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Waltzing with Hitler:
Black Writers, the Third Reich,
and Demonic Grounds of Comparison, 1936-1940

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Comparative Literature

by

Benjamin Ratskoff

2021

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Waltzing with Hitler:
Black Writers, the Third Reich,
and Demonic Grounds of Comparison, 1936-1940

by

Benjamin Ratskoff
Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature
University of California, Los Angeles, 2021
Professor Michael Rothberg, Chair

This dissertation analyzes the idiosyncratic and ambivalent ways Black writers in the United States and French Empire perceived Nazism, up close and at a distance, from 1936 to 1940. This period reveals the pervasive sense among Black writers, artists, and militants that German fascism was entangled with the colonialism and racialization experienced in the liberal empires. While significant scholarship, primarily in the fields of memory studies, French studies and German studies, has uncovered seminal intersections and continuities linking the Holocaust and colonialism—both in the terms of empirical historical research and collective memory—this dissertation expands the comparative archive to include Black writers who elaborated comparisons in real-time and without rear-view knowledge of the Holocaust as a bounded historical atrocity. In doing so, it excavates comparative schemas that are outside dominant

frameworks and require a nondeterministic approach, which I term “demonic grounds of comparison.” If the conventional ground of comparison classifies and organizes white supremacy and Nazism, Blacks and Jews, into neat comparative taxonomies of measure and equivalence, demonic grounds of comparison blaspheme against such comparative pieties by destabilizing commensurability and “providing avenues for the conjuring of alternate possibilities” indifferent to the governing alignments of victims, perpetrators, and their attendant ‘racisms.’

The first chapter focuses on the columns written by Du Bois for the *Pittsburgh Courier* while spending four months in the Third Reich in 1936. This correspondence, in its form as serialized columns, produced neither a definitive nor discrete analysis but offered an ambivalent and mercurial elaboration of comparison across time, marked by unsettlement, incoherence, and contingency. By reading serial columns, this chapter moves away from unearthing a delimited comparative perspective that ostensibly coheres and toward a structure of comparison that is disintegrated and contradictory, assembling and disassembling different vantage points across space and time and retreating from the comforts of analogical orthodoxies. Du Bois’s unsettlement of comparison is an inventive mode, generating multiple, relational strategies for conceptualizing the roles of economics and race in fascism’s rise—and thus relating multiples regimes of race—while at the same time marking that which exceeds generalized analogies between anti-Blackness and antisemitism.

The next chapter shifts from an analysis of an unfolding series of texts to one discrete text: the “the manifesto of the negritude movement,” Léon-Gontran Damas’s 1938 poetry collection *Pigments*. With close readings of two of the poems in the collection—“Save Our Souls” and “Nuit Blanche”—alongside contemporaneous writing from Suzanne Césaire, C. L. R. James, and, especially, Hannah Arendt, I argue that *Pigments*’ negritude critique of Black

assimilation isolates precise historical resemblances and adjacencies between francophone Blacks and germanophone Jews, and between the Third Republic and the Third Reich. These in turn evince analogous breakdowns of imperial inclusion and expose the filiative ground of race-making on which the supposedly adversarial Third Republic and Third Reich are correlated. Both poems mobilized the overlapping, synchronic context of the Third Reich and its persecution of German Jews, tracing the adjacencies linking negritude strategies of class betrayal and European Jewish politics of assimilation.

The final two chapters unearth a method of *periscopic comparison*, an approach that activates a novel's paratexts in order to represent its synchronic, international relationalities. It does so, however, without smoothening the novelistic and paratextual viewpoints into a coherent whole or plane of equivalence—on which the US and the Third Reich, and Blacks and Jews, would relate to each other as discrete, given unities. Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) was a naturalist proletarian novel that magnified the environmental formation and psychic tension of Bigger Thomas, a young Black man in Depression-era Chicago's Black Belt. However, in private correspondence, lectures, pamphlets, and public responses, Wright chased the novel's interpretation, curving away from the novel's claustrophobic focalization by asserting the international framework of the novel's relevance. The first chapter of this section focuses primarily on the slanted, paratextual lines of connection Wright traced from Bigger to German fascists, which maneuver around the novel's focalization to coordinate multiple scales and registers of material and psychic dispossession across what Wright described as a vast "commodity-profit machine." The coordination of these scales and registers circuited the Communist Party's blindness to the Black lumpenproletariat in the interwar United States through its synchronic failure to prevent the rise of fascism in Germany.

The final chapter asks what periscopic comparisons Wright's paratexts make to oppressed Jews. Jewishness appears submerged and peripheral in the novel, and sometimes it is present in the absence of Jews themselves. And manuscript drafts of the novel alongside archived writing notes reveal a curious textual process in which the Jewishness of characters was effaced. However, what is submerged and peripheral in the novel's microscopic focalization becomes visible and suggestive in the paratexts, producing a critical tension between Bigger's local relations with white Jewish Chicagoans and his international identification with Jewish Biggers. The novel's acutely local focalization thus submerges Jewishness in whiteness while its paratexts pivot to uncover particular Jewish Biggers in the field of international multiplication. In doing so, Wright exposed the scalar imbrication of white/Black and Aryan/Jew axes of racialization. The territorialization of race occurred simultaneously across local and international scales, coding anti-Black and anti-Jewish racializing assemblages in overlapping and contradictory schemes that constantly organized and reorganized whiteness, Aryanness, Blackness, and Jewishness according to the shifting scale of relation or comparison.

The dissertation of Benjamin Ratskoff is approved.

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2021

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Introduction: Demonic Grounds of Comparison

“Hitler Will Treat Jews Like Blacks: Adopts South African Methods to Deal With Problem.”¹ “Says Jews Are Full Citizens in So. Africa: Press Flays Anti-Jewish Talk Of Minister in Bitter Terms.”² Two headlines printed side by side on the Chicago Defender Foreign News Page of November 13, 1937. The contradictions produced by international synchrony and comparison could not be more apparent as the former posited Black and Jewish racialization as radically parallel, connected processes in multiple geopolitical zones while the latter implied, at the scale of a single settler-colony, that such processes were radically incommensurable; Hitler might adopt methods of racialized governance from the Union of South Africa and apply them to Jews in Germany but South African Jews themselves would not be subjected to them. The first column was composed and sent as correspondence from Hamburg by Trinidad-born anti-colonial, Pan-Africanist militant (and former editor of the *Negro Worker*) George Padmore. While the headline prefigured a somewhat simplifying comparative mode that would become more or less conventional in postwar, anti-colonial Black discourses—namely, in Césaire’s terms, that “Hitler applied to Europe colonialist procedures”—the reporting in the column itself navigated multiple axes, scales, and registers of relation.³ In distinction to the analogical presuppositions of the headline, in which the Nazi treatment of Jews *here* (in Germany) resembled the treatment of Blacks *there* (in South Africa and the US South), Padmore’s correspondence layered anti-Blackness and antisemitism according to both diachronic and synchronic axes and at both national and international scales.⁴

¹ George Padmore, “Hitler Will Treat Jews Like Blacks,” *Chicago Defender*, November 13, 1937, sec. Chicago Defender Foreign News Page.

² Anonymous, “Says Jews Are Full Citizens in So. Africa,” *Chicago Defender*, November 13, 1937, sec. Chicago Defender Foreign News Page.

³ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 36.

⁴ Following Charisse Burden-Stelly, I use anti-Blackness throughout this dissertation to name “the reduction of Blackness to a category of abjection and subjection through narrations of absolute biological or cultural difference;

Writing from Hamburg, a stop on his route from Holland to Sweden, Padmore recalled that “four years ago I was arrested by the Nazis and deported from Germany for criticizing Hitler’s treatment of Negroes from the former German African colonies, at that time living in Germany.”⁵ Now, after having “had the opportunity to meet and speak with many Jewish leaders and to discuss the ‘Jewish’ problem...I am able to say that the position of the Jews under the Nazi regime is as bad as the conditions of the Negroes in the Southern States of America and South Africa.” Padmore both traced the temporal development of anti-Black and anti-Jewish governance in the Third Reich itself and also identified a synchronic, structural parallel of racialized positionality between Jews in the Third Reich and Blacks subjected to Jim Crow and South African regimes. Furthermore, beyond the identification of such national continuities and international parallels, Padmore exposed a material network of personnel that provided the causal link between democratic, settler-colonial, and fascist apparatuses of racial segregation and discrimination: “Fascist leaders have been sent to America and South Africa...so that similar methods can be applied against the Jews in Germany.” Racializing governance at the national scale of the Third Reich accumulated, over time, overlapping anti-Black and anti-Jewish dimensions while, at the international scale, an interactive network of shared methods paralleled discrete geopolitical zones of white and Aryan supremacy.

Just two columns to the right of Padmore’s was the headline announcing “Jews Are Full Citizens in So. Africa,” under which correspondence from Cape Town reported on South African Minister of Defense Oswald Pirow’s warning to Jewish immigrants, who supported a German

ruling-class monopolization of political power; negative and derogatory mass media propaganda; the ascent of discriminatory legislation that maintains and reinscribes inequality, not least various modes of segregation; and social relations in which distrust and antipathy toward those racialized as Black is normalized and in which ‘interracial mass behavior involving violence assumes a continuously potential danger.’” “Modern U.S. Racial Capitalism: Some Theoretical Insights,” *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 72, no. 3 (August 2020): 11–12.

⁵ Padmore, “Hitler Will Treat Jews Like Blacks.”

boycott, to “behave like gentleman”; the column printed responses from the *Cape Times* and Minister of Education J. H. Hofmeyr that characterized Pirow’s remarks as a “monstrous indiscretion” and disavowed anti-Jewish discrimination in South Africa.⁶ Even as anti-Jewish race-baiting became central to National Party politicians such as Pirow, liberal media and politicians affirmed the inclusion of Jewish immigrants as “full citizens”—that is, as enfranchised settlers in contrast to the colonized and dispossessed Black natives. Reading Padmore’s column in the context of the broader newspaper page in which it was printed thus raises questions about the analogical integrity of “Jews” and “Blacks” as diasporic units and, consequently, antisemitism and anti-Blackness as parallel forms of racialized governance.⁷ While Padmore considered how Nazi antisemitism combined with and adopted the methods of anti-Black governance at German and international scales, the column across from his suggested that, at a South African scale, Jews did not parallel the structural position of Blacks at all; even the governmental methods proposed by the nationalist Pirow (e.g. restricting Jewish immigration) neither resembled nor adopted the anti-Black methods of racial segregation. The newspaper page therefore presented a complex, multiscalar field of synchronic relations that drew multiple lines of connection between Jews and Blacks, antisemitism and anti-Blackness, and the Third Reich, United States, and Union of South Africa—profoundly destabilizing but not foreclosing comparison.

A year and a half later, Haitian communist writer Jacques Roumain published a brief essay in the short-lived, Paris-based revue *Les Volontaires* that, in between the Munich capitulation to Nazi imperialism and the invasion of Poland, unearthed an international network

⁶ Anonymous, “Says Jews Are Full Citizens in So. Africa.”

⁷ To make matters even more complicated, another column on the page reported on the “disorders...continuing in Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews.” See Anonymous, “Arab Revolt Spreads to Transjordan,” *Chicago Defender*, November 13, 1937, sec. Chicago Defender Foreign News Page.

of violence and exploitation from which writers could not extricate themselves. Writing as a colonial refugee in an increasingly nationalist Europe creeping towards war, Roumain argued,

An isolation of facts in space that would result in the moral independence of the individual seems to me inconceivable... Distant colonies are integrated in the deadly game of diplomacy in the same way as the borders of Central Europe, and the same newspaper page tells us that in a small Alabama town nine young, innocent Negroes were condemned to death, burned alive in the electric chair, and that a writer has, behind the barbed wire of a Hitlerian concentration camp, paid for the crime of being a Jew.⁸

Roumain's international frame disregarded normative geopolitical taxonomies in order to clarify isomorphic dynamics of land, labor, and violence that unified colonial domination with Nazi imperialism. He made a seemingly asymmetrical comparison, asserting the isomorphism of overseas *colonies* and Central European *borders*—typically incommensurable terms—vis-à-vis Western diplomacy. Roumain then located sameness in the compressed, discursive zone of the newspaper page, anticipating Benedict Anderson's argument that the juxtaposition of events on the newspaper page evoked imagined links by readers.⁹ However, unlike Anderson's attention to the consequent emergence of national consciousness, Roumain emphasized how textual juxtapositions produced by multiple flows of information, and converging in the ephemeral commodity unit of the newspaper page, enabled him to recognize the thick relations of state

⁸ Jacques Roumain, "Sur La Liberté de l'Écrivain," in *Oeuvres Complètes*, by Jacques Roumain, ed. Léon-François Hoffman and Yves Chemla (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2018), 691–92; my translation. "Un isolement des faits dans l'espace qui aurait pour résultat l'indépendance morale de l'individu me semble inconcevable... de lointaines colonies sont intégrées dans le jeu mortel des diplomaties au même titre que des frontières d'Europe Centrale, et la même page de journal nous apprend que dans une petite ville d'Alabama neuf jeunes nègres innocents ont été condamnés à périr, brûlés vifs sur la chaise électrique et qu'un écrivain a payé derrière les barbelés d'un camp de concentration hitlérien, le crime d'être Juif."

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 33-6.

terror articulating the necropolitical and biopolitical regimes of Jim Crow and the Third Reich. The newspaper page was not merely a vehicle for national consolidation but also fertile ground for a disruptive and uneven internationalism. Roumain then again created an asymmetrical comparison—between an anti-Black legal apparatus of premature death (“nine young, innocent Negroes were condemned to death”) and a repressive apparatus of illiberal incarceration (“a writer...behind the barbed wire of a Hitlerian concentration camp”)—before revealing that the criminalization of the incarcerated writer was not merely the function of illiberal censorship but in fact a criminalizing racialization (“...for the crime of being a Jew”). Questions of white supremacy and antisemitism become inseparable from ones of cultural production in general and writing in particular. Roumain’s essay collapsed the real and imaginary distances between colonial and metropolitan worlds (and their attendant racial and imperial violences) by suggesting mutually inflected relations across, what Richard Wright would name, a vast, international “commodity-profit machine.”¹⁰

The period immediately before the Second World War reveals the pervasive sense among Black writers, artists, and militants that German fascism was entangled with the colonialism and racialization experienced in the liberal empires—although the shape of this entanglement varied greatly in their work. Ethan B. Katz’s methodological approach to interrogating antisemitism, Islamophobia, and colonialism in the French empire asserts entanglement “constitutes a useful framework because it holds up simultaneously the deep interconnections between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, on the one hand, and the fact that the two ideologies remained discrete, each with its own distinctive facets and trajectory, on the other.”¹¹ Likewise, entanglement accurately

¹⁰ Richard Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born: The Story of Native Son, One of the Most Significant Novels of Our Time, and How It Came to Be Written* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 12.

