amends her story on the porch of

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<sup>21</sup> For a full discussion of Hegel's view of History as it relates to *Absalom, Absalom!* see Ladd, Barbara. "Faulkner Glissant, and Creole Poetics." *Faulkner in the Twenty-First Century: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, 2000. Ed. Robert Hamblin and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 2003. 31-49.

the Compson house the evening before Quentin is to accompany Rosa out to Sutpen's Hundred (Sutpen's old plantation) to see who is hiding there. His experiences there help him fill in the missing details of Sutpen's story. Then, there is a lapse of time. Quentin is at Harvard, and Mr. Compson's letter about Rosa's funeral has prompted him to retell the story to his roommate Shreve. This shift in narration is significant. The story that Quentin tells Shreve is different from the one he learned from Rosa and his father. He claims he learned something at Sutpen's Hundred. Shreve notices Quentin's story does not match with Mr. Compson's: "He seems to have got an awful lot of delayed information awful quick, after having waited forty-five years. If he knew all this, what was his reason for telling you that the trouble between Henry and Bon was the octoroon woman?" (214). Quentin replies that Mr. Compson "didn't know it then," because Quentin is the one who told Mr. Compson after returning from Sutpen's Hundred: "I did [tell him...] The day after we—after that night when we—" (214). The events at Sutpen's Hundred cause Quentin to recast the character of Charles Bon.

It seems unlikely however that Quentin learns anything factual at Sutpen's Hundred. Quentin does see and talk to Henry Sutpen, yet there is no reason to believe that anything substantive came from that conversation. After all, the circular nature of the conversation suggests Faulkner intended the text of the conversation given to be the complete conversation (not an excerpt), and Henry does little in the conversation but identify himself to Quentin (298). Quentin's own reaction to the situation confirms this reading: "He could not help it. He was twenty years old; he was not afraid, because what he had seen out there could not harm him, yet he ran" (297). Quentin is aware that his response is incongruous with the facts of the meeting. Based on the facts, he should not be afraid, yet he is. His response is emotional and not rational; he is affected by what he *saw*, not by what he heard.



I suggest that what Quentin sees in that room is his own future, or at least the future he fears will be his. He sees the waste of a man, “the heir, the apparent (though not obvious)” of a Southern family, who has repudiated his responsibility (296). The details of the description of Henry in the bed are filled with images of waste: “the yellow sheets and pillow, the wasted yellow face with closed, almost transparent eyelids on the pillow, the wasted hands crossed on the breast as if he were already a corpse” (298). Quentin is also the heir apparent of a Southern family. He, too, is incapable of fulfilling his familial responsibilities; *The Sound and the Fury* portrays him as being incapable, possibly because of his incestuous desire, of fulfilling his obligation (as he sees it) to protect his sister. Quentin, like Henry, will ultimately abdicate his responsibility. *Absalom* occurs before this complete abdication, however; Quentin relates his story to Shreve some three or four months before his suicide. Yet the image of Henry still resonates with him. The story of Sutpen that Quentin tells is altered by the resonant image of a wasted man, a man forever destroyed by his contact with the Creole. In response to this vision of himself, Quentin becomes even more dedicated to understanding the Creole character of Charles Bon. He sees Bon as undercutting Sutpen’s plan (and thus Henry’s legacy). Thus, he tries to understand what it is about the Creole that prevents the grand design of the South in the Civil War.

For Quentin, his obligation is connected to the fear of his sister marrying.<sup>22</sup> In *The Sound and the Fury*, this anxiety of Quentin’s is clearly linked to a larger national narrative. As he is preparing for his suicide, he wanders the countryside outside of Cambridge obsessing about his

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<sup>22</sup> John T. Irwin has convincingly argued that Quentin’s relationship with his sister mirrors the relationship between Henry and Judith. Further, he reads *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury* as companion texts. He argues, “Of the many levels of meaning in *Absalom*, the deepest level is to be found in the symbolic identification of incest and miscegenation and in the relationship of this symbolic identification both to Quentin Compson’s personal history in *The Sound and the Fury* and to the story that Quentin narrates in *Absalom, Absalom!*” (25-6).

inability to keep Caddy from marrying. He runs into a young Italian girl who he believes is lost and tries to help her find her way home. As he does so, the text alternates between his thoughts about the girl and his memories of Caddy. Quentin remembers: *“I tried to scratch your eyes out my Lord we sure do stink we better try to wash it off in the branch ‘There’s town again sister. You’ll have to go home now”* (138). The switch from italics is a switch in time period. He begins imagining a fight he has had with Caddy, and switches to talking to the young girl. His experience with the young girl ultimately erupts into violence as well. When he returns the girl, the language gap between him and her family results in his being falsely accused of kidnapping, a charge which is quickly dismissed by the white authorities. When Quentin explains his case, the judge writes it off to being confusing with *“Them durn furriners”* (143). The girl’s brother rejects this categorization, saying *“I American [...] I gotta da pape”* (143). The rather cracker-jack accent of the brother seems to belie his statement. He may have papers, but he remains different from the American family, a difference which is enforced by violence.

The blending narratives of Quentin’s sister and companion are juxtaposed with a larger concern about integration. Quentin encounters an African American man whom he knows. This man is marching in the Decoration Day parade, and Quentin remembers seeing him in other parades:

I remembered where I had last seen the Deacon. It was on Decoration Day, in a G.A.R. uniform, in the middle of the parade.<sup>23</sup> If you waited long enough on any corner you would see him in whatever parade came along. The one before was on

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<sup>23</sup> G.A.R. stands for the Grand Army of the Republic, a postbellum civic institution formed to celebrate Northern victory in the Civil War. For more information about this organization and the role it played in postbellum nation-building, see Blight.

Columbus' or Garibaldi's or somebody's birthday. He was in the Street

Sweepers' section, in a stovepipe hat, carrying a two inch Italian flag. (82)

In this passage, Quentin juxtaposes national holidays (such as Decoration Day, a holiday which recognized veterans of the Civil War) with Italian holidays. Further, he sees the Deacon as participating just as enthusiastically in both. Later, Quentin associates his encounter with the little girl as a confirmation that America is becoming "Land of the kike home of the wop" (125). Quentin is worried about America losing its distinctiveness because of the threat of racial-mixing that immigration connects. Mentally, he connects this struggle with Italians with his memories of trying and failing to prevent Caddy from marrying. Quentin's fear of losing Caddy is a fear of mixing, a fear of the family being polluted by the outsider (a fear which is echoed for the national family). Thus, it is not surprising that Quentin seems to have incestuous desires for her himself, as an incestuous relationship is the only way for Caddy to marry someone who is not an outsider.

When Quentin sees Henry, then, he sees the result of a brother who cannot protect his sister from an outsider. This encounter clearly changes Quentin's narration of Bon as well.<sup>24</sup> Initially, Mr. Compson does not paint Bon as a racial Other. Race is injected by Quentin and Shreve, Quentin first imagining Bon as a Creole (as an outsider the sister can marry) and then firmly deciding that he must have been an African American (an outsider who is not a possibility for marriage). Mr. Compson's story is free of the racial element. Rather than blaming Sutpen for the downfall of Sutpen's Hundred, Mr. Compson allows for the possibility that Sutpen is a victim. He explains Rosa's description of Sutpen's evil as being a product of her preconceived

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<sup>24</sup> I do not want to oversimplify the narration by dividing it neatly into two points. The text is far more complex than this, having as narrators both Rosa and Shreve, among other complexities. My purpose in the simple contrast is to observe some aspects of Quentin's narration. Clearly, a study of the way in which Quentin interacts with the other layers of the narration would reveal other aspects of Quentin's character.

notions: “she was doubtless one of that league of Jefferson women who on the second day after the town saw him five years ago, had agreed never to forgive him for not having any past, and who had remained consistent” (40). Further, he explains the flaws in the relationship between Sutpen and Henry as logically following from the natural relationship between father and son. He describes Henry’s stubborn thinking after learning of Bon’s morganatic ceremony, having Henry think “*I will believe; I will. I will. Even if it is so, even if what my father told me is true and which, in spite of myself, I cannot keep from knowing is true, I will still believe*” (72). For Mr. Compson, Sutpen is a wise and misunderstood father, trying to save his son from his own self-deceit.

For Mr. Compson, the story of Sutpen’s fall is the story of a failed family. Not only does Mr. Compson not portray Sutpen as a villain, neither does he blame any other character. Henry’s rebellion against his father is a natural part of maturation. Mr. Compson calls Sutpen “the father who is the natural enemy of any son” (83). The condition is universal. In fact, in all areas but that of standing up for the honor of his sister, Mr. Compson sees Henry as heroic, even having him rescue Bon from the battlefield. Henry is “the private who carried that officer [Bon], shot through the shoulder, on his back while the regiment fell back under the Yankee guns at Pittsburg Landing” (98). He rescues Bon while under fire, even though doing so undermines his central responsibility of protecting his family. This is not the only time Mr. Compson does not blame a character for the repudiation of a central familial responsibility. He introduces Goodhue Coldfield as “that man who was later to nail himself in his attic and starve to death rather than look upon his native land in the throes of repelling an invading army” (47). Yet Mr. Compson does not condemn Coldfield for not defending the South. He explains, “But he was not a coward, even though his conscience may have objected, as your grandfather said, not so much to

the idea of pouring out human blood and life, but at the idea of waste: of wearing out and eating up and shooting away material in any cause whatever” (65). Importantly, Coldfield’s repudiation of his responsibility to his family is also a repudiation of his responsibility to the South, the larger, metaphorical family.

In Mr. Compson’s narration, the South seems to take on the form of Mr. Compson’s Bon, a victim awaiting a fate that cannot be overthrown. Mr. Compson calls Bon “the fatalist” and pictures him as patiently awaiting Henry’s making a decision (97). For him, the death of Bon is predetermined: “that afternoon four years later should have happened the next day, the four years, the interval, mere anti climax” (94). It is important that Mr. Compson compares Bon’s fate with that of the United States. He imagines:

[...] an attenuation and prolongation of a conclusion already ripe to happen, by the War, by a stupid and bloody aberration in the high (and impossible) destiny of the United States, maybe instigated by that family fatality which possessed, along with all circumstance, that *curious lack of economy between cause and effect* which is always a characteristic of fate when reduced to using human beings for tools, material. (94, italics mine)

Bon is a part of the family, and shares the family’s (and nation’s) fate. He is fated to die, the South is fated to fall, and neither Henry’s nor Coldfield’s inaction nor the actions of Bon and Sutpen can change this.

In his narration to Shreve, Quentin rejects his father’s fatalism, replacing it with a racial discourse that imagines Sutpen’s (and Henry’s) failure as being based on the inability to rid the Southern family of the outsider. Quentin rejects the belief the South was doomed by fate, largely because he does not want to believe he is doomed by fate. He does not want to see himself lying

in a bed, a wasted shadow of his former self, having repudiated his responsibility. Rather, he seeks a narrative, a causality, which would have prevented Sutpen's downfall, hoping to find a causality to escape his own. As a part of his narrative creation, he invents Bon's Creole background. For Quentin, Bon is the embodiment of his fear that the strict binaries of the narrative that has governed his life may not be true. He has embraced a vision of the South as fated, through descent from a superior race, to prosper. Sutpen should represent this prosperity. But the War changes this, throwing Quentin's understanding of his family and his nation into chaos. In the character of Bon, Quentin blurs the boundaries of both the family and the nation, hoping to find a narrative that will allow him to live with the results of the war. In the end, his continued insistence on rigid binaries, represented by his narrative transformation of Bon from Creole to African American, leaves him paralyzed on his own bed months away from suicide.

It is, of course, impossible to determine if Quentin is more or less factually accurate about the details of Sutpen's life than is Mr. Compson. It is also irrelevant. Quentin may have done an excellent job figuring out what must have gone on, or his story may be grossly inaccurate. Either way, Quentin clearly projects his search for causality onto his version of the Sutpen story. When he retells what Sutpen told his grandfather, he has his grandfather insist that Sutpen proceed "with at least some regard for cause and effect even if none for logical sequence and continuity" (199). Quentin does not succumb to Sutpen's weakness in storytelling, creating a strong sense of causality. No image captures this more clearly than the moral ledger which Quentin envisions. Quentin says it is "as if nature held a balance and kept a book and offered a recompense for the torn limbs and outraged hearts even if man did not" (202). Similarly, he imagines Sutpen comparing life to the rules of baking. Quentin imagines Sutpen having "that innocence which believed that the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of pie or cake

and once you had measured them and balanced them and mixed them and put them into the over it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake could come out” (211-2). Importantly, Quentin applies causality to society as well as to Sutpen’s understanding. Quentin says, “the South would realize that it was now paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage” (209). For Quentin, every moral decision has a price, a consequence.

Besides superimposing a desire for causality onto Sutpen’s character, Quentin also tries to solve the mystery of what happened between Henry and Bon by relying on cause and effect. In order to do this, Quentin (with Shreve’s help) creates the character of the New Orleans lawyer. This lawyer literally keeps a moral ledger, constantly tracking the net worth of Sutpen: “*Today he finished robbing a drunken Indian of a hundred miles of virgin land, val. 25,000. At 2:31 today came up out of swamp with final plank for house. val. in conj. with land 40,000. 7:52 p.m. today married. Bigamy threat val. minus nil. unless quick buyer*” (241). Quentin and Shreve imagine the lawyer keeping up with the details of Sutpen’s life as a part of a larger design, a design to get Sutpen’s money, which required intricate planning, such as insuring that Bon meet Henry at the University of Mississippi. Quentin insists that Bon knew:

that the lawyer was up to something and though he knew that was just money, yet he knew that within his (the lawyer’s) known masculine limitations he (the lawyer) could be almost as dangerous as the unknown quantity which was his mother; and now this—school, college—and he twenty-eight years old. And not only that, but this particular college, which he had never heard of, which ten years ago did not even exist; and knowing too that it was the lawyer who had chosen it for him. (250)

The lawyer's design comes to fruition when he eventually steals Bon's money. Following Quentin's logic, Shreve interjects, "so without doubt the lawyer had murdered her [Bon's mother] before he stole the money" (271). This murder serves as a logical ending to the story of the lawyer, but like the rest of the lawyer's details, it is a product of Quentin and Shreve's imagination, Shreve borrowing largely from the imagery and logic with which Quentin overlaid the story. The lawyer *must* have existed. Otherwise, the story would not *make sense*.

The actions of the lawyer do not explain everything that transpired between Henry and Bon, however, so Quentin and Shreve are forced to change the story once again, trying to create a cause that explains the murder. In this account, Bon is not a fatalist: "Bon whom Mr Compson had called a fatalist but who, according to Shreve and Quentin, did not resist Henry's dictum and design for the reason that he neither knew nor cared what Henry intended to do because he had long since realized that he did not know yet what he himself was going to do" (268). Bon eventually decides to try to get Sutpen to acknowledge him as a son. He asks for Henry's permission to marry Judith, saying "He has never acknowledged me. He just warned me. You are the brother and the son. Do I have your permission, Henry?" (279). Bon's desire, then, is not so much for revenge, but to be recognized by his father. That is why he came to Sutpen's Hundred in the first place, that is why he was willing to wait until Henry made up his mind, and that is what he has failed to achieve when finally he asks Henry for Judith's hand.<sup>25</sup>

But this is not good enough for Quentin (and Shreve) either. An illegitimate son is not cause enough for fratricide. Quentin and Shreve search for something more extreme which could have caused the murder, a threat to the family so severe that violence was the only

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<sup>25</sup> Ladd sums up this version of Bon nicely: "the hubris of an American innocent, Thomas Sutpen, creates a retributive agent in the figure of Charles Bon" ("Direction" 231). I would only add the phrase "according to Quentin and Shreve."



solution. Shreve suggests incest, and Quentin goes silent, presumably thinking about his own anxieties about his relationship with his sister.<sup>26</sup> Shreve says, “That’s right. Dont say it. Because I would know you are lying” (260). When Shreve changes the subject from incest, Quentin joins back in, eventually deciding that the crime was something greater than incest. He has Bon say to Henry, “*So it’s the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear*” (285). In the same conversation, Bon drives the point home, saying “*No I’m not [your brother]. I’m the nigger that’s going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry*” (286). Quentin has found an absolute and compelling cause behind the fratricide, a cause other than incest. All the details (if not the facts) of the story now line up, following the rules of cause and effect.

Through the narration of Bon’s story, Quentin attempts to create a world in which the outsider represents something which is evil and must be punished. In addition, Quentin is able to displace his own anxieties about his sister onto Bon, transforming Bon into a scapegoat for his own flaws. Quentin’s insertion of strict binaries to the story of Sutpen does not help him cope with the image of Henry, however. At novel’s end Quentin is immobile lying in his bed, no different from the night he returned from Sutpen’s Hundred. Shreve is satisfied, released from the story. He says, “Which is all right, it’s fine; it clears the whole ledger” (302). But Quentin lies motionless in bed. His storytelling has not released him. Quentin’s attempt to write a narration of the fall of the Sutpen family has failed. Quentin makes Bon a scapegoat. Bon is the cause that leads to the effect of the Civil War. As such, Quentin seeks to understand the Bon he creates in black and white terms, failing to see the createdness of his explanation. This failure, one which comes from clinging too rigidly to pre-existing narratives, ultimately leads to Quentin’s destruction.

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<sup>26</sup> For more detail on the way in which Quentin relates to the theme of incest, see Zender, Karl F. “Faulkner and the Politics of Incest.” *American Literature* 70.4 (1998): 739-65.

Quentin's inability to move past the causality he has created is emphasized in the way Quentin's narration invites the readers to compare his experience with that of Sutpen. Both characters' formative experiences involved being stopped outside a door. In Quentin's narration, Sutpen tells Grandfather Compson how he was turned away from the door of a Tidewater plantation: "He had been told to go around to the back door even before he could state his errand, who had sprung from a people whose houses didn't have back doors [...] In fact, he had actually come on business, in the good faith of business which he had believed that all men accepted" (188). This door is never mentioned before Quentin goes to Sutpen's Hundred, yet Quentin imagines this experience as central to Sutpen's character development. Similarly, Quentin struggles to cross a threshold, the door to Henry's bedroom at Sutpen's Hundred. When he finally does enter the door, the image of the wasted Henry paralyzes him with fear. The door is also a mental barrier which Quentin cannot pass:

[H]e had something which he still was unable to pass: that door, that gaunt tragic dramatic self-hypnotised youthful face like the tragedian in a college play, an academic Hamlet waked from some trancement of the curtain's falling and blundering across the dusty stage from which the rest of the cast had departed last commencement, the sister facing him across the wedding dress which she was not to use, not even to finish. (142)

Behind Quentin's mental block, then, is the image of a sister facing marriage and the image of the wasted Henry which Quentin will become if he cannot come to terms with his relationship to his sister. Whereas Sutpen's design in building his plantation is to create a world in which he can pass his door, in which he will be in charge, Quentin's design in recreating the Sutpen myth

is an attempt to cross his own threshold, to come to terms with his past, particularly his relationship with his sister.

Both Quentin's and Sutpen's designs are attempts to enter the dominant national narrative. For Sutpen, this involves trying to change his class from the poor white to the dominant antebellum Southern aristocracy. In the Tidewater, "He had learned the difference not only between white men and black ones, but he was learning that there was a difference between white men and white men not to be measured by lifting anvils or gouging eyes or how much whiskey you could drink then get up and walk out of the room" (183). This realization leads to Sutpen's desire to become a part of the dominant class of white men. As Quentin tells it, however, part of Sutpen's motivation is an obligation to the past to fulfill this social obligation: "All of a sudden he [Sutpen] discovered, not what he wanted to do but what he just had to do, had to do it whether he wanted to or not, because if he did not do it he knew that he could never live with himself for the rest of his life, never live with what all the men and women that had died to make him had left inside of him for him to pass on" (178). For Quentin, Sutpen's impetus is an obligation both to himself and to his forbears to become a part of the dominant social group.

Quentin feels a similar impetus. He feels obligated to come to terms with the inclusion of the outsider, which for him is connected to his incestuous desire for his sister. The novel starts with Rosa calling Quentin to her house, expecting him to write down the story of Thomas Sutpen (and thus of the South) in order to come to terms with it. As the story begins to consume Quentin, he thinks, "*I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do*" (222). Shreve explains the same concept:

We [Canadians] dont live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves (or have I got it backward and was it your folks that are free and the niggers that lost?) and bullets in the dining room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget. What is that? something you live and breathe in like air? a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago? a kind of entailed birthright father and son and father and son of never forgiving General Sherman, so that forever more as long as your children's children produce children you wont be anything but a descendant of a long line of colonels killed in Pickett's charge at Manassas? (289)

Quentin's heritage insists that he continue fighting the Civil War, that he continue to fight against the dominant North. Like his version of Sutpen, Quentin is resisting being an outsider in the nation. While Sutpen resisted physically by building a plantation, Quentin resists by building a narrative that marginalizes the outsider by inserting him into a strict racial binary.

If Quentin and Sutpen have a similar design in mind, it is not surprising that their designs meet a similar end. Sutpen's Hundred burns to the ground, and Quentin commits suicide, no longer able to handle the burden of the past. Both ultimately remain outside of the nation. This is not because they fail in their design, however, but because they stick to their design too unrelentingly. As Ramón Saldívar says, "the real threat to Sutpen's 'design' is the very plantation itself (and the plantation system) that is the object of his desires" (101). For Quentin's Sutpen, this comes from his inability to recognize that others do not strictly follow the rules which they profess. He comes to a moment of crisis where he can have everything he wants, except he will have to break one of his rules in such a way that no one will ever know. He says:

[E]ither I destroy my design with my own hand, which will happen if I am forced to play my last trump card, or do nothing, let matters take the course which I know they will take and see my design complete itself quite normally and naturally and successfully to the public eye, yet to my own in such a fashion as to be a mockery and a betrayal of that little boy who approached that door fifty years ago and was turned away. (220)

Sutpen is so focused on his design that he will not waver from it, no matter the circumstances of the real world. Further, he will never question the morality of the dominant culture, the plantation system, instead accepting the societal hierarchy as an amoral given. He says, “You see I had a design in my mind. Whether it was good or a bad design is beside the point; the question is, Where did I make the mistake in it” (212).

Quentin makes a similar mistake. He will not yield from a cause and effect narrative in order to deal with reality. He cannot get past the strict binaries of the dominant national narrative, the logic that shows him that the effect is always going to be his ending up like Henry. As Baker says, “anti-imperialists wish to reclaim control of their past and no longer be defined by others, so they must intentionally subvert the assumptions of the metropole” (47). Quentin seems to see himself in this role, as a part of a conquered class now being defined as something Other than the national family. Further, Ladd would suggest that the assumptions of the metropole are the assumptions of Hegelian causality: “It is important to emphasize that Sutpen’s is not in any way a design of his own invention. It is a recapitulation of the design implicit in Western History” (“Poetics” 36). These assumptions are what Quentin does not subvert. He backs away from envisioning Bon as a Creole, instead blackening him. Even while being concerned about cause and effect, he is unwilling to discuss a scenario involving racial mixing, a

problem which for him is both national and personal. This is his hang-up. He cannot confront the truth, and so relies on the facts, just as Sutpen was too “innocent” to confront the truth that the plantation system was unjust and no number of rules could change that. What Quentin says of Sutpen’s logic applies to his own: “And he not calling it retribution, no sins of the father come home to roost; not even calling it bad luck, but just a mistake: that mistake which he could not discover himself” (215). Such oversimplifying of a narrative works neither for Sutpen nor for Quentin.

