

relationships across an era of integration as well as African American literary negotiations of the consequent discrepancies of identity. I mine James Alan McPherson's *Crabcakes* (1998), Andrea Lee's *Russian Journal* (1981), and Erna Brodber's *Louisiana* (1994) for their theoretical insights into the making and remaking of black subjectivity as a practice of the nation. These texts suggest how we might fashion identities that resist the fixed racial formulas of the United States—its racial binaries, its racial hierarchies, and its contradictory discourses of freedom and dispossession. Just as these black transnational narratives challenge nationalist constructions of a black geography and black identity, they also necessarily contest and revise the historical frames that facilitate these nation-based geographies and subjectivities. In doing so, these texts disrupt the historical borders that help constitute the dominant narratives of the civil rights movement and standard periodizations, such as segregation and integration, that have been used to tell a seemingly fixed story of inevitable racial progress within the nation. Together, these chapters identify legal and cultural sites—U.S. court rulings, the *New Yorker*, and the Federal Writers' Project—of nationalist discourses of geography, identity, and history and show how black transnational texts respond by undermining the fixity of these discourses and imagining competing constructions of black spaces, subjectivities, and time.

WORLDS BEYOND *BROWN*:
BLACK TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY AND SELF-NARRATION
IN THE ERA OF INTEGRATION

By

Shaundra J. Myers

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Advisory Committee:
Professor Mary Helen Washington, Chair
Professor Kandice Chuh
Professor Theresa Coletti
Professor Robert Levine
Professor Deborah Rosenfelt

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Dedication

For my great-grandmother B.H.P. and my grandmothers, J.M.B. and K.B.T.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1956, two years after the Supreme Court's landmark desegregation ruling in *Brown v. the Board of Education* and eight years after President Truman issued an executive order intended to end segregation in the armed forces, Langston Hughes published his second autobiography, *I Wonder as I Wander*, a text full of scenes of racial integration. In one particular story, he tells of two Americans, both soldiers—one black and the other white—who died together on the battlefield trying to rescue a wounded fellow soldier. The surviving men in the company, Hughes recalls, buried the two fallen soldiers together in a place called “No-Man’s-Land.” This story appears a fitting contribution within an era in which integration headed the domestic agendas of the U.S. Department of Justice, the Supreme Court, and the White House—fitting but for the fact that Hughes’ story is not about the then newly integrated U.S. Army. The story is about his experiences as a foreign correspondent during the Spanish Civil War in 1937. The soldiers killed in battle were black American Milton Herndon and a Scandinavian American named Smitty. These two men had joined the International Brigades—a racially integrated army of volunteers from more than 50 countries and colonies—to fight on the side of the Spanish Republic against Franco. That Hughes locates the promise of integration in the illicit, unauthorized acts of these two American soldiers in Spain and that he does so in 1956—a moment when the promise of integration *within* the nation was being

heralded—underscore his project of disrupting the containment of authorized narratives of integration within U.S. spaces.¹

Recounting the months in 1937 that he spent in Spain reporting on black Americans who had volunteered for the International Brigades to fight, independently of the United States, Hughes ponders their motivation for entering a war in a foreign country, finding them both puzzling and admirable:

Why ... were these men in the Brigades? With so many unsolved problems in America, I wondered why would a Negro come way over to Spain to help solve Spain's problems—perhaps with his very life. I don't know. I wondered then. I wonder still. But in my heart I salute them. And I tried to find the answers. (Hughes 354)

Hughes' interest in the black soldiers centers on how their voluntary participation in a Spanish war challenged accepted notions of African Americans' place—geographically, racially, and politically—in the world. The blacks who fought on the side of the Spanish Republic, members of the black Left who “regarded the Spanish Civil War as inseparable from the antifascist struggle in Ethiopia and the antiracist struggle at home,” acted not only outside the physical borders of the United States, but beyond the political parameters of U.S. citizenship (Kelley 6). In Spain, as members of the International Brigades, the black soldiers gave definition to the term “citizen of the world.” Hughes' questions acknowledge that the image of blacks

¹ An 1818 federal law prohibited any U.S. citizen from enlisting in a foreign army. Regarding the U.S. prohibition of American participation in the Spanish Civil War, Robin D. G. Kelley notes, “The U.S. government not only was prepared to punish volunteers for violating the federal statute of 1818 ...; it also placed restrictions on travel to Spain soon after the State Department discovered that Americans were joining the brigades. After March 4, 1937, all U.S. passports were stamped Not Valid for Travel to Spain. Thus, in order to enter Spain, volunteers had to pass through France and embark upon a treacherous climb over the Pyrenees mountains ...” (25).

fighting independently of the United States on behalf of Spain seems to many irreconcilable.

Hughes' *rhetorical* perplexity over Negroes going "way over to Spain" dramatizes another related problem: the *actual* perplexity of literary canon-makers faced with texts such as Hughes'—texts that venture beyond the perceived bounds of a black geography. African American literary canons, both critical and pedagogical, have generally underassessed, misclassified, or found no place at all for Hughes' and other African Americans' transnational narratives. This neglect and misidentification can be traced to what I call a *geographical protocol*: the expectation that "authentic" African American literature is set in the United States, venturing beyond its bounds only momentarily and rarely, most often to conventionally diasporic² spaces. My use of "geographical protocol" builds on literary critic Claudia Tate's argument that a "racial protocol for African American canon formation" has imposed "rules of racial representation" on the literature (5, 7). A geographical protocol, I argue, goes hand in hand with a racial protocol. Narratives of racial representation and resistance are expected to be mapped only onto the U.S. and diasporic landscapes where slavery and its residuals have been experienced.

The canonical demand for what is perceived as geographical authenticity is inherently tied to Robert Stepto's concept of a "symbolic geography," which he defines as a U.S. landscape that contains symbols of slavery and racism, as well as signs of African American resistance to those oppressive social structures. While a U.S. symbolic geography has been of great political utility in representing civil rights

² Africa, the Caribbean, Brazil, antebellum Canada, Paris, and more recently, the Black Atlantic are spaces conventionally associated in African American literature with a black diaspora.

struggles and demands for justice within the nation, the widespread tendency to map such a geography only in national (and narrowly diasporic) terms has marginalized the substantial number of works that seek to undermine U.S. racial projects from outside the nation or from transnational spaces within it.³ My aim here is not to dismiss the significance of U.S. and traditionally diasporic spaces in literary representations of African American identity formation. To the contrary, I seek to demonstrate how transnational narrative geographies incorporate, extend, and complicate the symbols, meanings, and implications of typically constructed black literary landscapes.

Scholarly treatment of *I Wonder as I Wander* reflects this geographical protocol. An account of Hughes' travel to Cuba, Haiti, the U.S.S.R., Soviet Central Asia, China, Japan, Spain, and France, the autobiography butts against his canonical reputation as "the poet laureate of Harlem"—a moniker that situates him squarely within the United States. In its biographical account of Hughes, *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition* (1998) mentions only Hughes' travel to Mexico. The *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (2004), probably the most widely used survey of its kind, gives only a slightly fuller picture of Hughes' travels, citing his trips to Mexico, Paris, the Soviet Union, Africa, and Haiti.⁴ References to Hughes in Soviet Central Asia, China, Japan, and Spain are

³ I borrow the term "racial projects" from Michael Omi and Howard Winant, who define them as vehicles for processes of racial formation that are "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines." As I elaborate throughout this dissertation, I find it useful to approach segregation and integration as "racial projects" that "connect what race means in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning" (56). For an explanation of racial projects, see Omi and Winant 55-61.

⁴ These sites are more easily incorporated into an accepted African American geography; Mexico, Paris, and the Soviet Union are acknowledged as racial havens of certain time periods, and Africa and

absent, likely because such locations are more difficult to assimilate into geographies confined to U.S. and conventionally diasporic spaces. More important than the quantity of references to international destinations, however, is the failure of both anthologies to address the impact of this travel on Hughes' work.

The enduring image of Hughes in Harlem, along with the relative lack of attention paid to his international experiences, especially beyond Paris, are part and parcel of a larger reluctance to envision an African American literary tradition in global terms. The expectations that have governed African American canon formation are similar to the racial and geographical assumptions about black identity defied by the black soldiers in the International Brigades. Like those black soldiers, texts such as Hughes' transnational autobiography seem irreconcilable—in this case, with a canon that gives priority to narratives enacted on U.S. and conventionally diasporic terrain. Such a canon lionizes Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, while it disregards his trilogy of travelogues about Ghana, Indonesia, and Spain. Such a canon yields virtually no scholarship on Andrea Lee's *Russian Journal*, despite its nomination for a National Book Award.⁵ Such a canon has been slow to encourage the transnational literacy required of scholars to engage the work of a substantial number of African American writers, including Hughes, Martin Delany, William Wells Brown, W. E. B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston, Lee, Wright, James Baldwin, Frank Yerby, Chester Himes, Lorraine Hansberry, Toni Cade

Haiti are key sites in an African diaspora. My project suggests the status of Japan and Soviet Russia as auxiliary black diasporic spaces. In doing so, my work also tracks how travel autobiographies themselves push the bounds and meanings of "black diaspora."

⁵ Harryette Mullen's talk, "Traveling Papers: Racial/Textual Transformations in *Homebase*, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, *Russian Journal* and *The Owl Answers*" (American Studies Association, Costa Mesa, 1992) is the only scholarship on *Russian Journal* that I have located.

Bambara, Toni Morrison, Collen McElroy, Jamaica Kincaid, Gayl Jones, Paule Marshall, James Alan McPherson, and Erna Brodber, to name a few. In its focus on the transnational aspects of African American self-narration within an ostensible era of integration, “Worlds beyond Brown” contributes in an as yet unaccomplished way to current efforts to reterritorialize (or deterritorialize) the field of African American literature.

“Worlds beyond *Brown*” examines black transnational autobiographical texts engaged in the conversation about U.S. integration from a transnational perspective. These narratives challenge domestically confined forms of integration by either negotiating racial identity and interracial relations, from places outside the United States, or by troubling the use of integration as a mechanism of national incorporation, from within the nation’s borders. The selected narratives were published after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, which made *de jure* segregation in schools unconstitutional, by authors whose lives were deeply shaped by social and economic policies desegregating the nation’s schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods.⁶ The texts considered, James Alan McPherson’s *Crabcakes* (1998), Andrea Lee’s *Russian Journal* (1981), and Erna Brodber’s *Louisiana* (1994), are written in various autobiographical formats, which I refer to collectively as self-narratives; each text navigates and often disregards the border between fiction and life histories, highlighting the overlapping terrains of these genres. McPherson’s memoir and Lee’s journal are products of their travels to places that were, at times, forbidden

⁶ Brodber, a Jamaican native who holds a doctoral degree from the University of the West Indies, was awarded in 1968 a Ford Foundation predoctoral fellowship to conduct research at the University of Washington. An integration-era funding program, the Ford fellowship initiative was established during the 1960s to help increase the presence of racial minorities in university and college faculties.

or unorthodox, namely, Japan and the Soviet Union. Brodber's novel—a communal life history—offers reconstitutions of the American South, the well-trod terrain of African American literature, recuperating the transnational currents that have historically traversed it. In seeking beyond U.S.-bound landscapes and subjectivities, or in transnationalizing them, these narratives resist the subtext of domestic containment underlying the U.S. project of integration, enabling them to imagine alternative modes of racial identity and interaction. Each text attempts to use non-U.S. spaces and practices to alter constructions of racial subjectivity and social relationships standardized by *Brown*, as well as to transform racialized narrative forms and strategies. Not merely travel accounts or texts set in foreign settings, these narratives, I argue, envision alternative racial subjectivities and relationships by explicitly transgressing geographical protocols and interacting inter- or intraracially in ways unavailable or inaccessible in standard constructions of the United States and the black diaspora.

“Worlds beyond *Brown*” considers the period known in the collective imagination as “integration,” a single era within a long and extensive history of black transnational literature and U.S. geographical protocols. My project here is to analyze black autobiographical texts—both fictional and nonfictional self-narratives—that specifically confront the symbolic geographies and the normative identities of integration, which are necessarily intertwined with and overlap those of segregation. In the past half century since the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, the decision has come to stand as a metonym for and a truncation of a longer, broader,

and variously more militant civil rights movement.⁷ In 1954 the ruling signaled a critical shift (albeit largely rhetorical) in the configuration of racial identities and relations in the United States. The decision's reach would eventually be broad and penetrating. Most Americans have experienced its ideological impact; the social policies spawned by *Brown* and the implicit ideals it conveys have shaped the very core of our beliefs, values, self-perceptions, and social relationships. Not only has *Brown* been the dominant ideal of racialization for the past 50 years, it has also been, as I argue here, an inconspicuous but key means of nationalizing African Americans, of containing them within and binding them to the nation. Examining black transnational narratives and their challenges of racial and geographical protocols in the era of integration helps cast light on the interdependence of race and nation, of identity and geography.

This study also explores the competing constructions of racial identity and interracial relationships in black transnational narratives and authorized U.S. legal and cultural discourse. Part of my goal here is to contextually analyze how official discourses have both proliferated and restricted the freedoms of modern subjectivity in the name of integration and how African American writers have negotiated and countered the unevenness of federally determined identity, in part by narrating autobiographical selves not bound by the nation. Through comparative analysis, I investigate the recurring discrepancies between black literary narratives of subjectivity and official narratives of subjectivity, such as laws, court rulings, and federal cultural projects, in order to understand how an unauthorized cultural realm

⁷ In my discussion of Erna Brodber's *Louisiana* in chapter 3, I take up the issue of this *longer* civil rights periodization that begins two decades prior to *Brown*, in the 1930s under Roosevelt's New Deal.

has attempted to resolve issues of freedom left unsettled in the official realm of the nation-state. By drawing to the surface the continuities between segregation and integration, my research works to trouble our common sense that integration *fundamentally* reversed or interrupted segregation. This project pushes us to consider integration not as a distinct historical moment that simply supersedes segregation, but as a period that has preserved elements of segregation's racial categories and practices even as it eliminates them. By depicting persisting struggles for racial freedom, African American transnational self-narratives offer a critical opportunity to rethink nationalist discourses of race by theorizing alternative forms of racial identity and relationships in a continuing era of integration.

CRITICAL CONTEXTS OF BLACK LITERARY TRANSNATIONALISM

My project works at the intersection of the genres of autobiography and travel writing in response to the hybridity of both genres. While scholarship on autobiography is arguably the most well-established field of African American literary criticism, discourse on African American travel writing is embryonic at best. Scholars of African American autobiography, including William Andrews, Robert Stepto, and Valerie Smith, have been concerned largely with analyzing identity formation and narrative strategies in exclusively U.S. contexts.⁸ For example, in *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1993), edited by Andrews, a comparison of North American, pan-American, and pan-African autobiographical traditions is the only transnational turn, the only manner in which

⁸ See Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (1988); Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative* (1991); and Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (1991).

the collected essays address the “increasing recognition of the international context in which African American autobiography studies can be situated” (7). Such treatment reinforces the national and conventionally diasporic limits (only the United States, the Americas, and Africa) of constructions of black geographies, and more importantly, it neglects the transnational formations *within* the U.S. autobiographical tradition itself. My project seeks to challenge and redefine the way that we think about the international contexts of subjectivity in black autobiographies in particular and the tradition as a whole, by contending with what happens to the autobiographical “I” when it either departs the United States or disrupts fixed borders of geography and identity from within the nation.

Scholars such as Farah J. Griffin and Cheryl J. Fish have more deeply mined the international contexts of African American autobiography in their focus on travel writing. *A Stranger in the Village: Two Centuries of African-American Travel Writing* (1998), an anthology edited by Griffin and Fish, includes 47 narratives, representing the broadest survey of African American travel literature to date. A major aim of publishing the collected writings—many never before reprinted or anthologized—was to demonstrate the “significance of mobility and its relation to subjectivity” in ways that anthologies and criticism privileging U.S.-bound narratives have not. The selected texts, the editors argue, push for a critical redefinition of “narrow or set notions of black subjectivity” (xiv, xv). Fish’s more recent work *Black and White Women’s Travel Narratives: Antebellum Explorations* (2004), an analysis of gender in the travel accounts of Nancy Prince and Mary Seacole, works in a critical space carved out by *Stranger in the Village*. Through the use of “mobile subjectivity,” Fish

argues, Prince and Seacole created multifaceted identities that enabled them to negotiate or alter a realm of womanhood circumscribed by gender, race, class, and nationality.⁹

Griffin's and Fish's projects significantly intervene in the geographical and generic exclusions of African American anthologies and criticism—the tangible features of a canon. Their anthology bolsters the work of the few literary scholars invested in African American travel writing and serves as an initial corrective to canonical omissions. Fish's work in particular confronts both the racial gaps in Americanist travel writing criticism and the gender gaps in African-Americanist/Black Atlantic studies of transnationalism. My project furthers their analyses of the intersection of international mobility and subjectivity, mapping out the specificities of such a relationship in late twentieth-century autobiographies.¹⁰

While discourse on black transnationalism is not singularly concerned with travel writing literature, it is the field of scholarship that has most coherently investigated the relationship between black subjectivity and international mobility. Emerging in the early 1990s, most notably in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), black transnationalism studies have

⁹ One of the more significant implications of Fish's study results from her reading of the freeborn Prince and Seacole against the dominant fugitive slavery narrative tradition. The dialectic that Fish reads between fugitive and freeborn travel narratives signals a distinctive freeborn genre through which alternative "experiences and identity formations for Africans in the diaspora have been produced and read" (Fish "Journeys" 227).

¹⁰ My work emerges out of a void in travel literature criticism, a field that has neglected African American travel writings. Most surveys and studies of travel and mobility exclude the work of African Americans from their conceptions of a travel-writing genre. Theories of travel and mobility established in the early 1990s, such as Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, approach the subject solely in terms of European and American traditions of colonialism, imperialism, and exploration. As Pratt's title suggests, travel-writing scholarship has been concerned mostly with a critique of the Western male gaze, interrogating the observations and interpretations of colonists, explorers, and tourists encountering "native" subjects. Even more-recent studies that have widened the scope of travel literature criticism, such as Sidonie Smith's *Moving Lives: Twentieth-Century Women's Travel Writing*, neglect works by African Americans altogether.

offered extraordinary reconceptions of African American identity and experience in international contexts.¹¹ *The Black Atlantic*, by far the most widely read study of black transnationalism, constructs a triangular zone of intellectual and artistic exchange between the United States, Britain, and the Caribbean through such travelers as Martin Delany, Du Bois, and Wright. As *The Black Atlantic* demonstrates, discourse on black transnationalism has been broadly interdisciplinary. Scholars such as Kate Baldwin, Brent Edwards, and David Moore have addressed the manifestations of black transnationalism in literature in particular. Kate Baldwin's *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain* (2002) examines the impact of travel to the Soviet Union on the writings of Claude McKay, Hughes, Du Bois, and Paul Robeson. In *The Practice of Diaspora* (2003), Brent Edwards discusses the impact of the cultural transit between black New York and black Paris on the Harlem Renaissance. David Moore has broken new ground by excavating six Hughes poems previously unknown in the United States—products of Hughes' travel to Central Asia—that existed only in Uzbek translation prior to Moore's English translations.¹²

Together, these studies have begun to reconstruct an African American literary history in vastly international terms. Their examples of racial and national identities formed across national boundaries have forced us to rethink the narrowly domestic terms that have come to define blackness in the United States. My project extends their work by beginning to tackle the significant and disappointing absence of gender analyses in many studies of black transnational literature. Far too often

¹¹ Other notable studies are included in *positions: east asia cultures critique* 11.1 (2003), a special issue devoted to “the Afro-Asian century.” See also Levine.

¹² See David Chioni Moore, “Colored Dispatches from the Uzbek Border: Langston Hughes' Relevance, 1933-2002” (2002).

scholars have addressed black women's travel literature and its particular concerns only at the margins of their studies: in passing comments and disclaimers, or nowhere at all.¹³ Black women travelers' alleged lack of influence on transnational politics and aesthetics has been offered implicitly and explicitly as justification for male-based studies. In my examination of the works of Andrea Lee and Erna Brodber, I demonstrate that black women have been constitutive of the practice we call black transnationalism. Contributing to the work of scholars such as Carol Boyce Davies and Sandra Gunning, I aim to track "Black women's subjectivity as a migratory subjectivity existing in multiple locations" in order to "see how their work, their presences traverse all of the geographical/national boundaries instituted to keep our dislocations in place" (Davies 4).

The earliest scholarly works on black travel abroad were more historical than theoretical, providing a necessary excavation of the experiences of twentieth-century black exiles in Europe. France, in particular, with its supposed symbolism of revolution and shared democratic principles, has held a privileged place in the

¹³ Black women's transnationalism has frequently been sidelined in critical analyses. For example, in the introduction to *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy poses provocative questions about the transnational experiences of Phyllis Wheatley, Ida B. Wells, Lucy Parsons, Nella Larsen, Sarah Parker Remond, Edmonia Lewis, Anna Cooper, Jessie Fauset, Gwendolyn Bennett, and Lois Maillou Jones, but he declines to address any of these women in his subsequent analyses. Kate Baldwin explains in her introduction that her "decision to focus on four men and not include a chapter on, say, Louise Thompson Patterson, Eslanda Robeson, or Shirley Graham, all of whom did visit the Soviet Union" was the result of "the limited influence that women, sadly, had on Soviet awareness of black America" (17). Despite the inadequate amount of influence these women are said to have had, Baldwin notes that a reading of Soviet media coverage of Eslanda Robeson and Shirley Graham "is reserved for another, future project" (17). A final example is Sidonie Smith's *Moving Lives 20th-Century Women's Travel Writing*, which examines the relation between women's travel and modes of transportation. Explaining her use of white writers only, Smith says she failed to identify any texts by women of color (before her book deadline) that foregrounded a particular technology of motion. This overall pattern of black women's omission in mobility scholarship is incisively addressed in *Black and White Women's Travel Narratives: Antebellum Explorations* by Fish (11-13).

African American (and American) imagination. Expatriate experience in Paris made literal the idea of African American identity formation outside the nation through figures such as Josephine Baker, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin. Wright's and Baldwin's departures to France have become representative of twentieth-century literary black expatriatism, and the once-exclusive scholarly interest in them and infrequently Chester Himes helped write literary black expatriation as a male phenomenon, leaving largely unexamined the experiences and writings of black women expatriates and travelers, such as Gwendolyn Bennett, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Andrea Lee, Toni Cade Bambara, and Gayl Jones. Early histories and explorations of African Americans in France include Lloyd Brown's "The Expatriate Consciousness in Black American Literature" (1972), Michel Fabre's *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980* (1991), and Tyler Stovall's *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (1996), texts that laid the historical groundwork for Gilroy's, Edward's, and others' theorizations of black Atlantic and diasporic practices.

An investigation of black mobility abroad requires navigation of a number of terms—black internationalism, pan-Africanism, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and diaspora—that are currently applied to black practices of affiliation, alliance, and travel outside the nation.¹⁴ These terms are often used interchangeably, reflecting the overlaps and intersections within a tradition of black global mobility. Black internationalism frequently connotes the multinational organizations and collective efforts in the early twentieth-century that sought to consolidate political power across

¹⁴ In my discussion of McPherson's *Crabcakes* in Chapter 2, I consider the term diaspora in the context of historian Earl Lewis' theory of "overlapping diasporas."

national borders. Organizations such as the League of Nations and the Communist International attempted to either represent the common interests of a community of nations through international collaboration or bring about an international working-class counter-revolution. Edwards demonstrates in “The Uses of Diaspora” that the expressive acts of the New Negro movement (which he labels both “internationalist” and “diasporic”), such as the Paris-based journal *Présence africaine*, attempted “to appropriate and transform [these] discourses of internationalism” through, for example, English and French translations of the works of Richard Wright and Alioune Diop and sponsorship of international congresses (Edwards *Practice* 3). Edwards traces the emergence of Pan-Africanism as a discourse of internationalism distinguished by the centrality of political activism on behalf of people of African descent. Du Bois defined pan-Africanism as “intellectual understanding and cooperation among all groups of Negro descent in order to bring about at the earliest possible time the industrial and spiritual emancipation of the Negro peoples” (qtd. in Edwards “Uses” 46).

The acts of self-narration by McPherson, Lee, and Brodber that I here term transnational all negotiate the materiality of national borders in efforts to redefine the self in ways inaccessible from circumscribed national positions. Through their border-crossings these texts create communal links between multiple national sites and in the process find means of forming transnational subjectivities that overwrite the restricted national identities entrenched in U.S. modes of subject formation. While Ifeoma Nwankwo finds the term transnationalism insufficient for her project of “indexing the complicated approaches to defining self, community, and other” taken

by people of African descent in the Americas in the wake of the Haitian revolution—and opts instead for the term cosmopolitanism—I find the emphasis on national borders connoted by transnationalism apt for my project of tracking the affiliations made by the crossing and trespassing of borders, as the penetration into the forbidden territory of “foreign” spaces allows these authors to also cross into and alter the forbidden zones of U.S. identity (11). Nwankwo finds transnationalism deficient because it “foregrounds geographical-national boundaries and presumes them to be salient” (11). I find instead that the transnational works I take up here give priority not to national borders themselves but to the possibilities available via their penetration. I use transnationalism to indicate practices that recognize the material consequences of national borders even as they undermine those very borders to carve out new subjective terrain. In its relative breadth and its connotation of “general physical or ideological movements across national boundaries,” transnationalism functions well as an overarching, unifying category for more specific transnationalisms, such as the “overlapping diasporas” that are the products of the imbricated dislocations and migrations that have been a consequence of the African slave trade, “industrialization[,] and revolutions [that] uprooted millions of people from Europe to Asia” (Patterson and Kelley 26). These “overlapping diasporas” emerge in McPherson’s *Crabcakes* as the intersection of his own academic migration with that of a Japanese colleague, in Lee’s *Russian Journal* as the intercrossing of her own travel with that of Russian Jewish emigrants and an Eritrean student, and in Brodber’s *Louisiana* as the parallels and continuities between Caribbean America and African America. These transnational contacts and relationships offer a means of

undoing the fixed racial categories and relationships borne of the intertwining webs of slavery and segregation, international politics, and global capitalism.

THE SUBJECTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY TO THE LAW

My project of examining black transnational narratives' interrogation of the interdependence of race, law, nation, and citizenship in African American identity formation relies on a central premise: African American identity is overwhelmingly constructed through the law. While the era of integration serves as the historical frame of my particular study, *Brown* (which serves as the legal marker of “integration” within the popular imagination) encoded but a single determination of black identity, representing merely one point on a continuum of state-defined identities. The original Constitution, the 14th Amendment, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and *Brown* together constitute a familiar and oft-recited chronology of legally determined black subjectivities. Together these laws and rulings form a racial epistemology: in so many ways and for so long, African Americans have known ourselves and have been known through these laws and rulings that form a narrative of progressive citizenship. The compounded histories of slavery, emancipation, Reconstruction, segregation, and integration speak to the sheer power of the nation's laws to continually configure and reconfigure African American identity. Jon-Christian Suggs captures the sense of this omnipresent legal frame that has imbued black identity (and, subsequently, black literature) when he writes:

The law's ability to shape—its historical force as the sole yet ever elusive determinant of African American social identity—presets the narrative base

for all African American fiction. It might not be too much to say that much of what any of us, black or white, might understand by the term *Black Americans*, insofar as that status reflects a condition of citizenship, ... is determined and redetermined by the law. (9)

“Black American” connotes, then, the experience of a racialized national subject, or citizen, who negotiates but is *subject* to national desires. Paradoxically, citizenship, historically granted to African Americans only incompletely, operates as both a voucher of freedom and a “disciplinary order”: citizens are granted freedoms by the very nation-state that regulates and restricts them (Hardt and Negri 95). As constituted in legal discourse, “slave,” “African,” “Negro,” “Colored,” “black,” and “African American” identity have conveyed a sense of race as well as a sense of one’s proximity to or distance from the nation. Racial identity is a means of signaling the degree of one’s inclusion in or exclusion from the national body. As the original Constitution, the 14th Amendment, *Plessy*, and *Brown* have “determined and redetermined” black American identity over the centuries, they have simultaneously constituted and reconstituted the relationship of that identity to the nation.

This history of the multiple shifts and recastings of black identity, of its impartial national inclusion, has encouraged the routing of African American freedom dreams through the cultural-political form of the nation-state, a pursuit of ever-elusive full citizenship well into the twentieth century. The historical denial of full rights has tended to foster an over-reliance on the nation-state, a widespread belief that only citizenship granted by the nation can satisfy the collective, centuries-long desires for complete emancipation. Anomalous strains—of black transnationalisms,

internationalisms, and diasporas—ranging from Martin Delany’s nineteenth-century vision of black hemispheric revolution to Claude McKay’s twentieth-century depiction of a deterritorialized transnational community, have challenged mainstream pursuits of nation-based citizenship and opposed the nineteenth- and twentieth-century doctrine that “the nation [is] posed as the one and only active vehicle that [can] deliver” political rights (Hardt and Negri 96). Like the texts examined here, black transnational projects have “[re]imagined community,” not as the limited nation-state, with its finite boundaries and promises of unreliable national citizenship, but as global subjectivities and multinational, unbordered collectivities.¹⁵ While some transnational projects, such as Lee’s *Russian Journal*, use transnational encounters as a means of further consolidating the privileges of U.S. national identity, others, such as McPherson’s *Crabcakes* and Brodber’s *Louisiana*, use border-crossing as a way to delink identity from the nation-state and reconfigure it from multiple sites through unauthorized transnational interactions.

In the following section I examine the legal constitutions and reconstitutions of black identity in the texts of the original Constitution, the 14th Amendment, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and *Brown v. Board of Education*, because the black transnational projects that I explore emerge in contestation against these shifts and instabilities. My analyses of the inseparably linked formations of racial and national identity within legal discourse demonstrate how the law configures racial identity as it assigns that identity a particular relation to the nation. In other words, racial references and categories in legal discourse connote the degree of one’s citizenship, how “fully”

¹⁵ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

American one is. The larger implication of the law's simultaneous racialization and nationalization of identity is that geographical protocols that govern an African American geography (e.g., where African Americans are expected to travel or where African American literature is expected to be located) emerge from these fixed links between race and nation in legal discourse. The transnational narratives of McPherson, Lee, and Brodber negotiate and challenge the law's configurations of racial and national identity as well as the fixed relationship between the two. Ultimately, these texts can be read as projects that configure new forms of racial identity by exploring alternative relationships between black Americans and national spaces and desires.

Constituting Fragmented National Identity

In the antebellum United States, the status of the overwhelming majority of blacks was "slave," an identity that, as translated in the Constitution, is neither fully drawn into the national body nor explicitly labeled as foreign. The Constitution constructs the identity of the enslaved as ambiguously national *and* foreign, locating them in an indeterminate category that, while not explicitly citizen or foreign subject, is implicitly both national and alien. The original Constitution, ratified in 1787 and unchanged until 1868, identifies the enslaved only as anonymous "other Persons."

Article I, section 2, reads:

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States ..., according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to

Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.

This passage, commonly known as the Three-Fifths Compromise, resolved the dispute at the Constitutional Convention between Southern and Northern delegates over how state populations would be counted in representation and taxation plans. The Constitution's reference to the nation's enslaved as "other Persons" is marked by both shame and ambiguity: at once, "other Persons" nicely glosses the existence of a racially determined slave status in the new democratic nation even as it links that status to an identity that resides on the border between citizen and alien.