¹¹ Ethan B. Katz, “An Imperial Entanglement: Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and Colonialism,” *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (October 2018): 1192.

describes the various ways Black writers, artists, and militants understood both the interconnections and discrete trajectories of anti-Blackness and antisemitism, colonialism and fascism. Like in Katz's study, such interconnections and trajectories were not merely perceived at a distance, comparing two or more discrete locations of oppression, but often materialized as an immediate and overlapping convergence of racializing assemblages and regimes of race. Black anti-colonial organizers on the European continent itself, for example—including the Trinidad-born Padmore and Cameroon-born Joseph Bilé in Germany and Mali-born Tiémoko Kouyaté in France—quite literally faced fascist repression as Berlin maneuvered to eliminate leftist dissidents; Padmore was deported from the Reich in 1933, Bilé refused reentry from Paris in 1934, and Kouyaté ultimately deported to KL Mauthausen from occupied France in 1943.¹² Others on the African and American continents remained distinctly attuned to the fascist behemoth in their representations of race and colonialism, from conservatives to Marxists and reporters to novelists. The transit of people and information accelerated by the First World War, the international turn of the “New Negro” movements, the growing involvement of Black masses and intellectuals with the Communist Party, and the Italian Fascist occupation of Ethiopia created the conditions for a discourse that consistently articulated race and colonialism in relation to the oppression of leftists, Jews, women, and other minorities in Nazi Germany.

I. Postwar Templates

¹² See Daniel Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest: Liberal Imperialism and the Surveillance of Anticolonialists in Europe, 1905—1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Brückenhaus's book is significant for demonstrating not only how government surveillance and policing ironically produced anti-colonial movements that were inherently transnational but also for revealing the central role played by Germany in the formation of this transnational anticolonialism.

Immediately following the war, the spectacle of post-Holocaust justice at Nuremberg and the nascent United Nations, alongside noticeable ideological and material continuities of Nazi policy elsewhere, encouraged anti-colonial and civil rights militants to mobilize the memory of Nazism in their political agitation. Michael Rothberg, in *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), has demonstrated that “early Holocaust memory emerged in dialogue with the dynamic transformations and multifaceted struggles that define the era of decolonization.”¹³ Rothberg narrates the “punctual dialogue” in which memories of Nazism provided a language for exposing the moral and political corruption of European colonizers, and anti-colonial thinkers and militants, in turn, provided some of the earliest expressions of Holocaust memory—in a period otherwise characterized by scholarship as one of “silence and repression.”¹⁴ The result is the excavation of a “countertradition that not only foregrounds unexpected resonance between the Holocaust and colonialism but also can provide resources for the rethinking of justice.”¹⁵ The question of Nazism’s relationship to colonialism ultimately receded from scholarly and public discourse as a powerful “Holocaust exceptionalism” emerged in the late twentieth century that insisted upon uniqueness and singularity as privileged problematics.¹⁶ Likewise, the rehabilitation of the liberal West after its

¹³ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 7.

¹⁴ Rothberg, 22.

¹⁵ Rothberg, 21.

¹⁶ Holocaust exceptionalism refers, on the one hand, “to interpretations of the Final Solution that emphasize the unique historical features of the Nazi genocide, for instance, the exceptionally radical ideological disposition of the perpetrators, the unique institutional and technical attributes of the Nazi death camps, or, in more general terms, the Final Solution as the epitome of modernity’s dark side. On the other hand, Holocaust exceptionalism also includes interpretations of the Final Solution as an event that poses unique challenges for existing paradigms of historical interpretation, whether they be grounded in history, philosophy, literature, or the visual arts. One of the more radical variants of this line of thought posits that the Holocaust, unlike other events, eludes historical understanding altogether and thus demarcates absolute limits of historical comprehension. Both of these notions of exceptionalism consider the Holocaust to be the defining event of the twentieth century and the clearest testament to the failure of Western civilization.” Todd Presner, Claudia Fogu, and Wulf Kansteiner, eds., *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 309.

bellicose implosion in world war and its protracted antagonism with the Communist East led to a stigmatizing conception of fascism as the illiberal exception proving the rule of liberal civilization. Paraphrasing Umberto Eco, Cedric Robinson narrates,

In the ‘exemplary’ tales which constitute the interrogation of fascism, the hero is the West; the value is individual freedom (in material or spiritual terms); the interdiction is authoritarian mass movements; the villain, charismatic leaders; the misfortune fascism; the rescuer, bourgeois democracies; the struggle, the Second World War; the moral: “The hero was imprudent, but managed to redeem himself on his own.”¹⁷

The early postwar texts, before such “‘exemplary’ tales” became hegemonic, therefore provide useful templates for analyzing the relationship between Nazism and colonial and settler-colonial regimes of race as well as for interrogating fascism, against which the interventions of even earlier texts—those from the period of Nazi power itself—become visible.

The writings of Hannah Arendt, Aimé Césaire, and Frantz Fanon comprise a set of representative texts examining diachronic and synchronic relations across colonialism, fascism, and the Holocaust, as well as anti-Blackness and antisemitism. For all of its conceptual and historiographic shortcomings, including its presentist reliance on the “totalitarianism” concept and its often imprecise or selective use of evidence, Hannah Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) remains one of the most fruitful attempts to trace a historical relationship between Western imperialism and the carnage unleashed by the Third Reich in Europe. An extension of her earlier writing during the war itself, Arendt narrated a diachronic sequence from continental

¹⁷ Cedric J. Robinson, “Fascism and the Response of Black Radical Theorists,” in *Cedric J. Robinson: On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance*, ed. H. L. T. Quan (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 152.

antisemitism, to imperialist expansion, to culmination as totalitarian governance in Europe.¹⁸ Her concept of colonial “boomerang effects” attempted to describe forms of indirect influence linking South African settler-colonialism and Nazism (she was, apparently, unaware of the networks, and thus direct influence, exposed by Padmore in his 1937 column).¹⁹ Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950) reflected on the scandalized atmosphere of postwar imperial France by discursively exacerbating the contradictions of its self-assured “Christian bourgeois” humanism, drawing out continuities between Nazi and French colonial ideologies and narrating the “choc en retour,” or reverse shock, that European colonialism generated and white anti-fascist outrage indexed.²⁰ This surrealist “splattering of the object” refused the stigmatization of fascist violence as an aberration by fabulously exposing the poison that European colonial violence “distilled into the veins of Europe.”²¹ In perhaps the most straightforward and extensive examination of colonial “Negrophobia” and European antisemitism in comparison, Césaire’s student Frantz Fanon published his paradigmatic, auto-theoretical account of Black racialization just two years after Césaire’s *Discourse*. Drawing on both Sartre’s existentialist and psychoanalytic analysis of antisemitism and Césaire’s polemic, Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) argued, *pace* Octave Mannoni, that “colonial racism is no different from other racisms [in particular, antisemitism]”; that “*it is the racist who creates the inferiorized,*” just as Sartre asserted “It is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew”; and that contrasting Black and Jewish

¹⁸ For her previous wartime writing, see, for example, “Race-Thinking Before Racism,” *The Review of Politics* 6, no. 1 (January 1944): 36–73.

¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 206.

²⁰ Notwithstanding Joan Pinkham’s translation as such, Césaire’s concept of “choc en retour” is not directly translatable by Arendt’s phrase “boomerang effect.” See Ben Ratskoff, “Splattering the Object: Césaire, Nazi Racism, and the Colonial,” in *Caribbean Jewish Crossings: Literary History and Creative Practice*, ed. Heidi Kaufman and Sarah Phillips Casteel (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 184–85.

²¹ Ratskoff, 179–82; Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 36.

assimilation reveals both the relation of ‘Negrophobia’ and antisemitism under Western racializing logics as well as the singularity of the former.²²

There are, however, three primary limitations to these now counter-canonical analyses of colonialism, the Holocaust, anti-Blackness, and antisemitism. First, Arendt’s *Origins* organizes European imperialism in Africa and Nazism in Europe according to a teleological sequence that ultimately bifurcates them, denying their dynamic relation and rendering the fanaticism and violence of the former as a natural trauma of European incursion onto a “dark continent” peopled by Black natives with a “genuine racial origin.”²³ In addition to reifying precisely the moral hierarchy of suffering exposed and critiqued by Césaire, Arendt’s genetic argumentation excludes the synchronic axis across which colonialism and Nazism related and interacted in real-time.²⁴ Naturalizing colonized Africa as Nazism’s necessary laboratory of racializing violence, she distinguishes imperialism and “totalitarianism” through a diachronic structure of unidirectional causality. Consequently, as Rothberg argues, “her critique of modernity remains primarily internal to Europe because even as she tracks imperial expansion she is unable to render its victims as subjects.”²⁵ And she never approaches an analysis similar to Padmore’s and Roumain’s that identifies the synchronic coordination and cooperation of fascism in Europe and imperialism elsewhere. Second, Césaire’s *Discourse* polemically and playfully relies on a geopolitical binary of the European and the colonized that makes it difficult to understand how,

²² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 69, 73; Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 69.

²³ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 186, 205.

²⁴ Rothberg writes, “Instead of understanding the traumatic nature of the physical and epistemic violence of colonialism as productive of the natural/unnatural humanity opposition, Arendt seems to hold that the Africans really are excluded from the project of building a common world (not essentially, perhaps, but historically and for the foreseeable future, nonetheless). The logic of her argument is that the Nazis turn their victims (and even their own adherents) into the deindividualized humans that Africans already are.” See *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, 61.

²⁵ Rothberg, 40.

in the context of his argument on fascism as a reverse shock, he considers antisemitism and Jewish particularity within Europe (notwithstanding the addition of a reference to Jews “feed[ing] new bonfires” in the second 1955 edition of the text).²⁶ The limitations of Césaire’s text are not reducible to a problem of Jewish erasure per se, unless we confuse his surrealist polemic against postwar French imperial nationalism with historical research on Nazism. Rather, they simply constrain the text from articulating a coherent argument about how specifically *racializing* forms of subjugation travel from colony to metropole. Third, Fanon’s analysis projects assimilated Jewish men and, less so, assimilated Black (especially Antillean) men as figural abstractions, following Sartre’s rhetorical strategy. Their ‘sociogenies’ in turn become representative of antisemitic and anti-Black relations and psychoses at large.²⁷ Fanon’s text not only requires deep contextualization, masked by its abstract language of the Black and the Jew, but is also ultimately more reflective of “Negrophobia” and antisemitism vis-a-vis French imperial inclusion and subordination than of the specificity of Nazism. Arendt, Césaire, and Fanon’s texts are therefore best understood as generative and provocative works that open lines of inquiry into the ideological, technical, and psychoanalytic relationship between colonialism and fascism but do not quite outline their precise historical interaction.

II. Continuities, Correspondences, and Syndromes: Versions of Comparison

Significant scholarship, primarily in the fields of memory studies, French studies and German studies, has uncovered seminal intersections and continuities linking the Holocaust and colonialism. Rothberg, Max Silverman, and Debarati Sanyal, for example, have analyzed how

²⁶ Rothberg compellingly suggests that the 1955 addition of the text’s only mention of Jews, recognizing Jewish particularity without invoking hierarchy and competition, reflects Césaire’s contemporaneous critique of Communist universalism in his 1956 *Letter to Maurice Thorez*. See 100.

²⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xv.

representations of the Holocaust in postwar French and Francophone literature and film generated multiple forms of collective memory that considered the atrocity and trauma of the Holocaust in relation to other forms of political violence; each theorizing, respectively, paradigms of “multidirectional memory,” “palimpsestic memory,” and “memory-in-complicity.”²⁸ Historians such as Jürgen Zimmerer, Pascal Grosse, and A. Dirk Moses have emphasized the empirical connections that link genocidal and exterminationist violence in colonial contexts and in the Third Reich. Zimmerer’s ‘continuity thesis’ posits a diachronic relation at the national scale that organized the 1904 annihilation of the Herero and Nama peoples as a critical precursor to the Holocaust.²⁹ Grosse resists the “problematic logic of continuity or discontinuity” but keeps to a national (German) scale by instead identifying “correspondences” that illustrate “a shared governing structure based on a common biopolitical intellectual foundation — namely, eugenicist ideas of racial selection, racial reproduction, and territorial expansion.”³⁰ And Moses unites colonial genocides and the Holocaust under a single process of European modernization that “links nation-building, imperial competition and international and intra-national racial struggle to the ideologically driven catastrophes of the twentieth century” and their culmination in a widespread “security syndrome” of fanatical border-policing, deportation, and counter-insurgency.³¹ This dissertation shifts from empirical

²⁸ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*; Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham Press, 2015).

²⁹ Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk Nach Auschwitz?: Beiträge Zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus Und Holocaust* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011).

³⁰ Pascal Grosse, “What Has German Colonialism to Do with National Socialism? A Conceptual Framework,” *Germany’s Colonial Pasts*, ed. Marcia Klotz, Lora Wildenthal, and Eric Ames (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 118.

³¹ A. Dirk Moses, “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the ‘Racial Century’: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 4 (2002): 33; A. Dirk Moses, “Empire, Colony, Genocide: Keywords and the Philosophy of History,” in *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, ed. A. Dirk Moses (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 3–54. See also

historical research as the ground of comparative analysis by considering instead the idiosyncratic and ambivalent ways Black writers perceived Nazism, up close and at a distance. As such, following Rothberg, “the logic of comparison explored here does not stand or fall on connections that can be empirically validated for historical accuracy...Rather, a certain bracketing of empirical history and an openness to the possibility of strange political bedfellows are necessary in order for the imaginative links between different histories and social groups to come into view.”³² However, this dissertation is concerned not with the comparisons that are foundational to the formation of collective memories but instead with the comparisons elaborated in real-time and without rear-view knowledge of the Holocaust as a bounded historical atrocity.

Indeed, by expanding the archive to include Black writers who, from 1936 to 1940, addressed antisemitism, fascism, and Nazism in more marginal, idiosyncratic, and ambivalent ways, this dissertation eschews genocide or extermination as the ground of comparison and thereby produces a number of non-teleological forms of putting Nazism into “thick historical relation.”³³ It excavates the contingent and textured ways regimes of race in the Third Reich, the United States, and the Third French Republic constituted an interactive political, ideological, and affective system. In “Versions of Incommensurability,” Natalie Melas notes that the conventional comparative method that endures in the discipline of comparative literature “seems always constrained by an invisible binary bind in which comparison must end either by accentuating differences or by subsuming them under some overarching unity.”³⁴ This conventional method, especially with regard to the concentration camp, colonial outpost, and

Moses, *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

³² Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, 18.

³³ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 36.