Through his narration of the Sutpen story, Quentin reveals to the readers that he sees much of Sutpen in himself, and like Sutpen, his design is doomed to fail because he is unwilling to imagine a world in which the family mixes with outsiders, a possibility which is represented by the Creole. Whereas Cable is able to envision national assimilation by re-evaluating the term Creole so that it includes the black as well as the white, Quentin cannot. His fear of mixing, of losing himself and his family in the national aggregate, remains too strong, ultimately leading to his suicide. Through Quentin, Faulkner reveals a similar anxiety about national homogeneity as he revealed in his public statements. While he sees the narratives of descent that undercut the myth of the national narratives, he also seems to prefer the narratives of descent, showing concern that a loss of these narratives will result in a loss of individual identity, both for himself and the South.

### Chapter 3: National Masculinity and the Fear of Assimilation in *Go Down, Moses* and Thomas Nelson Page's *Red Rock*

In his early fiction, the national family is for Faulkner a symbol for national assimilation. He demonstrates his anxiety at too much assimilation, fearing that the racial Other will mix the family too much, a possibility which paralyzes Quentin at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin imagines a miscegenous marriage for his sister as frightening on the same level as increased immigration in Boston. If his family is in danger of losing its uniqueness in assimilating the Other, so the South is in danger of losing its uniqueness in the national melting-pot. Some postbellum authors use the national family as a metaphor through which to imagine a desirable form of national reunion, however. Thomas Nelson Page (specifically in his 1898 novel *Red Rock*) explores the role of masculinity within the family, ultimately re-writing Southern masculinity so that it aligns with the national narrative of masculinity, a narrative centered on imperial conquest. If the racial Other remains a threat to the national family and an obstacle for national reunion, imperial conquest becomes a common ground on which both Southerners and Northerners can struggle together for a common cause. In *Go Down, Moses* (1942), Faulkner similarly writes masculinity as a common foundation for the national family. Unlike Page, however, Faulkner shows the assimilation that comes from such a narrative to be detrimental to the community. As a result, his text seeks (unsuccessfully) to re-claim Southern distinctiveness by re-claiming a distinctly Southern masculinity.

Practically, masculinity had long been defined differently in the South than elsewhere in the country. Susan V. Donaldson and Anne Goodwyn Jones argue that in the South, “White men, whether rich or poor, did not typically leave home for long daily hours at a factory or a business. The South was, at least in comparison to the North and its commercial, urban, and

industrial changes, still largely preindustrial and rural, even well into the twentieth century” (3). While masculinity in the North was verified by success outside of the home (in stereotypically masculine spheres), masculinity in the South had to be verified within the home, within the domestic space shared by the rest of the family. This was accomplished by men focusing on becoming “lords and masters” of their homes (3). Thus, Southern masculinity became directly connected to the institution of slavery. True men must be masters, both of their families and of their slaves. Thus, the quintessential man was the white plantation owner, a narrow definition of masculinity which excluded both non-plantation owners and non-whites. Donaldson and Jones trace this definition of masculinity through antebellum texts, finding their most clearly stated example in Harriet Jacobs:

Harriet Jacobs writes that Linda Brent’s rebellion against her master “Dr. Flint” (Dr. James Norcom) threatens his very sense of manhood. Apparently the smallest assertion of freedom and defiance on the part of a slave woman had the power to shrivel a white slave-owning man’s confidence in the power of his gender—because he believed his society’s prescriptions requiring white male control. (3)

The Civil War, then, does not just upset antebellum ideas about nation, but also about gender. It leaves the plantation owner (the paragon of masculinity) in defeat. For Donaldson and Jones, it was not just the South that was conquered by the North, but it was also Southern manhood which was proven to be less virile than Northern manhood.

It is no surprise that Southern men are depicted differently after the war than before. Caroline Gebhard traces the figure of the Old Colonel in postbellum literature, suggesting that this character type is used to negotiate both a new gender and a new national identity: “In the



guise of depicting the aging or sometimes deceased white master, still faithfully served or remembered by one devoted ex-slave, southern-identified male authors sought to renegotiate their generation's ideals of masculinity and patriotism in the aftermath of the Civil War and Radical Reconstruction" (133). Specifically, Gebhard argues that the figure of the Old Colonel (the type for antebellum Southern masculinity) is frequently cast in a usually feminine-coded literary role: "The spectacle of the white man's body in a scene designed to evoke tears and admiration placed readers in a sentimental relation to a site [the object of pity] that had formerly been reserved for women and slaves" (135). This postbellum depiction of antebellum Southern manhood must be seen, at least partially, as a critique of such manhood; Gebhard argues that "these writers acknowledged, though perhaps not consciously, that this ideal of southern manhood had indeed become outmoded, if not obsolete" (139). In trying to understand the defeat of the South, Southern writers caricature antebellum Southern manhood, suggesting its flaws.

Gebhard traces one way in which Southerners attempt to negotiate a loss of masculinity in Thomas Nelson Page's seminal Lost Cause story, "Marse Chan." In this story, the white slave owner is in a triangular relationship with both his lover (the daughter of the neighboring plantation owner) and his manservant. Gebhard explains, "the woman's presence merely underlines the men's bond; it is the connection between these men—Sam and Chan have been inseparable since childhood—that proves deepest" (142). This connection is highlighted in the scene in which Sam cries over his master. As Sam recounts the life and death of his former master, he is overcome with nostalgic grief; he says, "Dem wuz good ole times, marster—de bes' Sam ever see! Dey wuz in fac'! [...] Dyar warn' no trouble nor nothin'" (*Virginia* 10). While this passage has often been cited (and rightly so) as evidence of the Lost Cause's attempt to

domesticate the institution of slavery and to obfuscate its horrors, Gebhard focuses instead on the way this passage attempts to realign domestic relationships to refigure Southern manhood. Chan becomes the “lord and master” of his home not through violence, but by having the same relationship of domestic submission with his slaves as he does with his wife. This mastery occurs by conquering the home rather than by conquering other territories. Gebhard argues, “it is significantly not the freedom of the wilderness that allows men to bond but slavery itself, which is why black men are so often imagined as willingly reentering the relation of servitude to their former masters” (143). This is also why the former servants in Page have a familial (though subordinate) relationship with their masters.

Importantly, Trent Watts notes that Page is responding to specific Northern derisions of Southern masculinity. He argues:

Page also inverts the conventional Stowe-esque depiction of slave owners as violators of domestic order (through the splitting of slave families and with miscegenation), asserting instead that domestic virtues were central to antebellum (and by extension contemporary) southern maleness. This womanly tenderness makes Channing a complete man, with his death in combat (the stage on which nineteenth-century manhood was taken to be most fully realized) signifying his impeccable maleness. (55)

For Watts, the balance between tenderness and control is important in refuting Northern notions of failed Southern masculinity. In addition to “Marse Chan,” this can be seen in Page’s “Unc’ Edinburg’s Drowndin’.” In this story, the master-slave relationship is between Marse George and Unc’ Edinburg. Edinburg remembers the familial tenderness showed him by George: he says, “I ‘ain’ niver see nobody yit wuz good to me as Marse George” (*Virginia* 41). George

ultimately loses his life trying to save Edinburg from drowning in an icy river. The description of this rescue underscores George's bravery: "Marse George tun back an' struck out for me for life, an' how jes as I went down de last time he cotch me an' helt on to me tell we wash down whar de bank curve, an' dyah de current wuz so rapid hit yuck him off Reveller back, but he helt on to de reins tell de horse lunge so he hit him wid he fo' foot an' breck he collar-bone" (75).

While George is kind to his household, and specifically to Edinburg, he proves his masculinity in his protectiveness. His bravery and masculinity are confirmed in his domesticity, countering the portrayal of Southern manhood by Stowe and others. While George may ultimately fail in battle, Page retroactively asserts George's masculinity, refuting any claims of effeminacy that might have been implied by defeat in battle.

For both Watts and Gebhard, the way in which Page and others try to redeem antebellum manhood is not just about recovering the past, but about reincorporating Southern masculinity into the dominant American narrative after the Civil War. Douglas L. Mitchell agrees, suggesting that "Page seeks to establish a fund of memory from which southerners may draw to act in very different historical conditions" (63). The point of mythologizing antebellum Southern manhood, then, is to establish a narrative framework on which to write postbellum Southern manhood. Mitchell focuses on the new myth: "The renewed allegiance of the southerner to a unified national destiny, to the 'fresh and glorious possibilities' of a South remade in the image of the North, gives promise of power and prosperity, even while fidelity to the past, in mythologized form, redeems the Old South from history" (63). It is the use of narratives of masculinity to create a "renewed allegiance [...] to a unified national destiny" which concerns me the most in this chapter. Though such a discussion is necessarily foregrounded in an understanding of the myth of antebellum masculinity as it relates to domestic dominance, my

main focus will be on the ways in which Southerners used narrative masculinity to join into the national imperialistic discourse.

Amy S. Greenberg explores two major narratives of masculinity that undergird American expansionism in the late nineteenth century. She argues that “debates over Manifest Destiny also were debates over the meaning of American manhood and womanhood” (14). Some expansionists, she argues, understood manhood to be militaristic. The way for men to prove they are men is to succeed in battle. This is the type of manhood that undergirded such conflicts as the Spanish-American War and the many filibusters of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Greenberg argues, “Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders, a voluntary cavalry division made up of Harvard intellectuals and frontier cowboys, helped to energize a militant version of masculinity” (280). In its broad appeal, this definition of masculinity highlights the unimportance of sectionalism. In contrast to this version of manhood, many others embraced a restrained version of manhood, one which suggested that in order for a man to be a man he must exercise (usually religious) restraint. Greenberg argues that this definition of manhood, frequently manifested in missionary societies, undergirded cultural imperialism in places such as Hawaii. I argue that both militaristic and restrained masculinity are used by Southern authors to re-establish Southerners as a part of the national imperialistic project. By establishing restrained masculinity (that is, masculinity that is proven in the stereotypically feminine realms), Page is able to include masculinity associated with the antebellum plantation into the Northern narratives of the frontier. Thus, just as a pioneer on the frontier could prove his masculinity through physical assertion, so could a Southerner assert his masculinity through re-conquering his own lands, whether through physical

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<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the most famous American filibuster, William Walker’s conquest and brief presidency of Nicaragua, see Greenberg, chapter 4, “William Walker and the Regeneration of Martial Manhood.”

and legal struggle, or through uniting his family in marriage to the Northerners who now have power in the region.

Indeed, expansionism was a logical place to begin the discourse on national reunion. After all, expansion allowed for the corporate conquering of territory outside of either the North or the South. By focusing aggression on a common enemy (Spaniards, Native Americans, etc.), former soldiers of both sides could fight together for a common goal. A familiar symbol of this new national unity is Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders. Amy Kaplan notes, “The Rough Riders have been understood as a unifying cultural symbol—between North and South, West and East, working class and patrician, cowboy and Indian, and this unity is grounded in the notion of manliness, in the physicality of the male body that transcends or underlies social difference” (141). David Blight notes some of the ways in which this symbol was in fact a reality; he argues the Spanish-American is used to reincorporate Confederate soldiers and politicians into the Union cause: “Symbols of reunion abounded everywhere. Confederate veterans Hannis Taylor and Fitzhugh Lee were ambassador to Spain and consul to Havana respectively, and both were staunch interventionists. Moreover, Lee and another former Confederate general, Joseph Wheeler, were reappointed major generals for the war with Spain” (353). Blight argues that so strong were the reconciliationist sentiments surrounding the Spanish American War that “a Detroit paper concluded that after the war with Spain, ‘nothing short of an archaeological society will be able to locate Mason and Dixon’s line’” (353). With such sentiments of reunion abounding, it is no surprise that the Spanish American War (and its pivotal symbolic moment, the charge up San Juan Hill) became symbols for a united imperialistic masculinity.

Despite the power of this watershed symbol, imperialistic masculinity was not confined to Cuba or the Philippines. Roosevelt himself was also a symbol of masculinity on America’s

western frontier, though other prominent public thinkers (such as William James) promoted a less militant version of masculinity on the frontier. Both James and Roosevelt seek a solution for what they see as the femininity of the modern world. John Muir summarizes this need to head to the frontier to restore masculinity: Anne Raine summarizes, “as Muir put it in 1901, national park tourism would inspire ‘thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people’ to awaken from ‘the stupefying effects of the vice of over-industry and the deadly apathy of luxury’ and begin ‘to mix and enrich their own little ongoings with those of Nature’” (132). For both Roosevelt and James, a real man must leave the enervating crowds of the city and re-create himself (and it is usually a “himself”) as a strong, capable, masculine individual through the influence of nature. While perhaps best known in the writing of Roosevelt and James, such a narrative of the relationship of man to nature (usually in the American West) is found in a wide variety of writings, such as those of naturalists like Muir and doctors like George M. Beard and S. Weir Mitchell who argue Americans are especially susceptible to “nervous” diseases because of the enervating effects of life in cities.<sup>28</sup> As Patrick K. Dooley argues, the philosophies of James and Roosevelt fit into this “shared cultural matrix” (121).<sup>29</sup> Specifically, the two “explored whether a life of increased energy could make individual lives, and the life of the nation as a whole, worth living” (122). For these writers, physical exertion on the frontier is the answer to growing effeminacy of modernity.

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<sup>28</sup> Beard’s 1881 work *American Nervousness* places the causes of neurasthenia (nervous exhaustion) in a specifically American context, suggesting that modern life (that is, the inventions of such devices as the steam engine and the telegraph) is draining the balance of American nerves; it follows a banking metaphor for nervous energy in which energy can be depleted from a total balance by such causes. Mitchell’s *Wear and Tear, or Hints for the Overworked* (1887) proposes a rest cure for such a condition.

<sup>29</sup> For a conversation on how the strenuous cure intersected other writers and public figures, specifically London and Norris, see Dooley.

Though both conclude the strenuous life is worth living, Roosevelt and James differ slightly on the way individual strenuousness relates to national character. Dooley argues that Roosevelt “quickly transmutes personal virtues and traits into matters of national character” (126). As such, Roosevelt (himself a sickly child who goes West to live the strenuous life) becomes a type for the strenuous American character. For Roosevelt, Americans should do as he has done, reject the enervating cities and focus on the West, finding manhood in struggling to survive. In terms of a national narrative, Roosevelt’s focus on struggle equated to a need for America to prove itself in warfare. This latter point was the major disagreement between Roosevelt and James. Dooley argues, “Having conceded the potency and attractiveness of war, James returns to his considered opinion that the strenuous mood can more usefully respond to nonlethal and noncontagious stimuli,” such as sport or religion (125). Despite this difference, both James and Roosevelt write this individual strenuousness into a national narrative in which masculinity is a cure for the contemporary condition. The frontier is the place where masculinity can be re-asserted, either through military conquest or through vicarious tourism.

Both Page and Faulkner display Southern men participating in both militant and restrained imperialistic manhood. Both, however, show masculinity being re-asserted in the South, rather than on the frontier, connecting Southern masculinity to the dominant frontier narrative. Masculinity was not just important for self-mythologizing, for creating individual identity in the narrative vacuum of the frontier; it was also important in including the South in the national imperialistic identity. While both authors relocate these frontier themes to the South, Page and Faulkner focus on different aspects of this conversation. Page’s focus is on the possibility of using narratives of masculinity to write national reunion. On the other hand,

Faulkner (writing after the initial crisis of national reunion) shows anxiety about the effects of the assimilation that such a shared narrative would create.

Thomas Nelson Page's *Red Rock* follows two parallel characters from the same Virginia community through their struggles adapting to Reconstruction. Jacquelin Gray is the heir apparent to the Red Rock plantation, the largest plantation in the region. When Red Rock is taken by carpetbaggers, Gray works to reclaim it through legal means. The parallel protagonist is Gray's cousin, Steve Allen, who rather than trying to restore the past focuses on marrying the daughter of the community's most prominent carpetbagger, seemingly finding a way to reunite with the North in the present. Christopher Bundrick argues, "Each [plot] line represents a different approach to the issue of the South's relationship with the rest of the nation after the Civil War. The Allen plot looks forward, imagining a South that has to maintain the beaten South's connection with its past [...] The Allen plot follows, for the most part, the basic contours of a traditional reconciliation romance" (63). In addition to this, I would argue that each plot line associates the respective protagonist with a narrative of masculinity which allows this reconciliation. Gray's campaign to restore his home parallels both his brother's military campaign on the frontier and his near-mythical ancestor's (the Indian-killer's) original conquering of the land. These militant conquerors contrast with Allen, who tries to change the ideas of the Welches; his ultimate success in this intellectual assimilation leads both to his marriage to Ruth and his freeing from jail. These two versions of manhood are connected by a common term, honor, which serves as shorthand for common masculinity in the novel. Though the code of honor the male characters embrace is never fully defined, what is clear is that masculinity and honor are intricately connected. All masculine figures in the novel describe



their masculinity using this term. As a result, the conflict between North and South is refigured as a conflict between honor and dishonor.

Jacquelin Gray represents honor through militant masculinity. Early in his childhood, Gray's masculinity is heightened through its comparison with the femininity of his cousin Blair Cary. Gray longs for physical exertion outside of the home, desiring to reject the call of his aunt to come in and go to school: "How gladly would he have exchanged places to mind the cows and ride the horses to the stable, and be free all day long" (3). When he is free of his aunt, he tries through increasingly dangerous exploits to imitate Steve Allen, whom he sees as the pinnacle of masculinity. When Allen went away to school "Jacquelin missed him sorely and tried to imitate him in many things; but he knew it was a poor imitation, for often he could not help being afraid, whilst Steve did not know what fear was" (6). At this early stage in his development, Gray has learned to associate masculinity with lack of fear in the presence of danger. In order to conform to this definition, Gray regularly tests himself by taking unnecessary risks. During these tests, he begins to understand himself primarily in contrast to Blair:

[H]e determined to show his superiority [to Blair] by one final and supreme act. This was to climb to the roof of the 'high barn,' as it was called, and spring off into the top of a tree which spread its branches below. He had seen Steve do it, but had never ventured to try it himself. He had often climbed to the roof, and had fancied himself performing this feat to escape from pursuing Indians, but had never really contemplated doing it in fact, until Blair's persistent emulation, daunted by nothing that he attempted, spurred him to undertake it. (7).

Though Gray attempts to emulate Steve's masculinity by emulating his fearlessness, he is unable to follow in Steve's daring acts until he feels that he must prove that he can do something that a young girl cannot do. Thus, Gray's conquering of Indians is replaced by his conquering of Blair.

Gray's militant masculinity is confirmed through his heroism in the Civil War. Initially, the other soldiers in Gray's unit see him not as a man, but as a boy. Through his actions, however, his masculinity is confirmed in the minds of his comrades. The narrator writes, "he went in a boy, but a boy who could ride any horse [...] and if told to go anywhere, would go as firmly and as surely among bayonets or belching guns as if it were a garden of roses" (52). Gray's willingness to ride fearlessly into battle is not just hypothetical. When Blair's brother appears to have fallen in battle, Gray returns for him, despite the difficulty of the battle around him: "Jacquelin, missing Morris Cary, who had been near him but a moment before, suddenly turned and galloped back through the smoke. Two or three men shouted and stopped, and Steve suddenly dashed back after the boy, followed by Andy Stamper and the whole company" (52). In starting this rally, Gray precedes even the exemplar of his masculinity, Steve. Gray's early training, then, has come to fruition. He has learned to bravely (or perhaps recklessly) ride into danger, establishing himself as the preeminent figure of militant manhood in the eyes of his comrades.

Gray's early training also taught him that conquering on the frontier is not sufficient. After the war, he returns to re-conquer his home, just as he turned his fearless high jump into the conquering of Blair. Following the war, Gray goes to Europe to convalesce from his injury. Upon his return, he begins the re-conquest of his estate, a task which he directly connects to the reunion of the nation: "On the high seas or in a foreign land, it had been the flag of the nation that he wanted to see. He had begun to realize the idea of a great nation that should be known

and respected wherever a ship could sail or a traveller could penetrate; of a re-united country in which the people of both sides, retaining all the best of both sides, should equally receive all its benefits” (257). Reconquering his home (in his mind) is not a continuation of the war, but rather an act of reconciliation. During this reconquest, Gray is figured as a re-embodiment of the frontier hero who first captured the land, the Indian-killer embodied in the portrait handing over the mantle of Red Rock. Hiram Still initially recoils from Gray because of his resemblance to the painting; the narrator wonders, “Whether it was the man’s unstrung condition, or whether it was Jacquelin’s resemblance to the fierce Indian-killer, as he stood there in the dusk with his eyes burning, his strong hands twitching” (262). Gray returns to Red Rock as an exemplar of militant masculinity, but this masculinity is focused on the heroes of the frontier, not on the war. Gray, however, is not concerned with conquering new territory, but with restoring the old; he tells Still, “We are coming back here, the living and the dead” (262). Gray’s embodiment of militant masculinity is focused away from the frontier and back into the South.

Bundrick examines the importance of “the dead” returning to Red Rock, arguing that this return is not just backward looking. Bundrick suggests that the ghost of the Indian-killer (and other Gothic elements in the novel) insist that the past becomes a part of the present. He argues, “What we see in *Red Rock*, then, is not a lingering glance at an unrecoverable before. Rather, in *Red Rock*, the past seems to forcibly intrude upon the present, demanding nostalgia, or at least memory” (69). The memory that the Indian-killer demands is, for Page, capable of re-shaping the present. Bundrick argues:

*Red Rock* represents Page’s sophisticated attempt to separate the future from the past not in order to forget but in order to take control of the manner of remembering. The gothic in *Red Rock* serves a specific purpose relative to Page’s

larger strategy for creating a southern space in the postwar United States. Page chiefly uses the gothic as a way of harmlessly resurrecting the old order and salvaging aspects of the days “before the war.” (69-70)

I would add that what Page salvages from the past is not something distinctly Southern, but an aspect of masculinity that is central to militant imperialism, conquering the land and slaughtering the savages that previously inhabited it. Thus, in embodying the Indian-killer, Gray embodies the type of militant masculinity that compares him to the conquering that is happening on the Western frontier, a type of masculinity that can be easily re-integrated into Northern ideology.

To suggest that Gray represents militant masculinity, however, is not to suggest that Page intends him to be seen as a brute. Instead, Page shows how militant and restrained masculinity work together to refigure a Southern masculinity which is compatible with the north, a masculinity which is discussed in terms of honor. This can be seen in Gray’s close relationship with the Cary family. Dr. Cary clearly prefers restrained manhood, attempting to win over crowds with words instead of with force. When Rupert Gray is in prison, all of the men in the community form a posse to rescue him. Cary dissents, saying “I know that the wrongs we are suffering cry to God, but I urge you to unite with me in trying to remedy them by law, and not by violence. Let us unite and make an appeal to the enlightened sense of the American people, of the world, which they will be forced to hear” (428-29). Despite his dissent, Cary remains united to the posse by having a similar sense of honor. He assures them that he remains “flesh of your flesh, bone of your bone” (238). Despite disagreeing with him, they acknowledge his honor. Allen says, “Dr. Cary, I beg you to believe that we all recognize the wisdom of your views and their unselfishness” (429). Dr. Cary’s honor unites his restrained masculinity with the militant

masculinity of the rest of the crowd. Further, his honor connects him with a trait shared more generally by the “American people.”