The precedent for such masking language had been set in the Constitution's predecessor, the Articles of Confederation. At the Constitutional Convention, Delegate William Patterson of New Jersey reminded his colleagues that Congress had previously changed the language of the Articles of Confederation because members "had been ashamed to use the term 'slaves' & had substituted a description" (Madison 209). The altered passage in an early draft of the Articles originally stipulated that the colonies would contribute to the common treasury in proportion to the number of their inhabitants, "a True Account of which, distinguishing the Inhabitants who are not slaves, shall be triennially taken and transmitted to Congress." The passage was changed to read: "... a True Account of which, distinguishing the white Inhabitants ~~who are not slaves~~, shall be triennially taken and transmitted to Congress" (*Journals*, Art. XI). The literal striking out of "slaves" and its substitution with "white" speaks to a larger attempt to conceal from the world stage and repress within the national psyche the colonies' participation in and

tolerance of slavery. In trying to cloak slavery, the delegates inadvertently demonstrated the link between whiteness and status as a recognized colonial subject. Official colonial subjects are here named by negation, i.e., defined by what they are not. “White Inhabitants” are synonymous with “Inhabitants who are not slaves.” Together the original and the revised articles explicitly define the recognized citizenry via whiteness, a correlation the Constitution’s “other persons” attempts to conceal. In both the Articles and the Constitution, “slaves” are expunged from the national record, their presence overwritten by whiteness or concealed beneath a glossed reference. Processes of nationalization, or the production of national subjects, work here in tandem with processes of racialization, the production of racial identity. Nationality and race are inseparably linked; national identity cannot be defined without reference to racial identity.

The Constitution’s “other Persons” hold a liminal position between citizen and alien. Their three-fifths value signifies a fractional nationality that is effectively nullified by their perceived foreignness or Africanness as well as by their identity as property. The intersecting identities of national inhabitant, alien, and property work to create an unstable, ambiguous, and utilitarian relation to the nation. If three-fifths of their identity is counted for taxation and representation purposes, then the remaining portion suggests an identity discounted by a perceived foreignness, or even worse, by an outright absence of humanity. Indeed, in Constitutional Convention debate over state taxation, delegate Samuel Chase of Maryland insisted that “negroes in fact should not be considered as members of the state more than cattle & that they have no more interest in it” (Jefferson 24). The labor-based subjectivity of the enslaved

stemming from their physical work and reproductive capacities directly and indirectly undergirds the economic well-being of the entire nation. However, the Constitution extends the utility of black subjects beyond slave labor by using their numbers to both boost the recognized citizenry's political representation and augment the federal coffers through state taxation.

Citizens in Name Only

If only in word, the 14th Amendment drew newly emancipated blacks into the nation as citizens. The 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, marked a shift from ascriptive to consensual or contractual citizenship, a move that eliminated the Constitution's "other Persons" from legal configurations of national identity. Ascriptive processes, Peter Schuck and Rogers Smith observe, determined largely the terms of full citizenship from 1787 to 1868. In ascriptive processes, race is deemed "an inherited, 'natural' delimitation of the subject's power," a delimitation that determines whether one is a recognized national subject or an "other" (qtd. in Berlant 14).¹⁶ The 14th Amendment, in contrast, extends citizenship on an inclusive contractual basis, as it stipulates that "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and *subject* to the jurisdiction thereof, are *citizens* of the United States and of the State wherein they *reside*" (my emphasis). Here, the inclusive "all persons" replaces the unnaturalized and excluded "other Persons" of the Constitution. A class of "other persons" no longer marks the body politic; "all persons born or naturalized in the United States" and importantly, who reside there, are now theoretically eligible

¹⁶ See Peter H. Schuck and Rogers M. Smith, *Citizenship Without Consent: Illegal Aliens in the American Polity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

to participate in the American contract as a subject/citizen, a dual identity that signals both the obligations and rights of U.S. nationals. If one who is born or naturalized in the United States agrees to be subject to its jurisdiction and resides within its domestic boundaries, then one is (technically) guaranteed the privileges and immunities conferred on the citizen. In sum, the 14th Amendment discursively extended citizenship to the nation's native and naturalized. In doing so, it also nationalized a previously enslaved population by plugging the breach in the fractional representation of the Three-Fifths Compromise. However, even after the ratification of the 14th and 15th Amendments, the persistent and consolidated power of white supremacy forced the discourse and especially the practice of U.S. citizenship to continue to negotiate an "overt and covert semiotic," leading to the production of the unstable and discrepant category of "black citizen," a figure that existed only nominally, betraying the supposed universality of U.S. citizenship (Berlant 14).

The Incorporation of Once-Incongruous Subjects

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) rejects the 14th Amendment's incorporation of black inhabitants within the body politic. In a sense, *Plessy* calls for the resurrection of ascriptive citizenship as well as the reinstatement and resegregation of the categories of domestic and alien inhabitants because, as Amy Kaplan has argued, "a sense of the foreign is necessary to erect the boundaries that enclose the nation as home" (582). *Plessy v. Ferguson* legally identifies black subjects, who were nominally citizens, as foreign or un-American. In the decision, the law of segregation is justified by resurrecting a perceived gap between black racial identity and U.S. national identity.

Homer Plessy, the petitioner, is described as “a *citizen* of the United States and a *resident* of the state of Louisiana, of mixed descent, in the proportion of seven-eighths Caucasian and one-eighth *African* blood” (emphasis added). While Plessy met the 14th Amendment’s requirements of citizenship and residency, his “African blood,” however scant, was the single factor that unfit him for “every right, privilege, and immunity secured to citizens of the United States of the white race.” Whiteness in the decision, as well as in the Articles of Confederation and the original Constitution, is constructed as the natural condition of citizens of the United States. Thus, the presence of “African blood” in Plessy’s lineage marks him as un-American, as inherently foreign. “Colored” Americans, though native born, are seen as yet to be naturalized, their residual Africanness still unprocessed and alien. Plessy licenses the mapping of this identity onto the U.S. terrain, a cartography of cramped and restricted Jim Crow spaces to which the “American graffiti” of “Colored” and “Whites Only” signs were keyed.¹⁷

I turn here momentarily to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, a historical moment that both links and highlights the political objectives of *Plessy* and *Brown*. Kandice Chuh reads the federally authorized internment as a state project of identity formation, arguing that this nullification of citizenship was justified by a governmental narrative that used transnationality as a way to “produce race through the affiliation to certain bodies of foreignness, of being naturally and immutably of and belonging to another country” (61). Internment, like *Plessy*, was an effort to *transnationalize* (the term used here to mean the ascription of a foreign identity to naturalized and U.S.-born citizens) and quarantine them in

¹⁷ See Abel, “American.”

segregated spaces. The highly visible transnationalization of Japanese Americans allows us to read the similar yet subtler efforts in *Plessy* to invoke “African blood” in order to construct black citizens as inherently foreign and, therefore, unsatisfactorily American. *Plessy* and internment “alien-ated” black Americans and Japanese Americans, respectively, remapping their identities onto foreign spaces, allowing them to be quarantined and set apart from the recognized body politic.

It is this perceived trace of Africanness, or foreignness—used in the *Plessy* ruling as the basis for disenfranchisement and segregation—that emerges a half century later in the Cold War era as a perceived latent black transnationalism that threatens national security. The U.S. Cold War fear of African American ties to African, Asian, and American anticolonialists that frames *Brown* echoes the World War II context of national anxiety over “foreign” threats within domestic borders that frames Japanese American internment.¹⁸ The project of integration emerged, in part, from Cold War fears of the global potential of African American affiliations and can be read as an effort to contain blacks not by transnationalization but by drawing them further into the U.S. national body.¹⁹ This “nationalization” of African Americans in

¹⁸ Interestingly, Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren is linked to both integration and internment. Warren’s authorship of the court’s ruling in *Brown* has eclipsed his involvement in the relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II. As attorney general of California in 1942, Warren “urged the evacuation and detention of some 110,000 Japanese Americans” and later “defended the result in *Korematsu v. United States*, the 1944 case that ratified the internment of Japanese Americans for the first years of World War II” (Patterson 59; Ogletree 9).

¹⁹ In amicus curiae briefs filed on behalf of NAACP plaintiffs by the Truman Administration in post-WWII desegregation cases, the Justice Department, Mary Dudziak writes, “argued that crucial national interests were . . . implicated. The segregation challenged in these cases damaged U.S. prestige abroad and threatened U.S. foreign relations” (91). A brief filed in *Henderson v. U.S.* (1949), a case about railroad segregation, referred explicitly to the threat of African American radicalism: “The apparent hypocrisy of a society professing equality but practicing segregation and other forms of racial discrimination furnishes justification and reason for the latent urge to rebel, and frequently leads to lasting bitterness or total rejection of the American creed and system of government” (Dudziak 94). For a history and analysis of the “friend of the court” briefs filed in desegregation cases during the Truman administration, see Dudziak 90-91.

the 1950s was implemented via state efforts to integrate them into the nation through desegregation and contain them within the United States through passport revocations and regulated travel abroad. The expansion in the 1950s of State Department efforts to undercut autonomous black global mobility were intended to abort international identifications and alliances, undermine unregulated forms of black transnationalism, and bolster black national identification. *Brown*, then, was influenced not only by anxieties over world perceptions of Jim Crow in the United States but also by domestic concerns over the perceived precariousness of black patriotism in a racially segregated nation. The juxtaposition of *Plessy*, internment, and *Brown* reveals the continuities between segregation and integration: containment within Jim Crow spaces at the turn of the twentieth century was transformed into confinement within the nation's borders at midcentury. *Brown* must not be looked at in isolation, but as part of a long history of state efforts to secure the boundaries of a particularly imagined community by configuring and reconfiguring the status and mobility of racial (and political) minorities.

The intersection of the U.S. project of racial integration and the nation's Cold War objectives are implicit in the *Brown* ruling. Delivering the opinion of the court, Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren declared that "to separate [children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect *their hearts and minds* in a way unlikely ever to be done" (emphasis mine). The fact that a ubiquitous phrase of the Cold War era—"winning the hearts and minds"—appears in the *Brown* decision strongly signals the link between U.S. Cold War strategy and the project of

integration. This emphasis on the impact of segregation on black “hearts and minds,” or black national identity and identifications, highlights a state desire to reconfigure black national identity by at least superficially incorporating blacks further into the nation to counter the possibility of black alliances with Communist-sponsored anticolonial movements abroad. The desire to reshape black “hearts and minds” can be read as an attempt to corral or reign in the latent and active transnationalism of African Americans enduring the disciplinary and punitive forces of Jim Crow. The Cold War context and internal rhetoric of *Brown v. Board* are signs of a U.S. domestic policy of integration that worked in tandem with efforts to restrict the transnational mobility of black subjects through passport revocations, indictments, FBI surveillance, and House Un-American Activities Committee subpoenas.

CONTEMPORANEOUS TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

Perhaps no example more clearly illustrates U.S. anticommunist strategies of containment than the State Department’s confiscation or revocation of the passports of Richard Wright, W.E.B. Du Bois, Shirley Graham Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Eslanda Goode Robeson, Herbert Aptheker, Lorraine Hansberry, and other activists in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1950, the passport became a fixed requirement of travel into and out of the United States, and the *Brown* decision must be read not in isolation but within the context of this history of mobility restrictions.²⁰ The introduction of the passport as a precondition of foreign travel in the early 1950s coincided with the State

²⁰ The passport was not legally required for leaving or entering the United States, apart from minor exceptions, until the ratification of the Act of June 27, 1952, 66 Stat. 190, 8 U.S.C. 1185, which states that, after a prescribed proclamation by the President, it is “unlawful for any citizen of the United States to depart from or enter ... the United States unless he bears a valid passport.” See *Korematsu v. United States* (1944).

Department's more severe revocation of the passports of the Du Boises and Robesons, among others, from 1951 to 1958, because their presences abroad were deemed contrary to U.S. interests. The containment of these unacceptable travelers—on grounds of communist ties or because blackness and travel abroad were deemed an illicit combination—was an attempt to control the nature and geography of black diaspora. Anticommunist policies and integrationist projects worked coterminously, together containing black leftists within U.S. borders and incorporating the larger black citizenry into a national body from which it had long been excluded. The State Department restricted Du Bois', Robeson's, and others' freedom of movement—in particular, the international mobility that allowed them to make internationalist and black diasporic connections. While it is relatively easy to see how the anticommunist travel restrictions of the 1950s suppressed autonomous black travel beyond U.S. boundaries and how segregation further confined black mobility across the U.S. color line, it is much more difficult, in a contemporary moment when integration has come to define U.S. social progress in the twentieth century, to see how “integration” was also an attempt to contain and curtail black diasporan desires, to reroute and undermine the diasporic and transnational connections forged in the first half of the twentieth century.²¹

During the same period that the federal government ushered in policies of national integration and passport requirements and restrictions that had originated under the Truman administration, President Eisenhower established in 1953 the United States Information Agency (USIA), a foreign affairs agency charged with

²¹ See Washington, “Alice Childress, Lorraine Hansberry, and Claudia Jones: Black Women Write the Popular Front,” (2003); Mullen and Smethurst. *Left of the Color Line* (2003); and Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing between the Wars* (1999).

explaining and supporting U.S. foreign policy, furthering national interests through overseas programs, and, most importantly here, sponsoring black travel “ambassadors” abroad. Only two months after the *Brown* decision, Eisenhower pressed Congress to fund Cold War cultural exchange programs, and by October 1954 the State Department had “approved the creation of several panels to select American performing artists to tour abroad for the United States” based on the criteria of “integrity, personal attributes, musical abilities, and ‘Americanness’” (39).

The exportation of images of racial integration through the regulated travel of various black musical ambassadors—including Dizzy Gillespie’s integrated band (to the Middle East, Latin America, and Southeast Asia), Marion Anderson (to South Korea, Thailand, Burma, and Vietnam), and Duke Ellington (to the Soviet Union, Africa, South America, and South Asia)—supplanted the autonomous black activist travelers immobilized by passport revocations, indictments, and surveillance. With his passport revoked and unable to attend the First International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists Conference at the Sorbonne in 1956, Du Bois sent the following message: “I am not present at your meeting today because the United States Government will not grant me a passport for travel abroad.” “Any Negro-American who travels abroad today must either not discuss race conditions in the United States or say the sort of thing which our State Department wishes the world to believe” (qtd. in Rowley 477). Du Bois’ comments speak to the precarious and restricted conditions of *autonomous* black international travel following the Second World War. *Brown*—a metonym for the entire period commonly constructed as the era of integration—cannot be examined in isolation. The surveilled, regulated, and immobilized black

traveler was just as much a feature of the era of integration as the black students and workers who famously and courageously integrated the nation's public places. In part, my goal here is to explore black literary attempts in the Cold War and post-Cold War era to negotiate the national integration of black identity, the unyielding remainders of segregation, and national efforts to undercut autonomous black global mobility and unregulated forms of black transnationalism.

Chapter 1 focuses on James Alan McPherson's *Crabcakes* (1998), a memoir that recounts his migrations from Georgia to Harvard Law School, Baltimore, Iowa, and eventually Japan. In his narrative, McPherson encounters forbidden territory in the segregated spaces of Jim Crow and confronts how those spaces overlay the project of integration itself. Published nearly a half-century after *Brown*, *Crabcakes* still depicts the practice of racial integration as a danger zone, mainly through the trope of the Jim Crow rail car. I trace how McPherson contends with the contradictions between the mobile modern subjectivity invoked in integration-era court rulings and the historical immobility of black subjectivity. Ultimately, McPherson suggests how national protocols of black immobility might be transgressed transnationally in order to glimpse the outlines of alternative identities mobile across global color lines.

Chapter 2 examines Andrea Lee's first book, the travel narrative *Russian Journal* (1981), a National Book Award finalist that, nonetheless, received harsh criticism from some reviewers who took Lee to task for declining to mention her

racial identity at all, except for one brief, indirect reference to herself as an “American black.” Cloaked by the anonymous, collective narrative voice that originated in the *New Yorker*’s “Talk of the Town” column, Lee’s racial omission, as well as reviewers’ responses to it, forms a conundrum animated by questions of the significance and uses of racial identity in an ostensibly post-segregation era. I track Lee’s use of U.S. nationality made hypervisible in a Moscow context as a means for her to integrate not just sites of U.S. literary production but “American” identity itself, a narrative strategy that forces us to contend with protocols of race that have sustained uneven and contradictory formations of U.S. identity, even within an era of integration.

In Chapter 3, I approach the project of integration through its absence from Jamaican novelist Erna Brodber’s *Louisiana* (1994). In its place, Brodber situates the Works Progress Administration’s Federal Writers’ Project (FWP) as an alternative, prior project of cultural integration that constructs black identity as an object of observation and an instrument of national identity formation. In substituting post-*Brown* integration for this earlier, New Deal project of cultural integration, *Louisiana* opens up space to envision alternative, diasporic courses of twentieth-century black history. By shifting our national gaze away from *Brown*, the novel loosens the mid-century attachments of the concept of racial integration, sketching not only the FWP’s ethnographic project of incorporating African Americans within the nation but also black transnational resistance to such national absorption. The communal counternarrative in *Louisiana* foregrounds black diasporic disruptions of the nation

that seek forms of freedom that transcend the unfulfilled promises of the nation-state,
even as they demand the right of national belonging.

Chapter 2: Derailing the Color Line: Transnational Mobilization

in James Alan McPherson's *Crabcakes*

“If ... we have merely taken from the master the power to control the slave and left him at the mercy of the State to be deprived of his civil rights, the trumpet of freedom that we have been blowing throughout the land has given an ‘uncertain sound,’ and the promised freedom is a delusion.

—Sen. Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, during congressional debate on a Freedman’s Bureau bill, 1865¹

“Negro citizens, North and South, who saw in the Thirteenth Amendment a promise of freedom—freedom to ‘go and come at pleasure’ and to ‘buy and sell when they please’—would be left with ‘a mere paper guarantee’ if Congress were powerless to assure [it] ... At the very least, the freedom that Congress is empowered to secure under the Thirteenth Amendment includes the freedom to buy whatever a white man can buy, the right to live wherever a white man can live. If Congress cannot say that being a free man means at least this much, then the Thirteenth Amendment made a promise the Nation cannot keep.”

—*Jones v. Mayer Co.*, 1968

In a chatty overview of the April 1972 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, editor Robert Manning lightheartedly informed readers that the cover-story writer, James Alan McPherson, had “put the law aside to become one of the most talented young writers on the scene” (Manning 4). McPherson had graduated from Harvard Law School in 1968, but that same year he had also published to wide acclaim, *Hue and Cry*, his first short story collection. His writing passions certainly seemed to have taken precedence when he bid farewell to Cambridge with a law degree in hand, only to head west to the famed Writers’ Workshop at the University of Iowa. By the time

¹ *Cong. Globe*, 39th Cong., 1st Sess. 322 (1865).

McPherson's April 1972 feature story ran, he had been working three years as a contributing editor at *The Atlantic* and was on the verge of being awarded a Guggenheim fellowship in recognition of his literary accomplishments and promise.

Though his earlier *Atlantic* pieces had consisted mainly of short stories and personal narratives, his April 1972 cover story—a 30-page report on two class-action lawsuits brought by black homeowners seeking relief from onerous home contracts—was stark evidence that McPherson had done anything but “put the law aside.” “The Story of the Contract Buyers League” traced the four-year history of some 3,500 black Chicago homeowners who found themselves bound by housing contracts that “obligated them to pay, on average, 69 percent more” than what the investment sellers had paid for the properties only weeks or sometimes days earlier in a market skewed by panicked white homeowners (Sagalyn 102).

In a sweeping narrative, McPherson shows an interracial and interfaith alliance of black Baptists and white Jews and Catholics cooperating to fight a complicated web of panic peddling, blockbusting, red-lining, and price inflation. The contract sellers offered inflated, high-interest installment-purchase contracts to black families who were forced to accept them because FHA-backed restrictive covenants and red-lining limited their access to conventional mortgages. The contracts were little more than layaway plans that offered “no equity or title until the full contract price” was paid (McPherson “Story” 53).

In McPherson's view, the success of the lawsuits, still undecided in April 1972, hinged on the ability to connect them to *Jones v. Mayer Co.*, a 1968 case that was the Supreme Court's first unequivocal declaration of the government's power to

ban all race-based restrictions—private and public—of the right to buy and sell property.² Often eclipsed by more well-known integration-era rulings and legislation such as *Brown* or the Civil Rights Act of 1968, *Jones v. Mayer Co.* held “revolutionary implications” in its measure of blacks’ present-day condition against criteria established in early postbellum legislation.³ The court found that because blacks in 1968 did not securely possess “the right to live wherever a white man can live,” a form of mobility that largely determines one’s access to a number of other freedoms, they had never fully realized the status of freedmen for they still endured “the badges and incidents of slavery—its ‘burdens and disabilities.’”⁴

The *Jones v. Mayer Co.* opinion was different from many other integration-era rulings and laws whose central reference point was *Plessy v. Ferguson*’s separate-but-equal mandate or the 14th Amendment’s guarantee of citizenship and equal protection under the law. Instead, *Jones v. Mayer Co.* centered on the 13th Amendment’s abolishment of slavery. The matter of racial discrimination in the latter half of the twentieth century, the Court argued, concerned primarily not equality or citizenship but the distinction between chattel and persons. In particular, the court ruled that mobility (along with the right to property) determined the difference between bondage and liberty. If blacks did not have mobility—the “freedom to ‘go and come at pleasure’—then the 13th Amendment’s abolition of slavery, Justice Potter Stewart argued, “made a promise the Nation cannot keep.” The issue of

² Previous rulings held that (i) the 14th Amendment covered only state restrictions of individual rights (*Civil Rights Cases*, 1883; *Buchanan v. Warley*, 1917; *Corrigan v. Buckley*, 1926; *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 1948), (ii) the government was not empowered to enforce or overturn restrictive covenants between private individuals (*Shelley v. Kraemer*, 1948; *Hurd v. Hodge*, 1948), and/or (iii) private restrictive covenants were not unconstitutional (*Shelley v. Kraemer*, 1948; *Hurd v. Hodge*, 1948).

³ *Jones v. Mayer Co.*, 392 U.S. 409 (1968).

⁴ *Jones v. Mayer Co.*

mobility lies at the heart of the legal case McPherson perceived as central to the story he spent eight months researching and writing while commuting between Chicago and his home in Berkeley. “The Story of the Contract Buyers League” challenges the idea that McPherson had left the law behind; more importantly, the article’s emphasis on *Jones v. Mayer Co.* foregrounds the centrality of mobility to modern notions of freedom, prefiguring key themes in McPherson’s later work, especially his 1998 memoir *Crabcakes*, which I examine here.⁵

In this chapter, I am primarily concerned with the difficulties that black histories of restricted movement—a form of dispossession—pose for the achievement of the mobile subjectivity invoked in integration-era laws such as *Jones v. Mayer Co.* I contend that mobility, ostensibly a universal hallmark of modern subjectivity—is always already a vexed matter for African American subjects because U.S. legal and social discourses have historically defined black identity in terms of *immobility*. Here, I place *Crabcakes* at the center of my analysis of McPherson’s negotiations and challenges of the model of modern subjectivity proffered by integration, a model he considers “provisional” and wholly insufficient, to show how he transgresses national protocols of black mobility in order to “see the outlines of a new identity” that might alter standard practices of race and nation (McPherson “On Becoming” 21; *Crabcakes* 24). In service to the larger aims of this dissertation, I use McPherson’s meticulous and poignant accounting of the discrepancies between the legal ideals and the social realities of integration to suggest the endurance, even the persistence, of segregation’s identificatory categories and subject formations.

⁵ I discuss below McPherson’s skillful manipulation of the conventions of the memoir as a means of producing a spatialized narrative structure.

This chapter examines *Crabcakes*' illumination of the overlapping promises of integration and emancipation through the lens of mobility, and it investigates how those promises reiterate modes of Enlightenment subjectivity that have come to undergird Western understandings of the self. I examine mobility as both a marker and vehicle of modern autonomy. Circulating as a sign of freedom, mobility offers means of representing one's access to or exclusion from self-determination. I analyze three train scenes, in McPherson's *Crabcakes* and a related essay he placed in *The Washington Post Magazine*, in order to explore his representation—through rail mobility—of the conflicting expansion and foreclosure of modern autonomy within an era of U.S. integration.

A MEMOIR OF FRAGMENTATION

Labeled “a memoir” on its cover, *Crabcakes* is especially conducive to exploring identity formation within the era of “integration,” which is widely perceived to have been launched by the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954. Though “memoir” and “autobiography” are popularly used interchangeably, memoir writing is distinguished by a focus on the “relational identity” of the subject, that is, the subject in relation to others or particular historical events or eras.⁶ Reconstructing a 20-year period through a formidable mix of narrative techniques and textual forms—factual recollections, imaginative reenactments, letters, stream of consciousness, satire, monologues, lyrics, statistics, political sound bites, obituaries, and spiritual writings—McPherson depicts his self responding to a broad range of sociopolitical events and circumstances within an era of integration.

⁶ See Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (1999).

While canonical autobiographies often purport to offer a comprehensive, chronological record of a subject's development over a lifetime, the memoir is frequently episodic, nonlinear, and narrower in scope. McPherson productively exploits the conventions of memoir, using a fragmentary, achronological style to construct meaning according to space as opposed to time. For example, the first half of *Crabcakes* opens in the fall of 1993 with the narrator pondering events in Baltimore. The narrative then leaps back to 1976, erratically moves forward through Baltimore, Virginia, and Iowa, and finally turns again to Baltimore in 1993. The second half of the memoir maneuvers irregularly within the years between 1990 and 1996, navigating the transnational spaces between Iowa and Tokyo. By creating spatially determined halves in the memoir, McPherson is able to draw attention to the impact of place on identity, an emphasis that a more chronological progression might not facilitate. The artificial, nonlinear bisection of the memoir—a “periodization” concerned more with geographical implications than with those drawn from an orderly passing of time—works to create a primarily national first half followed by a more transnational second half. McPherson uses the global trajectory of the latter section to extend and exceed as well as engage the more domestic orientation of the first.⁷

⁷ Much of the material published in *Crabcakes* appeared three years earlier in an essay titled “Crabcakes” that McPherson placed in *DoubleTake* magazine. The separate publication of the material that would eventually become the first half of *Crabcakes* serves to emphasize the distinct concerns of the first and second halves of the memoir. The material in the first half of the memoir *Crabcakes* constitutes a primarily domestic or national narrative that considers the conflicts between autonomous modern subjectivity and black experiences of dispossession and black collectivism. The first half of *Crabcakes* shares with McPherson's earlier *Elbow Room* stories an interest in integration-era characters who struggle against a communal, folk past that is viewed as a remnant of segregation. The conflict between individualism and collectivism in relation to modern subjectivity is largely restricted to a black, national geography; the first half is resolved when McPherson reasserts a primal connection to a dispossessed, migrating black collective that stretches from the Deep South to points north and

Labeling the text a “memoir” on its cover likely encourages an obscuring of the purposeful crafting or constructedness of the narrative. In contrast to the distance assumed between authors and their protagonists in the realm of “fiction,” such a line is often blurred in the genre of autobiography, and “the flesh-and-blood author” (James Alan McPherson) and the autobiographical narrator (the “I” of *Crabcakes*) are often conflated. Leigh Gilmore observes that because the “autobiographer simulates nonliterary conditions and suppresses the art in the venture by appearing to inhabit the *I* as simply as in daily life,” the “autobiographical *I* appears to erase the conditions of fictionality...” (89).⁸ It is these very conditions of fictionality that McPherson exaggerates in *Crabcakes* as he takes advantage of the memoir’s function as a personalized narrative of history, using techniques more commonly associated with fictional writing. For instance, by manipulating the tone of the narrative voice that runs throughout the memoir, McPherson creates various personae and modes of identity that comprise the heterogeneous and fractured subject at the center of the narrative. Because each chapter is narrated in the present tense, a sense of continuous immediacy or present-ness pervades the memoir. This running present helps create the appearance of a single, coherent narrator speaking throughout the text. However, even as McPherson stages this illusion, he insists—through satirical, confessional, or rational constructions of “the” narrator—that that narrating presence not be read as a single, unitary identity. At times, the memoir’s narrative voice even echoes some of

west. The transnational trajectory of the latter half of *Crabcakes*, then, both extends and exceeds the more domestic orientation of the first. The second half of the memoir takes a distinct turn, dealing not with the intra-racial dilemma of the self-possessed subject’s relation to a black community but with the continued dangers and “unnaturalness” of U.S. interracial relations—even in the era of integration.

⁸ For theories and analyses of autobiographical subjectivity, see Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (1988); Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (1998); and Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001).

the protagonists of McPherson's earlier fiction, underscoring his transfer of fictional strategies to the memoir. Through these multiple voicings of himself, McPherson is able to record his shifting sense of selfhood across an era of integration.

A NADIR OF INTEGRATION

McPherson's record of his shifting sense of self can be read as an intimate, personalized tracking of the impact of integration's promises and failures on black subjectivity. Both McPherson's tenure at Harvard Law School and his literary ascent can be attributed to his talents, of course, but also to the extraordinary opportunities he was afforded in an emerging era of integration. McPherson remembers that "the 1960s were a crazy time. Opportunities seemed to materialize out of thin air ("On Becoming" 20). *Crabcakes*, then, is an attempt to chronicle the shift from a period of heightened possibilities and expectations to the subsequent disappointments of the following decades. His experiences over two decades force him to question not only the promises of the project of integration but its premises as well.

In his attempt to redeem constitutional promises, then, the *Crabcakes* narrator can be seen as similar to the black homeowners who attempted to exercise residential mobility without facing oppressive mortgages, a racialized form of economic discrimination. The Chicago homeowners banded together in pursuit of the promises of integration, namely the guarantee in *Jones v. Mayer Co.* that an autonomous American self could be constituted through, among other things, acts of mobility. The Contract Buyers League restaged the struggles of black freedmen to secure the promises of emancipation by making the unstable transition from restricted and

immobile subjects of slavery to autonomously mobile U.S. citizens. As a reiteration of the 13th Amendment, *Jones v. Mayer Co.* represents a renewed promise of full participation in a modern narrative of autonomy. Blacks ostensibly gained access to modern identity through legal integration, but McPherson depicts in *Crabcakes* the failure of the United States to make such access meaningful as well as the impossibility and insufficiency of modern subjecthood for African Americans. Prodded by the incompatibility of an extended experience of restricted movement and other dispossessions with a modern universalist identity based on autonomous mobility, McPherson's *Crabcakes* seeks to open critical pathways for us to imagine how we might fashion new subjectivities that can circumvent the limitations of intersecting racial, national, and imperial epistemologies.

Underlying McPherson's project is the suggestion in *Jones v. Mayer Co.* that "the Thirteenth Amendment made a promise the Nation cannot keep." In one sense, the "Nation" referred to here is the United States, in particular, which has not fulfilled its nineteenth-century guarantee of freedom to African Americans. In another sense, the statement can be read as suggesting that "the Thirteenth Amendment made a promise the *nation-state* cannot keep." In other words, the amendment's pledge of full liberty simply cannot be obtained *within* any modern nation-state, which suggests both the exhaustion of the political formation known as the "nation" and the animation of transnational formations. The social formation of the nation is limited in its ability to fulfill promises of individual freedoms because it "only reproduces itself as a nation to the extent that, through a network of apparatuses and daily practices, the individual is instituted as *homo nationalis* from cradle to grave," effectively

foreclosing the freedoms accessible through transnational mobility and forms of citizenship alternative to national ones (Balibar and Wallerstein 93). It is in resistance, then, that one ventures across national borders and beyond its epistemologies to seek full freedom. In *Crabcakes*, this perpetual border-crossing, depicted as McPherson's transnational movement between Japan and the United States creates a *trans*-national located-ness from which he can reconfigure his position within the nation, allowing him to exceed the "provisional identity" offered by integration and narratives of modernity (McPherson "On Becoming" 21). Recognizing the contested nature of the mobility-based subjectivity posited by nationalist discourses of integration, McPherson seeks to develop an alternatively constructed identity through an interplay of his domestic and international experiences. The transnational encounters in *Crabcakes* allow McPherson to venture beyond the limited epistemologies and ontologies of a nation so bogged in a mire of racial narratives, codes, and structures that it is incapable of honoring its constitutional assurances of liberty. The provision of fully liberatory social identities and relationships, in other words, is ultimately beyond the reach of the nation-state.