³⁴ Natalie Melas, “Versions of Incommensurability,” *World Literature Today* 69, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 275.

slave plantation, correlates to what Alexander G. Weheliye has named the “demon of comparison,” which too often reaffirms “existent hierarchies rather than design novel assemblages of relation.”³⁵ In his devastating critique of Agamben’s monumentalizing figuration of Auschwitz, Weheliye emphasizes that he is not concerned with “replacing the camp with the plantation as the nomos and hidden matrix of current politics” but rather with “think[ing] through the commonalities and disparities” that define their complex relationality.³⁶

While shifting backward from a focus on the extermination camp, I will interrogate this complex relationality in order to trace the reproduction of racializing subjugation across networked places and groups, tracing the structured relations that entail—rather than tabulate—terms such as white, Black, Jew, Aryan, colonial, and fascist. In “Comparative Racialization: An Introduction,” Shu-Mei Shih describes the often-submerged relationalities between two or more particular instances of racialization and, based in a nuanced reading of Fanon’s notion of “*comparaison* society” in Martinique, suggests that “if racialization is inherently comparative, a psychosocial and historical process, then we are working against the meaning of comparison as the arbitrary juxtaposition of two terms in difference and similarity, replacing it with comparison as the recognition and activation of relations that *entail* two or more terms.”³⁷ Fanon describes the social comparison that is foundational to racialized ontology (or “ontogeny”), triangulating

³⁵ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 72, 13.

³⁶ Weheliye, 72.

³⁷ Shu-mei Shih, “Comparative Racialization: An Introduction,” *PMLA* 123, no. 5, Special Topic: Comparative Racialization (October 2008): 1350; emphasis added. Melas also gives an extremely provocative and complex reading of Fanon’s *comparaison* in “Versions of Incommensurability.” Melas argues that because “the Martinican can compare himself to the white only with respect to his difference from the differences of others like himself...the equivalences between Martinicans indeed cannot ever unify.” Consequently, colonial *comparaison* society produces incommensurable subjects—“subjects who, despite their total imbrication in a process of comparison, can never be fully measured by it”—suspended in a “differential flux.” Melas’s stretching of comparison is important here given the incommensurability of terms like Nazism and colonialism—or Central European borders and distant colonies, to refer back to Roumain—that are nonetheless imbricated in a comparative relation, a differential flux. See Melas, “Versions of Incommensurability,” 278.

the Antillean ego, the (Black) other to whom the Antillean compares himself, and the super-imposed ideology of whiteness. Not only does Fanon “change the governing fiction from the personal to the social,” he activates structured relations not between presupposed entities but that *entail*—that include, intercept, and generate—entities such as the Antillean ego, the (Black) other, and the ideology of whiteness.³⁸ It is this sense of comparative methodology that I employ in my analysis, recognizing and activating the often-displaced relations not necessarily between the United States, Third Reich, and Third French Republic as discrete regimes but that certainly implicate and involve them in complex, international relationalities.

III. Regimes of Race and Racializing Assemblages

In order to do so, I rely on two key concepts capacious and flexible enough to consider race across diachronic and synchronic axes and national, transnational, and international scales yet precise enough to prevent dissolving different forms of racializing governance into an undifferentiated sea of oppression. The late anthropologist Patrick Wolfe developed the concept of “regimes of race” in his comparative analysis of how colonial dynamics of land and labor are reproduced across time and place, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (2016). Emphasizing the historical reproduction of race beyond the located relations of invasion, subordination, and exploitation that racial doctrines presuppose, Wolfe argues that “race is colonialism speaking” in that “different racialising practices seek to maintain population-specific modes of colonial domination through time.”³⁹ In other words, race itself indexes coordinated relations and ideologies of inequality and violence that are not entirely reducible to explicit racial doctrines. Wolfe prefers the term “regime” because it expresses the comprehensive accumulation

³⁸ Shih, “Comparative Racialization: An Introduction,” 1350.

³⁹ Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2016), 5, 10.

of “economic, political, moral, mythic, legal, institutional, sexual, and aesthetic” resources in “mobile and active,” rather than static and inert, structures of political domination.⁴⁰ As such, “regimes of race”—which should not be understood as “fait accomplis, as transcending history, but as ever-incomplete projects”—provide a conceptual tool for naming how race both gathers synchronically coexistent social discourses and practices and compresses diachronic histories of (colonial) extermination and subjugation—often at “individual sites of confrontation.”⁴¹ While Wolfe, as Robin D. G. Kelley astutely critiques, seems to organize colonialism and race according to a spatial chronology that locates the former outside of Europe and the latter inside Europe, “rather than see both processes as deeply embedded in Western civilization,” his concept is nonetheless pertinent to this dissertation’s analysis of Black writing on Nazism in a limited period of the Third Reich’s existence.⁴² It enables a granular, relational analysis of anti-Black and anti-Jewish processes of racialization by isolating specific sites navigated by these writers, tracing the diachronic and synchronic discourses and practices compressed into structured, racializing relations at these sites, and putting multiple political structures of race in comparative relation.

Whereas Wolfe stabilizes “regimes of race” by positing their derivative relation to colonialism, Alexander G. Weheliye’s concept of “racializing assemblages” illuminates the abiding instability of racialization even as racializing discourses and practices are collected into an appearance of order (or regime). Weheliye’s concept of “racializing assemblages,” elaborated in *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the*

⁴⁰ Wolfe, 18.

⁴¹ Wolfe, 18–21.

⁴² Robin D.G. Kelley, “The Rest of Us: Rethinking Settler and Native,” *American Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (June 2017): 273. Kelley also offers an important critique of the erasure of African indigeneity in Wolfe’s formulation of settler-colonialism.

Human (2014), is critical not only for helping to clarify the chaotic, internal order and external relationality of such regimes but also for foregrounding their subjective dimensions and effects. Weheliye draws on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of assemblages (*agencements*) to describe the polyvalent processes in which the "lacerations" inflicted by "apparatuses of political violence" are translated into a "vortex of hierarchical indicators."⁴³ Rather than conceptualizing racialization as a straightforward, sovereign process of pseudo-scientific classification, "assemblages are inherently productive, entering into polyvalent becomings to produce and give expression to previously nonexistent realities, thoughts, bodies, affects, spaces, actions, ideas, and so on," and, in doing so, they "circumvent the structure versus agency problematic."⁴⁴ As such, racializing assemblages make legible the fecund trajectories, relationalities, and mobilities of various regimes of race, as they are navigated by the Black writers studied in this dissertation, without bypassing questions of located power and ideology. Considering how these writers perceived and represented the Third Reich in relation to regimes in the United States and Third French Republic, often in provocative, surprising, and liminal ways, this dissertation necessarily relies on the notion of racializing assemblages to expose the "territorializing and deterritorializing, interested and asubjective" articulations that conceptually and materially combine regimes of race in an international field.⁴⁵

Weheliye makes a useful distinction between racialization as a process of differentiation and racism as a process of hierarchization and exclusion, even though "the two are often indistinguishable."⁴⁶ I, however, will resist relying on the racism concept not only because its anachronistic application to writers in the 1930s can obscure their own articulations of race and

⁴³ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 40.

⁴⁴ Weheliye, 46–47.

⁴⁵ Weheliye, 49.

⁴⁶ Weheliye, 72.

racialized oppression but also because the concept has been central to “subsuming” anti-Black and anti-Jewish forms of racialization “under some overarching unity.”⁴⁷ The often vague and increasingly reified racism concept all too easily analogizes anti-Black and anti-Jewish forms of oppression. In the critical text *Racism: A Short History* (2002), for example, historian George Fredrickson begins by narrating a parallel between the two as discrete historical units: “Hitler invoked racist theories to justify his genocidal treatment of European Jewry, as did white supremacists in the American South to explain why Jim Crow laws were needed to keep whites and blacks separated and unequal.”⁴⁸ Characterizing the formal political apparatuses that apply “racist theories” as “overtly racist regimes,” Fredrickson places the US South and the Third Reich side by side as equivalents under the book’s banner of “racism”—whose cover image, notwithstanding his ostensible rejection of pathologizing definitions of the term, features knuckles tattooed with the word “HATE.”⁴⁹ Coalescing Jim Crow and Nazism under the banner of “racism” risks making a reductive equivalence at the expense of qualitative difference and relation; additionally, it risks reproducing the very postwar frameworks that characterized Nazism as a moral and psychological aberration from Western civilization, which located the problem of racial violence in the individual moral and psychological flaws of individuals rather than the governing structures and processes that would have implicated the liberal Western victors.⁵⁰ Instead, I refer to racialization as a colonial-inflected process of differentiation,

⁴⁷ Melas, “Versions of Incommensurability,” 33.

⁴⁸ George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 1.

⁴⁹ The book opens: “The term ‘racism’ is often used in a loose and unreflective way to describe the hostile or negative feelings of one ethnic group or ‘people’ toward another and the actions resulting from such attitudes. But sometimes the antipathy of one group toward another is expressed and acted upon with a single-mindedness and brutality that go far beyond the group-centered prejudice and snobbery that seem to constitute an almost universal human failing.”

⁵⁰ See Barnor Hesse, “Racism’s Alterity: The After-Life of Black Sociology,” in *Racism and Sociology*, ed. Alana Lentin and Wolf D. Hund (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014), 141–74; Leah N. Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

hierarchization, and exclusion at once, constituted by racializing assemblages and constituting regimes of race.

IV. Demonic Grounds of Comparison

The interrogation of Nazism through Black writing from the period of Nazi power itself—that is, before the magnitude of Nazi atrocities became international common sense—brings together texts by W.E.B. Du Bois, Tiémoko Kouyaté, Léon-Gontran Damas, Suzanne Césaire, C. L. R. James, Richard Wright, and others alongside their real and imagined encounters with white European and American Jews such as Guy Lévis-Mano, Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, and Mike Gold in order to reveal the international relations that entail anti-Black and anti-Jewish racialization and subjugation. These writers also give shape to the multilayered and heterogenous terrain of Black cultural production in the period as well as the dialogic interactions between Black writers and Marxist thought and institutions. Nonetheless, I resist decoding a singularly Black, or even Radical Black, perspective on Nazism, extending the work of Barbara Foley, Kelley, and others in reevaluating the presupposed racial insularity of interwar writing and organizing (and also routine indictments of the Old Left’s racial chauvinism). Instead, I limn these texts for their inventive articulation of multiple, contradictory possibilities of relation, following Edward Said’s prescription for the literary critic’s attitude: “finding and exposing things [that] otherwise lie hidden beneath piety, heedlessness, or routine.”⁵¹ Such pieties and routines include both moralizing indictments and dismissals of Nazism—which will be addressed head-on by Richard Wright—as well as the settled (postwar) assessments that Black writers and theorists saw in fascism a simple iteration of white supremacist and colonial

⁵¹ Edward W. Said, “The Text, the World, the Critic,” *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 8, no. 2 (Autumn 1975): 22.

governance. There is much to be gained from the idiosyncratic perspectives that avoided simplifying analogies and predated full knowledge of Nazi atrocities.

On a disciplinary level, however, this research demonstrates the crucial interventions Black studies makes in our understanding of Jewish history, antisemitism, and the Holocaust. By taking seriously C. L. R. James's criticism of those who would confine Black studies to "something that concerned black people" or "some kind of ethnic problem," this dissertation seeks to learn from the archives of Black studies in ways that neither provincialize it as an ethnically and culturally solipsistic field nor disembody Blackness into a political or cultural posture.⁵² By analyzing Black writers alone for a relational conception of Nazism, rather than producing a tabulated set of Black and European Jewish writers in side-by-side comparison, I reorient the dominant comparative approaches away from exceptionalizing and integrative modes toward a "complete reorganization" of Jewish studies' intellectual and historical outlook.⁵³ Sylvia Wynter describes the destructive/productive potential of frames of reference, models, and vantage points outside "governing systems of meaning" as "demonic grounds"—a phrase that registers the fear and rejection such frames of reference generate among those invested in dominant systems of knowledge production.⁵⁴ Katherine McKittrick expands Wynter's notion, arguing "the demonic connotes a working system that cannot have a determined, or knowable, outcome. The demonic, then, is a nondeterministic schema; it is a

⁵² C. L. R. James, "Black Studies and the Contemporary Student," in *The C. L. R. James Reader*, ed. Anna Grimshaw (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 397.

⁵³ C. L. R. James, "The Black Scholar Interviews: C.L.R. James," *The Black Scholar*, 35-43, 2, no. 1 (September 1970): 43.

⁵⁴ At a panel discussion on Jewish Studies and anti-racism hosted by UCLA's Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies, historian Lila Corwin Berman described the "integrative posture" that has historically defined institutional Jewish studies' relationship to Western knowledge production and the resistance to radical anti-racist interventions that such a posture implies.

process that is hinged on uncertainty and nonlinearity.”⁵⁵ While Weheliye labels conventional comparative methods the “demon of comparison,” he also refers to Wynter’s notion, tracing the “demonic ground” from which alternative versions of humanity emerge. I would like to activate the elision of Weheliye’s use of “demon” and “demonic” in order to outline *demonic grounds of comparison*: comparative schemas that are outside dominant frameworks and require a nondeterministic approach, reconfiguring our governing understandings of Nazism and white supremacy’s relation in unruly, unsettling, yet alluring ways. If the conventional ground of comparison classifies and organizes white supremacy and Nazism, Blacks and Jews, into neat comparative taxonomies of measure and equivalence, demonic grounds of comparison blaspheme against such comparative pieties by destabilizing commensurability and “providing avenues for the conjuring of alternate possibilities” indifferent to the governing alignments of victims, perpetrators, and their attendant ‘racisms.’⁵⁶ Such demonic grounds emerge, for example, in W. E. B. Du Bois’s description of the “Fascist methods” of the New Deal, in Léon-Gontran Damas’s analogical critique of German Jewish assimilation, and in Richard Wright’s attention to the affective correspondences between Bigger Thomas and German fascists.

In doing so, this dissertation contributes to a growing effort to shift Jewish studies towards more comparative, transnational, and transcultural work and to deconstruct its epistemological and methodological investments in governing systems of knowledge production.⁵⁷ Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin’s *Powers of Diaspora* (2002) did attempt to articulate the subversive power of Jewish diaspora history and culture as part of an effort to inaugurate a

⁵⁵ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women And the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxiv.

⁵⁶ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 30.

⁵⁷ Jennifer Glaser has described the slow acceptance of comparative, transnational, and transcultural work in Jewish studies, and especially in American Jewish literary and cultural studies. See “Race, Ethnicity, Postcoloniality, and the New Jewish (Trans)Cultural Studies,” *Literature Compass* 10, no. 3 (March 2013): 217–23.