Despite the fact that Gray differs from the doctor in that he is willing to use violence, he is nevertheless closely tied to the doctor. Narratively, this is illustrated in Gray’s eventual union with the Cary household through his marriage with Blair. The novel ends with Gray only partially successful in his attempt to regain Red Rock. He makes a deal with Still to get back the house and part of the land, but Still gets to keep the rest of the land. This compromise seems to come partially from his desire to make Blair in the image of his mother. He wants to move his mother’s grave to within “sight of the old garden in which she had walked as a bride” (583). Soon thereafter, Gray marries and brings Blair to the same garden to “tell of his new happiness” (584). Thus, the Gray and Cary houses unite. Gray’s attempt to reconquer all of his land is tempered by his desire to marry Blair, just as the posse is eventually urged from violence (though not from action) by Dr. Cary. Gray’s masculinity is confirmed in this union. He is able to reclaim his house and also build a household from the old families of the region. However, he is able to do so not by acting on a specifically Southern creation of masculinity (as is Chan in “Marse Chan”). Rather, he acts on a narrative of imperialistic, militant masculinity which transcends the Civil War, making the reconquest of the South equivalent to the conquering of the Western frontier.

While Gray represents militant masculinity in *Red Rock*, Steven Allen represents a more restrained form of masculinity, one which seeks to conquer through moral rather than physical strength, and yet one which remains compatible with American imperialism. Steve’s restraint is seen most clearly as his action is contrasted with those of the Ku Klux Klan. Steve organizes the first KKK raid in the county, but he insists that his intent was nonviolent. He explains to Ruth,

“I myself organized a band of Ku Klux regulators [...] No one was seriously hurt—no women were frightened to death, as you say [...] no lives were taken and no great violence was done. The reports you have heard of it were untrue. I give you my word of honor as to this” (352). Despite Steve’s conviction, the KKK (with different membership) continues to be active in the county. Blair Cary saves a rival school from being burned by such a band of Klansman, which had decided to react to threats from local freedmen leaders that “the time had come for payment, and that matches were only five cents a box, and if barns were burned they belonged to them” (401). Though the KKK reacts to the threat of vigilante violence, they respond not with an alternative, but with vigilante violence of their own. Mrs. Stamper comments on the Klan’s activities: “you ought to be ashamed of yourself coming out here to harm a poor woman [...] If you want to do anything, why don’t you do it to men, and openly, like Andy Stamper and Capt’n Allen?” (407). The community recognizes a clear difference between the band that attacks the school and the band Steve organized. For Mrs. Stamper, part of this difference is connected to Steve’s lack of cowardice, his insistence on taking responsibility for his actions.

The difference between Steve and the other Klansmen is also Steve’s desire to avoid violence and conquer through words. This can be seen in Steve’s biggest confrontation with the Klan. After Leech has arrested all of the men of the county except for his own friends, Steve (who has just barely been able to escape his arrest warrant) takes Leech prisoner as a desperate (but in his mind necessary) attempt to ransom his friends. Despite taking these desperate measures, he still stands staunchly opposed to violence. The KKK shows up to claim Steve’s prisoner. Leech hears men’s voices coming from the room above him: “The men were a body of Ku Klux, and they were debating what should be done with him. Most of the voices were low, but now and then one rose. He heard one man distinctly give his vote that he should be

hanged, and judging from the muffled applause that followed, it appeared to meet with much favor” (515). Steve refuses to allow the men to take him. Rather, he ransoms Leech at Gray’s request in order to keep Leech safe. While Steve is driven to desperate actions in this scene, Page emphasizes Steve’s restraint as with contrasts to the violent vigilante actions of other men in the community.

Steve’s masculinity is also highlighted in contrast to Page’s description of Leech, whose cowardice and effeminacy are seen as the primary evils in the novel. When Leech arrests the other men, his lack of masculinity is highlighted: “Leech was feline. He oozed with satisfaction and complacency” (484). This language contrasts sharply with Mrs. Stamper’s description of Steve’s acting in the open. When Steve confronts Leech, his lack of masculinity becomes clear. Leech immediately pretends to recant, hoping to save his own life. “You know I was only fooling about what I said,” he claims. Steve, seeing through Leech’s hypocrisy, says, “Let’s drop our masks” (501). Steve’s masculinity throughout this section has been typified by his unwillingness to hide behind a mask, an unwillingness which Leech clearly doesn’t share. Rather than dropping his mask, Leech tries other tactics to get free, most notably attempting to bribe Steve (505). Leech’s cowardice and effeminacy stands in contrast to Steve’s masculinity, just as Steve’s restraint stands in contrast to the violent men around him.

Steve’s restrained masculinity is best understood in his courtship with Ruth Welch. Outside of this relationship, Steve’s actions could be understood as a mere apology for the KKK. While the crimes of the Klan were terrible, Page might argue, the crimes were not perpetuated by the real founders of the Klan, but by a bunch of low-class usurpers.<sup>30</sup> While this may be a part of

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<sup>30</sup> Martha Solomon Watson studies the public conversation between Page and Mary Church Terrell on lynching. Watson argues that Page makes a similar argument about lynching, displacing the primary blame for the problem away from the aristocracy and onto the lower class, in this case the African-American community.

Page's message, it becomes clear from Steve's courtship that his relationship to the Klan is supposed to underscore his larger non-violent strategy of masculine conquest. Before Steve first asks Mr. Welch to court Ruth and is rejected by him, he states to Gray his intent to "win" Ruth. He likens the courtship to a war. He says, "You don't know her. She's one of the proudest people in the United States, of her family. I tell you she could give General Legaie six in the game and beat him. By Jove! I wish one could do the old-fashioned way. I'd just ride up and storm the stronghold and carry her off!" (376). Steve invokes both chivalric and Civil War tropes in his framing of the conflict. He compares marrying Ruth to riding off as a knight with a maiden ("the old-fashioned way" that he is reading in *Idylls of the King* before the conversation). Also, he invokes General Legaie, the most prominent Civil War commander in the community. For Steve, marrying Ruth is a type of battle just as truly as General Legaie fought battles in the Civil War.

Steve's battle, however, is one of ideas. He is prevented from courting Ruth because of the difference between Mr. Welch's and his own politics. The only way he can "win" Ruth, then, is to win the battle of ideas with her father. Specifically, Steve must convince Mr. Welch that masculinity is a trait that transcends regional difference, making the two of them not all that different. Steve realizes this first. He refutes those who believe that, just because he is a Yankee, Mr. Welch must have something to do with the kidnapping of Rupert Gray: he says: "Major Welch certainly differs widely from you and me on all political questions—perhaps on many other questions. But he is a gentleman, and I'll stake my life on his being ignorant of anything like this. Gentlemen are the same the world over in matters of honor" (419). Steve sees Welch's honor primarily in his unwillingness to lie as a part of his suit to secure the Red Rock property. Even though Still has arranged the trial over the Red Rock property so that he



cannot lose, Welch is unwilling to accept a victory that he knows has been fraudulently won. He says, "I have lost what I put into it [his purchase of part of the property], which is a considerable part of all I possessed in the world. But [...] there is one thing I have not lost, and I do not propose to lose it. I am not willing to hold another man's property which he lost by fraud" (467). Like Steve, Welch does not act deceitfully. Rather, he acts openly and publicly on his convictions. Steve sees this as a trait of masculinity which transcends regional difference.

Welch does not initially believe this, however, doubting that Southerners can act as honorably as he. Both he and his wife have believed the stereotypes about Southern men that they have read in the Northern papers. When Mr. and Mrs. Welch discuss Steve as a possible suitor for their daughter, Mrs. Welch is concerned that her daughter would keep company with the likes of Steve. She asks her husband, "Do you think I would entrust my daughter's happiness to a desperado and a midnight assassin?" (381). Mrs. Welch's opinions of Steve have been softened by the reports of his dealings with the Klan, dealings which Page goes to great lengths to refute. Mr. Welch agrees that Steve should not be allowed near Ruth, though he is willing to allow for the possibility that Steve means well. Page writes, "In fact, though the Major had been astonished by Steve's proposal and had supposed that it would be rejected, it had not occurred to him that his wife would take it in just such a way" (381). He tells her, "Well, I don't think he intended it as an insult, and without intention it cannot be an insult. I think if you had seen him you would have felt this" (381). Welch's focus on seeing Steve suggests the importance he lends to acting openly. He believes in Steve's appearance and manner so much that, by the end of his conversation with his wife, he has agreed to "stand sponsor" that Steve will keep his word not to court his daughter without permission (381). In this conversation, Welch's opinion of Steve already begins to change, a change seemingly based on Steve's openness and honesty.

Welch's dealings with Steve continue to be negotiated through the term honor (in this scene shown through honesty), demonstrating that his own Northern masculinity aligns with Steve's, even if Steve is a defeated Southerner. The change in the relationship culminates in Steve and Ruth's wedding. This wedding is conceived of as a defense against Leech's attempt to make Ruth testify against Steve. Importantly, this testimony will be misused by Leech in a way that will propagate a lie about Steve. Leech's power is such that they cannot avoid this abuse, unless Ruth is allowed to not testify altogether. Steve initially refuses this plan, not wishing to "sacrifice" Ruth for his own protection (570). It is ultimately Ruth's parents that convince him. Page summarizes their conversation:

Steve told [Mrs. Welch] that while he had loved her daughter better than his life, ever since the day he had met her, and while the knowledge that she cared for him had changed the world for him, that very fact would not permit him to let her take the step she proposed. He would not allow her to sacrifice herself by marrying him when under a criminal charge, and with a sentence staring him in the face. Mrs. Welch adroitly met this objection with the plausible argument that it was as much on her daughter's account as on his that she desired it. She spoke for her husband as well as for herself. It would prevent the horror of her daughter's having to appear, and give testimony against him, in open court. (571)

This passage highlights the Welches' new trust in Steve's willingness to abide by his word. He continues to refuse to hide, in this case refusing initially to hide behind Ruth. When all parties realize that this isn't hiding (that, in fact, this is the most practical scheme to bring the truth to light because of Leech's corruption), he is willing to enter into a relationship that protects both parties. The Welches learn to see Steve as an example of the same restrained masculinity

practiced by Mr. Welch, and in light of this change of mind, are willing to unite the two families in an effort for propagating such an idea of manhood.

In *Red Rock*, Page imagines two kinds of masculinity. Gray represents militant reconquering of the South after the fashion of the conquering of the frontier. Allen represents an evangelizing of the most prominent Northern family in the novel; he conquers them through converting them to his frame of mind and convincing them of the necessity of union. Both of these versions of masculinity promise a restoration of union between North and South, as both resolve the political differences of the Red Rock community and allow the people to once again participate in the national political discourse. This reunion is possible through the re-appropriation of narratives of masculinity. Rather than purport a masculinity that is distinctly Southern, Page uses the narratives of masculinity that dominate the Northern discourse about the westward expansion in order to re-create the South as a frontier that has been populated with a new form of savage that must be conquered. This new conquest can be participated in by men from any region of the country, so long as they display certain traits (often negotiated through the rather ambiguous term “honor”). Thus, for Page, masculinity is a narrative that promises room for reunion of the South.

Faulkner, on the other hand, displays an anxiety about the assimilation that such a national narrative of masculinity suggests. He portrays the same narratives of masculine identity as Page. Specifically in *Go Down, Moses* (1942), Faulkner’s characters see masculinity through the lens of conquering the land (through [over]cultivating its resources). This focus on conquering is effective in unifying Southerners and Northerners, as it is in Page. Faulkner’s focus, however, is on the negative effect that such assimilation has. The men in the stories are so focused on conquering that they fail to preserve their individual community in any real way.

These communities become lost in the aggregate, as do the people that comprise them. Thus, their focus on masculinity and imperialism is seen as a unifying force, but also as a force that can destroy the community.

Indeed, the conquest of the land is the one thing that connects the men throughout the novel.<sup>31</sup> Specifically, the men's conquest has left the land scarred and exhausted. Faulkner portrays conquest of the land to be a trait of masculinity that transcends regional difference. In *Go Down, Moses*, it transcends time as well. The original Native American inhabitants of the county focus on conquering as much as the European settlers. The chief of the local tribe is Ikkemotubbe-Doom, who is depicted not as some native innocent, but as an abusive plantation owner. The chief before Doom begins this relationship to the land: "The People all lived in the Plantation now. Issetibbeha and General Jackson met and burned sticks and signed a paper, and now a line ran through the woods, although you could not see it. It ran straight as a bee's flight among the woods, with the Plantation on one side of it, where Issetibbeha was the Man, and America on the other side, where General Jackson was the Man" (*Stories* 361). Issetibbeha begins cultivating the land as the white settlers do, and in doing so participates in their definition of masculinity by conquest. In *Go Down, Moses*, Doom also illustrates the same societal values of the neighboring white landowners, denying his son based on his mixed racial identity. Sam Fathers is the son of Doom, but Doom does not acknowledge Fathers, because he was raised by his mother and step-father, who are both black. Louis M. Dabney explains, "In becoming

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<sup>31</sup> Many critics have discussed the relationship between conquest and masculinity. Recently, this criticism has focused on the performance of masculinity by the black men in the novel. Jennie Joiner argues that Lucas's metaphorical conquest of the hearth (and Mollie) allows him to perform manhood when he feels emasculated next to Zach. Thadious Davis argues that such performance is a response to the depersonalization of black men under slavery and other racist systems. Further, Tracy Bealer argues that such a formation of masculinity leads to instability. In contrast, Terrell Tebbetts argues that Lucas is ultimately the only man in the McCaslin family to be able to repudiate this version of masculinity, ultimately choosing Mollie over conquest.

Doom's son, Sam acquires a father who will not acknowledge him, as Old Carothers and Sutpen will not acknowledge their black sons" (124). In this relationship, it is clear that the relationship to the land by the local patriarchs is not limited to the white landowners.

Further, the approach to land ownership represented by the plantation owners (both white and Native American) is not an exclusively Southern understanding of conquest. As a part of Reconstruction, the local patriarchs have allied with Northern business interests to exploit the land. General Compson notes the new business interests of the Southern planters: "You've got one foot straddled into a farm and the other foot straddled into a bank; you aint even got a good hand-hold where this boy [Ike] was already an old man long before you damned Sartorises and Edmondses invented farms and banks" (240). Further, the new business interests of the Southern aristocracy are tied with an industry particularly associated with the North, the railroad. The hunting land, which was once pure bottomland, has now been turned into lumber camps and railroads, with only a small section of the woods preserved to give the appearance of the original wilderness. These lumber camps and railroads connect the rural community to an area almost foreign. When Boon and Ike go into Memphis, they realize how out of place they are: "But in Memphis it was not all right. It was as if the high buildings and the hard pavements, the fine carriages and the horse cars and the men in starched collars and neckties made [...] Boon's beard look worse and more unshaven and his face look more and more like he should never have brought it out of the woods at all" (221). What Boon and Ike find in Memphis is a re-creation of the type of urban economy found in the cities of the North, an economy that is now infecting the South. Importantly, the prominent Southern families are complicit in this change. A worldview which values conquest of the land is shared by men in the book, and their conquest of the land is represented in the gradual destruction of the forest.

The rapacious conquest of the land is best represented in “Delta Autumn.” Ike notes how the forests of northern Mississippi have slowly been destroyed and replaced with mass-produced consumer culture:

Now a man drove two hundred miles from Jefferson before he found wilderness to hunt in. Now the land lay open from the cradling hills on the East to the rampart of levee on the West, standing horseman-tall with cotton for the world’s looms—the rich black land, imponderable and vast, fecund up to the very doorsteps of the negroes who worked it and the white men who owned it [...] the land in which neon flashed past them from the little countless towns and countless shining this-year’s automobiles sped past them on the broad plumb-ruled highways, yet in which the only permanent mark of man’s occupation seemed to be the tremendous gins. (324)

The rich land has been exploited for commercial ends, and now what remains are mass-produced neon signs and automobiles. These new commodities and the towns which contain them are “countless,” which connotes both ubiquity and indistinctness. Further, the land is now said to have “exhausted the hunting life of a dog in one year, the working life of a mule in five and of a man in twenty” (240). The richness of the land has been replaced by soulless, mass-produced composites of American culture. The towns lose their individuality, becoming cookie-cutter replicas of each other, and the result for the inhabitants is enervation.

Boon Hogganbeck comes to represent Faulkner’s critique of this treatment of the land; not only does he exemplify the rapacious consumption of the land, he also becomes a type for the enervated shell that such consumption produces. Ike comes across Boon sitting under a tree “alive with frantic squirrels” (315). Boon appears to be attempting to hunt these squirrels, but

failing because his gun has jammed. When Ike first sees Boon, he is “sitting, his back against the trunk, his head bent, hammering furiously at something on his lap” (315). His desperate hammering is matched by his tone when he yells at Ike: “Get out of here! Dont touch them! Dont touch a one of them! They’re mine!” (315). Boon’s attempt to possess the squirrel stands in stark contrast to the masculinity represented by the older hunting culture represented by Sam Fathers. Faulkner notes the inferiority of Boon’s masculinity: “Two beasts, counting Old Ben, the bear, and two men, counting Boon Hogganbeck, in whom some of the same blood ran which ran in Sam Fathers, even though Boon’s was a plebian strain of it and only Sam and Old Ben and the mongrel Lion were taintless and incorruptible” (183). Boon’s masculinity is something lesser than some supposedly past masculinity. He has been reduced to picking off squirrels from a tree. But his rapacity and subsequent decline are unmistakably connected to the rapacity of the corporations which are destroying the forest and turning it into the enervating commercial wasteland which Faulkner earlier describes.

The world of *Go Down, Moses*, then, is the paradigm of masculine imperialism in *Red Rock* come to fruition. Masculine conquest has been visited on the South, conquering and taming it. This conquest also re-creates it into an area so indistinct it could be anywhere in the country. Furthermore, the business interests of the South are so intertwined with that of the North, that Ike can hardly recognize the people in the towns around them. Faulkner’s main characters react to results of this conquest, trying to reformulate masculinity along an older pattern. They try to return to antebellum masculinity in an attempt to resist being lost to assimilation. Lucas tries to create himself along the lines of Old Carothers, hoping to gain the agency and power that comes with the role of patriarch. Ike (the heir apparent to Old Carothers’s patriarchy) repudiates patriarchy entirely, seeking instead a masculinity represented by Native

American spirituality. Both characters offer alternatives to the national imperialistic masculinity that is the baseline for individuality. Neither, however, is ultimately successful, and the seriousness of their failure is emphasized by their ineffectiveness at protecting the community. They are not able to return to being masters of their domestic spheres. Instead, such masculinity is lost forever in favor of the rapacious masculinity of national consumerism.

Lucas attempts to assert antebellum masculinity by writing himself as the legitimate heir of Old Carothers, the last legitimate male progenitor from his perspective. Lucas refers to Old Carothers generation as the time “when men black and white were men” (37). He sees himself as the only living descendent of this generation; he sees the white branch of the family as being more effeminate than he: “He, Lucas Beauchamp, the oldest living McCaslin descendant still living on the hereditary land, who actually remembered old Buck and Buddy in the living flesh, older than Zack Edmonds even if Zack were still alive, almost as old as old Isaac who in a sense, say what a man would, had turned apostate to his name and lineage by weakly relinquishing the land” (39). For Lucas, Ike’s repudiation of the land is weak and unmanly, and the fact that the McCaslin claim to the land (as the nearest relatives but Ike) comes from their mother makes it less legitimate. Lucas sees himself as coming from “the old time, and better men than these” (44). Further, Lucas perceives that race has cheated him out of his natural inheritance as an heir through the male side. He calls his situation a “paradox”: “old Cass a McCaslin only on his mother’s side and so bearing his father’s name though he possessed the land and its benefits and responsibilities; Lucas a McCaslin on his father’s side though bearing his mother’s name and possessing the use and benefit of the land with none of the responsibilities” (44). Lucas sees that racial ideologies have dispossessed him of his right to be a McCaslin, and therefore of his right to be acknowledged by his society as a man.



As a result, Lucas seeks to reestablish his masculinity by possessing the land. Lucas sees both Old Carothers's and the Edmonds' possession of the land as deriving from their masculine conquest. He says of Cass that he was "a McCaslin only by the distaff yet having enough of old Carothers McCaslin in his veins to take the land from the true heir simply because he wanted it and knew he could use it better and was strong enough, ruthless enough, old Carothers McCaslin enough" (44). Since Lucas sees that Cass becomes heir only through his strength and ruthlessness (just as Old Carothers had initially attained the land through strength and ruthlessness), Lucas attempts to gain possession of the land through his own strength, seeking to affirm his masculinity through his possession. Since he cannot attain actual title to the land, he substitutes the wealth of the land by searching for gold on the plantation. As Lucas continues to doggedly stick to his plan to find money, it becomes evident that this is an assertion of his masculinity. He tells Roth Edmonds, "I'm the man here. I'm the one to say in my house, lik you and your paw and his paw were the ones to say in his" (116). Even when Roth points out that Lucas's insistence is risking his relationship with his wife, Lucas repeats, "I'm going to be the man in this house" (117). Lucas believes he needs to find and control the wealth of property in order to claim his rightful place as the patriarch (as the man) of the plantation. He believes that he must mimic Old Carothers, reestablishing the plantation owner as the paragon of masculinity. Ultimately, he becomes not a paragon of Southern masculinity, but another desperate capitalist, rejecting his responsibility to his community in favor of gold.

On the other hand, Ike repudiates land ownership, trying to revert to a form of masculinity even more primitive than Old Carothers's. He sees this represented by his mentor Sam Fathers. Fathers's masculinity is based on his connection to the land. Faulkner seems to suggest this is based on some sort of arcane knowledge; according to Ike, "When [Fathers] was

born, all his blood on both sides, except the little white part, knew things that had been tamed out of our blood so long ago that we have not only forgotten them, we have to live together in herds to protect ourselves from our own sources" (161). Ike believes Fathers's mixed blood should have made him "his own battleground," but there is no outward sign of Fathers's struggle. Instead, he seems to be separate from society. Sam does not seem constrained by traditional racial boundaries. Even though Ike believes his black blood should determine that he behave as a black man, he did "White man's work, when [he] did work" (163). Most of the time, though, he sat around the general store talking, as if he had the same amount of leisure time as a landowner. For Fathers, his arcane connection with the earth is his progenitor; thus he is able (unlike Lucas) to still identify as masculine, despite his race.

Fathers passes on this connection to the land to Ike through the annual hunting trip. When Ike kills his first deer in "The Old People," Fathers anoints the boy with the animal's blood: "They were the white boy, marked forever, and the old dark man sired on both sides by savage kings" (159). This blooding is more than just symbolic. Fathers is responsible for Ike's training in how to successfully kill an animal in a hunt. Further, Fathers teaches Ike that his arcane knowledge of the land is more important than his actual heritage, or is at least a part of his actual heritage. Fathers takes Ike to find the buck the hunting party is searching for, but when he finds it, Sam keeps Ike from killing it. Instead, he greets the buck in what is presumably his ancestral language, saying "Oleh, Chief [...] Grandfather" (177). This greeting not only connects nature, in the form of the buck, to patrilineal ancestry—the buck becomes Ike's progenitor, and not Old Carothers—but it also establishes this connection between masculinity and nature rather than masculinity and conquest.

This connection becomes more pronounced in “The Bear,” where Fathers is connected to the elusive prey, the bear Old Ben. Faulkner portrays Old Ben as the patriarch of the bear world: “he’s the head bear. He’s the man” (190). Old Ben has earned his legacy: he has “earned a name such as a human man could have worn and not been sorry” (221). Old Ben, like the buck, is part of a legendary group of progenitors. Importantly, Fathers is part of this group as well: “only Sam and Old Ben and the mongrel Lion were taintless and incorruptible” (183). Fathers has become the progenitor he taught Ike to respect. He is the inheritor of the arcane knowledge, the legacy not built on the legitimacy of blood. This transformation of Fathers from Ike’s mentor to Ike’s progenitor is played out through the hunt for Old Ben. Fathers counsels Ike to approach the bear without a weapon if he wants to see him. Ike does. This does not stop the bear from being killed later that season, however, an event which puts Fathers on his deathbed: “the wild man not even one generation from the woods, childless, kinless, people-less—motionless, his eyes open but no longer looking at any of them” (236). The doctor diagnoses Fathers with shock, saying the condition is not fatal. Despite this, Fathers dies, perhaps with the help of Boon Hogganbeck. Fathers’s passing is timed with that of Old Ben and of Lion, Fathers’s hunting dog that is a patriarch to dogs in much the way Old Ben is a patriarch to bears. Further, Fathers’s passing coincides with the recession of the wilderness, indicating that Fathers’s masculinity has failed because of the prominence of the imperialistic masculinity that otherwise pervades the novel.