TURNING EAST FROM THE MASON-DIXON LINE

Much of the autobiographical inscription of McPherson's negotiation of integration is mapped onto particular spatial terrains: the memoir traces his move from Baltimore to Virginia, his subsequent move to Iowa, his willful exile from the South, his travels to Japan, and his eventual turn back to a South represented by the borderland of Baltimore, a space at once southern and northern because of its

proximity to the Mason-Dixon border. The cultural and social remnants of the Mason-Dixon weigh heavily on the representations of McPherson's various migrations and settlements in ways related to the hold the North-South divide continues to have over African American literary discourses of spatialization. In mapping the grounds of an African-American literary tradition that stretches more than two centuries, the field has necessarily faced South—toward early vernacular traditions and slave, post-Reconstruction, and migration narratives. Literary representations of the enslaved fugitive's flight or the southern migrant's journey have often demanded a critical elaboration of the north-south geography that Robert Stepto so richly defined in the seminal book, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (1979).

The north-south axis around which Stepto's "symbolic geography" rotates serves as a frame for current debates within African-American literary studies that have been signaled by calls from critics such as Houston Baker and Riché Richardson to "turn South again" and opposing calls from scholars such as Hazel Carby and Madhu Dubey to turn *from* the South toward contemporary urban issues.⁹ *Crabcakes'* representations of McPherson's multiple crossings and negotiations of the Mason-Dixon—reverse migration, exile, and return—perform the Southern turns and departures that continue to be appealed for within literary studies more than a decade following the memoir's publication. While the scholarly debate, a discursive tug-of-

⁹ For calls for a southern (re)turn, see Houston Baker, *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.* (2001); Houston Baker, Jr, and D.D. Nelson, "Preface: Violence, the Body and 'the South'" (2001); and Riché Richardson, "Southern Turns" (2003). Critiques of the displacement of urban culture by the literary turn south include Madhu Dubey's *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* (2003) and Hazel Carby's "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston" (1999).

war over the politics of space, brings to light valuable aspects of (rural) southern and (northern) urban orientations, it also reflects the largely domestic bounds of African-American literary geographies and the long-standing dichotomy of North and South, which effectively maintains a virtual Mason-Dixon line across the field of African American literary studies and its consequent understandings of the tradition. The predominant containment of African American literary criticism within a bifurcated national configuration results in a diminished capacity to explain the transnational movements (meaning across the United States as well as between nations) of canonical and noncanonical texts alike. As I discuss later, McPherson's transnational remapping of the conventional U.S. terrain of African American literature proceeds beyond the national borders circumscribing current African Americanist debates. McPherson's stance is much like that of the "weary traveller" of the "sorrow song" that ends *The Souls of Black Folks*: "And the traveller girds himself, and sets his face toward the Morning and goes his way" (Du Bois 188.) His direction, Paul Gilroy observes, "is neither north nor south but eastward" (140).

Crabcakes' global moves place it in conversation not only with discourses of southern and urban U.S. spatialization but also with theories of what is collectively referred to as black transnationalism. McPherson's spatial acts correspond to the ways that diasporic networks operate beyond the nation-state—transnational routes that have been mapped by scholars such as Carole Boyce Davies, Paul Gilroy, Michelle Stephens, and Brent Edwards. These diasporic webs intersect with other forms of black transnationalism that are not necessarily intraracial and that do not necessarily inhabit the conventional spaces of a black diaspora—particularly cultures of black

leftism, cosmopolitanism, internationalism, and expatriatism, which tie more directly to the *interracial* concerns and the Afro-Asian spaces of *Crabcakes*.

Because no single discourse of spatialization—southern, urban, diasporic, or transnational—fully accounts for *Crabcakes*' wide-ranging geographical moves across and beyond the United States, or the relationships that emerge from these moves, I argue that a synthesis of these discourses through a theory of “overlapping diasporas,” a term borrowed from historian Earl Lewis that I wish to reinvigorate, provides a viable frame for mapping the southern, northern, urban, Midwestern, and transnational turns of McPherson's autobiographical narrator.¹⁰ Lewis's call to envision the United States, and by extension the globe, as a site of zones of interaction and contact between various dispersed communities provides a means of reading the multiple migrations, settlements, and encounters in *Crabcakes*.

Historians such as Robin Kelley, Tiffany Patterson, Lisa Brock, and Judith Byfield have mined from the term “overlapping diasporas” ways of seeing the “African Diaspora as but one international circle . . . that overlap[s] and coexist[s] with other circles and world-views” (Patterson and Kelley 27). Examining the contact zones between the dispersed and migrating communities uprooted the world over helps broaden the connotations of “diaspora” within black world studies.¹¹ As Brent Edwards argues, “overlapping diasporas” points to difference existing not only internally within a black diaspora, “but also externally: in appropriating a term so closely associated with Jewish thought, we are forced to think not in terms of some

¹⁰ Earl Lewis, “To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas.” Lewis writes that a full understanding of processes of racialization require us to “see African Americans living and working in a world [and a nation of] of overlapping diasporas (dispersed communities)” (767).

¹¹ See Patterson and Kelley 26.

closed or autonomous system of African dispersal but explicitly in terms of a complex past of forced migrations and racialization—what Earl Lewis has called a history of ‘overlapping diasporas’” (Edwards “Uses” 64; Edwards *The Practice* 12-13).

Extending these elaborations of diaspora, I underscore here the fact that race, nation, and origins are not the sole factors constituting diaspora. *Crabcakes*’ narrator himself belongs to a number of overlapping, uneven diasporas: a descendant of enslaved Africans, he lives in exile from the South, migrates toward educational and professional opportunities opened up by integration, later travels abroad, and relocates to the Midwest because of a transnational, interracial, cross-class community he has built around an academic site, the University of Iowa. As a member of these various migrating communities—African, southern, and academic diasporas—the narrator encounters and builds community with individuals from differently dispersed communities: Japanese writers and academics visiting the University of Iowa, black working-class southern migrants in Baltimore, a middle-class white family in Iowa City, and a Stanford alumna who has returned to her native Japan. It is the sustenance of these relationships forged through a global mobility, rather than any particular location, that enables McPherson’s narrator to “see the outlines of a new identity” less vulnerable to the disempowering racial legacies shared by nations across the globe.

IMMOBILIZED ON THE COLOR LINE

Though *Crabcakes* covers the years of McPherson's literary ascent, which included a Guggenheim Fellowship, a MacArthur award, and a Pulitzer Prize (at age 35) as well as tenured positions at the University of Virginia and the University of Iowa, the memoir never directly refers to any of these impressive achievements or the consequential turmoil that followed. Other personal events in McPherson's life never explicitly mentioned in *Crabcakes* include a marriage, the birth of a daughter, a divorce, a "protracted and expensive custody battle," and incidents of what he perceived as "jealousy," "sniping," and "racial animosity" among his UVA colleagues (Streitfeld). McPherson omits clear references to these personal traumas from his memoir, but the psychological "breakdown" these difficulties collectively triggered lies at the center of the narrative. Though McPherson placed a few essays and stories in newspapers, magazines, and journals and co-edited two issues of the literary journal *Ploughshares* in the two decades following the 1977 publication of his Pulitzer-winning story collection *Elbow Room*, *Crabcakes* represents his first book-length publication in 21 years. While readers might have expected his memoir to detail the vicissitudes of his life during the interim of relative silence, *Crabcakes* instead offers fragments of memory and history that directly relate to the consequences of McPherson's early development in segregated Savannah, Georgia, and his subsequent movements in and between Baltimore, Iowa, and Japan within an era of integration.

McPherson's *Crabcakes* locates its narrator in professional and social spaces created by the opportunities of integration, spaces that starkly contrast with the

segregated world of the narrator's past. The tensions and contradictions of these new interracial spaces generate feelings of distress that aggravate anxieties already born of segregation. McPherson specifically centers on the ambiguous nature of black mobility, highlighting its contradictory potential to grant the autonomy of modern subjectivity or pose the danger of transhistorical racial terror, be it the Middle Passage, the Underground Railroad, Jim Crow rail travel, or contemporary experiences of "driving while black." In particular, McPherson constructs mobility, as Du Bois and Hughes before him, as a site that can open up liberatory possibilities even as it reinforces modernity's historical exclusions of African Americans.

Drawing on his early experiences as a dining-car waiter, McPherson has often incorporated the metaphor of the railroad in his work to depict the ironies of his U.S. experience. His first collection, *Hue and Cry* (1968), contained "On Trains" and the much-anthologized "A Solo Song: For Doc," two stories about the possibilities and perils of rail mobility in the lives of dining-car waiters. Eight years later, McPherson co-edited *Railroad: Trains and Train People in American Culture* (1976), a celebratory collection of essays, photographs, letters, advertisements, poetry, maps, and sheet music documenting nearly two centuries of rail history.¹² As I elaborate throughout this section, McPherson continues this rail meditation in *Crabcakes*, a narrative in which the image of the train dually conveys liberty and limits.

McPherson left the segregated South—perhaps for the first time—at the age of 18 in June 1962. Having just finished his first year at Atlanta's Morris Brown College, he traveled by rail to St. Paul, Minnesota, to start training for a summer job

¹² In an essay in the collection, McPherson discusses *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the critical contradiction of U.S. ideals and realities that plays out between the majority opinion and Justice John Harlan's dissent.

on the Great Northern Railway as a dining-car waiter on its Seattle-to-Chicago line. McPherson revisits this critical journey out of the South in a 2003 *Washington Post Magazine* essay, which I refer to here because it depicts a scene from the 1960s that prefigures *Crabcakes*' examination of U.S. contradictions, through the figure of the train.¹³ In the essay, what McPherson recalls of that first ride from Atlanta to St. Paul is the moment when the train, having just crossed over the Georgia border, arrives in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a station remarkable in his memory for its location on an ever-shifting Mason-Dixon Line:

There is no movement. Instead, there is a very long wait while additional cars are added to the train taking us from Atlanta to Chicago, and then to St. Paul for training. It is close to midnight and it is dark inside the 'colored coach.' The black man wheeling his food cart up and down the aisle, ostensibly selling soft drinks and sandwiches, is quietly subverting the established order. 'Y'all don't have to sit back here no more,' he whispers to those black passengers who are still awake. 'This here's the Mason-Dixon line. Y'all can go on up to the other coaches.' No one moves. Neither do I. Lifetimes spent conforming to the settled habits of segregation weigh heavily on us. We do not dare to move. ("The Express" W16)

The temporal border of midnight and the geographical border between Georgia and Tennessee underscore other apparent divisions in this scene of southern departure, lines between segregation and desegregation, the Deep South and the peripheral

¹³ See McPherson "The Express" (2003).

South, and regional customs and federal law. These various divisions flow into the catchall of the Mason Dixon, which in 1962 was no longer a fixed geographical feature but a moveable one.

The Supreme Court's 1956 ruling in *Browder v. Gayle* prompted many southern rail companies to desegregate their passengers, both interstate and intrastate, but because of pressure from Deep South communities and states, few companies publicized their elimination of Jim Crow seating.¹⁴ The result was a nebulous, ever-shifting Jim Crow line that slowly and sporadically altered the South; the guarantee of desegregated travel was spotty, uncertain, and unreliable. After U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy warned the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) and rail industry representatives in 1957 that *Browder* had, indeed, outlawed *all* forms of Jim Crow transit, making the segregation of local and interstate travelers alike a crime, mandatory segregation (but not always customary segregation) largely ended on southern trains. However, as McPherson's account corroborates, some interstate railroads, including the Central of Georgia, refused to desegregate their local passengers. In fact, by McPherson's first summer in St. Paul in 1962, the Central of Georgia, likely the line he rode from Atlanta to Chattanooga, was the sole railroad in the country ignoring ICC warnings and still segregating its passengers.¹⁵

By staging his initial departure from the South on the unofficial Mason-Dixon Line cutting through Chattanooga in 1962, McPherson is able to fashion himself literally sitting on a line of contradiction that defines his U.S. experience, a line

¹⁴ See *Browder v. Gayle*, 352 U.S. 903 (1956).

¹⁵ See Barnes 129, 130, 182.

signaling what Paul Gilroy terms the “antinomies of modernity” (115). During the golden age of railroad domination, which stretched from the Civil War to World War I, passenger trains “were instrumental in fulfilling a condition of individual liberty: freedom of movement” (Welke x). Never before were Americans able to traverse the nation from coast to coast with such ease and speed. Rail technology allowed Americans to exercise in an unprecedented manner the freedom to move, a visible “marker of social power and of legitimacy” (Scharff 3). However, just as the first transcontinental railroad in 1869 began to make tangible “the physical mobility at the heart of American liberty,” various southern states and rail carriers began implementing Jim Crow laws, forcing African Americans to experience the rail system as a “geography of thwarted action, of arrested motion” (Welke, x; Scharff, 143). The fact that McPherson and his fellow black passengers “do not dare to move” as they sit aboard a still train underscores the denial of the autonomous mobility associated with modern identity and U.S. citizenship. McPherson and the other riders remain Jim Crowed across a federally unauthorized Mason-Dixon Line at the Georgia-Tennessee border, just as the customs of segregation illegally extend over and into an era of integration. The promises of integration—contracted in both temporal and geographical terms—remain unrealized as the Central of Georgia Jim Crow car compromises both an era and a terrain of integration.

Cast in terms of mobility, the Constitution, the 14th Amendment, and twentieth-century Supreme Court desegregation rulings promise unobstructed access to an “open road,” a democratic, national thoroughfare freely navigated by autonomous U.S. subjects. In idealized constructions, the railroad represents such an

egalitarian pathway. Antebellum observers, for instance, frequently commented on the open, unpartitioned interior of the U.S. rail car, a “space that invited mobility” and in which a “passenger could take a seat next to whomever he wanted.” Barbara Welke notes that this “physical mobility, so foreign to European travelers, seemed to embody American ideals of restless mobility, autonomy, and independence.” Antebellum passenger cars were commonly hailed “as a demonstration of the American commitment to the equality of all” (251). The train was further idealized as a vehicle of nationalization because of the illusion that rail lines bypassed the parochialisms of the communities, regions, and states they connected, and, in turn, constructed an unprecedented sense of nation. When the Northern Railroad opened in New Hampshire in 1847, for instance, statesman Daniel Webster remarked, “The railroad breaks down regional barriers. . . . The new inventions hold the promise of national unity and, even more exciting, social equality. Nothing could be as important to the ‘great mass of the community’ as this innovation ‘calculated . . . to equalize the condition of men” (qtd. in Marx 210).¹⁶ Just decades later, the “completion of the first rail line across the West to San Francisco in 1869 marked the apotheosis of a national vision (Nye 172).”¹⁷

¹⁶ Marx both paraphrases and quotes portions of Webster’s speech.

¹⁷ One of several paradoxes of the widespread vision of the transcontinental rail system as a technology of democratic nationhood is that the more than 10,000 Chinese laborers hired by Central Pacific Railroad to carve through the Sierra Nevada Mountains and lay track across Nevada and Utah in the 1860s are absent from the most-reproduced photographs of the “golden spike” ceremony at Promontory Summit, Utah, May 10, 1869. While Chinese laborers were photographed laying a rail in preparation for the ceremonious tapping of the last “golden” spike by white rail dignitaries, the absence of Asian workers and the high visibility of white laborers, onlookers, and dignitaries in the official photographs that have come to represent the occasion within the American popular imagination obscure the tremendous labor that Chinese Americans and immigrants contributed to the transcontinental rail system.

While the relatively open interior and the transcontinental breadth of the railroad helped create a sense of the train as what Kathleen Franz calls a “technological democracy,” the Jim Crow partitioning of rail cars barred its black passengers from such an egalitarian space, reducing a transcontinental “open road” to a parochial “back road” patrolled by southern white supremacy.¹⁸ In contrast to the promise of rail as a democratic national thoroughfare, Jim Crow practices brought aboard America’s nation-making fleet of trains the racial indignities and surveillance associated with the “back roads” of the South—what Houston Baker calls “omnipresent southern dangers to mind, body, and soul” (Baker 6). Southern rail companies, some independently and others in adherence to state laws, instituted segregated transit inconsistently from the end of the Civil War through the 1870s and then vigorously beginning in the late 1880s. The widespread appearance of separate coaches and partitioned cars—often located in filthy “smoking cars” polluted by the adjacent engine and white male passengers who used the car for “smoking, spitting, and drinking”—betrayed the ideal of the railroad as a grand democratic concourse uncompromised by local or regional proclivities (Welke 255).¹⁹ Though local communities and their residents might appear only as blurred terrain from the window of a speeding express train, Jim Crow accommodations prevented black passengers from similarly bypassing local customs of race. In reality, the ostensibly “open road” of rail posed the same dangers and discriminations black motorists faced navigating the South’s local “back roads.” Because autonomous mobility stands as “a cardinal

¹⁸ For a discussion of the open road as a technological democracy, see Franz 242.

¹⁹ See also Welke 260-261.

practice of the modern subject,” Jim Crow rail travel constrained blacks’ movement as well as their access to modern subjecthood (Seiler 1092).

The railroad’s dual nature as democratic “open road” and parochial “back road” reflects the contradictions of modernity that McPherson represents at Chattanooga as a conflict between the ideal of mobility and its antinomy, Jim Crow stagnation. McPherson constructs the Great Northern railroad job as an invitation to move “upward through socioeconomic strata and outward across geographical space,” even as, in the process of seeking such a goal, his narrated self is detained at a Mason-Dixon Line that fails to transition into “free” territory (Seiler 1094). The sole encouragement to address this failure of integration comes from the food-cart vendor’s unheeded whispers to subversively move into the other coaches. Black movement, then, into formerly “white” spaces and across unfamiliar geographical terrain often defines acts of integration.

In Chattanooga, the greater outrage is not the unenforced desegregation at the Mason-Dixon Line but the very existence of the Mason-Dixon line itself. It is a border that suggests division even as it illuminates the contemporaneousness of segregation and integration. The idea of continuity between the traditionally conceived eras of segregation and integration—an overlap magnified in the Chattanooga train scene—lies at the center of McPherson’s achronological narrative strategy in *Crabcakes*. By employing a narrative sequencing that defers to space not time, McPherson constructs the narrative present within the memoir as a “constellation” of epistemologies, ideologies, and practices that the era of integration

has formed *with* the segregation era.²⁰ McPherson’s use of nonlinear time denies integration as the teleological end of segregation and instead “dilute[s] the binary between the contemporary and the past” (Róman 13). The circular and oscillating progression of time demands a continual renegotiation of the past within the present, troubling any common sense that integration fully reversed or interrupted segregation. The contemporaneousness of the past and the present—often depicted in *Crabcakes* as past moments underlying or haunting the present—acknowledges the “historical past as a means to contextualize . . . contemporary conditions,” to historicize them as the immediate past in order to facilitate their examination (Róman 104).²¹

THE CONTESTED GROUNDS OF AFRICAN AMERICANIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Following Róman’s recommendation to historicize the “now,” I suggest also a mapping of the “here,” by which I mean the current grounds of African American literary criticism, in relation to *Crabcakes*. If McPherson refuses a clear division of segregation and integration into distinct eras, he also challenges the construction of the U.S. North and South as discrete regions, a partitioning particularly relevant to current discourses of spatialization within African American literary studies. As I mentioned earlier, Robert Stepto’s “symbolic geography” uses a north-south axis as the pillar of an African American literary geography that accounts for race-based social structures such as slavery and segregation as well as black rituals of

²⁰ My use of the term “constellation” borrows from Walter Benjamin’s understanding of history and his insistence that the historian stop “telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one” (263).

²¹ See also Róman 14.

resistance.²² Isolating a north-south corridor as the dominant route of African American narrative, Stepto identifies both ascent and descent narratives. Ascent narratives commonly trace the fugitive slave's journey northward via the Underground Railroad or the twentieth-century migrant's travel north via Jim Crow trains. Using Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* as an anchoring text, Stepto identifies the descent narrative, or the cultural immersion ritual, as a depiction of "a journey both to and into the South," "an immersion in a source of culture and [...] 'race-spirit'" (66).

While Stepto's analysis, published in 1979, is limited to narratives of the eras of slavery and segregation (the most recent text examined is Ellison's *Invisible Man* [1952]), African American literary scholarship and pedagogy in the subsequent three decades—as evidenced by anthologies, syllabi, and criticism—still maneuver largely within the bounds of his bipolar cartography.²³ Hortense Spillers, for instance, points to the continued authority and relevance of Stepto's archetype, when she laments the crises of a post-Civil Rights era marked by the "*dispersal* of community across so wide a social terrain that Robert Stepto's 'symbolic geography' takes on added explanatory power" (85). Spillers notes also the comprehensive aim of Stepto's geographical frame, which aspires to be:

a paradigmatic concept ... capable of identifying 'the requisite features or tropes of *any* ritualized journeys or pilgrimages in Afro-American narratives, whether they be of ascent [the journey North, actually and

²² Robert Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); hereafter cited parenthetically.

²³ Farah Jasmine Griffin's extensive and popular work in *Who Set You Flowing?* is an example of scholarship that has extended Stepto's premises.

symbolically, toward freedom in the historical outline] or immersion [the reversal of direction, back toward the matrix or cradle of the South]. (85 emphasis added)

Much of African American literary scholarship implicitly adheres to the north-south trajectory of Stepto's conceptual frame, but in some circles the relevance of either end of the axis—the reign of either the rural South or the urban North as the matrix or cradle of black experience—has become a polarizing issue. For example, in the early 1990s, Hazel Carby saw the academic reclamation of Zora Neale Hurston and the accompanying elevation of a *southern* folk aesthetic as a displacement of the crises and “cultural conflicts sparked by urbanization” (“Politics” 182). More recently, Madhu Dubey has extended Carby's criticism broadly, directing it at the “decisive turn toward southern folk culture under way in African-American literary studies,” a turn, Dubey argues, that “retreats from a century-long history of urbanization” and shifts “the scene of African-American writing away from its inescapably metropolitan conditions” (144, 154).

On the other end of the spectrum, scholars such as Houston Baker have explicitly called for a renewed focus on the South through a “new Southern studies” cultivated in the spaces of overlap among the fields of American, African-American, southern, and hemispheric criticism. In a special issue of *American Literature* in 2001, Baker along with co-editor Dana Nelson, urged the creation of a “new scholarly map of ‘The South’” that would deconstruct familiar myths, complicate old borders and terrain, and set “the Americas on a more even southern keel.”²⁴ The same year, Baker published *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker*

²⁴ Baker and Nelson 243; Baker 11.

T., a book grounded in the idea that “a black southern past” is “in very profound and undeniable ways, *the past of the Americas*” (10). Baker’s emphasis on the hemispheric implications of southern studies anticipates the global turn “new southern studies” has taken in recent years. In “Southern Turns” (2003), Riché Richardson further contributes to African Americanist articulations of a new southern studies by exploring the global reach of the South as well as directly confronting Carby’s (and by extension Dubey’s) attempts to “unsettle a discourse of blackness centered in Southern rural geography.” Richardson finds that their urban-centered paradigms “belie the continuing significance of the U.S. South and its rural contexts as factors shaping black identity” and fail to “recognize the urban as yet another hegemonic script of blackness” (723).

If McPherson rejects the mutual exclusion of the eras of segregation and integration, he also denies clear divisions of North and South, often staging narrative scenes on the very border of the Mason-Dixon or within borderland spaces such as Baltimore. Ambivalently positioned somewhere in the middle of the academic debate, McPherson’s work struggles with Malcolm X’s (useful) overstatement, recuperated by Baker, of the overlap between South and North: “Mississippi ... is anywhere in the United States south of the Canadian border” (qtd. in Baker and Nelson 231). McPherson does not confirm the dismissal of regional overlap implicit in Dubey’s denial of the interplay of North and South in the often hybrid, dislocated, and translocal lives of southern migrants (and their descendants) residing in the urban North.²⁵ In *Crabcakes*, McPherson discovers means of negotiating the temporal,

²⁵ Carol Boyce Davies’ definition of Afro-Caribbean and African American migratory subjects who are “formed, reconstituted, and relocated” in multiple locations is especially relevant to a discussion of the

geographical, and psychological overlaps of segregation and integration, means that are alternative to the north-south oscillations of African Americanist critical paradigms. Expanding the conventional north-south axis of African-American mobility by traveling westward to Iowa, McPherson encounters relationships that allow him to disrupt the inertia evoked at the Mason-Dixon. Moving farther off a north-south U.S. track, McPherson's representations of his travel to Japan, a crossing of the cultural divide that has been imagined between the East and the West since the period of the late Roman empire, enables him to undermine the color line, the Mason-Dixon Line, and other domestic remnants of slavery and segregation.

McPherson refers to the East-West divide as Pompey's Line after historian Arnold Toynbee, recognizing its origins as a military borderland between Pompey the Great's Rome to the West and Parthia to the East. Toynbee, quoted at length in *Crabcakes*, observes in *The World and the West* that, "Long after ... [Pompey's] border ceased to exist as a military frontier, it remained in the thought and literature of the West as an intellectual barrier. In the popular consciousness of the west it has been almost the boundary [sic] between the known and the unknown" (qtd. in McPherson *Crabcakes* 126). It is only after the narrator of *Crabcakes* trespasses the imaginary global border of Pompey's Line that he is able to negotiate the material conflicts inhering in the constructed boundary of the Mason-Dixon. This linking of the national and the transnational is central to McPherson's attempt to disrupt the inertia he encounters on the train at the Mason-Dixon Line. In this chapter, by examining McPherson's representation of the dual and contradictory ways in which

intra-national migration of African Americans. Applied to the writing of U.S. black southern migrants and their descendants, Davies' theory helps us read their work as a "series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing" (4).

he experiences the United States, I show how transnationalism may be conceived as a technology for negotiating such duality.

African diasporic theorists have long considered global links and formations of blackness a means of circumventing, critiquing, and intervening in the structures of the nation-state. For literary and cultural critics such as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Carole Boyce Davies, Michelle Stephens, and Brent Edwards, “diaspora” has variously signaled practices of international racial association, webs of interconnection and difference between Africans and Afro-descendants in Europe and the Americas, global frames of black subjectivity, or histories of dispersal, displacement, and migration. While McPherson’s staged border crossings align with certain aspects of diasporic discourse, namely the emphases on transnational mobility and disruptions of national structure, “black diaspora” connotes an intraracial context, where McPherson seeks an interracial one.

Diasporic approaches are often constructed as alternative to the broad body of work termed “African Americanist” and frequently point to exclusions and hegemonic tendencies within traditional black U.S. cultural work. Certain diasporic scholars have cited the “inanity of limiting the understanding of Black ... writing to United States experience” or critiqued the “racially conservative culturalism” of African Americanists “who resent the intrusion of global concerns into their ethnically cleansed canon-building operations.”²⁶ At the same time, African Americanist scholars have challenged black cultural studies critics’ “allegations of essentialism and particularism,” contending that the criticism of African American studies as essentialist and nationalist undermines the status of African American

²⁶ Davies, *Migrations of the Subject*, 4; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 138 and 145.

studies and denies “the historical and political contingencies of its very inception.”²⁷ The often antagonistic and atomized conditions of the broad field of “black” studies work to sustain a nationalist/transnationalist binary within the field, in addition to, or perhaps in tandem with, the North/South dichotomy. My two-fold objective is to work, like McPherson, at the borders between the national and the transnational and the northern and the southern even as I map new routes of mobility that flout those very borders.

While the racial limits of a traditional African diasporic frame may not provide the interracial contexts that would allow McPherson full interrogation of the limitations of U.S. modes of racial integration, other forms of black transnational discourse more readily accommodate interracial encounters and alliances. The transnational spaces charted in studies of black leftism, cosmopolitanism, internationalism, “Afro-Orientalism,” and expatriatism maneuver more closely to the literary spaces mapped in this chapter. For example, McPherson’s use of the transnational corresponds to Kate Baldwin’s study of the alternative models of subjectivity imagined by Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Paul Robeson as a result of their travel to the Soviet Union. Also, McPherson’s interest in the parallels between Japanese and African-American social customs relates to Bill Mullen’s examination of “Afro-Orientalism,” a counterdiscourse to Western racism emerging out of the historical links between peoples of African and Asian descent.²⁸

²⁷ Henderson, “Introduction” 58; Henderson, “Where, by the Way” 64.

²⁸ See Kate Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters Between Black and Red, 1922-1963* (2002); Bill Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (2004).

NATIONALLY FANTASTIC RAIL VISION

Though published after *Crabcakes*, the 1962 Chattanooga train scene in *The Washington Post Magazine* prefigures the memoir's meditation on the doubled implications and cultural narratives of rail technology. Rail mobility (and later auto mobility) is a key means for McPherson to simultaneously depict the United States' invigorating "open road" and dreadful "back road." Early in the memoir, McPherson's narrator recalls that during a 1976 research trip to the Library of Congress for his work on *Railroad*, he bumped into an old friend, Ira Kemp. The encounter is full of rail allusions: the narrator is searching for pictures of old trains, and Kemp is a college classmate whom he has not seen since the summer of 1962 when they worked together "on the road"—railspeak for their runs on the Great Northern railroad. McPherson depicts their encounter through a streaming monologue by Kemp, who gushes in reveries of the Empire Builder—the Great Northern's flagship train between Seattle and Chicago. Kemp leads the narrator back through memories of the cowboys in the snack car who tipped silver dollars and the older black porters who joked around the dinner table. He especially remembers the views from the Empire Builder when it would "slow down in the late afternoon of the first day out of St. Paul, up in the Rockies" just before dinner (34). Kemp remembers that after he would walk through the coaches ringing the dinner bell, he would stop before the one dining-car window always left open:

It was hot and noisy and crowded in the car, next to the kitchen, but when you looked out that window it was green and cool and quiet and peaceful outside. You could look down from up there through the green trees and see deer

drinkin' water from a stream. You could look up and see the tall green trees movin' in lines up toward the tops of mountains with snow on them and white clouds above them in the sky. And all the time the train would be movin'.

Things were so close and so far away at the same time you felt you could just reach out and touch a tree or a rock or the sky. Or you felt you could open up the rest of the door and step out without falling because some kind of peaceful magic out there wouldn't recognize the regular things like cooks shoutin' back in the kitchen and the passengers filin' back from the coaches to the diner.

(34-35)

From the lookout of the train, Kemp glimpses a panorama that grants a sense of transcendence and freedom. He beholds what Anne Lyden terms “railroad vision,” the traveler’s view of “tempting images of large, open landscapes and awe-inspiring vistas—of *escape*” (Lyden 85 emphasis added). For Kemp (and the author McPherson who scripts this scene) the exterior views of expansive terrain reflect rail’s promise of an unobstructed “open road,” a democratic thoroughfare of possibilities. This promise constitutes an escape from the confining interior of the dining car, which refracts the constraints and divisions of an American “back road,” the familiar territory of Kemp’s and McPherson’s past as black “boys” from segregated Georgia. Behind Kemp lies the segregated space of the car’s interior, meticulously regulated by protocols of race, gender, and class. Because the train has slowed through the Rockies, the immediate landscape is no longer a blur, but an impressive sweep of woods, alps, and wildlife that enchantingly blocks out the rigid forms of segregation surrounding Kemp. Enraptured by a moving picture that

promises him democratic access to a “spacious universe,” Kemp no longer registers the oppressive spatial dynamics of the train’s interior, the divisions between the regular coach passengers and the sleeping-car passengers, the all-black waitstaff and the Swedish cooks, and the black workers and the white riders (McPherson, “The Express” W16).

The “peaceful magic” of the natural terrain that Kemp senses through the train window reflects what Lauren Berlant terms “national fantasy,” the utopian promise that the individual subject will be transformed into the abstract citizen, the form of identity requisite to access national freedoms and privileges.²⁹ The glimpse of abstract citizenship that draws Kemp to the window operates fantastically or illusorily; Kemp only *feels* that he can “reach out and touch a tree or a rock or the sky,” but he actually cannot. The symbolic landscape remains framed within the open window, a vision that cannot be grasped from the interior of the dining car. As the material of national culture, the experience of rail travel conveys “the nation’s utopian promise to oversee a full and just integration of ... ‘the people,’ and the state” even as it “simultaneously records the discontinuous, contradictory, [and] ambiguous ... elements” of U.S. experience (Berlant 21). The view temporarily liberates Kemp from old, familiar restrictions while transporting him within a space bound by those very restrictions.