“New Jewish Cultural Studies” that would be sensitive to comparative, transnational, and transcultural work. Part corrective for the growing disappearance of Jewish history and culture in postmodern and postcolonial appropriations of “diaspora” and part reevaluation of what “the shared word ‘diaspora’ can do,” their political-intellectual manifesto opens with the following:

For if a lost Jerusalem imagined through a lost Córdoba imagined through a lost Suriname is diaspora to the third power, so is a stolen Africa sung as a lost Zion in Jamaican rhythms on the sidewalks of Eastern Parkway. To say as much as that is, we hope, to catch a lucid glimpse of how creative the powers of diaspora could be.⁵⁸

The logic of their elegant proposition posits a comparison between Jewish and Black diasporas, juxtaposing the compounding accumulation of dislocated Jewish culture with the hybrid production of dislocated Black culture; the former spiraled into an imaginative mythology and the latter compressed into a single chronotope. The proposition’s dichotomous structure, placing Jewish and Black diasporas side-by-side as discrete trajectories, restricts them to relating at the abstract levels of homology (e.g. lost Jerusalem vs. stolen Africa) or shared language (e.g. Zion). Yet buried in their grammar are intersections that do not partake of such an alignment, intersections better described by Édouard Glissant’s notion of “*histoires entrecroisées*,” or interwoven histories.⁵⁹ Concealed within their grammar are the “blackamoor” mercenaries of Córdoba, the Sephardic slaveowners of Jamaica, the rebellious maroons of Suriname, and the Lubavitcher Hasidim of Eastern Parkway. While the Boyarins’ productive conception of diaspora balances genealogical and rhizomatic conceptions of history and culture, diaspora

⁵⁸ Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), ix.

⁵⁹ Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981), 28.

nonetheless seems to multiply only within discrete national/cultural units, partitioning the intimacies of Jewish and Black diasporas along what Melas describes as the “invisible binary.”⁶⁰

One cannot properly understand the Boyarins’ intervention on Jewish diaspora outside of the influence of Cultural Studies in general and, in particular, the pathbreaking publication of Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993). This dissertation equally pushes on Gilroy’s insights. The Boyarins’ challenge to the dominant, statist assumptions of “Israelocentric” Jewish studies mirrors Gilroy’s argument that “where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination.”⁶¹ But even Gilroy’s important overtures to Jewish history and culture in the text remain largely undertheorized. While Gilroy himself ultimately backs away from interrogating the interactive relationship between anti-Black and anti-Jewish regimes of race, he does enticingly ask, “What would be the consequences if the book had tried to set the Holocaust of European Jews in a provocative relationship with the modern history of racial slavery and terror in the western hemisphere?”⁶² This dissertation, I hope, constitutes some possible answers to Gilroy’s hypothetical question.

V. Chapter Outline

The dissertation focuses primarily on three sets of texts and three writers—W. E. B. Du Bois, Léon-Gontran Damas, and Richard Wright—that move from an unsettlement of comparison, to a form of analogy that identifies located resemblances and adjacencies, and

⁶⁰ Melas, “Versions,” 275.

⁶¹ Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture*, 33; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1.

⁶² Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 217.

finally to a structure of *periscope comparison* that balances local focalization and international lines of connection in a shifting, multiscale structure without reductively equivalizing them. The first chapter—“‘Not at all analogous:’ Du Bois Before Warsaw, Fascism Before Racism”—focuses on the columns written by Du Bois for the *Pittsburgh Courier* while spending four months in the Third Reich in 1936. In contrast to Du Bois’s postwar reflections on fascism in general and Nazism in particular, either in *The World and Africa* (1947) or “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto” (1949), this correspondence, in its form as serialized columns, produced neither a definitive nor discrete analysis but offered an ambivalent and mercurial elaboration of comparison across time. While Du Bois’s stated intention for his *Courier* column was “to prevent the American Negro from considering his problem as local and provincial, but rather as a part of the whole international development of the modern world,” the elaboration of this international perspective in real-time was marked by unsettlement, incoherence, and contingency—a demonic ground of comparison indeed.⁶³ Most notably, Du Bois struggled across the columns to stabilize an international relation between anti-Blackness and antisemitism and between regimes of race in the US and the Third Reich—even declaring in his December 19 column that the reasons for German “dislike” of Jews “are not at all analogous to white dislike of blacks in America.”⁶⁴ By reading serial columns, this chapter moves away from unearthing a delimited comparative perspective that ostensibly coheres and toward a structure of comparison that is disintegrated and contradictory, assembling and disassembling different vantage points across space and time that retreat from the comforts of analogical orthodoxies. Such a structure

⁶³ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Pittsburgh Courier,” Correspondence, January 4, 1936, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b080-i090>.

⁶⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Germany,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, December 19, 1936, City edition, sec. Feature Page, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/201989869?accountid=14512>.

of comparison approaches what Melas names “mere comparison,” or *comparaison désœuvrée*: “a practice of comparison that doesn’t begin from the foundation of empirical unities and in which comparison is not put to work in the service of a distinct project.”⁶⁵ While Melas’s general methodological intervention is open-ended, pursuing a complex micro-analysis of Du Bois’s columns demonstrates how such a non-teleological comparative method makes legible the manifold ideologies, structures, and methods of racialization that aggregate incongruously along both diachronic and synchronic axes and at an international scale. Du Bois’s unsettling of comparison is an inventive mode, generating multiple, relational strategies for conceptualizing the roles of economics and race in fascism’s rise—and thus relating multiples regimes of race—while at the same time marking that which exceeds generalized analogies between anti-Blackness and antisemitism.

Whereas the chapter on Du Bois unsettles comparison by rehearsing various relations across anti-Black and anti-Jewish regimes of race and racializing assemblages, maintaining their incommensurability while illustrating diachronic and synchronic trajectories of white supremacy and fascism, the next chapter, “Assimilation Without Guarantees: The Third Republic and the Third Reich,” reveals a strategic form of non-reductive analogy that opens possibilities for tracing located correspondences across the Third Republic and the Third Reich. This chapter shifts from an analysis of an unfolding series of texts, such as Du Bois’s columns, to one discrete text: the “the manifesto of the negritude movement,” Léon-Gontran Damas’s 1938 poetry collection *Pigments*.⁶⁶ Published by young Sephardic Jewish typographer Guy Lévis Mano on a Minerva printing press he inherited from Nancy Cunard, *Pigments* is a text whose very

⁶⁵ Natalie Melas, “Merely Comparative,” *PMLA* 128, no. 3 (May 2013): 657.

⁶⁶ Keith Q. Warner, ed., “Négritude Revisited—An Interview with Léon Damas,” in *Critical Perspectives on Léon-Gontran Damas* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), 24.

production straddles Black and Jewish interwar diasporas, surrealist letters and negritude poetics, and multiple political contexts of overlapping fascist and imperial violence. With close reading of two of the poems in the collection—“Save Our Souls” and “Nuit Blanche”—alongside contemporaneous writing from Suzanne Césaire, C. L. R. James, and, especially, Hannah Arendt, I argue that *Pigments*’ negritude critique of Black assimilation isolates precise historical resemblances and adjacencies—between francophone Blacks and germanophone Jews, and between the Third Republic and the Third Reich. These in turn evince analogous breakdowns of imperial inclusion and expose the filiative ground of race-making on which the supposedly adversarial Third Republic and Third Reich are correlated. “Save Our Souls” analogizes Nazi violence against Jews to posit the replication of fascist violence as a metropolitan reaction to the assimilated in France. “Nuit Blanche” mimes the figure of the assimilated Black parvenu himself to illustrate the ideological ground on which the French family romance convenes with Hitler. Both poems mobilized the overlapping, synchronic context of the Third Reich and its persecution of German Jews, tracing the adjacencies linking negritude strategies of class betrayal and European Jewish politics of assimilation.

The final two chapters—united under the title “The Multiplication of Bigger Thomas”—move beyond the unsettlement of Du Bois’s ground of comparison and beyond the located specificity of Damas’s analogical and overlapping relations by unearthing a method of *periscope comparison*, an approach that activates a novel’s paratexts in order to represent its synchronic, international relationalities. It does so, however, without smoothening the novelistic and paratextual viewpoints into a coherent whole or plane of equivalence—on which the US and the Third Reich, and Blacks and Jews, would relate to each other as discrete, given unities. Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) was a naturalist proletarian novel that magnified the environmental

formation and psychic tension of *Bigger Thomas*, a young Black man in Depression-era Chicago's Black Belt. However, in private correspondence, lectures, pamphlets, and public responses, Wright chased the novel's interpretation, curving away from the novel's claustrophobic focalization by asserting the international framework of the novel's relevance. Most surprisingly, this international framework entailed comparisons that situated *Bigger Thomas* in relation to both German fascists and oppressed Jews. The first chapter of this section, "The Data of Fascism," focuses primarily on the slanted, paratextual lines of connection Wright traced from *Bigger* to German fascists, which maneuver around the novel's focalization to coordinate multiple scales and registers of material and psychic dispossession across what Wright described as a vast "commodity-profit machine."⁶⁷ The coordination of these scales and registers circuited the Communist Party's blindness to the Black lumpenproletariat in the interwar United States through its synchronic failure to prevent the rise of fascism in Germany, in turn suggesting that the United States and the Third Reich were not parallel regimes of race but networked appendages of an expansive "machine" in which components replicate, rearrange, and recode spasmodically. Wright's urgent attempt to anticipate *Bigger's* revolutionary/reactionary valence prefigured Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's method of "schizoanalysis," unearthing a temporally disjointed convergence in thinking the articulation of political and psychic economies and the production of volatile, errant, and fugitive personalities.⁶⁸ The periscopic comparisons enacted by the paratexts internationalized the novel without reductively generalizing or globalizing it, producing a complex literary apparatus that traced slanted lines of connection between not only the political volatility of the Black

⁶⁷ Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 12.

⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 105.

lumpenproletariat and the Nazi movement's startling success but also between the theoretical indecipherability of both the Black lumpenproletariat and German proto-fascists in official Marxist schemas.

“Part II: Whither the Jews?” asks what periscopic comparisons Wright’s paratexts make not to fascist potential but to oppressed Jews. Jewishness appears submerged and peripheral in the novel, and sometimes it is present in the absence of Jews themselves. Additionally, manuscript drafts of the novel alongside archived writing notes reveal a curious textual process in which the Jewishness of characters was effaced. However, what is submerged and peripheral in the novel’s microscopic focalization becomes visible and suggestive in the paratexts, producing a critical tension between Bigger’s local relations with white Jewish Chicagoans and his international identification with Jewish Biggers. Not only in the pamphlet, “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,” but also in a printed response to *Atlantic* literary critic David L. Cohn, Wright compared Bigger Thomas to oppressed Jews in Europe and, in particular, to one Jew: Herschel Grynszpan, the seventeen-year-old Polish Jewish refugee who assassinated a Nazi diplomat in Paris on November 7, 1938. The Nazi leadership in Germany responded by organizing the notorious *Reichspogromnacht* (or *Kristallnacht*) on November 9. Unlike the reactionary echo Wright heard in German fascists, Wright put the Black American lumpen here in a revolutionary call and response with European Jews. Wright’s response to Cohn’s anti-Black, paternalistic denunciation of the novel illustrated provocatively that Bigger Thomas was more synchronically commensurable to oppressed Jews in Europe than was Cohn himself, a white American Jew—incidentally the child of Polish Jewish immigrants himself—from Greenville, Mississippi. The novel’s acutely local focalization thus submerges Jewishness in whiteness while its paratexts pivot to uncover particular Jewish Biggers in the field of international multiplication. Modulating

his observations of Black Americans to the reported tempers of both fascisized Germans and oppressed Jews, Wright resisted narrativized analogies between white supremacy and antisemitism, and between Blacks and Jews, while nonetheless putting them into a thick synchronic relation. In doing so, Wright exposed the scalar imbrication of white/Black and Aryan/Jew axes of racialization. The territorialization of race occurred simultaneously across local and international scales, coding anti-Black and anti-Jewish racializing assemblages in overlapping and contradictory schemes that constantly organized and reorganized whiteness, Aryanness, Blackness, and Jewishness according to the shifting scale of relation or comparison. In the place of open-ended and hyper-located comparison are relational intensities and multiscale simultaneities that, articulating spasmodically across an international capitalist machine, become alternately visible through provisional displacements of the scale of focalization.

In a letter to Mike Gold following the publication of *Native Son*, Wright asserted desperately, “I wrote *Native Son* to rouse, to agitate, to stir the minds of people to the quicksilver potentialities of the present.”⁶⁹ Such “quicksilver potentialities of the present” include the lines of connection that only become visible from demonic grounds of comparison, grounds of comparison that are nondeterministic and transgress the alignments and taxonomies that have become hegemonic. Wright’s phrase calls attention to the acutely synchronic scale at which such potentialities emerge, emphasizing the mercurial charge or directionality that real-time observation and analysis often entail. By isolating three writers reflecting on the rise of Nazism in real-time from 1936 to 1940, this dissertation limns such “quicksilver potentialities” as they

⁶⁹ Richard Wright, “Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright,” 1940, 8, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

trace “novel assemblages of relation,” seeking, to paraphrase one of Wright’s Jewish contemporaries, to seize hold of them as they flashed up in a moment of danger.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 72, 13.

Chapter One:
“Not at all analogous:” Du Bois Before Warsaw, Fascism Before Racism

The difference between these two methods is not essential, but it does make direct comparison between the plight of the Negroes and the Jews in Germany difficult and in many respects misleading.

W. E. B. Du Bois to the American Jewish
Committee (March 1937)

I. “*Farbiger bereist Nazi-Deutschland*”

On January 29, 1937, New York City’s *Staatszeitung und Herold*, a historic German American newspaper founded by immigrants a century earlier, editorialized an interview with W. E. B. Du Bois headlined, “*Farbiger bereist Nazi-Deutschland*”—“Man of Color tours Nazi Germany.”¹ Just below this headline, the deck added, “Prof. Du Bois of Atlanta on the Jews in the Reich,” and a pull quote below clarified, “Their situation lamentable, but not to be compared with that of the Negroes.”² Du Bois had just returned from a global journey that took him to Germany, Poland, the Soviet Union, Japan, China, and Hawaii before returning to the mainland United States. While the article’s actual discussion of Jews in Germany was buried in its final two paragraphs, the editors’ peritextual framing, provided by the deck and pull quote, reflects an agenda that sought to minimize similarities between the two cases of racial oppression. This German American interrogation (or disavowal) of comparison, supposedly supported by eyewitness evidence from a prominent Black American scholar and activist, was possibly

¹ “*Farbiger Bereist Nazi-Deutschland*,” *Staatszeitung Und Herold*, January 29, 1937, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b081-i203>.

