Caribbean hauntings and transnational regionalism in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature

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CARIBBEAN HAUNTINGS AND TRANSNATIONAL REGIONALISM
IN NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

Bethany Aery Clerico

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Abstract

Caribbean Hauntings and Transnational Regionalism in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century American Literature offers a new literary map of U.S. history that is routed through the Caribbean and that intervenes in certain historiographic problems that exceptionality creates for national literary studies. In the literature of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Martin R. Delany, Charles Chesnutt, William Faulkner, and Toni Morrison, I tease out references to the Caribbean that other critics have overlooked as a result of strictly national frames of analysis. These references evidence that each text is haunted by a Caribbean presence, a phrase that signifies both a “real” Caribbean, a political and territorial place, and a spectral Caribbean, figures in the narrative (i.e., tropes, discourses, or signs) that demarcate space for events or persons that national history has suppressed. Each chapter explores how this haunting gives shape to a transnational region, which I theorize to be a non-national historical space that these writers construct in response to actual and epistemological racial violences in the nation’s historiographic process that have manipulated representations of Plantation America. The transnational region is significant in that it reveals how the U.S. perpetuates the racial asymmetries of plantation order through its imperial and neo-colonial presence throughout the Americas during the Reconstruction through Cold War eras. As a lingering literary space, the transnational region acts as a ghostly vantage point for re-viewing the historical trajectory of slavery, disenfranchisement, and imperialism. The haunting nature of this Caribbeanized space in representations of U.S. geography and ideology shifts the reader’s interpretive focus; as the literature eschews a history gleaned from empirical evidence in favor of a history of haunting traces, it alters the reader’s sense of the historical periods during which these
writers were working. Therefore, rather than try to recover what history has failed to record, I theorize that American literary studies can re-configure knowledge about race in the Americas by historicizing through the loss—the ghost—itself. The ghost, while elusive, offers a literary counter-history of the nation’s repressed dependency on its Caribbean past and thus unsettles the exceptionalist and hegemonic histories that lend nationalism its power.
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Introduction

Caribbean Hauntings and Transnational Regionalism in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century American Literature

History has its dimension of the unexplorable, at the edge of which we wonder, our eyes wide open.
--Edouard Glissant, Caribbean Discourse

Caribbean Hauntings and Transnational Regionalism historicizes a Caribbean presence in nineteenth- and twentieth-century U.S. literatures. In the work of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Martin R. Delany, Charles Chesnutt, William Faulkner, and Toni Morrison, I tease out references to the Caribbean that have been overlooked by other critics to consider how that space influences the writers’ imaginations as they explore, either implicitly or explicitly, the geographic, racial, and cultural boundaries of the United States. What is unique about the selection of texts I analyze is that, while they serve as a sample of the numerous works in which references to the Caribbean appear, and in which such references mark the tension against which a U.S. writer explores the geographical and cultural boundaries of his or her American world, they use region in a novel way. Their narratives feature regionalist elements that reveal a continuing literary trace of the transnational in the United States imagination and that allow critics to theorize the potential of the region in ways that are not bound by imposed geographical borders. In this dissertation, I do so by looking at their regionalism as an expression of imbrication, where their narratives about U.S. regions are inextricably bound to the Caribbean region. As I explore the implications of this imbrication, I align my work with recent advances in transnational American studies by claiming that this regionalism is evidence that we cannot fully understand U.S. literary and cultural nationalism in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century without considering non-national geographic and historical landscapes. To that end, my progression of chapters traces the emergence of
and gives shape to what I term a transnational region, which is a literary geography for U.S. literatures that moves through the Caribbean and that acts as an alternative and haunted site for emplotting United States history. I theorize transnational regionalism to be a new critical framework within which scholars can understand the relationships between the United States and the Caribbean in ways that strictly national frames of analysis have previously obscured. As I re-examine literature’s engagement with these relationships, I demonstrate this revisionary framework’s responsiveness to some of the challenges inherent to national literary studies.

Robert Jackson observes that theorizing through the region always begins with a “suspicion” of “automatic and monolithic nationalism” (19). Likewise, my project begins with a suspicion about nationalism: references to the Caribbean in these novels have been overlooked because they do not fit within the “automatic” national container that scholars apply to American literature.¹ As I see it, national rubrics for literary study produce two correlated problems that preoccupy critics and scholars, particularly those who are interested in more strident literary and cultural histories. The first is exceptionalism, a perceptive that precludes dissenting narratives from the imagined community’s history. Exceptionalism is “the idea that the U.S. is not just a one-of-a-kind political experiment but that it is also a truly special, divinely sanctioned place, its success in dominating the hemisphere a consequence of its unparalleled mission and destiny” (Guterl 464). To maintain this ideal, the nation cannot assimilate certain events within its historical narrative, particularly those that might run counter to the ontological

¹ I borrow the phrase “national container” from Frederick Cooper, whose work cautions against scholarly work that attempts to “stuff history back into national or continental containers.” Rather, he encourages scholars to consider “the changing meaning over time of spatial linkages” (195).
and epistemological principles that reify its unique and sovereign place. This in turn produces the second problem, where the nation must absent such narratives from its official historical record and in so doing creates what William Spanos calls its “amnesiac history” (105). For these reasons, Americanists have a complicated relationship with history, particularly as literary scholarship has increasingly recognized that exceptionalism is endemic to the national project, and that western historiography is subsequently redolent with gaps and omissions that stymie what we might think of as a fuller knowledge about the past. Thus, scholars are trying to be cognizant of how contingent our sense of America is, given the incomplete and biased nature of our historical narratives.

However, Sibylle Fischer’s work on eighteenth-century antislavery activity that was inspired by the Haitian Revolution—an event with seismic repercussions throughout the world and yet one that has long been subjected to historical misrepresentation and marginalization—reveals that the process of creating amnesiac histories, that is, national histories, is dependent upon “operations of suppression and denial” (274). These operations, she emphasizes, are not natural to the nation’s progression but rather the result of a concerted and organized strategy. In other words, it takes political and cultural effort to “vanish” past events that might complicate an exceptionalist vision (274). As one of the more invasive consequences of exceptionalism, this effort becomes the crux of my analysis. That is, I am interested in how regionalist literature acts as a testament to what Fischer calls the “acts of negation” (273) that the U.S. undertakes with respect to the Caribbean. My chapters will demonstrate that the acts which facilitate national forgetting of the Caribbean’s relevance are multi-variant, and include manipulating,
silencing, and obfuscating certain events in the official record. These acts, though, are also evidence that U.S. nationalism is not divinely sanctioned but wholly contingent upon its interactions with the rest of the Americas, particularly the Caribbean.

My analysis traces the etiology of U.S. nationalism’s negation of the Caribbean in the historical record to a particular ideology of racism that the U.S. adopted post-Civil War as it moved beyond the social and political ruptures caused by the end of institutionalized slavery. In fact, U.S. efforts to strategically resolve the nation’s involvement in slavery required that the nation alter evidence that the U.S. and Caribbean were and continue to be entwined by their shared plantation past. Here, I work closely with Edouard Glissant’s theories about historical knowledge in the Caribbean, which he argues is always hampered by a “brutal dislocation” that resulted from the slave trade (*Caribbean* 61). Glissant argues that a Caribbean past begins with this rupture and is thus incompatible with the “linear, hierarchical vision of a single History” to which colonial and imperial powers subscribe (66). As a “totality that excludes other histories that do not fit into that of the West” (75), History with a capital H is precisely the totality against which the writers in my dissertation struggle. As I will demonstrate, the U.S. depended on this form of ideological dominance—a linear and singular History—to facilitate state-sponsored racism after the Civil War, and thus writing about race required new imaginative strategies.

My theory of transnational regionalism, then, proposes that this particular form of regional writing—one that looks to the Caribbean and is thus itself overlooked—is a response to and interrogation of the limitations that these writers were observing in the nation’s monolithic historiography. By connecting the overlooked Caribbean references
in these literatures to a larger historical project of national forgetting, transnational regionalist inquiry can apply pressure to exceptionalism’s effect on knowledge production from an analytic that works both within (the region) and beyond national borders (the hemisphere). Specifically, I contend that as these writers explored domestic race relations, they found themselves at a representational threshold, where they could not write about race without implicitly signaling to the U.S.’s increasingly imperial and neo-colonial presence throughout the Americas in the twentieth century. A transnational region results, a crucial literary site that investigates ghostly traces of what History has forgotten in present violence; when foregrounded, the transnational region makes visible revolutionary and unsettling perspectives on the more relational nature of hemispheric America’s regions.

Indeed, these writers are situated within specific ideological moments when national discourse manipulated histories of slavery to aid in the creation of the modern United States after the Civil War, and their fiction responds to the official records and rhetorics that were actively engineering a specific and sanitized version of a U.S.-Caribbean past. Their fiction reveals that this manipulation, analogous to Fischer’s acts of negation, is achieved through correlated policies of segregation and imperialism that allow for the U.S.’s emergence as a twentieth-century world power, but it also naturalizes ongoing and persistent racial violence across the hemisphere despite slavery’s official end. In other words, Caribbean suppressions were part of a larger process whereby the U.S. established an efficient system of racial inequality and power asymmetry after the Civil War. To address histories about race in the Americas, then, U.S. Americanists need to be mindful of synchronous and transnational historical frameworks. What *Caribbean*
Hauntings details is that such approaches in literary study are productive as they can discover innovative aesthetic and historiographic properties in imaginative writing that can fundamentally change our sense of nationalism. U.S. exceptionalism has created a body of political and literary histories that have manipulated narratives about the relationship between the Caribbean and the U.S., especially the plantation system and New World slavery; this has reinforced the notion of a progressive, teleological, and neighborly U.S. However, Caribbean Hauntings shows how literature unsettles this by illustrating entwined regional boundaries that de-center the nation and reveal a tautological and relational U.S. that is always contingent upon and historically situated within the space of the Caribbean.²

American Exceptionalism and the Transnational Region

Caribbean Hauntings joins a two-decade long conversation about the disciplinary parameters of American studies. A nationalist project from its inception, American studies has long had what John Carlos Rowe describes as “a nativist bias.” According to Rowe, this is the result of both the nature of the field of study and “the subtler political work American Studies scholars have done on behalf of U.S. nationality and globalization” (xviii). As Emory Elliott notes, the field was traditionally dominated by U.S.-based scholars who “focused narrowly upon the national literature with little regard to the relationships of American literature to the literatures of other countries” (8).

American Studies emerged at the end of the Second World War; during the Cold War-

² For example, Levander and Levine, and other hemispheric Americanists, concur that these relations are often rendered invisible because they compromise the nation’s myth of exceptionalism: “[t]he ‘invention’ of a seemingly autonomous and exceptionalist U.S. nationality developed in relation to the more expansive geographies and longer histories of the Americas”; however, the U.S. nation’s relationship to these contexts is “often elided” and in that elision are crucial avenues by which hemispheric and transnational approaches can put pressure on exceptionalism (4).
era, it “justified American exceptionalism, rarely challenged the assumption that the
nation-state was the proper unit of analysis for understanding the American experience,
and endorsed an American ideal of internationalism. [...] [S]cholars of American
Studies often developed notions of the United States as the economic, social, and political
utopia toward which other nations ought to aspire” (Curiel 5). It was, in essence, a
“monolithic, unidimensional, and monocultural” field of study (Pease 2). Limited by the
national container, American Studies spent its early decades advancing narrowly defined
formulations of Americanness that encouraged exceptionalist readings of its literature.

The field has undergone a substantial shift since the 1990s, when scholars began
to address the rubric of the national in multinational, multicultural contexts. Transnationalism was invoked by scholars as a way to “fix” the conflation of “American”
with the United States, to counter exceptionalism, and to challenge national myths of
consensus. According to Andy Doolen’s recent work, “transnationalism refers
generally to the linkages among people and institutions across the borders of nation-
states” (163). As phenomena that reveal the porousness of national borders,
transnationalisms are unbounded spaces, practices, and movements that aide in the
circumvention of national boundaries to make possible connections beyond the
parameters of nation-states. Reception of transnationalism has been fervent, but its goals
and methodologies continue to differ widely among its practitioners. Some critics have
suggested that this perspective signals the end of the nation. For example, Peter Carafiol

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3 For a survey of this shift, see Ralph Bauer. For a summation of recent changes to national literary studies
in relation to regionalism, see Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse (214-221).

4 According to Eric Hayot’s survey, transnational turns in literary and cultural studies began as an attempt
to “move past their traditional national and geographic boundaries” and are about two decades old now
(909).
argues that new historical perspectives which de-center the nation as the site of inquiry have “depriv[ed] us of the certainty that the category ‘American literature’ refers to anything in particular, much less anything special” (543). More often, they claim it represents nationalism’s successor. Ralph Bauer, for example, has described how the “‘discovery’ of the hemisphere by American studies in the wake of that discipline’s turn from a United States-centered multiculturalism” moved the field “toward a trans- and postnationalism during the 1990s” (235). Donald Pease inaugurated the postnationalist era with his 1994 National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives. Rowe’s work on postnationalism also encourages scholars to “transcend” the nation as our primary unit of analysis, since other “social, economic, and political organizations will challenge the nation’s hegemony” in the twenty-first century (xxi-xxii).

I argue, however, that transnationalism, as evidenced by the writers under consideration, does not challenge the nation to the degree that these critics charge. I have discovered that each regional writer is intimately invested in the idea of nation and in the prospect of being defined as an American. Their texts look to the transnational as a way to explore what it means to belong to the U.S. national community. Like Caroline Levander and Robert Levine, I agree that “we need to recognize that the nation is not the realization of an original essence but a historical configuration designed to include certain groups and exclude others” (5). These writers affirm that nation is a central identifying category and a crucial organizing concept for the modern world, but their transnational vision suggests that they are all too aware of the limits it imposes to create and sustain an imagined community. Therefore, rather than jettison national rubrics altogether, I propose that transnationalism refines our knowledge of U.S. nationality as, at various
times, constituted explicitly through its relationships to the Caribbean. In the case of
these writers, we can define transnationalism as a perceptive that unsettles or
supplements the nation, but does not obliterate it. In this way, I align my project with
Spanos, who argues that critics cannot resist empire “by claiming the demise of the
nation-state and encouraging transnationalism as its antithesis” (xvii). Spanos claims that
transnationalism is useful in as much as it can help to recuperate what he calls “spectral”
histories that enable us to challenge the United State’s effort to achieve “global
sovereignty” (xvii). In this introduction, I will explain how *Caribbean Hauntings* does so
by foregrounding literature’s engagement with spectral American histories, identifying
the strategies by which writers find expression for those histories, and describing the
transformations that these literary specters enact on the readers’ knowledge of American
history.

Regionalism, like transnationalism, has long been read as an oppositional
discourse. Region is a politically-bound term that connotes a unique relationship to
geopolitical boundaries, national spaces, and historical narratives. The term region (as
opposed to territory, geography, place, etc.) invokes the hierarchical relationship that
exists between a local space and the U.S. nation. Critical definitions of region assert that
it is a subset of and peculiar unit within the nation and its boundaries are constructed
against the dominant national culture. American regionalism is a literary discourse that
emerges in the late-nineteenth century from the writer’s privileging of local perspectives
to critique and resist the hegemonic and homogenous national center. For example,

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5 See Robert Jackson, who defines region as a contentious force in American history, even if it is ill-defined. He writes that region is best defined as “middle-ground” between the nation and a social group (9).
David M. Jordan writes that regionalism “proceeds from a de-centered world-view, and this de-centered world-view distinguishes regionalism from other place-based literature, such as nature writing or travel writing” (8). Regionalism has often been critically overlooked, usually relegated to minor status as a nineteenth-century writing style associated with local color. However, as Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse have documented, regionalism was a significant literary discourse whose representations of spatial boundaries de-centered a hegemonic world-view (unlike realism) and de-naturalized political and cultural borders (unlike naturalism). One specific way that regionalist writers did this was to use their fiction to resist the United States’ early imperial ideologies. According to Fetterley and Pryse, Theodore Roosevelt, the “architect of an American imperialism understood as an explicitly racial enterprise,” used his political power to nurture an American canon that promoted an ideology of “true Americanism”; since regionalists refused to “place their fiction in the service of reproducing ‘true Americanism,’” their work was associated with “unpatriotic and anti-American sentiment” (28-29). In other words, we should understand regionalism as a form of writing that has always been essentially foreign to the nationalist project.

The tension between region and nation makes the term a significant part of the vocabulary through which to describe what I identify as a Caribbeanist presence in the U.S. literary tradition. The Caribbean, as a series of repeating islands, has its own geographic, cultural, and historical peculiarities that regionalize it within the Americas;

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6 Fetterley and Pryse argue that regionalism differs from realism because it “poses both a critique of and a resistance to the cultural ideologies that realism naturalizes” (4), and they recognize regionalism’s distinction from naturalism because regional boundaries “highlight relations of ruling rooted in economic history and the material requirements for everyday livelihood rather than in physical and ‘natural’ borders” (5).
furthermore, it is a seminal landscape through which the U.S. nation tested its imperial reach in the twentieth century. My reading is therefore informed by these traditional ways of theorizing the region as an oppositional perspective that problematizes enactments of U.S. nationalism in the Americas. However, *Caribbean Hauntings* builds on nineteenth-century resistance to early forms of imperialism, picking up on Fetterley and Pryse’s call that scholars continue to study how region’s meaning changes over time to account for contemporary relations of ruling and current exploitations of regions and regional peoples in transnational contexts as postcolonial, neocolonial, and global relationships are formed throughout the twentieth century (4).

Such work is already underway. My project enters the field at a time when numerous other studies are treating the Americas as a collection of regional units, an approach that de-centers national perspectives that might occlude crucial dialogues. For example, the U.S. South is one such region that has been given considerable attention in recent collections. *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South* (2007) opens up Southern studies to a broader American terrain, while *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies* (2004) uses a postcolonial analytic to study the similarities and differences between the U.S. South and the rest of the Americas. In addition, an extant body of work engages the Caribbean and the broader North America as regional counterparts. From earlier work such as David M. Jordan’s *New World Regionalism*, J. Michael Dash’s *The Other America*, and Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island*, to Sean X. Goudie’s recent *Creole America*, I draw connections between their regional definitions of the Caribbean to expand the
vocabularies through which we undertake a regional study of hemispheric America.\footnote{Goudie’s most recent work in American Literature is particularly relevant to my own—his sense that a “Caribbean perspective” could advance “conversations about regionalism” (“Towards” 295) helps to set the stage for broader interpretations of the ways in which U.S. writers’ regional representations of an “actual and imagined Caribbean” are a fruitful matrix for challenging U.S. hegemony (318). He advances a provocative argument regarding the value of identifying a “Caribbean American regionalist line of inquiry” (295), which he applies to the political and economic relationships between North and South America, as well as the Caribbean. I too argue that hemispheric American studies can benefit from regionalist lines of inquiry that open up our accounting of the political, economic, and cultural relations that have contributed to the development of syncretic regions in the Americas. However, where Goudie uses the regional to investigate the nineteenth-century U.S.’s economic expansions in the Caribbean and to contribute to the emerging interdisciplinary field of international political economy studies, my work is interested in how those regional relations can alter our historiographic methods in literary studies.}

These studies attest to the broadening applicability of regional approaches in transnational American studies.

*Caribbean Hauntings* also extends beyond the traditional region-nation dynamics to consider regions that are external to the nation’s geographic borders, but are still woven into and against the transnational reach of U.S. hegemony. I do so by building off of both established and emergent regionalist studies. One way I do so is to analyze U.S. literature by thinking through the work of Caribbean theorists, who have a distinct method of theorizing the region. When re-historicized as a hemispheric invention, regionalism as such can significantly alter the way that scholars approach what appears to have been vanished from history by a strictly national paradigm.

**The Caribbean Presence in United States Literatures**

*Caribbean Hauntings* catalogues what unites these writers: each sense that past connections between the U.S. and the Caribbean—connections forged by New World slavery and the plantation system that spread throughout the Caribbean islands and into the United States—were essential to the nation’s ascendance and, once slavery had officially ended, continued to be crucial to how the nation came to power in the twentieth century. This past may be central to how we understand nationalism and Americanisms,
yet it remains a contested and troubling history to catalogue. The complexity of time
periods, geographies, ideologies, and economies that comprise the story of New World
slavery is daunting. Nonetheless, the desire to know a fuller story persists. George B.
Handley observes that “[w]hile history yearns for the knowable story of the hemisphere,”
such a story might be imaginable only if we recontextualize U.S. regions within “the
literary imagination of greater Plantation America” (27). That is, recontextualization
might allow scholars to “begin to appreciate what is forgotten in the forging of imagined
communities” (27). *Caribbean Hauntings* contributes just a sliver to this massive
historical project by looking more closely at the traces of Plantation American that peek
through these narratives.

Foremost, I am interested in how scholars might use literature to supplement what
history yearns for: a knowable story. That is, I look at places where these writers
obliquely echo, rather than explicitly represent, the past of plantation slavery, and
consider how that echo can tell us more about the effect of racism on historiography
during the times that these authors were writing. I claim that as these writers engage
American history in their novels about race, they create a copy of the plantation Americas
in the transnational region, a figurative and ghostly site that lingers in the national
imagination despite slavery’s dismantling during reconstruction and decolonization.
Here, I am influenced by Fischer, who argues that to think about American landscapes,
literatures, and histories transnationally, one must look to the “fragments that survived
the process of congealment into national histories” (2). The transnational region is one

\[8\] See Wai Chi Dimock for more on this. She uses New World slavery as an example of how temporal and
spatial restrictions have delimited knowledge production in American studies. While often contextualized
within the “geography and chronology of the United States,” slavery becomes “virtually unrecognizable”
when studied within a larger-scale world history (6). In fact, Dimock argues, the “space and time
coordinates needed to understand slavery are five continents and some thirteen hundred years” (7).
such fragment. Building off of Fischer’s and Handley’s arguments, I propose that we investigate the historical fragments of Plantation America that have survived in the U.S. regional imagination through narrative invocations of ongoing revolutions and rebellions, of the repercussions of miscegenation, and of state-sanctioned peonage.

*Caribbean Hauntings* works with marginal texts produced by canonical U.S. writers. These are writers who are established as major contributors to the nation’s literature, but who have each written a very odd, slightly regional text. These marginal texts have been read as formally or thematically flawed, often misunderstood or under-theorized in critical conversation: Stowe’s *The Pearl of Orr’s Island*; Delany’s *Blake, or the Huts of America*; Chesnutt’s *Paul Marchand, F.M.C.*; Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*, and Morrison’s *Sula*. I account for their oddities by re-evaluating each text’s engagement with what I perceive to be a type of regionalism. This regionalism hasn’t been identified as such, because critics have overlooked a crucial element that surfaces in each text: a Caribbean presence. This Caribbean presence is comprised of two factors: the first is a spectral Caribbean, a figurative presence in the narrative, and the second is a “real” Caribbean, an actual political and territorial place. The spectral Caribbean is a U.S. invention, a representation that the writer uses to bolster his or her regional portrait. It demarcates space for events and persons that have been suppressed by History through the writer’s use of Caribbeanized tropes, discourses, or signals. The spectral Caribbean does not positivistically signal the actual Caribbean, its dual counterpart in the narrative. In fact, these two appear distinct and do not have a discernible causal relationship.

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9 My division of the Caribbean presence into two elements is informed by Sean X. Goudie’s work on the “real and imagined Caribbean” (“Towards” 318), as well as Hayot’s work on how recent transnational turns in Asian American studies have encouraged scholars to recognize how both “phantasmatic and realpolitik Asias” disrupt identity formation in the United States (908).
Therefore, I read the spectral elements as the result of some fundamental overlap between the accepted narratives of past and the social and political conditions during the time when the author was writing. The interpretive value of this spectral disruption emerges in the narrative only when we turn our attention away from the familiar boundaries of U.S. history and geography, and look instead toward the Caribbean.

The presence of a spectral Caribbean in these literatures invites us to re-contextualize the writer’s imaginative moves within the broader history of Plantation America. I do so by placing these narratives within a transnational field of relations, broadening our view of the political and historical forces that have shaped their sense of American history. I adopt this synchronic and non-national historical approach because the existing critical conversation, limited to national history, has missed each novel’s Caribbean gestures. For example, conversations about race and region in relation to these texts abound. Critics have studied this literature for its commentaries on U.S. histories of exclusion and disenfranchisement. However, in so doing, critics have assumed that the writers were addressing only discernible U.S. historical and geographic coordinates (pre-Civil War U.S. South and New England, eighteenth-century New Orleans, mid-twentieth century Mississippi, post-Civil Rights Act Ohio)—and this assumption has become the standard interpretative frame through which readers come to know the texts’ critical value. In so doing, scholarship has missed the ways that these narratives resist positivistic national referents; it has overlooked places where the story does not connect to those coordinates or where the narrative introduces out-of-time, out-of-place pockets within the otherwise quantifiable references to U.S. events. Indeed, through their temporal and spatial anachronisms, these texts beg for a different interpretative
framework to account for the ways that their narratives exceed the strict boundaries of time and place imposed by “the mold of the nation-state” (Fischer 3).

Accordingly, a transnational historicizing accounts for the second Caribbean presence in the texts, the “real” Caribbean. I define this as a narrative feature that signals the conditions of authorship; that is, the “real” Caribbean hints at a contemporaneous U.S. relationship with a specific Caribbean nation during the time that the writer was composing his or her novel. In fact, each of these texts emerges at a time of upheaval or reevaluation of what constitutes the United States’ borders and that upheaval was meted out both in the nation (through domestic race relations) and outside the nation (through foreign interventions). Harriet Beecher Stowe and Martin R. Delany wrote in the decades surrounding the Civil War and the furious debates over the U.S.’s possible annexation of Cuba. Charles Chesnutt’s novel emerged in reaction to the oppressive era of Jim Crow and the U.S. Occupation of Haiti. William Faulkner composed his text about racial violence in the U.S. South during the inter-War period when the U.S. was defining its nationalism through Caribbean relationships prescribed by the Good Neighbor Policy. Finally, Toni Morrison’s early work was written during post-Civil Rights Act U.S., a period where U.S. immigration policy was being overhauled in light of the Haitian refugee crisis that resulted from the increasingly oppressive Duvalier regime in Haiti during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Oblique at best, these references to the political conditions during the text’s composition are nonetheless provocative if foregrounded. More specifically, when read together, the spectral and the real Caribbean presence in the narratives suggests that seminal moments in domestic race relations, from Jim Crow to Civil Rights, are occurring within and informed by specific action in the Caribbean.
My notion of a Caribbean presence is influenced by Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* and her conception of the Africanist presence in the American literary tradition. Morrison’s seminal text argues that “a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to [white U.S. writers’] sense of Americanness” and surfaced in U.S. literature as “omissions, startling contradictions, [and] heavily nuanced conflicts” (6). *Caribbean Hauntings* follows Morrison’s theory that U.S. literature contains textual features that reveal the degree to which a writer’s construction of America depends upon imaginative encounters with racial ideology. However, I distill her argument within specific historical moments and through particular political ideologies to theorize that there is also a Caribbeanist presence shaping U.S. Americanisms; this presence emerges in response to the two forces, racism and imperialism, that most influenced the relationships between the United States and the Caribbean in the twentieth century.

The presence shifts slightly the interpretive context, where the oddities are a result of the writers’ insertion of ghosts into the official record. Morrison calls these “startling contradictions,” or features that arrest the reader. In these texts, the Caribbean presence makes itself known in the moments where the reader encounters a character, event, or story-line that disrupts, confuses, or otherwise suspends our interpretative path through the text. I call these textual features ghosts because they suggest—with surprising force—that the contemporaneous national project is always haunted by the fragments that survive, the traces of Caribbean familiarities that render U.S. regions foreign to the national project. In other words, as a result of the writers’ (often) ambivalent encounter with racial and imperial ideology, the Caribbean presence points to the inherent inconsistency between the nation’s ideals and its history of racial exclusions. In this way,
my Caribbeanist presence is divergent from Morrison’s Africanist presence in that I am interested not just in the way that literature reveals the effects of racism and imperialism on the imagination, but also the way that literature can affect the History that is determined by racism and imperialism.

To that end, I use the Caribbean presence as a way to reimagine what has hampered history’s ability to know the hemisphere’s story. Vera Kutzinski argues that the point of changing our approaches to American literary history isn’t to open up existing canons or establish counter canons. Rather, the point is to “change the ways in which we traverse textual and other cultural territory and the ways in which we position ourselves in relation to various objects and subjects we encounter on those travels” (“Commentary” 556). By foregrounding the Caribbean presence as a crucial interpretative lens, I reposition the reader within the many other political and cultural worlds bound up in the literature. This new position extends the reader’s sense of regional boundaries in the texts, as they also include territories in the Caribbean Sea. Consequently, my chapters extrapolate on an analytic strategy that might account for what we can glean from a Caribbeanist re-reading of these texts. If transnational regionalism is a recurring and evolving discourse through which U.S. writers find expression for something that lingers in the nation’s present, then haunting is an apt paradigm for identifying what Hortense Spillers calls the “calibanesque potential” of U.S. literature when re-historicized.10

To illustrate the connections I draw between the ghost and the region when we read through the Caribbeanist presence, I first look to the ways that the region’s

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10 Spillers argues that U.S. culture has suppressed its “calibanesque potential” through the “dreamful flattening out of textures of the historical” (5).
boundaries shift. These texts perform work that resembles what Caribbean writers have undertaken since decolonization—to theorize new cultural, social, and political forms by thinking through the geographic features that make the Caribbean region distinct. With disparate linguistic, economic, and political systems, the islands are separated by landscape and by history. This may problematize scholars’ attempts to account for “the Caribbean” as a totality, but its geography has also generated fascinating theoretical possibilities for thinking about community and identity beyond the traditional and totalizing national container that dominates Western modernity’s organization of the world. J. Michael Dash, whose own work develops a theory of a regional Americas, summarizes this theoretical precedence as one of the most productive and provocative ways to approach the historical and geographic challenges of the Caribbean. He describes this in the work of Caribbean theorists such as Edouard Glissant and Antonio Benítez-Rojo, who generate a regional aesthetic from their “imaginative grasp of the possibilities” that the image of the islands affords as a discontinuous or broken chain that nonetheless links the Americas together (Other 7-8).

For example, Aimé Césaire offers one of the most well-known literary passages to illustrate the islands and North America as a conjoined region in his *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. Here, Césaire describes “the archipelago” arching with an anxious desire to protect “this impossibly delicate tenuity separating one America from another” (15). His poem imagines Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, and “the funny little tail of Florida” as a singular region, united by the “[m]onstrous putrefaction of revolts/stymied” and the “[l]and red, sanguineous, consanguineous land” (16). Césaire’s poem proposes that the ubiquity of racial violence and the suppression of opposition to
that violence are defining features of the American experience, and he imagines that violence extending between the islands and North America. Césaire’s poem exemplifies the creative tension between the Caribbean writer’s dual regional and transnational vision by foregrounding the ghostly relations—the impossibly delicate tenuity—between the Americas. I build on this by claiming that these writers are also Caribbean regionalists to the extent that they too have a stake in preserving that tenuity.

Like Césaire, these U.S. writers make note of the territorial connections between the Americas as they encounter the brutality of New World slavery in the ghosts that populate their regions. More specifically, the writers under consideration in this dissertation share with Caribbean writers a fundamentally haunted perspective, where the geography of Plantation America will always supersede the geography of the United States. Here, I am thinking through Benítez-Rojo to argue that there is a long-standing overlap between the United States and the Caribbean that continues beyond the end of slavery and that is realized, at least in these literatures, in response to the ongoing effects of plantation slavery in the areas where the Caribbean plantation system was produced and duplicated throughout the Americas. In other words, Benítez-Rojo thinks of the Plantation as a “multiplied presence” that is a crucial rubric for thinking about the relationality between the Caribbean region and North America after slavery (39). I build on this, and propose that the transnational region, full of this multiplied presence, is a haunted site. That is, the transnational region is faintly inscribed with the geography of Plantation America. This is similar to what Césaire describes; his speaker claims that “not an inch of this world [is] devoid of my fingerprint,” giving voice to the displaced Africans in the Americas against whose “filth” the Western world emerges as a “glitter of
gems” (15). The transnational region is analogous to that fingerprint; it acts as a palimpsest because it reveals that the U.S. has tried, but failed, to erase entirely the geography of Plantation America from its terrain.

The palimpsest affirms that these writers sense that the Caribbean is the crucial site for “seeing” the linkages between past racial violence and its present incarnations, a story that has been erased to preserve the myth of a naturally occurring and isolated nationalism. For example, they connect domestic racial violence in the U.S. before Civil Rights with the violence of occupation, trade agreements, and immigration policy, all of which perpetuated the uneven economic, racial, and social structures of the plantation in the U.S.’s present relations with the rest of the hemisphere. We see this in Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*, a story that uses ghosts to re-define the “neighborly” relations between black and white citizens in the post-emancipation South by highlighting the repercussions of miscegenation. The ghost, as a figurative space for the violence of plantation order, also brings the Caribbean to bear on the narrative. That is, the ghost draws our attention to history of New World slavery, which was being violently manipulated by Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor policy rhetoric. As Faulkner illustrates how the Roosevelt administration consolidated power by invoking a Caribbean that is wiped free of slavery’s traces, his novel clarifies the relational axes that give shape to nationalism. It also makes evident the historiographic potential that emerges from literary correctives to history, for the novel’s ghosts reveal the “sanguineous, consanguineous land” that official policy denies.

The willful desire not to see the Caribbean overlaps with a similar problem that Americanists have long tackled, a persistent misrepresentation of race in North American
writing. This is what Andy Doolen calls “the problem of representation” since the production of knowledge in the U.S. is “shot through with the distortions and variations of white supremacist ideology” (154). Doolen calls for a re-reading of the ways that literature challenges distorted historical representation, and his work has its roots in the earlier movements in American studies that sought to historicize differently. According to Gregory Jay, to be responsive to the distortions in records regarding American race relations would require historical approaches that critique “positivism, empiricism, chronology, causation, and representation” (215). If American studies is always encumbered by aporia—the impasse between reference and representation (Jay 213)—then when critics view aporia as a catastrophic hurdle that prevents historical understanding, they are overlooking what Jay argues is the precise place to begin historical investigations. That is, he claims that a representational impasse, such as we see in these texts when writers attempt to express a sense of the past that includes what has been erased, is not a catastrophe but an opportunity—here, we can observe the production of aporia (214).

Fischer’s concept of disavowed modernity illustrates the hermeneutic possibilities of thinking about aporia in relation to history. She clarifies disavowal as an attitude toward the past that refuses to acknowledge certain issues, actions, or events, such as revolutionary antislavery actions inspired by the Haitian Revolution. What I’d like to underscore about Fischer’s theory of disavowal is that it “is productive in that it brings forth stories, screens, and fantasies that hide from view what must not be seen” (38). The Good Neighbor fantasy of cordial relations hides from view the brutalities (the sangineous connections) that structured American relations, but the literature reminds the
reader of a consanguinity that lingers in other forms. Consequently, failure to see consanguinity affects our understanding of these representations. That is, characters that appear to be minor or incidental become critical to the interpretive act. Previously partitioned off by the national container, they now act as multiply-situated, complexly-arranged figures that alter the texts’ historical and geographic landscapes.

Therefore, my dissertation affirms that while we may not recover elements of the past or ways to accurately represent that past, we can encounter some fragment of it. By this I mean that what is most significant about the notion of a Caribbean haunting—as a process at work on the readers—is the unsettling, the experience of seeing not the referent itself but the copy or trace left behind after it was erased. Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that the process by which national identity is congealed always produces a trace. Silence is never simply a gap or impasse. Rather, Trouillot theorizes that the past leaves evidence of how that silence was achieved. He writes that the “presences and absences embodied in sources (artifacts and bodies that turn an event into fact) or archives (facts collected, thematized, and processed as documents and monuments) are neither neutral or natural. They are created” (48). Historical absences then are created, not natural, and embodied, not abstract.

I read the ghost as a constructed, embodied, and disruptive evidential fragment in the text, a metonym for purged American histories. The ghost enacts on the reader a different type of historical knowledge, one that requires a process that Morrison calls “remember[ing] gone things,” a seemingly paradoxical activity that produces in the characters (and the readers) an encounter with the site where geography and history are
ruptured and rearranged—an experience best described as being haunted. Here, my reading is informed by Avery Gordon’s work on “ghostly matters,” where she underscores that haunting is a process which “meddl[es] with taken-for-granted realities” (8). Therefore, what is remarkable about the literary texts under consideration in *Caribbean Hauntings* is their shared interest in meddling with what have been our historical and geographic realities; in this way, haunting invites us to rethink the Caribbean in these texts beyond topical, thematic, or geographic points of interest. The Caribbean presence is unstable, transitory, and fleeting. As Gordon writes, haunting is so unsettling because it asks us to reconsider “the very distinctions between there and not there, past and present, force and shape” (6). In this instance, the Caribbean nature of the haunting suggests that the search for historical and geographic certainty, for a progression between past and present, is an impossibility.