Ike’s attempt to repudiate imperialistic masculinity ultimately fails just as surely as Lucas’s attempt to revert to antebellum masculinity. Warwick Wadlington suggests, “Faulkner’s commentators have pointed out that Ike condemns himself to futility with his well-meaning decision to wall his desire off from such a flawed public, social world by giving away his

inheritance” (211). Margaret M. Dunn sees Ike’s futility in his inability to save the things he cares about: “In ‘freeing’ himself from the responsibilities of managing the McCaslin land holdings, Ike renders himself powerless to stop or at least appreciably retard the destruction of his beloved wilderness” (411). Further Carl E. Rollyson finds that Ike neglects his responsibility to pass on his realization about the flawed nature of Southern society to anyone else: “By not becoming actively involved in his heritage, Ike not only deprived Roth of a chance to see Ike’s principles in operation but left him to work out very complex problems for himself” (110). After all, Ike claims to be trying to make a better world for his son, but in the end, he does not succeed in having a son or passing on his knowledge in any way. Finally, Ike is unable to help characters like Mollie Beauchamp (in “Go Down, Moses”) in a way that might have been transformative.<sup>32</sup> By being unable to protect members of the community, both Lucas and Ike have lost the ability to act as “master of the house,” the distinctive aspect of Southern masculinity that would allow it to reassert itself in light of modern enervation. This failure reveals Faulkner’s anxiety that this distinctive Southern masculinity is lost forever, swallowed into the national aggregate.

Indeed, the inability to help Mollie in the final story seems to also mark the failure of Lucas to redefine his masculinity. Lucas’s failure to help his family is first seen in his willingness to break up his family instead of giving up his claim to the gold on his land. Lucas believes (wrongly) that Zack Edmonds is trying to divide his family by having an affair with

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<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that Mollie’s name is sometimes spelled “Molly.” Usually, “Molly” is used by black narrators (or more properly, in the dialogue of black characters, as Faulkner shies away from having black narrators), while “Mollie” is used in the dialogue of white characters and in the third person narration. I have chosen the latter for purely stylistic reasons. Faulkner generally uses conventional spellings in the third-person narration and unconventional spellings (when necessary) in the dialogue. As such, I assume that “Mollie” was supposed to be the convention. One might also argue that the question is one of authority, and Mollie’s name is connected to her identity, which means that the dialectical spelling might be more authoritative. It is also possible that this was an intentional inconsistency across Faulkner’s drafts.

Mollie, an action which he sees as an affront to his right as potential property owner. In response to this, Lucas violently confronts Zack with a straight razor. In this confrontation, Lucas's focus is not on his family. Instead, he is concerned with what he views to be rightfully his. He says, "You knowed I wasn't afraid, because you knowed I was a McCaslin too and a man-made one[...] You tried to beat me. And you wont never, not even when I am hanging dead from a limb this time tomorrow with the coal oil still burning, you wont never" (52). For Lucas, the threat of losing Mollie is not a threat of losing community, but an affront to his manhood. Lucas is concerned with what is rightfully *his*, not what is best for his family. As such, Lucas is reappropriated into the system, merely replacing the system of property that he sees as threatening him with a system of property of his own. This priority of ownership over community is repeated later when Lucas refuses to accept Roth's advice that he not risk a divorce in his attempt to find gold.

Mollie's behavior is an indictment of the men's inability to serve as protectors of the community. When she perceives that Lucas's greed is poisoning the family, she asks Roth Edmonds to try to get her a divorce. She explains she is worried that Lucas is going to find the gold he is searching for and that Lucas's greed is going to destroy the marriage of their daughter Nat and George Wilkins. She says:

Cant you see? Not that he would keep on using [the divining machine] just the same as if he had kept it, but he would fotch onto Nat, my last one and least one, the curse of God that's gonter destroy him and her that touches what's done been rendered back to Him? I wants him to keep it! That's why I got to go, so he can keep it and not have to even think about giving it to George! (118)

Her focus is not on her own self-interest, or establishing what is hers, but on saving her family from the obsession with property that has plagued both sides of the family.<sup>33</sup> She is able to work against this system of masculine ownership, using the threat of divorce to change Lucas's mind (ultimately Lucas does capitulate), rather than being reappropriated into the system of property ownership.

In *Go Down, Moses*, narratives of masculinity threaten the health of the family and by complication national unity. The dominant narrative of masculinity through conquest has left the land barren and the people enervated. Both Lucas and Ike attempt to return to an earlier masculinity, one represented by a symbolic male patriarch, Old Carothers for Lucas and Sam Fathers for Ike. Neither narrative of masculinity is able to help restore the family, however. Mollie gets no help from either Lucas or Ike in bringing Butch home to be buried amongst his family. The national narrative of conquest of the frontier has been successful; the South has been re-conquered along with the frontier, and all parts of the melting-pot accept such conquest as central to masculinity. Faulkner balks in light of this melting-pot, however, fearing that the importance of individual communities and the ability to care for them have been lost along with individual identity.

In Faulkner's works from before World War II, then, he expresses an anxiety about assimilation, an anxiety which continues to influence his public remarks after the war. Drawing on earlier Southern writers, Faulkner portrays the South as a family. Unlike the dominant national narrative of the melting-pot, however, the Southern family cannot assimilate all difference for fear of the loss of distinctiveness. This loss of distinctiveness is a threat to the

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<sup>33</sup> Specifically, she is preoccupied with her last child, the one whose loss would be the final straw for her. This connects her with the story of Israel and Benjamin, which she later cites in support of raising money for Butch's funeral.

South, for Faulkner, because such distinctiveness is needed in order to understand how to solve the South's problems. Speaking about the integration crisis, Faulkner writes, "So the Northerner, the liberal, does not know the South. He cant know it from his distance. He assumes that he is dealing with a simple legal theory and a simple moral idea. He is not. He is dealing with a fact: the fact of an emotional condition" (*Essays* 90-1).<sup>34</sup> Faulkner believes that the outsider cannot understand this condition, and therefore cannot fix it. Assimilation with the North only threatens to destroy the ability to perceive this distinctiveness at all.

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<sup>34</sup> Excerpt from "Letter to a Northern Editor." First printed in *Life*, March 5, 1956.

#### **Chapter 4: Faulkner's Shift toward Assimilation and the Postbellum Use of the Uncle Tom Character Type**

Faulkner's anxiety over losing individual and regional distinctiveness, which is shown clearly in his early works, diminishes in his novels from after World War II. The novels of the Cold War era, while not endorsing immediate integration, present the threat of communism as more severe and more pressing than the threat of assimilation. In his 1951 speech to the graduating class of Oxford (MS) High School, Faulkner summarizes the fear at the heart of his Cold War ideology: "What threatens us today is fear. Not the atom bomb, nor even fear of it [...] Our danger is the forces in the world today which are trying to use man's fear to rob him of his individuality, his soul, trying to reduce him to an unthinking mass by fear and bribery" (*Essays* 122-3). Before, Faulkner portrayed assimilation into the national melting pot as a threat to individuality. Now, he suggests instead that the forces of communism threaten individuality and argues that assimilation is America's strongest defense against this threat. In 1956, Faulkner writes, "our principal and perhaps desperate need in America today was that all Americans at least should be on the side of America; that if all Americans were on the same side, we would not need to fear that other nations and ideologies would doubt us when we talked of human freedom" (94). The need to unite as Americans, to assimilate into one national identity which can resist the threat of communism, becomes the principle narrative of nation of Faulkner's Cold War career. Though the need to unite becomes Faulkner's new focus, his Cold War novels also reveal a contradictory attitude towards the racial integration that such union of "all Americans" would necessitate. These novels support in their rhetoric a unified national identity, but nevertheless fall back into racist character types that belie his pro-integration stance. In 1948's *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner returns to the character of Lucas Beauchamp. While Lucas



continues to not be fully integrated into the community of Jefferson, Faulkner shifts the primary threat to the community to a lack of assimilation. The threat becomes fratricide, rather than racial difference, emphasizing the importance of a unified national family. In this shift, Faulkner creates a character which is a reaction to the stereotypical Uncle Tom, a stock character used in the postbellum period both to endorse and subvert the dominant national narrative. Faulkner imagines Lucas as subverting the Uncle Tom character type (and the narrative of assimilation which undergirds it), but he also refigures Lucas's society such that the racism which Lucas is subverting is a less pressing threat than fratricide. While Faulkner argues that a lack of unity within the national family is the primary danger to the nation and that racism is a scapegoat which the community uses to avoid facing the fratricide within itself, Faulkner contradicts his pro-assimilation rhetoric by ending the novel with an image of Lucas as inassimilable.

Perhaps because of the importance of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) as a part of the abolitionist movement, one of the most common recurring character types in the late nineteenth century is the "Uncle Tom," the old, former slave, still loyal to his master, who frequently serves as a narrator of stories. For authors of the Lost Cause movement, these uncles (such as Thomas Nelson Page's Uncle Edinburg and Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus) serve to ameliorate the guilt of slavery by portraying former slaves as happy with (and better off because of) their former condition. These authors use plantation narratives in support of American nation-building, narrating racial subjugation not as a violation of the idea of equality but as a mutually beneficial relationship that both slave and master elect to participate in, and an institution which unites rather than divides. Other authors use plantation narratives as possible sites of resistance for imperial ideology. Authors such as Charles Chesnut (Uncle Julius) have their uncles subtly undermine the authority of their former masters. These authors

expose the continued existence of a racial hierarchy in a national narrative that purports to be about equality. Thus, these authors expose the contradictions at the heart of imperialistic narratives without being polemic, creating a wider audience for their resistance. After World War II, Faulkner builds upon and revises this tradition. In *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner presents Uncle Lucas, whose refusal to be cast as an Uncle Tom is central to his character. He refuses to be characterized in either a way that will ameliorate white guilt or in a way which will couch his resistance in blackface. Instead, his resistance is in the open; he sees the forces of racism as the key threat to his identity and he publically and visibly resists them. The forces that Lucas resists are ultimately shown to not be as threatening as he initially supposed. Thus, Faulkner comes to terms with the legacy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by putting his uncle into a world where the threat to him was largely exaggerated. In this world, Faulkner shifts the focus to fratricide (and not racism) as the biggest cause of national weakness, a weakness which must be purged in order to be safe from the communist threat. Both the community's desire to avoid this reality by blaming Lucas for its own flaws and Lucas's open and public insistence on racism as the primary threat to the community serve as distractions from this needed purge.

I say that Faulkner "came to terms" with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because I believe that this particular legacy of the nineteenth century is one that Southern writers cannot ignore, since it is representative of Northern ideological conquest. Neil Schmitz argues that Stowe was so important in the abolitionist movement that she could not just be ignored by postbellum Southerners. He says, "Confederate generals surrendered to Grant and Sherman. These Southern writers surrendered to Harriet Beecher Stowe. Uncle Tom was the opportune figure, his text, his speech, the place where the unspeakable (trust) could be entertained, the impossible (love) regarded" (76-7). In re-imagining Uncle Tom, then, Southerners sought to re-imagine the

relationship between the South and the nation. When authors such as Page re-appropriate Uncle Tom into postbellum narratives, he seeks to assert that the South was more like the North than Stowe had suggested. There were Uncle Toms, but they were treated kindly and usually preferred their positions. The brutal plantation owner Legree was the exception, deplorable to both parties. Thus, Page ameliorates the guilt of slavery, creating a common ground on which to write a reunited nation with a place for the South. On the other hand, when authors such as Chesnut use Uncle Tom to subvert such imperialist narratives, they suggest that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* remained a crucial reminder that equality for all Americans remained a myth.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* not only plays an important role in nation-building in the late nineteenth century because Southern writers needed to surrender to the text that defeated them; it also becomes a symbol for American progress nationwide, and as such reveals the tensions at the heart of American progress, namely that segregation remains the law in a nation that claims to be founded on equality. Barbara Hochman sees this tension on display at the World's Columbian Exposition, the World's Fair held in Chicago in 1893 to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus' landing in America. This fair was the first of its kind to be held in the United States, and it sought to highlight that American progress had made the United States a cultural equal to Europe.<sup>35</sup> At this fair, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was exhibited as one example of American progress. Hochman quotes one of the exhibit's organizers: “[Kate Brannon] Knight's account of the Stowe display stresses the genius, international standing, and universal appeal of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as well as its important role in the history of America as a nation” (83). According to Knight, the work is chosen not only as an example of literary achievement, but because it

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<sup>35</sup> The role of the 1893 World's Fair in shaping American ideas about progress was recently popularized in Erik Larson's *The Devil in the White City*. Though Larson's work is a popular history, and thus mixes scholarly research with fictional embellishments to appeal to a general audience, it is compelling in its presentation of the cultural impact of the fair.

represented American progress; it represented America's creation of a more equal society through constant struggle with racist institutions. Hochman summarizes:

Both the image of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a timeless work of genius and its image as a historical agent gave the book an important place in the master narrative of the World's Columbian Exposition—a story of irresistible progress, with the United States on the pinnacle of the evolutionary ladder of nations. As a masterpiece *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had helped raise the level of American literature; as an agent of history it had contributed to the nation's social progress. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* represented not only American's literary coming-of-age but also its moral, political, and cultural maturity. (85)

Hochman explores contradictions in this display, however, contradictions which obfuscated the racism still central to the American understanding of nation. She notes that various versions of the book were presented behind a glass case. Thus, the viewer's experience with the text was closely controlled. Specifically, she explores how the illustrations put on display avoided the themes of racial equality in favor of more universal themes.<sup>36</sup> She explains, "Herein lay the threat of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for U.S. culture at the turn of the century. Insofar as the book could be read as promoting racial egalitarianism, it still contained a hefty dose of dynamite, perhaps best left untouched [...] Thus, like the Stowe exhibit at the fair, many new editions framed the book as evidence of America's moral, political, and social progress" (101). By thus repackaging the novel around universal principles of literary excellence rather than the historical struggle for

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<sup>36</sup> Various versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were on display behind glass. The different editions were open to fixed pages, and the viewer (because of the glass) could not flip through them. Thus, the display designers could carefully control which illustrations the viewers were exposed to, and which ones remained unobserved.

racial equality, both those organizing the fair and those preparing new editions of the text were able to tout American progress, while hiding American realities.

Nineteenth century Southern authors returned to Stowe at a time in which Stowe had become a symbol of national progress, a symbol which they saw as particularly inflected with the South's defeat. In coming to terms with Stowe, then, they came to terms not only with the South's defeat in the Civil War, but also with the South's place within the new national progress. Their response is ambivalent, some seeking to re-appropriate the South into the narrative of progress and others seeking to use Uncle Tom as a subversive figure that undercuts this imperialist narrative. Ambivalence about the character of Uncle Tom is not created by these authors, however. Stowe scholars have seen a similar ambivalence in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* itself. Though scholarship about this ambivalence is voluminous, I would suggest that the ambivalence found in the novel itself foregrounds a similar ambivalence in later reiterations of the novel.

On one hand, some scholars have viewed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an attempt to narrate a specific version of American imperialism. David Grant argues that the site of Stowe's publication of the serialized novel is important in understanding its nationalistic agenda: "That Stowe chose to publish *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in an organ of the *political* anti-slavery movement, not in an abolitionist or otherwise moral or religious forum, suggests that there are affinities between the discourse of politics and her work" (430). This organ was specifically attached to the Republican party, which Grant notes was based on "the belief that the only strong and just society is one based on free labor" (430). Stowe, Grant would argue, is not only spreading abolitionist beliefs, but is also spreading Republican economic beliefs. Isabella Furth similarly sees *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as spreading Northern narratives of nation other than abolition. She argues, "the predominantly Republican espousal of abolitionism and the predominantly

Democratic invocation of manifest destiny display some striking convergences” (32). Furth explains, “Stowe resorts to the discourse of manifest destiny throughout *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, consistently presenting abolition’s aims in terms of the teleologies of expansion, with the attendant emphasis on claiming and converting territories and the pursuit of imperial designs” (33). For Furth, Stowe works toward manifest destiny through the domestic sphere, suggesting that controlling the home becomes a metaphor for controlling the nation. For both Furth and Grant, Stowe’s novel promotes a version of American imperialism that argues for more than just abolition. Slaves should be freed, but they should be freed to participate in a market economy which will help promote the doctrine of manifest destiny.

Other critics have argued that Stowe’s text works to subvert these same imperial narratives. Many of these critics explore how Stowe draws upon minstrelsy. Michael Rogin argues that minstrelsy is a primary medium of writing nationalism in the antebellum period. He says, “American blackface is a product of that moment. Yankee, backwoodsman, and blackface minstrel, emerging simultaneously in assertions of American nationalism [...] came to signify the new nation as a whole” (17). Of these new symbols of nation, Rogin argues that the minstrel was the most powerful and most enduring. Jason Richards argues that Stowe’s novel draws upon this tradition of minstrelsy, which both helps create and at the same time questions national homogeneity. He says, “Stowe’s black characters engage in acts of mimicry whereby they both hybridize cultural purity and reinforce homogeneity, revealing how racial and national identity is both a shifting and a stable phenomenon” (205). In evidence of this point, Richards considers the portrait of George Washington that hangs over the mantle in Uncle Tom’s cabin, arguing that the portrait is described in the novel as though George Washington were himself in blackface: “Stowe is drawing from the minstrel pantheon here. By blackening George Washington, she

invokes blackface pioneer George Washington Dixon [...] Like [Dixon's famous song] Zip Coon, the portrait satirizes African American self-making while at the same time threatening white cultural purity" (207-8). For Richards, Stowe's stereotypical portrayal of Uncle Tom also contains this element of satire. While Tom on the surface may seem the dutiful servant, he is also threatening cultural homogeneity in a subversive way.

This, of course, is a very brief discussion of Stowe criticism; however, I highlight this particular debate because it sheds light on the strategies which later Southern writers used to create re-iterations of Uncle Tom. On the one hand, some writers such as Harris used Uncle Tom to write away Southern difference, to make the South not really all that different from the North at all and thus easily assimilated. Just as Stowe uses her novel to narrate manifest destiny, these authors use Uncle Tom to advance an American imperialistic identity based on homogeneity. On the other hand, some authors such as Chesnut used Uncle Tom for his subversive potential. They subverted the national narrative by punching holes in the myth of homogeneity. In most cases, these are not two distinct groups. For all but the most didactic writers, these texts contain a little of both, creating and questioning the national narrative at the same time.

Before turning to the complexities of these texts, I will present an example of the more didactic use of the Uncle Tom character during this time period. As discussed in the previous chapter, Thomas Nelson Page's "Marse Chan" presents a sentimental version of a former slave, ameliorating the guilt over slavery. Previously, I discussed how this portrayal helps Page to write Southern manhood in such a way that it is compatible with Northern manhood. This story can also be read as a refutation of antebellum accounts of slavery. Whereas accounts of slavery such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* present the ultimate cruelty of slavery (even in the hands of kinder

slave owners), “Marse Chan” presents the former slave, Sam, as genuinely a part of the Chamberlain family. When his master Channing is born and the child is put in his arms, he reacts like an older brother rather than like a servant: “he put de baby right in my arms (it’s de truth I’m tellin’ yo’!), an’ yo’ jes’ ought to a-heard de folks sayin’, ‘Lawd! marster, dat boy’ll drap dat chile!’ ‘Naw, he won’t,’ ‘sez marster; ‘I kin trust ‘im’” (6). Sam continues to be treated like family for the rest of his life, ultimately reacting with true remorse when recounting Channing’s death. He says, “I couldn’t see, I wuz cryin’ so myself, an ev’ybody wuz cryin’” (37). There is nothing in the story to undercut Sam’s sentimentalism or the clear racism which undergirds it. His care for the family is not performance. The reader is to understand it as genuine.

And, I would argue, it is heavy-handed. Page is countering the accusations of Stowe and others that slavery is a cruel institution. By having his protagonist be a devoted slave longing for the good times on the plantation, Page reimagines Uncle Tom. Importantly, Page’s audience is the North. This tale is framed by a Northern traveler who recounts Sam’s story. Through this story, he seems convinced of Sam’s place within the family. When he first sees Sam, Sam is interacting with Channing’s dog, which stands in the story as the last remaining vestige of Channing himself. Sam is caring for the dog in lieu of the lost Channing, and the narrator observes that it was as if he were watching “what was merely a family affair” (3). Further, Sam’s last claim to the narrator is that he believes that Channing and Anne (the unrequited lovers that are the subjects of Sam’s story) will be reunited in the afterlife. The narrator agrees with Sam, attempting to assuage his grief. While the narrator may just be reassuring him out of pity, he does seem genuinely convinced of Sam’s role within the family. Page, then, not only defends the South against Stowe’s accusation using a re-iteration of her own character, he does so for a



Northern audience, successfully imagining grounds for national reunion. He portrays a South that is not as different as Stowe believes and creates a narrative framework for the North to correct its false perceptions and reunify the nation.

Not all uses of Stowe are so heavy-handed; instead most display the ambivalence about the national narrative that is evident in Stowe herself. Page's stories remain very important, however, and scholars judge other writers in this tradition through their association with Page. Charles Chesnutt and Joel Chandler Harris have both been variously condemned and embraced for their perceived closeness or distance from Page's plantation tales (and their racism). Harris and Page were contemporaries and acquaintances, trying multiple times to share a lecture tour. Edward L. Tucker traces this relationship, citing Harris's referral to Page as an "old friend" as support of the close association between Page's and Harris's work (274). Further, Chesnutt's work was seen as derivative of Harris's, an opinion which caused Chesnutt to fall out of critical favor for a time. Tynes Cowan notes how Harris's legacy affects Chesnutt's career: "Chesnutt is alternatively hailed as the first serious African American writer of fiction and spurned for following Harris and other plantation writers in perpetuating the myth of the glorious South and the stereotypical contented slave" (231). Cowan ultimately concludes, along with Eric Sundquist, that Chesnutt's relationship with Harris was mutually beneficial: "In other words, while there is much in Harris that Chesnutt had to reappropriate and re-form, Sunquist sees Harris as 'the first to pay careful tribute to the great complexity of inherited African American folklore'" (249).<sup>37</sup> For Cowan and Sundquist, both Chesnutt and Harris have perhaps been read too simplistically. While they do portray characters filled with negative stereotypes (like Page), portions of the tales, specifically the interactions between the tales themselves and their frames,

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<sup>37</sup> See *Sundquist, Eric*, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP), 1993.

undercut both these negative stereotypes and the master narrative of national assimilation that is their source.