² The deck reads, “Prof. DuBois von Atlanta über die Juden im Reich,” and the pull quote reads, “Ihre Lage bedauernswert, aber nicht mit der der Neger zu vergleichen.” All translations are taken from a document in Du Bois’s papers, housed at Amherst University, contributed by the *Staatszeitung und Herold*. It is unclear who authored the translation. “Man of Color Tours Nazi-Germany: Prof. Du Bois on the Jews in the Reich,” February 1937, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b081-i204>.

motivated to counter early Black American criticism of National Socialism; as Clive Webb documents broadly, the Black American press “had drawn explicit parallels between Jim Crow and Nazi Germany almost from the moment that Adolf Hitler had assumed the chancellorship of his nation in January 1933.”³

In the body of the *Staatszeitung* article, the anti-comparative assertion in the pull quote was repeated, ambiguously expanded, and tenuously supported with very few and brief quotations from Du Bois:

The treatment of Negroes, as Dr. DuBois expressed himself, shows “still no trace of race-hatred,” and the attitude of the German press during the Olympic games was altogether thoroughly fair to the colored athletes, indeed friendly. But the attitude toward the Jews Dr. DuBois can “simply not understand.” The situation of the Jews is, as he said, very deplorable, but it does not admit of comparison with the situation of Negroes in the United States.⁴

This conclusion then dubiously emphasized, in Du Bois’s name, the difference between the “lawful” persecution against Jews in Germany and the “flagrant violation” of law represented by anti-Black violence in the United States. While the evident referent for extrajudicial, anti-Black violence in the 1930s US was lynching, the entire legal edifice of Jim Crow—from which the Nazis sought precedent for their Nuremberg Laws—certainly calls into question this supposed contrast.⁵ Returning to the particular question of anti-Blackness in Germany, the article ended by reminding readers that Du Bois “himself was received in Germany in a very friendly way and

³ Clive Webb, “The Nazi Persecution of Jews and the African American Freedom Struggle,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 53, no. 4 (2019): 338–39. See also Larry A. Greene, “Race in the Reich: The African American Press on Nazi Germany,” in *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange*, ed. Larry A. Greene and Anke Ortlepp (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 70–87.

⁴ “Man of Color Tours Nazi-Germany: Prof. Du Bois on the Jews in the Reich.”

⁵ See James Q. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

had to suffer no kind of racial prejudice [*Rassenvorurteilen*].”⁶ The *Staatszeitung* therefore sought to manage two overlapping comparisons at an international scale: one that positioned anti-Blackness as a US variant of racialization paralleling (or not) German antisemitism and a second that considered anti-Blackness itself internationally, across US and German regimes.

In response to this article, Dr. Leo Stein of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) wrote to Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) inquiring about the abstruse contents of the reported interview. He requested a full text of the interview itself for, “although everything may be all right, some of his statements sound not quite clear; but perhaps the reporter may not have rendered exactly the words of Dr. Dubois.”⁷

Interestingly, Du Bois wrote to Stein on February 23 explaining that he had neither seen the interview in the *Staatzeitung* nor the text the reporter submitted.⁸ Stein subsequently sent a copy of the interview to Du Bois and asked him to verify its reporting.⁹ Finally, in response, Du Bois clarified to Stein the statements reported in the *Staatzeitung*, navigating with sophistication a comparison that, to his mind, required balancing sameness and difference. He wrote,

Answering your letter of March 2, I beg to say that it is extremely difficult to express an opinion about Germany today which is true in all respects without numerous modifications and explanations...I am convinced that without doubt the mob rule and illegal aggression practiced upon Jews in the earlier days of the Nazi

⁶ “Man of Color Tours Nazi-Germany: Prof. Du Bois on the Jews in the Reich.”

⁷ Leo Stein, “Letter from American Jewish Committee to National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” Correspondence, February 16, 1937, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b081-i200>.

⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to American Jewish Committee,” Correspondence, February 23, 1937, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b081-i201>.

⁹ Leo Stein, “Letter from American Jewish Committee to W. E. B. Du Bois,” March 2, 1937, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b081-i202>.

Movement was very grave and equaled in some cases the aggression upon Negroes in the United States. But the point I was trying to make in my interview in New York was that while I was in Germany the Nazis had so changed the laws that practically anything they did to Jews was legal, and what you had was legal oppression rather than the illegal cast and lynching of Negroes in the United States. On the other hand the difference between these two methods is not essential, but it does make direct comparison between the plight of the Negroes and the Jews in Germany difficult and in many respects misleading. Of course I was not at all deceived by the attitude of Germany toward me and the very few Negroes who happened to be visiting there. Theoretically their attitude toward Negroes is just as bad toward Jews, and if there were any number of Negroes in Germany would be expressed in the same way. But the point that interested me was that while this is the theoretical attitude, there was on the part of the populace no natural reaction of prejudice toward Negroes while there was such reaction toward Jews.¹⁰

Du Bois began with an equivocal reflection on his real-time observations, demonstrating their inevitable partiality. Such a partial conclusion on race in “Germany today” was essential given the extraordinary variance of Black German racialization in the period, variance that encompassed, for example, both forced sterilization and membership in the Hitler Youth.¹¹

¹⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to American Jewish Committee,” Correspondence, March 10, 1937, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b081-i205>.

¹¹ For the same reason, based on her analysis of oral histories, Tina M. Campt proposes only “a partial account”—rather than a “definitive or comprehensive telling”—of how “German Blacks were constituted as particular kinds of raced and gendered subjects in Germany under the Nazi regime.” See Tina M. Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 1.

Eschewing a reductive and disembodied approach to Nazism, he considered it a dynamic, historical movement that shifted its methods over time.¹² He complicates an initial comparative frame of measure and equivalence (e.g. “equaled in some cases”; “just as bad”) by introducing distinctions between “theoretical” anti-Blackness (or racial doctrine) and the social and historical conditions in which racialization manifested in practice. Du Bois thus carefully resisted any kind of direct homology between anti-Blackness and antisemitism, foregrounding an asymmetry that in turn disorganized any conception of a globally systematized and stable racial hierarchy. Yet, evident in the final line, Du Bois remained intrigued by the localized relationality of Blacks and Jews as racialized subjects.

Du Bois’s perspective was decidedly distinct from the growing trend in the 1930s, especially among liberal and leftist Black American writers and activists, to either equate the plights of Black Americans and German Jews or focus on the “theoretical” anti-Blackness evident in Nazi literature and propaganda.¹³ Unlike most of these assessments, Du Bois’s own were formed through international travel to and immersion in the Third Reich.¹⁴ His opening equivocation to Stein, and the entire episode with the German newspaper, evokes the very

¹² Du Bois’s approach confirms the importance of Robert Paxton’s historiographic method, which studies “fascism in motion, paying more attention to processes than to essences.” Robert O. Paxton, “The Five Stages of Fascism,” *Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 1 (March 1998): 10.

¹³ For example, a 1934 article in the *Philadelphia Tribune* stylistically paralleled the two thusly: “The persecution of the Jews in Germany by the Nazi government is deplorable, stupid, and outrageous...The persecution of colored Americans by Americans is deplorable, stupid, and outrageous.” As for the latter trend, an example can be found in 1939 when, after Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* was published for the first time in full in English, L. D. Reddick, curator of the Schomburg Center Collection, wrote an exposé for the National Urban League’s *Opportunity* revealing “What Hitler Thinks about the Negro.” See Maria Höhn, “‘We Will Never Go Back to the Old Way Again’: Germany in the African-American Debate on Civil Rights,” *Central European History* 41 (2008): 611; Harold Brackman, “‘A Calamity Almost Beyond Comprehension’: Nazi Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in the Thought of W. E. B. Du Bois,” *American Jewish History* 88, no. 1 (March 2000): 74–75. See also Greene, “Race in the Reich: The African American Press on Nazi Germany.”

¹⁴ An exception is journalist George Padmore, who had lived in Hamburg while editing the *Negro Worker* until his deportation by the Nazi Reich in 1933. He returned to tour Germany in 1937 and, for the *Chicago Defender*, he wrote, “I have had the opportunity to meet and speak with many Jewish leaders and to discuss the ‘Jewish’ problem.” See “Hitler Expels Africans From Germany in Race Tilt,” *Chicago Defender*, April 15, 1933, National edition; George Padmore, “Hitler Will Treat Jews Like Blacks,” *Chicago Defender*, November 13, 1937, sec. Chicago Defender Foreign News Page.

problematic of synchronic, international analysis as well as Du Bois's awareness of it. The production and transmission of relational assessments, assessments made in real-time between spatially distant yet temporally synchronous regimes, was conditioned by these very regimes and their international articulation; the comparisons therefore lack the detached, critical omniscience that would stabilize generalization (let alone abstract equivalence). Nonetheless, Du Bois does not retreat into endless differentiation either, an inverse risk of inter- and intra-racial comparative work. Rather, without a retrospective gaze on a historically fixed Nazism and the atrocities known as the Final Solution, Du Bois's comparative analysis simply remains constitutively precarious and fractional.

More than a decade later, in 1949, Du Bois visited the remains of the Warsaw Ghetto and, in 1952, reflected on this visit in a short essay published in the Communist monthly *Jewish Life*; Rothberg argues that Du Bois's relativization of the "color line" in the essay holds "together commonality and difference in a revised version of double consciousness," confirming "the need for a comparative approach to the multidirectionality of collective memory that considers questions of politics, aesthetics, and the public sphere in a nonreductive, transnational framework."¹⁵ He continues, "Du Bois's essay on the Warsaw Ghetto avoids the binary opposition between absolute discontinuity and complete continuity that characterizes much discourse on the Holocaust and its relation to other histories."¹⁶ Du Bois's writing before the war, and before the wholesale destruction of European Jewry, does not merely anticipate this multidirectional, postwar complexity but turns focus from the overwhelming magnitude and finality of the Final Solution toward particular assemblages of anti-Blackness and antisemitism

¹⁵ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 112–13.

¹⁶ Rothberg, 114.

and shifts the conceptual terrain from collective memory to real-time correspondence— correspondence in the double sense of international reportage and analytical relationalities. Most notably, whereas Du Bois writes in “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto” that his postwar visit to Warsaw resulted in a more “complete understanding of the Negro problem,” his writing before the war never arrived at such a stably integrated understanding.¹⁷ In exchange for such settlement and completion, Du Bois’s 1936 columns offer a “partial account,” tracing various possibilities of articulation and disjuncture as he considered the ‘American Negro problem’ from within Nazi Germany.¹⁸

II. Between a Ground of Comparison and a Basis of Equivalence

This chapter specifically addresses how Du Bois related the regimes of race in the United States and Germany in columns he wrote for the *Pittsburgh Courier* while spending four months in the latter in 1936. The trip was part of a world tour Du Bois embarked on from June to December 1936, traveling through Germany, the Soviet Union, Japan, and China, and came just after Du Bois began writing his new column in the *Courier* in February 1936.¹⁹ Manning Marable notes that “the non-*Crisis* journalistic writings of Du Bois have received, to date, little analysis. But through these popular essays, Du Bois spoke to several million Afro-Americans over a period of eight years.”²⁰ Furthermore, he estimates that “they illustrate better than any

¹⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto,” *Jewish Life: A Progressive Monthly*, May 1952, 15.

¹⁸ The phrase “partial account” alludes to Camp’s stated scholarly agenda in *Other Germans*.

¹⁹ After NAACP president Joel Spingarn and secretary Walter White effectively ousted Du Bois from the organization and the *Crisis* magazine in 1934, Du Bois was unable to reach a mass audience until the *Courier* publisher Robert L. Vann asked him in December 1935 to write a regular column. See Manning Marable, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat*, New updated edition (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 136–43, 153–54.

²⁰ Marable, 154. The *Courier* was produced in the North but two thirds of its issues were sold in the South. Compared to newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, the *Courier* had more of a middle-class readership. See Höhn, “‘We Will Never Go Back to the Old Way Again’: Germany in the African-American Debate on Civil Rights,” 609.

other single source the evolution of Du Bois's political thought during the depression and World War II." Marable suggests how the columns as a plurality of texts—more than any singular and discrete text—reveal the dynamic quality of Du Bois's thinking. The analysis in this chapter will emphasize not quite the "evolution" of Du Bois's thinking across these multiple columns but instead its very instability. Whereas Harold Brackman reads Du Bois's career as a "prism through which to view the global impact on African-American attitudes towards Jews during the period marked by the rise of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust," overburdening the individual Du Bois with representative power, this chapter will take a somewhat opposite hermeneutic position by appreciating the idiosyncrasies that defined his perspective.²¹ In doing so, an alternate structure of comparison tentatively emerges that neither enlarges or completes understandings of anti-Blackness (or antisemitism)—the methodology of "quantitative inclusion," as Natalie Melas describes—nor asserts its absolute opacity.²² Illustrating diachronic and synchronic trajectories of white supremacy and fascism, Du Bois rehearsed various relations across anti-Black and antisemitic racialization while maintaining their incommensurability. Incommensurability here does not suggest a possessive emphasis on rupture over relation but rather provides the very possibility of relation itself across multiply and unevenly intersecting regimes of race. As Melas theorizes, incommensurability names the space between a ground for comparison and a basis of equivalence, producing a "generative dislocation without silencing discourse" and opening up "the possibility of an intelligible relation at the limits of comparison."²³

²¹ Brackman, "'A Calamity Almost Beyond Comprehension': Nazi Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in the Thought of W. E. B. Du Bois," 53–54.

²² Natalie Melas, "Merely Comparative," *PMLA* 128, no. 3 (May 2013): 653.

²³ Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 31.

The subject matter of the *Courier* columns in general, before and during his trip, was wide-ranging and eclectic. Du Bois dispersed and serialized a broad set of discussions that weaved national and international history with contemporary politics, analyses of economic planning with theoretical observations on racial identity and organization, and critiques of socialism, democracy, and fascism with his professional and leisurely experiences in Germany. He chronicled the formation and development of Ethiopia from antiquity to the Italian defeat at Adwa in 1896; he stressed that Pan-African unity and cooperation was needed for Ethiopia's present defense against Italian aggression; he twice asserted, ominously, that "pacifism stands dumb before the conquest of Ethiopia;" and he excoriated the English government for "deliberately" sacrificing Ethiopia "because the vital interests of English investors were only threatened and not destroyed by the Italian conquest, and because the threatening attitude of Germany was more vital to English aristocracy than the death of a black nation."²⁴ Over the course of four columns in the summer of 1936, Du Bois detailed "our political history from 1896 to today," offering a relatively granular history that began with the "rise of cotton manufacture in the South" and ended with the National Recovery Administration's neglect of Black poverty.²⁵

²⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Three Ethiopias," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, February 8, 1936, City Edition, sec. Second, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 4, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202001500?accountid=14512>; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, June 6, 1936, City edition, sec. Feature Page, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202009370?accountid=14512>; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: England," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 5, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202018953?accountid=14512>; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, June 13, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202013684?accountid=14512>.

²⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Schaden-Freude," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, June 27, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202004421?accountid=14512>; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, July 18, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202003411?accountid=14512>; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, August 1, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/201997488?accountid=14512>; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: A Negro Book-of-the-Year Club," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, August 15, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202005948?accountid=14512>.