Derek Walcott theorizes that “there is a memory of imagination in literature which has nothing to do with actual experience, which is, in fact, another life, and that experience of the imagination will continue to make actual the quest of a medieval knight or the bulk of a white whale, because of the power of the shared imagination” (*What* 62). As the site of “another life,” these literatures invigorate the process of creating history. Because certain dimensions of literature have “nothing to do with actual experience,” literature distinguishes itself from the discipline of history. As Glissant writes, history “claims to clarify the reality” of a people who have been displaced from the “global historical consciousness,” but will always suffer from “a serious epistemological deficiency” (*Caribbean* 61). History’s epistemological deficiency is linked to its fidelity

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11 The reference to “remember[ing] gone things” comes from *Sula* (174). For further analysis of this process, see Chapter Four.
to reality, and as Glissant notes, the Caribbean experience (“the misery of our lands”) “contains a historical dimension [. . .] that realism alone cannot account for” (Caribbean 105). Following Glissant’s insistence that representation—and its corresponding veneer of accuracy and authenticity—cannot account for the slippages and fragments, those elements of the past that have gone undocumented, I propose that we recognize history’s deficiency when we also address the ghosts before us in these U.S. literatures.

Representation, as the haunting evidences, is an impossible act, since the object or event that it seeks to invoke has been persistently and violently subjected to epistemological manipulations. In contrast, Caribbean Hauntings posits a historiography that does not seek to represent, reproduce, or recover what History has suppressed. Instead, because I foreground the ghost, I theorize a historiography that produces knowledge at the site of aporia, not around it. Thus, I align less with those who see these representational challenges as the end of historical knowledge and who define their literary-historical projects as recovery work that values equally literary and historical sources in the reconstruction project. Rather, I agree with Walcott, who argues that history is “irrelevant” in the Caribbean “not because it is not being created, or because it was sordid; but because it has never mattered, what has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of the races, what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention” (“The Caribbean” 6, emphasis added). Perhaps, as transnational regionalist literature suggests, what should matter most to Americanists is not history itself, but the loss of history. My analysis concurs; the Caribbeanist presence in U.S. literature is that imaginative invention, a haunting element that places the reader in what Walcott argues matters most: the loss of history. Therefore, reading this literature does
not facilitate the recovery of what’s been lost; rather, reading requires us to make sense of
the narrative from within the loss, the gap where historical knowledge ends and the ghost
begins.

The potential to redistribute power lies in the point where history—the story of
what was said to have happened—and the past—what actually happened—diverge.
Indeed, Glissant writes that to resist the force of a single History is to encourage the
“revaluation of power” (Glissant 93). As I see it, then, my project alters what other
critics think of as the dual nature to historicity. For example, Trouillot refers to this as a
two-sided history: history as process (a theory that is concerned with how history works
by examining the concrete productions of historical narratives) and history as narrative (a
theory that our knowledge comes entirely from the story, from what is said to have
happened) (22-25). Caribbean Hauntings offers an additional, third side to historicity:
history as ghost—where historical knowledge does not attend to Fischer calls “events and
causality in the strict sense” (2) but to what develops around what could have happened
and what never was, an almost-history. This is of critical importance to how we reread
these novels, to how we limn the connections between the Americas that were lost in the
shuffle of congealing nationalism, and to how we might reimagine the U.S. nation as
sharing a social and political orbit with the Caribbean.

Entering U.S. history through the transnational region is to enter a historical
dimension that is not dependent upon a stable, teleological mimesis but characterized by
persistent disruption and constant repositioning that makes for a dizzying reading
experience. That is, by foregrounding figures, not facts, literature produces not that
knowable story which Handley claims history yearns for, but a ghost story. This story
about the hemisphere refuses the kind of empirical evidence that Fischer, Glissant, and Trouillot argue is problematic given the racial bias of ontological and epistemological assumptions that govern historical production. Rather, it offers a counter-history, a story about the possibilities of transformation that occurred but were forestalled, overlooked, or impossible.12 Such is the case with the Haitian Revolution, a common thread in all these texts. While successful in Saint Domingue, the Revolution failed to take hold in North America, despite countless opportunities and possibilities, as illustrated by Chesnutt’s *Paul Marchand, F.M.C*. If we read from the space between the opportunity and its failure to take root, our interpretation reveals that the novels are remaking the Caribbean into a conceptual alternative to U.S. nationalism during this era. If we foreground the space of missed opportunity and ghostly historicity, we see how the present might have been different if that “calibanesque potential” were seized.

In the broadest sense, then, *Caribbean Hauntings* thinks through literature not just as an aesthetic expression, but also as an entire field of knowledge that intervenes in the United States’ “amnesiac history.” Because transnational regionalist literature proceeds from the point of rupture, its narratives carry traces of those possibilities, revolutions, and contestations. Thus, like Glissant and Walcott, I claim literature’s primacy as a field of

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12 My notion of a counter-history is not meant to duplicate a constructivist view of history, whereby historical narrative is simply another kind of fiction or, in other words, where there is no clear line between history as what actually happened and history as only invention. Here, I follow Trouillot, who argues that historical credibility, that line between fiction and history, is crucial:

The need for a different kind of credibility sets the historical narrative apart from fiction. This need is both contingent and necessary. It is contingent inasmuch as some narratives go back and forth over the line between fiction and history, while others occupy an undefined position that seems to deny the very existence of a line. It is necessary inasmuch as, at some point, historically specific groups of humans must decide if a particular narrative belongs to history or to fiction. In other words, the epistemological break between history and fiction is always expressed concretely through the historically situated evaluation of specific narratives. (8)

My counter-history recognizes that line, and questions how fiction can encourage us toward historical credibility in the future by revealing the epistemological fault lines where U.S. writers have chosen to accept or reject the narratives of Plantation America that emerge at these various moments in this era of U.S. nationalism.
knowledge that can supplement history by inventing space beyond the brutal dislocations that characterize the American experience. Transnational regionalism’s value lies in its repositioning of the reader within what Kutzinski calls “other cultural territ[ies].” Since transnational regionalism occupies a distinctly haunted territory, its literature, an imaginative invention with elements that, as is the case with the ghost, unsettle realism, empiricism, and positivism, becomes a seminal medium through which to restructure historical consciousness. Literature is not simply a contributor to the story of American history; instead, it offers a new means altogether of historicizing, and thus, of knowing America.

Chapter Overview

In the chapters that follow, I give shape and specificity to the new historical coordinates that a transnational regionalist perspective reveals. Transnational regionalism has its origins in the mid-nineteenth century. Responding to the sectional crisis that preceded the Civil War, Martin R. Delany and Harriet Beecher Stowe use their novels to build national frameworks through representations of thriving regions, and their regional writing looks to those spaces to determine what the United States’ future might be if U.S. regions and the Caribbean were no longer linked. While Delany and Stowe were writing at the cusp of what would become the nationalist project and are only speculating as to the possibilities of regional, national, and transnational connections, the later writers are firmly ensconced within the twentieth-century U.S.’s extensions of national hegemony. Following Reconstruction, the U.S. expanded its domain by moving beyond Northern and Southern reconciliation, and here transnational regionalism emerges as a form of writing that observes the loss of the regional spaces as the nation’s
ideological and geographic domain expanded. Trish Loughran describes the national project as one predicated on the integration of the local—towns, states, regions—into the framework of the nation (27). It is this integration process that Chesnutt, Faulkner, and Morrison describe, since each novel is set within a dying region. Chesnutt writes about the quadroon community in New Orleans, which has “vanished since slavery” (3). Faulkner’s stories about Jefferson mourn a time that “was gone” (319) and a land that was “retreating since its purpose was served now and its time an outmoded time” (326). Morrison’s *Sula* explores the loss of an African American neighborhood, of which there is “nothing left” (4).

Their historical interventions are clearest when we recognize that, despite their depictions of integration’s fatal effects on U.S. regions, the ghost preserves traces of the region’s eradication. Appearing as a narrative disruption, the ghost is a figurative reflection of loss but also a complication to the reader’s interpretive process. That is, it is both discursive (appearing as formal disruptions that challenge the linear thrust of white characters’ histories) and material (appearing as damage done to the landscape, to the characters’ bodies, and to subsequent generations). Described through Caribbeanized tropes and images, the ghost hovers at the novel’s edges and hampers our sense of the text’s coherence. Sometimes explicit, other times subtle, the ghost evidences the writer’s desire to create a “fuller history of race” (Levander and Levine 2), as well as the writer’s inability to do so within the boundaries of the nation. Thus, the fissures, anachronisms, and disruptions expose fractured links between moments of violent discord in U.S. race relations and moments of imperial Caribbean encounters.
The first chapter, “Harriet Beecher Stowe, Martin R. Delany, and the Nineteenth-Century Caribbean Imaginary,” re-examines the literary conversation between Stowe and Delany to posit that the emergence of U.S. literature coincides with a hyper-awareness of the Caribbean. Rather than read their works as polemic intertexts on abolition as other critics have done, I look to the similarities between them: both Delany and Stowe depict U.S. regions as haunted by their proximity to the Caribbean. As Stowe fictionalizes a national ideal in which slavery is incompatible, she finds herself in an uncomfortable historical position because the nation’s regions are inextricable from and sustained by the complex system of trade, exchange, and movement between the U.S. and the Caribbean. She tries to resolve this by asserting New England’s mythic Puritan past as the nation’s ideal site of origin. However, rather than purge the Caribbean from her texts, this assertion actually leaves behind ghostly traces of West Indian influence. Like Stowe, Delany recognizes that U.S. history is a Caribbean history. However, his Blake explicitly embraces what Stowe exorcises in her ghostly treatment of West Indian characters. Where Stowe’s novels cast a wary eye toward the Caribbean, Delany’s revisionary historical details move the region outside national boundaries to underscore the revolutionary potential of the U.S. region’s Caribbean traces. Together, they become a doubled-origin for American transnational regionalism, where their hemispheric overtures route U.S. history through the Caribbean.

In the following chapter, “‘Always before the eyes’: Haiti’s Revisionary Haunting in Charles Chesnutt’s *Paul Marchand, F.M.C.*,’ I describe how two seminal moments in U.S.-Haitian relations were affecting Chesnutt’s national vision and artistic abilities in the 1920s: the late-eighteenth century Haitian Revolution and the early-twentieth century
U.S. Occupation of Haiti. Chesnutt’s *Paul Marchand* is preoccupied with how local-color histories obscured the relevance of the Haitian Revolution and connects this obfuscation to the Occupation, which was vehemently opposed by Haitians and U.S. Americans alike while Chesnutt was writing *Marchand*. I argue that his novel’s use of regionalist techniques is an explicit attempt to revise local-color histories, which are part of the archival records that mishandled representations of the Revolution. He inserts revisionary historical incidents about Haiti into his narrative, a tactic that not only emends history but also challenges the Occupation’s merit. I contend that his revisions signal to readers that New Orleans history is always haunted by its connections to Haiti and that these ghostly connections persist into and inform twentieth-century political policy. By inserting Haiti into the historical record, he challenges local color’s implication that Haiti’s influence in the U.S. is contained by illustrating a persistent revolutionary impulse manifest in U.S. regions. Subsequently, his novel illustrates that early-twentieth century political and legal structures in the U.S. are simultaneously constituted by yet desirous to avoid connections to Haiti. Thus, as I assert the importance of Chesnutt’s revisions, I use the novel to claim that the manipulation of historical knowledge about Haiti is the prerequisite to the modern U.S. nation-state.

My third chapter, “Haunting the Good Neighbor: Ghosts of Insignificant American Histories in William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses,*” focuses on Faulkner’s use of regionalist fiction to intervene in racial discourses that were defining imperial foreign policies adopted by the U.S. during the mid-twentieth century. I argue that *Go Down, Moses*’ seemingly (in)coherent textual features are in fact the result of Faulkner’s Caribbeanist imagination, a reaction to the power asymmetries perpetuated by Franklin
Delano Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy. Faulkner’s slippery representations of the Caribbean appear insignificant, ghostly even, but when we read these disruptions within the matrix of U.S.-Caribbean relations, we see that they alter the interpretive process. In the text, not only do they interfere with the characters’ ability to untangle the convoluted history of neighborly relations in Jefferson, Mississippi, but they also prove fatal to future generations of the region’s white residents. Beyond the text, these fatal Caribbean disruptions serve as a lens through which I reread Good Neighbor discourse. This strategy proves that the Caribbean presence in Faulkner’s novel is also fatal to the Roosevelt administration’s manipulations of New World history by revealing how its neighborly rhetorics mask its imperial intentions.

The final chapter, “Writing from the Periphery: Haiti, the Bottom, and Transnational Regionalism in Toni Morrison’s *Sula,*” reads Morrison’s depiction of the Bottom, a regional community that experiences profound alienation in Jim Crow America and is ultimately eradicated by the U.S.’s urban renewal projects in the 1970s, against the Haitian Refugee Crisis that was occurring while Morrison was writing *Sula.* Unlike other critics who treat Morrison’s communities as positive counters to the historical displacement of Africans in the Americas, I propose that reading Morrison’s regionalism alongside U.S.-Haitian relations reveals an alternative historical process at work in her fiction. *Sula* not only denies representations of cultural and national insularity, but also advocates for the region as a site of constant contact with the outside world. To structure my argument, I highlight the ubiquity of Haitian-specific tropes in *Sula* that reflect the U.S.’s response to the island nation during the crisis. Isolation, lunacy, and undesirability dominate U.S. representations of Haiti at this time, and form the basis of Morrison’s
rendering of the Bottom. I conclude that she uses Caribbean cultural expressions like Carnival to form a rhetorical place in which her characters find fleeting agency and historicity despite their peripheral position. Thus, Morrison theorizes region not as a recuperative space of isolation and cultural authenticity but, like Haiti’s isolation from the rest of the Americas under the Duvalier regime, as a site that makes visible the U.S. nation’s political displacement of blackness to maintain its own historical narrative of progress.

A coda, “Regionalism and the Age of Globalization,” proposes future lines of inquiry that transnational regionalism might explore. Because the meaning of region adapts to evolving forms of nationalism, I argue that scholars need to account for contemporary relations of ruling that emerge in the age of globalization. Scholars are currently debating the value of the diasporic perspective in nationalist studies, but I contend that writers like Cristina García, Edwidge Danticat, and Junot Díaz recognize the potential of extra-national sites to unsettle Cuban, Haitian, and Dominican exceptionalism. They contribute to my sense that transnational regionalism can offer scholars a vantage point from which to overcome the historical partitions that nationalism erects.

I present these texts together as an archival complication to the story of the U.S. nation’s development after the Civil War. They unsettle what are presumed to be stable and distinct identities of the United States and its Caribbean neighbors. By uniting the two within the rubric of the regional, the writers ask us to begin anew with our assumptions. They remind us that what we’re actually looking at is not two separate spaces, but a singular entity that we don’t always see as such. That is, they ask us to
begin the process of seeing and knowing America from the perspective of the “gone thing,” where our sense of America is always unfolding at the point of instability.
Chapter One

Harriet Beecher Stowe, Martin R. Delany, and the Nineteenth-Century Caribbean Imaginary

If nation-states are widely conceded to be “new” and “historical,” the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.

--Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities.*

This chapter historicizes the inception of a Caribbean imagination in the American literary tradition, arguing that it arrives in the U.S. through discourses about race and region. Claiming Harriet Beecher Stowe and Martin R. Delany as pioneering figures of this Caribbean imagination, I catalogue their novels’ contributions to the fields of regional and transnational literary studies. I examine dialogues between Delany and Stowe to consider how each participated in the narration of the events leading up to the Civil War, and how their narrations serve as an historical foundation for this project’s identification of a transnational regionalist discourse in U.S. literatures. Rather than read these two in strict opposition to each other, as is common given Delany’s well-known intention to rewrite Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin,* I am interested in the ways that they complement each other. Both Stowe and Delany peopled their novels with bodies moving between the Caribbean and the U.S, movement that chronicles early transmigratory patterns into and out of the developing nation. Both trace the potential implications of that movement on the construction of the nation as a bounded, exceptional space. Together, their representations of the Caribbean suggest that imperialist and expansionist ideology aided in the creation of American regionalism. Together, then, their work shares a mutual interest in using the region to explore the national. For these reasons, their literary conversation marks American regionalism as a discourse that proceeds from a preoccupation with the foreign and often threatening...
nature of other American spaces, not just from an interest in native and peculiar U.S. enclaves.

The other critical element that links these two is their texts’ investment in exploring the nation’s origins, a project that links their regionalism with a distinct type of historiographic work that later U.S. writers will engage more self-consciously. That is, both writers envision national history from a regional perspective, not from a nation-state perspective, a shift in focus that intervenes in what Benedict Anderson argues is the nation’s seeming ability to loom out of an “immemorial past.” Stowe and Delany are writing to create history, each novel offering up a different sense of this past through which each hopes to influence a national trajectory. Given their shared emphasis on the region as a site of foreign influence, I argue that they are in fact offering up a hemispheric historical perspective that pose worrisome questions regarding what this “limitless” future might be.

Region is a central category of analysis because both writers engage the construction of nation by looking to local places where cultural, legal, and social differences in the U.S. were most pronounced. Utilization of the region was no doubt born out of the political climates in which these writers were situated. The antebellum United States saw the North and South as principal regions dividing the nation; however, the West and the Caribbean islands were also significant spaces for potential expansion and thus imaginative exploration. The West developed out from a series of acquisitions following the Mexican-American War; the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded to the U.S. a significant portion of territory (including but not limited to present day California, New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona). This helped the U.S. to enact its vision of
Manifest Destiny, and it also prompted extensive debates on the new territories’ slave-holding status and exacerbated already tense discussions. The Americas were linked by political and economic conditions during this period; the West Indies, Central, and South America were also being eyed for inclusion into the United States, particularly by Southern states who were anxious to increase slaveholders’ clout by creating a slaving empire in the Americas that was governed by U.S. interests. This rapid growth accelerated a sense of sectional difference, as well as the need for some coherent national body. It significantly affected the writers’ vision, as their polemic representations of this moment in U.S. history are composed around regional exchanges. As Delany and Stowe utilize their notion of region—different, sectional, seditious, and fraught with potential to determine the nation’s fate—to address the political climate’s anxiety over what would define the U.S. as its boundaries were called into question, each questions the viability of a unified imagined community. By highlighting the writers’ excavation of regional histories, this reading of Stowe and Delany emphasizes a more expansive investigation into the geographic relationships each invoked to scaffold their visions of the nation’s past.

Both Delany and Stowe wrote what most consider to be polemic and political novels, not necessarily artistic or innovative works of literature. However, by highlighting their regionalist significance, I emphasize the literary innovations at work in each’s writing strategy. Writing about region has long been a contested category within the literary tradition, as its purpose is often defined in relation to the writer’s national perspective. For example, Marjorie Pryse’s work on Stowe traces the various forms of

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13 See, for example, Eric Sundquist on Stowe (“Introduction” 1-2) and Andy Doolen on critical disregard for Delany’s “excessively polemical and thus flawed” novel (156).
regional fiction that have emerged in the American literary tradition, and argues that Stowe was conflicted throughout her career with her own use of the region (133).

Specifically, regional fiction and its various evolving forms have the potential to either serve the nation or challenge the nation. For example, Pryse defines local color as a type of regional fiction that helped to ameliorate sectional differences during the late-nineteenth century because it “reduc[ed] the fear of sectional and regional differences by making ‘colorful’ characters humorous to readers outside the region” (Pryse 133). However, Stowe resisted local color and attempted to write an “alternative” regional fiction (133) that was more empathetic and complex; her effort “contribute[d] to inventing a new form of regional writing” (Pryse 134).

This new type of regional fiction emerged shortly after Stowe in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and distinguished itself by avoiding such voyeurism; indeed, this regionalism emphasized a more empathetic relationship by “shift[ing] the reader’s perception away from the urban center and instead mov[ing] the reader inside the region” (Pryse 134). Stowe’s work on region is not located within either tradition, and scholars of regional writing often debate the ways in which her novels evidence a self-conscious regional empathy. For example, Pryse argues that Stowe creates in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* a “northern nationalist novel for a sectional readership [that is] powerful but hardly [a] regionalist novel” (135). As Pryse notes, although Stowe is thinking through the literary value of the regional perspective, and although she desired to avoid replicating what she saw as insufficient, cruel, or nationalistic models of regional writing, she still imposes a Northern perspective on the plantation south—an imposition that compromises her empathetic portrait of the region (134). Nonetheless, her work
remains useful to regional observations because it questions the “role of the regional in American literature: does regional writing serve the purposes of national unification, minimizing regional differences as merely ‘local color,’ or does it keep alive alternative values and stories that may challenge the fiction of the union?” (133).

Following Pryse’s observation that Stowe’s work is crucial to understanding the development of regionalism, I further argue that her writing should be read as American regional, not U.S. regional, since her landscapes encompass the continental U.S. as well as the neighboring Caribbean. That is, her fiction is crucial to understanding the development of another type of regional fiction, a transnational regionalism, which emerges in the early-twentieth century and which Stowe and Delany both set in motion. As a discourse that develops in response to imperial and neo-colonial relationships between the United States and the Caribbean, transnational regionalist fiction attempts to account for the uneven and asymmetrical power relations between the Americas through revisionist historiographic perspectives that focus on ghostly regional traces of histories occluded by U.S. nationalism. If we study Stowe’s interest in the repercussions of transnational exchange, we see that such exchange is facilitated by a series of regional similarities that she observes between the U.S. South and the Caribbean. As Pryse’s work has already demonstrated, we can construct a reading of Stowe as an early regionalist writer because she is invoking the region not as a unifying concept or critical tool, but as a more critical site wherein the fate of the nation might be problematized. However, in both Uncle Tom’s Cabin and The Pearl of Orr’s Island, Stowe is able to reclaim what she perceives to be the Americanness of those regions only by inflecting them with Caribbean overtures. Both novels contain Caribbean hauntings—either literal
or figurative ghostly characters, events, and legacies that unsettle the text. In novels about slavery and imperialism, discussion of the Caribbean is unavoidable—that region was crucially bound to the economic destiny of the U.S. However, for Stowe, the Caribbean presence compromised the moral destiny of the U.S., and she thus relies on familial reconstruction metaphors to alleviate that haunting. Both novels excise the haunted regions by rendering traces back to the Caribbean innocuous and restoring a vision of the nation’s exceptional New England origins.

Like Stowe, Delany’s portrait of the U.S. nation invokes the Americas, and he too imagines them as haunted by the specter of slavery, the black body, and obfuscated transnational origins. The primary ghost in this novel is the title character, who haunts the slave regions of North America by spreading fear, hope, and rebellion. A liminal figure, Blake has several names, is shrouded in the U.S. and in Africa, and only emerges fully in Cuba. Blake’s shifting nature makes it possible for him to spread the necessary knowledge of how to win a war against the whites (Powell 357). As a transnational figure, Henry Blake becomes one of the first characters created by a U.S. writer to articulate the potential of region-to-region exchanges across national borders and to imagine a broader framework that includes North and South America, as well as the Caribbean to lend a historical, geographic, and political flexibility to narratives interested in transforming the destiny of the Americas. Because Delany relocates the “American” text to Cuba, his novel, as Robert S. Levine notes, helps to “remap the boundaries of American literary study” (291).

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14 Stowe’s novels often rely on the metaphor of family reconstruction to speak to the larger national schisms that preoccupied Stowe. Critics have already charted how Uncle Tom’s Cabin is particularly dependent upon this image. For example, her novel’s reliance on domestic melodrama intends to provide a picture of how slavery was destroying the national family. See Sundquist’s “Introduction” for an overview (18-21).
These texts therefore mark a shift in early American literature; previous references to the Caribbean exist in nonfiction writing: travel journals, diaries, sermons, and speeches. Scholarship on early American literature has explored the role that the Caribbean played in the nascent formation of America’s literary and cultural development.\(^\text{15}\) However, Stowe and Delany emerge within a later context, one noted for the simultaneous development of both nationalism and a critical literary tradition. For example, according to Jonathon Arac, nineteenth century U.S. experienced two “cultural transformations”: “the emergence of nationality and the emergence of literature (in the specialized sense of imaginative belles letters, not all culturally valued writing)” (17). Fiction writing in particular became the primary venue through which writers began to explore and affirm the nation. This chapter argues that the emergence of U.S. national literature coincides with a hyper-awareness of the Caribbean within U.S. culture. Stowe becomes one of the first to creatively engage the Caribbean, and her texts, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) and *The Pearl of Orr’s Island* (1862), are markers for how that space enters into the imagination of U.S. readers and writers. Stowe’s alternative portrait of the nation in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had reached celebrity status by the time Delany began writing, and his novel, *Blake* (published serially between 1859 and 1862), responds to its celebrity by making a critical intervention in the portrayal of Caribbean spaces. *Blake* inverts Stowe’s marginal treatment of West Indian characters and re-centers U.S. history entirely around the Caribbean. In this way, their literature begins to place the writing of region as a fundamental analogue to the emergent national literary tradition. Together, they become

\(^\text{15}\) For recent analyses that read early American literature against the Caribbean, see work by Christopher Iannini and Sean X. Goudie.
a doubled-origin for American regionalism, where their hemispheric overtures route that origin through the Caribbean.

**Caribbean Ghosts in Stowe’s New England Regions**

Stowe’s novels inaugurate this conversation because they were deemed harbingers of American myths, fictive recastings of national life whereby a community of natives is dedicated to common history and heritage. Her lauded ability to capture the reality of the nation, to define what is truly American, must be interrogated for those unexamined spaces which buffer her creation of the American nation. That is, Stowe’s writing was critical of regional distinctions, casting the marginal places in her novels as utterly foreign; ultimately, she can imagine national unity only by appealing to a common heritage whereby the United States claims its exceptional and sovereign place within the Western Hemisphere. Delany doesn’t temper his regionalist perspective with xenophobia as Stowe does; rather, regionalist distinctions are his book’s raison d’être—they become the techniques through which he undoes national myth-making.

To frame the historiographic work of these regional texts, one must acknowledge the degree to which they are writing both within and against the histories that supported some of the more idealized notions about the American republic. Americanists have identified these myths as problematic and self-perpetuating, particularly as they depend upon ideological processes of othering. For example, Donald Pease argues that through repeating literary images such as the exceptional national subject and its native geography, the “mythological entity” of nation is created and recognized by its national subjects as natural to their community (3). He argues that such a natural or native understanding of nationhood depends on “the national narrative [which] represented other
peoples (women, blacks, ‘foreigners,’ the homeless) from whom the property of
countryness had been removed altogether and upon whose differences from them the
national people depended for the construction of the universality of their norms” (4).
Pease’s observation is valuable because it illuminates how the invention of the other or
non-native was necessary to the establishment of a nation.

Certainly, a text like Toni Morrison’s Playing in the Dark is another such
every example of how critics have looked to literature to problematize U.S. historical
narratives; Morrison locates the simultaneous fictive invention of the United States and
the African American. Her reading of American literary history through its Africanist
presence makes evident that U.S. writers’ and critics’ relied on racial ideology to sustain
national formation. To reread Stowe for a Caribbean presence makes evident her role in
perpetuating such ideology. Non-native, West Indian characters in her text infiltrate the
domestic space of the U.S. through regional similarities that she finds troubling, and her
novels advocate for an Anglo-American nation which coalesces only after its regions are
purged of Caribbean influence. To reread Delany for this presence makes apparent the
extent to which he engages and revises Stowe’s regional portraits by centralizing the huts,
swamps, and other fugitive spaces that she renders foreign; his perspective dismantles
national myths as it reveals the undeniably Caribbean nature of U.S. regions.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin remains one of the most successful novels ever written, and
critics have already limned the tale of domestic slavery as an infection of the nation’s
morality for its Caribbean traces. The Pearl of Orr’s Island was published some ten
years after Uncle Tom’s Cabin, and it too traverses the Caribbean while drumming up
patriotic nostalgia for the nation’s republican origins. Stowe’s canon is often studied in
reference to the African American presence there, but more recent scholarship addresses other syncretic figures as well. Scholars such as Anna Brickhouse, Joan Dayan, and Carolyn Vellenga Berman assess race and miscegenation in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* beyond a black/white dichotomy, and argue that the figure of the darker other has multiple figurations that could not be contained by U.S. slave laws. Their work reveals Stowe’s more complex and nuanced representations of racial boundaries in the antebellum U.S. through her creolized characters and spaces. However, it is Stowe’s portrayal of the Caribbean, not the Creole, that marks her fiction as the first of many narratives to conceptualize a spectral Caribbean presence against a representation of U.S. boundaries, and it is precisely these references in *The Pearl of Orr’s Island* that remain uncharted territory in Stowe scholarship. I claim that her Caribbean references mark Stowe as a seminal figure within a transnational literary tradition, and that her fiction routes the origins of U.S. literature through the West Indies.

Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* holds particular significance to the American literary tradition; contemporary critics have found innumerable arguments for and against its relevance, artistry, and vision. Arguably, it maintains its celebrity status because many treat it as the quintessential American novel. Lawrence Buell notes that the first critical attempt to identify “the great American novel” appeared in 1868, and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* topped the list (190). Indeed, the novel was hailed immediately following its international publication as “‘the greatest book of its kind’” and “‘the greatest of all American tales’” (Buell 191). When it was published, however, it was highly contentious. Treated as a sectional and anti-Southern novel, it ignited what was already a heated debate over how to reconcile the question of slavery against the question of the
nation. For example, Trish Loughran observes that despite *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s massive audience at the time of publication, the novel managed to “divide rather than unite [its reading constituency] politically” (365). In contrast, Sarah Meer writes about the novel’s very different reception among international readers. She argues that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was the answer to calls at the time for a distinctly American novel, as the U.S. sought to distinguish itself from the British and the English literary tradition (197). In Britain, Stowe was heralded as the writer who finally countered the assertion that “‘the Americans have no national literature.’” With the advent of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, critics announced the birth of the U.S. literary tradition: “‘Let us hear no more of the poverty of American brains, or the barrenness of American literature’” (*Stowe Sunny Memories*, xxxvii-iii). The novel’s success among nineteenth-century international readers is due to its presentation of disparate American regions, which seemed to reflect an image of the new nation that many readily accepted abroad. The stark contrast between the domestic and international reception invites a closer look at the divergent interpretations of American, and of how Stowe’s regional portrait was simultaneously credited with both destroying (domestically) and inventing (internationally) the nation.

This heralding becomes symptomatic of an entire literary tradition, whereby early critics of American literature judged a text’s worth based not on its artistry, but on its “Americanness,” its ability to be the “‘most American’” (Baym 5). Nina Baym’s description of this literary era is useful: “the early critic looked for the standard of ‘Americanness’ rather than a standard of excellence [. . .] it came to seem that the quality of Americanness, whatever it might be, constituted literary excellence for American authors” (5). Artistic merit thus came second to national function—great American
novels were those which reaffirmed a national history and used that history to contextualize the exceptional reality of nation’s present state. Indeed, Stowe herself argued such a point in her *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, where she makes a distinction between art and reality: “the book has a purpose entirely transcending the artistic one, and accordingly encounters, at the demands of the public, demands not usually made on fictitious works. It is treated as a reality, sifted, tried and tested, as a reality; and therefore as a reality it may be proper that it should be defended” (5). *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is thus born amidst this fervor for literature to capture the definitive American reality. Reception of the text and a demand for an accounting of how Stowe came to such conclusions about the nation necessitated *Key’s* publication, which proved how real Stowe’s fiction was. *Key* made evident the very American origins for all the incidents within the novel and in so doing sought to prove that the novel truthfully and accurately captured American life.

In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Stowe questions the repercussions of regional contact when she imagines the distinctions between the U.S. South and the rest of the nation because of its participation in the illegal importation of slaves throughout the Americas. For Stowe, transportation of black bodies across the Americas is an obvious and uncomfortable source of continued contact with the West Indies. Here, I will provide an overview of Carolyn Vellenga Berman’s analysis of the creole in Stowe’s novel; Berman argues that the West Indies was such a problematic space for U.S. writers because the island system of slavery differed from that in the U.S. For example, European colonial slave systems tended to enfranchise their freed slave populations and this created a tertiary racial structure which complicated clear racial classifications (*Creole* 155).
Berman also provides significant analysis of how the influx of European colonials in the South surface in Stowe’s work, arguing that Stowe suggests that the presence of Spanish and French creoles in the U.S. made passing easier for slaves who didn’t appear white; they could easily be mistaken for French or Spanish—as characters such as George and Madame de Thoux prove (157). The Southern regions in her novels are most susceptible to transformation given their proximity to the West Indies; economic ties bound the regions together and made New Orleans the slave-trade capital of the U.S. Thus, Berman notes that within these regions traverse the creolized characters, moving with ease about the U.S. South thanks to the racial mixing occurring as Caribbean slaves and colonials intermingle with the U.S. domestic slaved population. Through representations of Louisiana, particularly New Orleans and the Red River region, Stowe explores the implications of how the economic links forged by the slave trade made the U.S. vulnerable to non-native practices and infiltrations. My own reading builds upon Berman’s extensive research into the Caribbean overtures in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to consider how such a Caribbean imagination bolstered or affected her early regionalist inclinations. In so doing, I also propose that the juxtaposition of foreign and domestic regions in her novels offer us a key to assessing Stowe’s particularly enduring vision of the “immemorial past.”

Her Caribbean imagination is best seen through *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* villain, Simon Legree, who finds fortune yet loses his soul in the West Indies. Stowe’s depiction

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16 See Berman’s *Creole Crossing* for an extensive discussion of the development of the term *creole* in both the U.S. and the Caribbean. In addition, she argues that creole society created the freed slave populations that the U.S. viewed as particularly dangerous because of that population’s role in the Haitian Revolution: “this French colonial tendency to enfranchise mixed-race slaves went hand-in-hand with the history of French slave rebellion. Mulatto slaves challenged the domestic ideology of the ‘patriarchal institution’ when they claimed a birthright not as metaphorical but as biological children” (156).
of the Caribbean influence upon Legree suggests that the region has transformed him into something antithetical to U.S. American values. Legree and his Louisiana plantation are marginalized within the text; Legree is depicted as an amoral and isolated man with no proper family, while his land is wild and located miles away from neighbors. In addition, he is further marginalized within the text because of his excessively cruel treatment of his slaves which makes him unique from Stowe’s depictions of other slave owners. Stowe locates this difference in her suggestion that he learns such treatment from time spent in the Caribbean. Cassy tells Emmeline that “‘[h]e’s learned his trade well, among the pirates in the West Indies’” (534). The novel’s narrator connects piracy to trade: “The slave-trade is now, by American law, considered as piracy” (622), and thus marks Legree as a character whose allegiances, education, and subsequent influence in the United States are informed by a moral code antithetical to U.S. legal and moral values. Stowe clearly locates national values in the North, and Legree’s vehement eschewing of New England values and space make him unassimilable into Stowe’s united nation. Tracing Legree’s origins in the West Indies allows Stowe to further imply that such a citizen is a significant “break” from her portrait; indeed, Legree’s portions of the text are multiply haunted because of his time in the Caribbean. His land is haunted by the black bodies trafficked and tortured there, while he is haunted literally by the “fake” ghost of the Creole Cassie; it is, however, the “real” ghost of his New England mother that highlights Stowe’s attempt to reroute the origins of the region from the Caribbean to the U.S.17 In

17 See Berman’s discussion of Cassie as a Creole character who personifies “the rebellious image of successful West Indian slave revolts” (“Impersonating” 34) and whose tactics for survival are “specific to the former colonies of the French” (32).
so doing, Stowe divorces the U.S. from its hemispheric context, identifying alternative origins than those in the Caribbean.

Stowe’s novel does not deny that the U.S. South has become a threat to the future of the nation—New Orleans and the Red River region are Caribbeanized and this creates a tension within the text that Stowe struggles to resolve.

Legree’s transnational movements within and beyond these spaces provide him the opportunity to circumvent some clear U.S. borders—legal, geographic, and moral. He literally moves beyond the legal boundaries of the U.S. while participating in the illegal trade in the Indies. In addition, his movement outside the nation’s geographic boundaries begins to infect the very land itself, a strategy through which Stowe marks Legree’s domestic land as foreign. Loughran describes Legree’s plantation as one site where we can see Stowe’s efforts to integrate the local into the national. The Legree scenes allow Northern readers the chance to “infiltrate[e]” the local, which are described in “foreign and exotic terms” (28). For example, Legree’s Red River plantation offers evidence of the way that the slave trade marches across the region; it is haunted by a trail of tortured and ghostly slaves. Immediately after explaining that Legree is to be feared because of his West Indian training, Cassie tells Emmeline that the land itself is as terrifying as its owner: “There’s a place way out down by the quarters, where you can see a black, blasted tree, and the ground all covered with black ashes. Ask anyone what was done there, and see if they will dare to tell you” (534). Legree’s land bears traces of black bodies sacrificed to maintain the efficiency of his plantation, and this particular quote speaks to a cruelty yet unseen in Stowe’s vision of other U.S. slaved spaces. The region haunts because it

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18 Stowe depicts the U.S. South as “an open frontier linked culturally to the (French colonial) Caribbean” (Berman “Impersonating” 28).
remains unspoken in the text; when Emmeline asks Cassie what she means by this story, Cassie replies that she “won’t tell” because she “hate[s] to think of it” (534). The unknowable nature of what occurs on this land strikes fear in both women, but both observe that the land itself is transformed, the trees “blasted,” and stands as a marker of his hegemony and their silence. The result is an entrenched perversion of nature (the trees, the bodies) that marks the whole plantation as “wild” and “forsaken” (491). While the impetus of transformation is never revealed explicitly, Legree’s cruelty and avarice (he is interested only in “money-making”) render the topography starkly opposed to all previous regions described in the text.