Just as the expansive view seems to diminish the restraints and partitions within the train, the experience of riding the rails all summer appears to minimize the impact of segregation once the young men returned to school:

Then in September we’d go back to Atlanta and there’d be the same old segregated buses and restaurants and hotels and water fountains, *you*

²⁹ See Berlant.

remember! They didn't matter to me after St. Paul and Seattle and Chicago. I had already seen too much on the Ranch Car of the *Empire Builder*. *The Big Bitch*. Atlanta back then just seemed kind of small and sad. Kind of *puny*. (33)

Through Kemp's monologue, McPherson invests the view from the Empire Builder with the possibilities of American liberty, possibilities that for Georgia "country boys" translates into a promise of freedom through the twinned experience of mobility *and* fantastic vision. The four summers he spent on the railroad, McPherson would later write, not only "liberat[ed] my body from the painful confines of legal segregation" but "liberated my spirit," implanting a vision of personal expansiveness. The "unfettered movement of the train across the Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana and Washington state landscapes," a combination of the tactile and the visual, the technological and the natural, elicits a sense of limitless possibilities, unconstrained by racial discrimination (McPherson, "The Express" W16). Kemp confides to McPherson in the recently desegregated cafeteria of the Library of Congress that he had "felt free from all the bullshit lookin' out that window" (McPherson, *Crabcakes* 35).

But true to the dual nature of national culture—utopian fantasy masking inevitable contradiction—Kemp, like Senator Trumbull in the epigraph, comes to sense integration's trumpeting of freedom as a delusory and "uncertain sound." In the Library of Congress, Kemp appears disillusioned by the failed promise of his early railroad vision. After Morris Brown, Kemp graduated from the Howard University School of Law and went on to a job investigating complaints in the Pennsylvania attorney general's office. Fulfilling the economic promises of integration—access to

the American Dream he glimpsed from the window of the train—the newly married Kemp began “[m]akin’ good money for the first time,” bought a house, and planned a family (30).

He ran into trouble, however, when he began investigating complaints of racially motivated ballot-tampering. Ignoring his boss’s demand that he “forget” about the complaints, Kemp filed a lawsuit against Pennsylvania Secretary of State C. Delores Tucker on behalf of African-American and Puerto Rican voters. Against the advice of his boss and his wife, Kemp pursued the case all the way to the Supreme Court. After filing the case, Kemp tells McPherson, “I was fired” and “my wife left me and took the house. White picket fence, crumbsnatchers, gone like my lucky silver dollars. I didn’t have shit. But I still filed. I had to move into the YMCA in Harrisburg. I had to file from there.” (32). After losing the case in Federal Court, he went on to win an appeal before the Supreme Court, where, Kemp claims to the narrator, “The old system was held in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment just before this last primary in May” (33).

Driving Kemp through all of his losses was the desire to recapture the sense of possibilities he had felt at the open dining-car window. “I felt that same way when I first filed my case,” he tells the narrator, “I want to feel that way again” (35). In pursuing the national ideal of political equality through the Supreme Court case, Kemp sought to make real the utopian promise of abstract citizenship for himself, the plaintiffs, and an entire district of black and Puerto Rican voters. Kemp believed he had made passage into citizenship—that his status as a historically circumscribed individual had been overwritten by a national promise of wholeness—at the window

of the Empire Builder, but the promise of abstract, impervious citizenship dissolved when he attempted to actually pursue its guarantees, leaving him a mere raced historical subject (Berlant 25). The national fantasy perpetuated by cultural icons such as the Statue of Liberty (or the transcontinental rail system), Lauren Berlant argues, is a utopian promise:

to provide a passage for the individual subject to the abstract identity of ‘citizen’ Thus the [icon] ... promis[es] the immortality of identification, suspended outside any historical moment By passing into citizenship through inscription in the National Symbolic ..., the citizen reaches another plane of existence, a whole, unassailable body.... According to this logic, disruptions in the realm of the National Symbolic create a collective sensation of almost physical vulnerability [or anxiety] National identity provides, then, a translation of the historical subject into an ‘Imaginary’ realm of ideality and wholeness, where the subject becomes whole by being reconstituted as a *collective* subject, or citizen. (24)

Despite Kemp’s claims of judicial success, he displays the symptoms of anxiety and vulnerability associated with disruptions in the national fantasy of citizenship.

Crabcakes’ narrator recalls that long after their reunion, he obtained a copy of Kemp’s case, which revealed that Kemp, relying on “the overburdened clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment,” had lost the case before the Supreme Court (36). Kemp’s fiction of his legal victory can be read as an effort to manually sustain “the fantasy-work of the National Symbolic” in the face of its collapse by reconstituting himself as the “whole, unassailable” citizen he had once seen reflected in the open window of

the train (Berlant 22). It is through the figure of Kemp, through his integration-framed expectations and failures, that McPherson represents at once the double vision of the nation as an “open road” and its refracted image, the “back road.”

RECONFIGURING THE RACIAL RAIL TROPE

In the next section, I read the train scene in *Crabcakes* as an extension of the Chattanooga scene that appeared in *The Washington Post*. I also read these two rail scenes together—one in the U.S. South in 1962 and the other in Tokyo in 1990—as bookends of a series of troubled scenes of mobility narrated by McPherson in an era of integration. In 1976, headed to a job interview at the University of Virginia for a position that is undoubtedly the product of a new era of integration, the narrator pulls into a motel on a Virginia back road, where he encounters a group of police chiefs who encircle his car and pound on the hood with “extreme prejudice and focused hatred.” Seven years later, the narrator recounts, he is pulled over on a Maryland back road by an officer who berates him with racial epithets, arrests him, and impounds his car. McPherson emphasizes in these scenes the precariousness of black mobility. The combined racial trauma of these “back road” encounters forces McPherson’s autobiographical narrator to retreat from the dangers and contradictions of the road. Suffering a nervous breakdown just as he begins a tenured position at the University of Iowa in 1981, McPherson takes refuge in *immobility*, cloistering himself in the bedroom of his Iowa home. If Chattanooga in 1962 marked his first southern departure, his flight in the early ’80s from his traumatic back-road encounters and what he sensed was UVA’s hostile racial environment marks the beginning of

McPherson's southern exile, his refusal to venture south again across the Mason-Dixon.

In search of respite and freedom in 1990, the narrator in *Crabcakes* travels instead on an east-west axis to Japan as a guarded and apprehensive traveler. In journeying to Japan, McPherson encounters a country that “transformed itself into a modern nation and a colonial empire” throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the U.S. occupation after World War II leading to the “transformation of Japan into an Americanized nation” (Koshiro 9, 6). Much like the United States and other Western imperialist nations, Japan established a system of racialization staked on its own supposed homogeneity and purity, a racial hierarchy used to justify and facilitate its colonization of Taiwan, Korea, and other Asian sites. McPherson's U.S.-Japanese routings contend, then, with what historian Yukiko Koshiro has termed “trans-Pacific racisms,” both the conflict and interdependence of U.S. and Japanese racisms and racial rhetoric that have shaped international relations across two centuries. Seeking respite from U.S. racial entrenchments, McPherson travels to a country to which the United States had once exported the very Jim Crow practices he flees. In 1946, the first year of the U.S. occupation of Japan, “American GIs and the Japanese were completely segregated,” with signs in public places marking separate Japanese and Allied entrances (Koshiro 60). In part as a response to the historical racism of the United States toward Japan—embodied domestically in a series of U.S. laws and court rulings that codified the ineligibility of Japanese and other Asians for U.S. citizenship—Japan constructed a pan-Asian consciousness that defied practices and discourses of U.S. white supremacy even as Japan based its own supposed

superiority within the pan-Asian hierarchy on its “identity as an honorary white nation” (Koshiro 13).³⁰

The history of the complex of U.S.-Japanese racisms circulates in the background of a pivotal scene of McPherson’s stay in Japan. McPherson rides a train through Tokyo seated alongside Mrs. Ishii, a Japanese woman who works for a group that has asked him to give a speech on the condition of blacks in the United States. On the hot and humid train crowded with Japanese commuters, the narrator sweats profusely, feeling uneasy as “the only foreigner” in the car (194).³¹ Glancing over at Mrs. Ishii, he notices she is crying over something she has been reading. Primed by U.S. racial protocols and deferential to what he knows of Japanese social hierarchies, the narrator simply ignores Mrs. Ishii. He knows that even in the era of integration, U.S. racial codes prohibit “two people from different backgrounds, no matter how close or intimate they are ... to express the depths of that intimacy in a public space full of strangers” (194). The narrator is unaware that Mrs. Ishii has been moved to tears by his own writing that a mutual friend has translated for her. He knows only that the burden of U.S. racial customs he carries like psychological baggage and his growing knowledge of Japanese social codes keep him from crossing the lines of race, gender, and nationality that separate the two of them. He says, “[i]n deference to her social station, and to her risk of potential censorship by the car—full of same-

³⁰ For a history of the latent and overt racisms that have marked U.S.-Japanese relations, see Koshiro.

³¹ McPherson’s sense of himself as “the only foreigner,” even if true, helps perpetuate a Japanese myth of racial homogeneity and purity, a national imagining that necessarily suppresses the presence of racial and ethnic minorities, including Chinese, Koreans, and other Asians, who have long faced discriminatory policies in Japan. Japan’s history of inequitable treatment of its former colonial subjects reflects the complex nature of a Japanese national identity that has fought against Western anti-Asian policies even as it has engaged in anti-Asianism within a pan-Asian world. For a discussion of the overlap of U.S. and Japanese discriminatory policies—their “mutual racism”—see Koshiro 90-93.

seeming Japanese—I thought it best to *protect* her by *ignoring* her tears. *I pretended to not know her as a person*” (195).

The narrator has entered Japan yearning to cast off an American-made self overdetermined by race. He says that in the United States “[s]omething [had] happened to my soul, to cause it to withdraw into a category created for it, and projected *onto* me, from places outside my *self*” (192). The autobiographical subject seated beside Mrs. Ishii, then, seeks an authentic self undistorted by racial categorization even as he rides within the form of conveyance—rail—that served as the basis of the Supreme Court case authorizing racial classification. While I began the discussion of Jim Crow trains from the perspective of mid-twentieth-century desegregation, I’d like to circle back now and discuss Jim Crow rail at the turn of the twentieth century from the point of its legal origins in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

The Supreme Court’s decision in *Plessy* in 1896 can be said to have given birth to the African American literary trope of Jim Crow rail scenes to which McPherson has so frequently been drawn. The Tokyo and Chattanooga rail scenes work intertextually with a convention that appears in a number of key works, including Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*, Charles Chesnutt’s *The Marrow of Tradition*, James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, Richard Wright’s “How Jim Crow Feels,” Toni Morrison’s *Sula*, Ralph Ellison’s “Boy on A Train,” and Andrea Lee’s *Russian Journal*. That African American literary works have continually revisited or restaged the rail scene at the center of Homer Plessy’s unsuccessful challenge of Louisiana’s Jim Crow practices speaks to

the centrality of the case—as well as rail—in the founding of legal segregation, the consolidation of white supremacy, and definitions of U.S. citizenship.

Critical race theorists have encouraged us to examine legal discourse such as *Plessy* as narratives or fictions about racial identities and relationships. I suggest here that we also look at the Jim Crow train itself as a narrative that constructs racial identity and relationships through the stories it continually narrates about its categorized and sequestered passengers. By assigning racial meaning through its partitions, the Jim Crow train tells fictions about the passengers who negotiate its racially constituted layout. Despite the *Crabcakes* narrator's distance in time and space from the Chattanooga scene of unfulfilled desegregation, the narrator continues to “ride Jim Crow” in Tokyo in 1990 because he is still habituated to a narrative of his own containment within the Jim Crow car, a metaphor for the cramped and restricted spaces intended to contain blackness. The specter of Jim Crow rail travel that underlies the 1990 Tokyo scene forces us to consider again the overlaps and shared spaces between segregation and integration.

Even as the narrator seeks in Tokyo a self uninhibited by racial codes and practices, he complies with a decidedly American story about his identity, a story built into the structure of the train. In the *Washington Post* essay, McPherson recalled that in 1962 in Chattanooga no one dared to move beyond the Jim Crow coach because “[I]fetimes spent conforming to the settled habits of segregation weigh[ed] heavily on us” (“The Express” W16). McPherson narrates himself still bound by such protocols nearly 30 years later in Tokyo when he is unable to reach across to comfort Mrs. Ishii.

As the narrator and Mrs. Ishii ride on “through the underbelly of Tokyo,” she glances over at him and sees that he is sweating profusely. Instinctively, she reaches over and busily wipes the sweat from his face with her handkerchief (195). Mrs. Ishii’s gesture immediately alters the narrator; it is a solution, he says, to the “paradox that I had brought into Japan with me” (195):

... when she wiped away my sweat from my face with her own handkerchief, which was damp with her *own* sweat and her tears, *something of her*, far beyond the human sympathy of the gesture itself ... *entered into me*. ... I began then, slowly, to take another chance on being openly human I began to move out of, with a tentative slowness, the black compartment that had been enforced on me, or that I had accepted for myself. (197)

McPherson revises the conventional Jim Crow rail scene by relocating it to a transnational setting, but it is his scripting of Mrs. Ishii’s simple gesture that works to stall, or undermine, the U.S. racial protocols that power this scene, divorced though it is from a U.S. landscape.

The staging of the Jim Crow rail trope in Tokyo is not only a relocation of a traditional African American literary and legal scene; the conveyance of the rail car scene from the United States to Japan also retraces the exportation of U.S. segregatory practices to Japan during the U.S. occupation in the post-World War II era. A policy of nonfraternization between American troops and Japanese civilians took shape first as singular directives, issued by local Army units, that unsurprisingly replicated the edicts of Jim Crow, demanding, for instance, that any “car, train, or horse carriage that carries a Japanese person on board must not pass an American

automobile,” a transgression punishable by death. The effectiveness of rail segregation as a visual staging of racial difference, a practice perfected for half a century in the United States, was not neglected by the U.S. Army, even as it continued to construct a liberatory discourse around U.S. war actions. By 1946, Japanese rail cars were strictly regulated by a fused complex of race and nationality: “American troops rode in spacious comfort, while the Japanese were jammed into unheated coaches, usually with no windows” (Koshiro 60).

Seated beside one another on the Tokyo train, McPherson and Mrs. Ishii signal this complex history of mutual U.S.-Japanese racisms and imperialisms and shared Afro-Asian experiences of U.S power. In depicting the natural but “improper” act of Mrs. Ishii wiping sweat from his brow, McPherson theorizes *communitas*, an alternative to insufficient nation-based projects of integration. Unregulated by the nation’s contradictory concessions and compromises of freedom, *communitas* consists of spontaneous acts of bonding that challenge, cut across, or occur outside of social norms and structures. In disrupting the racial protocols of both the United States and Japan, Mrs. Ishii repeats the act of the Chattanooga train vendor who quietly subverted the established order by encouraging the black passengers to move into the other coaches. While the vendor’s whispers went unheeded by a car full of immobile passengers, McPherson scripts Mrs. Ishii’s gesture as a disruption of that inertia, a disruption that enables both of them to begin to move across color-nationality lines. The transnational restaging of the Jim Crow rail scene allows McPherson not only to negotiate his dual and contradictory U.S. experiences but to

place those discrepancies within a wider, transnational frame, a realm of overlapping diasporas.

McPherson recuperates the freedom of mobility heralded in the juridical realm, in cases such as *Jones v. Mayer*, yet alters it, disregarding as much as possible the regulated and normative boundaries of race and nation. Mrs. Ishii's gesture, a signal that alerts McPherson to his citizenship within a global community of imbricated diasporas, sets him on a path of developing further transnational and transracial bonds upon his return to the United States. Living in Iowa City, McPherson builds transnational community from a seemingly unlikely Midwestern base, forging friendships with Japanese colleagues visiting the University of Iowa's Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, but also with the "ordinary Americans" who are the neighbors on his street: "Black, Asian, Irish, lesbian, Jewish, Spanish, Anglo-Saxon, etc. We all live here, as best we can. We actively neighbor to each other" (McPherson, *Crabcakes* 222). This neighboring requires not the celebrated nation-based mobility of travel across an ostensibly open American frontier, but the smaller yet more meaningful everyday movements across lines of color, nationality, sexuality, religion, etc.

Chapter 3: Spectacular Absences: The Restricted Black

Spectator in Andrea Lee's *Russian Journal*

In her first published work, “The Blues Abroad”—a 1979 *New Yorker* “Talk of the Town” piece that would go on to become a chapter in her first book, the travel narrative *Russian Journal*—Andrea Lee gives U.S. readers a glimpse of B.B. King performing live in the Soviet Union. Lee frames her recollections of the Leningrad concert in terms of the dynamics between the jovial and enthusiastic B.B. King and the reserved Russians, dressed up in American denim and Italian ankle boots, gazing silently at the bluesman onstage. King’s efforts to turn the crowd of spectators into participants—he “played an irresistible riff, stopped, and leaned toward the audience with his hand cupped to his ear”—at first suggests to the Russians “a lack of culture and an almost frightening disorder,” but by the end of the concert they are “answering B.B. King’s playful coaxing on the guitar” with claps, hoots, and “tumultuous applause” (23, 24). Perhaps because of the privilege of her U.S. nationality or her association with the *New Yorker*, Lee was fortunate enough to talk to B.B. King at intermission. “He rose when we came into his dressing room, a large, dark-skinned man with sweat glistening on his forehead,” she writes, treating King’s body, its raciality, as remarkable, or spectacular, a seeming redundancy for a U.S. readership already well acquainted with the performer. In response to her encounter with King, Lee admires what she sees as his onstage transparency: “Mr. King is one of the few performers whom it is not a revelation to see close up; he presents himself onstage

exactly as he is, and his conversation has the same warmth and intermittent playfulness as his music” (23). Lee’s conflation of King’s performative and historical selves further links his warm spirit and the rowdy blues, a correspondence, it is implied, that is inscribed in the sign of his racialized body.

That Lee praises the ostensible correspondences between King’s onstage persona and his offstage nature—both suggestively linked to his corporeality—is fascinating, especially considering the fact that reviewers of *Russian Journal* took Lee to task for what they read as the discrepancy between her own narrative self-presentation and her “flesh-and-blood” identity. In *Russian Journal* (1981), Lee’s narrator, the traveling American spectator, declines to mention her racial identity at all, except for one brief, indirect reference to herself as an “American black,” an omission and disclosure that disturbed several reviewers.¹ In contrast to Lee’s impression of B.B. King presenting “himself onstage exactly as he is,” some reviewers found Lee to be “a revelation . . . close up.” As a *Washington Post* writer put it, “Discovering that Andrea Lee is black gave me the feeling that, for all of its candor, *Russian Journal* is holding some things back” (Osnos 10).

Together, Lee’s racial omission and reviewers’ responses to it form a conundrum animated by questions of the significance and uses of racial identity in an ostensibly post-segregation era. For instance, what were the social structures and historical contexts that Lee negotiated as a black woman writer in the late 1970s and early 1980s and how did those negotiations register in and perhaps structure the writing itself? What cultural frames allowed reviewers to insist on Lee’s racial

¹ Throughout this chapter, as in the chapter on McPherson’s *Crabcakes*, I refer to both “Lee” and “Lee’s narrator” as a means of distinguishing between the “flesh-and-blood” author Andrea Lee and her constructed autobiographical subject, the “I” of *Russian Journal*, respectively.

disclosure but not the racial disclosure of the countless white authors whose books they had also reviewed? And finally, just what is at stake in both Lee's racial masking and unmasking? In responding to these queries, I take up *Russian Journal* as a record of Lee's efforts to further integrate not just the *New Yorker* but "American" identity itself, a record that forces us to contend with protocols of race that have sustained uneven and contradictory formations of U.S. identity, even within an era of integration.

In this chapter, I approach the project of integration through the multiplicity of gazes—Lee's narrative gaze, reviewers' critical gazes, and readers' consumptive gazes—that constitute the racial experiment of *Russian Journal* in order to consider the twin legacies of restricted black spectatorship and overdetermined black spectacle that enable the idea of American identity as a marker of one's access to the power to gaze. In the previous chapter I examined the difficulties that black histories of restricted mobility and dispossession pose for the achievement of the mobile, property-based U.S. identity invoked in integration-era laws. In this chapter I again take up the nature of modern U.S. identity, this time examining how identity is also a visual formation, registering one's ability to both see and (not) be seen and determining one's location within a national grid of power. Spectatorship and spectacle—or visibility and visibility—have historically been troubled arenas for African American subjects within and beyond the Jim Crow era because U.S. legal and social discourses have confined black identity to restricted gazing and hypervisibility. My priority here is to analyze Lee's challenge of, as well as her deference to, the racially coded model of American identity as the achievement of

spectatorship. I show how she violates, even as she fulfills, U.S. codes of white
visuality (the state of seeing) and black visibility (the state of being seen) to suggest a
new integrated American spectator that destabilizes the boundaries of whiteness and
defamiliarizes its mechanisms, even as it troublingly leaves the powers of whiteness
intact. Lee's narrative strategies of racial masking and unmasking superficially link
American spectatorship and black identity through a miscegenistic intimacy that
develops between a black author and the white readers who were initially unaware
that Lee is black. *Russian Journal* uses this interracial intimacy as a way to redefine
American-ness but instead creates an unstable American identity that ultimately
evacuates blackness. The black spectator—one who contends with the material
consequences of globalized racialization—fails to ever appear. This absence limits
the potential of Lee's project to undermine the systems of racial representation in
both the United States and the Soviet Union. Attending to the larger goals of this
dissertation, I use Lee's literary experimentation to track the remains of segregation's
identity categories and subject formations as well as to examine how normative racial
representations have continued to render whiteness an invisible (yet visible) racial
category and blackness its necessary hypervisual counterpoint—well beyond the
presumed end of segregation (Carby 85).

RACIALLY INTEGRATING “THE TALK OF THE TOWN”

While Russians “had little idea what the blues was,” associating “Negro”
music only with jazz or spirituals, Lee writes in “The Blues Abroad,” they
nonetheless flocked to see the “great *Negritanski* musician” billed by the Voice of

America in Leningrad as the “best-known blues musician in the world” (23). As a Russian concertgoer tells Lee, “B.B. King astounded me. . . . He poured his whole heart and soul out there on the stage” (24). The whole of the image that Lee constructs of the bluesman using his ever-present guitar Lucille to coax the stiff Russians into clapping, whistling, and hooting along rehearses the historically assumed correspondences between the visible material body and racial identity. Embodying his emotive blues, King’s corporeality in Lee’s depiction—large, dark, and sweating—confirms expectations that the material self will be a reliable register of identity, upholding “the cultural logic that the physical body is the site of identic intelligibility” (Ginsberg 4).

In “The Blues Abroad,” which would later be incorporated into Lee’s *Russian Journal*, a narrative of her 10-month sojourn with her husband in Moscow and Leningrad from 1978 to 1979, Lee the narrator declines to offer up her own body as a source of racial legibility in the same manner that she constructs B.B. King’s. In fact, the narrator refuses any viewing of her body, never describing her physical self beyond her American clothing. Though Lee’s subject, the blues abroad, is explicitly about race and nation, she declines to acknowledge the fusion of racial and Cold War imperatives that underlie King’s tour, his Russian reception, and her own intraracial encounter with him on Soviet terrain. Lee’s narrator is identified only as American, and only implicitly, in a reference to the narrator as one of the foreigners at the concert—the only people in the crowd who “shouted and stomped out the beat” along with B.B. King at the start of the concert, making the Russians stare openmouthed in disbelief (23).

Lee constructs the racial absences of “The Blues Abroad,” which carry over into *Russian Journal*, under the pretext of effacing herself “as much as possible” in order to “let the country come through” (A. Lee, "Double Lives" 71). Lee’s aim of self-erasure as a means of perceiving Russia “in a state as close as possible to the way it might have been if [she] hadn’t been there” works against the logic of the genre of autobiography (that is, its purpose and processes of self-creation), as *Russian Journal* tracks encounters, relationships, and a perspective that are thoroughly imbued with her personal desires and inclinations ("Double Lives" 67). Lee’s opinions, attitudes, and judgments pervade *Russian Journal*, shaping the narrative as the observations of an elite, if not snobbish, American woman. More importantly, Lee’s racial effacement fails to attend to the racial stratifications deeply penetrating Soviet social structures, even as the narrative explicitly registers the impact of other modes of her identity—nationality, class, and gender—on the Russians she encounters. Her project then, becomes an attempt to represent Russia not as if she hadn’t been there, but as if she were not black. A light-complexioned woman who has described herself as black American and most recently as African American, Lee has justified her physical erasure in *Russian Journal* by explaining that “[b]ecause of the way that I look, most Russians tended to assume that I was that not-unusual phenomenon, a Cuban exchange student, and so I didn’t attract much attention” ("Double Lives" 66-67). The Soviet setting of Lee’s narrative then, assists in her project of racial masking, for in Russia, according to Lee, her body’s potentially racially ambiguous appearance could be read in a manner that exceeded the bounds of the dominant black-white racial binary of the United States.

The publication of “The Blues Abroad” as a segment of “The Talk of the Town,” the most recognizable department of the *New Yorker*, itself a ubiquitous product of 20th-century American culture, further enabled Lee’s attempt to represent Russia as “it might have been if [she] hadn’t been there.” “The Talk of the Town” allowed Lee to make use of the invisibility long associated with the column’s infamously anonymous “we.” Unsigned, “The Blues Abroad” is written in classic “Talk of the Town” form, opening in an unidentified first-person plural voice. (Unbeknown to the *New Yorker*’s readers, Lee’s narrative “we” actually refers to Lee and her husband, Tom Fallows, a doctoral student whose research grant funded their travel to the Soviet Union.) The exclusion of any explicit signifiers of the narrator’s racial identity works in tandem with the anonymity of the column, allowing Lee’s narrator to mirror the imagined community—affluent, educated, and white—of *New Yorker* readers. Lee’s narrator accentuates her U.S. identity, operating within the *New Yorker*’s collective “we” as a fellow erudite (and presumably white) American abroad. While the narrator does not explicitly portray herself as white, the frame of “The Talk of the Town” allows her to exercise a privilege that has historically accrued to U.S. whiteness, that of treating racial identity as unremarkable. By incorporating the disembodied voice of “The Talk of the Town” in *Russian Journal*, Lee claims as her own the mechanisms of white transparency, those unapparent techniques that allow whiteness to operate as “that elusive color that seems not to be one” (Abel 498). In using such a narrative strategy, Lee seems well aware that within the U.S. racial system, racially “unmarked bodies [including racially unmarked texts] constitute the currency of normative whiteness” (Butler 170). Fully employing classic

“Talk” anonymity, itself a mask of white, male normativity, Lee escapes potentially stigmatizing visibility as a black American writer in her first publication.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a challenge of integrating the *New Yorker* for Lee, Charlayne Hunter, and Jamaica Kincaid, the trio comprising the magazine’s first black staff writers, was to draft narrative identities that could fit within or alongside the frame of the historically white voice of “The Talk of the Town” “we.”² From the *New Yorker*’s start in 1925, “The Talk of the Town” ran as a conversational mix of New York City vignettes anonymously narrated by a “we” that from 1925 to the pronoun’s demise in the late 1990s was as much an “organizational entity” as it was a reflection of elite and upper-middle-class America, “uniting contributors and readers as a single group” (J. Y. Lee 114, 23).³ While the “Talk of the Town” pieces were occasionally written as a dispatch from a friend of the collective pronoun or from some colorful persona, such as “Our Man Stanley” (Philip Hamburger), “The Long-Winded Lady” (Maeve Brennan), or “our acquaintance the old curmudgeon,” writers of the unsigned “Talk” pieces (among them James Thurber and John Cheever) spoke as a collective “we” in a voice that was “urbane yet slightly innocent” and perceived “almost always a man” and almost always as white (Boxer E35).

The white framing voice of the column’s “we” necessarily mediated between its white readership and any black presence within “The Talk of the Town” before 1963 when the magazine hired its first black editorial staffer. Prior to 1963, the blacks profiled or interviewed in “The Talk of the Town” most often were entertainers and

² Faith Berry was the first African American hired as an editorial assistant by the *New Yorker* in early 1963, and she published a single “Talk of the Town” piece (see below).

³ The byline “Van Bibber III” or “The New Yorker” was appended to the earliest “Talk of the Town” columns. The use of “we” in unsigned “Talk of the Town” columns was a fixed feature by the midpoint of the magazine’s first year, 1925.

athletes—boxers, singers, dancers, actresses, musicians, and baseball players. More overtly stereotypical, however, was the content of some of the colloquial anecdotes that regularly interspersed the main “Talk of the Town” segments. For example, in the 30 Jan. 1943 issue, “The Talk of the Town” closed with a few sentences titled “Precious Cargo” about two U.S. Army majors visiting a post in the Midwest. They were being driven around the base by a “colored corporal,” who, unlike most of the reckless soldiers previously assigned to the job, drove at a conservative 30 miles per hour. When the majors complimented their driver, he replied, “ ‘Well, suhs... Ah look at it dis way—Ah’m in disshere jeep too’ ” (“The Talk of the Town: Precious Cargo” 13). Such a construction of black speech, published during wartime in a month when black enlistment topped 467,000 troops, draws on the historical use of black dialect as a comic interlude within “properly” literate white discourse, such as the collective prose of “The Talk of the Town” (Moore 29). Framed as they are by the “correct” speech of the collective “we,” the represented black deformities and mispronunciations of the English language here, as John Edgar Wideman notes, stand as “a sign not simply of difference but of inferiority” (Wideman 34). Most of the *New Yorker*’s white audience would have read this representation of what is construed as black dialect as “an accurate representation of Negro character,” a familiar cultural trope announcing “the presence of an entire value system—white superiority and black inferiority” (35).

Under William Shawn’s editorship of the magazine, beginning in 1952, “Talk of the Town” made efforts to expand the breadth and depth of its black coverage, as demonstrated, for example, by the columns it devoted to black playwright Lorraine

Hansberry and then-Ghanaian Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah. However, as late as 1963, the *New Yorker* was still carrying on its tradition of publishing the purported letters of black servants to their employers or the black dialect supposedly overheard by writers and readers alike—the collective white “we.” A snippet from the 5. Jan. 1963 issue reads, “Yet another note from a domestic: ‘Dear Miss Young, I’ll be here next Wednesday. The farther Wednesday, I won’t be in until Thursday’” (“The Talk of the Town” 24). These textual representations of black verbal deficiency worked in tandem with *New Yorker* cover images of black domestics in white kitchens, literary and graphic cues that helped shape and affirm white American assumptions of black alterity and minority throughout the early and mid-twentieth century.

The historical use of a black presence as a foil for the white framing voice of “The Talk of the Town” thus shadowed the earliest black *New Yorker* staff writers, Lee, Kincaid, and Hunter, who each devised narrative strategies of altering, undermining, or simply preserving the authority of “The Talk of the Town” voice, a “literary frame [that had] *a priori* devalued black speech and sensibility” before their arrival (Wideman 35). Kincaid and Hunter helped integrate the *New Yorker* in the decade before Lee’s hire, and their early “Talk of the Town” contributions are relevant to the publication of Lee’s work in the storied magazine because their strategies for transforming the black self from spectacle to spectator within the frame of the “Talk” “we” set precedents for the representation of blackness, if not for Lee, then for the *New Yorker*’s readers.