He was attuned to shifts in the international organization of colonial governance; for example, he suggested that “what Japan has done is to take the European imperialism and use it in Asia against Europe,” warned of Germany’s growing interest in the return of their former colonies in Africa, and diagnosed Europe’s present tendency away from “small independent countries” and toward “imperial groups.”²⁶ He repeatedly—perhaps most consistently of all the topics he covered—advocated for the formation of Black American consumers’ cooperatives and the necessity of state economic planning across “fascist, socialist, or democratic” regimes, especially in terms of industrial organization and education and the redistribution of income.²⁷ He criticized the New Deal and also asserted dryly that “it was necessary to restore normal life and industry by Fascist methods”; he considered the turn to dictatorship in the United States a consequence of the way “the rotten borough system of the South so dislocates and distorts normal political power”

²⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: No Chance,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, February 29, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202014538?accountid=14512>; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, March 14, 1936, City Edition, sec. Second Section, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Egypt,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, November 28, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202001804?accountid=14512>. In the March 14 column, Du Bois wrote that “Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda...demands the return of the German African colonies—divided between France and England after the World War. The former Governor of German East Africa is head of the German Colonial Society and has scheduled 341 lectures in universities in high schools in Germany and Austria on the subject. During the past year, forty-one doctor’s theses in Germany have been written on the subject of colonies. Hitler, like Bismarck, was once provincial and cared nothing for German colonial advancement. But now apparently he has changed and stands back of the demand for colonies. With him stands the powerful and farsighted Minister of Economics, Dr. Schacht and a special administrator has been appointed to push this movement.”

²⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, March 7, 1936, City Edition, sec. Second Section, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Prolegomena,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, March 21, 1936, City Edition, sec. Second Section, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” April 4, 1936; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 9, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202007911?accountid=14512>; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, May 16, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202011882?accountid=14512>; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, June 20, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202006994?accountid=14512>; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” July 18, 1936; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” August 1, 1936; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Sport,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 19, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202008421?accountid=14512>; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Egypt.”

while urging the “dictator”—that is, Roosevelt—to move toward socialism.²⁸ He elaborated a sort of dialectical history of race consciousness and strategy, which moved from a “race provincialism” that strives for racial equality toward a principled segregation “so far as this is necessary for self-defense and self-expression, leading ultimately to the goal of a united humanity and the abolition of all racial distinctions.”²⁹ And, once in Germany, he documented his visits to the Berlin Olympics, the German Museum of Science and Technology, a Wagner opera in Bayreuth, and the Siemens factory and its industrial school.³⁰

Unlike the essay in *Jewish Life* in 1952, or the relatively brief remarks on antisemitism and Nazism published in Du Bois’s *The World and Africa* (1947), *Color and Democracy* (1945), and *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), the *Courier* writings produce neither a definitive nor discrete analysis but rather, in their form as serialized columns, offer an ambivalent and mercurial elaboration of comparison across time. The official purpose of Du Bois’s journey was to examine industrial education in Germany in order to apply successful German methods to Black American schools in the United States; but, at the same time, and as he wrote in the February 22 column before his trip in late spring, “No people in the world have the interest in the Jewish problem in Germany

²⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 11, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202023586?accountid=14512>; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” May 9, 1936; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: A Negro Book-of-the-Year Club”; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Discussion,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, August 22, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202014274?accountid=14512>.

²⁹ This final position on “segregation” was largely responsible for the fall-out with the NAACP and the *Crisis*. Dr. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Visitors to Trans-Ethiopia,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 25, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202013247?accountid=14512>; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” June 6, 1936; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” June 13, 1936; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” June 20, 1936.

³⁰ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Sport”; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: The Division of Life,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, October 3, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202007600?accountid=14512>; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Shrines,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, October 17, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202006292?accountid=14512>; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Opera and the Negro Problem,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, October 31, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202001199?accountid=14512>; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Industrial Education,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, November 7, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202002744?accountid=14512>.

that the American Negroes have. It re-orientes the whole attitude of the modern world toward race problems.”³¹ What emerges from the multiple columns from Germany is an international perspective on race that is neither total, nor comprehensive, nor consistent. Alongside his own profound ambivalence towards the Third Reich as a lifelong Germanophile, Du Bois struggled to relate the plights of Black Americans and German Jews, and also the US and German regimes of race, in any conclusive way—extending what Barnor Hesse has described, with respect to *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), as the “undecidability of race in Du Bois’s thinking.”³² The columns from Germany thus navigate regimes in the United States and the Third Reich without presupposing a settled and commensurate conception of race. Describing Du Bois’s import for the disciplinary formation of Black Studies, Weheliye asserts that Du Bois “devised a set of methodological and philosophical protocols that excavated the sedimented synchronic and diachronic relationality of the Negro....so as to replace the Negro as a putatively given object of nature with the complex methods of racialization.”³³ Synchronic and diachronic relationality enabled Du Bois to put forth a racialized object of knowledge that was not “a social Darwinist fait accompli” but “the conglomerate effect of different racializing assemblages.”³⁴

As such, Du Bois’s approach maintains at once the integrity of the “Negro” as an object of study and the relational reproduction of her racialization, providing the vantage point from

³¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, February 22, 1936, City Edition.

³² Barnor Hesse, “Of Race: The Exorbitant Du Bois,” *Small Axe* 50 (July 2016): 18. Russell A. Berman demonstrates, with a close analysis of Du Bois’s reading of Wagner’s “Lohengrin” opera in *The Souls of Black Folk*, “how surprisingly central a role Germany played in the formation of Du Bois’s thought.” “Du Bois and Wagner: Race, Nation, and Culture between the United States and Germany,” *The German Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 123. Kenneth Barkin argues that Du Bois’s “praise [of Germany] was unflagging from his first days in Berlin until well into his nineties,” a somewhat imprecise assessment given the columns examined in this chapter, and which Barkin also acknowledges, but not altogether inaccurate. “W. E. B. Du Bois’ Love Affair with Imperial Germany,” *German Studies Review* 28, no. 2 (May 2005): 285.

³³ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 20.

³⁴ Weheliye, 20.

which anti-Blackness and antisemitism might relate without collapsing into one another. Additionally, the columns evinced a historically located conception of fascism that seems little concerned with moral or political indictments. Kelley has demonstrated that in the postwar period Du Bois, and other radical Black intellectuals, “viewed fascism as a blood relative of slavery and imperialism.”³⁵ Referring to Du Bois’s postwar text *The World and Africa* (1947), Kelley argues that, “to understand the roots of fascism, Du Bois did not waste his time examining the collapse of the Weimar Republic or the failure of the workers' soviets in Turin, Italy, or even the peculiarities of the Dreyfus affair. He went straight to the source: slavery and the struggle to end it.”³⁶ Interestingly, however, Du Bois’s columns from interwar Germany did reveal an interest in the collapse of the Weimar Republic and even in the long history of anti-Jewish oppression in Europe, a history that caused Du Bois to resist analogies. Rather than minimizing the perspective elaborated in the columns as inchoate or unevolved vis-à-vis his later writings, it is worth meditating on their contradictions and instabilities and the relational possibilities such contradictions and instabilities suggest.

By reading serial columns, this chapter moves away from unearthing a delimited comparative perspective that ostensibly coheres and toward a structure of comparison that is disintegrated and contradictory, assembling and disassembling different vantage points across space and time and “finding and exposing things that otherwise lie hidden beneath piety, heedlessness, or routine.”³⁷ Such a structure of comparison approaches what Melas names “mere comparison,” or *comparaison désœuvrée*: “a practice of comparison that doesn’t begin from the

³⁵ Robin Kelley, “‘But a Local Phase of a World Problem’: Black History’s Global Vision, 1883-1950,” *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 1067.

³⁶ Kelley, 1067.

³⁷ Edward W. Said, “The Text, the World, the Critic,” *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 8, no. 2 (Autumn 1975): 22.

foundation of empirical unities [such as ‘Negro’ or ‘Jew,’ or anti-Blackness and antisemitism] and in which comparison is not put to work in the service of a distinct project.”³⁸ While Melas’s general methodological intervention is open-ended, pursuing a complex micro-analysis of Du Bois’s columns here demonstrates how such a non-teleological comparative method is necessary in order to make legible the manifold ideologies, structures, and methods of racialization that aggregate incongruously along both diachronic and synchronic axes and at an international scale. For, “directed toward neither the consolidation nor the operationalization of categories,” Du Bois’s columns and their readers “traverse and plumb the space between them.”³⁹ Melas eschews a “definitive outcome,” emphasizing the “provisional” nature of such a comparative practice; and this dynamic and precarious interval in Du Bois’s thinking, encapsulated by the serialized columns, demonstrates the critical possibilities of relation that such provisional comparisons can generate. Specifically, Du Bois’s columns open up comparative strategies for conceptualizing the roles of economics and race in fascism—and thus relating multiples regimes of race—while at the same time marking that which exceeds generalized analogies between anti-Blackness and antisemitism.

III. The Four Uncensored Letters: Paradox and Contradiction

On December 5, 1936, the *Courier* published the first of four letters Du Bois sent once he departed from Germany, continuing on to Poland and ultimately Japan and China before returning to New York via Los Angeles. Du Bois began his column by announcing his intention to write about Germany, explaining, “I have written already a word here and there about minor aspects of the German scene. I am sure my friends have understood my hesitations and reticence:

³⁸ Melas, “Merely Comparative,” 657.

³⁹ Melas, 657.

it simply wasn't safe to attempt anything further."⁴⁰ This preface framed his previously serialized remarks about Germany from August onward as partial, idiosyncratic, and secondary. Du Bois added, "Even my mail, when Mrs. DuBois sent me a minor receipt to sign, was opened to see if money was being smuggled in. But now I have ended my sojourn—or at least shall have long before this is published; and to insure its reaching *The Courier* on time I am taking it to a foreign land to mail." These details reveal the treacherous geography of state surveillance that shaped the flow of information and analysis from Germany to the *Courier*'s readers. In a column just a month previous, Du Bois asserted, "I came to Germany to learn, among other things, something of industrial education...I hoped by what I might see to be able to see just what is wrong with industrial training among American Negroes."⁴¹ The comparative process described seems conventional enough: the traveler's gaze refracts society at home through what he "sees" abroad. As foreign correspondence, Du Bois's writing promised to offer its readers a rather immediate view of Germany, continuously synchronized with other local and global flows of information converging on the newspaper page. But the introduction to his final correspondence, disclosing how these flows of information are trafficked and policed, suggests the paradox of his reportage. He belatedly exposed the chain of observations in his initial columns from Germany—columns that had appeared immediate, transparent, and autonomous—as fractional, constrained by the German state and its propaganda agenda; whereas the columns that followed consisted of a second set of writings, concealed during his actual presence on the ground in Germany and only divulged at an admitted spatial and temporal delay.

⁴⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Germany," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, December 5, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/201994409?accountid=14512>.

⁴¹ Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Industrial Education."

When he had originally written in January 1936 to publisher Robert L. Vann about his proposed column for the *Courier*, Du Bois asserted his intention “to prevent the American Negro from considering his problem as local and provincial, but rather as a part of the whole international development of the modern world.”⁴² This stated intention did not indicate a new project for Du Bois; he had, since his earliest writings, evinced an international approach to Black American history and sociology and had invested considerably in the rise of Pan-African discourse and activism.⁴³ But the ultimate form of the columns, split between censored and uncensored correspondence, reflects how the territorialization of nation-states intervenes and constrains the formation of this international perspective on race. Du Bois’s stated intention for his columns was to undermine an exclusively national perspective on the so-called ‘American Negro problem’ and his trip to Germany represented the geographic overflow such an intention required. Yet the partitioned form of the correspondence from Germany suggests that his dislocation of the nation-state’s conceptual borders portended a dislocated corpus of writing. And Du Bois admitted in the December 26 column that even writing alone does not provide reliable access: “When this is published I shall be in Hawaii...But, as I write, it is not Christmas, it is October; and I am still in that Germany whose inner meaning I am trying, with the clumsy tool of the written word, to picture to my far-off readers.”⁴⁴ Du Bois acknowledged a basic problematic of representation that impedes the transparent transmission of information across an international field.

⁴² Du Bois, “Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Pittsburgh Courier,” Correspondence, January 4, 1936, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b080-i090>.

⁴³ See Kelley, “‘But a Local Phase of a World Problem’: Black History’s Global Vision, 1883-1950,” 1054–55.

⁴⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Christmas, 1936,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, December 26, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202006988?accountid=14512>.

There is a resulting instability to the columns from Germany that signals the difficulty of assimilating the ‘American Negro problem’ to an international scale of analysis. For example, Du Bois’s September 19 column, sent to the *Courier* before he had departed, noted that “as a specimen of organization, the [1936 Berlin summer Olympic] games were superbly done; as a gesture toward international peace and good will, their value cannot be over-estimated.”⁴⁵ Yet, Du Bois’s December 19 column, sent for publication after his departure, revealed that “visitors to the Olympic Games are apt to have gotten” the impression that the ‘Jewish problem’ “is already passing... They saw no Jewish oppression. Just as Northern visitors to Mississippi see no Negro oppression.”⁴⁶ In doing so, Du Bois ironically implied the unreliability of first-hand impressions at the very moment he proposed a homology between Jim Crow and Nazi mechanisms of concealment. In his January 2 column, Du Bois modified his earlier representation of Berlin’s orderly presentation of the Olympic games: on the night Du Bois left Berlin, a German friend visited him and remarked, “You know... the restrictions on coming into Berlin for work have recently been raised to admit more servants,” from which Du Bois concluded, “So that was the reason Berlin was so busy, with no idlers nor criminals, during the Olympian Games. The city was barred against all but those at jobs.”⁴⁷ The orderly organization of the games, praised by Du Bois in September, turns out to have been a function of the state’s repressive regulation of movement into the capital. Straightforward and transparent correspondence therefore appears impossible in two registers: state surveillance and regulation of social space overdetermined Du Bois’s correspondence from Germany to *Courier* readers, and, consequently, the comparative

⁴⁵ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Sport.”

⁴⁶ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Germany,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, December 19, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/201989869?accountid=14512>.

⁴⁷ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: What Germans Think,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 2, 1937, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202040118?accountid=14512>.

correspondences broached between German Jewish and Black American oppression remained constitutively precarious.⁴⁸

Du Bois's explanation for the lack of "idlers" and "criminals" in Berlin appears, then, less a correction or completion of his earlier observation than the production of another discrete perspective. Thus, no comprehensive view of Germany emerges. The disorganized production, form, and content of the columns suggest that shifting scales from the "local and provincial" to the international did not involve a simple expansion of perspective. The comparative knowledge furnished by Du Bois is never total, accumulating irregularly over time as Du Bois sent writing piecemeal for publication. The combination of state censorship, propaganda, and the fragmentary form of correspondence coincided with Du Bois's unsettling of the comparative relationship not only between Black Americans and the world but also between Black Americans and German Jews and between white supremacy and National Socialism. This is not to elide the two registers, the material impediments to international comparison and the incommensurability of the relations compared. Rather, it is to note the coincidence of material and conceptual instability in Du Bois's international comparison. This coincidence suggests the general overdetermination of not merely antisemitism and anti-Blackness as located sets of racializing relations but also of comparative relations between them. This overdetermination does not invalidate comparison, at various levels of abstraction and points of intersection, but it requires a retreat from aspiring to a

⁴⁸ Furthermore, it does not even seem that straightforward and transparent correspondence was desirable to begin with: Du Bois wrote all of his columns with techniques of "miscellany and collage," such that, for example, his impressions of the Berlin Olympics appeared alongside general comments on the redistribution of income in fascist, socialist, and democratic states. See Jacqueline Emery, "Writing to Belong: Alice Dunbar-Nelson's Newspaper Columns in the African American Press," *Legacy* 33, no. 2 (2017): 287; Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Sport." Emery identifies these techniques in Alice Dunbar-Nelson's columns written for the *Courier* a decade before Du Bois's, but they are nonetheless also apt for describing the form of the latter's columns. Even before his trip to Germany, Du Bois might have juxtaposed in a single column criticism of "religious fanaticism," a discussion of income tax, comments on Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, and an analysis of segregation as philosophy. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion," June 6, 1936.

settled theory of the relation between antisemitism and anti-Blackness as discrete, transhistorical units. Instead, Du Bois's writing introduced an idiosyncratic set of multiple comparisons that wove antisemitism and anti-Blackness into complex, international designs, drawing lines of connection occluded by presupposing their analogical integrity as commensurable forms of racism.