Stowe most explicitly juxtaposes the space of Red River, a Middle Passage region infected and transformed by its economic dependency on spaces outside the nation, with the soft, pale body of Legree’s mother, located firmly “far” away in the bosom of New England (528). She thus locates the moral center of her story within the North, feminized as “perfect love” in which Legree was “trained” (529), language that mirrors his retraining at the hands of pirates. When Legree rejects his mother’s training and he goes to “seek his fortune at sea” (528), Stowe signals the “break” with morality that turns

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19 As other critics have noted, Stowe entitled the section in which Tom is taken to Red River as “The Middle Passage,” a reference that clearly asks the reader to compare Tom’s journey into the heart of Louisiana slave territory to the African slaves’ passage into the Caribbean. The phrase carries with it connotations of the horror inflicted on those who survive, as well as the suffering attached to life within the plantation. According to Henry Louis Gates, the term middle passage entered into America’s lexicon at the end of the eighteenth century to refer to the voyage made by African slave ships on their way to America (354). By 1807, Congress had legally banned the African slave trade, but slave trade within the Americas was flourishing; as Berman notes, this ban on international trade only increased the development of domestic slave trade (Creole 148). Stowe’s terminology thus reinforces her depiction of tragedy that continues long after its legal end. As Berman notes, Stowe provides added meaning to the term by suggesting the transport of thousands of slaves across the southern states (354) is an echo of that transnational movement of human bodies across national borders (Creole 148). Here, U.S. regions are now equally involved in the trade, even if they remain within national boundaries. As a movement, rather than location, the middle passage encompasses all regional points touched by the trace of bodies. Louisiana thus becomes, as Tom moves through it, a regional stop within the Middle Passage, a space bound to Africa and the Caribbean while divorced from the rest of the U.S.
him into a “wilder and more brutal” man than ever (528). His inability to assume the same virtues as his mother, representative of New England as the nation’s moral center, is specific to his West Indian travels. His movement between the two regions and his establishment of a node along the Middle Passage within the U.S. nation marks an interregional exchange that transforms him and the land into the story’s most terrifying elements. Legree’s origin, then, is the Caribbean, where his transformation is complete. His mother’s sacrifices and struggles, symbolized by the lock of her hair that he burns, continue to haunt him; he often saw “that pale mother rising by his bedside, and felt the soft twining of that hair around his fingers, till the cold sweat would roll down his face, and he would spring from his bed in horror” (529). The evil with which he communed during his time in the Caribbean and which he transported into the U.S. perverts his mother’s legacy and prevents his establishing a proper family or home in Louisiana. She, a pious and loving mother with whom Stowe asks us to sympathize, is ghosted and the legacy she represents perverted. Yet Stowe gives Legree, a villain unparalleled in American literary history, an “out”—the reason for his abhorrent practices originate in the Caribbean, where such occurrences, the text suggests, are commonplace. The danger then of that region trumps in Stowe’s imagination the danger posed by Legree, whom she leaves groveling in the dirt at the hands of George Shelby.

20 Critics have observed Legree’s New England ties, but have yet to triangulate a reading between New England, the South, and the Caribbean. For example James M. Cox argues that Legree’s background only indicates “the book’s awareness that the potentialities of the slave driver are to be found in the North as well as in the South” (Cox 458). Furthermore, Cox dismisses the connection as substantial because “nothing about Legree’s dialect smacks of New England” and therefore his New England origins are “lost on Southern readers of the time just as it is lost on most modern readers” (459).

21 See Halttunen for more on the mother’s ghost. She argues that “Simon Legree is not actually haunted by a supernatural presence, but by a sense of guilt rising from his mother’s enduring grip on one side of his dual nature” (124).
Legree’s moral degeneracy makes it possible for her to highlight the superiority of true patriots, such as the “heroic” young master. George Shelby’s trip to Red River not only inoculates that space, but it also leads to the discovery of another Caribbean figure who haunts the narrative. Madame De Thoux’s presence in the text is not as terrifying as Legree’s plantation, but she is nonetheless unsettling and incompatible with life in the U.S. She is introduced to the reader as a French lady (599) who enters the U.S. freely, but is in fact a mulatta who passes as a Caribbean colonial. She represents, as Brickhouse writes, “the impossibility of an impermeable, Anglo-Saxon U.S. entirely remote from the interrelated new-world histories of ‘Hayti’ and the larger francophone Americas” (431).

Stowe explains that after being sold to the South as a girl, a West-Indian based man “took me with him to the West Indies, set me free, and married me” (600). Stowe sets their marriage in the Caribbean because the region circumvents the legal boundaries of the United States, as marriage in the South would have been illegal due to miscegenation laws. Traversing this boundary and then returning grants her ability to haunt the U.S. as racial other who passes thanks to her time in the Caribbean. The legacy left to be traced here is the money earned through West Indian trade: “[t]he death of her husband had left her an ample fortune, which she generously offered to share with the family” (605). It is this that enables George and his family to leave the U.S. Without her money, George and his family would remain in Canada and Stowe’s tale of family reunion (national reunion) would not be complete. Indeed, she is able to reclaim her lost brother only through the fortune she inherits from her West-Indian-based husband. Thus, the West Indies complicate Stowe’s ability to resolve the region. As Brickhouse writes, the
francophone Americas “ambiguate the very racial distinctions her novel seeks, but without succeeding, to clarify” (429).

Madame de Thoux’s transformation from Emily, a Kentucky slave, to a propertied French woman, that underscores Stowe’s odd position to the Caribbean. The islands become a region that could provide slaves some emancipation through lax legislation on interracial relationships, yet it also could potentially transform the racial makeup in the United States and confound the distinctions between citizen and slave. For example, Madame de Thoux’s French name “signif[ies] Emily’s emancipation by sexual liaison in Louisiana [and] effectively disguises her origins as a Kentucky slave” (Berman Creole 157). More so, as Berman notes, this again underscores Stowe critique of miscegenation: here it allows infiltration and a weakening of racial and domestic borders. De Thoux’s appearance in the text marks an unsettling dynamic that counters Stowe’s vision of New England (Legree’s mother) as the only proper origin in the text. She therefore cannot remain; the family’s reconstruction is possible only outside the boundaries of the United States. The entire domestic life of this character—her marriage in the Caribbean, reunion with brother in Canada, settling in Liberia—occurs outside the U.S. Indeed, her time within the U.S. renders her one of two unsettling things. First, she is a slave, a nonbeing, nonnative. Second, upon return after her time in the West Indies, she is a haunting face that unsettles George with its familiarity and his own disbelief that he did not recognize her as a person of color. Stowe ghosts her even while attempting to restore the humanity denied her under slavery.

Legree and Madame de Thoux represent Stowe’s uncomfortable imaginings of what the U.S.’s proximity to the Caribbean could mean. While Legree is castigated as
entirely other, de Thoux is a sympathetic but foreign presence. The novel ends by expunging these characters from the nation. Legree is dying and Madame de Thoux moves to Liberia. Stowe’s novel, as many critics observe, suggests a solution to slavery not through emancipation and integration, but through liberation and colonization. She argues that slaves exit not just the U.S., but the whole of the Americas. Rather than relocate them to independent Haiti, a space she disparages through George as a “worn-out, effeminate” space (609), she sends her characters to the U.S.-sponsored Liberia. Martin R. Delany critiques this decision in a letter to Frederick Douglass, and he cites an incident where Stowe spoke with a free colored person who told her of his successes in the U.S. She asked what he hoped to gain here, and he cited opportunities in South America and the West Indies. She suggested he go instead to Liberia (Levine, *Martin*, 233).\(^2\) The proximity of the West Indies, the rebellion in Haiti, and the subsequent creolization of New Orleans affects Stowe’s nativist vision of America. Her preference that African Americans and Creoles leave the Americas evidences the threat posed by the increasingly transnational makeup of U.S. regions, and her work questions whether such regions could be assimilated into the national family. Stowe’s U.S. characters reverse any syncretism by proffering a vision of what is possible for both the US. and Africa, but only do so after clarifying the distinctions between the two places. As for the rest of the Americas, Stowe remains dismissive in George’s final castigation.

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\(^2\) Delany would later change his position on the debate between emigration to West India or Africa. According to Katy Chiles, while he wrote *Blake* he “resolutely set his sights on emigration of Africa.” She suggests that this shift is a reaction to a “public debate [that] raged over Haitian emigration” during the six-month publication of *Blake* (339). She concludes that Delany was certain that the territorial limitations of the Caribbean islands were insufficient to house a revolution and new government. This could only happen in Africa (342).
Stowe’s representations of Caribbean regions bolster her portrait of unity, and begins a series of literary exchanges whereby those regions become inescapably written into the fabric of literary history. Even as Stowe argues in *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that it is not artistically beneficial to identify “from which region each fragment of the mosaic picture had its origin” (5), she implicitly acknowledges that the combined presence of multiple regions shapes her “mosaic” national picture. Yet her depiction of the regional reactions to and participation in slavery suggests that regional distinctions have developed out of contact with the Caribbean, and thus she perceives the nation to be composed of lingering exchanges that confound the geographic, historical, or moral boundaries that she upholds in the end. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is the first of Stowe’s novels to in which we see how the movement between the U.S. and the Caribbean challenges her notion of an exceptional nation. Through Stowe’s awkward engagement of these regional encounters, we see a slippage in her portrait of Americanness; while attempting to contain U.S. origins, she simultaneously rehistoricizes it around the Caribbean. The creolization of American space was undeniable, and Stowe ultimately chooses to purge the nation of such cultural exchanges by the end of each text. A novel for a northern readership, an appeal to New England’s morality, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* tries to imagine a nation united by disconnecting it from the rest of the Americas. Stowe considers the Caribbean again in her subsequent fiction, and there too is an uneasy commentary on the modern nation and its origins.

**Cuban Mothers and American Origins: The Pearl of Orr’s Island**

In *The Pearl of Orr’s Island*, published in 1862, Stowe looks South again, this time to paint a picture of America’s past. She reaches back to the late eighteenth and
early nineteenth centuries to tell the story of a doomed relationship between Moses and Mara, two childhood friends, who live on a small New England island. After working on novels that engaged in contemporary debate and were set within the current political climate, Stowe appears to have retreated. She began her “Maine novel” perhaps to portray a different America, a reaction against the very political projects she had completed. It is interesting, then, that *Pearl* is an historical novel, an attempt on Stowe’s part to extol the virtues of a simpler time. My reading of *Pearl* emerges against the idea that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* marks Stowe’s early enactment of a national history; *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* thinks through present ideological, political, and sectional rifts to compel readers toward what Stowe envisioned as the nation’s moral foundation—one that she arrives at by looking to the Caribbean for its antithesis. *Pearl* does the same, but is much less sectional.23 As it moves closer to the regionalism that Pryse identifies, Stowe’s portrait of the New England region as the bastion of the U.S. nation’s historical narrative is authenticated by what distinctions she can develop between it and the greater Caribbean. In other words, this novel, even more than *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, proves that U.S. regionalism orbits the Caribbean, its circling preoccupation reveals that the U.S. imagination was uneasy about what divisions actually existed between foreign and native spaces.

23 Here, I am thinking through James M. Cox, whose work on Stowe articulates how late-nineteenth century U.S. nationalism transformed sectionalism into regionalism. He argues that Stowe’s work makes this evident through her use of Puritanism in *Pearl* as a way to “impose a nostalgic historical frame on the region” (465). Cox argues that this historical frame suggests that Stowe saw, even before the Civil War, that New England was “a region rather than a section” and with this clarification he defines region: a “geographic space with a cultural history and an integrity, yet without the possibility of nationality, a land possessing a cultural past without a political future” (465). For Cox, this shift may be fascinating for historians, but it further problematizes any reading of Stowe’s artistry. Regionalism, by Cox’s assessment, “reduce[s]” New England to “religious history” and a staging ground for “sentimental plots”—all of which must be purged by the artistry of later local colorists (465).
*Pearl* is set at the turn of the nineteenth century, during which time Moses and Mara grow up and eventually fall in love. Before their romance can blossom, however, Moses—who is an unruly youth—must be cured of his wild ways. Stowe’s solution is that Moses must contend with his unknown origins before he is worthy of Mara’s affection. These origins are thrown into stark relief by their tutor, Mr. Sewall, who reveals that he was in love with Moses’ mother, Dolores, when he worked as her tutor years earlier. Dolores’ family moved into the U.S. South from the Spanish West Indies; despite Sewall’s intention to marry the girl, Dolores’ father marries her off to a wealthy Cuban landowner. Dolores eventually leaves Cuba following a slave revolt, only to be shipwrecked off the coast of Orr’s Island. She dies, but Moses survives. This Caribbean thread to *Pearl*’s plot offers us substantial insight into how crucial that space was to the burgeoning regional imagination. It also illustrates with more complexity the regional facets to Stowe’s historicism. The novel’s narrative threads straddle two centuries—Sewell’s time in Florida (late-eighteenth century) and Mara’s story in Maine (early-nineteenth century). I would like to recategorize the novel’s historical geographies by focusing on Stowe’s gaze South. She utilizes—once again—the Caribbean as backdrop against which to paint scenes of domestic (hence, national) harmony.

Critics have located this novel within the realm of “local color movement,” a “pioneering” text that anticipates “the future of literary history” (Cox 464), and one with “significant regionalist elements” (Fetterley and Pryse 111) that provides “early prototypes” of regionalist figures (31). They have addressed her pivotal role in American literary history as one who began the shift from national narrative to imaginative narrative (Arac 16). However, by positioning Stowe at the intersection of the multiple
geographic borders that the text traverses, one can see how inextricable the Caribbean is to her vision. She locates the origins of Orr’s Island in the Caribbean, yet she ultimately uses Cuba to bolster the moral superiority of an American legacy that must be divorced from West Indian contact.

In this novel, Stowe continues her interest in origins which haunt or elude. I argue, however, that *Pearl* offers a more concrete solution—in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* the characters struggle to purge themselves of ghostly separations from their families, separations exacerbated by contact with the West Indies. In *Pearl*, Stowe evolves this theme further by manipulating that contact through a series of mothering metaphors. The novel opens with two shipwrecks, both of which separate the primary characters from their mothers. The first shipwreck kills Mara’s father, and Mara’s mother dies of grief and shock shortly after giving birth. Mara is forever marred because of this tragedy. For example, according to Roxy and Ruey, a seven month’s baby orphan will be haunted by her mother and “homesick to go back where” she came from. As Roxy says: “Some say it’s the mothers longin’ after ‘em makes ‘em so, and some say it’s them longin’ after their mothers” (29). This mark by a ghostly mother for whom Mara will always search becomes the first reference to a character’s haunted origins. The second shipwreck brings the second mother-haunting. Here, the ship carrying Moses and his mother is destroyed. I find it interesting that while this wreck produces the text’s second orphan—young Moses is rescued from the arms of his dead mother—Moses is never haunted by his own lost mother. Rather, Mara is haunted by her. She dreams of Moses’ mother, a “pale” woman with “serious dark eyes,” who “laid her hand on [Mara’s] head as if in blessing, and then put the boy’s hand in hers” (50), thus marking Mara as the boy’s new
caregiver. The dream-gesture ensures that Mara remains forever indebted to Moses’ mother for the care of her son. Indeed, Mara mentions throughout the text a constant awareness of this woman’s mark on her. This intensifies throughout the novel to ultimately suggest that while perhaps tinged by the loss of her (New England) mother, Mara is haunted more by this other mother, this unknown specter from Cuba. For example, Stowe replaces Moses’ mother, Delores, with Mara because she is the one who can protect Moses against amorality. His Caribbean origins, as Sewall explains later when he reveals Moses’ lineage, would have perverted him; he is thus saved (Sewall tells him: “your value as a human being would have been unmeasurably less” had Moses grown up knowing he was “heir to wealth and pleasure” [267]) upon arriving in New England. Indeed, Sewall’s narrative intends to persuade Moses “of his good fortune in having been saved from so corrupt and corrupting an inheritance” (Fetterley 113). His narrative thus reframes the shipwreck into a fortuitous act of providence that purges the West Indian mother and replaces her with the New England Mara.

Judith Fetterley’s work on *Pearl* suggests that the relationship between Mara and Moses is certainly one whereby each must be saved (for her, from the strictures of romance), and she argues that the story is Stowe’s critique of the potential offered to women through traditional education and marriage. Fetterley argues that Stowe “saw herself as telling the ‘truth’ about ‘real life,’ and that truth had to do with her perception of the danger to both women and men of romance” (112). Whatever limitations Stowe encountered in imagining potential out of women’s lives, we see further compelling evidence of Stowe’s larger limitation in imagining a Caribbean-U.S. intimacy, as symbolized by the romance between Sewall and Delores. That is, if the novel is
concerned with a nostalgic history, a return to New England origins (and thus, in Stowe’s vision, the United States), then the novel’s central “romance” is not between Mara and Moses, but is actually Stowe’s courting of U.S. history to address the connections forged between U.S. (Sewall) and Caribbean (Delores) regions around slavery. Sewall attempts to “save” Delores, but she is lost. By silencing this information until the second half of the novel, and by orphaning her two main characters, Stowe creates a Caribbean ghost whose haunting presence begs questions about the origins of New England. Indeed, through these shipwrecks, Stowe embeds the specter of slavery, colonization, and imperialism within Orr’s Island history. As she imagines this Caribbean presence, she has to reaffirm the moral superiority of that which Stowe fears may be truly lost—not the Caribbean mother, but a U.S. defined by its Puritan heritage. In so doing, Stowe’s novel furthers a vision of exceptional America, a nation whose imagined borders are complicated by a dark and foreign Southern presence.

I argue that these romances and plot devices to resolve missing origins mirror Stowe’s desire for a national return to its Puritan legacy to counteract the demoralizing fragmentation she observes within the present. \(^{24}\) We see this in two distinct textual emphases. First, there exists a pervasive nostalgia within the novel for a time now past, and Stowe’s characters frequently extol the virtue of the nation’s childhood days. For example, the narrator discusses the difference between modern times and the time of Orr’s Island by arguing that “these days” the Bible isn’t considered inspired. However,

\(^{24}\) Cox argues that Stowe’s 1834 “Uncle Lot” sketch marks the writer’s early interest in New England characters who might lend a “realism” to her stories and act as an “antidote to the exotic ‘romance’ which could have drawn her from her simple and sturdy native land to foreign climes” (452). I read Sewall through a similar lens, but look to the ways that her notion of romance and the foreign are not extrinsic to her imagination—as Cox suggests—but rather inextricable from the landscape of her native land, as she imagined it.
the narrator notes that the island is distinct from the rest of the country because there
inhabitants will never replace the Bible with the Koran, Shakespeare, or Homer (43). She
thus identifies New England as a cultural center during the eighteenth century and clearly
argues for the superior merit of such time. Such references to contemporary times are
 tinged with sadness at the passing of what has been lost as modernity approaches, and
this is reflected in the second half of the text. As Moses and Mara grow older, Stowe
writes that in Maine a more “desirable state of society never existed” and this space is in
stark contrast to “our modern times” (122). As Andy Doolen notes, throughout the
antebellum period, “the geography of greater New England had been cast as the sacred
historic origin of the American Republic” (158). This is indeed true for Stowe, whose
narration suggests that modern influence threatens to alter this way of life—the
republican ideals of a sacred nation—and she encapsulates this threat within dual
specters of the larger U.S. nation and the Caribbean.

Secondly, note that Sewall, the character with the most extensive connection to
the Caribbean, is defined by his adherence to Puritan garb and solemnity: he “preserved
the costume of a former generation” and maintained “a sufficient degree of the formality
of olden times to give certain quaintness to all he said and did” (88). It is Sewall and his
quaint, old-fashioned ways whom Stowe entrusts with narrating the connection between
the “primitive” New England and “savage” Caribbean regions in the text. Other critics
have made similar observations in their readings of Stowe. For example, Sacvan
Bercovitch argues that Stowe’s vision of Americanness depended on her ability to
imaginatively recuperate U.S. history to fulfill mythic standards set by early Puritan
writers like Cotton Mather. He notes that Stowe’s accounts of national history often
viewed America as a “federal identity not merely associated with the work of redemption, but intrinsic to the unfolding pattern of types and antitypes, itself a prophecy to be fulfilled” (89). If we follow Bercovitch’s theory, we can further read Sewall (and other characters in the text who too are marked with Puritan signifiers) as a character through whom Stowe identifies an early historical continuum that inflects the lives of the more “modern” characters. For example, Dorothy Baker argues that Cotton Mather’s influence on Stowe is evident in her use of historical detail: “[Mather’s] interpretation of historical events is determined by his attempt to understand singular events as part of the continuing history of God’s people. [. . .]. Likewise, in Stowe’s novel, the history of the people of Orr’s Island takes shape only as it is directed toward the story of their salvation” (75). Baker’s argument suggests that Stowe’s novels perpetuated an American literary tradition that sought to ‘save’ the nation through historical narratives that reinforced Anglo-American’s destiny of supremacy in the Western hemisphere. She argues that Bercovitch finds within Stowe an expression of “sacred origins and the future of American society” indebted to Mather’s “Christian mythopoetic interpretation of New England history” (70). Certainly, then, the anachronistic minister with a hidden past who can reveal Moses’ origins in order to save his future (he educates Moses and prepares him for adulthood) speaks to Stowe’s investment in a negotiating a bond that inscribes the mythic past onto the progressive future, ‘saving’ the nation by invoking this past.

To better understand how Stowe interprets historical events to detail the “salvation” of the characters and how such salvation is unsettled by the Caribbean, I read first those moments in the text where hemispheric regional encounters occur. The impetus behind all transnational movement between the Cuba and the Puritan-esque
space of Orr’s Island is the ubiquitous figure of the ship. It is the ships that leave the
shore strewn with bodies and articles that haunt the island, ships that promise violence,
wealth, adventure, and separation. Ships also connect the island to the West Indies and
other foreign places, and islanders imagine these places as romantic, exotic, and rich:
ships “touch the regions of the unknown and the imaginative; they seem to us full of the
odors of quaint, strange, foreign shores, where life, we fondly dream, moves in brighter
currents than the muddy, tranquil tides of every day” (294). They invent the Caribbean—it
becomes an enchanting space upon which to project the most fanciful daydreams.

However, as Stowe’s novels reveal, for the New Englander the Caribbean was also
threatening—the potential offered was ultimately corrupting, as evidenced in her
depictions of the American South infected by its cultural and spatial proximity to the
Caribbean. According to John Lowe, the Caribbean “has always been seen singing a
siren song, and it has taken many registers” (55). This metaphor of the ship traversing
enticing borders and encountering impending danger is well-suited to Stowe’s narrative
about the shipping industry, which sustains this small island and keeps the space in
contact with national and international influence.

Through a series of federal laws, the shipping industry becomes severely limited
and this creates unrest on Orr’s Island, unrest that affects Moses most prominently. The
conflict emerges as merchants engage in illegal responses to Jefferson’s Embargo, which
“stopped at once the whole trade of New England, and condemned her thousand ships to
rot at the wharves, and caused the ruin of thousands of families” (194). The Embargo
“put an absolute stop to a very successful and profitable American activity” (Phillips
466), when, on December 29, 1807, Jefferson’s act went into effect. In essence, the act
decreed that “no vessel could leave a United States port for a foreign port, and that no vessel could sail in the coastwide trade unless it gave bonds of double the value of the vessel and its cargo to reland its cargo in some port of the United States” (Phillips 468). The Embargo, according to Phillips, was intended to counter “provoking” attitudes against the U.S. by French and British ships in the West Indies, and was designed to punish those nations for their aggressive actions that were damaging to American commerce. The Embargo crippled importation, led to food scarcity, loss of work, and ceded U.S.’s “most profitable trade route” to the West Indies to the British (472). Stowe suggests that the “weak and unworthy legislation” (194) demoralizes the purity of the once idyllic region (and by extension the nation itself) by creating within that region hiding places for the “brisk business” of piracy. And this moral degeneracy has its dual origins: weak U.S. laws make alternatives necessary and the achievement of such alternatives is possible through the proximity of the Caribbean. Stowe argues that in resistance to the law, “vessels were constantly fitted out which ran upon trading voyages to the West Indies” (194) whereby they could profit from illegal trade. Stowe suggests that too heavy a federal presence makes possible necessary regional encounters not circumscribed by legal boundaries, and as in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the Caribbean is a space where such moral or legal codes are easily unmoored. More so, the Caribbean is a place which, when engaged, could infiltrate and make vulnerable the moral fabric of the U.S. nation.

For example, Moses’ rebellion at sixteen leads him into a dangerous friendship with a group of Embargo evaders, smugglers who frequent the West Indies and whose dastardly plan involves a West Indian voyage of pillaging financed with Mr. Pennel’s
money (which Moses would have to steal). Mara’s terror at overhearing these plans is for Moses’ very soul, and she feels she must save him from certain spiritual ruin should he continue to fraternize with such men. Stowe imagines the practice of smuggling in response to the Embargo as “demoralizing” not just to the community, but also to the very individual lives and souls of every inhabitant on the island. Indeed, Pennel is targeted because of his moral solidity, not his money: he was “made of a kind of straight-grained, uncompromising oaken timber such as built the Mayflower of old” (195), and as such felt it his duty to help the government catch smugglers. In the space of this tiny battle being fought for Moses’ salvation, Stowe pits the formidable Puritan past—the Mayflower’s architecture embodied within the staunch Pennel—against the encroaching future where U.S. regions are susceptible to West Indian practices. That is, Stowe imagines the space of the West Indies as the origins for all that could dismantle the proud heritage of the nation.

Stowe’s interpretation, then, of the embargo and piracy serve to underscore the challenge the Caribbean presented to the region’s moral and legal boundaries, yet it also provides an opportunity for the characters to do the right thing—to either succumb to potential ruin or escape. The conundrum Moses faces here is mirrored in the subsequent unfolding of further historical detail through Sewall’s own narrative. He too encounters the potential of the Caribbean, and faces his own choice of possible happiness, ruin, or escape. As we see, Stowe makes clear that his choice to escape (although unwilling at the time) is the right one. Stowe’s depiction of the Caribbean crystallizes during Sewall’s tale about his experiences as a tutor to a wealthy family from the Spanish West Indies who immigrated to Florida. Sewall’s story of the West Indian family unravels the
mystery of Moses’ parentage and the origins of the wrecked ship which brought him to
the island, yet it ultimately asks Moses to reframe his understanding of his origins
through the lens of this same moral distrust of aligning oneself with the other American
regions.

Stowe’s vision of the Caribbean family stands in stark contrast to the proper
family that lives on the island. The Mendoza family was “savage and untaught and
passionate” as a result of their lifestyle (252). According to Sewall, such savagery is bred
within “isolated plantation life” so common in the West Indies and American South,
which he determines is the result of the family’s close contact with their slaves. The
“savage element” of their nature is common in these regions because “[i]n the ill-
regulated families in that region, the care of the children is from the first in the hands of
half-barbarized negroes, whose power of moulding and assimilating childish minds is
peculiar” (251). The intimacy between slaves and the family shocks him. He
condemned the indulgence that results from the peculiar institution which spoils both
slave and owner and perverts the domestic scene. Indeed, his observations contrast what
is tolerated within the West Indian family with the New England family. Idealized as the
epitome of domestic success, the New England way of life treasures “simplicity and
order” (250) and a “command of temper which is the common attribute of well-trained
persons in the Northern states” (252). As we saw in Uncle Tom’s Cabin Stowe imagines
the Caribbean as a source of domestic upheaval, as one which threatens to destabilize the
order of national domestic space.

Indeed, the attempt to begin a new family legacy within the Caribbean through
Dolores’ marriage proves fatal. The romance between Sewall and Delores ends abruptly,
and Sewall must escape the South and leave Delores in the hands of her father and future husband. Not only does Sewall’s escape hint at the impossibility of union between the savage South and moral North, it also abandons Delores to a fate further embedded within Stowe’s Caribbean. Stowe prevents the establishment of domestic peace within Cuba, suggesting that, to her, island domesticity is so perverse as a result of slavery that she cannot imagine a successful family there. Therefore, after Dolores is married to a man with a “splendid estate in Cuba” (258), she and her family find themselves in the midst of a violent slave insurrection on the island. Their plantation is burned and they narrowly escape. They sail from the Caribbean for Boston, but are shipwrecked en route and Moses is the only survivor. The origins of his family, bound up with “savage” Caribbean traditions, are recovered, if only to provide him the knowledge that he stands to inherit a large fortune. As with Madame de Thoux’s fortune, Stowe implies that the only possible way for West Indian influence to persist within the U.S. is through the financial benefits of plantation life. He earns a fortune, but never reflects fully on his mother’s sacrifices. This is perhaps best evidenced in his reaction to hearing Sewall’s story, where he observes after learning of his Cuban-colonial ancestry that he feels like a “leaf torn from a romance, and blown strangely into the hollow of those rocks” (268). By reading himself as product of a “romance,” Moses returns his mother’s story to one appropriated by the New Englanders who too view the Caribbean as one of those “quaint, strange, foreign” places. As a product then of the islanders’ imagination, the Caribbean is a romance that he too reads as “strange,” romantic perhaps but ill-fitting within the U.S.
Stowe attempts to wrap up the Cuban thread and the mother-figure by the end of the text by mediating the trauma of the shipwreck, the savagery of the family, and the infiltration of New England shores with a rather didactic comment on the propriety of American values. The Caribbean as a threat to (or at the very least incompatible with) national space is demonstrated though Moses’ only proper choice for wife in the end, Sally. While Mara is deemed Moses’ moral protector, it is Sally who is meant to be his domestic partner. However, Sally is also an example of what Dolores could have been, a Dolores raised properly. Stowe makes clear connections between the two women by describing Sally repeatedly as so dark-completed that she appeared Spanish: she was the handsomest girl on the island due to her “face with a rich Spanish complexion” (184) and her “Spanish eyes” (286). This becomes an echo of Delores, who is also “beautiful; and more than that, there was something in her Spanish nature at once so warm and simple” (255). Stowe later describes Sally in similar terms, noting that the sight of Sally “cheered and warmed one” (184). Indeed, Stowe implies that a Spanish heritage renders both of these women attractive, warm, and faithful. Sally becomes Stowe’s comment on the potential of a successful assimilation of foreign characteristics and dark features into the U.S. if not perverted by contact with the Caribbean. As we see, such extensive contact with the West Indies literally causes Delores’ death. Yet, through Sally, Stowe imagines the successful (moral) product of European and U.S. interaction firmly within proper boundaries of Spain or the United States, no Caribbean interlopers. Sally can set up and maintain proper domestic space, something Delores could not do given her spoiled and savage upbringing. Thus, Stowe reappropriates Delores through Sally, making “right” all the damage done in the Caribbean. Moses’ mother is buried and the Cuban lineage,
except the wealth it affords him, is forever lost to Moses. His wife becomes the “better” version of foreign influence, properly trained and contained. Thus, Sewall’s escape from a Caribbean romance, as well as Delores’ escape from Cuba, while deadly to her, is necessary for Stowe to mediate the ubiquity and necessity of transnational exchange on the island while reinforcing a nation destined to fulfill its Puritan origins.

**No Less Foreign: Martin Delany’s Regional Historiography**

Stowe imagines that her regional literature will, as James Cox writes, “be the history” (456) that will restore her vision of exceptional origins; in that sense, she imagines a regional history that can secure the nation against the foreign, which enters by way of Caribbean trade and reminds Stowe that the realities of slavery, while incommensurate with her ideals, persist. Delany is equally invested in seeing his literature become the history that will alter the nation’s current course. However, he is more interested than Stowe in limning regional complexities to arrive at possible alternative non-national historiographic frameworks that might be available to Africans throughout the Americas. For both writers, the Caribbean is a complication to national historiography. Its racial dimensions during the mid-nineteenth century were similar to those of the U.S. South, and its proximity through geography and trade offered each space to imagine regional exchanges that did not depend solely on imperialism and oppression. However, as Loughran notes, Stowe imagines the nation as a “spatial problem—a series of distinct places whose relations have become overly entwined and whose boundaries have collapsed” (439). Thus, she purges all traces of those routes that bring the Caribbean and its unsavory connections to slavery into the region so as to imagine that system as having no claims on her space of sacred national origin. Delany’s
novel traverses Caribbean terrain to assert that slavery is intrinsic to national origins, a move that counters Stowe and brings censure to the myths that her novels buffer.\textsuperscript{25}

Delany’s *Blake; or the Huts of America* tells the tale of a “pure” black (16) Cuban man who is enslaved in the United States, escapes to Canada, frees his Caribbean-enslaved wife, relocates to Cuba, and travels to Africa on a slave-ship before returning to Cuba to set in motion a massive slave rebellion that would “free” Cuba from Spanish and American interests and create an independent black nation. His text appeared serially beginning in 1859, but the book form of his work did not appear until the publication of Floyd J. Miller’s 1970 edition. Delany’s novel was engaged in similar questions about the burgeoning nationalism present in the U.S. consciousness. For a free black man, the question of nation was particularly pertinent and many credit Delany as the father of black nationalism. Therefore, while the text may have been ghosted out of the canon due to its unfinished ending, its overtly political goals, or artistically awkward form, it has emerged as essential to American literary history and crucial to any understanding of imaginative conceptions of the nation. While both writers place the U.S. region in a transnational web of relations, they differ on what must come of these associations if the nation is to evolve. Unlike Stowe’s sense that the region must reject or domestic the transnational to make room for the new national narrative, Delany’s fiction proposes that the transnational is endemic to and a requirement of any future American nation.

Critics agree that *Blake* was Delany’s response to Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; he was attempting to “writ[e] the antithesis to Mrs. Stowe’s picture of a mulatto hero (Delany preferring a black protagonist), slave docility, Christian endurance and Liberia as

\textsuperscript{25} Here, I am thinking through Doolen, who writes that Delany’s transatlantic chapters in particular work “against the common assumption that slavery in the United States was a contradiction, somehow outside the conception of American modernity and its republican political structures” (167).
the ultimate destination of the successful fugitive slave. [. . .]. Delany resented Mrs. Stowe’s prominence as an interpreter of the Afro-American slave experience to both white and blacks” (Miller xx).26 His novel takes as its starting point one similar to Stowe; Blake introduces readers to a familiar situation—a mulatta slave woman is in danger of being sold by “kind” masters and her husband must confront the realities of their slave existence. Blake too engages questions regarding slave law, from the Fugitive Slave Act to Dred Scott. Through his references to contemporary political maneuvers, his text talks back to Stowe, and the intertextuality reveals his revision of her presentation of the United States (Gilroy 27). Delany’s United States and Caribbean are imagined quite differently than Stowe’s. Delany locates the domestic scenes of this novel firmly within the Caribbean, and in so doing recuperates its portrait in Stowe’s work—even while reaffirming what her characters feared. That place represented savagery to Stowe, and the threat of insurrection permeates her novels. Blake counters her accusation of savagery with a civil, organized, and philosophical foundation to the massive slave uprising. The uprising, a fear for all white, land-owning citizens, strikes fear—as Stowe’s novels evidence—yet for Delany this is anything but savage. Rather, it is a carefully constructed, complexly organized, and patriotically dispatched reaction to centuries of degradation. Such an uprising, Delany imagines, is possible only through the leadership of a black Caribbean man who has surpassed the geographic and legal boundaries of the Americas and the Middle Passage.

26 For an overview of Delany’s critique of Stowe (and of Frederick Douglass, whom Delany called Stowe’s “attorney”), see Yarborough (70-72).
Delany’s novel has been treated by many critics as a transnational paradigm. I agree with Katy Chiles, who argues that the novel’s value lies not in its circumvention of nation-forms, but rather as an investigation into the mechanisms of nationalism. Such a move shifts our sense of the transnational as a process that might overturn nationalism to one that encourages a fuller vision of the nation’s operative power through deep historicism, geographic flexibility, and cultural movement. Chiles writes: “Rather than cleanly supplanting a national perspective with a transnational one, Delany presents a nation-state in which local, regional, national, and transnational figurations overlap and permeate each other” (325). Indeed, Chiles’ work on how Delany’s local and hemispheric perspectives enhance our sense of the nation-state informs much of my own readings. However, I would like to focus this discussion of *Blake* around his use of the region to develop a historical form that could challenge Stowe’s vision. Unlike *Pearl*, which holds sacred a mythic Puritan legacy, *Blake* challenges the possibility of ever capturing a true or real history. As Andy Doolen has argued, nineteenth-century American history was upheld by a framework of white supremacist ideology that compromised any sense of realism (154). Delany’s text concurs; he represents the nation’s history as little more than a narrative of white anxiety. The first part of Blake’s journey is entirely regional—not national or hemispheric—and this helps us to see a few common threads emerge that together render a portrait of the U.S. that would have made Stowe quite anxious: a Caribbean presence doesn’t haunt the region, but U.S. regions are quantifiably Caribbean in origin.