Charlayne Hunter first appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1963 as the subject of a three-part series by Calvin Trillin about the desegregation of the University of Georgia. Hunter and friend Hamilton Holmes entered the university in 1961, ushering in the now well-known desegregation of the school. Hired as an editorial assistant in 1963, Hunter would become only the second black writer for “The Talk of the Town.”⁴ Hunter’s early work for “The Talk of the Town,” to which she was promoted in 1966—employs the collective “we,” taking the genteel pronoun into territory largely uncharted by the magazine and unknown by its readers, places like Brooklyn’s Bedford-Stuyvesant (black New York’s “Second City,” after Harlem) as it recovered from riots spurred by the fatal shooting of a black teenager by a white police lieutenant; “The Corner” at 125th Street and Seventh Avenue in Harlem, a magnet since the 1920s for all manner of soapbox orators, preachers, and exhorters, among them Malcolm X; and, facing The Corner, the storefront of the famed National Memorial African Bookstore, headquarters of “the Professor,” activist Lewis Michaux, who presided over the informal gathering place of politicians, intellectuals, journalists, students, and community residents. Hunter has said that though “not everything she wrote for *The New Yorker* was about race or black people,” she distinguished herself by writing “about what I knew or what I was intimately interested in. But what I knew and what I was intimately interested in was also something that wasn't being covered anywhere, for the most part. And that was the

⁴ Barnard graduate Faith Berry was hired as an editorial assistant in the months following the *New Yorker* publication of James Baldwin’s “Letter from a Region of My Mind” in the 17 Nov. 1962 issue. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, Berry states that she was one of two other black female employees ... on the editorial staff” when Hunter was hired in the summer of 1963 (see Berry). Berry’s sole “Talk of the Town” piece, an interview with U.S. Ambassador to Finland Carl Rowan, the first African American to hold the position, ran in the 7 Dec. 1963 issue.

black community, the way I saw it. And I saw Harlem as a very exciting, dynamic, diverse place” (Hunter-Gault, "Interview #2").

Since *all* of the “Talk of the Town” writers were, Hunter says, “really good writers,” “writers who come from the best schools,” and since all of them wrote in the editorial “we” form, for a piece to get into the “Talk of the Town” it “had to be presented in a way that was different from what everybody else was doing.” Hunter’s focus on the black community, she says, gave her that “edge, because this was 1963, ’64, ’65. There wasn’t that much of a concerted effort to cover the black community in any of the media.... So it was a very sort of episodic, paternalistic look ... that predominated in the media at that time about minorities, and blacks in particular.” Hunter presented black New York—Harlem street corners; black students at Columbia University; New York’s first female borough president, Constance Baker Motley; a memorial service for Langston Hughes—not as a source of deviance or entertainment but “through the eyes of someone who didn’t see it as just one big pathological blur but as a place where people lived” (Hunter-Gault, "Interview #5")

Like Hunter, Antiguan native Jamaica Kincaid began her career at the *New Yorker* as a subject of another writer’s prose.⁵ Her first appearance in “The Talk of the Town” in 1974 was as a highly visible character in a piece, “With Jamaica,” written by her friend and staff writer George Trow: “We took our friend Jamaica Kincaid, who is just slightly sassy, to the opening of a new club on West Fourth Street called the Bottom Line, and then she took us to a roller rink in Brooklyn.” “Our friend Jamaica” serves as a cultural guide, escorting the *New Yorker*’s “we” to “black

⁵ Kincaid migrated from Antigua to New York City at the age of 17 in 1965. She would later marry Allen Shawn, son of *New Yorker* editor William Shawn, who ran the magazine from 1952 to 1987.

night” at the Empire Rollerdrome, where “about eight hundred young black people” either skated “around in infinite dervishlike figures” or crowded around the rails of the oval track. Anonymously, Trow introduces “our friend Jamaica” to the *New Yorker*’s overwhelmingly white audience, remarking that she makes it “a point to combine her Striking Black Looks with the syntax of Eve Arden” (31).⁶ As “our sassy black friend Jamaica Kincaid [sic],” Kincaid acts as a guest spectator in these early “Talk” appearances, and at the same time, she is framed by Trow’s narrative as a spectacle, who with her “sassy” comments draws the gaze of the *New Yorker*’s readers, many of them white, educated, suburban women.

By Kincaid’s third appearance several months later, she was promoted from a “Talk” character to a “Talk” writer, giving a lively description in her own voice of the West Indian-American Day Carnival in Brooklyn. Kincaid narrates her first “Talk” piece, “West Indian Weekend,” not as the anonymous “we” but as “sassy Antiguan Jamaica Kincaid,” one of the few “Talk” writers, if not the first and at the time the only, to write under his or her own name. She guides readers through a maze of Carnival practices and festivities, writing, for instance, that “what I really have to do is to tell you about ‘jumping up.’ ‘Jumping up’ is a very important West Indian concept. You ‘jump up’ when things get to be so exciting you just can’t sit still, and that happens all the time during Carnival.” Kincaid is clearly an observer-participant here, as the piece is as much about Carnival as it is about her experience of it. She also seems fully aware of the spectacle that Carnival and by extension her narrative about Carnival presented to white attendants, as she remarks, “Many of the white

⁶ Kincaid’s “Striking Black Looks” perhaps refers at least in part to her hair, which was dyed blond. Eve Arden was a white actress who starred in the late-1940s-and-1950s radio and TV situation comedy “Our Miss Brooks” about a single high school English teacher with a caustic but loving temperament.

people there looked as if they were doing fieldwork for an extension course in Inter-Cultural Interaction: The Folk Experience” (31). Kincaid’s critique of white ethnographic spectatorship addresses the whites within her narratives, but her comments also extend beyond the narrative, critiquing the white gaze of “Talk of the Town” “we”—its writers and readers alike—that had early “posit[ed] black subjects ... as objects of ethnographic contemplation” (Wald 170). In her early pieces, she develops a pattern of fusing glimpses of black cultural life with humorous yet incisive critiques of whiteness (and blackness) in the voice of “our friend Jamaica,” enabling an acknowledgment from within the “Talk of the Town” of the column’s implied but previously unspoken whiteness. Kincaid narrates her “Talk of the Town” segments in her own voice under her own name, or alternatively, her “character” appears in Trow’s pieces, functioning like a voice-over, her frank comments and one-liners peppering his narratives. For instance, when Kincaid accompanies the “Talk” “we” to a party thrown by a soap opera star from “Search from Tomorrow,” the actor tells Kincaid and Trow that his character is changing because he “has been too goody-goody. Too much the Wasp.” Kincaid quips, “I hate to tell you, but I think Wasps are on the way out” (“The Talk of the Town: Three Gatherings”).

In contrast to Hunter, who incorporated herself into a “we” that reported from explicitly black communal spaces, and to Kincaid, who functioned apart from the collective “Talk” identity, escorting it on black cultural excursions and often resistantly gazing back at the white “we,” Lee determined that to gain authority as the looker or the spectator in her early work in the *New Yorker* and in *Russian Journal* she would have to either manipulate *what* readers saw of her (somehow divesting

herself of the social stigma of blackness) or manipulate *how* readers saw her (changing the manner in which her audience received black authors). Lee decided to do both by choosing not to write about explicitly black topics nor to speak in the voice of a conspicuously black persona and by revealing her black identity only *after* she had established an intimate relationship with her intended white readers. Lee's early "Talk of the Town" pieces reveal no distinctions or gaps between the "Talk of the Town" frame and her own voice; her narrators *appear* fully incorporated within the collective "we."

In 1978, Lee, a 25-year-old Harvard English graduate, embarked on a 10-month sojourn to Moscow and Leningrad, accompanying her husband, Tom Fallows, a Harvard doctoral student researching Russian history on a travel grant. The research trip, which became the basis for *Russian Journal*, also served as a honeymoon for the newly married interracial couple. Lee grew up in a black upper-middle-class suburb of Philadelphia, in a family she described in 1990 as

an affluent, extremely bookish, extremely middle-class Afro-American family, in which the adults, at least, would have been horrified to hear themselves called Afro-Americans. Descended from free mulattoes from Virginia and North Carolina in whose veins English and Irish blood was mixed with Indian, my family, theoretically as American as possible, was specialized in being outsiders. My parents, a minister and a teacher, were deeply involved in the civil rights struggle and yet also clearly felt apart—they certainly lived apart—from the poorer, blacker masses with whom they were declaring solidarity. At the same

time, having grown up under de facto segregated conditions in the North, they had a basic deep suspicion of the mainstream white American society they were trying to integrate. ("Double Lives" 60-61)

Lee's self-description illuminates the paradoxical nature of racial and national identity in the United States. "[T]heoretically as American as possible" in their hybridity, Lee's family carried, because of that very hybridity, a sense of unbelonging that led them to live ensconced in the Philadelphia railroad suburb of Yeadon, separate from both the poorer, more visibly black masses and the white mainstream, which they nonetheless tirelessly worked to integrate. Lee and her two brothers were raised as model candidates for racial integration, and of their childhoods, she has said

[we] often found ourselves in the position of integrating something or other, whether it was schools, camps or neighborhood friends. We grew adept at assimilation without absorption, at double lives, and developed an esprit de corps of a tiny garrison of spies: we went everywhere and belonged nowhere. In a racially divided society—and for all our parents' dreams, America in the sixties and seventies continued to draw the line—we moved on two sides, with double knowledge and double insecurity. ("Double Lives" 61)⁷

⁷ Lee's now-former husband, Tom Fallows, was raised in Redlands, California, the son of a Harvard-educated doctor and a mother who was an active community volunteer. His brother, James Fallows, was President Jimmy Carter's chief speechwriter and later Washington editor for *US News & World Report* and is currently a national correspondent for *The Atlantic*. In 1975, James Fallows wrote a now-famous essay, "What Did You Do in the Class War, Daddy?" about the class issues involved in his well-crafted exemption from service in the Vietnam War.

As part of the first generation experiencing *de jure* integration, Lee and her brothers became all too familiar with its limits and contradictions, bearing the marks of its failures in their fractured senses of self.

While literary scholars have all but neglected *Russian Journal* since its publication nearly 30 years ago, having published not a single critical treatment of the text, it was well received elsewhere in the literary world, becoming a National Book Award finalist and earning the Jean Stein Award from the National Academy of Arts and Letters. Reviewers especially admired Lee's reportorial skills, the effortless way that she "takes us everywhere she is, conveying a feeling of place and atmosphere that is the mark of real talent" (Osno 10). Much of *Russian Journal's* appeal lies in its offer of vicarious travel through Lee's careful impressions of her wanderings off the beaten path and into the worlds of the politically orthodox and cultural outsiders alike. U.S. readers encounter the Soviet Union in *Russian Journal* as a shared experience, gazing through Lee's eyes upon Soviet life at once rich and bleak. Comprised of 36 episodic journal entries that can be read as chapters, many only two or three pages in length, the journal is a running log of the various people and places Lee encountered, including Grigorii, the journalism student with KGB ties; Olga, the big-time black marketeer specializing in U.S. jeans; Seryozha, the harassed divorcee descended from long-time aristocratic landowners in imperialist Russia; the motley group of emigrating Soviet Jews taking clandestine English lessons from Lee; and Ibrahim, the racially persecuted Eritrean attending Patrice Lumumba University, a "school set up in southwest Moscow to educate Third World students in advanced technology and Communist ideology" (A. Lee, *Russian Journal* 147).

While most reviewers praised Lee's mastery in describing "the people, places, and experiences that touched her most deeply," some reviewers at the nation's most influential publications—including the *New York Times Book Review* and the *Washington Post's Book World*—were troubled by the revelation of Lee's racial identity buried deep in the book (Jacoby 11). The one brief, indirect reference to herself in *Russian Journal* as an "American black" is so subtle that it could easily be missed: in a scene in which she is introduced to an Eritrean student, Ibrahim, Lee's narrator comments that "[t]oward me he showed the absolute lack of interest with which many Africans greet American blacks" (147). Reviewers, likely working from galley proofs—preliminary, advance reading copies sent out for review purposes, which often lack artwork, such as the photo of Lee that ran on the back of the hardcover edition—had assumed that Lee, a relatively unknown writer, was white and were jarred by the revelation of her black identity because they had come to trust and identify with her narrative voice, taking on her traveler's gaze as their own.⁸ That one reviewer built his entire article around Lee's omission emphasizes the pervading sense that Lee had played a trick on her intended white readers, not only by failing to disclose her blackness but also by guiding them through Russian quarters with a manner of narrative voice so like the way they perceive their own that they never considered the possibility that she was not white. Lee's racial omission, coupled with her nationally framed narrative voice, led many readers to infer the whiteness of her gaze; her disclosure, on the other hand, possibly left readers startled that their own gazes had failed to discern the narrative view of a spectator now exposed as a racial

⁸ Even if they had seen the photograph of Lee, as some reviewers may have, the grainy black and white image is racially ambiguous enough for viewers to assume that Lee is white.

other. *Russian Journal* and its reviews show the persistence of U.S. racial protocols below the surface of integration, making apparent “an entire racialized discourse of the unconscious” that manifests itself as twin expectations of visible blackness and invisible whiteness.⁹

Lee’s efforts to depict herself as a racially unidentified American traveler, her subsequent racial disclosure, and some reviewers’ expectations that black authors disclose and use racial identity as a narrative frame form the central concerns of this chapter. The assumption that Lee is white stemmed just as much from her measured strategies to upend U.S. racial codes as from readers’ inferences based on these national protocols. By keeping her racial identity offstage but for a brief narrative moment, Lee throws into relief the burden placed on nonwhite subjects to gaze through racially qualified lenses—to make a spectacle of their own identities—and the freedom granted to white subjects to bypass race altogether and fully inhabit “American” subjectivity without qualification. By drawing on the representation by “The Talk of the Town” of an imagined communal identity, Lee inadvertently brings to our attention the ways in which the whiteness of the American spectator is implicit in the *New Yorker*’s anonymous “we,” a pronoun that is a microcosm of the larger voice of mainstream print journalism that has historically been racially coded, even as it has invoked an ostensibly objective, unsituated American identity.

In reading both Lee’s narrative of racial omission and disclosure and her reviewers’ responses, I extend Elizabeth Abel’s dual strategy in “Black Writing, White Reading: Race and the Politics of Feminist Interpretation” of “[r]eading black women’s texts, and reading our [white] readings of them” (498). In the essay, Abel

⁹ Mary Helen Washington, written communication to author, July 2009.

tracks her own (white) interpretations of Toni Morrison's "Recitatif" (1983), a short story that, like Lee's self-creation in *Russian Journal*, constructs its characters by replacing "conventional signifiers of racial differences" and substituting "the racialized body [with] a series of disaggregated cultural parts," "render[ing] race a contested terrain" (Abel 471). In examining white feminist readings of black women's texts, Abel articulates how whiteness "gains materiality through the desires and fantasies played out in its interpretations of blackness"; I extend her analysis by tracking how whiteness takes shape in the imperatives of white visibility and black hypervisibility not only in white reviewers' readings of *Russian Journal*, but also in *Russian Journal* itself. *Russian Journal* and its reviews offer an unusual opportunity to examine the protocols of race at work in the construction and assumption of the whiteness of Lee's spectator and at work as well in the expectation that black racial identity be disclosed. Lee's narrative strategies and reviewers' responses to them help make "the unconscious conscious," allowing us to supplement articulated [and thus more overt] ideologies of whiteness with [the] less accessible assumptions" of whiteness contained in *Russian Journal* and its reviews" (Abel 498). Before examining the racial interplay of visibility and visibility in *Russian Journal*, it is useful to first map the social contexts of Lee's relationship with the *New Yorker* in the late 1970s.

GENDER, CLASS, AND THE *NEW YORKER*

Lee's struggle to confidently claim the authoritative voice of the privileged American spectator is a story behind the story of *Russian Journal*.¹⁰ Portions of the book first appeared as "The Blues Abroad" in 1979 and two lengthy installments in the *New Yorker* in June and July of 1980. Lee writes in the introduction for the 2006 25th-anniversary edition of *Russian Journal* that the "creation of *Russian Journal* is inextricably linked not only with my first marriage, but also with my first professional work as a writer and my first experience of a foreign culture" (ix). The *New Yorker* installments of *Russian Journal*, then, publicly legitimated Lee's self-fashioning as a writer. Lee constituted that writer identity through the gaze of her narrative persona, a Western traveler's gaze that surveys the Russian populace and state intimately yet critically.

Almost immediately after her marriage to Tom Fallows in 1978, Lee embarked for Russia on a trip that would allow her to fulfill a dream of becoming a writer. At every turn in the narrative, Lee is negotiating multiple identities—wife, traveler, writer—in a continual process of self-production. Lee's struggle to "work" during this trip, to escape being labeled a mere travel companion to her working husband (whose research grant, "fatefully for [her]," included "provisions for a spouse") forms a current through the book that rivals, yet is inseparable from, the less visible current of race (ix). In the introduction to the 2006 edition, Lee writes of the challenge—cast solely as a gendered issue—that plagued her as she attempted to draft in the Soviet Union her first piece for publication:

¹⁰ In contrast, scenes in *Sarah Phillips* (1984), Lee's autobiographical novel published after *Russian Journal*, repeatedly show her as a disempowered object of a Western white gaze.

We each had our heroic task to accomplish: Tom to plumb archives for his dissertation on prerevolutionary liberalism and I to compose my journal for *The New Yorker*. I was permitted to use the reading room of the Lenin libraries both in Moscow and in Leningrad, and I spent hours there every day, armed with a yellow legal pad and a pencil, agonizingly writing out my encounters of the night before (x-xi)

Struggling not to be undone by feelings of inadequacy, Lee managed to write in the midst of others' academic labor that she perceived as a decidedly male enterprise. Within the imposing structures of the Lenin libraries, she sat across from Soviet scholars who reminded her of the larger-than-life figures of Trotsky and Rasputin, feeling daunted as well by the industriousness of students like her husband and his colleagues. Lee likens the intellectual work taking place in the library to manual labor that she had to somehow take up. Tom "plumb[ed]" the archives, while she tried "desperately to believe" that her writing was "actual work." In a setting described more like a factory than a library—an "overheated room stinking of damp wool, sausage, and poorly washed bodies (my own included)"—her "actual labor ... was to have faith in myself and to go on"—like the repetitive motions of workers in an industrial plant—"putting down one word after another" (xi).

Lee's endeavor was all the more precarious because publication in the *New Yorker* was not guaranteed. After leaving Harvard with a master's degree, Lee sent out a "blitz of letters to magazines [she] ... fondly imagined would be dying to publish a recent Harvard English graduate's pontifications on Soviet life." According to Lee, William Shawn, the famed editor of the *New Yorker*, was the only editor to

respond. Summoned to “the fluorescent murk of the old Forty-third Street offices of *The New Yorker*,” an awe-struck Lee met with Shawn, who proposed that she “should write a trial journal. If he liked it, he’d publish it.” “With that challenge ringing in my head,” she writes, “I left for my great adventure” (*Russian Journal* ix). Lee’s meeting with Shawn within the hallowed walls of the *New Yorker* offices was something of a rite of passage, one shared by numbers of other previously unknown writers, many of them also Harvard graduates, who had made the life-changing pilgrimage to Shawn’s office and then gone on to fame. Many of the *New Yorker* hires during Shawn’s tenure from 1952 to 1987 “had little if any experience in conventional journalism”; Lee had none (Yagoda 320). Shawn hired writers “either straight out of college or from unlikely places,” and he “didn’t just hire writers—he anointed them, as if to enter a secret and particularly holy religious order” (324).

For Lee, the chance to be published in the *New Yorker*—as a first-time writer, no less—was an invitation to join an elite group of writers, among them Kincaid, John McPhee, Rachel Carson, James Baldwin, Garrison Keillor, John Updike, John Cheever, and Ann Beattie. The *New Yorker*’s well-known editorial selectivity created a narrow entryway onto its staff, an attempt to maintain the standards at a magazine in which even the display type exuded “upscale urbanity” (Yagoda 13). Especially under Shawn, the *New Yorker* “became more than a magazine. It became a totem for the educated American middle and upper-middle classes. It became the repository for increasingly high standards of English prose, taste, conscience, and civility” (24).¹¹

So for Lee in Moscow, “after months of Lenin Library afternoons,” Shawn’s telegram

¹¹ Capturing the magazine’s role in social and class identity formation, *New York Times* reviewer John Leonard commented that the *New Yorker* “was as much a part of our class conditioning as clean fingernails, college, a checking account and good intentions” (1).

stating, “It will make a beautiful piece,” meant to her not only that she “was a real writer at last” but also that her world had suddenly taken off “at an entirely different speed” (*Russian Journal* xi).

Lee was probably quite familiar with the typical *New Yorker* reader as she wrote in the Lenin libraries with hopes of being published in the magazine. As a Harvard undergraduate and graduate student and a native of the Philadelphia suburb of Yeadon, a “black upper-middle-class suburb full of colonial-style houses and Volkswagen Rabbits,” Lee likely encountered the ubiquitous presence of the *New Yorker* first in her own home and those of childhood friends and then later in Harvard dormitories and classrooms and the many bookstores just outside the Cambridge campus (A. Lee, “Black and Well to Do” A23). Indeed, in 1970, just as Lee was heading to college, the *New Yorker* launched its first half-price promotion, aimed at collegians and professors, and by 1971, the magazine’s 78,000 campus subscribers made up nearly a fifth of the total (Yagoda 363). Lee, then, likely regularly read the *New Yorker* and shared the ethos of its educated, affluent, and overwhelmingly white readership. John Leonard, the one-time executive editor of the *New York Times Book Review* (who would later review *Russian Journal*), called the *New Yorker* “the weekly magazine most educated Americans grew up on” (“Fifty Years and All Grown Up” 1). The post-World War II explosion of suburban enclaves and the *New Yorker*, with its undertones of class ascendancy, were inextricably linked. “The magazine was read by the people who had migrated or were about to migrate to the promised land of the suburbs, who had cast their lot with the gospel of striving and success” (Yagoda 277).

More pointedly, beginning in the 1950s, women readers—many college-educated housewives—began to constitute the majority of the *New Yorker*'s readers. This development was infamously articulated in a stinging profile of the *New Yorker* in 1965 by then-*New York Herald Tribune* reporter Tom Wolfe. Under Shawn's leadership, Wolfe writes mockingly, the *New Yorker* became "the most successful suburban women's magazine in the country," a comment that was meant to be wholly derisive (259). Wolfe goes on to insist that the *New Yorker* had "been the laughingstock of the New York literary community for years" because it published "an incredible streak of stories about women in curious rural-bourgeoise settings" and "[u]sually the stories are *by* women" (279). Nevertheless, the *New Yorker* was, for much of its female readership, one of the few means of using and extending their abbreviated intellectual and cultural educations (Yagoda 311). Lee's narrative of traveling to Russia as a Harvard graduate student with her husband, himself a doctoral candidate in Russian history, would have resonated with many of the *New Yorker*'s readers, who were themselves, in Wolfe's caustic words,

educated women with large homes and solid hubbies and the taste to ... *buy expensive things*. *The New Yorker* was the magazine—about the only general magazine—they heard their professors mention in a ... good cultural way. And now here they are out in the good green world of Larchmont, Dedham, Grosse Point, Bryn Mawr, Chevy Chase, and they find that this magazine, this cultural magazine, is speaking right to them.... *The New Yorker* is a totem for these women.

Just having it in the home is, well, it is a ... *symbol*, a kind of *cachet*.

(281)

In contrast to such disparagement of women's writing, Lee's narrative struggles against the social dichotomy of domesticity and the craft of writing: "My memory of writing *Russian Journal* is that of slogging onward, ... trying to forget the inevitable smirks of disbelief on the faces of Russians and Americans alike when I, a member of the wife caste, would describe myself as a writer" (*Russian Journal* x-xi).

If Lee perceived her gender and domestic status as challenges to a writing career, publishing as a black American in the *New Yorker* might have been a more daunting task statistically. From the *New Yorker's* beginnings in 1925, "female and male writers were published in the *New Yorker* in roughly equivalent number" (Yagoda 77). However, before the publication of James Baldwin's "Letter from a Region in My Mind" in 1962, "the *New Yorker* had no black editors and no black contributors—and had not since Langston Hughes published a handful of stories and poems in the thirties and forties" (316). Baldwin's piece "made it impossible any longer to ignore or justify the fact that the *New Yorker's* staff was all white" (318). Integration came to the *New Yorker* first with the 1961 hire of Ved Mehta, a native of India and graduate of Oxford and Harvard, and then with the hires in 1963 of Faith Berry and Hunter.

WHITE VISUALITY AND BLACK VISIBILITY

Lee's calculated management of her visibility in *Russian Journal* intertwines the issues of identity, visuality, and visibility. "Looking relations," or social structures

of gazing, are about how identity is constructed through the gaze. Lee's narrator in *Russian Journal* is keenly aware that looking relations determine who is empowered to gaze, what one is permitted to gaze upon, and under what circumstances and within what spaces one is allowed to gaze. The multiplicity of gazes associated with *Russian Journal*—Lee's narrative gaze, Russians' counter-gazes, reviewers' critical gazes, and readers' consumptive gazes—allow us to see that “practices of identity and subject formation in Western culture are largely structured around a logic of visibility” (Schlossberg 1). While “we are subjects constituted by our visions of ourselves and others,” we are also, particularly in terms of a history of black hypervisibility, constituted by others' visions of ourselves, by a “double-consciousness,” which W.E.B. Du Bois influentially defined as the “sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others” (Schlossberg 1; Du Bois 3).¹² The racial protocol of black visibility mandated by slavery and Jim Crow-era laws and preserved in the era of integration continually reinforces the belief that “our ability to see and read carries ... a certain degree of epistemological certainty” (Schlossberg 1). Taking on the role of the looker in *Russian Journal*, Lee undermines an expectation of black visibility by masking her race, forcing readers to question if what they see and read carries *any* degree of epistemological certainty.

Lee's narrative strategy of racially masking to obtain literary authority garnered the criticism of white reviewers at the nation's most influential book reviews, the *New York Times Book Review* and the *Washington Post's Book World*,

¹² The study of African American autobiography brings together two theories of subjectivity, double-consciousness and autobiographical identity, demanding a consideration of how a multiplicity of autobiographical selves—the narrated “I,” the narrating “I,” and the historical “I” (the author)—animates the text in conjunction with the doubly conscious African American subject.

and Lee, in a new introduction to the 2006 25th-anniversary edition of *Russian Journal*, addresses these criticisms, insisting that the omission of race was not intentional. She writes:

One frequent criticism of *Russian Journal* was that I gave the reader too little information about myself—reviewers seemed aggrieved that I mentioned only in passing and well into the book that I am African American. Looking back now, I can only feel that, like everything in *Russian Journal*, it was not a conscious decision, but had to do with extreme youth. (xii)

It is disappointing that in the new millennium, when critical race theory has established itself as a significant branch of literary and cultural inquiry, Lee backs away from what I read as the potentially radical work of *Russian Journal*: the disruption of racial protocols through the masking and unmasking of race. Lee says that because of her “extreme youth” when she wrote *Russian Journal* she had yet to figure out who she was and what her light complexion, suburban middle-class upbringing, assorted ethnic heritage, and attendance at integrated schools meant in terms of her identity. The project of sorting out her identity, she writes, was reserved for her second book, the autobiographical novel *Sarah Phillips*, which she worked on, along with *Russian Journal*, in the Lenin Library. Lee contends that “*Sarah Phillips*—conceived at the same time [as *Russian Journal*]—represents the background not expressed in *Russian Journal*; the exploration of the familiar as opposed to the foreign” (xii). However, *Russian Journal*, I argue, is as much about the familiar—the United States and its racial strictures—as it is about the foreign

world of Russia. *Russian Journal*, ostensibly about Lee's Soviet travel, is narrated entirely in the shadow of U.S. racial constrictions, its narrative strategies betraying its constant awareness of an ever-present white U.S. gaze.

Lee's 2006 disavowal appears to be yet another mask, for in a largely unknown speech at the New York Public library some 15 years earlier, Lee laid claim to the narrative strategies she used in *Russian Journal*. In contrast to her 2006 statement that the omissions in *Russian Journal* were "not a conscious decision," Lee told the audience in 1990 that

As my year in the Soviet Union went on and I got deeper into writing about Russia, *I consciously decided* not to add any autobiographical explanation to the book, to mention my background only once, and then to let it go. I adopted this policy partly as a tease and partly with the quite serious idea that any book of the kind written by someone describing herself as a black American would be viewed by some myopic literary people as 'a black look at Russia.' ("Double Lives" 71; emphasis mine)

Acknowledging in this speech (appropriately titled "Double Lives") that the narrative strategy of omitting blackness throughout most of *Russian Journal* was intentional, Lee describes the omission as a playful "tease" as well as a serious circumvention of the racial protocols and restrictions that would automatically label as "black" and thus a marginal "look at Russia" any narrative identifying her race. Lee's shifting claims over a period of 25 years of naiveté and shrewdness justify examining *Russian Journal* as a narrative of passing, as its ambiguity skillfully

demonstrates “[p]assing’s ability to be both playful and serious” (Schlossberg 3). Lee says that her fear of U.S. literary myopia was justified by “the silly comments made in reviews and during interviews after the book came out,” including those made by a television reviewer in Cleveland who asked Lee how she “had gotten along without soul food for a year in the Soviet Union” (“Double Lives” 71). To fully disclose her racial identity from the outset of *Russian Journal* would have allowed the reception of Lee’s narrative of spectatorship to be wholly shaped by what Lee describes as the “flat and limited . . . American idea of a black person” (71-72). Lee refuses to provide any signs or markers that would enable her audience to read her body as racially marked, i.e., as nonwhite. Not only does she decline to counter what Judith Butler describes as the “hegemonic presumption that she is white,” but Lee fosters and manipulates such assumptions (Butler 71). By withholding her racial identity and holding at bay the U.S. tendency to devalue or marginalize black authorship, Lee hoped to gain a protected space to establish an imagined community between her narrator and intended white readers—even as such community building requires an evacuation of blackness and reinforces pervading cultural assumptions that link whiteness, literary authority, and spectatorship.¹⁴

¹⁴ In her reading of Lee’s autobiographical novel *Sarah Phillips*, Kaylen Tucker traces what she terms the protagonist’s “white flight,” a narrative sojourn into whiteness that dehistoricizes the circumstances of race and withdraws from representations of blackness. While Tucker’s identification of Sarah Phillips’ white flight aligns with my reading of Lee’s evacuation of her own blackness in *Russian Journal*, my argument here insists that Lee’s narrative construction of apparent whiteness relies on an external black presence (i.e., Ibrahim and B.B. King), reiterating and extending Mary Helen Washington’s seminal insights in 1985 about Lee’s *Sarah Phillips* and its “evasions,” reluctance to “deal with racism or poverty,” and exaltation of class privilege. See Tucker, 38-66; Washington, “Young” 4.

Lee constructs herself as an authorized spectator by taking on the Western gaze of an American traveler. Her goal is for readers to accept her narrator unconditionally as an American, and it is through travel writing, through the gaze of an American spectator that she accesses that privileged national identity. Lee's desire to photograph Russians is the most explicit representation of both her role as a spectator and the manner in which the traveler accrues power, albeit contested, through the gaze. Relating a visit to a peasant market in Moscow where a long line of Russians extended from a wagon selling *kvas*, a mildly alcoholic drink made from rye bread, Lee writes that she and her husband "had always wanted to photograph a *kvas* line, with its workmen, teenagers, mothers, and *babushki*, but had heard from local photographer friends about hostility to such picture-taking" (*Russian Journal* 18). Here Lee steps into the role of the stereotypical American tourist, snapping pictures without regard for the locals' privacy or resistance. In doing so, Lee acquires a "tourist gaze," which John Urry describes as a consumptive gaze "constructed through difference" and "in relationship to its opposite, to non-tourist forms of social experience and consciousness"(1). To avoid the Russians' hostility, Lee and her husband devise a scheme to capture the sight of the *kvas* line, asking a teenage girl in the line if they can photograph her puppy. Even this young Russian refuses them, explaining that a friend's dog had died after being photographed, at which point, Lee writes, the "entire *kvas* line ... turned to look at us, and we backed away before the unassailable strength of this superstition" (*Russian Journal* 18). In a narrative whose entire purpose is to avoid casting its narrator as a disempowered object of the gaze, this narrator clearly treats the Russians in the queue as objects to be visually

consumed and even “captured through photographs” that enable the tourist gaze “to be endlessly reproduced and recaptured” (Urry 3). Despite the embarrassment Lee experiences when the line turns its collective gaze on her, this scene is key in that the depiction of the narrator as a gawker, while distasteful, actually authorizes her within an overarching frame of U.S. anti-Communism as an American spectator, one who can look and more importantly label or constitute others, for example, as “primitive” Russians with unfounded superstitions that contrast with her apparent American sophistication. The Russians are not helpless objects of the gaze, however, as they counter Lee’s critical U.S./Western gaze with their own collective gaze. One vendor, a tall Georgian woman, who has been watching Lee and her husband wander through the market, even calls out to them, asking, “What is the matter with you two? ... You walk around, and all you do is *look*. Then you stand in a corner and talk and talk. Why did you come to the market?”” (*Russian Journal* 21, emphasis added). This Russian woman’s interruption of Lee’s consumptive looking, photographing, and assessing momentarily averts the “Western eyes” of Lee the narrated autobiographical subject from the peasant market toward herself, making her aware that she too is a spectacle, even as she walks through the marketplace with the eyes of a tourist. The placement of the market woman’s questioning at the end of a chapter dedicated to a portrayal of Lee as a spectator reveals both an awareness and a critique by Lee the author of the historical figure of the U.S. spectator, the “ugly American” abroad.