Du Bois's stated purpose was "an intensive six-month study of Germany, educational methods and standards to aid Negro schools in America."⁴⁹ He had reevaluated his early position against Booker T. Washington's program of industrial training and now intended to improve upon it, studying "the way in which popular education for youth and adults in Germany has been made to minister to industrial organization and advance; and how this German experience can be applied so as to help the re-organization of the American Negro industrial school."⁵⁰ Such was the proposal Du Bois submitted for a grant-in-aid from the Oberlaender Trust, a part of the Carl Schurz Memorial foundation established to enable prominent Americans to "become better acquainted with the achievements of the German speaking peoples."⁵¹ But Du Bois's original proposals to the Trust had a different research focus: German colonialism and race. In May of 1931, Du Bois wrote to Wilbur K. Thomas, Executive Director of the Trust, explaining his hope "to broaden the provincial outlook of Americans on foreign affairs, and at the same time, make them realize that the Negro problem is a problem of international politics."⁵² He proposed to

⁴⁹ Anonymous, "DUBOIS TO STUDY GERMANY'S EDUCATIONAL METHODS: Educator To Sail In June; Hopes To Aid Race Education Here," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, March 28, 1936, City Edition, sec. Second, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202009033?accountid=14512>.

⁵⁰ Anonymous, "DUBOIS TO STUDY GERMANY'S EDUCATIONAL METHODS: Educator To Sail In June; Hopes To Aid Race Education Here."

⁵¹ Anonymous, "DUBOIS TO STUDY GERMANY'S EDUCATIONAL METHODS: Educator To Sail In June; Hopes To Aid Race Education Here."

⁵² W. E. B. Du Bois, "Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Oberlaender Trust, July 15, 1931," Correspondence, July 15, 1931, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b060-i207>.

study German colonial methods of administration but ultimately was not awarded a fellowship.⁵³ In 1934, he wrote again to Thomas proposing a study of changes in German culture “from the point of view of one not only outside the nation but outside the Nordic race.”⁵⁴ Here one can identify the liminality that Weheliye describes (with respect to Sylvia Wynter) as “the promise of black studies,” a vantage point that results from focused interrogation of racialization as an object of knowledge.⁵⁵ Thomas wrote back rebuffing this proposal—“I think our Trustees would reaffirm their decision in regard to your application if I brought it up again”—and suggested instead the future possibility of a study of “the ‘black troops’ question,” having “heard the rumor that the French are again concentrating black troops near the German border.”⁵⁶ This move appears to have replaced the possible effects Du Bois’s vantage point could have on an understanding of European culture by routing this vantage point back to the study of Black people themselves, betraying a misguided assumption that Black study implied in the first instance merely the study of Black people as given objects. Du Bois however replied with interest, explaining he was currently applying for a grant-in-aid from the Social Science Research Council to “help me finish my history of the Negro troops in the war,” a decades-long and ultimately unfinished project titled *The Black Man and the Wounded World*.⁵⁷ For whatever

⁵³ Du Bois, 15; Wilbur Kesley Thomas, “Letter from Oberlaender Trust to W. E. B. Du Bois, October 28, 1931,” Correspondence, October 28, 1931, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b060-i210>.

⁵⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Oberlaender Trust, October 17, 1934,” Correspondence, October 17, 1934, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b071-i356>.

⁵⁵ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 28.

⁵⁶ Wilbur Kesley Thomas, “Letter from Oberlaender Trust to W. E. B. Du Bois, October 19, 1934,” Correspondence, October 19, 1934, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b071-i357>.

⁵⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Oberlaender Trust, November 6, 1934,” Correspondence, November 6, 1934, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b071-i358>. Du Bois published the first chapter of the book in the January 1924 issue of *The Crisis*. He faced considerable, repeated difficulties in securing funding to complete the book. Chad Williams argues that Du Bois’s “daring perspective”—that the war “had strengthened white supremacy across the globe” and “had redoubled the economic exploitation of peoples of

reason, Du Bois shifted focus again and by February 1935 made his ultimate proposal on industrial education.⁵⁸ It is therefore more appropriate to consider the final reason for Du Bois's journey as a palimpsest, bearing traces of his earlier proposals as he maneuvered over time to obtain the financial means necessary to elaborate an international perspective on racialization and a Black (American) perspective on Germany.

Du Bois continued the introduction to his “four letters” by further complicating the constraints of censorship and even provincializing his own observations from abroad. After disclosing the partial nature of his previous writing on Germany, Du Bois added, “This does not mean that I have not enjoyed my five and more months in Germany. I have. I have been treated with uniform courtesy and consideration. It would have been impossible for me to have spent a similarly long time in any part of the United States without some, if not frequent cases of personal insult or discrimination. I cannot record a single instance here.”⁵⁹ The disclosure of state censorship gave an impression of anti-democratic governance, yet Du Bois here dispelled the impression that such governance was necessarily coeval with anti-Blackness. To be sure, Du Bois experienced anti-Black “race prejudice” in Germany, which he described in the December

African descent by the American and European ruling classes, bought with the silent complicity of white wage earners and the perversion of democracy”—accounted for its rejection from the Macmillan Company, the Slater Fund, the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Fund for Public Service, and the Julius Rosenwald Fund, even as books by white historians and memoirs by white generals received funding. Following the publication of *Black Reconstruction* (1935), Du Bois returned to the book and, following his trip to Germany, asked for \$7,500 from the American Philosophical Society to finally complete it. Given the context of the Italian-Ethiopian war, it had become an explicitly anti-war text. His request was rejected and the project abandoned. Williams estimates that the “inability to complete *The Black Man and the Wounded World* represented one of the biggest intellectual regrets of [Du Bois's] life.” See “World War I in the Historical Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois,” *Modern American History* 1, no. 1 (March 2018): 3–22.

⁵⁸ It is possible that Du Bois's decidedly international perspective on Black soldiers and the war fell outside of the Trust's interest in German-focused research. It is also possible that the so-called “‘black troops’ question” itself was ultimately of little interest, having faded from public discourse after its climax in the early Weimar years. The suggestion made by Thomas in 1934 is in itself somewhat surprising and atypical. See Camp, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich*, 25–64; Iris Wigger, “‘Against the Laws of Civilisation’: Race, Gender, and Nation in the International Racist Campaign Against the ‘Black Shame,’” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 46, Special Issue: Race & Ethnicity: In a Global Context (2002): 113–31.

⁵⁹ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Germany.”

19 column, but here Du Bois noted the lack of any “personal insult” and “discrimination.”⁶⁰ In doing so, Du Bois complicated attempts to integrate Germany and the United States under a unified and consistent ideology of white world supremacy, emphasizing instead the shifting structure of regimes of race across international locations. Du Bois’s personal comments do not stand in for a definitive assessment of anti-Blackness in the Third Reich but they do confirm Campt’s assertion that, “beyond measures specifically directed at dealing with the threat posed by the children of the Rhineland, National Socialist policy toward Afro-Germans who were not part of this group was not characterized by a top-down execution of legislative power, and for the most part, the regime’s actions were neither systematic nor coherent.”⁶¹

Du Bois seems to repeat his rosy reflection on his liberating years spent in Germany as a student in the late nineteenth century, signaling his personal biases—from youth, from memory, and from his general circulation in bourgeois, metropolitan circles. Kenneth Barkin nonetheless asserts that Du Bois’s “Love Affair with Imperial Germany” demonstrates “German anti-Semitism and racism towards Africans or African Americans cannot be lumped together without fine tuning.”⁶² Campt specifies further vis-à-vis Black Germans that

the contradictory and uneven effects of Nazi racial policy on the Black German population...demonstrate not only the extent to which the National Socialists seemed unable to fit Black Germans neatly into their racial ideology but also that Black Germans were a highly diverse group of individuals whose status and fate within this regime was quite different from and thus cannot be subsumed in

⁶⁰ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Germany.”

⁶¹ Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich*, 64.

⁶² Barkin, “W. E. B. Du Bois’ Love Affair with Imperial Germany,” 291.

historical accounts and explanations of other ‘non-Aryan’ groups such as Jews and ‘Gypsies.’⁶³

Du Bois himself ambivalently circumscribed his perspective, admitting its limitations while also underscoring its breadth and credibility:

It is always difficult to characterize a whole nation. One cannot really know 67 million people, much less indict them. I have simply looked on. I have used my eyes and to a lesser extent my ears. I have talked with some people but not widely, nor inquisitively.

Chiefly I have traveled...I have seen Germany; and not in the mists of a tourist’s rush, but in slow and thoughtful leisure. I have read German newspapers of all sorts and places; I have read books, listened to lectures, gone to operas, plays and movies and watched a nation at work and play. I have talked with a half dozen officials.⁶⁴

On the one hand, Du Bois documented his immersion in German society and his various points of intimate access while there. On the other hand, he resisted concluding that such immersion and access produced a “whole” characterization of Germany. The elaboration of an international perspective in real-time was marked by unsettlement, incoherence, and contingency—and so too then the international relationship between the German and US regimes of race remained unsettled.

The first expository portion of the December 5 column proceeded by explaining German support for Hitler and narrating the political and economic background contributing to his rise to

⁶³ Camp, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich*, 5.

⁶⁴ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Germany.”

power. Du Bois presented a paradoxical description of Germany that mirrored the duality of his columns, before and after his departure:

Germany in overwhelming majority stands back of Adolf Hitler today. Germany has food and housing, and is, on the whole, contented and prosperous.

Unemployment in four years has been reduced from seven to two millions or less.

The whole nation is dotted with new homes for the common people, new roads, new public building and new public works of all kinds. Food is good, pure, and cheap. Public order is perfect, and there is almost no visible crime.⁶⁵

The reported success of the Nazi-led economic recovery is notable because, as the Depression marked a global crisis of liberal democracy, Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union each asserted the superiority of fascist and socialist models to resolve such a crisis.⁶⁶ By documenting the economic success of National Socialism in Germany, Du Bois implied a critique of the Roosevelt administration's tepid approach to economic planning; for the *Courier's* readers, the contrast between German circumstances and those of Black Americans in particular would have been readily apparent.⁶⁷ In a column from April, before his trip, Du Bois made clear the results

⁶⁵ Du Bois. Germany's speedy recovery resulted from the combination of an early "powerful 'natural' recovery in the German business sector," civilian work creation programs, and, most substantially from 1934 onward, rearmament. See Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2006), 37–66.

⁶⁶ Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2014), 51–53. Katznelson writes, "The dictatorships projected many alluring answers. With market capitalism performing so poorly, the Italians put forward a corporatist model that coordinated matters of labor and capital under the auspices of the state. The Germans advanced a highly managed capitalism. The Soviets, who had eliminated private property and markets altogether, pushed ahead with an ever-more-ambitious planned economy... The dictatorships professed to solve these various problems better than democracies. As antiliberal democracies, they offered mass mobilization and participation through approved political parties, buttressed by strong image of popular support and national unity... By advancing a social agenda, producing economic results, and mobilizing the population, they 'caught the parliamentary powers off guard' by advancing policy answers without going through the route of democratic lawmaking."

⁶⁷ In a column from August 5, Du Bois outlined the disproportionate suffering of Black Americans: "The depression had begun to strike the colored people before it was felt in the country. The immigrant black laborers who had rushed North to decrease the labor reserve in the South and increase the workers in northern factories and industrial concerns, found themselves out of jobs and dependent upon the charity of strangers. In the South, the laborers and farm tenants sank to economic levels lower than usual. They lost a million acres in land holding, and homes and

thus far of Roosevelt's recovery: "In the current reorganization of industry, there is no adequate effort to secure us a place in industry, or to open opportunity for Negro ability, or to give us security in age or unemployment."⁶⁸ Attacking agricultural, manufacturing, and housing relief more broadly, he wrote on May 9,

It is easy to assume that the relief of agriculture is the relief of the poor farmer. As a matter of fact, it is particularly and almost exclusively the relief of the rich farmer...and in the same way, the tariff protection which we have piled on and then piled on again in the United States, does not result in high wages to the worker, but in high profits to the manufacturer...

The great American housing movement for the poor has had unparalleled success in everything except housing for the poor.⁶⁹

However, in a column that was published while Du Bois attended the summer Olympics in Berlin, he criticized the New Deal in terms that both aligned it with fascism and revealed its relative inadequacy. This column was the last in a series spanning nearly two months that offered "sketches of our political history from 1896 to today," which Du Bois prefatorily qualified by disclosing that "the materials for this history are incomplete and I shall doubtless make errors in facts."⁷⁰ In the penultimate section of the series, published on August 15 and titled "Political History: The Depression," Du Bois 'sketched' his evolving understanding of the Roosevelt

savings were swallowed up." See "Forum of Fact and Opinion: A Negro Book-of-the-Year Club." Of the later period following Roosevelt's election, historian Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, writing of New York City alone, demonstrates that, "for black communities, and Harlem in particular, unemployment rates were worse still...Blacks endured higher unemployment rates than whites or the same reasons they had lost their jobs more quickly in the early Depression: lack of skills and the discrimination of employers. Semi-skilled and unskilled jobs, where blacks were highly concentrated, had the highest unemployment rates all decade long." See *Or Does It Explode? Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 66.

⁶⁸ Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion," April 11, 1936.

⁶⁹ Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion," May 9, 1936.

⁷⁰ Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Schaden-Freude."

administration and its response to the economic crisis: “Roosevelt came to power just as the depression reached its lowest point and threatened the whole financial structure of the country. It was necessary, therefore, to restore normal life and industry by Fascist methods; that is, by a dictatorship which did not depend upon Democratic control.”⁷¹

While it is not entirely clear if Du Bois used the “Fascist” modifier as a critical epithet or a straightforward descriptor, his interpretation of the Roosevelt recovery as “fascist” in method was not altogether unique or extraordinary. Michael Joseph Roberto demonstrates that “in the media there was a visible and vigorous discussion about the relationship between fascism and capitalism that began after Roosevelt’s inauguration.”⁷² Influential liberal journalist Walter Lippman wrote in his *New York Herald Tribune* column that the incoming President Roosevelt would need “extraordinary powers” to confront the emergency, and Congress should “suspend temporarily the rule of both houses, to limit drastically the right of amendment and debate, to put the majority in both houses under the decisions of a caucus.”⁷³ He also personally advised Roosevelt in February 1933 that there may be “no alternative but to assume dictatorial powers.”⁷⁴ Rejecting socialist alternatives, the normal methods of liberal democracy, including its *laissez-faire* approach to the market, would have to be suspended for the capitalist system itself to survive. Some critics highlighted New Deal similarities to the Italian corporatist model

⁷¹ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: A Negro Book-of-the-Year Club.”