27 For early readings, see Eric Sundquist and Paul Gilroy.
Like Stowe, Delany worked closely with American history. According to Doolen, the novel’s historiographic work is important because it introduces the ideological, ontological, and discursive corruptions wrought by slavery since the slaves in Blake “infiltrate” and “exert control” in ways that might demonstrate the fundamentally “unreliable facts of American life” (156). Other critics have also argued that Delany sought to intervene in contemporary political dialogue. The novel opens in 1852, “on one of those exciting occasions during a contest for the presidency of the United States” (3). Referencing Franklin Pierce’s impending election, Delany contextualizes the novel through Pierce’s vehement “commitment to the acquisition of Cuba as a slave state” (Clymer 711) and makes evident the U.S. government’s expansionist inclinations through participation in the illegal slave trade which strengthened those forces “trying to bring Cuba into America’s orbit as part of a U.S. slave empire” (712). His text also references the Ostend Manifesto, a secret document written in 1854 by U.S. diplomats at Ostend, Belgium, describing a plan to acquire Cuba from Spain (Sundquist “Slavery” 22).

These multiple references to the Caribbean, including discussion of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), the Dred Scott decision (1857), and the character of Plácido, alive in the text yet executed in 1844, are all squeezed into the novel’s brief timeline. As Miller notes, the text compresses into a short period of time debates between Southern annexationists, Cuban exiles, and the colonial government which actually took place over

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28 Unlike Stowe, who invoked U.S. history to reaffirm entrenched founding narratives, Delany manipulates historical detail to offer a new perspective on the modern nation divorced from the exclusionary model in other national narratives. For example, Timothy Powell makes the following observation about the function of history in Blake: he argues that Delany’s novel reinvents “the colonial order of chronology” evidenced by legal manipulations by offering a new temporality (multidimensional time as opposed to linearity) “in that his protagonist moves in and out of so many different cultural dimensions that, as one character tells Blake, ‘it makes no difference when, nor where you are . . . as the [revolutionary] scheme is adopted to all times and places’ (p.41)” (362). As Powell makes clear, Delany’s historical referents place the rebellion outside nationalism’s teleological frame.
a decade (xxiii). This manipulation allows Delany to write a counterhistory to what was being prescribed by legal and political discourse while he was writing. As Gregg Crane notes, slave legislation, such as Judge Taney’s *Dred Scott* decision, depended on its own manipulative reading of the Constitution to create an “historical fable of cultural consensus and constitutional intent” whereby African Americans were always disenfranchised (533). Such legislation established the “historical fable” of the dehumanization of Africans in the U.S., and Delany’s text attempts to retell a history that could challenge legal doctrines. Chiles notes that one of the most remarkable things to be culled from Delany’s historical manipulations is that “the text imagines a black community that exists simultaneously throughout time, bringing together people from the past (Plácido) with those who exist in the 1853 present (Henry Blake) and those in the future (both the 1857 *Dred Scott* litigants and the newspaper’s own readers)” (335).

Using anachronism, Delany invokes an entire political period in American history in which Cuba took center stage.

The text historicizes through, not around, the system of plantation slavery from the very first chapter; for example, a transnational figure like Blake appropriates the potential of that system’s circulation of goods and services throughout the Americas to facilitate his travels and to subvert oppression. Delany reveals the porous nature of regional boundaries to the benefit of the slaves, presented as a series of shape-shifting tropes that repeat throughout the novel. Indeed, through Blake’s claims of the supremacy of people of color in the Americas and his intent through revolt to claim that space,

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29 See Clymer and Crane for more extensive discussions of how Delany’s novel interrogates the validity of slave law within the Americas. Crane notes, for example, that in addition to work by writers such as Stowe and Douglass, “Blake” powerfully exemplifies a type of literary intervention in American jurisprudence strikingly common in nineteenth-century fiction addressing race” (527).
Delany advocates the shifting of the land itself through the “ability to appropriate Spanish and American property and transform [Cuba] into a new black nation” (Clymer 716). This transformation, while never actualized in the narrative, is prefigured by other transformations that challenge the reader’s interpretations as national meaning is manipulated, just as the sequence of historical events is manipulated. Certainly, the text argues that slave laws, which governed the fate of these regions, blurred geographic and political boundaries, and Delany evidences this through a series of transformations that occlude clear national referents. Blake’s wife Maggie is a prime example of this. She is unrecognizable to her husband when he meets her in Cuba; her time there has transformed her into Lotty, the tormented Cuban slave girl, and neither husband nor wife recognizes the other. Once her true identity is revealed, as well as her true parentage (she is the daughter of the lecherous Colonel Franks), the reader is left with the lingering portrait of her that includes some new combination of Cuban-Anglo-African origins. This character, as do others in the text, functions as a palimpsest; they reveal layers of ancestry or alliances buried underneath what appears to be at first simple identifying rubrics: black, white; north, south; U.S., Caribbean.

For this reason, I argue that Delany isn’t just responding to Uncle Tom’s Cabin. He is using geography to structure his thinking about the nation in innovative ways. His text looks to the region to reinsert the foreign in the American imaginary. For example, the first part of the book focuses on Blake’s travels to various slave-holding states to drum up support and teach slaves to “[s]tand still and see the salvation” (38). During this time, we see little of unified national culture. In fact, the novel begins by illustrating that the nation remains an elusive and contentious concept. When Mrs. Ballard, wife of an
eminent Northern judge, argues the North will be “true to the country,” Colonel Franks suggests that “[w]hat you consider true, may be false—that is, it might be true to you, and false to us” (4). Here, sectionalism proves more certain than nationalism, since the ability to “be true” is relative to one’s sectional, not national, affiliation (even as Mrs. Ballard concedes that the North recognizes how crucial the South’s slave economy is to the country’s commercial interests). In addition, while Judge Ballard later admits that he a northerner, we know that he has an estate in Cuba and that his rulings prove him to be a southern sympathizer (59-60). Here, Delany uses the Northern figures to illustrate what little difference exists at a national level. This passage reminds readers that slavery unites, not divides, the nation-states.

Indeed, individual states are governed by clear laws and customs regarding slavery that distinguish them from other states. In this way, the states retain more regulatory force than the nation. Each early chapter explores Henry’s journey to various states, and these chapters become almost redundant in their form. Henry arrives, motivates the slaves who almost always have some form of state-wide communication system, and then narrowly escapes capture before departing. While this repetitiveness may be part of the imaginative failure critics charge of Delany, if we consider more closely what distinguishes these states, it becomes clear that each region in inflected with Caribbean traces. For example, Ralph Jordan, the head of a slave patrol party in Arkansas, has a flask of Jamaican rum and hunts the slaves with Cuban dogs (90-93). On another plantation in Louisiana, Blake meets a mulatto planter from the “isle of Guadaloupe” (70). In this way, northern and southern regions are not distinct, but rather through their trade with the Caribbean are complicit in a U.S. nation that can be
determined only to the degree to which characters can(not) perceive difference from Cuba. What unites these diverse states is not some republican ideal or national destiny, but the extent to which the Caribbean haunts their local customs. The Caribbean traces are generally detrimental to slaves, often imported items and peoples who are controlling agents. We “see,” like his enlightened slaves, the Union’s transnational composition. And, the vision provokes one certainty: Cuba is no less foreign than Kentucky.

Furthermore, the text suggests that there exists a haunting symbiosis between the destiny of Cuba and the U.S., a strategy that counters the latter’s hegemonic claims to the hemisphere during their expansionist period. Claiming ownership of Cuba, as Blake does, suggests a proprietary relationship between the black characters and the island. Through the language of familial claim, Delany even argues that the Western Hemisphere is the “inheritance” due the colored race (287). Delany reasons that Africans and their descendents (along with Indians) are owed supremacy because they have been in the Americas long before the arrival of the Europeans. Who is foreign and who belongs is inverted then in Delany’s novel, and he opens up a counter-dialogue to U.S. debate on claiming land and people to build a nation. The U.S. nation is one of interlopers, claims Blake (287). Here the Caribbean becomes a “kind of twin, a shadow play, of the American South for masters and slaves alike” (Sundquist Wake 185).

Delany argued a similar point in an article for The North Star about Cuba, published April 27, 1849: “the iron-linked and yet unbroken chain of slavery,” he writes, “binds this foreign child in embryo to a most sympathizing mother” (“Annexation” 161). His image of the Caribbean island as unborn child to mother U.S. is striking. Delany and Sundquist use familial language to highlight the intimate relationship forged between the
U.S. and Cuba. The land as parentage (“I am the lost boy of Cuba”) and profit for his people becomes Delany’s focal point, and in so doing he counters the notion of Manifest Destiny. Blake’s concealment within the U.S. suggests that the U.S. remains the more haunted of the two regions, as the character is distilled into generations of slaves who have struggled to create a space for themselves within the framework of nation.

While much has already been parsed out regarding Blake’s unique historical work through readings of the scene between Henry and the conjurers in the Dismal Swamp, I would like to build on that conversation through a more focused examination of the history that Delany’s regional interest enacts. Here, I look to the New Orleans chapter, where Henry meets in a secret room with fifteen representatives from various plantations around the “great city of opulence” (101). Upon hearing Henry’s plan, one representative wants to start the rebellion immediately, but Henry cautions against rash action. The meeting breaks up when the “mischievous man” (105), who is growing louder and attracting more attention, is arrested. While the white citizens capture him, all the others slip away unnoticed. What follows is a telling portrait of the flawed and prejudicial processes at work in the production of historical narrative. “Intelligence” soon spreads that the white citizens have successfully stopped a rebellion. White inhabitants run about in the “open” streets lest they be slaughtered “secretly” in their homes. As they do so, the “editors, journalists reporters, and correspondents, all were busily on the alert, digesting such information as would form an item of news for the press, or a standing reminiscence for historical reference in the future” (107). Delany asserts that historical reference is flawed thanks to whites’ inability to imagine an intelligent and formulated plan among the slaves. Doolen makes a similar observation in his analysis of Captain-General

30 For more on the Dismal Swamp, see Doolen, in particular. See also Levine and Sundquist.
Alcora’s inability to “see” the revolution spreading in Cuba: his “racial pathologies prevent him from reading the signs of a growing revolution” (171). And thus, as Doolen says succinctly, “[w]hat the imperialists fail to see, they cannot record” (172).

The New Orleans chapter reveals the hysteria of white historiography; anxiety over their own supremacy blinds them to the actual events. Indeed, white American history becomes little more than a fictive portrait of misunderstood events. As Doolen terms it, the “fictiveness of imperial historical writing” (170) is precisely what Blake uncovers and then subverts. Delany is manipulating and reshaping what history exists and in the process rerouting that history through the back doors, the plantation huts, the invisible figures. This history positions the black community into its own historical accounting, one missed by the white characters but nonetheless shaping a community beyond the geographic and legal distinctions that Blake, our ghost, so seamlessly crosses.

Delany’s attention to geography as a structural device places him as one of a few early American fiction writers who was thinking through the region as an innovative and relevant rubric through which to intervene in historical knowledge. Like Doolen, then, my reading hopes to shed light on Blake’s literary value. Where Doolen finds traction in the text’s dynamic between narration and history, a strategy that enables Delany to maneuver around the “formulaic and political restrictions of abolitionist writing” (156), I find the book’s entry into regionalist fiction a testament to literature’s ability to illustrate how local incidents are manipulated in official records and to reinvigorate our historical sense. The fictional nature of his historicizing presents U.S. history as a reactive narrative of misinterpreted, misattributed incidents that is flawed because of profound racial anxiety.
In Stowe’s book, the regional distinctions regarding foreign and domestic reinforce a historical narrative by which the nation’s values are routed through a carefully sanitized New England. Delany, however, charges that the Caribbean is familiar, not foreign, to the nation’s history. If we return to the assumptions framing Benedict Anderson’s work—that historical narration, those stories constructed to facilitate the nation’s emergence from an immemorial past, is central to the nation’s sense of self, then Delany’s work finds fault with the entire historical process. As Doolen argues, Delany’s work identifies “history as an ominous solution to the problem of identity in the modern nation-state” (162) since his narrative underscores the fundamental racial bias of U.S. productions of historical knowledge. Thus, early regional fiction took to task the question of national history and this inaugural conversation between Delany and Stowe epitomizes the central division—to lend coherence to disparate states, was history a magical narrative or ominous solution? Delany and Stowe looked to the Caribbean for answers, since narrating Americanness during a period of sectional crisis required a careful negotiation between the local and the transnational, distinctions that were blurred by the global slave system.

The Power of Local Knowledge

Both novelists share a keen sense of what Loughran calls the “particularly disintegrative power of local knowledge” (27). Stowe’s struggle with nationalism (as an entity dependent on imperial, oppressive gestures) suggests that she was ambivalent about the category of region. On the one hand, thinking through the region might allow her the space to redeem the modern nation through a more empathetic discourse. On the other hand, her Caribbean imagination suggests that she was particularly sensitive to the
region’s “disintegrative power.” Pearl tries to resolve this by presenting an exceptional take on region, at times offering us a fantasy that values the sectional, small places as capable of returning nation to its destiny. Uncle Tom’s Cabin and The Pearl of Orr’s Island present the movement between regions in the Americas as a necessary economic byproduct of belonging to a large empire like the U.S.—imperialism necessitates such movement, and becomes infectious. Pearl, however, makes evident the contradictory stance she takes: the space also facilitates travel, oddities, wealth, exploration, and fantastic stories. Its imaginative potential, its romantic allure—as evidenced through the reading of The Tempest and the West Indian mermaid stories Kittridge tells (119)—is perhaps part of the romance that Stowe eventually critiques. Indeed, her portrayal of that space in both texts centers on fears of miscegenation, insurrection, piracy, and human traffic. It is an enticing space, yet dangerous and incompatible with life in the U.S. On the other hand, Delany’s intertextual intervention into Stowe’s work shows a transnational figure who is not wholly condemned nor romanticized. His interest lies in nationalism’s limitations, where the nation-state is little more than institutional obfuscation while the potential for transformation and subversion lies within the region. Both writers question its future given moral outrages, yet Stowe upholds an exceptionalism by imbuing the nation with a mythic history of Puritan founders; she uses the region to remind of the necessity of maintaining history as a sacred narrative. Delany argues that the limitless future lies beyond what the U.S. national framework can offer, and he proposes instead a hemispheric frame. His notion of history is shaped by a sense that regional differences contain flexible and slippery interpretations of history that allow for the possible transformation of a narrative dependent upon racial ideology. His
historiographic work uses the region to unsettle the entrenchment of racism in the U.S. historical process, where regional travels suggest that racial ideology is the force that congeals the Union into a recognizable shape.

These two writers offer a spectrum of evidence that the Caribbean was an integral component to the imaginative construction of the U.S. nation. Their representations suggest that the questions about race in this sectional period were fraught with implications over the foreign, the transnational, and the Caribbean to the extent that it paralyzed Stowe’s imaginative capacities and enlivened Delany’s vision of emancipation. More to the point, their writings are important because they use the Caribbean to think through a national history that they find limiting, underdeveloped, or paradoxical to their regional portraits. To that end, they engage in a discourse wherein the region looks South to alleviate anxieties about U.S. historical narrative, thus underscoring the degree to which the U.S. imagination was shaped by the transnational.
Chapter Two

“Always before the eyes”: Haiti’s Revisionary Haunting in Charles Chesnutt’s Paul Marchand, F.M.C.

[A]ny historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences.
   –Michel-Rolph Trouillot. Silencing the Past.

Nevertheless, the awful example of San Domingo, where the land, for its sins, had been drenched in blood, was always before the eyes of those just across the Gulf of Mexico who still fostered the institution of slavery.
   –Charles Chesnutt. Paul Marchand, F.M. C.

Paul Marchand, F.M.C., a historical novel written by Charles Chesnutt in 1921, is a relatively new addition to American letters, having been published first in 1998 by the University Press of Mississippi. It has since proven invaluable to scholars as they reconstruct a particularly bleak period of African American literary history. In the novel, the title character is a quadroon man living in 1820s New Orleans who discovers that he is the legitimate son of the wealthiest Creole in the region. The text concludes when he rescinds his place as a white American and moves to France. Scholars have argued that Paul Marchand’s concluding rejection of the U.S. as a home for its racially-complex characters is likely a pessimistic response to the nation’s deteriorating race relations, which had grown increasingly violent by 1921.31 I would like to suggest, however, that Chesnutt’s novel offers more than a glimpse into how literature responded to a grim moment in U.S. history. Studying how Chesnutt worked with historical texts reveals that he was in fact developing a literary framework through which to re-position U.S. race relations beyond the violence occurring within national borders. In fact, if we look more closely at Chesnutt’s formal revisions to the source materials from which he developed

31 See Wilson, who argues that the “national extent of racism” at the time would have “deeply shocked” the author and affected his composition of Paul Marchand (186).
his portrait of 1820s New Orleans, we find evidence that he was crafting the novel in such a way that it might intervene in the historical narrative. These interventions are significant because they provide scholars with a rubric for how we might move beyond analyses that highlight the recovery of lost histories and toward a new paradigm for treating history altogether, one where literature is best suited to the task of emplotting the lives of enraced Americans.

Chesnutt’s historical novel is grounded in material he gleaned from nineteenth-century local-color writers. The foreword tells readers that the writer has made “free reference” to local-colorists such as George Washington Cable and Grace King, whose depictions of colonial and early-national New Orleans helped to shape the field of local-color writing. Criticism of Marchand focuses on Chesnutt’s use of these outdated sources, and the novel has been categorized as a continuation of the tradition, one that scholars argue was anachronistic by the 1920s.\textsuperscript{32} For example, critic Matthew Wilson wonders if readers could have seen past Chesnutt’s use of the “old-fashioned conventions of local color to its bitter disillusionment,” both of which, he argues, are the result of Chesnutt’s position within an “intolerable” United States (198). While Arnold Rampersad reviews Marchand’s 1999 publication with gusto, he notes that Chesnutt’s “art was outmoded” because he “reached arthritically into the past of local-color writing for a too-shiny Louisiana tale of French Creoles, alabaster maidens, haunted octoroons, desperate duels, miraculous wills and letters, and the like” (33). Looking closely at the critical tendency to temper disappointment over the novel’s form with concessions for the

\textsuperscript{32} On the outdated nature of local color, see Dean McWilliams: “The vogue for this type of fiction, pioneered by Chesnutt’s friend George Washington Cable, had crested and receded in the late nineteenth century; it would not have seemed a promising genre to market-conscious publishers in the 1920s” (“Introduction” x).
period, I suggest that the charges against Chesnutt of anachronism and pessimism are the result of a strictly national conversation. For example, criticism of this period in literary history, termed by Chesnutt “post-Bellum, pre-Harlem,” often looks to the struggles occurring within national boundaries to contextualize a writer’s artistic and social vision—i.e., between North and South, between black and white U.S. Americans, between Old and New Negro.\textsuperscript{33} However, such criticism has yet to address the ways this novel’s historical landscape extends beyond the national. Indeed, Chesnutt’s New Orleans is mapped atop a series of temporal and spatial trajectories wherein the U.S. and Haiti intersect, overlap, and blur. Therefore, I propose that we extend the boundaries of the conversation to include the transnational, to keep Haiti “always before [our] eyes.” In so doing, we can better understand his regional form as more innovative than critical conversation has allowed.

Chesnutt’s use of local-color writing as literary history lends a regional specificity to his novel that complicates the nationally-focused criticism of the text. For this is more than a Louisiana tale. This is a novel expressly concerned with Haiti. The story unfolds against the backdrop of the Southern U.S.’s uneasiness about the recently successful Haitian Revolution, and its plot twists are generated by Haitian-identified characters who have made their way into Louisiana. As we see in the above quote from the novel, Chesnutt invokes San Domingo as a violent and blood-drenched space that looms before his New Orleans characters. This image is a common one in U.S. literature, where Haiti has long been represented through what J. Michael Dash calls “reductionist myths of

\textsuperscript{33} See McCaskill and Gebhard. Their text provides an overview of these readings and represents the most recent and revisionary readings of Chesnutt’s work during this period of literary history. The collection does not, though, treat Paul Marchand, nor does it address the effect that U.S.-Haitian relations might have had on national discourses of race.
Haiti’s strangeness” (*Haiti* 11). Central to these myths is the spectral and violent visage of the Revolution itself, an event that threatened white hegemony and that has persisted in the twentieth-century U.S. imagination as the epitome of “white America’s nightmare” (11). However, Chesnutt’s novel does more than reiterate this trope; he uses literature to wrestle with what representative value Haiti might have for African Americans beyond its reductive and entrenched “strangeness.”

Failure to see Haiti in terms other than nightmarish and peripheral has led critics to overlook its ubiquity in *Marchand*’s 1820s setting. But, they have also overlooked Haiti’s presence in the 1920s, during the novel’s development. While Chesnutt was writing *Marchand*, the nightmare of the Revolution had again moved to the forefront of the U.S. imagination. From 1915-1934, the U.S. was involved in a two-decade long militaristic seizure of Haiti, and Chesnutt produced *Marchand* during a particularly bloody juncture of the Occupation. At the time, Haitian insurgents, called Caco fighters, were waging a war of resistance against the U.S. The violence between the Marines and the Cacos had grown so pervasive that a senatorial inquiry was dispatched to assess the merit of the Occupation. 34 Scholars theorize that this violence, which was ultimately downplayed in the official review, was in part a response to the memory of the Revolution. 35 For example, Eiko Owada argues that the Caco revolts against the Marines would have “reminded Americans of slave revolts in the nineteenth century” and “recalled the Haitian Independence battles,” and that the subsequent massacre of

34 See Renda, 33.

35 See Langley, 101-102. Between 1920-1922, press in the U.S. regarding the Occupation was “[t]inged with a racist theme,” and the stories charged that the Marines in Haiti were largely white Southern men who “enjoyed torturing and even killing Haitians.” Despite the bad press, the senatorial inquiry concluded that the Occupation was a blunder that didn’t need to be terminated, only reorganized.
insurgents by the Marine Corps was simply a continuation of the nation’s suppression of any iteration of the eighteenth-century revolt (115, 116).

These details help to underscore my argument: the confluence of historical incidents regarding Haiti in the text and surrounding its composition has significant bearing on how this novel should be read. It should signal readers to shift away from a nationally-focused conversation, which fails to see how profoundly Haiti affects Chesnutt’s historical enterprise.36 I argue that when one reads with Haiti “always before the eyes,” Marchand emerges as neither pessimistic nor anachronistic, but rather as a revisionary evisceration of the histories of post-Revolution New Orleans. With this in mind, I propose that Marchand’s regional choices here have a two-fold function. First, they position the reader to review U.S. historiography as a narrative of manipulation that seeks to contain this echoing nightmare. Second, they construct a new historical space for the Revolution that is neither spectral nor nightmarish, but material and opportunistic.

Marchand begins with the supposition that history is a contentious and problematic narrative for the enraced American writer. For example, although Chesnutt’s foreword invites readers to see the details in the text as “historical incidents,” it simultaneously implies that such details are problematic by arguing that the “careful studies” produced by local-color writing have not accounted for the lives of people like Marchand: “If there was not a Paul Marchand case in New Orleans, there might well have

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36 In the 1920s, Chesnutt was concerned about the Occupation. The press was reporting an increase in violence between Haitian Caco insurgents and the U.S. Marines; the soldiers, ostensibly on a stabilizing mission, were accused of massacring the resistance fighters daily. Chesnutt had kept a close watch on the events since 1920. According to Chesnutt, he “kept in pretty close touch through the newspapers, principally the Nation, with conditions in Haiti.” In fact, between 1920-1922, while Chesnutt was working on Paul Marchand, the Nation published over thirty articles dealing with the Occupation (Chesnutt, Exemplary, 159). He eventually began drafting letters to lawmakers that called for the removal of troops. He argued that the U.S. administration’s “possession” of Haiti was “without right,” and urged the administration, if it was in fact interested in “orderly government,” to turn its attention away from Haiti and toward the lynchings in the U.S. South (Chesnutt, Exemplary, 166-167).
been” (Chesnutt 3). This pronouncement regarding the historical elusivity of his title character calls into question the accounts by Cable and King, suggesting that a “careful” history can never be known precisely because the lives of racial subjects were precluded from the historical record. Critics such as Rampersad and Wilson have overlooked the ways that Chesnutt’s local-color style moves beyond an outmoded reach into the past or repetition of a pastiche form, but rather signifies on it. He revises these local-color records by inserting Haiti into the “historical incidents,” where it functions to haunt the narrative and unsettle the reader. As a ghostly ancillary to the text’s “careful” sources, Haiti can also be read as a “might well have been”; like Marchand, Haiti represents historical incidents whose impacts have been deferred.

To convey this sense of deferral and potential, Chesnutt disturbs the fabric of these “careful studies” by rendering Haiti as a space inextricable from New Orleans. While local-color history treats the two spaces as distinct, Chesnutt imagines them as a singular region. This strategy enables him to construct a different historical space in which to isolate moments that might revise Haiti’s “strangeness” by inserting it into the familiar narrative of local color. Now, as Rampersad and other critics have observed, local color is problematic; it depicts New Orleans through fantastic, amusing, and outlandish conventions not suited to the work of representing the political and ideological struggles of an African American writer during the Jim Crow era. For example, Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse have argued that African American writers “would have found it difficult to adapt the conventions of local color to their purposes, given its

37 See McWilliams, who defines Chesnutt’s borrowing from the white literary tradition as signifying. He does not, however, make note of Chesnutt’s Haitian revisions, a critical change that alters the novel’s temporal map; where McWilliams focuses on the complexity of overlapping histories in Chesnutt’s novel, he limits those histories to events occurring within U.S. borders (“Introduction” xii-xiii).
reliance on racialist distinctions for its meaning (even the term ‘local color’ has a racialist
cast, suggesting that the ‘local’ against which the national defines itself is also the
‘colored’)’ (26). Locating within the local-color tradition a “mode of writing” that is
“potentially antiracist” would have been difficult, they posit (27).

However, critics have failed to see Haiti, and have thus failed to see Chesnutt’s
revisions, wherein he shifts from a local color to a regional perspective. Fetterley and
Pryse theorize that regionalism, a discourse appropriated by writers in the latter part of
the nineteenth century, was distinct from local color and might have provided Chesnutt
the space to explore questions of race.  Regionalism depicted the local in ways that
“complicate[d] and even destabiliz[ed] the concept of nation” (68), and was particularly
invested in “challeng[ing] turn-of-the-century U.S. imperialism” (29). Therefore, I seek
to shift prevailing critical discussion of the text’s outdated form by repositioning it within
a revisionary regionalist discourse. Such a shift toward a transnational regionalism
reveals that Chesnutt’s Marchand finds tentative expressions of not just anti-imperial
sentiments, but also anti-racist modes of writing. To imagine New Orleans and Haiti as a
singular region reshapes familiar boundaries that mark Haiti as foreign to the U.S. nation.
In Chesnutt’s text, using transnational regionalism allows him to map Haiti’s relationship
to the U.S. among a different set of narrative coordinates: as a discourse that explores
local experiences of and resistances to marginalization across the hemisphere,
transnational regionalism imagines historicity for enraced Americans beyond the gaps in
nationalist histories and across the boundaries that determine what is foreign to the U.S.

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38 Local color produces uncritical communal portraits, often relying on and reinforcing sexist and racist
stereotypes. Further, local-color writing serves to mock the regional by drawing attention to its otherness,
and thus reinforcing a standard for normalcy that resides within the nation (usually depicted as white,
Northern, male). Regionalism connotes a more critical style, and is not synonymous with local color; it is a
discourse that critiques appropriation by or placement within a hierarchical system.
In this sense, then, Chesnutt’s regionalist vision allows him to envision Haiti, as an always foreign space in the U.S. imagination, no longer as peculiar, but as familiar. Such a strategy is remarkable because it provided him with more flexibility when attending to historical gaps in nationalist narratives.

Given these details, I propose that we read *Marchand* not as a historical novel, but as a literary quarrel with history. If historical materials help us to know about the lives of New Orleanians subjects, as the foreword claims, then the novel’s attention to historical exclusion proposes that, by extension, the nation’s self-knowledge might be challenged by a region that is mapped as a singular, transnational unit. Chesnutt’s novel then raises the uneasy question: how does one “know” the boundaries between Haiti and the U.S.? To begin to engage this question, we have to recognize that the novel’s revisions bifurcate the reader’s historical vision. Our knowledge of regional history in the text is in fact dependent upon two separate and divergent narratives. This first is generated by the “careful,” local-color histories, a form that Chesnutt recognizes as a hegemonic narrative in which Haiti is manipulated. Most of Chesnutt’s incidents in *Marchand* are drawn from this history, which is akin to what Martinican poet and theorist Edouard Glissant terms “History with a capital H,” “a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone ‘made’ the history of the World” (*Caribbean* 64). Chesnutt then challenges the accuracy and merit of History by revealing the debased treatment of Haiti within these careful studies, where the global impact of the Revolution is stripped of meaning and “deformed by dominant ideology (Glissant, *Caribbean* 88) to produce these “highly functional fantasies.” Thus, his revisions comprise the second historical narrative wherein Haiti functions to inspire

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39 I adapt the phrase *quarrel with history* from Edouard Glissant (61).
resistance and agency. This second narrative makes visible the first’s deformation, but it also constructs a literary model of future space within the U.S. historical narrative for the Haitian Revolution.

**Deforming the Event: A “Careful” History of Slave Insurrection**

Chesnutt’s narrator entreats the reader to endure his recounting of historical details, arguing that the “merit” of a story rests on the reader’s “reasonably accurate knowledge of the conditions which surround those who figure in it” (163). A story’s meaning, we are to understand, may be found in our knowledge of an accurate historical context. To observe how Chesnutt’s novel reveals History’s deformation, I begin with the novel’s treatment of one such historical incident, which purports to provide an accurate context for New Orleans history. His narrator tells readers that a slave revolt took place in Louisiana after the Revolution and “had proved a costly failure for the rioters” (82). As Chesnutt’s novel unfolds, it puts increasing pressure on this historical footnote. While it appears to be little more than one of the incidents that adds credibility to Chesnutt’s history, we see in his revisions to source materials that Chesnutt was bothered by existing accounts of the incident.

His knowledge of the insurrection would have come from his sources, Grace King and George Washington Cable, as well as the “more obscure records and chronicles from which they drew their information” (3). King’s well-documented literary relationship with Charles Gayarré helps place him as one of these more obscure records, and directs the reader to the latter’s account of the 1811 insurrection that Chesnutt references.⁴⁰

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⁴⁰ According to Fetterley and Pryse, Grace King wrote her *New Orleans: The Place and the People* (1895) in response to Gayarré’s *History of Louisiana*: her book “draws heavily on the early nineteenth-century New Orleans historian Charles Gayarré” (387 n. 18). In fact, their research suggests that much of the material that critics argue Chesnutt “borrowed” from King is actually King borrowing from Gayarré;
Gayarré’s 1885 *History of Louisiana* records that two whites were killed in a slave uprising in the Parish of St. John the Baptist a little more than seven years after Louisiana was handed over to the United States. Sixty-six slaves died in battle, while another twelve (or so) slaves were executed. Gayarré describes the revolt as easily subdued; when narrating the plight of one land-owner, who held off the five hundred slaves with a single gun, he declares: “This [. . .] shows how little that population is to be dreaded, when confronted by the superior race to whose care Providence has entrusted their protection and gradual civilization” (267). He also notes that, to deter further insurrections, the heads of the dead rioters “were placed on high poles above and below the city, along the river, as far as the plantation on which the revolt began. The ghastly sight spread terror far and wide” (267-268). Gayarré’s teleological and paternalistic account intends to prove the benefit of these events for all: the white race’s superiority is made self-evident and civilization can continue unchallenged. What is unnatural in Gayarré’s historiography is insurrection, which occurs when “misguided negroes” are “deluded” into thinking they might “gain a position in society” (267). What is naturalized, then, is white supremacy.

Chesnutt’s representation of the insurrection does not include these details. In his version, the insurrection is not a success, but a “costly failure.” It is not a return to natural order, but an unnatural suppression of the entire enslaved population: their failure costs them physically as dismemberment and public display serve as terror tactics and the severed body serves as a symbol to deter any communal (and thus resistant) inclinations. Rather than engage these gruesome details, Chesnutt follows his observation that this

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indeed, at times both King and Chesnutt are almost “quot[ing] directly” from Gayarré (396-397 nn. 5-6). This trace renders Gayarré’s presence in Chesnutt’s text undeniable.
singular insurrection was costly by writing: “Nevertheless, the awful example of San Domingo, where the land, for its sins, had been drenched in blood, was always before the eyes of those just across the Gulf of Mexico who still fostered the institution of slavery” (82). With this reference, Chesnutt directs attention away from the “ghastly sight” of the failed rioters and toward the “awful example” of Haiti. Here, Chesnutt identifies a glaring silence in Gayarré, since the latter’s account of the insurrection is devoid of this hemispheric context. To Chesnutt, Haiti is a significant analogue to the singular event, and his narrative thus maps within Gayarré’s history a counter history. Here, the singular insurrection may have been costly for the slaves, but it is now also evidence of a potentially far greater opportunity that American slaves have seized. In other words, in his retelling the “ghastly sight” is no longer the severed black body to spread terror “far and wide,” but the *united* black body of independent Haiti. The new sight reminds readers that what has been severed is in fact the *colonial* body across the Americas now that French rule is overthrown, a power shift that American slaves have seized in an attempt to subvert their own debased position in the U.S. Here, then, the Haitian Revolution is re-characterized as a successful model of the “deluded” gaining power, and its repercussions in the U.S. effectively destabilize the normative distinctions which Gayarré’s record reinforces.

As Chesnutt reappropriates the Revolution from Gayarré, he inserts a different trajectory for narrativizing New Orleans, and U.S., history. For, when Chesnutt entreats that we keep that event “always before [our] eyes,” he is reminding us that context profoundly manipulates knowledge. Because Gayarré’s account foregoes Haiti, it offers a truncated record of the many events converging in the region that might unsettle the
self-evident rule of white landowners. With this revision, Chesnutt’s text opens room to theorize how historical knowledge might be generated not through the official, careful record, but through what “might well have been,” the elusive bundles of silence. As Chesnutt makes visible the processes by which History is produced, he suggests that it is not the only historical space available. Beyond its critique of History, then, Chesnutt’s novel is significant because it constructs an alternative historical framework. He does so by developing a sub-plot about an additional slave rebellion. To bring this sub-plot into the conversation, I think through Glissant again, who argues that as History is produced, the disempowered are subjected to what he terms a “nonhistory,” which occurs when a people’s collective consciousness has been dislocated by a “totalitarian philosophy of history” (Caribbean 62). This nonhistory, then, might be understood as a real historical space, an alternative one made up of “missed opportunities” that need to be “repossessed” (63). The unfolding story about slave insurrection in New Orleans is a reminder of the “missed opportunities” that arose, and through it he lends shape and specificity to his alternative framework.

Jean Lebeau and Pedro Valdez are paperless men of color who are captured and imprisoned, but go on to escape and stage an insurrection at a New Orleans plantation. Their actions are subversive, and their voices loquacious throughout the novel. However, they undergo an unfortunate transition from vocal and present to silent and absent by the text’s end. This would seem to suggest that their resistance is ultimately subdued and might therefore be interpreted as further evidence of Chesnutt’s pessimistic vision, as critics have suggested. However, if we read them as exemplars of history’s missed opportunities, then we see that it is precisely through the process of silencing that
Chesnutt carves out room for other historical trajectories. Their eventual silence may return readers to the History that dominates the narrative, but it returns them transformed; readers must now proceed with that silence “always before the[ir] eyes,” and this, I argue, is a powerful technique through which Chesnutt seeks to repossess historical space for Haiti.