Lee uses even the occasions when she is an object of the gaze to reinforce her identity as an American spectator, constructing herself either as a privileged capitalist American or as an American woman engaged in nontraditional acts. Such identities,

national, gendered, and ostensibly nonracial, fall into categories that are acceptable to Lee's audience. Lee complains of the unrelenting stares of the Russian populace, but such gazes only help to bolster her image as a presumably white, relatively affluent American. She writes:

It was in the subway that night that I first endured the unblinking stare of the Russian populace, a stare already described to me by Tom and by friends who had been in the Soviet Union before. 'You will never not be stared at,' they told me, advising me to stare back coolly and steadily, especially at the shoes of my tormentors, since the average Soviet shoe is an embarrassment of cracked imitation leather. ... They all looked us up and down with undisguised fascination and whispered comments to their neighbors. Although we were dressed in what we thought was a neutral, inconspicuous fashion, the clothes we had on—cotton pants and shirts—now seemed infinitely newer, crisper, better cut than anything anyone else had on; my sandals, also, seemed to fascinate everyone. So we sat, practically riddled with stares, in the dim light of the rocking subway car, breathing an atmosphere heavy with odors of sharp tobacco, sausage, and perspiring human flesh.

(Russian Journal 7)

In a scene reminiscent of McPherson's ride in a hot, crowded subway car in Tokyo, Lee is introduced to the unwavering gaze of Muscovites in the close quarters of a Russian subway car. Failing to compare her own discomfort with that of the Russians she would later relentlessly observe and photograph at the market, Lee takes up a

counter-gaze that is especially cutting in its focus on Muscovites' cracked shoes, a sign of lack, both economic and cultural. This scene then is not about making comparisons, but about drawing distinctions between Lee's (and therefore her U.S. readers') relative affluence—signaled by ordinary American clothes and leather sandals—and Russians' material (and thus cultural) lack—signaled by their imitation shoes and the heavy odors of tobacco, sausage, and sweaty flesh that, Lee laments, she is forced to breathe. While the foreign rail car, where McPherson's blackness is hypervisible, becomes a site of healing for his American trauma, Lee constructs the foreign rail car as a site of national division and hostilities, a place where her American exceptionalism, historically coded as white, is hypervisible and thus codes Lee as white, prior to her racial disclosure.

Lee draws readers' attention to her gender in the same way that she draws it to her nationality, using Soviet staring as a means of underscoring her national and gendered identities, which displace her racial identity. For example, in a chapter describing an afternoon run through the woods around Moscow State University, she writes, "I stopped running and began jogging slowly when I reached the overlook, which, as usual, was crowded with tourists, mainly Soviet. They gave me some strange glances: a female runner is very unusual in Moscow" (67). By depicting her narrator as a spectacle for Soviet tourists—whose stares foreshadow the "stares" of astonished readers who will discover that she is black—Lee highlights her national identity and gender, effectively diverting U.S. readers' gazes from her racial identity. In this way, national identity and gender serve as decoys, luring the U.S. reader's eye away from the narrator's unstated racial identity. The certainty with which her gender

and nationality are narrated led the book's earliest U.S. readers, accustomed to U.S. protocols of race, to presume the whiteness of the narrator. Since U.S. readers are conditioned to treat blackness as spectacle, by constructing her narrator as an object of the gaze only in terms of U.S. womanhood, Lee effectively masks her blackness, delaying or putting off a particular stare, the white American gaze, that could fix her as a racially circumscribed object and minimize her ability to achieve an authoritative literary status.

Lee is able to control and manipulate the spectacle of herself as an apparently white American woman but cannot so easily narrate other forms of her self as an object of the gaze; in particular, she represses certain gendered experiences that bear the marks of a black historical legacy. If Lee omitted all but one mention of herself as a black American from *Russian Journal* in order to avoid detection as a racial object of the white gaze, then, I argue, she also excised scenes of sexualization, because of their inextricable links to race. In order for Lee to construct herself as an American spectator, a subjectivity open to women, especially through the genre of travel writing, she had to take care not to write herself as a "black" woman, because the transnational and historical sexualization of black female bodies threatened to undermine her aim of being accepted by readers as unconditionally American. If Lee had to evacuate the text of narrated blackness, then she also had to extract the black womanhood signaled by scenes of sexualization.

In the introduction to the 2006 edition of *Russian Journal*, Lee mentions that she and her husband "sought out risky situations, ending up in some places that never made it into the chaste annals of *Russian Journal*" (x). For example, during a tour of

Soviet Armenia, after they are warned against going to a certain nightclub rumored to be a gangsters' hangout, Lee writes in the introduction, she and husband

couldn't get there fast enough, and sure enough we ended up making the acquaintance of a local crime lord who not only invited us back to his ritzy apartment for a drinking bout, but also offered the service of two small, very pretty Armenian prostitutes to Tom in return for a night with me. (We declined, but at least we'd learned the exchange rate.) (x)

Although Lee makes light of the Armenian's offer to buy her for a night (a scene that is omitted from previous editions), it is strikingly similar to the sexually objectifying experiences of the cosmopolitan black women in Lee's later works, such as *Sarah Phillips* and *Interesting Women*. It has been argued that travel has long been a means of "forming a national subjectivity through culture"; that tourism, at least since the 19th century, has been "open to participation by women"; and that the "aesthetic gaze associated with tourism transformed [elite] women travelers from sexualized objects of the gaze to authorized subjects" (Bailey 61, 66). However, Lee's omission of the gangster's offer to buy her suggests that this type of transformation does not necessarily hold true for black women travelers, even elite ones; Lee leaves out this scene of seemingly racialized sexual objectification in order to construct herself as a legitimate spectator in terms of U.S. discourse. Lee would elaborate the story further in the New York Public Library speech, revealing that the crime lord had threatened their lives if her husband "didn't accept his generous offer to buy me" ("Double Lives" 68). The possibility that women, one visibly nonwhite

and two sexual workers, might be exchanged between two white men, under a threat of violence, necessarily invokes images of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the historical and global exploitation of black women's bodies, images brought to life by the experiences and narratives of those such as Sartje Bartmann, Harriet Jacobs, and Nella Larsen's Helga Crane. It is this legacy, both historical and literary, that Lee divorces herself from—by extracting its remnants from her narrative—in order to attempt the transition from sexualized object to authorized subject. By masking race in *Russian Journal*, Lee avoids not only the deintellectualization of black authors who write without a racial filter but also the sexualization of black womanhood by a white imperial gaze that has historically and particularly fixed black women. Lee is aware that to write a narrative of her Russian travel as a black woman would be to write as a black spectator who is always already a spectacle. *Russian Journal* seeks a momentary (and ultimately illusory) stay against the historical making of black spectacle and its attendant burdens, but its excisions of the material effects of the author's racialized experiences produce a text bound by and even supportive of the power inequities racially inscribed in spectatorial relationships.

Lee's narrative identity is constructed not only through manipulation and omission of scenes inscribed by black womanhood, but also by narrative elisions that translate as blank, silent spaces, moments when narration is aborted. The scenes in which these gaps and silences, what I call "narrative foreclosures," appear are marked by a refusal to articulate racialized experience, betraying the seams in Lee's narrative of spectatorship and pointing to the instability of her role as a spectator. For instance,

in the first journal entry, Lee writes of her arrival at Sheremetyevo Airport outside Moscow:

Our disembarkment and passage through customs at Sheremetyevo were standard chaos, involving a long, dazed wait in a crowded room Only one memory remains with me from those hours: the sight of a Pioneer excursion group of twenty small girls who seemed, by their Asiatic faces and straight black hair, to be Siberian. They all wore the blue shorts, white shirts, and red neckerchiefs that I had seen in pictures, as well as ornately curled hair bows that gave them a queer geisha look, and as I studied them with the dreamy precision of fatigue, all twenty stared back at me with an avid, unadorned curiosity.

(4)

What is only implied here is why Lee stares at the girls, but what is entirely unarticulated is why all twenty girls stare back at Lee “with an avid, unadorned curiosity.” Unlike the narration in the scenes of Lee riding the subway or jogging through Moscow, in which the narrator readily attributed Russian stares to her American attire or the unusualness of a woman jogger, the narration here is suspended, failing to explain or interpret the Pioneer girls’ intent gazing at Lee. It is implied that Lee stares at the girls because of what Lee reads as the racial-national incongruity of their “Asiatic faces” and Soviet attire. She stares at the girls, noting that their unadorned uniforms coincide with images of (white) Young Pioneers that she had seen in the United States. However, their ornate hair bows, coupled with what Lee reads as Asian faces, disrupt her idea of “white” Russians, giving them, she

decides, a “queer geisha look” (4). The Pioneer girls’ “queering” of racial expectations, the way that their racial otherness disrupts Lee’s expectation of white Russians, is doubled, we can speculate, by Lee’s own queering of their racial-national expectations. Seemingly, Lee appears just as “queer” to the girls as they seem to her. We as readers can speculate that it is Lee’s features and complexion, perhaps in conjunction with her Western attire, that captivate them. (They do not seem to be drawn only by her attire, since they stare specifically at Lee, not at Lee and her husband, and since the narrator does not provide this possibility as an explanation, as she does later.) This mirrored image of Lee and the girls locked in mutual gazes blurs the distinction between the gazing tourist and the object of the gaze, calling into question the stability or permanence of fixed spectator/spectacle positions. The narrative refusal to articulate the possible reasons for the girls’ stares—why they view her as a spectacle—suggests both that the scene relates something of the narrator’s racialized experience, thus triggering the narrative strategies of evasion, and that the reasons for the girls’ stares at Lee are ultimately unknowable.

The narrative foreclosures of blackness in *Russian Journal*, its refusal to give voice to the material effects of the narrator’s blackness, mimic the refusal of representations of whiteness to remark “whiteness *qua* whiteness;” the suspended narration here speaks to a yearning for the invisibility that shrouds whiteness, an invisibility that works to mask whiteness as a racial category (Dyer 44). However, this yearning for a democratization of the “nothingness” attached to whiteness evades the material consequences of racialized identity and leaves intact the privileges and powers that have historically accrued to whiteness.

The spectacular absences of *Russian Journal*—the blank textual spaces left by the narrator-spectator’s omissions and silences—employ aspects of both the Soviet system of censorship and the U.S. practice of rendering whiteness normative. The narrative’s exclusion of the material consequences of Lee’s blackness and the textual silences surrounding the racialization of others produce effects similar to those of Soviet censoring. Watching a French film in a Moscow kinotheatre, Lee notices an unevenness in the action that she concludes must be the result of censoring, because there was “a strange stuttering feeling to the action which could not . . . be wholly” attributed to the fact that “the sound was dubbed in Russian” (106). Her suspicion is confirmed later in Leningrad when a viewing of the dubbed version of the American movie *Cleopatra*, which she is familiar with, is full of “the erratic jumps of most foreign films shown here after censorship” (180). Lee’s Russian friends seem wholly unaware that scenes have been cut from the films, not even noticing, for example, the absent sex scenes in the French film that, after Soviet editing, make suggestions of bedroom farce but never fulfill them. Lee is intrigued by her friends’ obliviousness, concluding that “a diet of such films” must develop “odd mental talents,” such as “an ability for elision, for constant suspension of logic” (106). The gaps created by Soviet censorship, a totalitarian system of repressive measures that restricted the circulation of Western images and alternative Soviet histories, correspond to the gaps required by the U.S. construction of whiteness, a set of practices that works to continuously deracialize the category of whiteness, sustaining its normativity and thus its invisibility. If the Soviet system of cinematic censorship developed “odd mental talents”—“an ability for elision, for constant suspension of logic”—then the global

system of racialization that has taken a particular shape in the United States has nurtured an ability to elide, to make imperceptible the white subject as a racialized subject. Negotiating the absences created by deracialized representations of whiteness requires a constant, often unconscious suspension of logic that enables one to disregard the “emptiness, absence, [and] denial” that mark images of whiteness (Dyer 44). These gaps signaling the nothingness of whiteness are the linchpins of racialized social orders, as the absence, the invisibility, of whiteness is the means by which it at once “secures its dominance” and colonizes the definition of the norm (46).

The spectacular absences of *Russian Journal* must be distinguished from the strategies of “resistant postmodernism,” defined by Hal Foster as seeking “to question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations,” that have been read in Lee’s *Sarah Phillips* (qtd. in McCormick 810). While *Russian Journal*’s masking and unmasking of blackness work to call into question U.S. protocols of racial representation, its evacuation of the material effects of Lee’s blackness and its silence on the racialized persecution of others (such as Ibrahim) ultimately consolidate the privileges attached to white spectatorship and reaffirm the assumed incongruities among blackness, literary authority, and U.S. identity. In the end, the category of the white American spectator remains untroubled, because the text empties the narrator not of blackness but of any connection to the material ramifications of her own and others’ blackness in racialized social orders. Here, the narrative’s spectacular absences cannot be read *only* as postmodernist “verbal masking,” as narrative strategies of “indirect commentary,” as silences that grant freedom, for they are a direct consequence of the narrator’s constriction by a

constant and debilitating awareness of an omnipresent white U.S. gaze (McCormick 881, 21). The narrator attempts to use the narrative strategies of masking and unmasking blackness to liberate herself from the limited American notion of blackness, but she is ultimately bound by an ever-present and global system of racialization, an entrapment she continually refuses to confront or even attempt to articulate.

While the narrative absences in Lee's other work, such as the autobiographical novel *Sarah Phillips*, have been read as productive silences that afford the protagonist a "complex freedom," *Russian Journal*'s explicitly autobiographical nature makes it difficult to consider only the *discursive* meanings of silence (McCormick 824); attention must be paid also to the *material* consequences of silence. With the figure of Ibrahim, an Eritrean student whom Lee and her husband met at a gathering at a friend's apartment, we are forced to confront the *materiality* of racial identity, to consider the question, Who stands in the gaps of Lee's silences and foreclosures? Ibrahim, whose homeland in 1979 is fighting to gain independence from Ethiopia, became persona non grata in 1977 when the Soviet Union switched allegiances from Eritrea to Ethiopia (at the same time that the United States tapered its two decades-long relationship with Ethiopia) in the middle of his education at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow. In addition to this "precarious and dangerous" political situation, Ibrahim also faces as an African the constant animosity of "the Russian *narod*, the masses," who, he reports, "call us black devils and spit at us in the street" (Russian Journal 147).

As Lee's narrator listens to Ibrahim's plight on a February night warmed by a midwinter thaw that has brought her "a ravishing, unquenchable happiness," she remains detached from Ibrahim's story, focused instead on savoring the lighthearted feeling that prompted her and Tom to hop and skip "giddily through the darkness" from the metro to their friend's apartment. Gazing upon Ibrahim as he talks through the night of the Eritrean struggle to "secede" from Ethiopia, the narrator regards Ibrahim's body as a text of racialized and nationalized meaning. Reading his body as classically *Ethiopian*, the narrator contorts Ibrahim's features into an image that undermines his words calling for Eritrean independence from Ethiopia. The narrator's gaze casts Ibrahim in angular terms, seeing him as "cranelike figure," "a very tall, thin young man in his late twenties, with a huge mass of frizzy hair, brown cheeks decorated with several precisely set black moles, and the beautiful linear features of the saints in ancient Ethiopian church frescoes" (150, 47). Resorting to racial types that conflate national identity and what are read as racial characteristics, the narrator subsumes Ibrahim's Eritrean nationalist aspirations in what she interprets as a decidedly Ethiopian countenance: "In the candlelight," his face, "with its thin nose and black-rimmed eyes," is "unmistakably Ethiopian" (148).

Lee's abstraction of Ibrahim divorces him from the historical immediacy of the Eritrean struggle as well as the frame of competing Soviet and U.S. Cold War interests. She herself is divorced as well from the material consequences of U.S. and Soviet maneuvers to gain control of the strategic Horn of Africa. Lee's narrator is more concerned with keeping the "uninvited guests" of Ibrahim's burdens from spoiling her "giddy mood." As "Ibrahim went on talking, outlining for us government

factions and military movements, of which he somehow managed to keep abreast during his secretive life in Moscow,” “I couldn’t follow him,” the narrator says; “all I could envision was a dry landscape, stark as an abstraction, in which troops of soldiers with faces like Ibrahim’s marched and countermarched, and bodies lay mummified in the sun.” Not only can Lee’s narrator not follow Ibrahim’s intricate details, she also refuses to follow, or empathize with, Ibrahim’s heavy losses of homeland, family, and freedom, failing to see them as the byproducts of Soviet and U.S. interventions in anticolonial and independence movements across the globe. She fails to articulate the larger Russo-American desires framing the Eritrean struggle, unsympathetically likening Ibrahim to “flotsam and jetsam,” insignificant and miscellaneous debris, “washed up in Moscow from obscure warring Third World states” (148). As Lee, Tom, and Ibrahim walk together to the metro station at the end of the night, the narrator notes that Ibrahim “jumped over puddles with us, but his face in the streetlights was as abstracted as ever.” Sheltered from Ibrahim’s political turmoil by her U.S. citizenship, the narrator is also protected from white Russian racial animosity either by her light complexion and/or by an authorial hand that refuses to allow her material experiences of racialization to enter the narrative. After they depart at the Gorky Park station, the narrator merely watches as two “babushki, who were manipulating an enormous electric sweeper, paused in their work to study ... [Ibrahim] with a hostile stare, but he passed without appearing to see them, as if he were entirely alone” (150).¹⁵ Lee constructs Ibrahim as an alienated, hypervisible,

¹⁵ Lee in this scene is not exposed apparently to the same hostility, and the scene supports Ibrahim’s disinterest in the American black or maybe only Lee, who in the end, simply watches his persecution but does not share in it or intervene.

disempowered object of the gaze, fashioning him further (along with B.B. King) as the unmistakably black presence in the narrative, a proxy for the narrative absences or evacuations of her blackness and the material experiences of that blackness.

Coincidentally, it is through Ibrahim that she chooses to disclose her racial identity; Ibrahim alone explicitly discerns and responds (with disinterest) to her blackness and its American nature. His discernment, in turn, becomes a foil for reviewers' inability to read Lee's masked body.

By removing her own body as a site of racial intelligibility, Lee forces Ibrahim's and B.B. King's bodies to shoulder the "work" that blackness is made to perform within racialized social orders. It is important to note that black and Russian bodies perform similar tasks in *Russian Journal*, serving as either a proxy for Lee's racially absent self or the national Other to Lee's hypervisible U.S. body. Lee's project is dependent on its Cold War context; her travel specifically to the Soviet Union allows her to use Russo-American hostilities to fashion an American self that could not similarly exist within U.S. borders, where in the late 1970s a Jim Crow sense of race still persisted in registering identity in terms of either black or white. The Russians who people her narrative help define Lee's American-ness, accentuating it in much the same way that nonwhiteness, in its ostensible difference, gives whiteness its substance. The linked alterity of blackness and Russianness is underscored by the self-mocking joke that a student in Lee's clandestine English class for emigrating Soviet Jews tells her. The man, an experienced engineer who makes only slightly more than minimum wage and struggles to support his wife and baby, explains that "[w]e young engineers have a name for ourselves Because we know

how blacks are treated in America, we call ourselves “enginiggers”” (127). Lee’s narrator records the “joke” but offers no response to it, another narrative silence that indicates, among other things, the reliance of her own self-representation on the dual subordination of black racial identity and Russian national identity. In possession of a nationally identified yet racially unidentified *American* body *in a Russian context*, the narrator enjoys a certain level of immateriality, an immateriality that, translated into U.S. terms, grants whiteness its seeming invisibility, its ability to *pass* as nonracial.

CRITICAL FAILURES

While the narrator’s racial absence and accentuated nationality require other raced and nationalized bodies to serve as stand-ins, these same aspects of her self-construction enable her attempt to thwart the racial protocols driving the expectations of a U.S. readership. Trying to circumvent the “flat and limited . . . American idea of a black person,” Lee removes the visual aids integral to U.S. practices of racial representation, teasing readers habituated to narrative requisites of visible blackness. This “trick” disturbed some writers for the nation’s preeminent newspaper book review sections. *Washington Post* reviewer Peter Osnos, for instance, warns readers of “one slightly awkward problem with the book,” while *New York Times* reviewer Susan Jacoby laments Lee’s masking of race as the “one regrettable omission” in *Russian Journal* (Osnos 10; Jacoby 22). Jacoby understands that Lee might have made “a conscious decision not to use her race as one of the prisms for reflecting Russian life” because she feared “that her book would be merchandised as an ethnic curio piece.” Jacoby nonetheless concludes that even if Lee’s “freckle-spattered,

sand-toned complexion” did not fit Russians’ image of “blacks,” “the high quality of Miss Lee’s writing and the acuity of her perceptions make it especially regrettable that she chose to avoid racial issues” (22).

While I too read certain aspects of Lee’s racial effacement as troublesome—even as I value (and even relish) the way that it undermines U.S. demands of black visibility—my criticism diverges from reviewers’ and is aimed mainly at the manner in which Lee’s narrative foreclosures are achieved at the expense of other racially and nationally disempowered subjects. In addition, rather than registering the absence of “race” in Lee’s travel encounters, *Russian Journal*’s narrative gaps merely veil her material experience of “race” in a transnationally racialized world. What the reviewers fail to recognize is that the countless white authors whose books are the subjects of nearly all their reviews, these authors *too* regularly suppress a record of the material consequences of their racial identities. In its mimicry of white invisibility then, *Russian Journal* demonstrates the routine foreclosures and gaps that enable whiteness to continually go unseen. These customary failures to articulate or even consider the effects of whiteness are a microcosm of a larger effacement of whiteness in the literary traditions and institutions of American discourse, of which periodicals such as the *New York Times Book Review* and the *New Yorker* are representative.

This double standard that assigns racial issues exclusively to nonwhites can be seen in Leonard’s *New York Times* review, in which he evaluates *Russian Journal* alongside another book of travel writings about Russia. Of the four paragraphs devoted to *Russian Journal*, all of them build toward Leonard’s astonishment at Lee’s sole and slight reference to her black identity. “We are two-thirds of the way through

‘Russian Journal,’” he notes, “before Miss Lee, describing a troubled Eritrean student, tells us, ‘Toward me he showed the absolute lack of interest with which many Africans greet American blacks.’” Leonard continues (in the voice of a collective “we,” no less), writing, “We have been with Miss Lee to a Leningrad beriozka store, a communal bath, a B. B. King concert and a Russian Orthodox Easter service. We have listened in as she teaches English to Jews hoping to emigrate, ... as she stomps along in a Moscow discotheque to an irreverent song about Russia” Leonard’s litany of scenes from *Russian Journal*, one that records a developing intimacy between author and reader, crescendoes for three paragraphs, a testimony to Lee’s skill in rendering her Russian experience into evocative prose. “[W]e have complete confidence in her powers of observation,” Leonard announces, that is, until Lee “says she is black, and drops that subject” (C9).

Inured to customary representations of legible blackness, Leonard concludes that “[o]nly a remarkable writer could throw away such a badge of identity and insist on our seeing, anyway, precisely whatever she saw, on her austere terms, with her mixture of disgust and grudging love” (C9). In Leonard’s reading, visible blackness is “a badge of identity,” one that signals alterity, and it is the usual vehicle through which black subjects are apprehended. Buried within his response lies the acknowledgement that *Russian Journal* presents an unusual challenge to him, to the collective white “we,” the challenge of “seeing, *anyway*, precisely whatever [Lee] saw,” without the usual crutch of blackness-in-plain-sight (emphasis added). Implicitly, Leonard defines the “remarkable writer” as one who can write without “such a badge of identity” as raciality, implicitly placing writers who locate

themselves racially in a category subordinate to that of white authors who write customarily without any expectations of racial visibility.

Leonard's response is ultimately contrary to the myopic reception that Lee anticipated, with Leonard positing Lee's blackness not as a restricted perspective but as an exceptional experience that possibly accounts for her literary gifts. He considers her omission and disclosure a "daring strategy, because we want to know more: was it better or worse for her, being black? Does it help account for her critical intelligence, her wait-and-see skepticism, her lyrical exactitude, as though Henry James had gone to St. Basil's?" However, when Leonard's review turns to *From the Yaroslavsky Station: Russia Perceived*, the published travel notes and reflections of Elizabeth Pond, a white foreign correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor*, his sense of the significance of racial badges of identity vanishes. He does not ask if "being white" helps account for what he reads as Pond's "pessimistic reportage" or her "superb [treatment of] ... Soviet abuses of psychiatry, ... recalcitrant nationalities, or imperialism..." (C9). The difference in the trajectories of Leonard's paired reviews demonstrates the unconscious and customary assumption that "race is always an issue of Otherness that is not white: it is black, yellow, red, purple even" (Abel 498; hooks 162).

In uncovering this differential between the visibilities of white and non-white identity, we can further the project of defamiliarizing white normativity by exposing the persistence of racial codes circulating just beneath the surface of what we know as integration. If an examination of the racialized understructure of experience continues to be considered a burden, as in *Russian Journal*, or the domain of the Other, as in

much of white-authored discourse, the ongoing era of integration will be perpetually unfulfilled. Within any serious project of integration, all must share the “burden” of understanding our own particular entwinements, our investments, in the national fantasies that are spun of race. True racial integration demands that none can enjoy the “privilege” of bypassing race. Lee’s attempt to stage a postracial identity within the entirely racialized historical contexts of *Russian Journal* and the widespread cultural practice of disregarding the raciality of whiteness are evidence that what we know as the era of integration has *already* been lived by many white Americans as the “postracial” epoch whose inception so many pundits have just recently heralded. It is unclear how the nation might have moved from segregation to unfulfilled integration and now allegedly postraciality, when we as Americans have implemented a project of integration that has legally eliminated the visible signs of Jim Crow and assuaged the most violent forms of racial violence but that has left so many of the cultural customs and social perceptions of segregation untouched.

CORPOREAL FREEDOM

In the early months of Lee’s trip, she begged her Russian friends to take her to the *banya*, the still-opulent prerevolutionary public steam baths. In the gender-segregated *banya*, she finds the dressing room full of naked women, recognizing them as similar to the women on the subway—“humpbacked *babushki*,” “a pretty fresh-faced girl [with] ... two aluminum teeth,” “a fat young mother in a minidress and platform shoes”—who had tormented her with their stares (*Russian Journal* 7). “Minus their flimsy flowered dresses and cheap shoes, they [are as she] ... might

have imagined them”—“mainly stocky, often bulging grotesquely”—except that they are “so unpretentious and unself-conscious that they [have] ... a powerful appeal” (32). In the *banya*’s small elegant pool, “women playing tag, shrieking and ducking each other, paddling awkwardly across the pool” surround Lee’s narrator in the water (33). Their uninhibited behavior disarms the Western gaze of the narrator, who gradually becomes more attentive to the “intoxicating sense of liberty” in the women’s bath than to the quality of the women’s shoes.

In the “self-enclosed world of the *banya*,” Lee’s narrator senses “a magical feeling of freedom in the air” and begins to splash and play herself, taking pleasure in the spectacle of the “unhindered freedom of women in a place from which men are excluded” (30). When a man tried to steal a look at the bare women through an air vent in the scrubbing room, the narrator recalls, “[i]nstead of screams, the air was filled with loud laughter and raunchy comments. Two muscular *babushki* grabbed buckets of hot water and dashed it at the Peeping Tom, who disappeared abruptly. Then everybody—teenagers, matrons, grandmothers, and children—lay back and laughed” (33). The narrator realizes that in “the segregated world of the *banya*,” the “feeling of constraint that occurs in [Russian] social situations when the sexes are mixed” “disappears ... , and with it goes the puritanical veneer that leads Russian women in mixed company to squeal and blush at the slightest mention of sex” (33).

Disrobed, the women offer a striking display of self-satisfying corporeality, in contrast to Lee’s bodily absences in the narrative. In the steam and scrubbing rooms, “mountainously fat mothers lay on marble slabs while their small daughters scrubbed and massaged every inch of their flesh,” and “*babushki* sat clutching their withered

breasts, while beside them adolescent girls narcissistically searched their hips for bulges” (32). These segregated and spectacularly embodied, self-gazing women present an image dissimilar to Lee’s “integrated,” yet spectacularly absent, racial self, whose exclusion from the narrative speaks to Lee’s inability to escape an omnipresent white U.S. gaze, even outside U.S. borders, because, as Du Bois wrote, the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” is everpresent.¹⁶ Lee is drawn toward the unfettered freedom of the women in the bathhouse, because, unlike the freedom that she tries to obtain through the narrative strategies of *Russian Journal*, the women’s freedom is gained not through an evacuation of their womanhood or an evasion of its material consequences, but by collectively disarming the male gaze and making a self-edifying spectacle of their gendered selves. As evidenced by the continual narrative exclusion of Lee’s “black spectator” self, a white U.S. gaze constantly fixes Lee, and she so fears the potential for that gaze to restrictively read her blackness that she makes every effort to keep her racialized body from its view. Thus constricted and constructed by an everpresent and omnipotent white gaze, Lee abandons her racial self, the self who in the 1990 New York Library speech is able to articulate her understanding of “how flat and limited the American idea of a black person is” and the pressure that such restricted thinking exerted on her from a young age.¹⁷ By abandoning the self who has insight borne of racialized experience and

¹⁶ That Lee’s diary is a journal or diary gives the audience or the narrator’s sense of the reader’s gaze added significance. As Margo Culley writes, “The importance of the audience, real or implied, conscious or unconscious, of what is usually thought of as a private genre cannot be overstated. The presence of a sense of audience, in this form of writing as in all others, has a crucial influence over what is said and how it is said. . . . It shapes the selection and arrangement of detail within the journal and determines more than anything else the kind of self-construction the diarist presents” (Culley 218).

¹⁷ By her 1990 New York Library speech, Lee would have likely been aware of the small but growing black readership for her work, especially after the publication of *Sarah Phillips* in 1984. Central to this

declining any lasting solidarity with the racialized and nationalized others of *Russian Journal*, Lee forgoes the kind of collective, embodied freedom that prevails in the *banya*. Ultimately, the spectacular absences of *Russian Journal*—its silences and lapses—reveal that Lee’s internalized white gaze, textually enacted by her assimilation into the collective white “we” at the *New Yorker*, displaces Lee’s racialized self, effectively restricting the black spectator to spaces outside the narrative’s borders.