As can be seen from the examples of Harris and Chesnutt, critics have sometimes been hesitant to look at the Uncle Tom character type for its subversive potential, emphasizing instead the negative stereotypes that this character type helps to perpetuate. As with Stowe's novel itself, however, critics have more recently focused on the subversive potential that also exists in these texts. Joel Dinerstein explores texts which he believes begin to attack the Uncle Tom character type: "In returning to the literary texts of Wright, Ellison, and Himes, I will change the register of the object of vilification: it was less Stowe's Uncle Tom that incited these authors to literary attack than what I will call the *Uncle Tom-mask*" (83). This mask was a performance that involved acting out subservience as a political strategy. Dinerstein argues that postbellum authors began to reject this mask, and this rejection came to fruition at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, as cultural scholars distanced themselves from the legacy of racism that surrounded the Uncle Tom character. Dinerstein argues, "In other words, the end of 'blackface'[by NAACP lawsuits that ended the last of the minstrel shows]— the white masquerade of transgressive rebellion—correlates historically with both the artistic slaying of the Uncle Tom-mask and the onset of the civil rights movement" (84). This cultural movement is understandable. The stereotypical image of Uncle Tom was so prevalent that it is not surprising critics decided it must be rejected entirely. Page's simplistic and offensive refiguring of Uncle Tom had won the day. The connection with Page that had plagued the reputations of Harris and Chesnutt continued to plague the legacy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

More recently, scholars have attempted to recover the ways in which postbellum reiterations of Uncle Tom were also occasionally used to subvert the master narrative of race and

nation. Specifically, scholars have explored the ways in which the uncles who tell trickster tales become tricksters themselves. One of the more common tricksters in these uncles' tales is Brer Rabbit. Harris's collection, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings. The Folk-Lore of the Old Plantation* (1880), is the most definitive. In this collection, Harris claims to collect trickster tales that he has heard in studies of folklore. He claims to be presenting these tales "without embellishment and without exaggeration" (3). Henry Louis Gates explores the importance of tricksters in African-American folklore, concluding that tricksters (in the African tradition) do more than subvert; they are transformative. *Uncle Remus*, according to Gates, is an example of a set of trickster tales that is subversive, but which ultimately instantiates the narrative that it seeks to subvert. Gates argues, "even sympathetic characterizations of the black, such as Uncle Remus by Joel Chandler Harris, were far more related to a racist textual tradition that stemmed from minstrelsy, the plantation novel, and vaudeville than to representation of spoken language" (176). For Gates, Harris is closely related to Page's tales. Though he does utilize genuine African-American folktales (tales which themselves have the potential to resist the narrative of slavery and racism), he uses these tales ultimately to reinscribe the narrative of white dominance.

One example of this is Uncle Remus's tale of the origin of races, which comes in the middle of his Brer Rabbit tales. In this story, Uncle Remus explains the origin of races to a young boy. This explanation seems initially to highlight the arbitrary hierarchy brought about by racism. The conversation begins when the boy notices "that the palms of the old man's hands were as white as his own" (141). Uncle Remus explains this by recounting a time when race was not an essential signifier. He says, "en, w'en it come ter dat, dey wuz a time w'en all de w'ite folks 'uz black—blacker dan me, kaze I done bin yer so long dat I bin sorter bleach out" (141). This period of racial equality is brought to an end when someone finds a pond that could wash

blackness away. Those that got to the pond first were washed completely white, and the later other people arrived, the blacker their skin remained. Thus, Remus creates an origin myth that emphasizes the arbitrariness of the racial hierarchy. Remus explains, “en dey wuz secha crowd un um dat dey mighty nigh use de water up, w’ich w’en dem yuthers come ‘long, de mostest dey could do wuz ter paddle about wid der foots en dabble in it wid der han’s” (142). This is Remus’s direct answer to the boy’s first question, but it also ties racial hierarchy to a monopolization of resources. Monopolization of resources, then, is the basis for inequality, not innate racial difference, a fact which would seem to be a subversion of the racial narratives that Remus was asked to explain.

Remus backs away from this subversion, however. First, he paints the time before the racial hierarchy as no different from the present time. He says, “en ‘cordin’ ter all de ‘counts w’at I years fokes ‘us gittin ‘long ‘bout ez well in dem days ez dey is now” (142). Racism is not the source of social problems. Instead it alters society not much at all. Further, at the end of the tale, Remus seems fixated on participating in the racial hierarchy he has been narrating, joining the boy in parsing the finer points of the hierarchy. Specifically, they discuss whether the Chinese or the mulatto is higher on the social hierarchy, a difficulty which Remus navigates by examining coarseness of hair. The implications of Remus’s creation myth would seem to subvert racism, and (if Harris did in fact record an actual African-American myth) the original creation myth may have been used in this context. Harris, however, retells this myth, but has his narrator Remus unquestioningly support the racist assumptions the tale has been undercutting, thus mitigating the subversive potential of the tale.

Indeed, Remus becomes the dutiful servant that ameliorates the Southern guilt of slavery, thus becoming another embodiment of Page’s uncles. Harris’s final depiction of Uncle Remus

involves Remus describing a fight he has been in to a white man he encounters. Remus assures his listener that he is “a mighty long-sufferin’ nigger” but that once the fight began “you des oughter see me git my Affikin up” (230, 231). This story endorses two key racist stereotypes. First, it depicts Uncle Remus as primarily the dutiful, longsuffering servant. Second, it depicts the bestial violence (the “African” in him) that threatens to consume him outside of the confines of servitude. Thus, slavery (and *de facto* slavery following the war) is a benevolent institution, causing Remus to follow his better nature. Gone from this depiction of slavery are any of the harmful abuses of the monopolization of resources on which Harris’s hierarchy is based. Importantly, Harris introduces this depiction of slavery in direct response to Stowe. He introduces his tales thusly: “I trust I have been successful in presenting what must be, at least to a large portion of American readers, a new and by no means unattractive phase of negro character—a phase which may be considered a curiously sympathetic supplement to Mrs. Stowe’s wonderful defense of slavery as it existed in the South” (4). Certainly, few modern readers would accept Harris’s characterization of Stowe’s work as pro-slavery. Like Page, Harris argues that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* depicts the horrible abuses of slavery, abuses which Southerners like Northerners abhorred. But these abuses, for Harris and Page, are exceptions rather than the rule. The rule is that slavery is a benevolent, positive institution, and this rule is ultimately narrated through the creation of these new Uncle Toms who are better for their experience with slavery.

If Harris shows the potential of the trickster tale to be reappropriated into the plantation pastoral of Page, Chesnut’s Uncle Julius (featured in 1899’s *The Conjure Woman*) has the potential to be not just subversive, but transformative. Elizabeth Ammons explains how simple subversion differs from transformation: “It is not simply a matter of trickster strategies being

subversive [...] If subversion is the sole purpose of a narrative or of an author's choices, then the whole project of that narrative or author remains totally defined in terms of the dominant culture's power and presence" (xi). In making this distinction, Ammons draws on Gates, who argues, "It is not sufficient merely to reveal that black people colonized a white sign. A level of meta-discourse is at work in this process. If the signifier stands disrupted by the shift in concepts denoted and connoted, then we are engaged at the level of meaning itself, at the semantic register" (46). He roots this argument on an alternative definition of "Signifyin(g)" which grounds signifying not just as a playful verbal tactic, but as a tactic which questions systems of meaning themselves. He says, "The alternative definition amounts to nothing less than a polite critique of the linguistic studies of Signifyin(g) [...] I cannot stress too much the importance of this definition, for it shows that Signifyin(g) is a pervasive mode of language use rather than merely one specific verbal game" (80). One reason Gates objects to Harris's use of the trickster is that it fails to signify on this level. While Harris uses African-American folk tales as his subject, he draws (as Gates argues above) more from the plantation tradition, creating a narrator who may play verbal games, but who does not upset the dominant system of creating meaning in any substantial ways.

Chesnutt, on the other hand, participates in such signifying. *The Conjure Woman* is (as the title suggests) all about transformation, undertaking exactly the type of work for the trickster tale that Gates imagines. Houston A. Baker argues, "There is, to be sure, justification for regarding Chesnutt's work as an expressive instance of the traditional trickster rabbit tales of black folklore, since his main character Uncle Julius manages to acquire gains by strategies that are familiar to students of Brer Rabbit" (41). The important distinction between these tales and Harris's is that the narrator is himself becoming a trickster. He is not just relating the tales as a

part of a linguistic game; he is using the tales to undercut the master narratives of the listener, who is almost always a representative of the plantation community of Page. Chesnutt's Uncle Julius works to punch holes in the national narrative that would seek to reunite North and South by forgetting the history of slavery. For Baker, the recurring theme of transformation represents Chesnutt's use of an Uncle Tom mask to signify on Uncle Julius's master John:

The fluidity of *The Conjure Woman's* world, symbolized by such metamorphoses, is a function of the black narrator's mastery of form. The old man knows the sounds that are dear to the hearts of his white boss and his wife, and he presents them with conjuring efficaciousness. In effect, he presents a world in which 'dialect' masks the drama of African spirituality challenging and changing the disastrous transformations of slavery. (44)

For Baker, Uncle Julius questions John's master narrative by acting out the same conjuration that he describes his characters participating in.

Julia B Farwell similarly argues that Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* attempts to replace a dominant master narrative through the use of conjuring. She summarizes, "while *The Conjure Woman* performs the critically acknowledged cultural mission of affirming a group identity bound by speech, experience, and tradition, its most important task may be to use a trickster strategy to confront white hegemonic misrepresentations of that group as distinctly 'other'" (79). Julius is a conjurer because his stories are able to transform his listeners (John and his wife). Before Julius's stories, John is attempting to inhabit the role of the paternalistic and benevolent master (like the ones found in the Page stories). Farwell argues, "Even if slavery is no longer legal, John fits easily into the southern plantation stereotype he's mapped out for himself as a gentleman farmer; he's deeply protective of his delicate (read feminine) invalid wife,

paternalistic and condescending toward Julius, and indulgent of his storytelling” (84). Julius is able to shake John from this role by creating in him a knowledge of another system of knowing: “Julius is a conjure evangelist who, through the ‘powerful goopher’ of story, indoctrinates John and Annie into sympathy with, if not faith in the possibility of transformation [...] Rather than blacks applying for position in white racist society, whites can become part of a black system” (88). Farwell also emphasizes the fact that in order to cause this transformation, Julius takes on the Uncle Tom mask.<sup>38</sup> She argues that “any possibility that we should regard Julius [as a stereotypical dutiful servant] is undercut by his manipulation of the Uncle Tom role” (81). Farwell argues that Julius uses the Uncle Tom mask to expose his listeners to a different way of knowing than the paternalistic binaries that undergird John’s master narrative.

Farwell’s reading is indeed convincing; her focus on binaries in dominant narratives gives us a framework with which to understand Chesnut’s critique. I wish to argue that one aspect of this master narrative that Chesnut is specifically critiquing is a narrative of nation that ignores racial inequality in order to bring about national cohesion. Important to this reading is the fact that the master whom Julius is tricking is a Northerner. John moves to North Carolina in hopes of finding a milder climate for the sake of his wife’s health. He considers himself a “pioneer,” a distinction which reveals that he associates himself with the narratives of westward expansion that are central to defining American masculinity (31). Further, his project in Carolina is specifically defined in terms of Yankee capitalism. He notes that he chooses the region

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<sup>38</sup> Richard H. Brodhead explores some of the socioeconomic conditions that made the plantation narrative the most effective tool for Chesnut to use to be heard. Brodhead argues: “It is not easy to tell for the *Conjure Woman* stories how ambivalent Chesnut felt toward this genre of writing. But his letters make clear that he saw the Joel Chandler Harris-Thomas Nelson Page formula as a deeply distortionary representation enforced by organs of dominant-cultural expression” (206). Chesnut re-writes Uncle Tom because this is the genre which could get him published in the best periodicals. He also was concerned with using this medium, worrying that the negative stereotypes associated with the stock characters he employed would outweigh the transformative use to which he put these characters.



because “the climate was perfect for health, and, in conjunction with the soil, ideal for grape-culture; labor was cheap, and land could be bought for a mere song” (31). While the health of his wife is a factor in his decision, his move is ultimately driven by capitalist motives; he wishes to take advantage of cheap labor and lands. John is a carpetbagger, desiring to bring a Northern version of capitalism to the South.

Uncle Julius ultimately becomes John’s employee, and the trickster stories that he tells are directed at John. While slavery is often the topic of these tales, Julius’s act of narrative subversion takes place in the present, with John as his target. Thus, Julius is not subverting the narratives that undergird slavery, but the narratives that undergird John’s capitalistic endeavors. Specifically, Julius exposes the fact that Northern capitalism, like slavery, treats labor as a commodity, dehumanizing those doing the labor. Julius’s conjure tales show this by describing how a slave, Henry, becomes magically connected to the life of the grape crop. Henry’s master, “Dugal’,” has an old woman “goopher” (that is to say, bewitch) the grape crop in order to keep his slaves from eating the grapes. He does not necessarily believe that whoever eats these grapes in the future will die, but he believes that his slaves believe it, and therefore that it will dissuade them from taking grapes. Henry, however, was not on the plantation when the goopher happened, and so when he later eats some grapes, he expects that he will die without having fair warning of the ban. Because of this unfairness, the old woman spares Henry, bewitching him so that he will not die but will instead grow young with the new crops and age with their harvest.

Julius describes:

When Henry come ter de plantation, he wuz gittin’ a little ole and stiff in de j’int.  
 But dat summer he got des ez spry en libely ez any young nigger on de plantation  
 [...] But de mos’ cur’ouses’ thing happen’ in de fall, when de sap begin ter go

down in de grapevimes. Fus', when de grapes 'us gathered, de knots begun ter straighten out'n Henry's ha'r; en w'en de leaves begin ter fall, Henry's head wuz baller 'n it wuz in de spring, en he begin ter git ole en stiff in de j'int's ag'in. (39)

The central result of the conjure is to directly connect Henry's life and health with the work of the plantation. As the crop grows, Henry grows; as the crop dies, Henry dies.

This change in Henry makes it impossible for his master to separate Henry as a person from the work he performs. His master discovers this when he is trying to decide whether to sell Henry. He ultimately decides he cannot, because Henry is necessary to harvest the crops. Julius says, "en seein' ez he wuz sho't er han's dat spring, havin' tuk in consid'able noo groun', Mars Dugal' 'cluded he wouldn' sell Henry 'tel he git de crap in en de cotton chop" (42). Henry's master is in an economic bind. On one hand, Henry is at his most valuable as a commodity in the spring, when the goopher has returned his youth and strength to him. Were he to be sold on the slave market in this state, his master would make more profit. On the other hand, Henry is needed to continue to make the crop healthy and profitable; therefore, if he were sold, the productivity of the plantation would suffer. Henry's master recognizes in this bind an inability to separate Henry's value as a commodity with Henry's value as a worker. Certainly, Henry's master does not see in this an indictment of slavery. Whether as a commodity or as a worker, Henry's master continues to see him for his market value.

Important to Julius's story is the arrival of a Yankee who attempts to profit off of the grape crop. His arrival emphasizes not the commodification caused by slavery, but how closely related (and more severe) the Northern capitalist system is to the plantation. Julius describes the arrival of this man: "De niggers soon 'skiver' dat he wuz a Yankee, en dat he come down ter Norf C'lina fer ter l'arn de w'ite folks how to raise grapes en make wine" (41). This stranger's

arrival is under much the same circumstances as John's own. Further, rather than offering an alternative to the system of slavery, he offers only an intensification of it. Julius explains, "Dyoin' all er dis time, mind yer, dis yer Yankee wuz libbin' off'n de fat er de lan', at de big house, en playin' kya'ds wid Mars Dugal' eve'y night; en dey say Mars Dugal' los' mo'n a thousan' dollars dyoin' er de week dat Yankee wuz a-ruinin' de grapevimes" (41). This stranger joins into the lifestyle of the Southern planter, taking it to an even more lavish extreme. Ultimately, his hope to improve the crop's production fails. The vines die, and Henry along with them. In both Henry's master's and the Yankee's economy, Henry is a commodity, but the Yankee's use of Henry is so severe that Henry dies. The arrival of the Yankee, then, does not result in a better, more humane system, but in an intensification of the existing system.

Julius's tale exposes the inequality that is central to the capitalist, expansionist narrative the John offers as an alternative to the Southern slave system. Julius exposes that a similar (and perhaps more intense) disregard for workers is at the heart of John's system. Julius does not allow the national narrative to scapegoat the South as the sole center of American racism. Rather, the postbellum expansionist narrative is also undergirded by racism, and Julius's tale emphasizes this fact. At the end of this tale, John's way of thinking is not transformed, however. He continues to see the world through the same worldview, assuming that Julius is a manipulative capitalist like himself. John suggests Julius's possible capitalist motives: "I found, when I bought the vineyard, that Uncle Julius had occupied a cabin on the place for many years, and derived a respectable revenue from the product of the neglected grapevines" (43). John goes on to conclude that Julius's lost income was replaced by the salary that John pays him once he buys the plantation. In this explanation, John misses the subversiveness of Julius's tale. He

continues to view the world as though everyone is driven by the rational self-interest that he sees as central to capitalism.

John eventually takes a more equivocal position to Julius's tales, partially due to his wife's acceptance of the tales. After one tale, when John is beginning to explain Julius's story through his profit motive, John's wife replies that she does not care whether the stories are factual: "these are mere ornamental details and not at all essential. The story is true to nature, and might have happened half a hundred times, and no doubt did happen, in those horrid days before the war" (92). John's wife begins to listen to Julius's story for the underlying meaning, seeing in his tales a revelation of injustice (though she does not yet connect these injustices to what is happening in her own time). John, perhaps because of his wife's urging, ultimately begins to view the tales similarly. He begins to acknowledge the "deceitfulness of appearances" (80). While he often uses this acknowledgement to decry Julius as a self-interested liar, he ultimately begins to apply it to his own knowledge, understanding that his observations about Julius may not have been accurate. By Julius's final tale, John is no longer able to ascribe any profit-motive to Julius's action. He says, "I do not know whether or not Julius had a previous understanding with Malcolm Murchison by which he was to drive round by the long road that day, nor do I know exactly what motive influenced the old man's exertions in the matter" (119). Further, one of John's final observations is that Julius has inexplicably acted against profit-motive. John says, "For some reason or other, however, he preferred to remain with us" (120). Julius's tales have ultimately had a transformative effect. Not only do they highlight the inequalities that continue to undergird the national narrative, but they also cause both John and his wife to recognize that there are alternative ways of seeing besides the rational self-interest through which they had previously weighed the world.

In *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner creates his own black uncle, one who draws on the history of how the Uncle Tom character was used during the postbellum period, but who refuses to fill this role. He will neither be subservient nor pretend to be so for political reasons. This character is Lucas Beauchamp, an old, African-American man who is accused of murder after he is discovered standing over the body of a white man with a gun in his hand. Lucas enlists the help of Chick Mallison, a young white boy, to help exonerate him. The tension of the novel comes from Chick's racing against the clock to prove Lucas is innocent before the citizens of Beat Four (portrayed as the center of poor white trash in Yoknapatawpha County) storm Jefferson and lynch Lucas. But Beat Four never comes. The town assumes that this is because it is Sunday, but when Chick meets the Gowries (the family of the murder victim), it seems as though they have no intention of going after Lucas. They are not part of a threatening mob, but part of a genuinely grieving family. Ultimately, Chick's detective work reveals that Crawford Gowrie had murdered his brother Vinson, emphasizing the crime of fratricide over the crime of racism. Lucas's racial difference remains a fact for both him and the community, but his potential lynching is replaced with the previously buried fact of fratricide. The primary danger to both the community and to the national family is self-destruction, not the racial Other.

In the way Lucas interacts with the community it is clear that he does not see himself as an Uncle Tom. He resists all attempts by the community to cast him in this role. In fact, it is this resistance that causes him to stand out, that makes him the perfect patsy for Crawford's crime. Lucas refuses to become the type of character presented by Page; he does not reinforce a narrative of racial harmony in order to create national unity. Lucas's lack of equality becomes less of a problem at the end of the novel, however. In earlier works, Faulkner has used characters such as Lucas to punch holes in a melting pot narrative that portrays all people as

equal. For example, Faulkner shows the ways in which Joe Christmas does not fit into the national melting-pot myth. Joe's difference remains central to the novel's plot, and his lynching (if it is to be called that) is the plot's climax. Here, Lucas similarly upsets any narrative that would suggest that race has ceased to be a problem in the U.S. If the Uncle Toms of Page and Harris assured readers that cruelty under slavery was an aberration and Southerners and Northerners were really equally opposed to such slavery, Uncle Lucas refuses to let himself be used in any narrative that will deny his inequality. Nevertheless, Faulkner switches focus from the destructive potential of racism (as seen in Joe Christmas's death) to the destructive potential of fratricide. Lucas's death is not the climax of the novel. His lynching never comes and likely never was coming.<sup>39</sup> While the crowd in the square wants to see the lynching, seeming almost to be a waiting powder keg, the spark never comes, and the crowd disperses nonviolently. If Lucas sees his racial difference as essential to his standing in the community, Faulkner seems less concerned finally with exploring this difference, replacing it instead with the threat of fratricide. So, though Lucas does not function as a dutiful Uncle Tom, Faulkner deemphasizes Lucas's racist treatment in order to show fratricide as the major threat to the community. Whereas Faulkner's earlier works have reminded readers that national narratives that promote homogeneity do damage by hiding the racist and sexist practices of the nation, this work (while still acknowledging such racism) focuses more on the importance of keeping the family together, even at the expense of dismissing racial violence as a lesser threat.

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<sup>39</sup> Donald M. Kartiganer similarly argues that the plot of the novel minimizes the threat of lynching. He says, "Not only does the lynching not take place, but as the novel gradually makes clear to us, it never could" (131). Rather than seeing this fact as a defense of Southern racial hierarchy, as I do, Kartiganer suggests that Faulkner's point is to show the parallels between Lucas and the Gowries, giving the two common ground which might be the foundation for assimilation. He argues, "Particularly significant is the novel's developing realization that Lucas and the Gowries, in many ways self-willed outcasts, indifferent to common opinion, prepared to offend, actually stand at the center of value in their community" (135).

In not being a dutiful Uncle Tom, Lucas joins in a traditional mode of critiquing the Uncle Tom character type. Baker describes an alternative means of resisting the Uncle Tom stereotype. Whereas writers such as Chesnut use the Uncle Tom mask to subvert the plantation tales popularized by Page, other writers do not operate behind such a mask. Baker explains, “Rather than aspiring to a mastery of form like Washington and Chesnut, the black poet chose the *deformation of mastery* as his strategy [...] Rather than concealing or disguising in the manner of the *cryptic* mask (a colorful mastery of codes), the phaneric mask is meant to advertise. It distinguishes rather than conceals” (51). Dinerstein calls this phaneric mask the “cool mask”: “With the Uncle Tom-mask repudiated and social equality a dream deferred, the mask of cool projected a collective history while signaling self-assertion, rebellion, withdrawal, secret knowledge, and a bored exhaustion with racism” (95-6). Importantly, Dinerstein sees the rise of the cool mask as coinciding with the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. He suggests, “The aggressive leadership of African Americans in this period can be read through a sudden backlash among white Southern liberal journalists during World War II” (87).<sup>40</sup> Because of this backlash, he argues, the Uncle Tom mask (the acted out subservience of African Americans as a tool for survival) was replaced with open political action, a mask that could be worn openly, whose visible presence was part of its political message.

Lucas Beauchamp should not be read as a character who wears Dinerstein’s “cool mask.” Dinerstein’s understanding is largely generational, and Lucas is still of the previous generation. He is not a Civil Rights activist. Though he wears his difference visibly, he couches it in the form of Old Carothers McCaslin. In fact, Lucas hardly seems like the type of character that

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<sup>40</sup> Dinerstein explores early reactions to a march on Washington which sought to secure defense industry jobs to African Americans. These and other political movements, he argues, serve as important precursors to Civil Rights activism, and their success encouraged the death of the Uncle Tom mask in favor of a more direct political strategy (87-8).

would be at home with this younger post-World War II generation. Nevertheless, Faulkner is writing from this time period. He is aware of the shift in the use of the Uncle Tom mask, just as he is aware of the growing Civil Rights Movement. So it should not be a surprise that Lucas shares some characteristics of racial portrayal during the time period of the novel itself. Lucas is indeed a relic from the plantation tradition, but he is also (like his contemporaries) unwilling to be written into this simplistic role. Nevertheless, Lucas's concerns are minimized throughout the novel. It is not that Faulkner finds his concerns false; the sympathy remains with Lucas throughout the novel, and the readers acknowledge that he has been treated unfairly because of his race. But the threat to him is not as severe as it at first appears, while the threat of fratricide is central and pressing. So, while Faulkner does not dismiss the critique of the Uncle Tom mask, he shifts the focus to national unity and away from highlighting racial inequality.