The captured men are a significant revision to local-color histories. Their plot marks an additional slave insurrection, rendering the original claim by Gayarré of a single one after the Louisiana Purchase questionable. They thus represent the likelihood of localized revolts that have gone undocumented, just as they themselves are undocumented, paperless men. Their homes are never identified, and they drift into the text by shipwreck. Jean Lebeau is a black man whose name signals French colonial space. Pedro Valdez is a mulatto whose name suggests a Spanish Creole or Spanish Main connection. Colonial names link these characters to the larger New World intersections within New Orleans, and establish a connection between people of color throughout the Americas. Therefore, because the text never confirms their origins, it becomes relevant to note that they identify only with Haiti. In jail, Marchand overhears their secret plans to carry out an insurrection: “‘I hate them all, root and branch. I would kill the last one, even as our people did in San Domingo’” (81). Their connection to “‘our people’” in Haiti is a narrative trace whereby transnational communities are affirmed, thus revising History’s attempt to limit the effects of the Revolution and establishing Haiti’s persistent influence in regional American spaces. In this new account of antislavery activity in U.S. regions, Haiti is inserted back into New Orleans history not as nightmare, but as a catalyst for collective action.
The potential of these Haitian associations unfolds in the climactic scene, when Marchand chases down the insurrecting mulatto and thwarts the rebellion. During their confrontation, Marchand identifies with “the long night of crime which had produced [Valdez]”—a “steady process of imbrutement” which includes a barrage of transnational signifiers: “the midnight foray into the forest, the slave coffle, the middle passage” (159). Marchand sees in Valdez the entire moving cultural experiences that collide to create the man before him. From battle in Africa, to capture and journey to the Americas, ending in enslavement and miscegenation, this man embodies the history of Africans in the Americas. For this, Marchand pities him. However, his pity is also “very nearly his undoing,” as Lebeau creeps up behind him (159). Lebeau, the man whose speech and name and kinship-claims link him to Haiti, is quickly dispatched by Marchand’s sword. Thus ends the insurrection: Valdez runs off to be “the bane of the society which had produced him” and Lebeau lies dead under the bushes (160). Chesnutt’s scene frames the severing of a Haitian connection as a necessary response, suggesting that empathy for the Haitian’s violent inclinations is a dangerous weakness. In this moment we see Chesnutt struggling with what Haiti offers to his conceptualization of the future of the African American in the U.S. It is critical to note, then, that it lies dead. That Marchand identifies with the mulatto and kills the Haitian-identified man suggests that Chesnutt perceived racial life in the United States continuing without a successful enactment of the model of insurrection that Haiti represented.

However, this is not an entirely disillusioned reinstatement of History because the transnational experiences that undergird racial identity in the Americas remain secreted inside Valdez and Marchand. Unspoken, hanging specter-like between them, this silence
draws readers’ attention away from the failure of insurrection and toward the processes that instigate rebellion. What Chesnutt focuses on then are the repercussions of this meeting: the future before all of these characters. Marchand’s moment of empathy is arguably what solidifies his decision to relinquish life in America as a white man, and his presence in the nation persists only as a what “might well have been.” And Valdez’s future is certain: he will become a haunting figure within the system that made him. With these details, Chesnutt’s innovative revisions take shape, for the scene draws readers into a different relationship to history: we are no longer looking backward, but forward. In other words, the “careful” incidents in the text are now haunted by the possibilities of what might well be.

Chesnutt offers, therefore, a literary counter-history in which he imagines how silences can unsettle History’s self-evident progress. The significance of this is that he pushes the Revolution beyond its ingrained function as an awful specter to explore its possibilities as what Michel Foucault terms an epistemological threshold, a moment where we must reevaluate how we come to know history (4). Indeed, Marchand’s transnational regionalism frames the Revolution as an irruption to “vast unities” like historical thought, a moment that displaces and transforms our conception of history (Foucault 4). As Foucault writes, a threshold “suspend[s] the continuous accumulation of knowledge [and] force[s] it to enter a new time” (5). If we apply this theory to Chesnutt’s revisions, we see that the suspended moment hanging between Marchand and Valdez functions in such a way—it suspends the accumulation of our historical knowledge. Marchand’s recognition of the process of imbrutement allows us to theorize a similar process at work in the historiography of American regions. When Chesnutt
encounters Gayarré, he sees the process by which the achievements of the insurrecting slaves are deformed, a process that shifts the delineations between the ghastly and the noble, the deluded and the rational. Returning Haiti to the story of regional insurrection inverts these delineations. Furthermore, it allows Chesnutt to propose that future U.S. spaces will always be haunted by, not immune to, potential power shifts that the echoing Revolution inspires. Given these details, we can reframe the historical work that Marchand undertakes: the novel is a testament to ongoing, fleeting redistributions of power that have gone undocumented, and encourages readers to view the nonhistory of the Revolution no longer as what has been silenced, but as what might still be seized.

**Transforming the Reader: A Haunting Counter-History**

By rewriting the history of insurrection in New Orleans, Chesnutt returns readers to the local repercussions of a transnational event like the Revolution. His retreat to and revision of local-color sources is a means for reclaiming what Hortense Spillers argues is the “calibanesque potential” of the transnational, which has been subjected to “the dreamful flattening out of textures of the historical” by nationalist discourses. As Chesnutt opens up space for other histories (like that of Lebeau and Valdez), he encounters the question of what future might be imagined if history is so altered as to think of Haiti differently. Therefore, I’d like to apply these strategies to the remainder of the narrative. If we read mindful of the fact that Haiti is a contextual frame for this region, we see that Chesnutt questions not only the history of slave insurrection, but also the entire premise upon which this novel is based: a white Creole landowner claims that a free man of color is his son.

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41 See Spillers, 1-25, for an analysis of Caliban metaphors in U.S. narratives, a formulation whereby Caliban—and by extension, New World figures—exists only within discourse and is therefore always beyond representation, denied the specificity, locality, and humanity afforded “man” (6).
Pierre Beaurepas offers readers a contextually-truncated historical narrative in the form of his will, the document through which he posthumously reveals that he is Marchand’s father. Pierre is a cultural authority in the region, a slave-owner with a particularly invidious relationship to Haiti. His authority is determined insomuch as he deploys familiar racialized codes with respect to the family’s ties to the Caribbean. As New Orleans’ wealthiest citizen and a loyal colonial subject, Pierre represents a stabilizing element within the city. His death halfway through the text, then, signals an inevitable shift in the region’s economic and hegemonic composition, and his narrative should be read within the context of this dying interest in maintaining hegemony. The “miraculous” will—one of those local-color elements that Rampersad identifies—prompts characters (and readers) to grudgingly accept Pierre’s revelations about Marchand because it offers an accurate and moral story of the family’s history, a history that affirms the patriarch’s care and guidance. Yet, Chesnutt’s revisionary account challenges readers to reexamine the will as a product of the same converging events through which he revises Gayarré.

Pierre’s will is a highly romantic story that justifies his abandonment. In short, his story suggests he abandoned his son to protect his wife, the boy’s mother, from public scrutiny. He married the woman in a secret ceremony after her first husband was presumed dead. On the day she intended to reveal her marriage to Pierre, the first husband returned. He died two days later, making her pregnancy by Pierre a potential “embarrassment” that had to be hidden lest she be suspected of infidelity. Thus, “[t]o

42 This narrative is delivered with great flourish by the family lawyer, Renard. We never hear this information directly from Pierre. I argue this removed perspective helps Chesnutt challenge the legitimacy of prevailing narratives. For, while the relevance of Renard’s profession certainly lends credence to Pierre’s revelations, it also draws attention to the legal fictions in place that define the parameters of social and racial classifications.
save the mother’s good name, it was necessary temporarily to sacrifice the child” (101).
The proof of paternity depends on the audience’s belief in the “merit” of his romantic story, and further, their acceptance of the “conditions which surround” them—here, that context is the Caribbean. For example, he married Mrs. Beaurepas after her first husband ran off with pirates in the Spanish Main. That desertion makes possible Pierre’s union to the woman, while underlining the first husband’s dubious morals: when the narrative explicitly questions whether he goes to fight the pirates or to join them (99), it makes room for the legitimate and chivalrous move by Pierre.

Thus, Pierre establishes a morally-sound foundation to his story through the contrasting representation of a morally-unsound territory. The disreputable husband moved out of the U.S. and into the Caribbean, and the space all but disappears the man. In this way, Pierre relies on the foreignness and otherness attributed to the Caribbean to characterize the husband’s degeneracy.43 The reference suggests that Chesnutt was aware that the antebellum U.S. imagination perceived the Caribbean as a liminal space where men were transformed through and nurtured in violence, and he thus has Pierre utilize the space to lend a moral framework to his tale that he hopes will absolve him of his own (probable) sins.44 It is significant to note, too, that the possibility of garnering accurate information out of the Caribbean appears, according to Pierre’s story, an unlikely yet

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43 U.S. literatures have often cast the Caribbean as a site that facilitates contact with the disreputable and dangerous. We saw this, for example, in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, where Legree’s training among pirates in the Caribbean is similar to what Pierre describes. Stowe marks a precedent in U.S. national literature wherein the Caribbean has been represented as an open, terrifying, non-nationalized space where men, if they do return, come home transformed and more violent than before. Legree returns to the South a brutal tyrant; similarly, Mrs. Beaurepas’ husband returns home only to die in a nasty fight outside a gambling house two days later.

44 For a reading of these probable sins that his narrative seeks to disguise, see McWilliams. He notes, for example, that because the woman in question is the wife of his business partner, this marriage is likely an attempt to consolidate power—not the romance Pierre would have us believe (Charles 198).
understandable occurrence: “The report of his [first] death, though made in good faith, had proved to be not in accordance with the facts” (101). This moment underscores Pierre’s reliance on “good faith,” or the appearance of truth because of the source’s repute, as an acceptable substitute for “the facts” (which seem hard to come by when the Caribbean, a space of ill-repute, is involved). This marks a moment where the thoughtful reader should question Pierre’s play on our “faith” in his reliability, as a discursive tactic that masks the way context manipulates knowledge.

Second, the fabulous loss and return of a white heir is possible because, according to Pierre, Caribbean events disrupt the Beaurepas family. Apparently, Pierre and his wife intended to adopt Paul after their marriage became public knowledge, but could not do so because of the Haitian Revolution. The fighting in San Domingo brought to him five orphaned nephews, and Pierre felt he could not adopt “a fatherless child” without facing “curious and unfriendly comment” for diverting a portion of his wealth away from his “own flesh and blood” (102). Like the Spanish Main reference, this appears sound because it relies on the Creole communities’ understanding of that event as disruptive to colonial interests. This allows another moment where the audience’s knowledge is bound up with their “good faith,” and their understanding of the Caribbean as a certain complication, a space that unquestionably prevents the establishment of a proper family. More importantly, it trivializes the impact of the Revolution. Pierre’s narrative erases the significance of the successful slave revolt by appropriating its effects into a story of personal hardship; what matters to him is that in the face of such a challenge, the Beaurepas family’s actions appear rightful. Thus, Pierre’s narrative actively produces a
body of knowledge that directs attention away from the achievements of the insurrecting slaves and to the achievements of the colonial subject.

The entire will is a flight of fancy, where Chesnutt relies on a nostalgic depiction of colonial New Orleans’ moral and social code—always driven by the gentleman’s defense of pure white womanhood—to create a paternalistic story that veils other secrets. Pierre’s presentation of events is representative of what Chesnutt recognizes as a familiar, accepted narrative that disguises any culpability on Pierre’s part in the fracturing of family lines. However, Chesnutt is highly critical of such representations. As Dean McWilliams notes, the story “gives grounds to doubt,” as it relies on unquestioned beliefs to convince its listeners (196). He argues that the reader must be suspicious of the many precepts undergirding this story, because at the center of Pierre’s narrative, “where we expect to find clarity and truth, we find implausibility and contradictions” (198). Pierre weaves a fantastic story by referring his audience to unchallenged principles which comprise the foundation of white patriarchy, thereby ensuring none can doubt his tale without doubting the very foundations of their own privilege. Pierre’s Caribbean references, like his dependence on pure white womanhood, draw on myths of the white landowner as a chivalrous protector (and draw his audience away from other conclusions: miscegenation, abandonment, avarice). Indeed, Pierre’s story operates within a recognizable paternal discourse, where his mobilizations of gender and race normalize his authority and lend credibility to his History.

When Glissant uses the term deformation to describe how colonial and imperial modes of thought transform Caribbean events, he identifies not just the way events are misrepresented, but also the way in which that misrepresentation becomes naturalized.
He argues that Western historiography, to which Pierre subscribes, erases the event itself “since the more natural its depiction, the more one avoids the basic deformation that it assumes” (Caribbean 89). Indeed, Pierre and Gayarré are prime examples of how the “absurd catalogue of official history” (Gilroy 6) is made through discourses of paternalism, those conventional modes of thought that, Chesnutt suggests, cannot conceive of an entity like Haiti or process its independence. As historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes, the Revolution challenged the very framework of Western thought, whose ontological and political assumptions would render the French colonial slaves’ struggle unthinkable. He theorizes the unthinkable to be “that which one cannot conceive within the range of possible alternatives, that which perverts all answers because it defies the terms under which the questions were phrased” (82). The Revolution and greater Caribbean in Pierre’s narrative is exactly not unthinkable; it is entirely conceived as an answer to an improbable question: how can a black man be white? Because deformation is uncontested, Pierre’s claims are as well. Accordingly, his version of the Caribbean can be contained within Western discourse because it reinforces those ontological and political assumptions.

Pierre’s narrative represents Chesnutt’s struggle to write within a dominant discourse and narrative form inherently racist and xenophobic, and the transnational interventions throughout the novel point to places where Chesnutt attempts to find aesthetic expression for liminal positionalities beyond or outside of that discourse. Such interventions, like the “awful example” of Haiti, do not participate in reductionist myths, but rather question the claims of historical and ancestral authenticity. Chesnutt’s most significant revision in Marchand reconfigures the region’s “calibanesque potential”
through Zabet Philosophe, the singular character to actually challenge the authority of Pierre’s narrative. Her presence maps New Orleans within the same regional coordinates as Haiti, revising History’s “strictly defined separateness” of Haiti (Dash Haiti 10) and proposing a connectedness that, when visualized, alters the future trajectory of the family’s (and nation’s) history.

Chesnutt’s excavation of and revision to New Orleans literature is most pronounced in his treatment of Zabet Philosophe. Grace King locates Zabet’s origins in New Orleans, stating that the woman was born “in the house of the widow of an officer who had served under Bienville” (341). King argues that “[n]o relation of the city in the first quarter of the century is complete without Elizabeth, or ‘Zabet Philosophe’” (341). Chesnutt clearly agrees, and Zabet figures extensively in his novel. However, in Paul Marchand, Zabet is not born in New Orleans, but lived in Haiti first. He establishes very early that she lived in “San Domingo, from which she had fled, with her master’s children, during the insurrection of 1793” and then came to New Orleans, where she became “a public institution” (9). His revision substantially repositions her, as she now occupies multiple positions beyond just the local, unlike in King’s tale where she is native to New Orleans and remains entrenched within the Cabildo. Chesnutt’s relocation of this historical figure within the New World complicates our understanding of her as a traditional local-color figure. With these new contours, Zabet is no longer just a “public institution,” but a flexible and moving figure with significant connections to the private

45 Fetterley and Pryse make note of this revision. They trace Zabet as a recurring character in nineteenth-century American regionalist literature. For example, Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s “The Praline Woman” (1895), is one such representation. They also acknowledge that Grace King’s seminal work on Zabet clearly influenced both Dunbar-Nelson and Chesnutt, providing them with “accurate” historical portraits of antebellum New Orleans (288-289). Their work makes clear a crucial thread of influence, moving from King to Dunbar-Nelson to Chesnutt, each of whom uses this historical figure to represent the complexity of race relations in the city.
past of the Beaurepas institution. Furthermore, she holds a significant Beaurepas family secret. Readers learn that Zabet fled Haiti with not just her master’s children, but also her own grandson. When one of her master’s children dies during the journey, she passes her own grandson off as one of his white nephews. These revisions remap Zabet (and thus her history within the local-color tradition) through a hemispheric system, and she emerges from the violence of Revolution with information that could undermine transfers of power.

To know the secret, then, is to hold the power, a fact that does not escape Paul. He intends to learn the secret and wield its power over his disgruntled cousins. To do so, he must contend with two historical sources—a narrative, in the form of a hidden letter written to Pierre from his sister-in-law in Haiti, and a witness, the slave who survives the revolt. The letter is narrative proof of Zabet’s substitution, since the sister-in-law reveals that she entrusted Zabet with her two sons and her daughter. However, its veracity is debased because of the tumultuous Caribbean context out of which it originates. Paul assumes the child’s gender is overlooked because of the writer’s “uncertain handwriting and overwrought tone” (119) or the writer’s “stress of emotion” (120). Such indicators in the uncovered Haitian document suggest a plausible oversight depending on the reader’s own position and investment. Here, good faith might work—as it did in Pierre’s narrative—to ensure that the unthinkable remains hidden. However, Paul recognizes that such a reading, one that favors appearance, is uncritical and serves to silence whatever story that oversight might indicate. Chesnutt thus encourages the reader to read from a subject position analogous to Paul’s, to examine what palimpsests are created and what knowledge is produced when secrets are buried. If we read for the silences, we see that
the only certain “answer” is that in burying this information Pierre has rendered the Revolution and the passage between regions a “non-event”—where the unthinkable is ameliorated.\textsuperscript{46}

Zabet, the other source available to Paul, can interpret the secret that the presence of the letter itself represents. Under threat of violence, she confirms that the white girl died on their journey to the U.S.: “there were too many, the ship was small and crowded, the sea was high, the sun was hot, the water was stagnant, there was no milk—the little girl died” (123-4). Thus, the white girl is ghosted out of the family through a description that echoes the deadly Middle Passage, the liminal space where humanity is transformed into chattel. Zabet re-appropriates that space and transforms property (her grandson) into person (Pierre’s legitimate nephew). This gives birth to new family lines and thus new historical possibilities within the U.S. But, the passage of a character of African descent through one leg of the Middle Passage and into the United States as a white descendent is unthinkable within the bounds of Pierre’s narrative. Accordingly, neither the nephews nor the reader ever learn the name of this survivor. What the reader never hears is crucial, as the withheld secret suggests that the reader has reached the end of definitive knowledge regarding this family’s history. However, the attendant silence reveals the degree to which the reader must interpret clues using the nation’s “absurd” system of classification to infer which of the nephews is Zabet’s grandchild. Chesnutt thus draws the reader’s attention to his or her own investment in racial categorization as the only

\textsuperscript{46} Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that during the nineteenth century Haiti fell into economic and political decline. In the process, the “reality of the Revolution seemed increasingly distant, an improbability which took place in an awkward past and for which no one had a rational explanation. The revolution that was unthinkable became a non-event” (98). He then traces the way that Western historiography’s nationalist interests silenced Haiti, and how that silence was repeated in other popular writings and literary histories. That is, writings such as the local-color histories that Chesnutt is struggling with are part of that “archival power” to turn the Revolution into a “non-event”: they, as represented in Pierre Beaurepas, have the power to “define what is and what is not a serious object of research and, therefore, of mention” (99).
way to “know” the truth. By withholding that information, by denying the absolutes of truth, fact, or confirmation, he seeks to transform readers by making them aware of how uncomfortable that silence is as it resonates to the very last page.

As with the captured men, Zabet’s character evidences Chesnutt’s ambivalent response to resistant actions inspired by the Revolution. We see this best in the most haunting facet to the text: Zabet’s disappearance after Marchand interrogates her. During that scene, his threats reinforce the ongoing violence that defines her participation in and departure from this narrative as the one who is forced to tell. The scene allows readers to witness the process wherein the racial other is disarticulated from her historical agency: her resistant actions are appropriated by Paul’s reconstructive efforts. Accordingly, her final words are ghosted out and she never reappears in the text, evidence that once her function is performed, she slips into narrative recesses. The silencing suggests that Chesnutt was unable to imagine a future for her once she is forced to pass on to Marchand what Fetterley and Pryse describe as the power of racial knowledge (131).

47 Critics argue that readers can use narrative clues to deduce that the nephew is in fact Philippe. However, this is never confirmed in the text, and could certainly be problematized. McWilliams writes that it “appears that Zabet Philosophe named Philippe” (Charles 190). Wilson writes that “[t]he only possible reason” for Paul’s reaction to Zabet’s news is that “the racial ringer is Philippe” (192). Note that both critics qualify their interpretations, as each understands that it only “appears” that Philippe is the substituted child—we cannot know the truth.

48 The power here is the ability of such knowledge to denaturalize hierarchy, but in Chesnutt’s representation this is specifically gendered as well. As Leslie W. Lewis notes: “women, as slaves, have the power to tell secrets and with such telling can shift the private to the public, thereby changing, and often recreating, social orders” (11). If the telling of women’s secrets is a powerful and transformative action, then containing Zabet’s secret underscores that nothing will change. Furthermore, we have another secret left unresolved: it is crucial to note that we don’t know if Marchand’s own mother is black or white. Without her story, the racial history of Marchand is left up to good faith, and is subsequently inscribed within the patriarchal accounts. Chesnutt’s awareness of the racial absences in historical record, then, is evident in his absent women: power is maintained, he argues, not in paternal claims, but through maternal silencing. The choice to silence those women whose stories could challenge patriarchal order warrants further study. Within the regionalist paradigm, absent mothers often signal the loss of specific forms of knowledge inaccessible to the other in hegemonic culture. For example, Fetterley and Pryse argue that women have not had the discursive freedom to tell their stories and have their lives represented in history—this is often present in regionalist tales through the repeating thematic of lost, dead, or absent mothers.
Silencing Zabet becomes a metonym for a greater loss that Chesnutt cannot resolve, a loss he envisions completely when Lebeau and Valdez depart the narrative: the loss of Haitian kinship.

Zabet’s absence affirms what Chesnutt suggested with Lebeau and Valdez: Haiti is the genealogical core of the novel. It prefigures all the narrative action and is the locus for each character’s lineage, yet has been disconnected from U.S. space by paternalism to ensure that the naturalization of white power persists. Yet, since racial knowledge is deferred, Chesnutt theorizes that the Beaurepas family will never know their kinship and what future they have will always be haunted by Haiti. This makes it possible to argue that it is precisely through what has been silenced (rather than in spite of, as in Pierre’s configuration) that history might shift. In other words, if paternalism is a manifestation of a discourse in which History is “made,” then transnational regionalism might be the way in which it can be “remade”—the way in which he might reorganize those links to make evident “forms of historical contact, even ties of kinship, between the South and the Caribbean” (Adams 2). What his revisionary regionalism offers us, then, is a hemispheric approach to the very nature of knowledge claims. What knowledge might be gleaned in this text could never be factual or cohesive, but is rather contingent on those losses wherein kinship ties to Haiti are severed from the narrative.

There is, then, an epistemological shift that occurs if one attends to transnational silences. Chesnutt’s emphasis on that which is unspoken encourages us to read Haiti as a manifestation of racial knowledge that haunts the nation’s historical narrative. That is, he

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(153). Thus, regionalism establishes a tradition of filling that lack through the trope of the surrogate mother. Regionalism constructs mother/“mother-knowledge” in unconventional terms, a strategy that attends to mother as a cultural construct while the act of mothering “bears no certain relationship to biological mother” (154). I argue that Chesnutt builds upon regionalist writers’ interest in mother-silences to help him represent what are essentially unrepresentable positions in U.S. historiography.
uses Haiti to unsettle the claims of “Reason and Power” (Dash *Haiti* 45) by which white American knows itself. This re-positions the reader, so that we can see that self-knowledge in the U.S. depends on a willful manipulation of connective tissues between American spaces. Accordingly, silence in the text should be theorized not as the end of knowledge, but the beginning of a transformative experience for the reader who must emend her perspective in order to proceed. The reader must now approach historical events not from the standpoint of what happened, but from the standpoint of what *could have* happened, the haunting possibilities of what this knowledge still represents.

**Seeing the Nation’s Future: the Shadow of the Haitian Revolution**

Sibylle Fischer argues that reading for historical “distortions” can reveal “the shadow of other futures” (23). The novel’s conclusion offers us a glimpse of what shadows Chesnutt imagined in light of the distortions he encountered. In his final speech, Paul Marchand implies that his identifications with the Caribbean signifiers and characters have affected his vision of the United States. In fact, he cannot envision the U.S.’s future as distinct from the island nation: “I hope the change will not come, as it did in France or in the island across the Gulf, in a deluge of blood, but come it will, if not in our time, then in that of our children” (176). With these cautionary words, Chesnutt’s novel departs from the 1820 landscape. The moment of repossession of the Revolution, where Chesnutt’s characters speak its impact, is the moment Chesnutt can no longer look back. He cannot abandon the nation-form; the novel’s conclusion abandons Marchand in France to focus on the future U.S. that remains haunted by its Haitian connections. The text ends with the Beaurepas descendants struggling to keep racial lines distinct; they

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49 See also Wagner’s analysis of *The Marrow of Tradition*. Wagner argues that Chesnutt theorizes racial violence to be the “prerequisite for the very possibility of white identity” (332).
contribute to a hostile legal and social climate, assisting Confederates in the Civil War, participating in the Ku Klux Klan, and seeking the nullification of the Fifteenth Amendment. This vision in which the Haitian past is so clearly affecting present social conditions in the U.S. sets forth the argument that power in the U.S. developed precisely to perpetuate a silencing of Haitian points of contact. However, the text reminds us that this secret kinship lingers: any one of the Beaurepas descendents, those U.S. leaders, may well have been Haitian-born. Chesnutt’s conclusion explicitly proposes that the nation’s future is inexorably tied to Haiti.

The novel theorizes that the Haitian Revolution is a crucial supplement to the nation’s historical knowledge. For this reason, what we read as anachronism in Marchand might be better framed as a response to the way Haiti (as a past and present silence) was complicating Chesnutt’s vision of the future. He is aware that the knowledge bound up in what has been manipulated post-Revolution has the potential to be incendiary to the U.S. nation, but his reservations about the shape of this shadowy future is evident when all his transnational characters depart from the narrative: what future they might have represented is deferred. Nonetheless, Chesnutt begins to frame for us how African American writers were thinking through the Revolution in complex if ambivalent representations, so that they might shift perception away from Haiti as a “ghastly sight” and toward Haiti as a space “always before the eyes.” The persistence of this entreaty underscores that literature might begin the work of constructing transnational histories that testify to ongoing attempts to redistribute power and recover missed opportunities where ideologies about race are unsettled.
Chapter Three

Haunting the Good Neighbor: Ghosts of Insignificant American Histories in Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*

[T]he grave, save for its rawness, resembled any other marked off without order about the barren plot by shards of pottery and broken bottles and old brick and other objects insignificant to sight but actually of a profound meaning and fatal to touch, which no white man could have read.

---William Faulkner. *Go Down, Moses*

*Go Down, Moses* explores the relationships between Southern blacks and whites following Emancipation through Isaac (Ike) McCaslin’s struggle to reconcile his family’s participation in slavery. A “genealogical puzzle,” the text’s fragmented family relations take shape within a region whose future is uncertain as racial lines grow increasingly blurred.50 The text’s form represents a dizzying intersection of past, present, and future wherein the reader must struggle to apprehend the relationships between generations. These historical shifts are replete with references to Columbian discovery, antebellum excess, reconstruction, and World War II. Specifically, Ike’s investigations into his family’s history culminate in 1940, which positions the text within a political moment where Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s administration was advancing the Good Neighbor Policy, generally considered a well-intentioned foreign policy that improved U.S.-Caribbean relations.51 Indeed, at the time Faulkner wrote *Go Down, Moses*, U.S. nationalism was defined through its intersections with the Caribbean, and the parameters of those relations were established in response to an embattled Europe. This reading, then, contextualizes *Go Down, Moses* and its puzzling presentation of race relations

50 See Dara Llewellyn for further reading on how Faulkner’s manipulation of time in *Go Down, Moses* turns the collection into a “genealogical puzzle” (497).

51 The policy was not specific to the Caribbean, but to all of Latin America. However, this chapter is primarily interested in the island archipelago as a symbol of both fragmentation and unity, of which I find echoes in the structure of *Go Down, Moses*. Precedents for theorizing through the Caribbean’s geographic features can be found in the work of Edouard Glissant and Antonio Benítez-Rojo.
within these hemispheric and global moments to reassess Faulkner’s interest in politics and historiography. As Go Down, Moses slides between past and present, Faulkner employs a series of tropes that divide Ike’s genealogical endeavors into puzzle pieces: clues and repetitions appear in the text “without order” yet, when read through the lens of the Caribbean, they reveal instead a “profound meaning” that can help critics reconceptualize Faulkner’s intervention into national historiography.

Reading Go Down, Moses through the historical matrix of U.S.-Caribbean relations adds to the burgeoning critical interest in transnational analyses of Faulkner. As Americanists increasingly catalogue hemispheric literary histories, they necessarily attend to the commonalities and asymmetries between New World spaces. However, scholars read a Caribbean presence in Faulkner primarily through Absalom, Absalom!, a text that engages the Caribbean directly. In that novel, Thomas Sutpen acquires family, prestige, and possessions through a trip to Haiti, and his ascension is written against the backdrop of the Haitian Revolution. Such readings, by critics like Vera Kutzinski, Barbara Ladd, Matthew Pratt Guterl, and John Lowe, have helped reframe Faulkner’s terrain through their transnational treatments of Absalom, Absalom!. Kutzinski notes that his imaginative landscape extends beyond the U.S. South: “[i]t is the Americas, not just the southern part of the United States, that constitute Faulkner’s literary and cultural ‘region,’ and he, in turn, is constituted by the perspectives and claims of this larger territory” (“Borders” 59). Working through Kutzinski’s hemispheric definition of

52 Barbara Ladd notes that the South’s unique position to the Caribbean, through geographic and cultural proximity, renders it a space whereby a writer can imagine powerful critiques of national ideologies (xiii). Thus, critical interest in Caribbean-U.S. South connections extends beyond Faulkner, as many Southern writers perceive this the larger territory to be part of their literary region. See the collections by Adams, Bibler, and Accilien, as well as Smith and Cohn for comprehensive surveys of the transnational U.S. South. In addition, the University Press of Virginia offers a diverse collection of interdisciplinary readings on the cultures of the Americas in their New World Series.
Faulkner’s literary region, I consider how a reading attuned to this larger landscape can enrich discussions of *Go Down, Moses* and our sense of the political moment in which Faulkner was writing. For example, critics have already described how the histories of New World slavery intersect with Faulkner’s exploration of contemporary U.S. race relations. Barbara Ladd catalogues Faulkner’s “deep familiarity” with political events in the Caribbean (142), and argues that his “rich historicism” captures the “intricate historical relationships among New World slave cultures” (144). Additionally, Eiko Owado asserts that “it is not too much to say that Faulkner’s awareness regarding slavery and its legacy was informed by the terms of early twentieth century American attitudes toward politics in the Caribbean” (135). However, critics rarely address *Go Down, Moses* as evidence of Faulkner’s interest in the verisimilitude between his South and the Caribbean and are just beginning to consider how that “larger territory” is in turn situated within a global historical moment.\(^\text{53}\)

I use the term region throughout this chapter to signify two things. First, as Kutzinski defines it, Faulkner’s region is a literary and cultural territory that is comprised of both the U.S. South and the Caribbean. Second, the term region (as opposed to territory, geography, place, etc.) invokes the hierarchical relationship that exists between Faulkner’s world and the U.S. nation. Critical definitions of region assert that it is a subset of and peculiar unit within the nation and its boundaries are constructed against the dominant national culture. The tension between region and nation makes the term a significant part of the vocabulary through which I can describe Faulkner’s Caribbeanized imagination. The Caribbean, as a series of repeating islands, has its own geographic,

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53 See *Global Faulkner*, edited by Annette Trefzer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2009), for further readings on the importance of placing Faulkner within a global framework.
cultural, and historical peculiarities that regionalize it within the Americas. My reading thus builds upon traditional region-nation dynamics to consider regions that are external to the nation’s geographic borders, but are still woven into and against the transnational reach of U.S. hegemony. For that reason, I argue that the islands contribute to Faulkner’s sense that the region is a valuable rubric for writing about places while resisting hegemonic and homogenizing representations of Americanness.54

Regionalism is the discourse that emerges from adopting a regional perspective, and is well-suited to considerations of the economic, political, and cultural boundaries of marginalized places. Critics often argue that regionalism “impl[ies] a positive attitude to the particular region [. . .] as featuring essential human values and as opposed to other entities such as metropolitan areas and international centers” (Honninghausen 42). As Faulkner wrote *Go Down Moses*, this conception of the region as a locus for “human values” was at the forefront of the American imagination. Roosevelt’s regionally-concentrated foreign policy evidences this interest in the region’s “positive” opposition to a global force. If regionalism challenges larger, global spaces (the metropolitan, the international), then we should consider the position of Faulkner’s region in relation to these. In *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner’s region is dually constituted by the U.S. South and the greater Americas; indeed, these two are inextricable in his vision of American space. Their imbrication in this text evinces a tension between FDR’s positive vision of the Americas and Faulkner’s more critical vision of the region’s composition. I argue that in the tension between these two exists a haunting, which Faulkner suggests inscribes the region with seemingly insignificant sights, like the barren plot from the epigraph. This

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54 For further readings on region and imperialism in American literature, see Sean Goudie’s recent work, as well as *Writing Out of Place* by Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse. For further readings on region and Faulkner, see Lothar Honninghausen and Robert Jackson.
haunting helps to sharpen the vocabularies with which transnational studies might approach Faulkner by inserting local resistances that complicate the power asymmetries being perpetuated by the nation-state’s “positive” deployment of region.

To read *Go Down, Moses* transnationally will assist hemispheric and global treatments of Faulkner studies because it is here that Faulkner moves beyond a positivistic representation of the Caribbean. That is, transnational readings of *Absalom, Absalom!* abound precisely because Haiti appears explicitly in the text: Sutpen travels there. In other words, existing studies of Faulkner’s response to U.S.-Caribbean relations have developed around the relatively straightforward presentations of historical and geographic referents. However, in *Go Down, Moses* Faulkner is not representing the Caribbean as a tangible presence, but rather as a metonymic one. This particular representation of the Caribbean proves both quite evasive and, I argue, ultimately quite valuable to the vocabularies through which transnational studies approaches Faulkner. In offering up this reading of the metonymic Caribbean, I lend shape and specificity to the forces that contribute to Faulkner’s construction of his literary region by identifying in *Go Down, Moses* a Caribbeanist imagination. My reading of a metonymic Caribbean presence in *Go Down, Moses* is indebted to Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* and her conception of the Africanist presence in the American literary tradition. Morrison’s seminal text argues that “a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to [white U.S. writers’] sense of Ameri canness” and surfaced in U.S. literature as “omissions, startling contradictions, [and] heavily nuanced conflicts” (6). My reading follows Morrison’s theory that U.S. literature contains textual features that reveal the degree to which a writer’s construction of America depends upon imaginative encounters with
racial ideology. However, I hope to distill her argument within this specific historical
moment and through a particular political ideology to theorize that there is also a
Caribbeanist presence shaping U.S. Americanisms; this presence emerges in Faulkner’s
work as a response to imperial ideology during a period of “friendly” hemispheric
relations.

Through a series of subtle imaginative turns and metaphoric signals, the text
accounts for not just the visible or accessible U.S.-Caribbean relations but also those that
are “insignificant to sight”—those unstable relations between hemispheric spaces that slip
past our notice and, in their apparent absence, profoundly complicate our understanding
of the region’s historical complexity. In part, Faulkner’s interest in evasive
representation has already been limned in critical discussion of Go Down, Moses’
puzzling form. Its arrangement—a series of separate stories presented out of
chronological order and each with disparate tone, time period, and character emphasis—
challenges attempts to locate a central plot or unifying theme. For that reason, structural
(in)coherence has been a central topic in critical conversation, but I propose that reading
against the Caribbean offers a new way of accounting for those elements that seemingly
do not cohere. This text’s fragmented form might be reconstituted not simply through a
thematic reading, but more specifically through what I identify as a transnational
regionalist reading. Transnational regionalism builds upon regionalism’s oppositional
strategies, but attends to the hemispheric crosscurrents in the regional narrative. When
placed within the frame of transnational regionalism, the text’s metonymic disruptions
are revealed to be slippery representational moments wherein Faulkner relies on a
Caribbeanist presence to compensate for historical silences and incongruities being deployed during the exceptionalist and hegemonic political moment in which he wrote.

As Faulkner was writing *Go Down, Moses*, the Caribbean region was crucial to how political leaders planned to enhance and enact the U.S. nation’s hegemony throughout the world. In particular, the Good Neighbor Policy hoped to symbolically and materially unite North, South, and Central Americas as a singular America that could counter the imminent threat posed by the ubiquity of fascist European regimes. In 1942, when *Go Down, Moses* was published, Roosevelt’s Secretary of State Cordell Hull had already engineered the Good Neighbor Policy as a way to restore U.S. and Latin American relations damaged by imperial actions during the Protectorate Era.55 Roosevelt introduced the policy in his March 4, 1933 inaugural address, when he dedicated the nation to a foreign policy that would treat fairly its neighbors. He promised that the U.S. would be “the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors” (Roosevelt 3). However, this first address reveals that the administration conceived of the Good Neighbor Policy as a global initiative, one applicable to “a world,” not just a region.56 A month later, though, Roosevelt had amended the scope of his policy, assigning it specifically to the Americas. He addressed the Pan-American Union on April 12th with a vision of hemispheric, not global, cooperation: “[t]he essential qualities of a true Pan-Americanism

55 See Lester D. Langley. After colonial rule was dismantled across the Caribbean, the islands found themselves intruded upon by U.S. militia and/or corporations during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Protectorate Era policies entrenched a U.S. presence throughout the Other America: for example, the installation of the Platt Amendment in Cuba (1899) ensured U.S. control in Cuban affairs. In addition, the U.S.’s military occupations of Hispaniola established a Marine presence in Haiti (1915-1934) and the Dominican Republic (1916-1924); both occupations initiated a pervasive neocolonial dynamic between the U.S. and Hispaniola that have had lasting repercussions into the present day.