Lee’s reinscription of segregation, within the historical context of her integration of the *New Yorker*, is indicative of the larger potential for the interior or psychic segregation of blackness within the raced subjects of U.S. projects of integration. Such racial suppression signals that because of the continued consolidation of the powers and privileges of whiteness within U.S. cultural products and social practices, integration can come to mean not desegregation, or political, economic, cultural, educational, and social equality, but simply a consolidation of whiteness, in which once-raced subjects claim the mechanisms and privileges of whiteness as their own, effectively resegregating the aspects of themselves that bear witness to the racialization of social order. Lee the author, the “black spectator” who contends with the effects of racialized experience, never appears in *Russian Journal*; that racialized self is barred from narrative representation. Within this self-imposed segregation, the racialized autobiographical self ever skirts the borders, lurks just below the surface of the narrative, but never gains entry. Beyond the single moment

readership were black feminist literary critics such as Mary Helen Washington, Sherley Anne Williams, and Valerie Smith, who showed the earliest scholarly interest in Lee’s work. Lee’s shifting sense of a racialized self may have, in part, resulted from a recognition that African Americanist scholars and their students were and have been a mainstay of her literary support.

of racial disclosure, we sense her presence only as spectacular absences, as unnarrated identity and unincorporated experience

Chapter 4: The Dictation of Diaspora: Resisting Integration within the Oral Histories of the Federal Writers' Project in Erna Brodber's *Louisiana*

In this chapter, I approach the project of integration through its conspicuous absence from Jamaican novelist Erna Brodber's *Louisiana* (1994). I consider both the promise of full national identity inherent in the U.S. project of integration and the alternative diasporic identities and webs of relationship that that same project of integration largely suppressed in the 1950s and 1960s. In the chapter devoted to McPherson's *Crabcakes*, I examined the challenges of overcoming the immobility long tied to African American identity, even and especially in the era of integration; in the chapter that takes up Lee's *Russian Journal*, I explored the difficulty as well as the ethics of partaking in U.S. traditions of spectatorship, even as a means of national integration. In this chapter I consider how Brodber's *Louisiana* affords us the opportunity to understand the project of integration—through its absence. *Louisiana* is structured around a narrative void—from 1954 to the 1970s—years that roughly coincide with “integration,” i.e., the “classical” phase of the civil rights movement, which scholars have begun to identify as the *short* civil rights era because it omits the politically radical civil rights years of the 1930s and 1940s.¹ This prevailing periodization of the civil rights movement—comprised of *Brown v. Board of Education*, southern boycotts and marches, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965—has served as the basis for a “national narrative of racial

¹ Civil rights activist and organizer Bayard Rustin in 1965 termed the period now commonly referred to as “integration” as the “classical” stage of the civil rights movement (qtd. In Hall 1234).

progress ... [that] obscures the more complex and contentious racial history of ... [a] *long* civil rights era” that stretches from Roosevelt’s New Deal to Johnson’s Great Society (Singh 8, emphasis added).²

The obscuring in *Louisiana* of what has come to be known as “integration,” the widely accepted yet truncated version of civil rights history, allows us to decenter it, to momentarily hold it at bay, in order to consider modes of identity alternative to national citizenship, the central promise of the project of integration. While McPherson’s and Lee’s narratives record their *post*-traumatic negotiations of integration, their efforts to devise other forms of racial identity and interracial relationships are still very much overshadowed, determined, and defined by “integration.” In contrast, Brodber expunges “integration” from the narrative chronology, and in its absence, *Louisiana* opens up space to envision alternative courses of history and, consequently, forms of identity that are not *a priori* “post-integration,” not always already “integrated.” Shifting the *Brown* era offstage, *Louisiana* turns our attention instead to a prior project of cultural integration, the New Deal-era Federal Writers’ Project (FWP). By averting our collective gaze, the novel unhinges the concept of integration from its mid-twentieth-century mooring, sketching not only an earlier governmental attempt to incorporate African Americans within the nation but also black resistance to such national absorption. Thus, I approach here the project of “integration” not only through its narrative absence but

² For a history of the legal practices that prioritized labor rights and economic equality in the 1940s and early 1950s and their significance to civil rights, see Goluboff, *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights* (2010). For other works delineating the activists and organizations who helped create a *longer* civil rights movement, see Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past.” (2005); Singh, *Black Is a Country* (2005); and Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (2008).

also through an examination of the FWP and its cultural products. *Louisiana* contains a narrative history that excavates the earliest years of the *long* civil rights era, and in doing so, it offers a history alternative to the easily recalled “integration” chronology of *Brown v. Board*, boycotts, and busing. This alternative history resists incorporation within the dominant national narrative, refusing to affirm that narrative’s claims of a destined unfolding of essential U.S. values of freedom and justice. This counternarrative instead foregrounds transnational black diasporic disruptions of the nation that seek forms of freedom that transcend the unfulfilled promises of the nation-state, even as they demand the right of national belonging.

The de-emphasis of the integration era in *Louisiana* disrupts the dominant U.S. historical narrative that relies on racial integration as the fulfillment of national claims of freedom and equality. By virtually striking from the record the two decades to which “integration” and “civil rights” have been confined in the popular imagination, *Louisiana* forces us to contend with the implications of a denaturalized “project of integration,” which, importantly, is defined here *not* as the desires for freedom that spurred the civil rights movement but as the U.S. legal and social project put into motion in the early Cold War years in part as a response to those civil rights desires and their impact on the United States’ image around the globe. Using Brodber’s chronologically interrupted narrative, I pursue in this chapter the central question of what lies to be discovered if we look *outside* the time period and racial project known as “integration,” if we were to explore “beyond *Brown*,” beyond the reigning U.S. narrative that fuses, unquestioned, the ideas of national citizenship and freedom within the mid-twentieth-century project of racial integration.

Louisiana prods us to think not just of alternatives that materialize in the wake of integration and after its fact, as McPherson's and Lee's texts do, but also of possibilities that emerge from integration's prehistory, the early stages of a long civil right era, marked by transnational black diasporic activity still very much unrecovered in 1994, the year *Louisiana* was first published, in the United Kingdom. As a late-twentieth-century literary text, *Louisiana* pursues post-integration possibilities via the recovery of "pre-integration" histories that constitute not only a *longer* but a (geographically) *wider* civil rights era, as these histories routinely transgressed national borders and challenged national discourses. At its narrative end, *Louisiana* leaves us at the beginning of "integration," perched in 1954 at the edge of change, yet the text arms contemporary readers with a recovered knowledge of a once thriving diasporic community of resistance whose presence was aggressively suppressed and silenced in the 1950s and urges them to find the means to apply this unmuted history in the contemporary moment.

CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND THE FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT

By way of a fictional editor's note dated 1978, Erna Brodber's novel *Louisiana* begins at the chronological end of a narrative that spans two centuries. In the fictive note, the editor of Black World Press (a small black woman's publishing house, we are told) informs readers that the narrative that follows, a "manuscript called *Louisiana*," arrived anonymously at the press's door in 1974 in a package bearing only a Chicago postmark. The proceeding story—part transcription, part diary, part multivoiced autobiography—traces from 1936 to 1954 the research

experiences of protagonist Ella Townsend, a black writer and anthropologist who began working in 1936 for the FWP. Brodber, a Jamaican novelist, historian, and sociologist, draws on the intersecting histories of the FWP and African-American literary tradition in her third novel, *Louisiana* (published in the United States in 1997), loosely basing the protagonist Ella on Zora Neale Hurston, who began working as an FWP field interviewer in 1938 in Florida. Ella, like Hurston a writer and budding anthropological researcher, is hired by the FWP in 1936 to “retrieve the history of the Blacks of South West Louisiana” through a single “informant,” Mrs. Sue Ann Grant King of St. Mary Parish, who dies less than 2 months into the assignment. Impressed by Ella’s work in the leading journals of the Harlem Renaissance era, *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*, an unnamed Columbia University anthropology professor—reminiscent of Hurston’s mentor Franz Boas, widely considered the founder of modern anthropology—“introduced himself to [Ella] as one of the directors of this nation-wide project.” Ella recalls, “he told me he knew of me and felt I was what he was looking for to go down into Louisiana” (47). Ella is “one of the few [FWP researchers] to be given the new field aid, an approximation of today’s tape recorder” (3), but, the fictional editor’s note reveals, Ella vanished shortly after traveling to St. Mary Parish to begin her fieldwork, and “[n]either recording machine, reel, transcript nor manuscript was [ever] submitted” to FWP officials (3).³

³ Ella explains that she was “one of the first to be given this instrument, this precious instrument, first of its kind, donated to the programme by the manufacturers” for testing (32). In general, FWP oral history interviewers did not have tape recorders (Hirsch 144). However, Stetson Kennedy, Florida Director of Folklore, Life History, and Social-Ethnic Studies, recalls that in 1939, “the Florida project borrowed a recording machine from the Library of Congress [for folkways recording expeditions]. The fact that Zora Neale Hurston had worked with the machine on a recording expedition with Alan Lomax

Part of an effort to extend the Roosevelt administration's New Deal programs to the arts, the FWP was launched in 1935 with the chief aim of providing job relief to the nation's writers during the Depression. Although charged primarily with the responsibility of shrinking local unemployment rolls in every state, national FWP officials—many of them Ivy League-trained intellectuals influenced by Columbia University anthropologist Franz Boas's concept of cultural pluralism—saw their positions as a means of redefining “American national identity and culture by embracing the country's diversity” (Hirsch 1).⁴ Through a number of projects, including folkways studies, oral histories of ordinary Americans ranging from formerly enslaved blacks to recent European immigrants, and a highly celebrated American Guide Series that offered broad, panoramic depictions of each of the nation's 48 states, the FWP leadership hoped to create a broader, more “inclusive portrait of America,” a wider sense of national belonging (6). The program's pioneering collection of first-person narratives of Americans who were often excluded from U.S. histories was for national FWP officials a key means of reconstructing fundamental definitions of “America” and “Americans.” During the life of the program, from 1935 to 1943, the FWP enlisted a staff of approximately 6,500 fieldworkers, little more than 100 of them African Americans, to gather material for what FWP officials envisioned as documentary evidence that the United States possessed an original national culture.

in 1935 may have been a factor in our being entrusted with the cumbersome device. Nevertheless, we were very glad to have the machine and Zora” (Kennedy).

⁴ For a cultural history of the Federal Writers' Project focused on its fusion of romantic nationalism and cultural pluralism, see Hirsch, *Portrait*. For critiques of the FWP's nation-building objectives and analyses of its activities as “the governmental making and regulation of a national citizenry” (Bold xiv), see Bold and Harris.

The FWP, an early experimental project of cultural integration, serves in *Louisiana* as a signpost for reading the narrative absence of the later, more-well-known project of integration that emerged in the 1950s. Brodber situates *Louisiana*—with its first entry falling in 1936, just after the FWP’s inception, and its final entry dated April 1954, just one month before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in May—squarely between the hallmark legal case of the integration era and the Federal Writers’ Project. The text opens in the midst of the FWP’s efforts to “create a more egalitarian, democratic, and inclusive community” through the then radical development of state guidebooks and oral history projects that attempted to embrace the nation’s racial, ethnic, and class diversity. *Louisiana* ends in early 1954, upon Ella’s death, more than a decade after the FWP’s demise. The opening editor’s note, which briefly resumes the narrative in 1978, only suggests what might have transpired between 1954 and 1974. Viewing the FWP as a prior, narrower project of government-sponsored integration allows us to explore the possible links between the limitations of the FWP and those of the integration era of the 1950s.

SUMMARIZING AN INTENTIONALLY DISORDERED NARRATIVE

While the editor’s note suggests that the “manuscript called *Louisiana*” constitutes the long-missing transcripts of Ella Townsend’s FWP interviews with Sue Ann Grant King in the 1930s, a reading of the manuscript’s first entries, Ella’s transcription of her first two months of recordings, reveals not the anticipated FWP field interview between anthropological fieldworker (Ella) and cultural informant (Sue Ann Grant King) but a reversal of roles: unbeknown to Ella, Sue Ann

psychically commandeered the recording device as well as Ella's voice, using them to document her own self-directed oral history that is at once diasporic, multivoiced, and transnational, a clear divergence from the nationally confined portrait of American multiplicity that FWP officials hoped to disseminate. The first words of the manuscript are of a "psychic" conversation, recorded in the fall of 1936, between Sue Ann and her dearest friend, Louise, who had died more than a decade earlier in 1924 in her homeland of Jamaica. Louise tells Sue Ann of her own funeral, attended by many Jamaicans from her own and neighboring parishes who had come to "celebrate [her] translation":

And they were all there. Every jack one of them I had told you about"

"They came in groups; they came alone. They came with banners: Mizpah 1, Mizpah 2, Mutual Association Benefit Society, Daughters of the King, Brotherhood of St Andrew, Ethiopian Burial Scheme no. 1, their velvet banners in the brightest reds and blues, the words embossed in opposite colours, tassels flying. (10)

Familiar with the regalia and names of the black fraternal lodges, women's orders, and mutual benefit societies that came out to sing in a "Vox populi" to send Louise "home," Sue Ann replies that she is weary and longs to join Louise, asking her if "this young woman," Ella, who looks and sounds so much like Louise, is her friend returned in physical form, "come to usher me home" (17, 12). When Sue Ann dies a short time later, a similar host turns out for her funeral in the Louisiana parish of her birth. Much like the attendees at Louise's funeral, they are adorned with "armbands, headgear, banners across the chest, gloves, swords," divided according to "tribes or

classes, each led by a brass band” (36). In depicting these two funerals, separated by time and divided by the Caribbean Sea, Brodber demonstrates the enduring correspondences between the black Caribbean and African America, the signs and evidence of an intact black diasporic culture persistently transcending national borders.

The recording also captures Ella trying to coax Sue Ann into providing material for the FWP studies: “Mammy I see you looking at me full and smiling. Like you ready to talk.” “... Mammy, what we want to know, to be truthful, what those people want to know, but as it happens, I want to know too, is what life was like for you, so go right back and tell me all about Louisiana....” “Tell me anything, everything” (17). Intent on fulfilling her job of gathering data “to add to these white people’s history of the blacks of South West Louisiana,” Ella is oblivious to Sue Ann and Louise’s altogether different objective; the pair see Ella as the “horse” that Sue Ann will “ride,” that is to say, in terms of African spiritualism, the “vessel,” medium, or “somebody’s talking drum” that will convey Sue Ann’s spirit “home” (14, 17, 46). In conscripting Ella to aid in Sue Ann’s “translation,” in both writing and spirit, Jamaican Louise and U.S. American “Sue Anna”—spiritual sisters whose names together form “Louisiana”—derail the FWP project of transcribing individual life histories that would collectively, officials hoped, constitute the “indigenous [U.S.] culture that would provide the basis for a national identity and a national literature” (Hirsch 182). The sisters overwrite this new national narrative, strictly framed by U.S. borders and ideals, with what Louise calls “our history,” a diasporic, transnational history of the integration of and crosscurrents between “African America and the

African Caribbean in the period between the World Wars” (a history that itself would be overwritten by U.S. Cold War imperatives in the 1950s) (5). From the start, then, *Louisiana* dispels any notion that the long-lost text of early 20th-century African America might conform to the FWP’s romantic nationalist objectives.

Louisiana’s opening traces a circuit of kinship between the Caribbean and the U.S. South—not the strictly U.S. terrain of the FWP’s American Guide series and oral history studies.⁵ In doing so, the manuscript resists national FWP officials’ call, voiced by Ella, for the incorporation of Americans within a nation-building project ostensibly diverse and egalitarian yet fixed within rigid and impermeable national borders. The manuscript rejects, usurps even, the FWP’s oral history program, an early-twentieth-century attempt to culturally integrate African Americans into the larger body politic without altering the brutal inequities and terrors of the U.S. system of segregation. *Louisiana*’s diasporic counternarrative to the FWP’s “American” guide series and oral histories of the 1930s provides signposts for understanding the later narrative silencing of the 1950s and 1960s, a period in which the U.S. processes of desegregation, Cold War manipulation of so-called third-world countries, and international travel restrictions became inextricably linked and together stymied African American participation in a once-thriving black diasporic world. The

⁵ The origins of this circuit of kinship between blacks in the Caribbean and the United States lie, of course, in the Atlantic slave trade. As a buttress of multinational European capitalism, the slave economy was necessarily transnational. In terms of contemporary African American constructions of a global black diaspora, the facts of slave trafficking belie any assumptions of black U.S. exceptionalism. Of the estimated 9,587,000 Africans who arrived in the Americas, less than 5% (387,000) were transported to the United States. In contrast, approximately 1,020,000 (10%) Africans were taken to Jamaica and an estimated 4,667,000 (nearly 50%) were taken to Brazil (“Map 9”). In addition, Jamaica and Louisiana (both Spanish and early American Louisiana) were inextricably linked in the slave trade, as between 1772 and 1796, slaves in Louisiana “originated primarily from the island of Jamaica.” Subsequently, from 1796 to 1803, Louisiana “slaves still arrived along Caribbean routes but they now came, for the most part, from Havana” (Leglaunec 188).

flourishing post-World War I black diaspora that comes to life in Sue Ann Grant King's self-dictated oral history is at odds with projects of integration—whether the FWP, or *Brown v. Board of Education* in a Cold War context—that sought to press black identity into strictly national forms. By crossing U.S. borders into the Caribbean and giving voice to not only “Americans,” but also Jamaicans, *Louisiana* resists participation in the early project of national integration known as the FWP and instead launches its own project of diasporic, hemispheric integration that would later be suppressed in the Cold War world of the 1950s and 1960s.

In an unexpected and supernatural fashion, then, Sue Ann Grant-King gives a scattered, nonlinear, and fragmented oral account of her family's activist history in Louisiana and her own exile from and return to Louisiana's sugar cane region. Brodber's chronological and geographical “disordering” of the narrative resists the national and narrative “processing” of histories undertaken by the FWP and at the same time constructs a decidedly diasporic, or dispersed-but-linked, narrative form. As Brodber scholar June Roberts observes, *Louisiana* is “told in non-chronological order, as a counter-historiographic gesture of resistance to dominant narratives and performs the spirals and ellipses of the acts of revision necessary to unseat them” (216). Diverging from the typical single-voiced life histories recorded by FWP fieldworkers, Sue Ann's account is a communal, transnational “autobiography” filled with other voices, including her husband, Silas, a world traveler, and their friend Louise, a Jamaican immigrant whom Sue Ann and Silas met in Chicago in the 1910s. Circuitous and piecemeal, Sue Ann's narrative begins in St. Mary's Parish, Louisiana, with her grandfather Moses, lynched as a slave because he ran off after learning the

difference between “slave” and “free.” Sue Ann’s grandmother’s second husband, Ramrod, would meet the same fate when, just after Emancipation, he refused to surrender his land to white Southerners, declaring, “‘I pitch my tent, I make my nest, I hatch my seed. Ain’t going no place. Gotta swing me right here. St. Mary Louisiana’s where I intend to stay.’ And they did swing him right there” (15).

Sue Ann’s mother would carry on the family legacy of resistance as a sugar cane field worker, when she began organizing her fellow workers “towards wresting a better deal from the sugar planters” in the 1880s. Brodber shapes the story of Sue Ann’s mother’s activism in the sugar cane fields of St. Mary Parish around the actual massacre of at least 30 black sugar workers in a three-week strike of 6,000 to 10,000 laborers in St. Mary and neighboring parishes in 1887.⁶ Sue Ann’s mother, Mrs. Grant, a leader among sugar cane workers, both men and women, began organizing for “better pay and the modification of a system of remuneration in which workers were forced to spend their wages in the company stores owned by the same plantation owners and from which debts were deducted before the pay reached the hand of the worker” (151). In a stunning repetition of Ramrod’s and Grandpappy Moses’ fates—in which Sue Ann’s mother is cut down by white landowners while fighting for workers’ rights and protecting the last remnant of the very land over which Ramrod was lynched—Brodber depicts the compounded defeats of nineteenth-century black acts of resistance waged without the cover and support of larger national and transnational networks.

The final chapter of Sue Ann’s oral history is her own story. Sue Ann herself “had been thick into [a] longshoremen’s strike” in New Orleans in the pre-World War

⁶ See Rodrigue (2001).

I era and escaped lynching only because of what appeared to be a supernatural intervention: “a voice came to her, a hand touched her on the shoulder and guided her away to the train. Somebody out of the blue paid her fare” (155).⁷ Retelling her history, Sue Ann recalls fleeing Louisiana, remembering especially the “fear, the sadness and tears on that chicken bone special” train ride out of New Orleans. “Chicken bone specials,” train lines used heavily by black migrants, were so called because most black passengers traveling northward and westward out of the South “packed a boxed lunch of chicken,” a food that “traveled well” on the often days-long journeys during which black riders were denied access to the dining cars (Williams-Forsen 115-116). By using “chicken bone special,” the black vernacular term for the “Great Migration” trains, Brodber locates Sue Ann’s experience within a broader communal history, connecting her story of exile not only to countless other stories of black southern migration to points north and west from the post-World War I era through the 1960s, but also to other global stories of diasporic dislocation, such as Louise’s migration from Jamaica to Chicago and Ella’s early migration from Jamaica to New York. Sue Ann’s story is both a link to and a representation of centuries-long legacies of black American exile and global diasporic displacement.

Though Ella learned early on—when Sue Ann first used the FWP recorder and Ella’s voice to dictate her own story—that Sue Ann was a psychic, it takes her more than 15 years of transcribing the voices of Sue Ann, Louise, and Silas from the FWP reel, from her own head, and then via her own “speaking organs” (143) to discover the final piece of Sue Ann’s story: Sue Ann, Louise, and Silas began working diligently in 1918 on behalf of “Mr. G,” Marcus Garvey, organizing for the

⁷ For a history of black dock workers and unions in New Orleans, see Issa 82-83.

Universal Negro Improvement Association together in Chicago and then separately in Louisiana and Jamaica. Sue Ann describes her immersion in UNIA activity as a re-education and begins to see her flight to Chicago less as a retreat and more as a rebirth: “Look where I come to learn what I should learn in grade school, to read newspapers, to know what is going on all over the world” (147). Likely exposed first to the UNIA’s *Negro World*, the trio—probably prompted by Silas, a World War II veteran and world traveler—eventually branch out and begin reading newspapers from points across a broad black diaspora. Louise recalls this diasporic re-education: “They were from places I had only heard of, places whose inhabitants I had never seen. Trinidad, for instance. Silas had travelled extensively but he had not been to Trinidad. I doubt whether he knew any Trinidadian either but here we were reading Trinidadian newspapers and knowing what was going [on] in Trinidad” (157). It is this educational immersion in the news of a global black diaspora—the very type of autonomous education and awareness that U.S. anticommunist initiatives would later counter—that allows Sue Ann to finally see the place of her labor activism and her family’s legacy of economic resistance within a larger framework of diasporic struggle. She began to understand in the years following World War I that her work had international parallels and that she herself had global counterparts, spurring her to return with Silas to Louisiana to set up chapters of Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, to work with Jewish labor organizers, albeit unsuccessfully due to local white backlash, and to help black Arkansas sharecroppers in their efforts to unionize, efforts that led to a white massacre of blacks.⁸

⁸ Brodber bases what is referred to in *Louisiana* as “that Arkansas devilment” on the unionization efforts of black sharecroppers in Elaine, AR, in 1919 and the subsequent massacre by whites of an

More than a decade later in 1936, Ella and her future husband Reuben, both displaced immigrants—she a Jamaican immigrant and he a Congolese native taken to Belgium as an infant—travel to St. Mary parish in the heart of Louisiana’s so-called Sugar Bowl, to record Sue Ann’s life history for the FWP. After Sue Ann’s death shortly after Ella’s assignment begins, Ella and Reuben relocate to New Orleans, but for the next 15 years, Sue Ann, Louise, and Silas continue to transmit their shared story, first on the recording machine and then in Ella’s head and voice. Furthering the narrative investment in acts of black transnationalism, Ella takes over a Crescent City tavern frequented by West Indian seamen stopped at the city’s thriving international port and once run by Sue Ann and her old friend Madam. Ella’s husband, Reuben, launches a European language school for the city’s increasingly transnational jazz musicians.

Brodber’s uses in *Louisiana* of the socio-historical phenomena of Jamaican emigration, the transnational development of the UNIA’s membership, and black oral history research draw on her interdisciplinary academic training and scholarship. Before ever publishing her first novel, *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980), Brodber had earned a master’s degree in sociology in 1968 and performed doctoral fieldwork in the discipline of history. In 1968, she would travel to the University of Washington in Seattle to perform research in child psychology for a Ford Foundation pre-doctoral fellowship, returning to the United States over the years since then numerous times for various consultancies and visiting professorships. In the 1970s, Brodber conducted the research—the collection of 90 oral histories of the second generation of freemen in Jamaica—that would lead to a doctorate in history at

estimated 100 to 200 black citizens.

the University of the West Indies in 1985. Brodber began her oral history research in 1973 as a staff member of the university's Institute of Social and Economic Research a little more than a decade after Jamaica had gained its independence and the university had transitioned from a satellite of the University of London to an independent institution, both in 1962. In this newly radicalized worlds of the decolonized nation and campus, Brodber was in the 1960s part of "the first post-independence generation of West Indian intellectuals," a radical leftist student-scholar cohort that included "the afrocentric Caribbean New World socialist or neo-Marxist standard bearers" Lloyd Best (Trinidadian economist), George Beckford (Jamaican economist), Kamau Brathwaite (Bajan writer), Norman Girvan (Jamaican-born economist), Sylvia Wynter (Jamaican writer and cultural critic), and Walter Rodney (Guyanese historian) (Roberts 13, 14). In 1976, Brodber joined the Twelve Tribes of Israel, a Rastafarian sect, and melding Rastafarianism and black nationalism, she, along with her colleagues, theorized "a uniquely Caribbean socio-economic worldview that applied to [the] facts on the ground [in Jamaica in contrast to] imported European revolutionary theories" such as a purely Marxist model (O'Callaghan 73; Roberts xi). Brodber has continued to write fiction while preserving her "social science grounding," and her subsequent work reflects a fusion of literature and social science discourses, an "interdisciplinary example of history and autobiography integrated with fiction" (Roberts 23). Maintaining a cabin on her family plot in Woodside, St. Mary, Jamaica, Brodber uses her home also as an international scholars' compound, Blackspace.

RESISTING THE LIMITATIONS OF FEDERAL NARRATION

While the editorial voice that frames *Louisiana* approves the accomplishments of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs, the voices within the transcript itself locate the authority of the FWP's oral history efforts outside themselves and often actively resist it. Thus, even though, for instance, the fictive editor of Black World Press silently prays that Roosevelt's "tribe" might increase because he "created jobs for plumbers, architects, the unskilled" and, "[b]less his heart, he also created jobs for artists ... black and white, male and female," Louise unequivocally considers Ella's job as a FWP field researcher a servile position lacking autonomy and is distrustful of the transcript that Ella "would submit to her *masters*" (3, 14, emphasis added). Initially, Ella herself claims no ownership of her fieldwork in St. Mary's Parish, lamenting when her interview with Sue Ann goes cold that "Mammy"—her unfortunate moniker for Sue Ann—"will give me nothing else to add to these white people's history of the blacks of South West Louisiana" (14). Thinking of her fieldwork not as "my history" or "our history," but as "these white people's history," Ella clearly does not consider the historiography in which she is engaged "black history," whose premises and objectives are generated and controlled by black historical subjects themselves. Her language concedes that her anthropological work for the FWP facilitates the ongoing production of blacks as the objects of official, authorized histories. It is only when Sue Ann, Louise, and Silas overtake the recording device, use Ella's voice as their own, and in the process begin to "undo" Ella's historical and anthropological academic training that they permit their voices to be heard on the FWP reel—under their own direction and by their own dictation.

Instead of embracing Ella's interviews as an opportunity to participate in the national project of cultural integration that FWP officials envisioned, Sue Ann sees the FWP's seemingly innocuous oral history efforts as a manipulation of her history that would whitewash a family legacy of racial traumas in the name of building (a myth of) a united and untroubled nation. As FWP historian Jerrold Hirsch notes, "the FWP tried to unite Americans, individuals and groups with conflicting interests, while ignoring issues that divided them, and therefore the project ... created a conservative myth that pointed to a harmonious future," but it did not grapple with "how a change from current circumstances to a better future could be achieved" (3). Though national FWP officials such as Benjamin Botkin, the national folklore editor, hoped to produce "a history of the whole people ... in which the people are the historians as well as the history, telling their own story in their own words," in reality, in many of the FWP publications, including the state guides, black Americans often appeared as an observed "type," written of in the third person and contained within separate, marginal essays (Botkin qtd. in Hirsch 121). Thus, despite the lofty goals of the national office, the FWP's state guides and life histories regularly allowed the structural divisions of Jim Crow to be reproduced on the page—hidden beneath a veneer of national unity.

In terms of the historical and sociological methodologies that influenced the federal oral history program, Sue Ann's life story ultimately constitutes a collection of "data" that can be shaped into a representative history of the socioeconomic population labeled "the lower class negro." Ella, for instance, frustrated with Sue Ann's reticence early in her assignment, complains to herself that "[o]ne whole side"

of a recording tape had been wasted, “and not a thing to give to the white people. How would it look? This woman they say has important data to give; *is* important data; she has seen things; had done things; her story is crucial to the history of the struggle of the lower class negro that they want to write” (21, emphasis added). Though the FWP life history programs sought to avoid the limitations of statistics-based sociological methods by using life histories “to help the inarticulate write themselves into history,” Ella acknowledges the persisting forms of statistical abstraction that pervade the federal historiography projects (Hirsch 108). FWP officials failed to acknowledge that even though interviewees were speaking in their own voices, ultimately those being interviewed were responding to questions—narrative guides, in effect—that they had not devised and acquiescing to a finished narrative whose premises they did not control. In the end, Sue Ann’s life history amounts to “important data” that will help the federal project reify, and circulate a particular narrative about, the U.S. construct known as “the lower class negro,” a sociological product wholly contained within national borders and divorced from its transnational and cross-class mobilities.

Ella’s description of her work as “these white people’s history of the blacks of South West Louisiana” (14) lays bare a central paradox about the Federal Writers’ Project: the corps of Federal Writers that was charged with “incorporating excluded groups in a redefined national community” was “overwhelmingly white” (Hirsch 198, 127). At its height, the FWP would employ some 6,500 writers; of the 4,500 workers employed by the FWP in 1937, only 106 were African Americans (Penkower 67). Thus, even as FWP administrators engineered American cultural projects that would

reflect “an inclusive national community” and despite the fact that national officials such as Sterling Brown persistently questioned various state directors about their failure to hire black workers, the FWP workforce remained about 98% white (Hirsch 182). Notwithstanding New Deal desires to redefine the nation in terms of its diversity, the Alabama state director, for example, informed Negro Affairs officials that ““it would be unwise to give a Negro this job”” because of the ““considerable racial sensitiveness in Tuskegee and vicinity”” (Sklaroff 93). Similarly, the North Carolina state director explained: ““So far I have employed no colored persons because the resources of the Writers’ Project in this state have not permitted the setting up of separate establishments, which would be required for such employment”” (Bold 133). In terms of the progressive pluralist vision of officials at the national administration level, the FWP comprised one of the nation’s first federally sponsored projects of racial integration, but at the level of state operations, many African American Federal Writers, a number of whom would go on to become U.S. literary giants, faced a recalcitrant Jim Crow: segregated working conditions and unequal wages, in the limited number of state offices that would hire blacks.

New York, Illinois, Louisiana, and Virginia were exceptions to the rule, as each had thriving contingencies of black Federal Writers, and in apparent opposition to the governing FWP idea of cultural integration, Louisiana, Virginia, and Florida had separate “Negro units.” Together these Negro units would produce a wealth of material on the African American experience (much of it still unpublished) that was unprecedented in its scope and depth. However, the very existence of these segregated units conflicted with the integrationist thrust of the national FWP

administration, and the bulk of material on African Americans was excluded from the main state guidebooks, laying bare the discrepancies between the project's ideals and realities.