Lucas's unwillingness to wear the Uncle Tom mask is most clearly seen in his interaction with Chick. Early in the novel, Chick falls into a creek while hunting on a cold morning. The nearest house is Lucas's, so Chick allows his hunting companion Aleck to take him there to warm up and dry off. Chick tries to pay Lucas for this hospitality, but Lucas refuses: "'What's that for?' the man said, not even moving, not even tilting his face downward to see what was in his palm" (15). Lucas then throws the money on the floor and makes Chick take it back. This begins a cycle of Chick and Lucas giving each other gifts, as though in a contest to not owe the other. For Lucas, not accepting this money (and not acknowledging that he is owed it) is a denouncement of the idea that he is a servant, in need of payment for his kindness, rather than a member of the community being generous. Lucas criticizes Chick's assumption that he is a servant by reversing the servant-master roles in his subsequent interactions with Chick. One of Lucas's gifts to Chick is a bucket of molasses. Chick receives it, wondering why Lucas didn't



stick around to give it to him personally. Chick's mother explains, "He didn't bring it himself. He sent it in. A white boy brought it on a mule" (23). In this act of gift-giving, Lucas has reversed the roles. A white boy like Chick has become the dutiful servant, and Lucas has become the master staying at home on his plantation.

Lucas similarly refuses to fit into the role of dutiful servant in his relationship with other members of the town, leading to their ultimate accusation of him in the Gowrie murder. He goes into one of the Beat Four stores dressed in his grandfather's suit (his grandfather was a white plantation owner). The poor whites in this store see this as a refusal to act in the proper role. He should know better, they think, than to come into their store dressed that way. One of the men says to Lucas, "Keep on walking around here with that look on your face and what you'll be is crowbait" (19). Rather than conceding, Lucas says, "Yes, I heard that idea before, And I notices that the folks that brings it up aint even Edmondses" (20). Lucas's assertion of a white grandfather (and one who is of a higher socioeconomic class than their own grandfathers) infuriates them. They decide that they must make him act in a subservient role: "*We got to make him be a nigger first. He's got to admit he's a nigger. Then maybe we will accept him as he seems to intend to be accepted*" (18). Lucas knowingly antagonizes the men, not just refusing to fit into the stereotypes that they would want, but becoming a visible symbol of the falseness of this stereotype.

Lucas causes such a strong negative reaction in the men because he visibly undercuts the narrative of homogeneity which they accept, a fact on which Gavin Stevens fully elaborates. Gavin sees the South as a "homogeneous people" and Lucas as a threat to this homogeneity (150). He argues that the balancing out and erasing of Lucas's difference is essential preserving this homogeneity:

We are defending not actually our politics or beliefs or even our way of life, but simply our homogeneity [...] We (I mean all of us: Beat Four will be unable to sleep at night until it has cancelled Lucas Beauchamp ((or someone else)) against Vinson Gowrie in the same color of ink, and Beat One and Two and Three and Five who on heatless principle intend to see that Beat Four makes that cancellation) dont know why it is valuable. We dont need to know. Only a few of us know that only from homogeneity comes anything of a people or for a people of durable lasting value. (150)

This explanation reveals that Gavin sees the loss of homogeneity as the real threat in this situation. In Gavin's speech, he equates homogeneity with a racial hierarchy, one so natural that he refuses to even acknowledge it as an ideology.<sup>41</sup> He uses the term homogeneity to represent this order. Lucas threatens this homogeneity by not knowing his place in the racial hierarchy. He sees the lynching as a necessary evil to restore this balance. Of racial equality, Gavin says, "That's what we are really defending: the privilege of setting him free ourselves" (151). This statement by Gavin is not far afield of the men in the store who want Lucas to act like a "nigger" before they are willing to possibly let him act as he desires. For Gavin and these men, homogeneity means conforming to racial hierarchies.

Importantly, Gavin relies on national security as an excuse for his focus on homogeneity. Specifically, he posits the homogeneity of the South as a national alternative to the current defense against a European communist threat. At the beginning of Gavin's rant about homogeneity, he addresses U.S. political entanglements in Europe. He suggests that Anglo-

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<sup>41</sup> In many of Faulkner's public speeches and letters, he similarly refuses to acknowledge his beliefs about American freedom to be ideological. Instead, he calls communism an ideology, and American values natural. See Introduction, pg. 11.

Saxons are the only race in Europe who do not “actively fear and distrust personal liberty” (146). Further, he suggests that our current defense against such people is solely military: “we are hoping without really any hope that our atom bomb will be enough to defend an idea as obsolete as Noah’s Ark” (146-7). Gavin Stevens is one of the first of Faulkner’s characters to speak from the nuclear age. From this perspective, he suggests that a nuclear deterrent is not sufficient enough to win the Cold War. Instead, Gavin posits Southern homogeneity (and the racial hierarchy at its base, including that hierarchy’s requirement that African-Americans go slow and allow whites to free them at their own pace) as a national model. He says, “Then we would prevail; together we would dominate the United States; we would present a front not only impregnable but not even to be threatened by a mass of people who no longer have anything in common save a frantic greed for money and a basic fear of a failure of national character which they hide from one another behind a loud lipservice to a flag” (153).<sup>42</sup> Gavin, though critical of a certain definition of national character which he associates with the business interests of the North, is not suggesting that a common national character should be avoided. Rather, he suggests that the nation should embrace Southern homogeneity as a definition for national character that would be strong enough to resist the communist threat. In doing so, however, Gavin shifts the focus from the injustice facing Lucas to the danger of breaches of homogeneity. For Gavin, Lucas is not only a victim, but a threat to homogeneity because of his unwillingness to conform to a racial hierarchy.

Gavin’s opinion of Lucas and of homogeneity is seemingly endorsed when the crime is solved and Faulkner’s focus shifts from race (and Lucas) as the town’s problem, to fratricide. Lucas ceases to be a potential victim as the threat of lynching is slowly exposed to be

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<sup>42</sup> The beliefs Gavin states here almost directly mirror Faulkner’s own statements. See especially his essay entitled “The American Dream: What Happened to It?”, published in *Harper’s* in 1955.

exaggerated. Initially, the town assumes that the lynch mob will come immediately. Chick's initial reaction is that "They're going to make a nigger out of him once in his life anyway" (31). The town initially assumes that the Gowries will kill Lucas before he is taken from Beat Four. Then, when that doesn't happen, they assume that the Gowries are waiting until the end of Sunday. But when we finally see Mr. Gowrie, he seems to be genuinely grieving, not plotting a lynching. Gowrie shows up while the sheriff, Gavin, and Chick are unearthing the grave. At first, his appearance seems to be threatening; it seems as though he arrived to prevent their work, even with violence if necessary. Then, it is revealed that the sheriff invited him. While he is initially angered at the unearthing, Chick soon realizes that this anger is coming from genuine grief: "Chick thought suddenly with amazement: 'Why, he's grieving, thinking how he had seen grief twice now in two years where had had not expected it or anyway anticipated it, where in a sense a heart capable of breaking had no business being'" (158). Rather than revealing a man bent on vengeance, Chick's realization is of a man who shares human emotions with Lucas (the first grieving Chick refers to is Lucas's upon the death of his wife Mollie).<sup>43</sup> Despite his initial angry reaction, Gowrie consents to peacefully help the sheriff because he wants to know what happened to his son. He does not seem interested in blind vengeance. If Gowrie embodies the threat to Lucas, the revelation of his grieving alleviates the threat.

Rhetorically, Faulkner highlights that fratricide is the threat, and not the racial Other.

Lucas is exonerated, and the real murderer is revealed. What the community initially believes is

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<sup>43</sup> Doreen Fowler suggests that the repeated instances of exhumation can be read as Lucas's attempting to force Chick to exhume the repressed side of a patriarchal binary, which could result in Chick's learning to question the process of identity formation through exclusion. This reading usefully highlights that the repressed portion of the masculine/feminine binary is recovered in Nub Gowrie and Lucas, Chick learning to see both of them as having maternal, nurturing characteristics (grieving) where he expected paternal characteristics (violence). Fowler goes on to argue that Chick ultimately learns to embrace the world of his uncle Gavin instead, fully accepting the formation of identity through exclusion. See *Doreen Fowler, "Beyond Oedipus: Lucas Beauchamp, Ned Barnett, and Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust, Modern Fiction Studies 53.4 (2007): 788-820.*

a racially motivated crime is proven by the exhumation to be fratricide. Crawford Gowrie has killed Vinson Gowrie over some sort of business deal gone sour. This fratricide is specifically tied to the national security threat that Gavin has previously expounded upon. Clearly, Crawford Gowrie is consumed by a greed that would cause him to kill his brother in order to make a small profit. In addition to being a murderer, Crawford is a traitor to his country. He is “a deserter from the United States army defending his freedom from the United States government with a piece of armament captured from the enemy whom he had refused to fight” (161). He uses this same weapon to kill his brother. Thus, the weapon he should have been using to defend against “the enemy” in a united front he has used to destroy his own family. This fratricide, then, is not just a tragedy for the family; it is an example of the type of national character that Gavin believes is a threat to national security. It is the type of national narrative that Gavin suggests should be replaced with the homogeneity modeled in the South.

In the final scene of the novel, however, fratricide is again reburied. Rather than picturing a community transformed by the realization of the need for assimilation, Faulkner returns Lucas to his racially stereotypical role, highlighting his Otherness. This reburial belies the earlier rhetoric of assimilation. After Lucas is released from prison, Gavin, Chick, and Lucas fall back into their old patterns, resuming the game of one-upmanship which had been the foundation of Chick and Lucas’s earlier relationship. When he arrives to pay Gavin for his services, he recapitulates the payment of Chick at the beginning of the novel, showing that his experience in jail has not altered his commitment to not embodying the dutiful servant. Lucas insists on paying, refusing to take Gavin’s charity because it is an act of condescension. Lucas means to assert that he is a man able to pay his own way, as would be expected of a white man, and that he is not a servant in need of his master’s charity. He emphasizes this critique and

prolongs its visibility by making a scene of counting out the payment. Lucas counts out the sum in pennies, saying, “That makes it out [...] Four bits in pennies. I was aiming to take them to the bank but you can save me the trip” (240). Lucas again intends to reverse the servant/master relationship. Gavin resists, insisting that Lucas count the change. After Lucas does this, however, Lucas refuses to leave. When Gavin asks what he is waiting on, he replies, “My receipt” (241). Lucas again emphasizes that he is the employer, not the servant. Further, this give and take between he and Gavin (each attempting to get the other to be the more subservient) mirrors the gift-giving between Chick and Lucas earlier in the novel. Neither Gavin nor Lucas has changed. By ending with this image after switching the threat to fratricide, Faulkner highlights that Lucas has returned to his role as scapegoat. He becomes again the visible threat to the racial hierarchy that undergirds the white community’s definition of homogeneity. The revelation of fratricide has passed unnoticed, and the reader is left with an image of an inassimilable Lucas which seems to endorse Gavin’s view of racial hierarchy.

Faulkner’s Uncle Tom, then, is no Uncle Tom. He refuses to wear the Uncle Tom mask, and in turn refuses to participate in the myth of the idyllic plantation that would seek to erase racial violence. For *Intruder in the Dust*, Lucas’s failure to wear the mask becomes a threat in itself. Even though Faulkner first exhumes fratricide (violent divisions within the white family) as the primary threat to the nation, he quickly re-buries this revelation, allowing Gavin (and his go-slow ideology) to have the last word. Lucas is first exonerated and then becomes the threat again. While early in his career, Faulkner used his works to subvert a national narrative of homogeneity, refusing to overlook racial violence in order to reconcile the South and North, at this stage in his career Faulkner has become an advocate of assimilation, even to the extent of deferring racial equality for present stability. After revealing Lucas to be only a scapegoat for

the greater crime of fratricide, he allows Gavin to continue to scapegoat Lucas in order to keep the myth of Southern homogeneity alive. The South is no longer the inassimilable other; it is now the model of homogeneity that should be embraced by the rest of the nation. This shift in favor of homogeneity seems to be connected to Faulkner's growing belief that an external communist threat was the greatest risk for the perseverance of the nation and that internal division threatened to weaken America's ability to confront this threat. In response to communism, Faulkner argues that a go-slow racial hierarchy (and not the rapid, unmasked approach of Lucas or the NAACP) is the best response to maintain cultural homogeneity.

## Chapter 5: The Communist Other in Faulkner's Revision of the Southwest Humor Tradition

Most of the postbellum Southern works discussed thus far presuppose that the romantic plantation tradition is central to understanding the South. Even works which seek to de-romanticize the South do so by using the tropes of the Lost Cause romance. Works are full of magnolia and scuppernong, old colonels, plantation life, and New Orleans. Race, miscegenation and masculinity are central obsessions. While such works do dominate the postbellum landscape, they operate in contrast to an antebellum tradition of Southern (or "Southwest", as much of the South, particularly the trans-Mississippi South, was also still thought of as frontier, and thus Western) humor. Though Southern writers often sought to overcome the stereotypes of backwardness that were the legacy of this tradition, other writers such as Twain and Faulkner use tropes from this tradition. Specifically, both authors re-cast the Southwest humor sketch to switch the object of critique away from the Southerner. In the antebellum Southwest humor sketches, the frame narration allowed readers to approach the Southern Other from a distance, minimizing its threat. Twain redirects this frame narration, adding a second frame which re-casts the Northern narrator (and his imperialist narration of nation) as the new Other, thus criticizing an American identity centered on the assimilation of frontiers into new markets. Faulkner similarly criticizes the dominant national narrative of assimilation in his early Snopes stories, showing his anxiety that Southern individuality will be lost in the aggregate national market. Late in his career, however, Faulkner shifts his critique once again, alleviating the past threat of Snopesisim (and the fear of assimilation which the threat embodies) and replacing it with the external threat of communism represented by Linda (the Snopes who leaves Jefferson for Greenwich Village and becomes a communist sympathizer and friend of foreigners). Thus,



Faulkner uses the Southwest humor tradition to frame a new national Other, one not differentiated by racial, gender, or regional differences within the nation, but one differentiated by Cold War politics. This new national Other becomes the cause around which Faulkner argues that assimilation must occur.

The fall from grace of the Southwest humor tradition following the Civil War can be seen as a reaction against the negative, condescending stereotypes of Southerners that were propagated in these stories. James H. Justus argues, “From the end of the Civil War to World War I, the history of the South shrank—or, rather, it was apotheosized—into a mythic moment, almost outside time, in which striving and mobility were sweaty phases irrelevant to the blossoming of a cavalier nation” (19). Part of the purpose of this revision of history is to legitimize the Confederate nation, “to make secession a heroic act so that the former Confederates might salvage honor from military defeat and thereby obscure the self-destructive decisions of their political leaders” (20). In addition to this, Lost Cause romances could serve to reincorporate Southerners into a national narrative of nation. Southwest humor works counter to these goals, seeing the South neither as a legitimate nation of its own nor as a legitimate part of the American nation, but as a frontier which civilization has yet to reach. Justus argues, “the protorealistic spirit of these ‘amateur’ sketches invited readers to see their depiction of rawboned society as a truer reflection of the lower South before war made it into a nation” (3). Justus’s focus on nation is telling. Southwest humor presupposes that the frontier is not yet ready for nationhood. Thus, it is not surprising that Southerners intent on establishing themselves within a legitimate nation sought to replace this tradition.

One of the ways in which the Southwest humor tradition creates the South as a frontier not yet ready for civilization is by portraying Southerners as yokels not capable of fully

participating in civilization. In the seminal Southwest sketch “The Big Bear of Arkansas” (1841), Thomas Bangs Thorpe portrays Arkansans as connected to a more primitive culture. The story consists of a Northern traveler recounting a meeting with Jim Doggett, an Arkansas bear hunter. Of him, the narrator says, “It was also evident that there was some superstitious awe connected with the affair [the bear hunt]—a feeling common with all ‘children of the wood’” (685). For the narrator, Doggett is both not an adult and not a part of civilization, but of nature. This echoes the narrator’s initial description of Arkansans. He calls them “a ‘plentiful sprinkling’ of the half-horse and half-alligator species of men, who are peculiar to the ‘old Mississippi’” (677). Arkansans are so close to nature that they are more closely associated with animals than with the other passengers of the river boat. Further, Arkansas itself is seen as primordial, as from a time before civilization. Arkansas is “the creation State, the finishing up country; a State where the *sile* runs down to the centre of the ‘arth, and government gives you a title to every inch of it. Then its airs, just breathe them, and they will make you snort like a horse. It’s a State without a fault, it is” (678). For Thorpe’s narrator, Arkansas represents a territory that pre-dates civilization. He understands the settlers there to be closer to Native Americans (“children of the woods”) than other Americans. Though their soil is rich, their inability to cultivate it commercially represents their unreadiness to enter into adult civilization. Thus, he continues to look at them as primitives, as children.

Importantly, one purpose of the frame narration of this story (and others like it) is to shield the readers from too close exposure to these primitives. Justus summarizes the ongoing discussion of the purpose of the frame narration:

An older version of discursive bondage theory centered on “The Big Bear of Arkansas” (along with similar frame tales) as a parable of contention between the

elite and the rabble. Kenneth Lynn’s influential thesis—that such humor was warning, not celebration, that the box structure itself functioned as a *cordon sanitaire* to contrast the “morally irreproachable Gentleman and the tainted life he described”—presupposed that the humorists were really satirists of a culture they deplored. (49)

The examples of condescension given above would seem to support this idea. Thorpe’s narrator gives an account of the uncivilized, keeping them at arm’s length and laughing at them. Justus rightly points out, however, that this is an oversimplification of the narrator’s role. He points out many narrators’ willingness to engage in conversation with their subjects, to ask seemingly genuine questions out of real interest. He argues, “The willingness to suspend one’s sense of superiority, to be curious, to risk engaging in competitive banter with the undeferential commoner is crucial to the authors’ experience in the space they tried to make their own” (60). These narrators learn from their subjects, rather than the other way around. The narrator is not the “‘light-bringer,’ an American version of imperialism’s cultural emissary to the dark places,” but is instead questioning his own values in light of what he finds on the frontier (67). Despite this friendlier tone, such narrators continue to condescend to their subjects, often using them as simpletons against whom to compare their own political ideals

C.F.M. Noland, an Arkansas humorist and politician whose sketches appeared beginning in the 1830s, presents such a narrator, one who treats the Southern yokel as the national Other by satirizing his political opponents in light of him. Pete Whetstone (the fictional yokel character on whose behalf Noland would send letters to *Spirit of the Times*) often makes humorous, common-sense remarks that satirize government and social institutions. Pete writes, “I have been used to camp-meetings all my life, and I never knew it to fail, that *nine months after them*

there was *three times as many babies born* as at any other time of the year” (77). Though such a statement might be considered uncouth, it humorously and concisely points out a hypocrisy that Noland (as Pete) sees. Similarly, Pete is able to dismiss the high rhetoric of politics through this narration. He writes, “Well, we have some big speeches in t’other House: the way they say ‘Banks are contrary to the genius and spirit of the republican institutions and subversive of the great rights of the Democracy, as secured to them by blood spilt by our forefathers, who fought and bled in the revolution.’ *N.B. I picked up that scrap.* I am in a hurry, so good bye” (100). By dismissing this high rhetoric as a scrap, Noland suggests that rhetoric over current political situations (in this case, the support of a federal bank), is less than (and is perhaps drowning out) common sense. Examples such as this are numerous in Noland. Pete has a political career that mirrors Noland’s, and Pete consistently adds his humorous satire in support of Noland’s arguments in the Arkansas legislature. Even this identification, though, is a form of condescension. Noland essentially says that what he says politically must be true if even this yokel can understand it. For Noland, then, the Southwest humor tradition is primarily a mode of satirizing society rather than the frontier characters themselves.

Noland and Thrope use the frame narration of the Southwest humor sketch to write the Southerner as a national Other, to keep him as an outsider at arm’s length. They may sympathize with (or even like) the subject, but they also condescend to him. Difference remains central to the Southwest humor sketch; narrators remain both attracted to and repulsed by their subjects. Justus argues that this plays an important role in American nation-building, as it allows readers to re-imagine the Other in a way that he or she is not threatening. Native Americans, African Americans, and women (the most common Others in Southern literature) are almost entirely absent in this genre; they are replaced with a less threatening alternative, the backwards (but

ultimately white and male) yokel. Justus says, “the backwoods people in the crossroads and hamlets were exoticized as a harmless Other that could be regarded with benevolent curiosity because, unlike the threatening Other, they were redeemable, even at their stage of human progress” (276). The yokel, while at times representing a level of difference that the audience might find repulsive, at least has the potential for assimilation. Thus, Southwest humorists not only create a national Other against which their own understanding of nation can be honed (they are, they might argue, real Americans because they are more industrious than frontiersmen who live off the abundance of the land rather than their own toil), but they also create a world in which the Other is less threatening and assimilation is ultimately possible. The Southern yokel may be different from the Yankee businessman and uncomfortably so, but the yokel is also humorous and likable and not a violent threat to the social order.

Given that the Southwest humor sketch envisions an Other devoid of threat to the social order, it is perhaps not a surprise that this genre fell out of favor after the Civil War. Instead, postbellum authors envisioned a world in which difference results in war and separation. Nevertheless, the modes of Southwest humor remain influential for Southern authors following the war. Both Faulkner and Twain employ these modes, revising them to re-cast the national Other. Twain reverses the criticism of the Southwest sketch to criticize a national identity centered on the assimilation of new frontiers into new markets. Faulkner similarly criticizes the danger of losing individuality in a national amalgamation in his early works, but later posits assimilation as a necessary response to the growing external threat of communism. In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), Twain modifies the type of frame narration popularized in humor sketches to switch the direction of the audience's criticism by adding a second frame narration which criticizes the narrator as well as the subject. On one level, Hank

Morgan acts in the same role as the narrators in Thorpe and Noland. He observes sixth century Britons, noting their backwardness and creating a *cordon sanitaire* between the reader and them. Morgan paints the Britons as the Other against which Yankee ingenuity can be highlighted. The reader is also kept distant from Morgan, though. Twain himself serves as a frame narrator encountering Morgan in the present. Rather than sympathizing with Morgan and his views about the Britons, this second frame narration encourages readers to question Morgan's encounter with the Britons, as well as the American imperialism which this encounter represents. Twain, then, uses the modes of Southwest humor not as a tool of imperialist nation-building, but as a critique of an assimilationist national narrative.

Critics have often discussed Twain's encounters with a narrative of American nationhood which centers on expansionism and assimilation. Jennifer A. O'Neill summarizes the critical consensus that Twain's career sees a shift from patriotic support of imperialism to a strong critique of imperialism after his encounter with the American expansion into the Pacific. O'Neill argues that *Connecticut Yankee* anticipates this shift in attitude:

The transmigration of which Morgan speaks [...] involves the transposition of the entire U.S. system—economics, technology, politics, and everything in between—to a less powerful, less developed society. This extension of power and imposition of ideals on a society less advanced—once Twain's narrative inventions of time travel and enchantment are stripped away—is, clearly, pure imperialism. (5)

O'Neill goes on to argue that Twain is depicting this imperialism to expose it rather than to endorse it. Specifically, she suggests that Twain is arguing that cultural expansion may be good, but only if the colonized people have already been taught to shift their values. She says, "His

concern seems to lie in the forceful implementation of technology, capitalism, and other US-American ideals on a people who had not come to value them on their own terms” (7). For O’Neill, Twain’s concern is on the use of force as a tool of imperialism, not on imperialism in general.