56 For a discussion of Roosevelt’s initial, global vision of the Good Neighbor, see Wood, 131.
must be the same as those which constitute a good neighbor”; moreover, he proposed that
the Caribbean and South America work together with the U.S. to achieve a “spiritual
unity of the Americas” (Roosevelt 4-5). This shift from global to regional is significant.
As Roosevelt observed that the spread of fascism in Europe and the poor domestic
economy limited his administration’s “exercise of power,” he decided that the most
effective policy would “concentrate on the Western Hemisphere” (Raymont 26). Thus,
the Americas promised to be the arena through which the U.S. might remake itself and
exercise its power during the 1930s and 40s. Crafted around the principles of
nonintervention, freer trade, and increased consultation between North and South
American regions, the Good Neighbor concept intended to prove that the U.S. was indeed
a republic, and not an empire. 57 However, Roosevelt’s policies, while rhetorically
benevolent, arguably continued a long-standing imperial agenda in the U.S. with respect
to its American neighbors, particularly through the policy’s trade agreements, which
helped subordinate Caribbean economies to the U.S.

In many ways, Go Down, Moses echoes the rhetoric saturating Good Neighbor
discussions of the Americas. As Faulkner observes and responds to nationalism’s
attempt to restore the hemisphere, he is simultaneously recognizing that the New World,
a phrase used with increasing frequency in FDR’s speeches and correspondence as
fascism spread through Europe, speaks to localized histories of entangled and inequitable
race relations. 58 Not surprisingly, these histories are ghosted out of the political rhetoric.

57 See Robert A. Pastor for further reading on the specific policies that the United States enacted during the
Good Neighbor era (24-25).

58 Roosevelt’s early speeches rely on “Pan-Americanism” and “continent” to characterize the entire
Americas. However, by 1936, Roosevelt replaces those terms with “the nations of the New World” (106)
and begins to speak of the Americas as a New World that can counter the conflicts experienced in “a dark
Indeed, when FDR’s administration imagines the hemisphere through the New World, it imagines a united body not through the shared trauma of slavery, but through teleological rhetoric. Furthermore, the administration does so through racially-coded language; in a 1936 address in Brazil, FDR states: “World horizons may be dark, but the time is auspicious for our task in America” (109). This American unity juxtaposes a “dark” Old World with the enlightened New, which has been purged of association with the dark body by projecting that image outward and beyond the Americas. Sumner Welles, FDR’s foreign policy advisor, invokes such language as well; he argues that Americans “hold out to a darkened world the beacon of a just and permanent peace” (qtd. in Zietsma 198). As a “beacon,” then, the entire hemisphere was discursively lightened and the history of racial entanglements vanished, since lightening corresponded with the Americas’ moral destiny. This New World image became the cornerstone of the administration’s effort to inscribe the nation-state’s exercises of nationalism throughout the hemisphere within a progressive historical narrative where New (present) has evolved beyond the Old (past). When Roosevelt argues before the Inter-American Conference in 1936: “Can we, the republics of the New World, help the Old World to avert the catastrophe which impends? Yes, I am confident that we can” (112), he employs an uncritical vision in which the Americas are positively united through a clearly-defined historical precedent against global encroachment. This reasserts a long-standing exceptionalism where the U.S. and like-minded republics can reinvent humanity through their Pan-Americanism. And this new Americanism is constructed through racialized tropes that remove the very specific histories of enslavement, miscegenation, and

modern world” (103). Henry Raymont notes that Roosevelt “made a point of playing up the theme of the New World idea” (40).
syncretism. However, *Go Down, Moses* belies the administration’s manipulation of regional histories to advance an imperial agenda. For Faulkner, the New World becomes a concept contingent upon the perpetuation of hierarchical relations, and is therefore incompatible with republican and redemptive ideals. His work in *Go Down, Moses* asks us to re-encounter the hemisphere by asserting a central problematic: national historiography has vanished local experiences of racial asymmetry. By foregrounding what has been vanished, *Go Down, Moses* then complicates the power dynamics being perpetuated by the state’s positive deployment of historical unity among the Americas.

Caribbean discourse theorists have already charted the ways in which Faulkner’s writing displays an awareness of historiographic challenges similar to those the Caribbean writer encounters. Theorists like Martinican writer Edouard Glissant have turned to Faulkner as a way to think through the relationship between writing and transnationalism. In his work, Glissant claims Faulkner as a Caribbean writer, one interested in the violent constructions which shape America’s racial contours. To observe *Go Down, Moses*’ symptomatic presentation of this violence, I look to the novel’s evasion of linear narrative, a well-known Faulknerian style which resists chronological order in favor of a tautological vision of the past. According to Glissant, a Caribbean discourse is one that acknowledges linear history as a fabrication of hegemonic power. He argues that Faulkner’s obsession with history and his characters’ search for a primordial past place him firmly within a Caribbean discourse that interrupts the Western model of teleological history (*Caribbean* 79, 147). He suggests that Caribbean writers’ longing to explore history is realized in their novels as a confused and “tortured sense of time” (*Caribbean* 144). Indeed, Glissant’s work establishes an
affinity between Faulkner and Caribbean writers, as their literary strategies are influenced by his style. For example, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Mr. Compson likens time to “the fluid cradle of events” (51), positing that time is never progressive but rather experienced physically as a flow between past and present. This sentiment challenges the fundamentals of Western historiography, where the past is a stabilizing element within a larger narrative of progression. It is past precisely because it is no longer present; the present has moved beyond the past. This distinction is destabilized in Faulkner’s texts, and it underscores the uncertain position of the region (the past) within the national narrative (the present). In addition to these disruptions to linear narrative, *Go Down, Moses* also challenges the coherent and secure geographic divisions upon which nationalism depended. Glissant writes that the Caribbean writer’s exploration of history is set against a vital, teeming landscape, often violently encountered. He characterizes the American text’s use of space as “open, exploded, rent” (*Caribbean* 145), and argues that Faulkner’s “rent” landscape records cultural and historical violences similar to those experienced by the Caribbean islands (*Faulkner* 10). Faulkner’s participation in a Caribbeanized discourse emerges in *Go Down, Moses* as that simultaneous exploration of history and explosion of the familiar stabilizing dynamics that comprise nationalism’s historiography.

In *Go Down, Moses*, these disruptions surface through the bodies of its raced characters, who serve as metaphors for the dissociation inflicted on discrete American regions by imperial ideologies. That is, if Good Neighbor rhetorics purged the national imagination of a violent history, then *Go Down, Moses* imagines bodies to attend to that history. These figures are literal or figurative ghosts; they complicate our sense of
discernible historical progression, and point to the fundamental instability in nation-building deployments of New World history. In Faulkner’s hands, this instability is troped through references to Caribbean-specific types of haunting: indeterminacy, insecurity, and destabilization. We see this best through Ike’s search for family origins, where he encounters a series of ghosts that return him to inequitable New World systems and compromise his vision of familial and national history. The ghost provides a new representation of the Caribbean yet unarticulated in critical readings of Faulkner, and surfaces in several ways throughout the text. Here, I refer to textual features with which other scholars struggle; spread over these disparate stories are figures that seem incongruous to the rest of the text and are often treated as minor: Eunice, the slave mother who drowns herself, is a figurative ghost who disrupts the ledgers in “The Bear”; Mannie and Rider, a husband and wife who live on the McCaslin land, appear respectively in “Pantaloon in Black” as a ghost and a lynching victim; and Samuel, the last known black McCaslin, is executed in the title story and his death haunts Jefferson’s officials. All represent moments of violent encounter that lead to death and produce a sense of discordance within the larger text. When reading these ghosts, one experiences a dislocation similar to that of the befuddled white characters during interactions with their black neighbors. Since Ike is invested in and constructed by imperialism, his attempts to “read” the ghosts prove “fatal.” However, reading precisely through these “insignificant” markers, through lacunae that stymie Ike, the reader might reappropriate American regions from the unity proposed by FDR’s vision of the New World, where such unity becomes a rhetorical vanishing of inequities, to unearth “profound” meanings that are not only possible through rupture but are also materially realized and perpetuated.
Textual and Geographical Barriers

National history was actively rewritten under Roosevelt’s administration. To mediate the damage done during the previous era to the U.S. image in the Caribbean, FDR’s administration began to highlight commonalities across the Americas. Good Neighbor policies intended to increase points of contact—economic and political—between the regions and foster intimacy through a shared Americanism. As Ike reads through his family’s ledgers, an account of economic exchanges bolstering their plantation, he too is afforded a chance to observe the (re)writing of his family’s history. In the process of reading, he encounters the ghost of a New Orleans slave, Eunice, whose presence in the ledgers actively complicates his understanding of the McCaslin family’s relationships with their black neighbors. Avery Gordon’s theorizing about “ghostly matters” informs my reading of Eunice as a complication to Good Neighbor policy. Gordon argues that haunting is a way to describe how the ghost—as a form of “something lost or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes”—unsettles us precisely because it “meddl[es]” with our sense of reality (8). Eunice is the primary vehicle for Faulkner’s literary meddling; she makes apparent to Ike that something within the ledgers which appears “insignificant to sight” is actually, as Gordon writes, “a seething presence.” Moreover, because the ledgers are a narrative of financial transactions, Eunice’s “seething presence” signifies a specific type of dissonance regarding the history of New World economic policies.

According to Roosevelt, economic policy strove to remove “artificial barriers and restrictions which [. . .] hamper[ed] the healthy flow of trade between the peoples of the American republics” (5). This is perhaps best exemplified in Hull’s Reciprocal Trade
Agreements bill, which gave the President control over trade rates and offered concessions to select American republics that the U.S. granted most favored nation status. However, scholars argue that these economic policies were less an attempt to be neighborly and more an attempt to develop “a Fortress America” (Roorda 4), a unilateral resistance to the Old World. Furthermore, the trade bill “provided substantial benefits to American corporations” and ultimately “maintained the Caribbean as an economic sphere of the United States” (Rhodes 120). To frame the benefits to nationalism of economic subordination and to re-read the ledgers, it becomes imperative to observe that economic relations between the U.S. and the Caribbean are predicated on securing power dynamics. Robert A. Pastor argues, for example, that the U.S. has long perceived Caribbean economies as “out of control,” and fears they are susceptible to exploitation by hostile global forces (21). Thus, the Good Neighbor policy strove to protect U.S. borders by preventing this exploitation at the hands of fascist European governments. If the U.S.’s interest in the Caribbean is always security-related, as Pastor argues, then we might reread the ledgers against the Caribbean to observe Faulkner’s imaginative reactions to the U.S.’s use of the island region as a point of entry, as a space symbolic of how the U.S. mediates power dynamics between Old and New Worlds.

The ledgers complicate the Good Neighbor’s vision of the Caribbean’s role in U.S. security because, when Ike reads them and encounters Eunice, the geographic boundaries delineated by the policy are compromised. Foremost, the ledgers attest to a

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59 David Green notes that FDR’s policy advanced U.S. nationalism at the expense of Caribbean nationalisms. Nationalist groups have one common goal, he argues: to gain full control of their economic resources, and the Caribbean’s resources were controlled in large part by the U.S. through reciprocal trade agreements (ix).
history vanished by the Good Neighbor design: Plantation America. As an economic system that united the Americas, the plantation provides Ike with the impetus to see the New World not as a space united and secure, but as a hopeless space defiled by economic exploitation. He repudiates his stake in the plantation, observing that the entire system engenders “no hope” for the “whole continent” and produces only “descendants of slavers” (271). His descriptions connect the U.S. not just to the larger territory’s history of human trade, but also to persistent contact with the corrupt Old World. For, as he invokes the trans-Atlantic system of trade, he brings to bear in the narrative a global connective thread between the Old and the New World, as well as Africa. Eunice shows Ike the incompatibilities of the rhetorical New World (as a “whole hopeful continent dedicated” to “liberty and freedom” [271]) with the reality (trade in human chattel complicated and transcended secure boundaries). This moves Ike into a different relationship with the history contained within the ledgers, because his historical knowledge is now both comprised of and compromised by the ghost. Upon seeing the history to which the ghost attests, Ike can no longer read the official narrative kept by his uncle and father the same way; it is now complicit in a global web of corrupt relations that belies distinctions between New and Old World. To that end, if Roosevelt “cast his Good Neighbor Policy as a continuation of a tradition and a civilization born from [the Americas’] common past of differences with the Old World [and] look[ed] toward a common destiny in the regeneration of the New World” (Raymont 40), then Ike’s ledger-reading counters the possibility of difference and regeneration. This is not a New World that can unite and provide hope for the Old. Ike’s struggle to move beyond this point

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60 See Benítez-Rojo for an extensive treatment of the plantation system’s pervasive effects and echoes throughout the New World.
underscores that the economic connectedness advanced by the Good Neighbor policies is always an exercise not in hemispheric cooperation, but in global power dynamics that affect regional spaces. If we look more closely at his encounter with Eunice, we see the implication of thinking through the insignificant histories unearthed in the ledgers: these economic systems are not confined to discrete historical moments and geographic coordinates, but are (re)occurring simultaneously within the present to the detriment of America’s future security.

The ghost’s origins can be traced back to the Caribbean, when Ike’s grandfather travels to New Orleans to buy a new slave. “[F]undamentally, a Caribbean city” in the mid-nineteenth century, New Orleans was an intermediary between the islands and mainland (Gruesz, “Delta” 55). As a locus for inter-American commerce, the city was marketed as a space that facilitated trade between neighbors; however, its primary function was “consolidat[ing] U.S. economic dominance over the hemisphere” (Gruesz, “Mercurial” 145). In Faulkner’s fiction, New Orleans is often a bridge between the U.S. South and the Other America. Unlike Absalom, Absalom!, where New Orleans figures prominently, Go Down, Moses references New Orleans only briefly: two characters travel there to purchase slaves. For example, Sam, Ike’s spiritual father, is fathered by Ikkemotubbe, who went to New Orleans “in his youth” and returned with “the quadroon slave woman who was to be Sam’s mother” (159-160). More importantly, Carothers McCaslin rides all the way to New Orleans to purchase his own mistress, Eunice.

However, New Orleans functions as more than a tangible geographic site through which

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61 In Faulkner’s canon, New Orleans is the central off-screen “foreign” setting through which characters’ origins are problematized or their subjectivity within a southern code of ethics is challenged. An “entirely worldly experience,” New Orleans starkly opposes the provincial and puritan U.S.: it is “foreign and paradoxical, with its atmosphere at once fatal and languorous, at once feminine and steel-hard” (Absalom 86).
the Caribbean and the rest of the world enters the text. New Orleans fittingly provides the text with the invasive Eunice, and is therefore better understood as a trope for the strident and systematic infiltration of the U.S. by the Caribbean. Her character—like the New Orleans references—is highly relevant and yet nevertheless so “hidden” that other characters and the reader must “struggle even to perceive her presence” (Muhlenfeld 204). Like the image of the grave in this chapter’s epigraph, Eunice seems insignificant, but actually profoundly complicates Jefferson’s historical narrative.

Eunice appears in the ledgers as a textual disturbance; she unsettles Ike because he cannot fully read her. Ike must infer much of her story through the nearly illegible annotations made by his father and uncle. The only information recorded about her sketches a brief biography: “Eunice Bought by Father in New Orleans 1807 $650. dolars. Marrid to Thucydus 1809 Drownd in Crick Cristmas Day 1832” (255). Buddy then corrects Buck’s entry about Eunice’s death, writing that she “Drownd herself” to which Buck argues “Who in hell ever heard of a niger drownding him self” (256). Their discussion points to a fundamental paradox she presents to these white readers. While their conversation denies her agency (e.g., a “nigger,” as property, cannot have a “self”), the circumstances of her suicide contradict their assessment: she walked into the creek “on that Christmas day six months before her daughter’s and her lover’s […] child was born” (259).62 This act, as Thadious M. Davis observes, allows for Eunice to transcend her position as concubine in the text: when she walks into the creek, she “erases her body from the patriarchal text of domination and subjugation” (107). Davis’ reading

62 See Thadious M. Davis for an extensive reading of Eunice’s suicide, as well as Ike’s response to it (106-112). Davis is concerned with the legal restrictions on slave women, which render them “socially dead within the system of slavery; therefore, Davis points out that “[s]uicide among slaves was dismissed as impossible” (109).
underscores the degree of agency that Eunice is afforded through her suicide; indeed, she is ultimately afforded more agency than Carothers’ white wife (who is both nameless and historyless). I would argue, however, that Eunice is not entirely “erase[d].” Certainly, little else about her appears in the text. However, she disrupts other stories, lingering as a “seething presence.” Consequently, her haunting asks us to reread Carothers’ trip “all the way to New Orleans” to purchase a slave he didn’t need.

Critics have long neglected Faulkner’s decision to supply the reader with Eunice’s origins. According to James Early’s research on “The Bear,” Faulkner originally wrote Eunice as a Beauchamp relation, and she actually appears on a genealogical chart in the Alderman Library as such. It was only in his final revision of the story that he made her Old McCaslin’s mistress (42) and relocated her to New Orleans. Rather than have her appear as a Yoknapatawpha resident, a slave from a nearby plantation, Faulkner chooses her point of origin as the creolized city. He makes a conscious choice to underscore the hybridity of the region and to disrupt the established family lines (McCaslin and Beauchamp). New Orleans introduces to Jefferson the central concern of Ike’s imperial sensibilities: miscegenation undermines claims of national legitimacy and viability. Eunice, as the matriarch of the black McCaslin family, as both product and mother, reveals the disastrous consequences of a plantation economy by disturbing the divisions between white family members and black slaves that the ledgers detail so precisely. Within this pan-American imaginary, Eunice originates from a space more Caribbean than U.S. American, a context that shifts the McCaslin family’s history outside the nation.
With her transnational origins, Eunice stands in stark contrast to the security-driven anxiety of Good Neighbor policy. As a commodity that produces indeterminate and transgressive bodies, she represents the threat that Caribbean trade posed to the U.S. by rending those barriers that maintained order in the U.S. South. We see this best in “Delta Autumn,” the final story in the text where Ike appears. The story, set in 1940, includes a discussion between several of Ike’s hunting companions who fear that U.S. security is threatened by the war in Europe. They argue that “[a]fter Hitler gets through with it,” the country will be compromised (322). Ike assures them the country is secure and “will cope with one Austrian paper-hanger, no matter what he will be calling himself” (323). However, by the end of the story, after meeting Roth’s mistress and child and failing to recognize that they are of mixed race, Ike is forced to reconsider his claims. Worse, though, he realizes belatedly that they are in fact descendents of his own grandfather. Thus, while Ike can easily dismiss the threat of fascism because the country has never been “short of defenders yet, when it needed them” (322), he is horrified at the penetrable force of miscegenation. Fascism may be problematic, but never an actual possibility. Assimilation, on the other hand, may be unthinkable, but it is also suddenly, precipitously apparent. This misrecognition produces a resounding historical intervention, for Faulkner suggests that the penetrable force effectively reorders what teleological sense Ike retains at the close of his life. When Ike panics: “Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America, he thought. But not now! Not now!” (344), we see a breakdown in linearity. His present self has the displeasure of encountering the future—a thousand years is now!—and he realizes that future America has been
compromised. This scene reveals that Eunice and her descendants belie the efficacy of the Caribbean as a barrier between Old and New Worlds; it is always already breached.

Finally, Eunice’s haunting calls attention to the debts incurred through trans-Atlantic trade, and for Faulkner this debt has material repercussions. Patrick O’Donnell writes that throughout Faulkner’s fiction “the quest for origins and the attempted limning and inscription of identity is sundered by corporeal materiality” (48). Indeed, Eunice’s power resides with this material force: she persists and overtakes Ike by the end of the text. She problematizes Ike’s relationship to his own past and future: her haunting renders his future dead, since he chooses not to become a father as a result of having encountered her story. Thus, Eunice proves fatal to the white McCaslin bloodlines. However, her bloodlines persist long after the white wife’s, leaving Eunice the identified matriarch to the entire surviving McCaslin clan. Roth’s illegitimate son, descendent of both McCaslin and Beauchamp lines, represents the conjoined white and black branches of the family tree. When Ike meets the boy, he is re-encountering Eunice, and we grasp her fully-corporealized intervention into his future. In a similar interpretation, Eric Sundquist observes that Eunice and Ike are linked when he notes: “the secret of [Ike’s] ‘patrimony’ lies in the grave of an unwedded mother—not his own mother, of course, but the slave mother who carries the white McCaslin blood into the black Beauchamp family” (Faulkner 134). His reading identifies clearly her significance to Ike. I argue, however, that the secret does not “lie,” nor is it “carried”; both are rather passive descriptions of what proves to be a much more active and transformative concept in the text. Instead, Eunice embodies this secret: she is the perpetuating, reproducing receipt that proves inequitable and entangled relations between the Americas. She is a marker of
the always present transnational circumvention of boundaries (between black and white, the U.S. and the rest of the world, past and present), and transcends the grave to become more than merely a secret, but a challenge to the security of U.S. teleology. As a persistent interruption to Ike’s understanding of his personal history and his country’s future (Not now!), Eunice is a template for reading other ghosts that open up temporally unsecured, conceptually Caribbeanized spaces to account for those lives constructed within and restricted by entanglement.

**Barren Plots and Buried Histories**

If Eunice figuratively represents the fatal repercussions of linear accounting, then “Pantaloon in Black” best offers insight into the potential Faulkner saw in the destabilizations to which these ghosts attest. “Pantaloon in Black” lends us the text’s only literal ghost. It is also the most incongruous story in *Go Down, Moses*. It seems to be displaced within the larger narrative, as it does not directly relate to the unfolding of the McCaslin bloodlines, nor to the fate of the land on which the McCaslin family has long resided. Critics often argue that this story disrupts what thematic unity they can discern, and in their struggle to place it within the larger text are prone to dismiss it, as Stanley Tick does, as “‘non-essential’” (qtd. in Jordan 91). However, if we read for disturbances to the text—a genealogical puzzle of the region’s history—then this is a seemingly misplaced puzzle piece. “Pantaloon” is about a lynching that occurs after a black man, Rider, attacks a white man; it is linked to the other stories only because Rider, who is mourning the loss of his wife, lives on the McCaslin property. The story opens

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63 Wagner-Martin notes that although “The Bear” was regarded as the most significant story in the collection, “Pantaloon in Black” received more critical attention because of what critics perceived as a “disjuncture” between it and the rest of the text (3). Kuyk, Jr. writes that “Go Down, Moses,” like “Pantaloon in Black,” “seems to attenuate its connections with the McCaslin family and the farm” (169). Their observations underscore a critical precedence to view this story as a textual pariah.
when Rider returns home from burying Mannie to find her ghost waiting. He attempts to follow, but the ghost disappears. The rest of the narrative follows Rider through a series of self-destructive actions which culminate in his death. He ends up at a dice game, where he slits a white man’s throat for cheating. He is lynched, leaving the white community perplexed by his violent act. This story is replete with puzzling complications because it destabilizes the temporal experience for both Rider and the reader: “Pantaloon” disrupts the larger narrative (Ike’s family history) and is itself disrupted by the ghost.

“Pantaloon”’s perplexing features are particularly knotted around the many types of displacement that Rider experiences, which Faulkner illustrates through the discursive model that Glissant recognizes as distinctly Caribbean—a “tortured sense of time.” Indeed, the ghost’s appearance suggests that the distinctions between Rider’s past and present have dissolved in a haze of grief. His early narrative followed a teleological pattern—before Mannie, “there had been only the Saturday and Sunday dice and whiskey.” After seeing her, though, he left that in his past: “‘Ah’m thu wid all da t’” (134), and he moved on to married life, his happy future. The symbol of his progression is the hearth, which they light on their wedding day. The hearth also positions him within the region’s larger historical narrative, the action embedding their family within Lucas and Mollie’s history (as detailed in “The Fire and the Hearth”). All of this suggests that—before Mannie’s death—Rider’s life followed a stable and predictable narrative of time passing and man progressing. Mannie’s ghost, however, signals Rider’s destabilization from temporal and spatial constraints—he moves about the remainder of the story as day and night, plantation and forest blur.
Yet, the ghost signals his more significant dissociation from culturally-bound strictures, evident when he attacks Birdsong, a white man who has been cheating the black workers at dice. His response is directly related to the economic oppression experienced by all the black participants in the game; as Davis notes, the “crooked” game reflects a fundamental “imbalance in the economic order” (73), which Rider’s actions make evident. His violence reveals the silent victimization to which the black characters are subjected, but it also provides the reader an opportunity to see how the official record renders those characters’ histories insignificant. According to the sheriff’s deputy, the black citizens “look like a man and they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they can talk and you can understand them and you think they are understanding you, at least now and then. But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might just as well be a damn herd of wild buffaloes” (149-150). As the deputy tells Rider’s story to his wife, his reading underscores the white characters’ inability to connect Mannie’s death to Rider’s attack. He assumes Rider does not grieve, and he cannot comprehend why Rider would react so violently to a game that he’d been “peacefully losing” for years (151). This story is paradigmatic of how Faulkner works within the parameters of a New World history, where raced figures are contained within the official history only as peacefully (reciprocally) subordinate. Rider’s resistance to these strictures is incompatible with the asymmetrical paradigm, so he must be (re)contained by silencing—accomplished because the deputy is in charge of interpreting the events leading up to Rider’s death. The deputy’s interpretation not only denies Rider the humanity that he and his story deserve, but it also ensures that the crimes here will go unrecorded. Consequently, Rider and Mannie are vanished from the official record.
However, while the meaning of Rider’s and Mannie’s existence may be misread by the sheriff’s deputy, “who had been officially in charge of the business” (149), the unofficial record of their lives persists in the disturbances they leave behind.

For example, although Mannie never appears in the text as anything other than a ghost, traces of her persist in the land after her death. As Rider walks home from her funeral, the narrator observes that Mannie’s feet would have certainly marked the road: “somewhere beneath them, vanished but not gone, fixed and held in the annealing dust, the narrow, splay-toed prints of his wife’s bare feet” (133). While inaccessible to sight, the footprints are present, held “fixed” by the land. This palimpsestic moment asks readers to think of the region on a surface level (that which is visible), and beneath that a level which offers “fixed” and “vanished” evidence of the dead. For the black characters in the text, ghosts and their traces are endemic to the region: Rider’s friends know he is likely to encounter her ghost, for “everybody knew” that they are surrounded by “the dead who either will not or cannot quit the earth” (132). The ghost is a regional fixture, then, and evidence of how othered experiences literally mark the earth’s contours. The narrator’s description of the road is one such marker, a place where readers encounter the haunting process at work throughout the text. Consequently, the road, as a site that holds fixed evidence of the dead, is in fact a record of past experience, a metonym for Faulkner’s specifically Caribbeanized historical narrative. That is, the road lends a form of textual coherence to the ghostly traces that are otherwise outside the official record, thus countering the notion that History—what Glissant describes as a teleological and hierarchical narrative—is a positivistic trajectory that leads Rider (reader) from one
Rather, history becomes a figurative route, a “tortured” and tautological experience for those who are linked not to the official record, but to the “vanished but not gone.”

The land’s especial recording of vanished historical evidence is best illustrated in “Pantaloon”’s opening burial scene; here, Rider is digging his wife’s grave in a “barren plot” that is punctuated with “objects insignificant to sight but actually of a profound meaning and fatal to touch, which no white man could have read” (132). The physicality of this recording is striking—should one touch, attempt to feel or know the import of this site, the result would be fatal. The opening descriptions, though, focus on the earth, which is afforded an agency denied the black character: against the force of Rider’s shovel, the “mound seemed to be rising of its own volition, not built from above but thrusting visibly upward out of the earth itself” (131). The grave’s construction amidst this plot inscribes new meaning to the plantation, for the land will record his loss, even as the white characters cannot. Furthermore, the assemblage speaks to a larger history of race relations that has been vanished. For example, Rider’s life is “shaped and bounded by the land on which he has grown up, married, and been widowed. [. . .]. His density is practically foreshadowed by his role as tenant farmer on a plantation where his forebears were slaves” (Llewellyn 500). Certainly, he “belongs” to the land and the text, as Llewellyn argues, because of this larger history. He is a testament to longstanding, un-reciprocal relationships that determine the black characters’ paradoxical relationship to

64 For a more detailed explanation of Glissant’s concept of History, see Caribbean Discourse (64-65).

65 In Faulkner’s histories of the U.S. South, primordial landscapes are often violently shaped into plantations. For example, in Absalom, Absalom!, Quentin imagines that “the wild blacks” enslaved by Sutpen “overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing” (4).
the region. That relationship is officially delimited by the white citizens who cheat, who kill, who deny an accurate accounting of his life and his ancestors’ lives. However, the land marks an unofficial space beyond the grave, a space that might testify to a vanished existence of the many dead who “will not or cannot quit the earth” (132). As Glissant notes, because hemispheric American history is comprised of the entwined experiences of many who are victimized by History, the only “true historical monuments” are “works of nature,” whose function is to keep memory alive (Faulkner 13). The burial scene and the splay-toed prints illustrate this clearly, as Faulkner repositions historiography around places where the physicalities of the past literally reshape the landscape.

In reshaping the plantation around insignificant historical sites, “Pantaloon in Black” demonstrates that Faulkner’s conception of a palimpsestic New World historical narrative can profoundly destabilize History. The land holds “fixed” vanished traces, making the region fatal precisely because its ghostly features can disrupt and deny cohesion to the historical record. This disruption is evident as the story’s presence in the text (and the characters’ presence in the story) disrupts any notion of progress. The black characters’ disruption to the town’s “official” story is a site of annoyance for the sheriff’s deputy and his wife (who wants to progress on to supper and a picture show), and the story itself is a site of annoyance to critics who read it as incongruous to the text’s progress. Indeed, this marks a larger New World problematic that Faulkner engaged by making space for generations of unrecorded lives who were bound to the land through inequitable economic relationships. As George B. Handley notes, New World history is impossible to define because the legacy of millions of Africans and their descendants “is often beyond representation because the lived realities were either initially understated or
erased in historical documentation in an attempt to conceal accountability” (26). Reading through the ghost, though, we see that Rider’s legacy is not wholly beyond representation. His meaning within Jefferson may be deferred, and he may appear in the historical record merely as a tension against which the white characters can record their own progress. Yet, the barren plot and annealing dust are both transformed by this tension. While they do not document the lived realities of Rider, Mannie, or their forebears, they do document their erasure and disruption. This inserts into the text monuments for the unrecorded millions whose New World experiences shaped the region, and it makes room for the enslaved and silenced to participate in Jefferson’s historical fabric.

**Reimagining Bridges**

Guyanese novelist and theorist Wilson Harris argues that when a writer explores the dimensions of a traumatic past, “[i]t is essential to create a jigsaw in which ‘pasts’ and ‘presents’ and likely or unlikely ‘futures’ are the pieces that multitudes in the self employ in order to bridge chasms in historical memory” (5). Faulkner’s jigsaw text concurs: if New World history is fragmented, then exploration of the past necessitates the development of new representational forms and figures to account for elusive historical traces. Such is the work he undertakes while thinking through the stories of Eunice, Rider, and Mannie. However, in “Go Down, Moses”—our final puzzle piece—Faulkner gives more consideration to how these pieces might bridge what Harris terms the chasms in historical memory. By illustrating a series of impossible confrontations between divergent historical memories, Faulkner complicates the puzzle’s assemblage in the face of residual traces of racial violence. In this story, Mollie Worsham Beachamp demands
that a white attorney, Gavin Stevens, help her find her great-grandson, Samuel, who is jailed in Chicago for killing a police officer. Samuel is executed halfway through the story, and Stevens fulfills Mollie’s wish by bringing Samuel’s body home. His help appears rote, even grudging: he collects money from the white citizens, arranges to have the body brought back to Jefferson, attends the funeral, and then returns to his office, tired and bothered by the inconvenience of the whole affair. Bound up in Stevens’ ambivalence is a reminder to the reader of the other white characters in the text, those who choose to not see the ongoing ramifications of violences wrought by New World slavery, or the effect these ramifications have on their own histories. Embodied in Samuel’s corpse, the traces of racial violence are always originating within the region’s boundaries and disrupting the entire town. That is, the divide between the black and white neighbors—even amidst the conciliatory gestures—is exacerbated by the homecoming, thus appearing to leave the reader with greater chasms rather than possible bridges.

Faulkner’s final story confirms that neighborly acts remain no more than hollow gestures. The ubiquity of racial violence lurking at the fringes of the story, and the persistent displacement of the white characters’ complicity in that violence counters the political contexts that were defining neighborly relations in 1940. As such, “Go Down, Moses” questions the capacity of the U.S.’s official policy to accomplish “spiritual unity” among American neighbors. In the early twentieth-century United States, racial violence was explicitly linked to the rhetoric of racial difference that imperial policy utilized. As Barbara Ladd notes, racism in the U.S. at the turn of the century was an “appropriation on the domestic front of the imperialistic agenda of redemption, the
burnings and dismemberments of black bodies a dramatization on the physical body of the effects of colonization on the black cultural bodies of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, acquired by the United States in the Spanish-American War” (148-9). Of course, *Go Down, Moses* emerges out of a later era, a golden age of foreign policy and hemispheric relations. Indeed, the Good Neighbor policy attempted to reverse the explicit “dismemberment” of the previous era, and reconstitute a hemispheric solidarity. Given the entire text’s emphasis on disunity, we can read Samuel’s corpse and the unwieldy task of bringing it home as evidence of ongoing national violence to domestic and foreign black bodies. The body in question meddles with Stevens and the reader by signaling that a great “historical ‘disturbance’” is at work in this story and cannot be negotiated.\(^{66}\) Executed for living what Stevens calls a life that was “not only violent but dangerous and bad” (355), Samuel lingers as a physical remnant of the state’s official attempts to purge itself of the black body. To the extent that Samuel’s story reveals how local history in Jefferson is persistently unsettled by and constructed against such violent purging, it testifies to the incompatibilities of Good Neighbor negotiations.

The historical disturbances that this story enacts are best framed if we look to the confrontations between Stevens and Mollie. Both lay some claim to the region’s history. Since “Go Down, Moses” is filtered through Stevens’ perspective, the story illustrates the way in which divergent experiences with and access to the historical narrative confounds reconciliation. When Mollie first visits Stevens, she begins to speak anachronistically about Jefferson’s history. She appears to be mixing up a variety of mythic and realistic histories by likening her Samuel to the Old Testament’s Benjamin. On the other hand, Stevens is presented as the official purveyor of this history, since his singular hobby and

\(^{66}\) O’Donnell, 48.
“serious vocation” is translating the Old Testament (353). He does not appreciate Mollie’s translation, which imbricates New World slavery within the classic text to which he holds authority. Their divergent historical interpretations become increasingly disruptive to Stevens when he visits Mollie’s house later in the story. When Mollie cries that Roth Edmonds sold her “Benjamin” into Egypt, Stevens tries to correct her: “‘No he didn’t, Aunt Mollie. It wasn’t Mr Edmonds” (362). Samuel’s relatives ignore him, and the Old Testament call and response reaches a crescendo. Stevens’ confusion over the grief-laden anachronistic verse and frustration at what he perceives to be their misunderstanding is so intense that it begins to suffocate him, and he races out of the room: “Soon I will be outside [. . .]. Then there will be air, space, breath” (362). His inability to grasp the “profound meaning” of her grief is indeed almost “fatal” to Stevens. He escapes, but remains oblivious to the implications of their song. In this moment, we see echoes of the haunting that is operating throughout Go Down, Moses; indeed, the song breaks down History into that palimpsestic quality which we saw in “Pantaloone.” Stevens’s narrative, the significant history that he is translating at his desk, is interrupted by what he perceives to be Mollie’s insignificant history, for hers is routed through knowledges that he cannot comprehend. As the text’s final ghost, the song draws attention to the chasms in historical memory: the distance between these divergent accounts of Jefferson’s history produces in Stevens a racial vertigo, and he is choked by the sudden realization that her history has outstripped his own. To mediate this, Stevens

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67 Even when Stevens finally “comprehend[s] what the old Negress had meant” by her accusation that Roth Edmonds sold her Benjamin in Egypt (355), he does not validate her connection between the two slave systems. Mollie’s meaning reinforces that present black-white relations in the U.S. South are still haunted by and operating within the specter of New World slavery, yet Stevens refuses to see Edmonds’ actions as complicit in Samuel’s crimes or in the state’s execution of him. Rather, he attributes it to Samuel’s father—calling Samuel a “seed not only violent but dangerous and bad” (355). Mollie’s interpretation shifts the blame, arguing, in essence, that it was Edmonds who planted the seeds of violence.
must return to the safety of his office; the story’s concluding line—“‘I haven’t seen my desk in two days’” (365)—suggests that his equilibrium will be restored by reconnecting with his Old Testament translation, his orderly, significant, and progressive history.