Zora Neale Hurston began working in 1938 for Florida's Negro Unit as a "junior interviewer," despite the fact that she was "the only widely published author on the Florida project's payroll," had been trained by the nation's leading anthropologist, and had recently returned to the United States from Guggenheim-funded trips to research voodoo spiritual practices in Jamaica and Haiti (Kennedy). Though national officials pushed the Florida director to promote Hurston to supervisor of the Negro Unit and give her responsibility for editing *The Florida Negro*, a small, select portion of the thousands of pages produced by the Negro Unit, material that had been used only meagerly in the general Florida state guide—she apparently held the position in name only (Boyd 316-317). Hurston would submit a number of essays on the black sanctified church, folktales, legends, and folk songs. One of her FWP pieces, much like her own personal research, took a transnational turn, comparing Floridian and Bahamian music and dance. In another essay she exposed the slavery-like conditions of a turpentine camp in Cross City and submitted along with this essay "cryptic handwritten notes such as 'a hand tried to run away last week, and the sheriff had all the roads guarded' and 'there is a grave not far from here of a hand they beat to death'" (Kennedy). Despite the fact that "few if any other Project writers exceeded [the black writers] in the quantity of their production" and the quality of it, which, according to Florida FWP folklore supervisor Stetson Kennedy, "was above the capacity of any of the white editors to improve upon," the

Negro Unit writers' essays were "never incorporated as a whole ... in the mainstream Florida state guidebook." Instead, fragments of their work were only scattered or "sprinkle[d] ... through the [main] *Florida Guide* manuscript for flavoring" (Kennedy), and *The Florida Negro* manuscript, comprised entirely of their work, remained unpublished until 1993. Only a few lines, for instance, of Hurston's essay on a murderous white riot against blacks in Ocoee, Fla., on election day in 1920 were used in the main Florida guide, because, Kennedy acknowledges, "'The white/black relationship was generally regarded as a fixed one, and therefore not a fit subject for commentary. The specifics of racial discrimination, on the other hand, could sometimes be pointed to in passing, provided this was done without rancor'" (Kennedy).

A DIASPORIC COUNTERNARRATIVE TO THE FWP'S NATIONAL HISTORIES

While Hurston and other black Federal Writers were able to produce a wealth of material on the African American experience, they were hemmed in by the constrictions of Jim Crow and the nationalist emphasis of the project, and in the end, so much of their work would be left unpublished. Historian Lauren Sklaroff cautions against negat[ing] the importance of New Deal cultural programs" because of "the [racial] obstacles embedded within each project ... ; indeed, the ways in which African Americans worked to create artistic expression within tightly confined spaces are a critical part of this history" (7).⁹ Locating *Louisiana* in the midst of this history of an African American presence within the FWP, Brodber envisions a site of cultural

⁹ For histories of African Americans' relationship to and involvement in New Deal programs, see Sitkoff (1981) and Sklaroff (2009).

work alternative to the “tight spaces” required by the national project of integration. Sue Ann, Louise, and Silas counternarrate their own histories not by consenting to and thus underwriting the FWP’s nation-building project but by recording over, or overwriting, a narrative of national unity that could be created only by fragmenting or eliding entirely full accounts of African American resistance to and oppression within the nation.

In directing an alternative historiographical project, Sue Ann, Louise, and Silas resist inclusion within the national archive created by the FWP to legitimate the nation and its claims to universality. Instead of providing evidence of untroubled American cultural pluralism, the trio's collective autobiography asserts a claim to national belonging even as it reflects a black diasporic community working for freedoms that exceed the nation's yet-unredeemed promises of equality and justice. Their alternative narrative reflects the transnational turn of their lives and their hopes that lie beyond the nation-state. Focused as it was on creating a portrait of the American people, the FWP neglected black Americans’ historical interactions with people and places beyond the nation's borders. The national life history project selected and classified its informants within the narrowly defined borders of Southern culture, with their lives valued only for how they could be read as a function of the structure and workings of Southern and U.S. society (Federal Writers' Project ix).

Brodber seeks to uncover the transnational intersections overlooked by the FWP. Sue Ann's mother, for example, seeking respite from the trauma of the lynchings of her father and stepfather in response to their resistance, turns to the bayous and the Gulf of Mexico, the periphery of both Louisiana and the nation. Sue

Ann remembers her mother as a "[t]hinking woman," and according to Sue Ann's grandmother, it was "[t]hem boats done set her mind to thinking" (110). The comings and goings of the fishing, shrimp, oyster, and crab boats in St. Mary Parish and then later, after she runs off to New Orleans, the distant destinations and sites of departure of the sugar, fruit, and cotton ships arriving at the city's harbor move her to dream of the world beyond Louisiana's gulf and ports. "'What that country like, what this country like and so on and so forth. Head full of thinking', is what my Grandmamma tell me about my Ma," Sue Ann recalls. Sue Ann's own father, a seaman, charmed her mother by telling her he had traveled the globe. "'Man been to the high seas', my Grandma say she say he say. Been to Russia; been to South America'" (110). It is after watching the ships engaged in commerce generated by the plantations of her birthplace, listening to Sue Ann's father "talk of far away places," and eventually being abandoned by him for his ship heading back to sea that Sue Ann's mother flies "like a bird" "back into the sugar cane," working "like it was the last days" and to the dismay of Sue Ann's grandmother, riskily turning their home into a meeting house to discuss "wages too small" that "[n]eed not be so small" (112).

A growing knowledge of a global black presence is also at the center of Silas' sharing and creation of black diasporic history with Louise, acts that constitute a historiography project alternative to the FWP's efforts to collect and archive American lives. In dictating his portion of the shared narrative, Silas recalls that upon first befriending him, Louise—who along with Sue Ann worked as the kitchen help in the Chicago boarding house where he lived just after World War I—longed to hear the tales of his travels. "What a blotting paper you were child, soaking up all

them stories of Cuba and Colon," Silas says. "How you wanted to hear of Africa What a thirst!" He speculates that Louise's curiosity about the histories of blacks elsewhere in the world reflects the fact that "with no live mother and father, [Louise's] ... personal history knew no boundary." Claiming the Afro-Cuban and -Panamanian histories he tells as her own, the orphaned Louise reflects the strategies of an entire black diaspora left "motherless and fatherless," substituting borrowed and shared histories for the voids and silences left by dispersal. Unlike the fixed interviewer and informant roles of academic and governmental historiography, Silas and Louise are equally participatory and their roles are integrated, overlapping, and mutually beneficial. Silas serves as a conduit, passing on the history and folk culture of the laborers on the sugar cane plantations of Matanza, Cuba, famous for its Afro-Cuban folklore, and at the same time, he enlarges both Louise's self-image and her world view. Not just "soaking up" Silas's stories, Louise presses him to expand and extend a collective diasporic oral record. "You forced me to add, to think, to add to Matanza's story of the coming of the Africans to Cuba," he tells her (142).

The transnational desires voiced in *Louisiana* exist only in the silences, gaps, and discarded portions of the FWP's life history project in its southeastern region, which gathered more than 400 life histories in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. *These Are Our Lives* (1939) is a collection of 35 of these life histories from Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. The only official publication of the FWP's southeastern life histories, *These Are Our Lives* omits narratives that reflect transnational intersections and influences. The incorporation of Louise's voice within the counternarrative of *Louisiana*—indeed,

hers is the first voice recorded on Ella's reel—is a direct challenge of the national boundaries that the FWP constructs around its definitions of "America" and "Americans." The editor of *These Are Our Lives*, W.T. Couch, who headed both the FWP's southern life history program and the University of North Carolina Press, declined to select for publication the histories of "Greek restaurant owners, Chinese laundrymen, Jewish shopkeepers, and Cuban and Italian cigar makers," choosing instead to select histories that "represent the different types present among the people, with attention proportioned according to the numerical importance of the different types" (FWP x). Thus, the depiction of the South in *These Are Our Lives* is typical in that it reflects a biracial, agricultural, and insular region, a region that, with the help of Couch's editing and without any mention of segregation, is inhabited by equally destitute and apparently equally struggling black and white sharecroppers, share renters, and farm owners, as well as a "negro dentist" and a white "country doctor." Nearly 40 years later, a second volume of collected FWP life histories, *Such as Us: Southern Voices of the Thirties*, was published in 1978. Hoping to expand Couch's earlier efforts, the editors of this volume "looked for stories that did more than represent a type and convey facts." The new, and ambiguous, criterion for histories included in this second volume was the portrayal of "an individual perspective on events" (Terrill and Hirsch xxii). Still, even though many of the histories reminded the editors of this new volume "that the South is not composed solely of native white and black Americans," they too declined to include the transnational life histories that Couch had omitted, arguing that as space limitations prevented them from publishing the entire group, they were all excluded because "[s]ingly they would appear *exotic*

and *peripheral*" (xxii emphasis added).

In much the same way that transnational identities are suppressed in the FWP's publications, race and segregation are unspoken yet wholly determinant variables in the national study of southern lives. A failure to acknowledge the racialized underpinnings of a global economy, of U.S. and southern society, and thus of black experience pervades *These Are Our Lives*. As in many of the state guidebooks, Jim Crow realities are forced underground in the collection of southern life histories. For instance, the outlined guide for conducting interviews contained in the FWP's "Instructions to Writers" directed them to guide their conversations with interviewees toward a number of subjects, including their families, education, income, attitudes toward their occupations, voting experience, religion, diet, and health care. That the writing guide for a life history project launched in seven southern states in 1938—when the racial inequality mandated at the turn of the nineteenth century had been woven fully into every aspect of life—failed to refer in any way to race speaks to the disciplining power of white supremacy. The omission also speaks to the ways in which the FWP's southern life history program forced racial issues below the surface in an attempt to paint a diverse yet racially untroubled portrait of "the life of a community ... made up of individuals, who are of different status, perform different functions, and in general have widely different experiences and attitudes—so different, indeed, as to be almost unimaginable" (FWP x). The discourse of "difference" here—"different status," "different functions," and "different experiences and attitudes"—serves to mask the racial inequality, unjust economic and political conditions, and the accompanying violence of Jim Crow.

Primed by their activism in the UNIA and their transnational relationships nurtured by the organization, Sue Ann, Louise, and Silas refuse the tight spaces of the FWP's historiography project. Specifically, UNIA membership had previously nurtured their desires to carve out broader cultural and political spheres beyond the nation-state. While scholarly references often distill the UNIA into “the Garveyite vision equating racial separatism and nation-building,” Garvey's race-based nationalist-imperialist dream never reached fruition, and I wish here not only to focus on Garvey's premises and strategies for establishing a self-governed African nation in the future but also to consider, like Brodber, the grass-roots, global community that actually existed—in the meantime—under the umbrella of the UNIA (Singh 51) . Brodber's reconstruction of the UNIA membership through the figures of Sue Ann, Louise, and Silas depicts a post-World War II community that was much like the black social movements of the 1930s and 1940s that were “national and transnational in scope and conception” and that have recently been included in the more broadly resistant historiography of a more politically militant civil rights movement. Brodber’s excavated UNIA members, like the movements that would follow, claimed national belonging even as they pursued transnational routes to freedom, identified and resisted a racialized global labor system, and engaged in transnational diasporic fellowship (Singh 6). In doing so, Brodber’s representation of the UNIA’s broad diasporic membership helps us perceive how it might have laid the groundwork for the subsequent emergence of what is now considered the *long* civil rights movement.

In this depiction of a UNIA membership that engages in global diasporic fellowship even as it remains committed to enacting change within national spaces,

Brodber reconciles the historical split of integrationism and separatism in black public thought. The transnational longings of Sue Ann, Silas, and Louise are directed not toward constructing the future African nation that the UNIA administration envisioned but toward reconnecting the diasporic kinship links among individuals wholly committed to activism within their national homelands. Here, Brodber defines “integration” not as the national incorporation promoted by the FWP but as the effects of their activism and commitment to the radical reconstruction of the nation. After Silas and Louise witness the murderous race riots of 1919 in Chicago, Silas shows a distraught and angry Louise a Jamaican newspaper reporting “rioting on estates in [her] island,” giving her the following advice: “If you want to change things you can. Make the change in your corner. The good Lord said, ‘let your net down at your feet.’ This is not your corner. What you do there, will be felt throughout the world for everything is related” (157). In a text that actively disregards the borders of nations as well as those between life and death, such advice seems to undermine the narrative’s transnationalist investments by seeking recourse in national formations. However, Silas’ conflation of Booker T. Washington’s famous call to “cast down your buckets where you are” and Jesus’s instructions to the disciples to “cast the net on the right side of the ship, and you shall find” signals Brodber’s revision of Garvey’s claim that the UNIA represented an African government in exile in the United States. In Brodber’s reconstruction, for the grassroots members of the UNIA, an investment in the nation and a sense of national belonging take priority over the UNIA administrative goal of acquiring a land base in Africa to establish a black empire. Similar to Sue Ann’s grandfather Ramrod’s post-Emancipation refusal

to surrender his land—"I pitch my tent, I make my nest, I hatch my seed. Ain't going no place. ... St. Mary Louisiana's where I intend to stay"—Silas' philosophy of transnationally linked nation-based acts of activism counters both Garvey's nationalist-imperialist goals and the national project of incorporation envisioned by FWP officials. Silas' perspective reflects a strategy borne of an awareness that a global empire of oppression must be confronted on multiple fronts, not from a single site in Africa.

The crux of the UNIA platform that appealed to Sue Ann, Louise, and Silas, and the same feature that allowed the organization to link the struggles of black diasporans around the globe, was its emphasis on the economic basis of racial oppression worldwide. Garvey's declaration in 1922 that "I know no national boundary where the Negro is concerned" spoke to a black transnationalism borne of global and transhistorical economic systems wholly dependent on the labor of individuals raced as "colored," "Negro," "preto," etc. (Garvey 728). In its broad reach, the UNIA necessarily mirrored the wide span of transnational capitalism (and its counterparts, colonialism and imperialism). In particular, in the interwar period, the geography of the UNIA membership generally reflected that of the United Fruit Company (UFC), the massive U.S.-based multinational banana operation that in the post-World War I era owned plantations, railroads, and ships in Jamaica, Cuba, Costa Rica, Columbia, and Nicaragua. Along with one other U.S. company, the UFC "exercised a duopolistic control over the world banana export trade" during the interwar years, gaining the apt nickname "el pulpo" (the "octopus"), a reflection of its wealth, broad geographical span, and enormous power and influence (Geoffrey Jones,

Multinationals and Global Capitalism from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth-First Century 50, 51). Garvey, who himself once worked on a UFC banana plantation in Costa Rica, traveled and worked in his early twenties in Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Spanish Honduras, Columbia, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, a tour that gave him a panoramic, multinational view of the deplorable work and living conditions of a broad swath of African diasporans whose labor sustained the wealth and commerce of multinational corporations and Western imperialist aims.

In focusing on Brodber's historicization of black diasporic labor issues, I share literary scholar Martyn Bone's concern that while critical readings of *Louisiana* have focused heavily on the "workings of the spirit" in the novel, little attention has been paid to the text's "emphasis on the historical and material conditions of blacks in Louisiana" (Bone). Here, I extend such an intervention by showing how Brodber narrates not only a history of black labor struggles in southern Louisiana but also an intertwining story of West Indian workers laboring along transnational circuits and across national borders made permeable by capitalist expansion. The materialist reading here challenges contentions that "Anglophone Caribbean women writers have ... shifted the purview of literary discourse from attention to labor unions, political corruption, economic and political domination, and other public venues to the private politics of domesticity and relationships, gender roles and their oppressions, self-discovery and identity, self-celebration in group identity, folk traditions, interiority, and spirituality" (Roberts 6). Brodber's explicit interest in unions, labor strikes, the historically economic basis of racial oppression, and the UNIA in *Louisiana* indicates that she at least seeks to merge what some scholars consider the gendered spheres of

the public and the private.

Brodber addresses the twinned transnational routings of capitalism and national expansion through the figures of the West Indian sailors, laborers, and farmworkers who pass through the New Orleans tavern that Ella helps run in the interwar years. Much of *Louisiana* is set in New Orleans, with the city's active port serving as a narrative mechanism of arrival and egress, especially the comings and goings of sailors from the West Indies. These sailors are drawn to the tavern, once run by Sue Ann and her friend Madam, because the women use their psychic abilities and a love of folklore and folksongs to help the laboring men heal from life's traumas, offering them a much-needed "balm in Gilead" (118). After Sue Ann's death, Ella joins Madam, taking Sue Ann's place at the tavern. Of the "ships and sailors from every conceivable part of the world" in New Orleans, Madam "was acutely interested in those who looked most like us," Ella notes. "The banana boats from the West Indies had a fair share of such sailors. These made up the bulk of Madam's clientele. She took from them their tales and quickly passed them on" and at other times she "intercepted with whatever their song brought to mind" (78, 84). This conveyance of folk culture—the borrowing, sharing, interjection, and improvisation—reflects the larger processes of acculturation between the Caribbean and the United States and, more importantly here, speaks to the transnational circuits of capital and commerce—from Atlantic slave trafficking to United Fruit Company trade—that have shaped the intersecting roots and routes of Afro-Caribbeans and African Americans.

Likely drawing on the findings of her own oral history-based doctoral

research of the second generation of Jamaican freemen, Brodber depicts a West Indian presence in New Orleans in the interwar years that is exclusively male and restricted to sailors. While the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924 set (male-biased) quotas on Jamaican entry that would last for nearly 40 years, the law also allowed for the entry of “aliens in continuous transit through the United States” as well as of “bona fide alien seam[e]n ... seeking to enter temporarily the United States solely in the pursuit of his calling as a seaman.” The Jamaican seamen of *Louisiana* in the interwar years are thus afforded a freedom of mobility because of the transitory nature of their labor. The clauses of the immigration act permit them to permeate national borders because their labor facilitates the global expansion of U.S. capitalism without demand of citizenship.

Brodber depicts also a far larger breach of the nation’s regulated borders when in the summer of 1943, Ella observes that at the New Orleans tavern there are “[m]ore men than before. Not just sailors now, [but also] employees of the United Fruit Company as well as farmworkers. These latter come in large numbers They come, paid for we think, by our government” (116-117). Acting on behalf of the nation’s agricultural industry in the face of a wartime labor shortage in 1943, the United States suspended the restrictions of the Immigration Act of 1924 and contracted with Mexico and Jamaica and other British West Indian territories to import laborers. Although the government’s contract promised standard provisions, housing and living essentials were substandard or nonexistent. Unlike the seamen who previously frequented the tavern—who “travelled by their wont””—these new laborers arrive “so mangled,” “tired and wrought from crossing a great divide in search of ... food.

Another middle passage as unfathomable as the first, a middle passage that you consent to taking” (118). In depicting laborers being drawn into a web of transnational capitalism, Brodber suggests the linkage between the original Middle Passage and latter-day migrations of labor. While colonial slave-trading companies can be viewed as “*proto-multinationals*,” large-scale firms such as the United Fruit Company in the interwar period were some of the earliest U.S.-based multinationals, facilitating “the between-country integration of commodity, labor, and capital markets” (Jones 4, 17, emphasis added). Brodber’s tracking of the various currents of West Indian labor within the United States reflects the fact that, like the “money, technology, . . . and goods” that feed the processes of production and exchange, the laborers who sustain twentieth-century capitalism also “move with increasing ease across national boundaries”—despite the FWP’s representation of a nation of fixed borders and defined limits (Hardt and Negri xi). The FWP’s nationally constricted portrait of the United States in its American Guide series and published southern life histories obscures the transnational reach of the nation-state and its multinationals and masks the actual porosity of U.S. borders made permeable for the purpose of acquiring foreign labor.

We must, I argue, consider how Garvey’s early experience as a United Fruit Company laborer and his tour of the Central and South American sites of the company’s expansion influenced his desire to develop an equally broad, equally multinational community of resistance against globalized capitalism, even as he sought to replicate the nationalist-imperialist form in Africa. Working with a global black diaspora that by its very definition—that in its very constitution—reflected the

geographical routes and patterns of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism, Garvey sought to gather and organize the multitude to act “in and against Empire” (xvi). Necessarily mirroring the lack of boundaries of global capitalism, the multinational membership of the UNIA—many of them laborers for the United Fruit Company and other large agricultural-industrial employers—began to redirect the UNIA’s energies toward “constructing a counter-Empire, an alternative political organization of global flows and exchange” (xv).

This transnational community of resistance is powerfully reflected in the records of the UNIA’s 1920 convention in Harlem, records that track a forging of diasporic practices alternative to the dominant U.S. routing of freedom solely through integration within the nation. In the records of the proceedings as well as the proceedings themselves, UNIA members were careful to emphasize the transnational scope of the organization, making sure to refer to the gathering as the “*International Convention*” (488) of the “*Universal Negro Improvement Association of the World*” in headlines and speeches (emphasis mine). Perhaps no documentary evidence better illustrates the global thrust of the convention than “the hearing of complaints from delegates” that took up the entire first week of the convention. If UNIA officials endeavored to create an impression of the broad international scope of the organization in the documentary evidence that they produced, the hearing of likely hundreds of delegates who had traveled from points across the globe allowed them to actually enact, or stage, diaspora, as the lengthy roll call of delegates and their poignant reports of the conditions in their respective countries and states brought to life the UNIA’s global aspirations.

On the first day alone, convention attendees heard testimony from delegates from a variety of diasporic sites: British Honduras; Cincinnati, OH; Colon, Panama; New Haven, CT; Nigeria; New York City; Pittsburgh, PA; Guatemala; Middletown, NY; Boston, MA; Bocas del Toro, Panama; Puerto Rico; Norfolk, VA; Chicago; Bermuda; Newark, NJ; Philadelphia; and Montreal. For the members and delegates seated among the thousands who had traveled from points across the United States, Canada, Africa, Central and South America, and the West Indies, the litany of accounts—including reports of the successful unionization of United Fruit Company workers backed by the UNIA in Guatemala, the armed suppression of Panama Canal strikers, discrimination in Newark factories, and high rents and deplorable housing in Nova Scotia—had the overall effect of creating a visceral sense of one's diasporic identity and of the universal suffering and the linked oppressions of globalized and, importantly, racialized capitalism. In giving each delegate “a chance to lay the grievances of the community he or she represents before this Conference of Negroes,” Garvey aimed to ensure that “this convention ... clearly understand[s] the *universal negro situation*” (Hill, 510, vol. II, emphasis added). UNIA members left the convention with a sense that their local and national struggles against political and economic inequities were mirrored around the world, and in their gathering, they were able to contest the constraints, the “tight spaces,” of an ever-expanding, always racialized national-imperial-capitalist network by “prefigur[ing] an alternative global society ... not limited to any geographical region” (Hardt and Negri xvi).

If we consider the impact of Garvey's early experiences of transnational U.S. capitalism and imperialism on his diasporic outlook and strategies, we, as scholars of

African American literature, should also be compelled to more thoroughly assess the manner in which Brodber's postcolonial West Indian political orientation and diasporic perspective of the Americas, evident in her historical, sociological, and literary trackings of the flows of labor, political practices, and folkways between the Caribbean and United States, have made her acutely aware of not just the national but the hemispheric and global reach of the United States throughout the twentieth century. Her own academic transnationalism, consisting of a number of fellowships and faculty positions in both Jamaica and the United States, has allowed her to be attentive to the political traffic between the United States and Jamaica of Garveyism, Rastafarianism, Black Power, and postcolonial Caribbean leftist thought. A clearer understanding of the historically transnational nature of the United States and consequently African American experience is integral not only to African American literary studies but, more importantly, to the continuing formation and recognition of a global black diasporic literary tradition. The example of *Louisiana* encourages African Americanists to identify a literary tradition less regulated by national borders and more attentive to the multinational, transnational, and global trajectories of the U.S. nation-state as well as the transnational formations of labor and culture continually developing between nations and *within* the United States itself.

Conclusion

“Worlds beyond *Brown*” examines competing constructions of black subjectivity that emerge, on the one hand, in U.S. legal and cultural discourses and, on the other, in black transnational self-narratives written in the putatively post-integration era. I contextually analyze how nation-based discourses—such as Constitutional laws and rulings, mainstream magazine culture, and the Federal Writers’ Project—have, in the name of integration, expanded yet at the same time contracted the freedoms of black subjectivity. I show how African American writers have then negotiated the resulting contradictions of national identity by suggesting the possibilities of alternative selves less bound by the nation and its racial categories and practices. In many ways, my project extends to the integration era literary scholar Saidiya Hartman’s project in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth Century America* of tracking the enduring legacy of subjugated identity within the era of emancipation. Here I track the persistence of segregation’s racial categories and relationships across an era of integration as well as African American literary negotiations of the consequent discrepancies of identity. I mine McPherson’s *Crabcakes*, Lee’s *Russian Journal*, and Brodber’s *Louisiana* for their theoretical insights into the making and remaking of black subjectivity as a practice of the nation. These texts suggest how we might fashion identities that resist the fixed racial formulas of the United States—its racial binaries, its racial hierarchies, and its

contradictory discourses of freedom and dispossession. Just as these black transnational narratives challenge nationalist constructions of a black geography and black identity, they also necessarily contest and revise the historical frames that facilitate these nation-based geographies and subjectivities. Not only do these texts subvert geographical borders and the boundaries of racial identity, they also undermine the historical borders that help constitute the dominant narratives of the civil rights movement and standard periodizations, such as segregation and integration, that have been used to tell a seemingly fixed story of inevitable racial progress within the nation. My project troubles our sense of an absolute historical border between segregation and integration. It contends with how to track the lingering effects of segregation—in other words, the failures of integration—without negating the very real victories of the civil rights movement. Together, these chapters identify legal and cultural sites—U.S. court rulings, the *New Yorker*, and the Federal Writers' Project—of nationalist discourses of geography, identity, and history and show how black transnational texts respond by undermining the fixity of these discourses and imagining competing constructions of black spaces, subjectivities, and time.

I gather here McPherson's transnational community of neighbors, Lee's integrated U.S. spectator, and Brodber's diasporic citizens as models of figures contesting integration as the unquestioned incorporation of blacks within the national body. These texts force us to interrogate—to question the grounds and conditions, the premises, of racial integration. They make us ask how racial integration can be implemented without a full understanding of the mechanisms of racialization, of how

the dominant and exclusive U.S. binary of blackness and whiteness has been constituted—in relation to the nation and American-ness. The texts examined here suggest that we cannot undertake desegregation, or overturn the nation’s racial techniques, if we have not comprehended how they actually operate. My project works to identify these racial mechanisms, to unpack them. In doing so, my project engages in the work required by integration—work, or labor, skirted in the *Brown v. Board* ruling and subsequently in the half-century since it was issued.

In analyzing these texts’ negotiations of the legacy of integration as national containment and their disruptions of the fixed narrative of integration as the definitive end of segregation, my project helps to unsettle the way we think about integration—its grounds, its history, and the identities that it reproduced and recast. Second, in tracking the uses of the transnational to facilitate these negotiations and disruptions, I show how black transnational narratives devise ways to elude the nation’s regulation of black identity formation. These texts’ imaginings of alternative modes of being address a foundational concern of African American literature and theory.

IMPLICATIONS

The opening of Erna Brodber’s *Louisiana* stages a call and response that signals a figurative reunion of black Caribbean American and U.S. American subjects. The novel opens with the voice of a Jamaican woman, Louise, calling out: “Anna do you remember? Can you still hear me singing it?” We then hear the reply to Louise’s call, from Sue Ann, her longtime U.S. friend: “You here again Lowly and I heard you

...” (9, 11). These voices in dialogue across a hemisphere point to a respatialization of black space, grounds collectively called “Louisiana.” Brodber’s theorization of shared diasporan territories—coastal spaces touched by the uncontained waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea—stands as a call to explore the continuities between African America and the African Caribbean but also as a guide for debates within the field over the geopolitics of scholarship—the political consequences of simultaneously competing and intersecting theorizations of African American and African Caribbean geographies, histories, and identities. The dislocation of regional borders and the scrambling of historical chronologies in *Louisiana* give way to the disruption of nationalist articulations of black identity. Diasporic time and space are constituted through figures who move within the overlap of the United States and Caribbean nations, including the protagonists Louise and Sue Ann as well as Marcus Garvey, Zora Neale Hurston, and Brodber herself.

These border-crossing figures offer guidance to contemporary African Caribbeanists and African Americanists who grapple with the where, when, and who of black cultural production. Brodber’s work especially resists nationally defined canons of black literary tradition, underscoring what Carole Boyce Davies describes as “the inanity of limiting the understanding of Black ... writing to United States experience” (3). The very title of *Louisiana* challenges the hegemonic tendencies of U.S.-centric constructions of black experience: Louisiana is not only the U.S. Gulf state but also a small town near Brodber’s birthplace in St. Mary Parish, Jamaica. Even as Brodber’s novel avoids constructing a narrative of black U.S. exceptionalism,

it is at the same time attentive to—via its focus, for example, on the Great Migration, southern black labor struggles, and the relationship between ethnographic historical projects and African American narrative strategy—what Mae G. Henderson has defended as “the historical and political contingencies of [African American studies] very inception” (“Where by the Way,” 64).

Contemporary African Americanists and Americanists invested in a “new southern studies” and black transnational theorists have begun to situate the South and African America, respectively, within a larger global context. Along with my examination of McPherson’s, Lee’s, and Brodber’s texts here, these theoretical developments encourage us to see “the South”—but more importantly, I argue, the entire U.S. terrain of African American literature—not only as a “geographic terminus for a multiplicity of transnational itineraries of persons, groups and images,” “but *precisely* these itineraries, the sites along them, and the processes of mobility of people and images they trace out” (Nonini 251). Even so, my gathering of Brodber’s text alongside McPherson’s and Lee’s pushes us to further interrogate the U.S.-centric epistemologies and hegemonic tendencies that have informed our acts of canon formation. We might extend my exploration of the racial politics of visibility and visibility across the works of McPherson, Lee, and Brodber to our cartographies of black diasporic writing. Such a stance would compel African Americanists to take into account the historically spectatorial position of the United States within the American hemisphere. Michelle Stephens writes to Caribbean scholars that “positioning the empire closest to us as the object of our gaze has implications for the study of Caribbean intellectuals in the twentieth century” (277). Brodber’s

overwriting of the FWP's nationalist project of integration in *Louisiana* shows that shifting the U.S. from the subject to the object of observation can be generative not only for Caribbean Americanists, but also so-called (African) Americanists.

Constructing current transnational turns not as shifts or rotations of a fixed outward U.S. gaze but as turns to or attentiveness toward the image and material presence of the U.S. in the hemispheric spaces beyond its borders is a means of examining how the production of the cultural and political entity known as "the United States" requires particular relationships with and constructions of its hemispheric neighbors.

The transnationally framed rearticulations and revisions of autonomous modern liberal subjectivity that I argue for across McPherson's, Lee's, and Brodber's texts not only point us toward alternative theorizations of subjectivity but also, importantly, help us identify how the *illusion* of universal subjectivity is produced via the overdetermined materiality and surplus corporeality of "others." These writers' competing constructions of identity draw to the surface the inadequacies of modern subjectivity and at the same time show that the apparent autonomy of universal personhood, which takes shape as mobility, vision, and voice in the texts I examine here, is reliant on "others" who are subjected to immobility, spectacle, and silence. Thus, for instance, the universal liberty of mobility, reflected in *Crabcakes* as the open, expansive road of rail travel, is built on the labor of the corporeally burdened and historically veiled figures of black Pullman porters and Chinese workers who laid the tracks for the transcontinental rail system. Similarly, the narrator of *Russian Journal*, operating in a realm of vision marked by gazes and hypervisibility,

participates in the cultural tradition of spectatorship, which is constructed in the pages of the *New Yorker* as an anonymous, unembodied form of modern subjectivity. Figuring herself as an American spectator, Lee's narrator strives to shed her identity of its raced and thus burdening corporeality, shifting this weight, through her gaze, to narrative others—B. B. King, Ibrahim the Eritrean, and ordinary Russians riding the subway. It is, finally, the women of the banya whose unfettered freedom arrests Lee's gaze; their inhibition and unapologetic corporeality in the public bath point to identities unprivileged by unembodied universal subjectivity yet free—explicitly *via* their flesh. Ultimately, “Worlds beyond *Brown*” is a sustained consideration of dominant and alternative narrations of blackness using the analytic of integration. By situating this analysis of the literary formation and reformation of racial identity within the frame of integration, a historicization that recalls the discourse of emancipation, I point to not only how we might imagine alternative subjectivities but how we might reconsider the discourse of rights, freedom, and citizenship—the very nature of modern universal subjectivity itself, including its premises and its prerequisite dispossession of “others.”

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