On the other hand, John Carlos Rowe argues that placing too strict a timeline on Twain’s changing opinions can obscure meanings of *Connecticut Yankee* that might otherwise be plain. Many scholars have suggested that Twain’s shift in attitude regarding imperialism occurs late in his career (after the Spanish-American War), but Rowe suggests is more gradual, starting much earlier and being inflected by his earlier visits to Hawaii and by the subsequent debate about Hawaiian annexation. Rowe argues that *Connecticut Yankee* is a critique of tyranny masked as imperialism, a critique that is often mitigated by the assumption that Twain would have taken a more friendly stance toward imperialism at this point in his career. Rowe argues that it is “One of Twain’s most obvious literary treatments of imperialism, indeed one of the most obvious in nineteenth-century literature in general” (176). He also suggests that it is frequently overlooked as such; “One reason for this neglect is that *Connecticut Yankee*, published in 1889, belongs to the decade preceding Twain’s overt ‘change of mind’ about the dangers of colonialism and imperialism” (176). For Rowe, then, Twain’s critique of imperialism is far more pointed than it is for O’Neill. He says, “In exposing the ways that the usual tyrants would learn to disguise themselves as bearers of enlightenment and thus, emancipation from both despotic rule and the drudgery of everyday labor, Twain anticipates the more modern critique of neoimperialist strategies of ‘winning hearts and minds’ in the course of shaping consumers” (178-79). Despite Rowe’s and O’Neill’s distinction between the intensity of Twain’s critique, both position

*Connecticut Yankee* as a key text in understanding Twain's conception of how nation should be imagined in light of American expansion into the Pacific.<sup>44</sup>

Though the public debate over American annexation of Hawaii (and other American attempts to expand into the Pacific<sup>45</sup>) form a useful framework to understand the debate which Twain was entering, I argue Hank Morgan does not primarily see the Britons he encounters as being like Pacific islanders but instead as being like Southern yokels and Indians, the characters of the literature of the Southwest. Further, Morgan relates to these characters as the type of frame narrator found so frequently in Southwest humor stories. Richard Slotkin notes that Morgan frequently compares the Britons to Southerners and to Comanches. He suggests that Arthur could be read as a noble savage, or more aptly as a Southern aristocrat: "The relationship of aristocrats to a semienslaved lower class, coupled with the satire of chivalric myths, suggests the analogy between Arthurian Britain and the South of Mark Twain's past. The analogy is made explicit in the section of the narrative which sees the disguised Yankee and the king taken and sold as slaves" (121). Slotkin suggests that this latter scene develops along the formula of an abolitionist slave escape narrative. Scott Dalrymple similarly sees the civil war in Arthurian Britain as a stand-in for the American Civil War. He also notices specific similarities between the Battle of the Sand-Belt and the Battle of Vicksburg. For these critics, Twain is engaging in a national debate on the assimilation of difference, a debate which applies most directly at the time

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<sup>44</sup> Quentin Youngberg expands this discussion, suggesting that *Connecticut Yankee* can be seen as part of a conversation on nation which extends to the present day. He says, "As a literary work that examines the reflective ideologies of Hank Morgan and his medieval foil, the feudal court of King Arthur (which is, in reality, a mirror of Hank's own imperialistic attitudes), *A Connecticut Yankee* is also a screen in which today's reader may see reflected the many ideological conflicts in twentieth century global politics" (316). While the legacy of Twain's novel is not the primary focus of this chapter, I believe that the reminder that these conversations are ongoing is important.

<sup>45</sup> Susan K. Harris explores Twain's engagement with expansion into the Pacific, specifically focusing on Twain's reaction to the Philippine-American War. Interestingly, she compares Hank Morgan's educational strategy with that employed by the Americans occupying the Philippines, concluding that both believed that "the people they were retraining not only must know *more*, they must also know *differently*" (97). At the heart of this debate seems to be a question of whether those being taught were capable (or could be made capable) of being assimilated.



of publication to the expansion into the Pacific but which is narratively set in a previous conflict about assimilation, the Civil War.

While these critics are right to argue that *Connecticut Yankee* is influenced by Twain's encounter with the legacy of the Civil War, I wish to focus on Twain's use of the Southwest humor tradition to re-write American nationhood such that imperialism (based on assimilation of new markets) is no longer a central value. With these critics in mind, it becomes apparent that Hank Morgan is acting in the role of a frame narrator in the Southwest tradition. He is a Yankee encountering the Southern yokel and retelling his encounter for a Northern audience. In this frame narration, Morgan both protects his audience from contamination by these yokels and seems at times to be attracted to certain aspects of their society, namely those which can be understood as intensifications of Yankee ideals. Twain adds to this tradition, however, putting a *cordon sanitaire* on Morgan as well, surrounding Morgan's frame narration with another frame. This second frame creates distance between Morgan and the audience, causing the audience to question Morgan's version of imperialism.

Morgan's encounter mirrors the encounter of the narrators in Thorpe and Noland; just as the earlier narrators, Morgan is simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by the people he finds. Initially, the audience sides with Morgan; they encounter the Britons along with him and see them through his condescending eyes. He describes them as more childlike than himself, mirroring the description of Southern yokels in the earlier humor sketches. He says, "And plainly, too, they were a childlike and innocent lot; telling lies of the stateliest pattern with a most gentle and winning naivety, and ready and willing to listen to anybody else's lie, and believe it, too" (12). The naiveté of the Britons seems to be centered on a boisterous, overblown oral tradition. Though Morgan feels he can see through these stories (that is, feels that he is too

sophisticated to believe them to be truth), he is also on some level attracted to them. He says, “It was hard to associate them with anything cruel or dreadful; and yet they dealt in tales of blood and suffering with a guileless relish that made me almost forget to shudder” (12). Morgan, then, condescends to the Britons, but at the same time enjoys their stories on some level. Morgan even enjoys Merlin’s story on the first night he hears it: “It seemed to me that this quaint lie was the most simply and beautifully told; but then I had heard it only once, and that makes a difference” (16). Morgan is cast as the Connecticut traveler introducing these yokels to a Northern audience.

A majority of the repulsion seems to stem from the fact that civilization has not yet reached the Britain that Morgan encounters. For Twain, the lack of civilization is not represented by unimproved land. Unlike the Arkansas of the Southwest sketches, Britain is entirely settled; Morgan is not going on bear hunts in a forest but is travelling through settled farms. Nevertheless, the human settlements which Morgan encounters do not equal civilization (a condition directly related to the level of Yankee-ness of the land). Morgan summarizes, “I saw that I was just another Robinson Crusoe cast away on an uninhabited island, with no society but some more or less tame animals, and if I wanted to make life bearable I must do as he did— invent, contrive, create, reorganize things; set brain and hand to work, and keep them busy” (24). The comparison to *Robinson Crusoe* is not particularly apt; after all, Britain is inhabited. It has cities and society, institutions and social order. For Morgan, though, these do not count. They are not civilization. The Britons are “white Indians” (12). Morgan takes an inhabited land and re-imagines it as an empty frontier, fertile for the expansion of Yankee values.

Central to the lack of civilization in Morgan’s Britain is the presence of the aristocracy and the Church. If Yankee ingenuity is central to civilization, the aristocracy is central to backwardness and barbarism. Morgan recounts “*any* kind of aristocracy, howsoever pruned is

rightly an insult” (28). This statement seems to be based on Morgan’s belief that aristocracy leads to slavery, which leads to the arrested development of civilization. He says, “The most of King Arthur’s British nation were slaves, pure and simple, and bore that name, and wore the iron collar on their necks; and the rest were slaves in fact, but without the name; they imagined themselves men and freemen, and called themselves so” (28). Morgan believes that this *de facto* slavery results in a populace that blindly follows institutions. He compares the situation to slavery in America:

This was depressing—to a man with the dream of a republic in his head. It reminded me of a time thirteen centuries away, when the “poor whites” of our South who were always despised and frequently insulted by the slave-lords around them, and who owed their base condition simply to the presence of slavery in their midst, were yet pusillanimously ready to side with the slave-lords in all political moves for the upholding and perpetuating of slavery, and did finally shoulder their muskets and pour out their lives in an effort to prevent the destruction of that very institution which degraded them. (120)

For Morgan, slavery is something associated with aristocracy, and therefore something associated with savagery. Yankee ingenuity stands in sharp contrast to it, representing the potential to transform savage slave-holders into enlightened, civilized businessmen. Morgan imaginatively refigures the frontier, not making the relatively empty expanse of the Southwest the center for civilizing efforts, but instead making the settled parts of the South (which he sees reiterated in Arthurian Britain) the primary locus of savagism.

If Morgan is repulsed by the savageness of the yokels he finds, he is also strangely attracted to them. This attraction is connected to his view that these people represent a

burgeoning market for both the commercial products and the ideas of his Yankee strategies. One of his first acts as the king's minister is to begin transforming the Britons into a market for commercial goods. He does this by sponsoring knights, transforming their traditional heraldry with advertisements for his new products. As Morgan is travelling about the countryside, he encounters the fruits of some of his commercial enterprises. He sees a knight bearing a bulletin board which reads: "USE PETERSON'S PROPHYLACTIC TOOTH-BRUSH—ALL THE GO" (68). As the knight moves closer he sees an additional advertisement on his shield. Morgan describes, "And he was so fine to look at, with his broad mailed shoulders, and the grand leonine set of his plumed head, and his big shield with its quaint device of a gauntleted hand clutching a prophylactic tooth-brush, with motto: 'Try Noyoudont.' This was a tooth wash that I was introducing" (68). The humor in this scene comes from the close juxtaposition of descriptions of chivalry and American consumerism. But Morgan's introduction of these products is more than just a joke on the knights; it is a small part of his larger social agenda. Morgan not only wants to fill his coffers by creating a new market, he also wants to make a new kind of consumer. Morgan argues, "The first thing you want in a new country, is a patent office; then work up your school system; and after that, out with your paper" (31). Introducing the market for new products is just the first step in introducing a market for new ideas.

Morgan's attraction to the people seems to be that they represent a broad potential market, that they are an Other which can possibly be assimilated into the national capitalist system. He remarks that the majority of Britons are worth saving because they have potential value in the market:

By a sarcasm of law and phrase they were freemen. Seven-tenths of the free population of the country were of just their class and degree: small "independent"

farmers, artisans, etc.; which is to say, they were the nation, the actual Nation; they were about all of it that was useful, or worth saving, or really respect-worthy, and to subtract them would have been to subtract the Nation and leave behind some dregs, some refuse, in the shape of a king, nobility and gentry, idle, unproductive, acquainted mainly with the arts of wasting and destroying, and of no sort of use or value in any rationally constructed world. (43)

Here, Morgan elaborates on his distaste for the aristocracy and the *de facto* slavery that undergirds it. His complaint is not framed in morality or in human rights. His complaint is against the wasting of a market. The aristocrats are not constructive and therefore have no value. But a wide majority of the people have potential value that is being wasted by their association with this sterile class. Morgan sees his building of civilization as an increasing of economic productivity. He equates education with commerce in his building of “Man-factories.” He describes one of these factories to a Briton whom he is trying to convince to go there: “I’ll book you both for my colony; you’ll like it there; it’s a Factory where I’m going to turn groping and grubbing automata into *men*” (61). In light of his other statements, we should understand Morgan’s definition of “men” as people with a constructive value in a modern, capitalist (perhaps we should say “Yankee”) economy.

In the way that Hank Morgan is both appalled by and attracted to his subjects, his narration follows the contours and conventions of a Southwest humor sketch. Morgan’s narration does not stand alone, however, but is framed by a narrator who is a fictive alter ego for Twain. This additional frame undercuts Morgan’s narration, switching the role of the yokel and the narrator. Its presence undercuts Morgan’s status as the authority in the novel, causing the readers to question his tactics and assumptions and begin to see him as just another tyrant like

the ones he purports to be overthrowing. Further, the content of this frame (which ultimately exposes Morgan as a dying, unfulfilled charlatan) underscores Morgan's hypocrisy and suggests to the reader the destructive nature of the tactics that Morgan has proposed. In juxtaposing Morgan's ideals and tyranny, Twain suggests the destructive nature of a national identity centered on imperialist assimilation.

One of the earliest places Morgan's tyranny is seen is in the juxtaposition of his character with Arthur's sister, the overtly sinister tyrant Morgan le Fay. Allen Guttman notes many of the similarities between the two: "Hank Morgan professes his belief in American democracy and his disgust with the inhumanity of Morgan le Fay & Co. is real, but he is curiously eager to institute a standing-army and a West Point where his 'boys' can learn about 'siege-guns, 'field-guns, Gatling guns, rifled guns, smooth bores' and all the rest. More than a similarity of names links him to Morgan le Fay" (233-34). Guttman convincingly argues that Hank's militaristic desires and plans to overthrow Arthur and the Church closely parallel him with le Fay. Drawing a modern parallel, Guttman suggests, "In blunt terms, the Yankee is a vernacular version of the nuclear scientist who can turn atomic energy to peaceful or to warlike purposes—it doesn't make any difference" (233). While his goal may not be war—in fact it almost certainly isn't, Hank being primarily interested in bringing Yankee civilization (that is, creating new commercial markets)—he is willing to use instruments of war to achieve his goals. He believes that force will be necessary to ensure the survival of his schemes.

Morgan's role as a tyrant becomes clear at the final Battle of the Sand-Belt, as does his role as the character that is willing to dispassionately use extreme force. During the battle, the readers' sympathies are strongly with the Britons on whom Morgan is attempting to force his civilization. These Britons are humanized in the fifty-two young boys whom he recruits as his

only army. Even Morgan notes how pitiable they are: “Poor lads, it was pitiful to see, they were so pale, so worn, so troubled” (172). Rather than directly address their plights and remove them from danger, Morgan manipulates them into doing what he wants, a manipulation that he had premeditated over the previous days. As he begins his speech, he reflects, “it shows the value of looking ahead, and being ready for a thing when it happens. If I hadn’t foreseen this thing and been fixed, that boy would have had me!—I couldn’t have said a word” (172). Morgan’s deception having been effected, the battle begins in earnest. The battle shows Morgan’s willingness to commit dispassionate genocide in order to fulfill his political goals. Morgan uses his superior technology to indiscriminately slaughter the knights who oppose him: “Within ten short minutes after we had opened fire, armed resistance was totally annihilated, the campaign was ended, we fifty-four were masters of England. Twenty-five thousand men lay dead around us” (178). Despite Morgan’s initial joy, this event is not portrayed as a major victory, but rather as a tragedy which destroys the pitiable youths whom Morgan had deceived. Clarence (writing for Morgan after he falls ill) notes the destruction brought upon these boys: “We were in a trap, you see—a trap of our own making. If we stayed where we were, our dead would kill us; if we moved out of our defenses, we should no longer be invincible” (179). Morgan’s technology does not bring civilization to England. Nor does it ultimately bring a new tyranny under Morgan, though that seems to be the real goal of the enterprise. Rather, it brings death both to the old tyrants and the new. Thus, this conclusion casts doubt on the efficacy (and perhaps morality) of building a national character centered on imperialism.

Twain’s frame narration ultimately emphasizes this pessimistic reading of Morgan and his tactics and beliefs. After reading the manuscript, Twain sees Morgan as delusional, as suffering from a mental collapse that ultimately leads to his physical death. Twain finds him

huddled in bed, no longer being able to tell the real from the imaginary. He mistakes Twain for his wife Sandy, lost to him long before the Battle of the Sand-Belt. Twain describes, “He lay muttering incoherently some little time; then for a time he lay silent, and apparently sinking away toward death” (180). Any sympathy that the reader might feel for the wasted Morgan is undercut by Twain’s description of his final words. Twain quotes them: “A bugle?...It is the king! The drawbridge, there! Man the battlements!—turn out the—“ (180). Before finishing the statement, Morgan dies, leaving Twain to conclude, “He was getting up his last ‘effect’; but he never finished it” (180). Through the quoted word “effect,” Twain compares Morgan’s final incoherent mutterings with his many strategies to overthrow Britain. His words and tactics are not efficacious; Morgan is wasted not by age or circumstance, but rather his dilapidation is directly connected to the tactics and goals he has employed throughout his career, causing the readers to question them.

Twain, then, uses the tropes of the Southwest humor tale against themselves. While the traditional sketch uses the frame narration as a way to examine the Other from a safe distance and explore ways to begin assimilating these outsiders, Twain turns the gaze back onto the Yankee narrator and his assimilationist assumptions. Ultimately, it is not the Britons’ but Morgan’s narration of nation that is criticized. Faulkner’s early use of the Southwest humor tradition follows a similar trajectory. Faulkner switches the dynamic of the Southwest sketch not by adding a second frame, but by inverting the subject and narrator. In the Snopes tales, a Southerner is the narrator and a character who functions like a Yankee capitalist is the subject of criticism. Faulkner uses frame narration to cordon off the Snopes family from the community of Jefferson, holding them at a distance as distasteful outsiders. The Snopes come to represent the crass consumerism that Ratliff seems to believe is infesting the South. Thus, Ratliff’s early



sketch of the Snopes criticizes the national consumerism that threatens to destroy Southern distinctiveness; Ratliff's (and Faulkner's) anxiety is that the South will lose its distinctiveness by being assimilated into a national identity based on crass consumerism. As such, these early Snopes tales are another example of Faulkner's early anxiety over assimilation. Later in his career, however, Faulkner shifts the criticism from Northern consumerism to communism. He suggests that the threat of communism is so strong that assimilation into a national identity (even the one over which he had earlier shown anxiety) is a necessary protection.

Faulkner's Southwest humor sketches center on the Snopes, a white trash family which gains more and more influence in the community throughout Faulkner's novels. Peter Alan Froehlich suggests that Flem Snopes is Faulkner's primary Southwest character. Froehlich begins by asserting a definition of the frontier: "Frontier is not a line between settlement and wilderness but is in fact an irregular, illicit, and tenuous European settlement located *within* the wilderness" (221). Within this framework, one that Froehlich argues is primarily narratively created and may not historically exist, the frontier character is one who does not fit into the civilized East. He argues, "Because cultural categories were fluid and unstable there, the frontier attracted people who were marginalized or dispossessed within settlement culture: criminals, religious separatists, the landless, the poor, or radical individualists who sought to escape control of cultural institutions" (223). While Froehlich's list is more detailed, these character types are largely collapsed into one stereotype, the Southern yokel. While looking at the same types of texts discussed above, Froehlich argues that looking at each sketch only through the lens of the frame narrative reveals only half the picture. He summarizes, "The cultured narrator presents the frontier subject as a curiosity, with the understanding that the reader will join the narrator in laughing at the subject's rough speech and foolish behavior. But when the frontier subject gains

the floor, he often describes an episode in which he outsmarts or humiliates a representative of settlement culture” (225). This is exactly the type of character that Froehlich argues Flem Snopes is, a radical outsider who outsmarts the representative of settlement culture and thus represents a threat to this culture. Though Faulkner portrays Flem as such in his early works, as he retells the story of Flem late in his life, these threatening frontier elements have been ameliorated, and the threat has been shifted to his daughter Linda, whose connection with foreigners and communists has made her the new threat for the community. As such, the community (Snopes, Ratliff, and Stevens) must unite to dispel her.

Faulkner’s changing narration of nation is mirrored in his changing narration of the life of Flem Snopes. Appearing as early as “Father Abraham” (1926), Flem Snopes is the evolving central figure in the Snopes stories. While the basic arc of his life story was set very early on, Faulkner’s understanding of Flem increased as his career developed, a fact which Faulkner admits in the foreword to *The Mansion*. Particularly, I will argue, Faulkner retells the same stories about Flem multiple times, placing the stories in new frames as a way of exploring his changing view about the possibility of assimilation. One clear example of this is “Lizard’s in Jamshyd’s Courtyard,” a short story Faulkner ultimately incorporated into *The Hamlet* (1940). The short story is very different from the novel, painting a different picture of both Snopes and Ratliff (then called Suratt). In “Lizards,” Faulkner presents Flem as an outsider to the community, one whose moral character stands in sharp contrast to Ratliff. In *The Hamlet*, Faulkner introduces a frame narration that encourages the readers to look at Flem and Ratliff more closely together. Here Faulkner most explicitly draws from the Southwest tradition, juxtaposing the frontier character with the civilized one and emphasizing how Flem’s consumerism (and the Yankee capitalism which it typifies) would be a detrimental force with

which to assimilate. In the later iterations of Flem's story, particularly in *The Mansion* (1959), the threat Flem seemed to pose in earlier versions is resolved, and the threat is shifted to his daughter Linda, who has become an agent of the external communist threat through her exposure to foreigners. The Snopes (and the version of nation centered on Yankee capitalism which they represent) can, and indeed must, be assimilated into the nation in order to combat this new, greater threat.

The title of "Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard" suggests the thematic material that will concern the story. It is an allusion to a poem in *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* which describes the courtyard of the great palace of Jamshyd many years after the ruler's decline. The courtyard, once populated with riches and grandeur, is now populated by lizards and other wild things. Such is the Old Frenchman's place in "Lizards": it is "a fading dilapidation of broad formal grounds and gardens" (136). In one of these gardens, Flem Snopes buries treasure, knowing he is building on an old legend of gold buried on the place by the Old Frenchman. Mistaking Flem's gold for the Frenchman's gold, Suratt and his partners buy the place, later realizing they have been tricked, the figurative mine has been salted. They (Flem and Suratt both) are the lizards, the lesser creatures come to replace the aristocratic, noble past. The legendary riches of the Old Frenchman have been replaced with the few coins and trickery of a new generation.

These events are presented with a third person narration that isolates the events happening at the Frenchman's place. The story opens with the road: "So peaceful the road was, so healed of the old scars of man's old restlessness, that almost with the turning of the road appeared to have run immediately into another land, another world" (135). In this other world, the characters are given little background, with the exception of a previous trade between Flem and Suratt, a deal involving goats which resulted in Flem's making one dollar off of Suratt. This

account emphasizes the competition between Flem and Suratt (and the greed of both characters), but does little to explain how Flem's philosophy serves as an infectious threat that could be the demise of the community. The characters are the logical inhabitants of this other isolated world, being separate from the events of the larger world.

These same basic events make up the core of the final section of *The Hamlet*, but in the novel a frame has been added, turning Flem from an equal participant in the action to an Other whose capitalism is a direct threat to the community. Not surprisingly, criticism of the novel has largely focused on what the difference between Flem and the community is. Mauri Skinfill sees the difference as stemming from the changing economy of the South: "In the novel's final scene, in which Flem dupes Henry Armstid out of the last of his meager savings and Armstid ends by literally digging his own grave, Faulkner pronounces a verdict not on the shiftless underclass, but on the desperate fetishization of money produced by the demands of underclass subsistence" (169). John Lutz agrees that the novel is critical of capitalism, whose representative is Flem: "The tendency of the irrational desire for commodities to take precedence over the satisfaction of basic physical and psychological needs is central to the novel's criticism of capitalism" (75). Further, Charmane Eddy suggests Faulkner's critique of capitalism extends to a critique of the entire act of nation-building: In the Snopes trilogy, "Economy and labor ground America's misrecognition, whether explicitly, as in Horatio Alger's stories which figure forth American economic expansionism as innocent, individualist gain without consequences to others, or implicitly, as when America's continuing manifest destiny and progressivist motifs of social good erase the economic consequences of its expansion" (588). Other critics are less prepared to see the subject of the novel as so black and white. Richard Godden describes Flem's homemade shirts, which are both signs of his class mobility and (because of their stripes) its imperfection.