Together, the stories in *Go Down, Moses* develop an alternative image of encountering the Americas, and the encounter, while often violent, is depicted predominantly as perplexing. Throughout *Go Down, Moses* white neighbors observe violence, but are ultimately invested in conciliatory gestures (genealogical searches, corpse retrieval, and inheritance disbursal). Given this, I argue that it is bewilderment at racial separation, and not the attendant violence, which unfolds throughout the text. Ike is dumb-struck, the deputy in “Pantaloon” is confounded, and Stevens is suffocated by the black characters’ expressions of grief. These ghostly moments ensure that historical continuity is deferred long enough for the characters to reimagine, however fleetingly, the bridges between past, present, and future; rather than stitch together the pieces toward some teleological end, these bridges are scaffolded upon chasms, traces, and disturbances. White characters are left with the uncomfortable sense that another reality, another historical site exists that they cannot fully read. Consequently, Faulkner’s text proposes that the nation’s future will not be defined by a New World ideal of American unity but rather by a transformation of the very notion of America. In other words, the ghost meddles with the idea of the New World as FDR’s administration invokes it—neighborly, reattached, unified. These qualities, when read against the haunting presence of the Caribbean, become fatal for Ike and other white characters who are constructed within the Good Neighbor’s imperial imagination: contact between American regions is now a perpetual process of assimilation, confusion, and breached barriers. Thus, the
ghost is a testament to how historical meaning and continuity in New World contexts are
never located within a cohesive present, but are rather always occurring within these moments of disruption.

Reading the text’s formal and figurative disruptions against the Caribbean redresses racial dismemberment without relying on unity, which has proven problematic within the logic of this text. Glissant argues that a Caribbeanized discourse must “return to the point from which we started” and he notes that this point is not “the longing for origins” (as Ike’s search can be understood) or “or some immutable state of Being” (as America’s exceptionalism can be understood) (Caribbean 26). Rather, one must “return to the point of entanglement [. . .] or perish” (26). Because Go Down, Moses endlessly cycles back to a chronological end in “Pantaloon,” the reader is always in the process of returning. That is, “Go Down, Moses” is not the chronological end to the novel; “Pantaloon in Black” is the last event to occur in Jefferson as recorded in the novel. We are told in “Pantaloon” that Mannie and Rider light their hearth forty-five years after Lucas and Molly (134) who were married when Roth was born in 1898 (46); therefore, Rider and Mannie would have been married by 1943, making this the most current story (as “Go Down, Moses” takes place in 1940). Given these details, the reader returns to the text’s pariah story, to Jefferson’s barren plot and annealing dust, and to a moment outside the official record and the text itself. Returning brings us back to the ghost, where the entanglements are most pronounced. As the bridge that Harris imagines, the ghost evidences how historiography that is recontextualized within and across disrupted geographies and histories can make significant what has been rendered insignificant by asymmetrical relationships. In turn, a history of the Americas might be reappropriated
from neighborly gestures and reimagined through a poetics of haunting. Haunting then is a material and corrective force; it allows for a (re)reading of Faulkner’s region as a porous space, one constituted within global movements and conducive to readings of dissonance and resistance—all of which facilitate ongoing destabilizations, not reinforcements, of exercises of power. As it does so, the New World ghost not only speaks to the simultaneity of past and present but also to the potential in Caribbeanized spaces to house likely and unlikely futures. This ghostly futurity thus occludes the region’s role in U.S. nationalism’s exceptional vision of America as it unfolds instead visions of what might be when historical narrative is composed through that which is vanished but not gone.
Chapter Four

Writing from the Periphery: Haiti, the Bottom, and Transnational Regionalism in Toni Morrison’s Sula

“What was you looking for when you came here?” he asked her.
“This place. I was looking for this place I could be in.”
-- Toni Morrison. Beloved

The fear and longing were too much for him, so he began to think of other things. That is, he let his mind slip into whatever cave mouths of memory it chose. He saw a window that looked out on a river which he knew was full of fish. Someone was speaking softly just outside the door.
--Toni Morrison. Sula

Toni Morrison’s 1987 Beloved invokes the ghost of New World slavery, and critics have since used it to frame Morrison’s canon as one interested in how the trope of the ghost can advance conversations about the history of Africans in the Americas. This essay proposes to re-frame Morrison’s interest in the ghost by reading her 1973 Sula as a story that features none of the explicit ghostliness of Beloved but nonetheless works within certain haunting parameters that make it, rather than the Pulitzer-Prize winning novel, the original Morrison ghost story. The ghost emerges in sharp relief when the novel is read against a specifically Caribbeanized landscape. In mapping the ghost through the Caribbean, I repurpose its relationship to Morrison’s historical work. To do so, I begin with the above quote from Beloved, in which the ghost tells Paul D. that her journey back from the netherworld was an attempt to find “this place,” which she describes as a place that she “could be in.” The ghost’s search for a place that can house her, a metonym of the traumas experienced by Africans in the New World, illustrates the persistent longing of slaves and their ancestors to be placed within the historical narratives from which they have been displaced as a result of the Middle Passage, enslavement, and disenfranchisement. Yet, if we also interpret Beloved’s desire for “this place” alongside Shadrack’s similar desire, expressed in the epigraphy, for a place that
will counter his “fear and longing”—the window, the river, the soft voices—then we might read what the ghost seeks is more specifically a physical place (i.e., a house, a town, a neighborhood). When read together, these passages suggest that Morrison sees a particular relationship between physical geography and absent historicity. That is, the ghost’s desire to “be in” history is articulated against her need to claim a geographic site where she might find agency, humanity, and community. As I will demonstrate, Morrison’s ghost emerges through a very specific discourse about place and, in *Sula*, that discourse addresses both the impossibility of returning to one’s geographic roots and the persistent need to “be in” a place to ameliorate historical displacement.

Morrison’s narrativization of the relationship between “this place” and the ghosts of African American history begins in *Sula*. *Sula* explores the lives of an African American community “tucked up there in the Bottom” of Medallion, Ohio during the early-twentieth century (6). Set between the eras of Reconstruction and Civil Rights, the novel investigates the effects of segregation on the black community, the Bottom. Thus, much of the narrative recounts the traumas that the community endures as a result of institutionalized racial segregation. The Bottom residents face horrific conditions—starvation, unemployment, poverty—and must often take violent and self-immolating action in order to survive such a marginal existence. In 1941, their collective act of resistance, attacking a tunnel that was going to span the river that separated the Bottom from the world beyond its borders, leads to a flood, in which most of the Bottom residents drown. The concluding pages take place in 1965, and we see that the Bottom is officially eradicated through gentrification. Its survivors now live dispersed throughout the desegregated, post-Civil Rights Act U.S., a place that is “so much better” (163).
However, the characters are arguably damaged by the act of survival: each is preoccupied by the repetitive act of “remember[ing] gone things” (174). In light of this damage, *Sula* asks what role “gone things”—those places that once housed African American communities but have since been destroyed for the sake of national progress—play in shaping the future of the U.S. nation. Our invitation to the haunting process emerges with the creation of the gone thing in *Sula*’s portentous opening line, the echo of which we find in *Beloved*: “In that place, where they tore up the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Course, there was once a neighborhood” (3 emphasis added). “That place” contains the same specificity of language that *Beloved* uses to identify what she is looking for. That place once housed the Bottom, a neighborhood that no longer exists but is the central focus of this story. Here, the novel lays out its ghostly claim: 1965 is fundamentally and symptomatically haunted by these “gone things.” Therefore, I will read the Bottom as one of the text’s ghosts, a symbol like *Beloved* of the fate of those who are, in the words of J. Michael Dash, the “displaced victims of the vagaries of history” (“Fictions” 40).

Throughout *Caribbean Hauntings*, I have demonstrated that the ubiquity of history’s displaced victims in regional narratives requires new methods for contextualizing and periodizing our interpretations. For this reason, I will set Morrison’s interest in gone things against the backdrop of the early 1970s to generate a fresh perspective on how the era during which Morrison was writing informs her portrait of the Bottom. At this time, U.S. policies were furthering, rather than ameliorating, the residual traumas of Jim Crow. First, the federal government was subsidizing “urban renewal” projects that had a devastating impact on black communities. Between 1930
and the early 1970s, dates which correspond with Sula’s setting, over sixteen hundred black neighborhoods in the U.S. were “renewed,” a euphemism for the “systematic destruction of individual and collective ecosystems [that] exacted an enormous financial and emotional cost on black communities” (Lipsitz 6). Second, the U.S. was developing foreign policies with respect to Haiti, the island nation that has long lived at the edge of the Americas, to ensure that Haitians remained extrinsic to the U.S. national community. This chapter argues that Morrison’s development of the Bottom draws connections between the U.S.’s political and rhetorical treatment of Haiti, and the ongoing, state-sponsored segregation and eradication of black neighborhoods in the U.S. in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Placing the novel within this transnational landscape, I intervene in existing conversations about Morrison’s regionalist aesthetic by proposing that her communal portrait responds more vigorously to the “vagaries” of hegemonic history than existing readings have allowed.

Sula’s regionalism illustrates how the nation’s polemic between race and progress undergirds its urban renewal projects and immigration policies. We know that the Bottom is “high up in the hills,” while the “white people lived on the rich valley floor in that little river town in Ohio” (5). The first description tells us that the rich valley floor of Medallion grew quickly—all “hot and dusty with progress”—but that the Bottom is “sheltered.” According to this brief geography of the region, progress is the force behind the white community’s eradication of the Bottom. The descriptions highlight the violence of this process, where they “tore” the plants “from their roots,” suggesting that white America is built, literally, over the ghosted past of unnamed communities that once inhabited the land. Furthermore, because the Bottom is replaced with a golf course, the
text defines progress as the process whereby the nation removes native, rooted elements and inserts “better” ones. For example, the Bottom is now called the “suburbs” because white people live there. The narrator tells us that “perhaps it is just as well, since it wasn’t a town anyway” (3-4). This is significant, in that the Bottom is never recognized as a documented place in the U.S. nation, and thus its position in the historical narrative is as the thing that comes before progress. I develop my reading of the thing that comes before progress (the “gone thing”) with Aimé Césaire’s *Notebook of a Return* as a guide. As I discussed in my Introduction, Césaire, like many Caribbean writers and theorists, argues that the existence of Western modernity (encompassing every “inch of this world”) is predicated on enslavement, colonization, and disenfranchisement. Morrison illustrates a twentieth-century version of this in her prelude; the nation is literally constructed atop marginalized and dehumanized communities.68

Claiming that the Bottom wasn’t really a town, the narrator questions the possibility of a historiography that is not complicit in what Morrison’s opening passages present as a geographic violence, the systematic destruction of black places to facilitate the emergence of better ones that will affirm the nation-state’s progress and perpetual renewal.69 Her text goes on to explore the ways that the nation is haunted by the black

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68 I am borrowing “prelude,” a useful term for the four-page introduction, from Maggie Galehouse (343-344).

69 This chapter builds on my dissertation’s focus on region, but introduces the terms place, space, and geography to the analysis. I do so to better articulate the diverse ways that Morrison’s novel explores the relationship between the community and its many environments. As I will demonstrate, there is not a singular place under consideration in *Sula*. Rather, Morrison explores many types of spatial relationships, and the term place does not adequately define what the Bottom is, nor what it becomes. Therefore, I use the term geography to describe the process by which the nation creates and manipulates space. I do not mean this to refer to natural features of the landscape, but a purposeful manipulation of structures—such as bridges, roads, and tunnels—that separate the real from the unreal places. I read geography as different from regionalism, which Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse describe as “not a referential geography but rather as a ‘rhetorical construction’ that enables understanding [. . .] of the process of creating [. . .] hierarchies” (15). That is, in my analysis of Morrison’s work, region signals a nonreferential and rhetorical
communities that it eradicates, and the ways that this haunting produces the potential for historical knowledge generated not through progress but through the ghost. Thus, *Sula*’s geographies are coded with additional meaning that can be best addressed through regionalism, a discourse in which place is a metaphor for specific exercises of nationalist power in which definitions of race have limited the communities’ knowledge of and relationship to history. Indeed, while the nation is dusty with progress, the Bottom is “preoccupied” with wondering “what they themselves were all about” (6). This phrase sets up the central problematic that Morrison’s regionalism counters: progress is directly linked to knowledge. In this way, the nation’s exercises of power (progress) are related to the Bottom’s limited exercises of historical agency. Knowing what they were all about—that is, having found a place where they could “be in”—is predicated on their removal from and opposition to progress.

I propose that we read *Sula* as a regionalist novel not because it fights against national encroachments, but because of the converging “worlds” that influence the community’s historical structure. These worlds span 1919-1973 and include not just the Bottom, but also France and New Orleans. Morrison imbricates these spaces to create a supplemental world for the Bottom, one that complicates readings of the Bottom’s sheltered borders. For example, the Bottom residents are African descendents, they participate in a global war, they enter into battle in France, and they have extended

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*place, while geography refers more directly to the actual things, the structures—bridges, tunnels, detention centers—that help the nation to demarcate its space. For more on geography, see Danielle Russell, who argues that place “indicate[s] structures or physical geography, or the position of a person or a group of persons. It thus names, classifies, and, seemingly, contains through definition” (16).

70 Critics have long read *Sula* as a place-obsessed novel. For a summary of such criticisms, as well as an extensive analysis on the distinctions between place and space as relevant to *Sula*, see Patricia McKee’s work.
families in New Orleans. Each of these landscapes is sketched out in the first two chapters and each is redolent with Haitian echoes and associations. Together, they establish Morrison’s regionalist perspective, one in which the Bottom and Haiti are connected within a system of U.S. racism that extends across national boundaries throughout the Americas.

This regionalism, which I have identified throughout *Caribbean Hauntings* as transnational regionalism, builds upon the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth century American literary discourse that responded to the power dynamics affecting a singular place, but evidences that the global spread of U.S. hegemony throughout the twentieth century spawned an evolution of regionalist discourse in which writers created a broader field of relations to challenge the limits imposed on domestic and foreign regions by the nation. My understanding that transnational regionalism invokes the convergence of multiple regions is informed by the work of Caribbean theorists. J. Michael Dash advocates for the centrality of a regional imagination that observes the connections between the islands and the rest of the Americas (*Other* 3) and Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s regionalism is based on his image of the Caribbean as a meta-archipelago that has no boundary or center and is defined by its repeating character throughout the Americas (4). Because Morrison has conceptually connected the Bottom to Haiti, as I will demonstrate, we can conduct a reading of the historical work *Sula* undertakes against Caribbean theories of history in order to enhance our sense of the U.S.’s relationship to “the other America,” a phrase that Dash uses to refer to a regional imagination whereby writers theorize that the archipelago and North America are a connected whole, rather than a series of individual and distinct territories (*Other* xi).
One feature of transnational regionalism that emerges with the most force in *Sula* and that allows Morrison to engage with multiple historical and geographic landscapes is the invocation of haunting; here, the transnational perspective provokes within an otherwise teleological and positivistic narrative an alternative and unsettling historical landscape that compromises the text’s more realistic depictions of U.S. history. Morrison does this by inserting conceptual Caribbean spaces into the “real” geographic sites where her characters experience traumas as a result of institutionalized racism. For example, in the prelude’s invitation to haunting, we find evidence that Jim Crow and state-sponsored inequalities will persist in the text’s post-Civil Rights Act present. While the prelude appears to look to the past (“there was once”), it is actually offering a contemporaneous perspective. That is, the Bottom’s destruction occurs in the reader’s present because the narrator tells us that the Bottom is always receding just beyond the horizon: “[t]here will be nothing left of the Bottom” (3 emphasis added). This phrasing allows for the writer to bring all future U.S. time periods (this “will be” happening soon) into complicity with the Bottom’s demise. Thus, like the Glissantian “tortured sense of time” that Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* invokes, *Sula* too exhibits elements of the tautological. Like Faulkner, Morrison accounts for gaps in the official record by inserting unsettling historical references. For this reason, I contend that Morrison’s present—a moment of tense relationships between the U.S. and Haiti—is always relevant to her representation of the undesirable and unreal black places that have been and have yet to be systematically purged from the national body. This particular execution of transnational regionalism lends the Bottom a palimpsestic quality; it is inscribed with and
goes on to inscribe readers with those “gone things” that have been displaced within the U.S. historical narrative.

The other feature of transnational regionalism is a Caribbean presence, which Morrison constructs immediately following the prelude. Here, she establishes links between American spaces that lend coherence to the region beyond the nation’s restrictive geographies. As David Jordan argues, regionalism is an “aesthetic tension” within a text that explores the “relations of marginal communities to the larger social and political worlds within which they exist” (3). To grapple with the boundaries of place being imposed by federal policy—as the prelude invites us to do—we must also consider what relationships exist between marginal places in *Sula*, those other worlds that house the region. In fact, the central dynamics that affect the region’s historical narrative are always occurring beyond regional boundaries and between those liminal spaces where the U.S.’s progress is determined. We find this only by looking more closely at the characters who leave the Bottom; each is imaginatively connected to Haiti.

In the second and third chapters of the novel, Shadrack goes to France and Nel goes to New Orleans. These two chapters are often treated separately and sparsely by critics. However, critics have not yet recognized the way that these moments where Shadrack and Nel leave the Bottom have altered, expanded, or complicated its borders. While separate from the rest of white Medallion, the Bottom residents do occasionally make contact with larger spaces, and this contact is always frightening. The world outside the Bottom’s borders leads characters into a vast, unchartered, unexplored space into which one disappears or is transformed. Indeed, contact is an explosive encounter, as we see most clearly in Shadrack’s story; his time in the army renders him “blasted and
permanently astonished” (7), without any historical sense. Nel also leaves the security of the Bottom to travel to New Orleans, an experience in which she finds that her family history is connected to an unsavory and creolized space that is incompatible with her own vision of national belonging.

As I will show, these two chapters function as the prelude’s antithesis and the rest of the novel’s counterpoint: they delay the reader’s introduction to both the Bottom and to the title character. Throughout Caribbean Hauntings, I have argued that the haunting to which transnational regionalism makes the reader attuned fundamentally changes the reader’s historical position. Sula’s traveling chapters contribute to this, but they are arguably the most inconspicuous examples of haunting that this dissertation explores. Avery Gordon’s reminder that it “takes some effort to recognize the ghost and to recognize the world it conjures up” (66) is particularly useful, then, to how we approach Sula. Indeed, because haunting “describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities” (8), Sula’s readers must look to the more subtle geographical textures that Morrison injects into the narrative. It is here that we find the ghost, “the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells [us] a haunting is taking place” (8). As I highlight how certain narrative elements in Sula render the Bottom a Haitian space, I argue that our sense of the ghost expands as well. As a sign that the nation’s narrative of progress contains elements that appear “to be not there” and that its realities are “meddl[ed]” with, Haiti becomes another ghost, a “seething presence” on the U.S. horizon. Therefore, the process of reading these two chapters is analogous to what Gordon refers to as “entering

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71 The same is true of Plum, who went to war in 1917. When he returns three years later, “there was something obviously wrong” (45). His heroin addiction renders him, according to his mother, a child again—senseless and dependent.
through a different door,” a door that leads us to the “fragment,” the “shocking parallel,” and the “uncanny” (66). In other words, these two chapters are that “different door,” one that readers must pass through before we can move on to the rest of the narrative.

**Entering Morrison’s Region Through the Caribbean**

Existing analysis of Morrison’s regionalism often treats the Bottom as offering its community both security from and confinement by the oppressive Jim Crow world at its borders. For example, Cynthia Davis assumes that there are clear distinctions between the inside and outside of the Bottom: “characters who are ‘outdoors,’ cut off from reassuring connection and definition, are profoundly frightening to the community, especially to a community dispossessed and ‘peripheral’” (14). Davis implies that the community, because it is peripheral, contains “reassuring” features such as connection and definition. Danielle Russell offers a similar formulation, when she defines place as something that “can create security (protective enclosures) or a sense of confinement (‘protective’ enclosures)” (16). While Davis’s analysis make sense in the context of Russell’s recognition that place both secures and confines African Americans, I would like to reconsider the implications of interpreting regional features as “reassuring.” Such readings often equate the Bottom’s insularity with an unique ability to root its characters. Dash cautions against the assumption that peripheral spaces can help to counteract displacement and warns that representations of “[c]ultural isolation” are often motivated by a desire to facilitate “the imaginative recovery of stable origins” (“Fictions” 38). Indeed, these readings treat the region as a place where lack of outside influence creates cohesive and knowable histories, ones less affected by the historical fragmentation that Morrison’s ghosts represent. For example, Russell, like Davis, reads the Bottom as a
rural place where one is connected to one’s ancestors. She argues that Sula’s travels to an urban landscape disconnect the character from her ancestors: world-traveling has an “isolating effect” on Sula and creates an “emotional detachment” that can only be emended by returning to the Bottom to reconnect with her ancestors (70-71). Russell’s reading is predicated on understanding the region as a site where one can find real, authentic, that is—stable—ancestral links.

In a broader sense, these types of readings imbue Morrison’s region with an exceptionalism: they imply that the region is especially equipped in its isolation to preserve African heritage because its community is geographically isolated from contamination by the U.S. For example, critic Oumar Ndongo argues that Morrison’s sense of the region, what Morrison refers to as “‘village literature,’” should be understood as “the metonymic presence of [Africa] and the myth of origins it represents every time the South or slavery is alluded to in her books” (26). Perhaps the most prominent example of this becomes apparent in La Vinia Jennings’ work on the idea of Africa in Morrison’s canon. Jennings argues that local spaces are “racially segregated or physically isolated from the dominant, host culture,” and therefore they preserve an “experiential communality” between Africanisms (4). Even more interesting, Jennings terms this an “island isolationism like that of Haiti.” She defines Haiti as a region that “fostered the retention of [...] African traditional religion derivatives in the Americas” (4). This allows her to conclude that Haiti’s geographic features are “compatible” with Morrison’s formulation of the Bottom: both are isolated and this is beneficial to the continued survival of African roots. Her emphasis on isolationism as a productive feature of the landscape, one that can foster rootedness in Africa and reduce contamination from
the West, reads into both the Bottom and Haiti an exceptionalism that over-emphasizes the preservative value of the region. Indeed, these readings assume that regions can, by geographic definition, maintain a degree of access to history despite deep traumas.

Unlike these other critics, I think that the Bottom imaginatively critiques mainstream stances toward the hinterland space of Haiti in the U.S. consciousness. I set Morrison’s regionalism within the context of U.S.-Haitian relations, thus burrowing away from a proliferation of readings that trace Morrison’s cultural signifiers and historical cosmologies to Africa. These readings most often brush against and rush through the Caribbean as an appendage to North America, a stop between Africa and the U.S. However, my reading arrests Morrison’s imaginative geography in the Americas. In so doing, I align my reading with Timothy Cox, who argues that many novels reacting to New World slavery struggle not just with the historical narrative of the oppressor, but also with the myths that “over-emphasiz[e] the African-ness of the people [and] distort and displace American identity” (33). Indeed, I am concerned with redrawing the boundaries of Morrison’s regional imagination as expressly hemispheric American. Such an emphasis adds to the readers’ understanding of not just the moment during which she was writing, but also to the ways in which the turmoil in Haiti was shaping U.S. racial consciousness in the late 1960s and early 1970s. More importantly, though, Haiti’s presence problematizes readings that assume that the novel’s setting makes possible the restoration of the African American community’s link to those geographic sites where

72 A frequent phrase in Jennings’ work.

73 Readings of Morrison tend to move in unqualified directions when they invoke the Caribbean. Critics treat the Caribbean in Morrison’s work as a highly abstract appendage of North America, a stop along the way between the two primary destinations—Africa and the United States. For example, critics read the Caribbean in Tar Baby as a half-way space or threshold wherein Morrison can shed light on the link lost between Africa and the U.S. See La Vinia Jennings and Stelemaris Coser for more on this.
they might find historical agency. A ghost story, *Sula* does not recover those
geographies, the places that these communities “could be in.” Instead of a re-attached
sense of the past, *Sula* offers a dis-attached and haunted sense of the future. In this way,
the novel’s ghosts have a significant impact on how we interpret the Bottom as a region
because the ghostly elements shift our focus. We are no longer reliant on determining the
community’s definition by looking to its resistance to or security from the nation; rather,
we are asked to see the peripheral spaces, those that appear extrinsic to the nation but are
actually central to how we generate meaning as we encounter the Bottom.

Morrison’s novel begins its historical work with a lunatic’s perspective. According to
Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid, when the people of a small place are removed from
history, they appear to be “lunatics who have made their own lunatic asylum” (57).
Shadrack, the town’s resident lunatic, allows us to study the effects of removal from
history. His journey from the Bottom, to the asylum, and back again constitutes the first
representation of a conceptual Caribbean space within the novel, one that becomes
apparent when we read his chapter within the framework of U.S.-Haitian relations. In the
early 1970s, while Morrison was writing, U.S. writers commonly associated
characteristics of lunacy and isolation with Haiti. As Dash reminds us, the horrors of the
Duvalier regime were becoming well-known in the U.S. at this time (*Haiti* 105). From
1957 to 1986, François Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude governed Haiti. They were
“ruthless” politicians who “brutally silenced all opposition” during this particularly
terrifying moment of Haitian history (105). Fictional representations of Haiti in the U.S.
began to depict the country as governed by nothing more than “black lunacy” and
relegated its history to a “tragic lunacy” (*Dash Haiti* 111, 113). While Haiti never
appears explicitly in *Sula*, Morrison’s portrait of isolation and madness (and the resultant new historical ordering) symptomatically responds to the politico-rhetorical conditions of its birth. These qualities dominated the U.S. imagination while Morrison was writing, and they arrived through Haiti. If Haiti was increasingly represented as a pathological space that needed to be contained, then we may read Haiti’s presence in Morrison’s creation of Shadrack, the character who introduce features of the pathological into the Bottom. Placing him within this imaginary, we can read Shadrack as a lunatic figure who aligns the Bottom with these Haitian textualities and who embodies the tautological relationship to history that uniquely positions a person from a small place.

Shadrack leaves the Bottom to fight for the U.S. during the First World War. In 1917, he finds himself in France, running across a field into battle. He sees a fellow soldier lose his head to gunfire, and the sight of the headless corpse running past him leaves Shadrack “permanently astonished.” Shadrack is hospitalized briefly before he slowly makes his way back to the Bottom. He does not, however, return to the Bottom easily because he “didn’t know who or what he was . . . with no past, no language, no tribe, no source, no address book” (12). Shadrack’s losses accumulate here: self, family, body, and past. These things—village, language, address book—once defined him and gave him a sense of the past that was coherent and rooted. Without them, Shadrack loses his mind, as we see very clearly, but he also loses his home. He can no longer remember the Bottom. Returning to the Bottom then becomes for Shadrack and for the reader a desire like Beloved’s; we want access to the “source,” but the chapter denies that. In this manner, Shadrack’s chapter invites the reader into a different relationship with the

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prelude’s progressive history. While Morrison argues at the end of the prelude that the Bottom is a place where the characters “could be in,” that is, a place where they could learn more about themselves, Shadrack puts pressure on this claim. As he wanders through the world beyond the Bottom’s borders, he brings into sharp relief everything external to the region.

This becomes relevant when we consider how the chapter manipulates chronology. Reading without Shadrack in the foreground, we might assume that *Sula*’s narrative uses realist strategies; that is, we might assume that its historical work is contained to and defined by the actual events and dates that the novel references (i.e., its chapters are titled with dates, 1919, 1920, 1922, etc., whose progression suggests that the novel is moving linearly toward that “better” place and time). Realism assumes that *here* and *there* (i.e., *this place* and *beyond these borders*) are fixed and quantifiable referents. In this case, a reading that assumes Morrison’s relative realism also depends on, leaves unchallenged, and otherwise reinforces a nationalist vision of reality. However, David Jordan argues that a regionalist writer is always confronting the “epistemological borders that define a particular sense of place” (10). Shadrack’s removal from history and subsequent recreation of alternative historical structures for the town are guided by his sense of the porous nature of the region’s epistemological boundaries. Indeed, Shadrack’s function in the text is to reveal how haunted or un-real these borders are.

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75 While not the most common categorization of *Sula*’s narrative strategies, realism certainly occupies much of the critical conversation about the novel. For example, Maggie Galehouse writes that the realist narrative is “defined as one in which gender issues, the class system, customs, and morality are consistent with the historical era that the author depicts. In *Sula*, Morrison offers these ‘realist’ elements as touchstones for Sula’s difference” (343). See also V. Sathyaraj and G. Neelakantan, who argue that the book exhibits a “social realist concern” because its primary sectional divisions—1941 and 1965—are dates where the U.S. saw an increase in immigrant presence that further segregated African Americans in the workforce (9-11).
this way, he introduces the salience of the transnational regionalist perspective in *Sula*. As a strategy that confounds realist narratives, transnational regionalism intervenes in the way that realism’s epistemological tenants exclude modes of knowledge production that deviate from assumptions of truth, stability, and reality. In *Sula*, this becomes apparent as Shadrack moves beyond epistemological as well as geographical borders; he opens up possible structures of knowledge that can challenge the racial asymmetries governing the Bottom residents’ ability to know “what they themselves were all about.”

To engage this non-racist, non-realist historical knowledge, the chapter employs regionalist strategies that expand, rather than delimit, the Bottom’s boundaries. Emphasizing Shadrack’s emergence from a Haitian imaginary reveals how Morrison’s text engages what Kincaid and other theorists describe as a distinctly Caribbeanized relationship to history. Because Shadrack is removed from his “source” and because his subsequent attempts to re-order and re-locate himself emphasize the loss of—rather than recovery of—that source, his history is not contingent on a stable sense of origins.

According to Cuban theorist Antonio Benítez-Rojo, writers who attempt to represent Caribbean origins in their fiction participate in a journey towards signification and legitimacy, and thus will never reach a destination. Such a journey, he argues, will “(dis)cov[er] that there and here are nothing other than black holes into whose vertiginous drain things keep disappearing” (241). Shadrack, unlike other characters in

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76 Other critics have observed the way Morrison’s text denies realist history in their recognition of the novel’s oddities. Robert Grant calls *Sula* an “unpredictable text” that has at its center “lacuna” (qtd in Surányi 20). See Deborah McDowell, who writes that although the novel’s prologue “gestures toward ‘realistic’ documentation,” the narrative actually “retreats from linearity privileged in the realist mode. Though dates entitle the novel’s chapters, they relate only indirectly to its central concerns and do not permit the reader to use chronology in order to interpret its events in cause/effect fashion. In other words, the story’s forward movement in time is deliberately nonsequential and without explicit reference to ‘real’ time” (159).
the text, has encountered and made room for the vertiginous drain that is history.

Benítez-Rojo suggests then, that “to be a Caribbean person and to be there in the Caribbean” are both “performances of the impossible” (241). That is, for Benítez-Rojo, arriving at the Caribbean is always about the voyage –there is never a destination. The Caribbean signifies a “dense void [where] one always perceives a lack” (240). Shadrack embodies this Caribbean-ness. For example, his journey back to the Bottom from France frames and complicates the readers’ own ability to arrive at her destination: the Bottom. The Bottom is the destination predicted in the prelude, but Shadrack’s story defers our arrival there. And, since Shadrack cannot actually find the Bottom, he illustrates what Benítez-Rojo argues: one cannot be there. While the Bottom hovers in the “cave mouth” of his memory (the river, the window, the soft voices “just outside the door”), Shadrack has no name for it, nor can he find his way back. For example, he collapses on his journey home, “cr[ying] soundlessly at the curbside of a small Midwestern town [and] wondering where the window was, and the river, and the soft voices just outside the door” (12). In this sense, Shadrack fundamentally complicates a positivistic reading of the Bottom’s regionalism: the region is given its historical structure by the lunatic, and has its locations in the vertiginous drains of conceptual Caribbean space. Having a place to “be in”–that longing Beloved voices to Paul D – is, if we read through Shadrack, impossible for those who have been dispossessed of their history. Shadrack embodies the impossibility of her desire—and returns the region always to that lack. The reader, then, is also never actually there.

The Caribbeanness of his journey home subsequently undergirds the historical structure that he brings to the Bottom, seen best when he invents National Suicide Day.
Every January 3rd, from 1920-1941, Shadrack’s National Suicide Day becomes the marker of time’s passing within the Bottom. He created the Day in order to counter his horrific experiences, to “mak[e] a place for fear as a way of controlling it” (14). Indeed, the Day recognizes the unexpectedness of death so that “everybody could get it out of the way and the rest of the year would be safe and free” (14). National Suicide Day is a performance wherein the community gains coherence through their shared (if ambivalent) celebration of death, and gains historicity by marking time through survival, not progress. Thus, Shadrack reclaims and reimagines an alternative to teleological nationality: the very name—“National” Suicide Day—is a reclamation of that appellation and reframes the black communities’ relationship to the rest of the world. As a region that the outside world marginalizes, the Bottom finds historical expression in the unexplorable dimensions that his journey home depicts. The fear at the center of National Suicide Day allows Shadrack to confront having “no past,” and the paradoxical performance of the Day mediates that loss while inventing a solution for it. The townspeople, at first frightened, eventually “absorbed [Suicide Day] into their thought, into their language, into their lives” (15). No one else participates, but all observe the Day and allow it to impose a sense of logic and organization on their day-to-day lives (births, deaths, weddings, etc.), thus creating a historical process well-suited to the oppression that defines the Bottom’s relationship to nation.

We can also read Suicide Day as a Caribbean signifier, reminiscent of the tradition of Carnival. An expression of the continued presence of death in the lives of the island slaves, Carnival developed in the Americas as a response to plantation slavery’s dehumanizing effects. As a tradition that also critiques the modern world’s
reliance on teleology, it offers a unique way to reread the implications of Suicide Day.\textsuperscript{77}

According to Benítez-Rojo, Carnival developed as a symptom of social complexity (306). Slave owners allowed an annual day of liberty to ensure that their violent system remained operational, while the slaves acted out hopeful scenarios whereby that system’s power dynamics might be overturned. Most often, slaves performed what Benítez-Rojo describes as pantomime-killings, performances that symbolically took “the violence out of tomorrow, when they would have to reintegrate themselves as slaves within the order set by the planter” (306). Given the conflicting investments of owner and slave in Carnival—both depending on the tradition to (re)shape social order—Benítez-Rojo argues that Carnival is a “paradoxical” practice. It serves the purpose of “unifying through its performance that which cannot be unified (the impossible desire to reach social and cultural unity)” (307). Like Carnival, Suicide Day observes the violence of the Bottom’s position in U.S. society; Shadrack attempts to counter the nothingness that the entire Bottom experiences, given their peripheral and tenuous relationship to the national community. And, the people’s acceptance of National Suicide Day suggests that they too hope for some alternative, since National Suicide Day appears to imbue Shadrack with both “sense” and “power” (15). That is, they recognize that any manipulation of historical and social ordering contains the potential to alter their current position. In the

\textsuperscript{77} Other critics have observed the carnivalesque in Morrison’s work, though most often in \textit{Tar Baby}. Their reading of carnival is based on Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories, which derive from the European tradition. My reading moves away from this perspective to think about the specifically American, syncretic adaptations of carnival that developed in the Caribbean islands as a response to plantation slavery. For further reading that places Morrison’s work alongside Bakhtin’s theories about carnival, see Joyce Hope Scott. Scott’s reads the Caribbean adaptations of carnival “as a manifestation of the spirit of African resistance seen in maroon communities of runaway slaves and freed Africans who revised and reformulated the European celebration brought by English, French, and other European slavers and colonists to the Islands. For Afro-Caribbean people carnival became a way to express the disruptive power of new forms to pervade and illuminate contrarieties within their society” (33-34). See also Inger-Anne Støtting’s work.
Day’s celebration of all that is “just outside the door,” the neighborhood finds respite from their violent tomorrow.

Setting Morrison’s National Suicide Day alongside Carnival, what emerges is a whisper of the Caribbean—a conceptual space that lends expression to the pressures upon a place like the Bottom whose history is a “vertiginous drain.” By linking the Bottom and Haiti, Morrison creates a rubric for the region that does not confer identity, community, and origins, but instead highlights the experiences of isolation, lunacy, and rupture. Thus, Shadrack’s chapter does not grant readers access to the Bottom; rather, we are introduced to the gone thing, a Caribbean-esque space that creates the possibility of fleeting order despite being at the door’s threshold.

The novel’s third chapter adds another historical layer to the region and, because it is a story about Nel’s journey to New Orleans, it too keeps the reader outside the Bottom’s borders for one more chapter. Here, Nel and her mother, Helene, travel to New Orleans to attend a funeral for Helene’s grandmother. We learn that Helene “escaped” New Orleans as a young woman, and remains disdainful of her hometown: Helene does not welcome the trip that excites Nel, who has never left the Bottom. Thus far, critics have overlooked that Helene and Nel travel to a distinctly Caribbean space, but the connection between New Orleans and the Bottom deserves closer examination.  

Certainly the novel’s most under-theorized chapter, the New Orleans portion is in fact central to how we interpret the rest of the novel. For example, where Shadrack offers a conceptual lens through which to observe Caribbean influences on the Bottom’s historical structures, Nel actually encounters a more grounded and geographically

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78 For example, in Ágnes Surányi’s essay on *Sula*, the author provides an overview, chapter-by-chapter, of the text’s plot but never once mentions Nel’s journey to New Orleans (17).
specific linkage between the Bottom and Haiti. Other than Shadrack’s war experience, the chapter offers the only other moment in which Morrison describes space outside the Bottom. Like Shadrack, Nel leaves the Bottom and returns transformed. However, unlike him, Nel does not build upon her journey, nor does it explicitly alter the Bottom. In fact, Nel returns committed to those proper and progressive Americanisms that will confer coherence, citizenry, and security, and that Shadrack’s presence in the text disassembles. However, Nel’s chapter lends to Morrison’s regionalism a specific route by which Haiti becomes entangled with the Bottom’s historical landscape.

Like the other writers under consideration in *Caribbean Hauntings*, Morrison’s representation of New Orleans contributes to our understanding of how central this city is to the transnational regionalist writer. As my previous chapters indicate, writers depend on New Orleans as both a tangible and figurative site through which to contemplate the pervasive Caribbean influence on North American regions. This particular chapter adds to my survey by considering how Morrison uses New Orleans to respond to the pressing issue of Haitian immigration in the U.S. In *Sula*, New Orleans is an uncomfortable site of infiltration that reveals the characters’ investments in racist and xenophobic definition of the American. These definitions were particularly contentious in 1973. As Carole Boyce Davies argues, black people in the Americas, those born in the

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79 New Orleans has long signified a Caribbean space within the U.S. Previously a Spanish and then French colony, Louisiana became a U.S. state in 1803 with the Louisiana Purchase, but the influence of its colonial legacy remained. New Orleans in particular experienced a greater degree of diversification due to its function in the Americas as a primary port that connected the early U.S. to the Caribbean and allowed for the exchange of slaves. It became a place defined by its amalgam of races, languages, and cultures. Furthermore, New Orleans is a distinctly Caribbean space within the U.S. because it was the destination of thousands of refugees fleeing Haiti during and after the Haitian Revolution. For U.S. writers, New Orleans has long posed imaginative potential. Vera Kutzinski notes that “New Orleans has functioned historically and imaginatively as link between the United States and the West Indies” (“Borders” 61). This link is clear in American literature, where New Orleans is often imagined as a transformative space where writers can observe the hybridity of U.S. culture. Indeed, according to nineteenth-century novelist George Washington Cable, the New Orleans region of the American South was noted for its “French West Indian tincture” (*Creoles of Louisiana* 172).
U.S. as well as those born in the Caribbean, have always struggled against the U.S. nation’s ongoing denial of basic citizenship rights. She writes that since the U.S. began tightening measures on immigration and increasing deportation in response to Cold War, members of the Caribbean diaspora have shared a sense of what citizenship in the U.S. has always been like for African Americans, who have historically been treated “as equivalent to, but often worse than, foreign nationals” (954). This observation was being startling illustrated by the Immigration and Naturalization Service’s (INS) treatment of Haitians at the time Morrison was writing *Sula*. By 1973, the U.S. had honed its responses to the human rights crisis in Haiti under the Duvalier regime. Of particular contention were Haitian “boat people,” those fleeing the brutality in Haiti by boat and seeking refuge in the U.S. According to Gilbert Loescher and John Scanlan, by the mid ‘60s, the Duvalier regime was the most repressive in the world and Haitians were increasingly becoming global migrants (327). The first boat load of Haitians entered Florida in 1963, and they were denied by the INS and returned to Haiti. By late 1972, Haitian boats continuously entered (Loescher and Scanlon 327). Over the next decade, the U.S. opened detention centers for the “boat people” and activists began filing lawsuits against the INS on behalf of those Haitians who were detained and denied basic rights. In other words, U.S. policies were preoccupied with constructing what Davies calls “the desirable citizen” (963) and considered Haitians as the most un-desirable. The New Orleans chapter reflects this by offering readers a polemic representation; the undesirable is embodied in Nel’s grandmother, while Helene and Nel reflect the ideology of the desirable citizen. The chapter’s preoccupation with desirability, travel, and infiltration illustrates the problems of overlooking a Haitian presence in U.S. regions.
New Orleans is described as the site of familial ghosts that terrorize Nel’s mother. According to Morrison, the New Orleans home in which Helene grew up, the Sundown House, is a whorehouse with red shutters that “haunted both Helene Sabat and her grandmother for sixteen years” (17 emphasis added). The house’s ghost has multiple implications, but I’d like first to consider the way it represents the process of racial othering. It haunts precisely because this process lingers with Helene and she passes it on to her daughter. Through the house, she has learned to read herself and her family as the undesirable. She consequently embarks on a life bound to eradicate all traces of otherness. As that syncretic space of African, French, Spanish, and West Indian influence, New Orleans represents an indeterminable place where she has to acknowledge the amalgam of racial and cultural influences that affect her life. Her fears that the space of New Orleans blurs boundaries between proper and improper racial otherness lead to her assumption that if she performs the proper role she may escape undesirability: “Helene thought about the trip South with heavy misgiving but decided that she had the best protection: her manner and her bearing” (19). She relies on visible markers of belonging, such as selecting clothes and mannerisms that she assumes will mark her as “right,” to assume an appearance similar to what is deemed beautiful and proper within a U.S. American context.  

Helene’s desire to be “right” and proper stands in stark contrast to her mother’s designation as improper. Her mother, Rochelle, is identified as a “Creole whore.” From a young age, Helene is raised by her grandmother to believe that her mother has “wild blood” and to be on the lookout for its influence on her (17). Rochelle’s wild blood

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80 See Houston A. Baker, Jr. for more on this. He discusses the play on Helene’s last name, Wright, and her belief in the right/white way of life.
stands in opposition to the puritanical, white U.S. American values Helene internalizes. She believes there is an inherent quality of looseness that could be inherited because her mother is Creole. Within the context of New Orleans, the Creole emerges as a hybrid figure who combines racial and cultural difference and links that difference to the Caribbean. The term creole does not imply that one is Caribbean, but numerous studies have located the evolution of the term creole in New Orleans to a persistent Haitian legacy, as Chesnutt’s novel, Paul Marchand, F.M.C., reveals. Creoles of color in New Orleans during the early nineteenth century generally divided into two groups: those from Haiti and those from Louisiana (Dessens 95). These two groups melded together as a way to protect their legal status and developed into a unified community over the course of the century (96). According to Dessens, refugees from Haiti following the Revolution in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries were a dominant force in determining the cultural makeup of the city. She argues that the term creole developed as a result of the early Saint-Dominguan community established by the refugees: “New Orleans gained the status of ‘Creole capital,’ a status which had much to do with the role of the refugees, white and black, free and slave, who came to Louisiana at the turn of the nineteenth century. By mixing, through intermarriage, with the Creole population of New Orleans, [Haitian refugees] spread their cultural traits to the whole city” (166).  

The persistent presence of the Haitian community in New Orleans contributed to the

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81 These traits include linguistic shifts to accommodate the West Indian dialect, religious developments as voodoo spread, and architectural creations reminiscent of Haitian homes. For example, the home that grounds this family in New Orleans is located on Elysian Fields and is described as a “Frenchified shotgun house” (24). Morrison’s description of the house links its design to that of the Caribbean Creole culture present in the city. Dessens argues that the shotgun house appeared in New Orleans during the early 1800s, coinciding with the arrival of “‘black Creoles from the Caribbean’” (149). She adds: “The refugees’ influence on vernacular architecture may be described as ‘significant,’ and those shotgun houses are often found to be identical ‘even down to the dimensions’ to houses found throughout Haiti, a feature generally attributed to the influence of free artisans of color from Saint-Domingue” (149).
development of the city as a Caribbean-inflected space. Consequently, we can read New Orleans as home to the original Haitian refugee crisis in North America, and its appearance in *Sula* as a signal of perpetual cultural infiltration.

For Nel and Helene, New Orleans is dangerous, sexualized, and confusing—and must be contained. Helene anticipates the racial tensions and sexual accessibility. For her, New Orleans represents the humiliation her skin color and gender prompt, and her mother (Rochelle, the creole whore) reminds her of everything that she hates. On the train ride into New Orleans, Helene is isolated for offering her smile sweetly, pathetically, to a train conductor, just as her mother offers herself in business. This move likens her to her mother and forces Helene to acknowledge that her light skin, which marks her as “right” elsewhere, here draws attention to a past she’d like to forget. The train ride reminds Helene exactly how she will be read in New Orleans. Within the context of Morrison’s novel, New Orleans is certainly a sexualized threat to the orderly and “right” U.S. life Helene would like to live. Therefore, even though Nel and Helene never consciously or physically traverse Haitian terrain, their struggle to distance themselves from New Orleans as they settle into their lives as proper U.S citizens echoes the nation-state’s attempts to contain Haitian immigration.

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82 See McKee for more on containment in *Sula*. She argues that Nel’s and Shadrack’s histories are preoccupied with a “loss of place” and a subsequent “need for containment” (153).

83 As a lighter-skinned woman, she is particularly vulnerable to exoticization given the city’s legacy. According to Alecia Long, New Orleans has a reputation for miscegenation; she argues that after the city ceased to be “the nation’s largest slave market” it became a tourist spot that encouraged “prostitution and sex across the color line” (1). Helene’s “custard” color (also described in the text as “pale yellow” [20] and without “dusk” [18]) is read in the space of New Orleans as accessible, marketable, and accommodating. Long notes that that city has historically exploited its “mixed-race women and their reputation for what might politely be called hospitality”; for example, guide books recommended the “Creole portion” of the city to single men looking to house with a quadroon or octoroon woman (38). This exploitation of miscegenation makes New Orleans a space of sexual accessibility and makes the Creole a fetish; here, the skin trade has shifted from sale on the auction block to sale in the brothel.
The chapter’s departure scene underscores best the methods by which Haiti is absorbed and transformed by the U.S. nation. As Helene and Nel prepare to leave New Orleans, Rochelle offers a breezy goodbye and then “she was gone” (27). When Nel asks her mother to translate her grandmother’s “‘Voir! ‘Voir!’”, Helene refuses: “‘I don’t talk Creole.’ She gazed at her daughter’s wet buttocks. ‘And neither do you.’” (27). Rochelle’s language emphasizes the hybridity at the heart of this city and, by extension, of its inhabitants and their offspring. Helene’s response denies Nel access to her grandmother’s parting words, a deliberate silencing that represents –on a larger scale—disconnection from their history. In addition, it also links Creole with a looseness not tolerated in their world. Helene’s reductive glance at her daughter’s buttocks echoes the white gaze on Helene earlier in the train. In Rochelle’s presence, the other characters embrace those white nationalist values that require self-policing and self-loathing. Thus, the phrase, “she was gone” has particular resonance—without Rochelle, New Orleans will continue to be absent from the space in which Nel is to be immured for the remainder of the text. In this way, Rochelle becomes yet another “gone thing.”

However, if we consider Morrison’s play on “voir,” Rochelle takes on greater significance. The scene implies that Rochelle’s “‘Voir” is a shortened form of au revoir and thus translates to “good bye.” However, if translated literally, voir also means “to see.” The juxtaposition of these two meanings becomes relevant in relation to the larger Haitian landscape that Morrison’s text invokes—a region that is both a gone thing (au revoir) and a seething presence (voir). In other words, Rochelle’s “‘Voir” may conclude the New Orleans section but it lingers untranslated, a subtle reminder to the reader that we should see what is not there. It is my contention, then, that Morrison does in fact
provide us with a translation for Rochelle’s character, and that translation is bound to our ability to see Haiti in this text. This paradoxical reading commands us to see in the Bottom lingering traces of Haiti, the space to which *Sula* appears to have said “good bye” once Rochelle exits the narrative. In other words, we are asked “to see” the region as a palimpsest. A “document that has been inscribed several times,” a palimpsest contains “remnants of earlier, imperfectly erased scripting [that] is still detectable” (Gordon 146). Indeed, the “voir” asks the reader to read the Bottom as such a document, one that makes visible what has been erased. If we follow Rochelle beyond her departure from the narrative, we see that the Bottom has a Haitian landscape, one that appears on the narrative periphery but is in fact strategically persistent.

Although Rochelle may be lost to Nel, she haunts the remaining passages, for Morrison encourages us “to see” Rochelle in Sula, Nel’s dearest friend. I’d like to focus on one specific moment where Morrison’s description of Sula brings Rochelle into the Bottom’s borders. Like Nel and Shadrack, Sula leaves the Bottom; however, readers do not get to see that experience. Yet, the New Orleans chapter acts as a narrative frame for Sula’s world-traveling. When Sula returns to the Bottom in 1937, the description echoes that of Rochelle’s appearance in New Orleans. Sula climbs up to the Bottom amidst a plague of dying birds. She wears a “black crepe dress splashed with pink and yellow zinnias” (90) and visits Nel “walking along with her fluid stride, wearing a plain yellow dress” (95). These images are familiar to us, as we’ve already seen the color combinations and bird imagery elsewhere. In New Orleans, Nel meets Rochelle at a house marked with a “black crepe wreath” (24). Rochelle wears a “canary-yellow dress” which “emphasized the funeral atmosphere surrounding them” (25), and Nel fixes
Rochelle in her memory as a “painted canary” (26). Keeping these earlier moments in mind, the reader can see that Sula’s arrival in yellow amidst “flying and dying” birds recalls the canary woman swooping through the New Orleans scene. Furthermore, Sula is unable to enter her mother’s house without stepping over “four dead robins on the walk” (91). Charged for Sula’s arrival, the Bottom’s deadly atmosphere echoes the funereality of the New Orleans scene. In fact, the Bottom’s environment is so similar to the one that Helene and Nel think that they have escaped by leaving New Orleans that the two places actually overlap each other, thus creating the greater regional space that Morrison is imagining.

Michael Taussig’s theories about spaces of death are particularly relevant to grasping Morrison’s imbrication of New Orleans and the Bottom. He argues that “the space of death is important in the creation of meaning and consciousness [. . .]. We may think of the space of death as a threshold that allows for illumination as well as extinction” (4). As Rochelle introduces us to “the space of death” that is New Orleans, she foreshadows the threat that Sula represents to the neighborhood. After she overwhelms and enchants Nel to Helene’s disdain, Rochelle morphs into Sula, whom the Bottom residents are equally obsessed with and wary of. Both women represent those “excesses in nature” that the residents fear could “become sovereign in their lives” (89).

Like Shadrack, who imposes a paradoxical historical order on the neighborhood, Rochelle (and then Sula) compel us to see the foreign, excessive, and uncontained figure

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84 Kutzinski notes that the creole figure has long been a troubling figure within U.S. literatures: “[i]f Euro-American modernism’s at once most troubling and most fascinating racial others are typically of African descent, in fictions about the southern United States especially, they are often very specifically nonwhite West Indians [. . .] entering the country through the portals of New Orleans” (“Borders” 61). Morrison highlights U.S. fascination with the West Indian other through Nel’s reaction to her grandmother. Nel is “enchanted with the smell, the candles and the strangeness” from her first moments in her grandmother’s New Orleans home (25). The descriptions of the Creole grandmother suggest she captivates her young granddaughter just as she repulses her daughter.
as a part of, not extrinsic to, the regional community. Sula is inscribed with Rochelle, who has been imperfectly erased by Helene, and she too will remind readers that the region is not isolated from the world outside its borders. Thus, both Rochelle and Sula make apparent that the region derives “meaning and consciousness” in direct relation to perpetual forms of contact with the Caribbean. They hearken us back to the undesirable citizen as being defined in and denied by U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, as undesirables, Rochelle and, as we will see, Sula, are both deported from the narrative abruptly.

Consequently, I argue that Rochelle cannot be read as a minor character, even though she is visible in the text for only a short period. She is, like Faulkner’s Eunice, central to the interpretive process. Her undesirability reflects the political moment where Haiti is the global measure of who belongs beyond the national community, and who belongs within, in this place. As the reader passes through Rochelle, we appear to leave New Orleans and finally enter the Bottom. And yet, in her resemblance to Rochelle, Sula continues the Césairean delicate thread, the Caribbean space that ripples between Ohio, Haiti, and New Orleans. Therefore, Rochelle, and her palimpsestic presence in Sula, offers evidence that Morrison is exploring what coherence exists between regional spaces, an exploration that reveals that the connections between North America and the Caribbean carry more interpretive weight than their relative difference and geographic distance. Thus, the reader’s entry into the Bottom is always through the “different door,” the “delicate” regional connection that Césaire imagines arching between the archipelago and the United States.

The Tunnel and Pantomime Killings
A Caribbean writer, according to Benítez-Rojo, finds that Western traditions and languages, “although indispensable to him, are insufficient for the narration of the carnivalesque context which surrounds him, his context, a setting where [. . .] parody and tragedy are all superimposed upon one another, where dismembered signs from all corners of the world coincide” (293). As Sula’s previous chapters have illustrated, the Bottom is indeed superimposed with “dismembered signs from all corners of the world.” Our journey through these various spaces of death culminates at the tunnel, which the Bottom encounters on National Suicide Day. In claiming Morrison as a Caribbean writer, I put pressure on the carnivalesque contexts by which the Bottom’s action at the tunnel derive meaning previously obscured by exceptionalist or nationalist readings. As we will see, this particular expression of Carnival in 1941 is quite different from all the previous expressions.

The tunnel is part of the white town’s desire to expand. First, the white characters build a road that will help them to take advantage of the nation’s “fake prosperity.” Morrison writes: “In a state of euphoria, with a hunger for more and more, the council of founders cast its eye toward a future that would certainly include trade from cross-river towns” (81). The Bottom residents are also euphoric about the Road’s potential to change their future. Their ability to say: “‘I built that road’” (82) would counter the objectification they experience otherwise. However, the road is eventually built “entirely by white labor—hillbillies and immigrants taking even the lowest jobs” (151). The second expansion project is the construction of a tunnel in 1937: “For three years there were rumors that blacks would work it, and hope was high in spite of the fact that the River Road leading to the tunnel had encouraged similar hopes in 1927” (151). This
time, “the government seemed to favor opening up employment to black workers” (151). Yet, by 1941, the Bottom suspects that they will be “forbidden to build” the tunnel as well (161). So, on January 3, 1941, the neighborhood once again celebrates National Suicide Day, but with the forbidden tunnel looming. For the first time, the celebration of National Suicide Day leaves the Bottom’s confines and heads toward the tunnel’s excavation site.

To illustrate the relevance of the Caribbean to the tunnel scene, I return to the Carnival nature of National Suicide Day. As we saw in Shadrack’s chapter, Carnival is an annual expression of social complexity and of momentary resistance to the slave owner’s authority. However, Benítez-Rojo’s analysis of Carnival emphasizes that what lends carnival its complexity is that both master and slave participate. Slaves get their liberty for a day, but only because the colonial authorities hope that Carnival’s momentary respite will “preserve the violent order of plantation society” (306). In other words, both master and slave acknowledge Carnival’s ability to preserve order and its potential to subvert order. For this reason, Benítez-Rojo argues that the carnivalesque, a quality that I claim can be found in Sula, seeks to unify that which cannot be unified. In Carnival performances, this gesture towards unity is acted out in front of the entire town; two actors play master and slave, and one person eventually “kills” the other. He describes this as a sacrificial performance whereby “killing the old ruler” makes possible “a future free of social, political, and cultural inequalities” (309). As I explored in my analysis of Shadrack’s chapter, Morrison’s National Suicide Day contains shades of this, where Shadrack performs his dirge to encourage the town to kill themselves. However, there is a significant difference between Benítez-Rojo’s description of Carnival and
National Suicide Day: according to Benítez-Rojo, what is so significant about Carnival (and what other critics have missed by focusing on Bahktin’s interpretation) is that both the “oppressed group” (307) and the “official power” (306) are invoked in the performance. The pantomime is an exchange, where power shifts back and forth between the two performers: their roles are interchangeable and their performance ends when one, the “official power,” is killed.

Unlike what Benítez-Rojo describes, Morrison’s illustration of previous National Suicide Days have emphasized the solitary and rather static nature of the event. These earlier Days are focused on articulation, rather than action. Shadrack “call[s] the people together. Tell[s] them that this was their only chance to kill themselves” (14), and the Day is a “prophecy that he carries on his tongue” (153). There is no invocation of the “old ruler,” no explicit action against the power that determines social order. This is because in all previous National Suicide Days, Sula has acted as a buffer that draws the community’s attention away from the inequities that are systemic and endemic to the nation-state. The community’s action against the tunnel is only possible once Sula is “deported.” Since Sula signifies the outside worlds that lend historical structure to the region, the Bottom is literally unmoored without her: “their positions [. . .] now had nothing to rub up against” (153). In other words, the faintly inscribed regional connections that once gave them cohesion are gone, and the Bottom residents end up encountering the larger “evil” that is actually “sovereign in their lives” (89). In this text, sovereignty is the “magic” ability to position the black community. Sula had been the figure upon which they displaced that magic, but now that she is dead the Bottom must confront the “old ruler.” As Morrison writes, the residents now see that there is no
“magic ‘government’” to “lift them up, out and away from that dirt” (160). Their relationship to the government is finally obvious (voir). Morrison describes this quite literally as an illumination, for the icy excavation site “dazzl[es] them” (161).

Therefore, I argue that this final Suicide Day becomes a fuller expression of what Benítez-Rojo finds most compelling about the carnivalesque. First, the entire town participates. Previously, Suicide Day had been an “annual solitary parade” (15). However, in 1941, the spectators are part of the performance. Rather than an imposition that they accept, Suicide Day becomes a necessity, something that they finally engage. Second, the official power is confronted, killed, and regenerated into a new social ordering. In 1941, rather than remain contained to Carpenter’s Road (15), the Suicide Day parade goes to where “the sidewalk started.” Here, they decide to cross over the sidewalk, moving from Carpenter’s Road to New River Road, to “enter the white part of town” (160). “[A]gressive and abandoned,” the “parade danced” to the tunnel’s excavation site (161). Once there, they begin attacking it, “kill[ing], as best they could, the tunnel they were forbidden to build” (161). The tunnel collapses, water rushes over them, and they drown. In many ways, then, this scene is more akin to what Benítez-Rojo describes, and yet there remains the troubling outcome. For example, that Benítez-Rojo says that the confrontational nature of a carnival performance occurs in a rhetorical space where slaves could kill the difference between “who is and who is not” (309). In 1941, the Bottom residents do just this, killing as best they could the symbol of their marginalization. Yet, what began as a rhetorical space for their struggle against the way that place has defined them ends as a physical irruption between region and nation.
Making visible the Bottom’s relationship to the magic government, Sula’s absence allows for the Bottom to act against the social order that has determined their marginal existence. Certainly, attacking the tunnel is an act of resistance. Given that their resistance occurs after Sula dies, we might argue that this resistance is inspired by (the removal of) Haiti. However, as I argue in my chapter on Chesnutt, African American writers often offer ambivalent representations of resistance that is inspired by Haiti. Where Chesnutt’s rebellious acts are ultimately impotent, Morrison’s are so potent that they eradicate everyone. Where Chesnutt’s characters remain grounded within the Haitian spaces of the U.S., Morrison’s characters go “too far, too deep” (162). Where Chesnutt finds inarticulable the shadowy futures and untenable violence that Haiti represents, Morrison foregrounds that violence, making it a spectacle. Indeed, her tunnel scene is not a pantomime-killing. By this I mean that unlike Carnival, where slaves had to return to the plantation order, the Bottom residents do not return. They drown, and then the narrative immediately jumps from 1941 to 1965. During this time, the Bottom “collaps[es]” under gentrification. The historical gap in the narrative indicates that Morrison wishes to highlight the change, and the quick jump to 1965 produces a seemingly paradoxical outcome: the Bottom is away from the dirt, but it is also extinct. What they were all about, it seems, can never be interpreted or represented within the context of national space, such as the tunnel or 1965 represent; it is far too limiting a container for what the neighborhood was “all about.” If the Caribbean writer always finds the West to be an “insufficient” yet “indispensable” context, then this is the

85 Ágnes Surányi discusses the spectacle of violence in *Sula* in more depth, where the “hallmark of Morrison’s fiction is death-watch: the characters – as willing or enforced spectators – often witness violent (natural or unnatural) deaths” (23).
sorrow of Morrison’s book: the U.S. is at once “insufficient” and “indispensable” to their survival.

The tunnel scene also reveals that Morrison’s region is always both—to paraphrase Taussig—luminous (voir) and extinct (au revoir). Indeed, between their drowning and the “better” place that is 1965, the black community has been transformed into the gone thing that haunts the suburbs (165). As we see in the concluding pages, the Bottom is little more than a memory. Shadrack and Nel both survive, and they move through this better place “in opposite directions, each thinking separate thoughts about the past. The distance between them increased as they both remembered gone things” (174). The phrase “the distance between them” suggests two things. First, these “gone things” are all that is left of the Bottom in historical memory. Second, in the gone things, a remnant persists. That is, the region persists in the relationships between places, not in the places themselves. For example, Shadrack and Nel are preoccupied by thoughts about the past, but their thoughts return the reader to those Caribbean references that have been purged from the narrative. Shadrack’s madness appears to be fading; he “could not remember that he had ever forgotten anything” (155). He sees Sula one last time, but she is a corpse in a “small room.” Nonetheless, she has the “same little-girl face” (157) that he remembers, suggesting that he will always be haunted by the dying away of familiar faces. Nel is never capable, even in her moment of grief at the end, to grasp fully that which hovers about her, unnamed, unseen. That is, her loss is not just Sula (which she recognizes), but also Rochelle—an entire history gone. Both Shadrack and Nel are haunted, ultimately, by all that they never understood—those places of extinction and rupture.
In this formulation, then, the region confers a sense of who they are and what they are all about (i.e., “meaning and consciousness”) through transitory and hovering gone things—the only rhetorical spaces where Morrison’s carnivalesque context can be narrated, and the only door through which the reader can encounter the new social order. Her novel emphasizes the value of the region’s relational nature; as a conceptual space, a rhetorical construction, Morrison’s late twentieth-century region is not a place where one can “be in.” Rather, it is a place where one is always in the presence of the potential shifts and the hopeful pantomimes. Therefore, the distance between Shadrack and Nel becomes like the missed opportunities that preoccupy Chesnutt’s characters, an expression of possibility. The haunting nature of the Bottom’s relationship to the nation in 1965 reminds the reader that power shifts occurred, and that new ones might be on the horizon. Therefore, in light of the transformations that occur, the tunnel scene is more than a “momentary degradation of official power” (Benitez-Rojo 306); it is a permanent resistance against future social geographies than might conscript them. It opens up both a new social order and a new space of haunting. As Gordon argues, “haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening” (8). Therefore, what Sula offers in return for the region’s “extinction” is a supplemental historical model whereby knowledge is not dependent on contained and isolated geographic models, nor on the “state of euphoria” that progress incites. She routes the entire story (history) of this community through lost pockets of Caribbeanness in the U.S., and suggests that the relations established in the past will haunt the present and unsettle any ability to “cast [ones] eyes toward a future.” Consequently, Morrison proposes that the region is never the destination, but the journey—the desire and not the recovery—where historical
knowledge is illuminated not by our sense of progress but by our sense of what is just outside the door, in the cave mouths of memory.
Coda

Regionalism and The Age of Globalization

“You need to learn how to walk the world [. . .]. There’s a lot out there.”

*Caribbean Hauntings* theorizes through, rather than around, elusive historical references by bringing to light seemingly implausible connections between U.S. regionalism and the Caribbean, and it models how we might re-imagine the historiographic practices in American literary and cultural studies. As a way of concluding the project and considering transnational regionalism’s future applications, I would like to comment on my text selection. As I mentioned in my introduction, I chose texts that were written during crucial moments of transition and definition for the U.S. nation-state: Civil War, Reconstruction, Good Neighbor imperialism, Civil Rights and enfranchisement, and Cold War immigration policy reform. However, the dissertation’s historical scope, Civil War to Cold War, is also significant in that these dates coincide with what scholars are now recognizing as a finite era in United States history. For example, according to Paul Giles, this time period, 1865-1970, is the only one in which scholars could associate America (and American literature) with the current “geographical boundaries of the United States.” That is, this association “should be seen as confined to a relatively limited and specific time in history” (40). Pre-Civil War United States had an “amorphous territorial framework,” while post-Cold War U.S. has been so affected by globalization that scholars are impelled to “reexamine the premises of U.S. national identity in a quite different light” (40). Michael Denning has also identified a historical break that occurs following the Cold War, a moment where we
leave behind what he terms the “age of the three worlds” (1945 – 1989) and enter into the “age of globalization” (1989 to present). 86

In other words, transnational scholarship recognizes the relevance of such periodization and sees, as I do, an “end” to a specific type of nationalism, one that is inchoate in Stowe and Delany and fully-operational in Morrison. Thus, the time period under consideration in my dissertation is both a singular moment of exceptionalist and nationalist United States history, and an “era of nation-focused modernization and development from whose success or failure one is now escaping” (Denning 9). Denning argues that the era’s end occurs when we “speak the word ‘globalization,’” which is to say that “these worlds and their ideals have not only failed, but are gone, over. The task of the various forms of critical globalization studies is to understand why, to find the fault lines that generated the earthquake, to read the history of the age of three worlds against the grain” (27). Caribbean Hauntings reads against the grain as it describes how writers were unsettling, puzzling, and fragmenting the nation’s sanitizing historical narratives. Furthermore, it takes up Denning’s call for scholars to elaborate on the transnational history of this gone age by refusing to “take the nation-state as the central actor” (28); my dissertation has done just so by taking the region as its central actor. I have claimed that regionalism develops in response to various evolutions of the nation-state’s power,

86 Critics agree that globalization is not a new concept, nor is it applicable only to the post-Cold War age that Denning identifies. As Denning makes clear, globalization is generally a way of announcing a new world-order, new processes that circulate commodities and communications in a global flow (22). He identifies three particular dates in which processes of globalization are inaugurated: 1492, 1791, and 1945. Of 1492, he writes that this was “the beginning of the modern world-system in the contemporary discourse of critical globalization” and which “places the conquest of the Americas and the slave trade as founding moments” (25). Claiming 1791 as another significant date specifies that modern social revolutions begin with the Haitian slaves, whose resistance precipitates “two centuries of global anticolonial revolt” (26). Lastly, of 1945, Denning says that “the discourse of globalization is largely a reflection on the legacies of the period which now seems to have lasted from 1945 to 1989, a period dominated by a particular imagination of the globe, the image of three worlds” (26).
thinking through Fetterley and Pryse, who argue that “the meaning of ‘region’ changes over time” and regionalism—as a critical discourse about the “political relations of subordination” and as a strategy for “resisting meanings generated by others” is thus well-equipped to critique “changing concepts of nation” and “contemporary manipulations of regions” (4-5). In culling the transnational histories that these writers invoke, however, my project can also open up questions about the future of nationalism in what Giles calls the “different light” of globalization.

*Caribbean Hauntings* concludes with Morrison’s vision of the Cold War region, the post-Civil Rights Act region. In *Sula*, the region is eradicated from memory, and the narrator suggests that in this new era there “weren’t any places left” (166). It is on this note that I’d like to propose extending the historical scope of *Caribbean Hauntings*. Contemporary writers are, as Giles and Denning argue, producing narratives about nation and region in a very different age, one that is arguably less “nation-focused.” How might we reexamine the premises of nationalism, and the urgency of regionalism, in this “different light”? That is, if region and nation have traditionally been understood as a conjoined pair, what happens to regionalist studies if we move beyond the era of a nation-centric world? If we look to contemporary writers who have a very different geographic, political, and linguistic relationship to nation than our U.S. writers, can we learn more about the rhetorics and politics of the region? How does regionalism evolve in the age of globalization?

Transnational regionalism takes on a different sense of urgency when applied to representations of region that appear in the writings of the Caribbean diaspora, where the writer’s relationship to nation is much more transitory and evolutionary. Diasporic
writers belong to a national community that is dispersed across geographies but that retains a sense of cohesion despite the distance between its people. Current writings across the Americas, narratives of diaspora, exile, and immigration, question what it means to think nationally while straddling multiple locations. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih argue that the transnational is a space or practice that is constructed by the traveling, migrant, and moving figures, which they refer to as “border-crossing agents” (5). Yet, these border-crossing agents are also inflected by the various regions out of which they write and live. From the perspective of Caribbean writers in the diaspora, transnational regionalism, then, becomes an exploration of a paradox: (how) does one remain grounded in region, while existing somewhere beyond the boundaries of nation? Their work can offer insight into what we have previously understood to be the interdependency of region and nation. To what extent does the presence of region in the transnational mark a space that is both beyond, yet still within, the realm of the national?

Diaspora is often the result of political processes that are violent and traumatic, and thus its writing struggles against very material forces, including geography, memory, language, and state-sponsored terror. According to James Clifford, diaspora is a “signifier not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as a distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement” (308). I contend that contemporary writers like Cristina García, Edwidge Danticat, and Junot Díaz use regionalist strategies in their fiction to represent and react to forces of displacement. What I’m most interested in are the ways that they articulate the local, particularly—as my research indicates—not only as a struggle but also as a vulnerability, something that Díaz is particularly adept at describing. The main character from his
story, “Drown,” illustrates best the pressing need for discourses that can articulate the vulnerability and movement of diaspora but do so in material and “placed” terms. A young immigrant from the Dominican Republic, he wonders how he might escape his impoverished New Jersey neighborhood, but his ambivalent actions are always conscripted as he encounters various local and national barriers. By the story’s conclusion, he is finally rendered motionless. However, he describes the feeling as being “caught somewhere in between, rocked slowly back and forth the way surf holds junk against the shore, rolling it over and over” (105). He expresses his immobility as a placelessness, a state of being where one has too much place (he is caught and held) and never enough (he is always moving and never arriving on the shore). The result is a hypnotic existence that is remedied, according to his friend, only by “learn[ing] how to walk the world” (102). In other words, Díaz situates the local in the movement itself; these characters can re-define their relationship to forces that displace them, those powers that “hold” them in flux, by learning fungible navigational skills.

I am interested, then, in how Caribbean American writers complicate the dynamic between security and vulnerability that are generally associated with regionalist narratives. As I demonstrated in my previous chapters, region is often associated with providing its community a degree of security—ontological, epistemological, and political definition. For example, Robert Jordan argues that “specificity of place will define a distinctive mode of being” (106). However, Stuart Hall argues that diasporic people are always removed from the security afforded by place: “their true cultures, the places they really come from, the traditions that really formed them, are somewhere else” (28). Furthermore, Cuban writer Román de la Campa argues that globalization will do away
with finite and local places, which he claims would be disastrous: “[t]he push toward utopias without spatial borders [. . .] may be precipitating an identity crisis everywhere” (7-8). If the regionalist text is situated, as Jordan claims, “on” the epistemological, cultural, geographic borders (10), and if a diasporic writer belongs simultaneously to multiple regions and to none at all (as that “true” place is always “somewhere else”), then these perspectives, when they imply that diasporas are so border-less that they are in crisis, reflect essentialist and exceptionalist assumptions about placement and displacement.

However, as my analysis throughout Caribbean Hauntings reveals, region is not the place where one can be in. Across the twentieth century, the region is increasingly a decaying and receding place, one that is—by the time we arrive at Morrison—a gone thing. For this reason, Morrison proposes that it is in the distance between places, not in the places themselves, that the late-twentieth century region emerges. That is, this type of regionalism is not conducive to arguments about discovering origins, essences, and truths—it does not privilege “true” culture, identity, or place. Instead, it lends itself to describing the experience of “learn[ing] how to walk the world.” As my research into contemporary writers of the Caribbean diaspora confirms, this expression of transnational regionalism—one where characters are both “caught” and in constant motion, “rocking” and rolling” against the shore—can offer insight into the potential and the hazards of being between places. When one “walks the world” but remains rooted in the understanding of multiply-located, multiply-situated oppressions that one encounters, alternative types of being and belonging necessarily emerge. Therefore, I argue that the diasporic writers’ especial focus on the ease and dis-ease of moving between regions can
produce new lines of inquiry into what it means to belong to a place. Moreover, diaspora might help to re-envision region in ways similar to what Morrison hints at in Sula, where the region is a floating, not rooted, space, one that should not be read as an excavation site, but as a vantage point from which to overcome historical partitions. In this sense, then, we might reconceive of the region in the age of globalization as a temporary place to be in, a transitory ground on which to stand, a quickly closing door.
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