He explains, “I have been reading Flem against the grain, seeking two class trajectories (residual and emergent) where others have found one” (86). Godden also notes Ratliff does not appear in a vacuum, but his own actions are “class-inflected” (89).

Godden’s latter point is an important one. Flem is not the only businessman in the novel. Will Varner has been tricking people out of money in Frenchman’s Bend for years. Nor is Flem the only capitalist, Ratliff being a door-to-door salesman of sewing machines and other wares, not to mention a notorious trader. I would argue, then, that the critique of Flem in the novel is not purely economic. Flem is not bad because he makes money, though some characters may resent him for this reason. Flem, however, does represent a version of economics which ignores the community. Community here is an ill-defined term, but it seems to represent the group of people whom Ratliff sees as being like himself. Flem is a threat not because he is a capitalist, but because he is an outsider, an Other, and outsiders may have moral values that are disgustingly different from the community’s own. He represents a version of luck-and-pluck capitalism associated with the North, and this definition of capitalism, focused on the individual and not on the community, is the threat to the Southern system. The changes between “Lizards” and *The Hamlet* emphasize these different definitions of capitalism.

Indeed, the original version of Flem in “Lizards” shows Flem and members of the community as equally flawed, all being equally consumed with greed. The first section focuses on Henry Armstid digging for gold, and the rest of the story is a flashback to how he got there. The flashback, however, has Armstid as desperately greedy from the beginning. As Uncle Dick tries to find where the money is, Henry insists on continuing to dig. Similarly, Ratiff is shown to be greedy himself, stopping every few months at the Old Frenchman’s place to think about the gold and how it must be there. It is no surprise in terms of the story that these two greedy

characters would try to trick Flem out of money, while Flem himself would trick them. In *The Hamlet*, however, Flem becomes the source of greed, or at least its catalyst. Armstid becomes completely crazed with money only after Flem (or rather his agent, the Texan) tricks him into buying one of the spotted ponies. Mrs. Armstid is furious with her husband for spending the five dollars she herself had earned, and she talks the Texan into returning the money. The Texan agrees, but no longer has the money, having given it to Flem. Flem, in turn, refuses to return the money. Flem's difference is inassimilable. He is entirely different from the community, and his capitalist narrative of rags-to-riches American success stands in sharp contrast to the Southern, community-centered narrative of nation which Ratliff represents.

Flem's refusal to return the money leads to Armstid's desperate madness. Importantly, the final scene of the novel reminds readers of Flem's role. First of all, the presence of Mrs. Armstid bringing Henry food is imbued with more meaning, coming after her accusation of Flem and defense of her husband. In addition, Faulkner adds she would leave because "she had feeding and milking to do too, as well as the children's supper to get" (405). Faulkner reminds readers of Mrs. Armstid's role in providing for her family, and thus of Henry's negligence toward his family. In addition, Flem is added as one of the spectators for the event. He goes out of his way to pass by Henry on his way to Jefferson and the next step of his upward mobility. This behavior seems to confirm Mrs. Armstid's accusation of Flem. Flem completely lacks compassion for Armstid; he even goes out of his way to gloat over his victory. Further, Flem is separate from the community, not stopping as the rest of the spectators do, not leaning up against the fence and talking. Henry remains an example of the triumph of greed over the community, but Flem becomes the source of his flaw, a completely detached paragon of Yankee capitalism with which the community has no desire to assimilate.

Ratliff's narration of Flem as a threat emphasizes competitions between Flem and Ratliff in which the two are not equally flawed. In fact, some of the situations are exaggerated, suggesting the extremity of Ratliff's fear of Flem's Otherness. Ratliff becomes a champion of community, one who values the distinctiveness of Jefferson and its people over the Yankee capitalism of Flem. As already stated, "Lizards" recounts Suratt's preoccupation with getting his hands on the gold, even before Flem owns the Frenchman place. In addition, Suratt decides to buy the place as soon as he hears Flem has bought it, not after he sees Flem "digging" for gold: "When he learned that Snopes had bought the place, Suratt was eating dinner in Jefferson in the restaurant which he and his brother-in-law owned" (141). Suratt's interest in the gold is not caused by Flem; Flem just takes advantage of it. In *The Hamlet*, Ratliff narrates Flem as more of a dynamic force in shaping the other character's beliefs about the Old Frenchman's place. As Joseph Urgo argues, "Flem transforms Varner's land from a place of residence to a piece of property" (457), giving it market value over inherent value as property (i.e., fertility of land). Similarly, critics have seen Ratliff as challenging Flem not so much to get the gold, but to challenge the shift in the source of inherent value that Flem represents. David H. Evans says, "He is seduced less by the prospect of wealth than by the promise of the stability of truth, or more precisely, truth *as* stability" (486). Ratliff, like Henry, seems to be primarily reacting to Flem, opposing the negative force of change (or decline) which he represents in the Frenchman's Bend community. Ratliff's change in motivation from "Lizards" to *The Hamlet*, then, emphasizes Flem's Otherness and its threat to the Jefferson community, undercutting the national rags-to-riches narrative which would seek to assimilate individual communities such as Jefferson into a narrative that principally values Northern capitalism.

The difference between Flem and Ratliff, and the threat that Flem represents because of this difference is most clearly seen in the goat trading incident between the two. In *The Hamlet*, Ratliff gets the best of Flem, but gives up his monetary winnings in the interest of preserving the community. From the beginning of the scene, the difference between Flem and Ratliff is highlighted. Ratliff knows of a place where he can buy goats, but goes first to Varner's store and gossips. He decides to stick around town for the evening and go out to buy the goats in the morning, preferring the company of the other men to work. Ratliff thinks, "So he will have plenty of time. Because I believe I done it right. I had to trade not only on what I think he knows about me, but on what he must figure I know about him" (91). Ratliff has a long history with his client, so he believes he can be patient. Flem, on the other hand, rushes out in the night to buy the goats, after overhearing Ratliff talk about them. For Flem, this is a monetary transaction, not a trade based on a long relationship.

Despite Flem's beating him to the goats, Ratliff is able to recoup his losses (and make a profit) by cashing in some notes on Flem, notes written in his name by his cousin Mink. Ratliff is clear to walk away with a profit, but he ultimately decides to keep the note and burn it after he realizes that Flem is using his mentally challenged cousin's money for his own profit. Ratliff says, "So if I pay him his ten dollars myself, you will take charge of it as his guardian. And if I collect the ten dollars from you, you will have the note to sell again. And that will make three times it has been collected. Well well well" (96). Ratliff initially takes the note to be a simple promise for payment, but Flem has instead turned it into currency devoid of intrinsic value. In turning the note to currency, Flem has also disinherited his own cousin, the member of the family most in need of his protection. Ratliff realizes this and steps in to fill the role of protector, leaving Isaac a sum in cash equal to the note. Ultimately, then, Ratliff only loses out on the goat



deal because he recognizes an obligation to the community that is more important than money. More specifically, he realizes that the cash Flem seeks to spend does not have intrinsic value in the same way the distinctiveness of the community and the people in it do.

Ratliff's obligation to Isaac does not stop with the goat deal. Soon after, he finds out Lump Snopes has been selling tickets to watch Isaac sodomize a cow.<sup>46</sup> He takes it upon himself to stop this peep show. Importantly, Ratliff protects Isaac, but does not later protect Henry: he says, "Besides, I wasn't protecting a Snopes from Snopeses; I wasn't even protecting a people from a Snopes. I was protecting something that wasn't even a people" (354-5). He continues, "I never made them Snopeses and I never made the folks that cant wait to bare their backsides to them. I could do more, but I wont" (355). Ratliff's fight is not a defense of individuals. Rather, Flem seems to serve as threat to the imagined idea of community. Further, the extremity of this moral flaw in Flem highlights the extremity of Flem's difference. If Flem could have been forgiven for his earlier greed, his profiting from bestiality is unimaginably different. Flem is now portrayed as an infectious force (represented by the ever-expanding number of Snopeses that move to town). Flem is not properly to blame; "Snopes" is. He is no longer an individual who threatens to hurt other individuals; he is now a force which Ratliff must combat by controlling him with his narrative.

Flem's threat to the community only grows through *The Town* (1957); the same destruction that Flem has wreaked on Frenchman's Bend, he brings to Jefferson. By the last work in the Snopes Trilogy, *The Mansion* (1959), Flem has completely taken over the town. He is now living in an old plantation mansion; the old way of life has completely been enveloped by

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<sup>46</sup> In this scene, Faulkner inverts a Northern stereotype of the South. Whereas Thorpe portrays the bear hunter as more bestial than himself, Faulkner portrays a Snopes (a member of the family who embodies Northern capitalism) as bestial. The inversion is meant to be striking.

the new. Despite Flem's new prominence, by the novel's end the threat of Snopesism has resolved, and the Snopes are able to assimilate, at least to a degree, within the community. The assimilation is realized through the inclusion of a Snopes as a co-narrator of this final volume. The threat of Snopesism is ultimately replaced by a new and greater threat (the threat of communism embodied by Flem's daughter Linda), and this new threat is emphasized by being placed as the central object of criticism in the frame narration. Now, rather than a Northern narrator critiquing a Southern subject (as is true in Thorpe and Noland) or a Southern narrator critiquing a Northern subject (as is true in Twain and previously in Faulkner), both an assimilated community of Snopes and their previous adversaries critiques a common shared enemy. Thus, assimilation is made possible, even necessitated, by switching the definition of Other to a foreign subject.

*The Mansion* begins to re-write the previous Snopes narrative, this time highlighting the similarity between the Snopes and the leaders of Jefferson. Though Flem remains the paragon of Snopesism in *The Mansion*, Clarence Snopes reveals the full reach of the Snopes family. Clarence has been elected to Congress. This initially seems to be the logical extension of the spread of the infection of Snopesism, from Frenchman's Bend to Jefferson to Jackson to Washington. As such, it is not surprising that some spectators, such as Gavin Stevens, suggest that Clarence's election represents a serious threat to national identity. The barbarian is not only at the gate, but in Washington as well. Stevens says:

They think they are fighting Clarence Snopes. They're not. They're not faced with an individual nor even a situation: they are beating their brains out against one of the foundation rocks of our national character itself. Which is the premise that politics and political office are not and never have been the method and

means by which we can govern ourselves in peace and dignity and honor and security, but instead are our national refuge for our incompetents. (310)

For Stevens, the threat to the nation seems to come from the fact that national myths about honor do not hold in light of people like Snopes getting into office. Inherent in this description is a projection of all the qualities Gavin feels are evil onto Snopes.

In *The Mansion*, however, we do not just see the Snopes from the point of view of Stevens and his friend Ratliff, allowing us to question Stevens's own assumptions. Instead, Mink Snopes becomes a co-narrator with his previous adversaries. In Mink's section, the narrator (who seems to represent the knowledge of Mink, if not his exact words) sees the election of Clarence not as a new threat from the outside, but as a continuation of the small-town politics that have long defined Jefferson: "So Uncle Billy Varner had to do something with Clarence so he got a-holt of Flem and both of them got a-holt of Manfred de Spain at the bank and all three of them got a-holt of enough other folks to get Clarence into the legislature in Jackson, where he wouldn't even know nothing to do until somebody Uncle Billy and Manfred could trust would tell him" (62). From Mink's point of view, Clarence is the puppet, not the other way around. Clarence is a tool who has been appropriated into the existing system. Importantly, it is Varner and De Spain that set Clarence up. These are the antagonists of the previous two volumes of the trilogy. In *The Hamlet*, Flem tricks Varner out of his business and his daughter. In *The Town*, Flem tricks De Spain out of his business and his home. In *The Mansion*, however, the focus is not on these characters as victims of Snopesism. Rather, they are part of the same corrupt political system as Clarence.

In fact, the frame narration of *The Mansion* does much to break down the assumption that all Snopes are created equally (in kind, if not in intensity). Mink proves to be a different kind of

Snopes. This is not to say that Mink does not initially buy into the assumptions of the community. He admits, "I was probably pretty young, when I realized that I had come from what you might call a family, a clan, a race, maybe even a species, of pure sons of bitches" (87). Mink has internalized his Otherness; he, along with the community, sees himself as so different to perhaps even be a different species, something less than human. Despite this internalization, though, Mink is driven by his inability to come to terms with the underlying assumption that he and Flem are alike. First, he begins making exceptions for the Snopes who do not act as Flem does. He says, "I dont count Wallstreet and Admiral Dewey and their father Eck, because they dont belong to us: they are only our shame" (83). In order to explain the difference in behavior that he sees in these cousins, he assumes that they must be illegitimate, and therefore free of the infection of Snopesism.

Such illegitimacy cannot explain his own difference, however. He cannot understand how Flem seems to be exempt from the rules that he understands as governing his own life. He says, "if Flem Snopes was subject to the same outrageous misfortune and coincidence that the rest of us was, then we all might jest as well pack up and quit" (56). At the heart of this complaint is an understanding that Flem is not necessarily just different because he has succeeded, but is different in his very nature; Flem is "the one Snopes of them all who had risen, broken free, had either been born with or had learned, taught himself, the knack or the luck to cope with, hold his own, handle the They and Them which he, Mink, apparently did not have the knack or the luck to do" (35). Mink recognizes that he and Flem may not be the same, and that this difference may be rooted in either nature or nurture. Mink never resolves these questions; he never states with certainty that Snopesism is a construct against which people like Gavin Stevens are defining nation. He does see the holes in the myth, however. He does see that it doesn't

make sense that Flem is bad because he is a different species. Instead, Mink stays mad at Flem for what he has done, which is fail to support him in his time of need: “Long before the moment came when he had had to aim the gun and fire the shot, he knew that his cousin Flem, the only member of his clan with the power to and the reason to, or who could at least be expected to, extricate him from its consequences would not be there to do so” (3). Ultimately, Mink murders Flem in revenge for this perceived slight. Though the readers are not necessarily supposed to support Mink’s revenge, they are supposed to realize that Mink is beginning to see the holes in the local myth that all Snopes are Other and that every Other in some way must be infected by Snopes.

Mink’s murder of Flem ultimately seems to remove the threat of Snopesism from the community. Mink’s death resolves the threat that the Other poses to assimilation. In his death, Mink and other Snopes can be assimilated. In his death, Mink seems to find equality, imagining a new utopian vision of the world in which “wouldn’t nobody even know or even care who was which any more, himself among them, equal to any, good as any, brave as any, being inextricable from, anonymous with all of them: the beautiful, the splendid, the proud and the brave” (425). This utopian vision is explicitly related to American national identity in the way it compares to the westward expansion and the promise of equality on the frontier. Mink “thought *I’m free now. I can walk any way I want to.* So he would walk west now, since that was the direction people always went: west. Whenever they picked up and moved to a new country, it was always west, like Old Moster Himself had put it into a man’s very blood and nature” (434). Mink directly relates his newly found assimilation with the myth of the paradise of the New World. Mink's newfound equality is only possible in his death, of course, but it does also seem to propagate changes in the community that is left behind. With his death and Linda’s leaving of

Mississippi, there are no Snopes left, at least none that pose a major threat to the stability of the community. The paragon of the Other had been dispelled and seemingly not replaced. Further, both Stevens and Ratliff eventually sympathize with and assist Mink. Thus, the greatest opponents to Snopesism eventually see the problems with their own terms and are able to humanize at least a part of the group, making assimilation with this group possible.

Instead, *The Mansion* switches the identity of the Other to Linda Snopes, the communist sympathizer who comes off as particularly sinister given her role as the puppet master in Flem's murder. If this late iteration of Flem's story imagines that the assimilation with the Snopes (and the crass Northern consumerism which they represent) is not as threatening as was previously believed, it also suggests that the threat of Linda is the new unifying force which makes assimilation necessary. Though Linda is portrayed in her girlhood as a victim, when she becomes an adult, she moves at Gavin Stevens' expense to New York City, where she falls in love with a communist sculptor who lives in Greenwich Village. Gavin connects her relationship to the coming war in Europe (one which Gavin imagines, his story being set in the 1930s, but which Faulkner writing in the 1950s knew was surely coming). Gavin expresses concern about growing tyranny: "That one already in Italy and one a damned sight more dangerous in Germany [...] And the one in Spain that all he needs is to be let alone a little longer by the rest of us who still believe that if we just keep our eyes closed long enough it will go away [and] the ones right here at home" (160-1). Though Gavin initially describes the home threat in terms of domestic terrorists like the KKK, it becomes clear when Linda returns to Jefferson that the communist threat could be transferred to the community. Linda begins supporting a pair of immigrants that come to Jefferson. Chick recounts: "that was what Linda had, all she had in our alien capitalist waste this far from home if she really was a communist and communism really is

not just a political ideology but a religion which has to be practiced in order to stay alive—two Arctic Circle immigrants” (214). Linda begins meeting with these two, and subsequently communist messages begin anonymously appearing in public in the night.<sup>47</sup> Though Linda never claims these messages, Flem pays for the sidewalks to be clean, marking the town’s assumption that Linda was responsible and Flem needed to protect her honor. Linda, then, comes to represent communism to the town, and most find it threatening.

In Chick’s narration, however, the condemnation of communism is given in the conditional. As if to remove Chick’s doubts (Chick is attracted to Linda and may be biased in her favor) and affirm that Linda is the threat the town has feared, the novel’s ending highlights Linda’s sinister role in Flem’s death. Though Mink ultimately shoots Flem, Linda is clearly the one pulling the strings, controlling not only Mink but Gavin and Ratliff in the process. Gavin figures this out when he learns that she has used her inheritance money to buy herself a new car which she will use to leave town. He wonders why “she had let him discover the new Jaguar and what it implied about the circumstances of her so-called father’s death. It was because she knew she could not have kept concealed from him the fact that she had ordered the car from New York or London or wherever it came from, the moment she knew for sure he could get Mink the pardon” (425). She has been the mastermind from the beginning, hatching an extravagant plot to get vengeance upon her father for the death of her mother. She has tricked Gavin into becoming a murderer. He calls himself an “accessory before murder” (425). Gavin’s reaction is that Linda’s plotting has revealed a degeneration of society. He says to Ratliff, “There aren’t any morals” (429). Gavin frames Linda’s narration in such a way where she becomes the

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<sup>47</sup> The town is especially concerned that these immigrants will be able to convince the African-American community of Jefferson to embrace communism. This fact seems to suggest that though the town now sees the foreign threat as most pressing, it still sees this threat in racialized terms. See Faulkner’s own comments on “whites” and “non-whites” in “On Fear: The South in Labor,” originally printed in *Harper’s* in 1956.

mastermind that is the threat to Jefferson society. She, not Flem, makes a murderer out of him, and she, rather than Flem, ultimately leads to Jefferson's decline.

In the trajectory of the Snopes trilogy, we can see in microcosm the trajectory of Faulkner's career. In the early iterations of Flem's story, he is the threat to Ratliff. He represents a definition of nation based on Yankee capitalism and his assimilation into the community of Jefferson could lead to the end of the distinctiveness of Jefferson, could make it just another one of those cookie-cutter interstate towns Ike laments in *Go Down, Moses*. Faulkner, like Ratliff, balks at this threat of assimilation. Late in the Snopes trilogy, however, a more significant threat to the community overshadows Flem's difference. Communism becomes a threat which necessitates assimilation, moving Mink from a subject position to a co-narrator, and fixing Linda as the new object of criticism. Though Flem and Mink remain unlikable characters, their threat is alleviated, or at least lessened, by the new threat that Linda represents. By drawing on the Southwest humor tradition and Twain's revision of it, Faulkner is able to write through his anxiety about assimilation, finding it necessary in his late career to imagine a unified, homogeneous nation which could resist the new communist threat.



### **Conclusion: Faulkner's Conflicted Portrayal of Assimilation in His Most Famous Public Speech**

Through the course of this project, I have charted a trajectory in Faulkner's portrayal of nation throughout his career. His early works, I have argued, narrate a nation in which assimilation is a threat. The national family is in danger of losing its distinctiveness by being diluted by outsiders. Thus, Faulkner writes a counternarrative for the national myth of the melting pot, showing the assimilation at the heart of the melting pot narrative to be dangerous rather than salutary. Later in his career, I argue, Faulkner begins to show a greater threat to the nation than assimilation. Drawing on Cold War politics, Faulkner's works from after World War II demonstrate a fear of an external communist threat, and argue that assimilation is necessary to combat this external threat. Faulkner relocates the Other to Eastern Europe, and this new common enemy becomes the grounds for assimilation. This trajectory is not absolute, however. Faulkner does not entirely reject his anxiety over assimilation overnight and suddenly become an avid apologist of the melting-pot. Instead, as is apparent in his public comments about the integration crisis, both of these worldviews coexist in his works, even though they seem to be contradictory. He may switch the emphasis to fratricide as the greatest threat to the community, but he has not resolved Lucas's difference and allowed the community to assimilate him. Similarly, Linda may become the greater threat, but Flem and Mink remain distasteful outsiders.

Faulkner's most famous speech, his 1950 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, at first seems to be free of such contradiction, but taken in context of his other public remarks of the time it becomes an excellent example of Faulkner's conflicted attitude toward assimilation. Faulkner's acceptance speech suggests art as an alternative to the ubiquitous fear of the Cold War era. He says, "There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be

blown up?” (*Essays* 119). This constant fear, he argues, drowns out the more important questions that are common to the human condition. He says, “Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself” (119). This is a human problem; Faulkner calls the fear “general” and “universal” (119). Similarly, art is a solution that can help all of humanity escape this fear. Faulkner says that it is the poet’s “privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past” (120). These traits are universal, and the artist is able to save all of humanity by his or her appeal to these common virtues. This is assimilation written large, bigger both than the concept of nation and of region. This is also, perhaps, Faulkner at his greatest optimism, suggesting that in response to the threat of communism, not just America but all of humanity will be able to unite based on common virtue.

Elsewhere in his public writings from the same period, Faulkner reveals that he does not see these “general” virtues as equally being shared by all people. His definition of “man” excludes the racial Other. Faulkner envisions homogeneity in response to the communist threat. In *Harper’s* in 1956, he says, “our freedom must be buttressed by a homogeneity equally and unchallengeably free, no matter what color they are, so that all the other inimical forces everywhere—systems political or religious or racial or national—will not just respect us because we practise freedom, they will fear us because we do” (106). Here, he seems to argue for ideological, not racial, homogeneity, claiming that it is based not on “color” but on freedom. The beginning of this same paragraph would seem to belie this claim, however. He says: “Soon now all of us—not just Southerners nor even just Americans, but all people who are still free and want to remain so—are going to have to make a choice, lest the next (and last) confrontation we

face will be, not communists against anti-communists, but simply the remaining handful of white people against the massed myriads of all people on earth who are not white” (105). Though Faulkner says that the homogeneity that he envisions is ideological, he still imagines it in terms of race. Thus, though he seems to argue in favor of assimilation (of all Americans and all free people behind a common value of freedom), he fails to imagine this assimilation in non-racial terms. He still cannot imagine the homogeneous United States as a mixed people, still seeing them as white.

Ultimately, Faulkner’s reliance on a racial binary to express his desire for an assimilated America shows his continued anxiety about the possibility of assimilation. Though he pictures the universal values of his Nobel speech as a possible common ground for all free peoples to assimilate to resist communism, he also envisions these values as inherently white. Though Faulkner’s focus has shifted, his anxiety has not disappeared. He now sees the foreign Other as most dangerous. This does not mean that he has ceased to see the world in a racial binary. Though the shift in Faulkner’s portrayal of nation (and of assimilation within the nation) suggests the role the Cold War played in unifying all regions of America behind a common enemy, Faulkner’s public statements continue to reveal a writer with deeply contradictory views of assimilation.

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