⁷² Roberto writes, “In this transition to *state capitalism*, or more properly understood as *state monopoly capitalism*, the question for some in the mid-1930s was whether the New Deal was fascist or marked a transition toward the particular national form fascism would take in the United States. This question is rather jarring. In their popular understanding and dwindling memory of U.S. history, Americans associate the New Deal with a now familiar liberal impulse to reform government to serve the interests of the people. This tendency has reduced complex historical processes to simple constructs in a narrative that glosses over or minimizes fundamental contradictions in the world’s most foremost capitalist society and in its political order during the 1920s and 1930s.” *The Coming of the American Behemoth: The Origins of Fascism in the United States, 1920-1940* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018), 237, 219.

⁷³ Qtd. in Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*, 118.

⁷⁴ Qtd. in Katznelson, 119.

as well as Mussolini and Roosevelt's shared fidelity to business interests; others emphasized the failures of the New Deal—"the paradox of capitalist progress: rising poverty within continued growth"—as harbingers of a fascist transformation of the state.⁷⁵ In a June 1933 article in *Harper's Magazine*, J. B. Matthews and R. E. Shallcross explained this failure with regard to economic planning, arguing, "Our planned recovery is not a planned economy. The fundamental principle of a planned economy is the organization and correlation of the grand aggregate of available resources with a view to higher living standards for the masses. Without this as the dominant and ever-present purpose there is not even a beginning of planned economy."⁷⁶ It was this failed response to the economic emergency, along with the normal development of monopoly finance capitalism, that accelerated a "tendency toward political dictatorship."⁷⁷ Du Bois's own criticism of the New Deal, writing a few years later, continued with similar attention to a failure of planning: "The country with scared unanimity ranged itself behind the New Deal and permitted without complaint a nation-wide attempt at social planning. But as Hoover's inquiry into social trends said: 'The best which any group of economic planners can do with the data now at hand, bulky but inadequate, is to lay plans for making plans.'"⁷⁸

Unlike other journalists and analysts, however, Du Bois considered the accelerated tendency towards the (quasi-fascist) consolidation of executive power in the United States as a product of white supremacy. Seeming to confirm Matthews and Shallcross' conclusion that "the driving force of American fascism would not be a mass movement from below but would come

⁷⁵ Roberto, *The Coming of the American Behemoth: The Origins of Fascism in the United States, 1920-1940*, 237–48.

⁷⁶ Qtd. in Roberto, 239.

⁷⁷ Roberto, 242.

⁷⁸ Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: A Negro Book-of-the-Year Club."

from the actions taken by the ruling capitalists above,” Du Bois asserted the centrality of anti-Blackness to the crisis:

In the twenty-eight organizations set up under the New Deal, there were 38,189 white employers and less than three hundred colored employees. This group of advisers to the various departments and bureaus consisted for the most part of men of high caliber and thorough education. Their handicap, of course, was to get their advice and planning to the ears of the superiors and through the intricate organizations of the NRA and past the local State set-ups. In this their success was not large and their situation emphasized their political helplessness. And not only theirs, but the paralysis of democratic government throughout the United States, due to the fact that the United States, in attempting to disfranchise the black man had disorganized democracy through the land.⁷⁹

The preservation of racial democracy in the United States made a thoroughly democratic response to the crisis impossible, for the incoherent distribution of power across business alliances and state and local hierarchies prevented a nationally comprehensive recovery.⁸⁰ Quite simply, “there can be today no logical appeal to an intelligent mass of democratic voters,” for “the rotten borough system represented by the South so dislocated and distorts normal political power that it functions only in the interest of reaction and monopoly.”⁸¹ The result is a desperate turn to “the rule of a dictator.”

⁷⁹ Roberto, *The Coming of the American Behemoth: The Origins of Fascism in the United States, 1920-1940*, 241; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Discussion.”

⁸⁰ Katznelson writes, “Pressured in many unexpected ways, the white South became uncertain and unsure, perplexed about how simultaneously to maintain its commitments to racism and to a changing Democratic Party, its long-standing political home. As southern power grew more guarded and fearful, the New Deal moved from a first phase of radical reform to a second, in which its social democratic wings were clipped.” For a full discussion of the internal contradictions of the New Deal coalition, see “Jim Crow Congress” in Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*, 156–94.

⁸¹ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Discussion.”

Du Bois's and others' attention to Roosevelt's "Fascist methods" comes in contrast to a post-war US discourse that would anchor mass movements, authoritarianism, and extreme nationalism and racism as the sine qua non of fascism. In 1952, Paul Alexander Baran, a Jewish and Marxist political economist who received his PhD from the University of Berlin just as the Nazis were seizing power, defined and criticized this approach in the *Monthly Review* magazine:

For a political system to 'qualify' as fascist, it has to display the German or Italian characteristics of fascism. It must be based on a fascist mass movement anchored primarily in para-military formations of brown shirts or black shirts. It must be a one-party regime, with the party headed by a Führer or a Duce symbolizing the principle of authoritarian leadership. It must be violently nationalist, racist, anti-Semitic. It must be frankly illiberal, intolerant of opposition, hostile to civil liberties and human rights.⁸²

Before the war, in his introduction to the 1939 English translation of French anarchist Daniel Guérin's *Fascism and Big Business*, leftist critic Dwight Macdonald had similarly warned against focusing on what he described as "secondary characteristics of European fascism, such as Jew-baiting and book-burning," at the expense of its economic basis; the result of such a myopic view would enable the American ruling class to organize workers in a "crusade against overseas fascism" while concealing its development at home.⁸³ The point of both commentators was not to minimize the racial violence perpetrated by European fascist regimes but to suggest that a focus on spectacular examples of illiberal behavior might myopically overlook its less superficial

⁸² Baran eschewed this approach. An interesting contrast to this caricature is Dwight Macdonald's assertion, in the introduction to Daniel Guérin's *Fascism and Big Business*, that "Our [i.e. American] fascists not only don't (yet) wear brown shirts; they proclaim themselves 'anti-fascist' as well as 'anti-communist' and march under the banner of 'liberty' and even 'democracy.'" Both quoted in Roberto, *The Coming of the American Behemoth: The Origins of Fascism in the United States, 1920-1940*, 13.

⁸³ Quoted in Roberto, 14.

conditions of production. Du Bois therefore articulated his implied comparison between the National Socialist recovery and the New Deal recovery, and his earlier description of Roosevelt's "Fascist methods," within a discourse that did not immediately fix xenophobia or racism as fascism's essence.

Although the Nazi regime's apparent investment in a housed and gainfully employed *Volksgemeinschaft*, reported by Du Bois, would have seemed ideal in contrast to the misery facing Black Americans, Du Bois ultimately revealed this apparent ideal as an incomplete representation, supplemented by political repression, want, and "race prejudice."⁸⁴ Like the state censorship partitioning Du Bois's observations, the Nazi recovery partitioned German society and veiled its alterity. He writes,

And yet, in direct and contradictory paradox to all this, Germany is silent, nervous, suppressed... Last winter 12 million were in want of food and clothes, and this winter not less than 9 million, perhaps 10. There is a campaign of race prejudice carried on, openly, continuously and determinedly, against all non-Nordic races, but specifically against the Jew, which surpasses in vindictive cruelty and public insult anything I have ever seen; and I have seen much. Here is the paradox and contradiction. It is so complicated that one cannot express it without seeming to convict one's self of deliberate misstatement. And the testimony of the casual, non-German-speaking visitor to the Olympic Games is worse than valueless in any direction.⁸⁵

In the analysis concluding his correspondence from Germany, then, Du Bois emphasized paradox and contradiction. It is not only that the elaboration of an international perspective on

⁸⁴ Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Germany."

⁸⁵ Du Bois.

the ‘Negro problem’ necessitated a fragmentary and dislocated form but also that the terms of comparison themselves contained multifaceted and complexly structured relations. The enthusiasm for Hitler, the appearance of relative abundance, and the spectacle of public works co-existed alongside mass hunger and racial violence, indicating a gap between the state’s self-representation and the actual purchasing power (and well-being) of ordinary Germans; the “Battle for Work” campaign and settlement program, for example, were as much (if not more) choreographed, ideological affairs of state as they were material investments in work creation and housing.⁸⁶ Du Bois also described the vicious “Nordic,” and particularly anti-Jewish, supremacy that accompanied the national recovery—an anti-Jewish Nordic supremacy whose social pathologies and symptoms exceeded Du Bois’s own experience. What Du Bois described as paradox and contradiction was therefore the concurrence of “an embracing vision of national prosperity for all the *Volksgenossen*” (national comrades) and a racializing economic apparatus of subordination and exclusion.⁸⁷ Du Bois struggled to consolidate Germany, as a nation, into a discrete unit of analysis (and comparison) because it was itself a divided, complex society structured in dominance, articulating investment and prosperity with repression, privation, and racial oppression.

⁸⁶ Tooze calculates, “In 1936, with the German economy at full employment, 14.5 million people, 62 per cent of all German taxpayers, reported annual incomes of less than 1,500 Reichsmarks...All in all, expenditure on food, drink and tobacco accounted in working-class households for between 43 and 50 per cent of average household budgets. Rent accounted for another 12 per cent, implying average housing expenses for German working-class households of only 24 Reichsmarks per month. A further 5 per cent went on utility bills. That left a monthly total of only 67 Reichsmarks for a household of four people for all other forms of expenditure, on clothing, household equipment, transport, health care, insurance and social and educational expenditure. A pair of men’s shoes would cost 10 Reichsmarks. Having them resoled cost 4 Reichsmarks. Children’s shoes were not to be had for much less than 6 Reichsmarks, the daily wage for most workers. If the man of the house needed a new suit this consumed virtually the family’s entire disposable income.” See *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*, 141–43. On the “Battle for Work” and resettlement, see also Tooze, 59–62, 159–61.

⁸⁷ Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*, 135.

The social duality Du Bois described, between national unity/prosperity and internal subordination, recalls his famous concept of ‘double consciousness.’ In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois narrated “twoness” in the register of identity: “One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.”⁸⁸ Similarly, but shifted to an ethnographic register, Du Bois perceived an internal paradox between the German ideal and social inequality. His subjective experience and analysis of anti-Blackness in the United States provided a structuring prism through which he, in the columns, communicated the German racial order. In his analysis of Du Bois’s postwar visit to the Warsaw ghetto monument, Rothberg argues that the

“unique” bifocal relationship of double consciousness that Du Bois charts in *The Souls of Black Folk* between African-American subjects and dominant culture gets refigured in “The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto” as a more general form for the expression of particular relationships between minority and majority culture and between victimization and survival. Double consciousness is no longer simply a condition of African-American life or, for that matter, of Jewish life in Europe. Rather, it is a conceptual, discursive, or aesthetic structure through which the conditions of minority life are given shape in order to ground acts of resistance to the biopolitical order.⁸⁹

In the 1936 columns, Du Bois bore witness less to the twoness of racialized “consciousness” than to the conceptual and material production of twoness in German society, wherein “racial thinking as well as racial violence emerge simultaneously with the production of ‘biopolitical’ space.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1989), 5.

⁸⁹ Michael Rothberg, “W.E.B. DuBois in Warsaw: Holocaust Memory and the Color Line, 1949-1952,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 185–86.

⁹⁰ Rothberg, 171.

Over two columns in October 1936, Du Bois detailed his visit to Bayreuth, a town he described as a “shrine...built around the name and memory of one man, Richard Wagner,” comparing it to “Westminster Abbey and Chartres and Reims...centers of renewed striving.”⁹¹ Strikingly, Du Bois’s language of “renewed striving” faintly recalls the famous essay from *Souls*, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” suggesting a latent romantic nationalism that unites Black and German national ideals in Du Bois’s thinking. In a 1960 oral history, when questioned about his praise of Bismarck and Imperial Germany, Du Bois countered the interviewer’s hostility by asserting, “They [the Germans] had been through the days of Louis XIV when he just walked over the German people. He had the Germans pushed down into the mud . . . They used to sneer at Germany. . . The Germans could not get together, there was no Germany, there were little bits of German provinces. . . and here, at last, you had them come together.”⁹² Beyond a vague sense of romantic nationalism, then, Du Bois identified Germany’s peripheral subordination within Europe and subsequent national unification with trajectories he had imagined for Black people. “Twoness,” at an international scale, does not simply homologize a proliferating set of discrete, divided nations but rather circuits together national contradictions transversally. In other words, Germany’s internally divided structure does not appear as a discrete homologue to the American “twoness” Du Bois coded as white and Black; rather, Du Bois’s own sense of “double consciousness” generated dual lines of connection that link to both the normative German ideal and those subjugated behind its national veil.⁹³

⁹¹ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Shrines.”

⁹² Qtd. in Kenneth Barkin, “W. E. B. Du Bois and the Kaiserreich,” *Central European History* 31, no. 3 (September 1998): 157n7.

⁹³ Based in her analysis of oral histories, Camppt contrasts Du Bois’s sense of “twoness” with Afro-German subjectivity, emphasizing Du Bois’s Black American gaze and revealing multiple racializing assemblages irreducible to a homogenized notion of anti-Blackness. See Camppt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich*, 22.

Bayreuth was long a right-wing (and Nazi) stronghold and Hitler himself made annual summer visits. As Frederic Spotts asserts, “with the apotheosis of Wagner [in Nazi culture] and the glorification of Bayreuth as Germany’s supreme cultural showpiece, it is easy to see why there took root in the public mind a symbiotic relationship: Wagner—Bayreuth—Hitler—National Socialism—Third Reich.”⁹⁴ Yet, instead of disclosing Wagner’s role in the National Socialist production of German nationalism, Du Bois threaded the Bavarian city into an international map of racial theory, exposing the material routes of culture that intercepted its nationalistic “glorification.”⁹⁵ Du Bois wrote, “On the corner of Listz [sic] street, where I live, is the house where Franz Listz, the master, died. At the corner of Wahnfried street, where I daily turn toward town, I pass the former home of H.S. Chamberlain, the American [sic], who, writing in German, did more perhaps than any one to establish in Germany the theory of Nordic superiority,” and immediately following, “Wagner’s ‘fancies’ were of the highest importance for music and the modern world.”⁹⁶ The city was a site where the diachronic accumulation of national heritage was imbricated with international flows of race-making, juxtaposing the production of cultural splendor and the production—or legitimation—of social inequality. Spotts writes that the Bayreuth Festival, “far from keeping National Socialism out of art, provided it with its most distinguished aesthetic cover.”⁹⁷ By splicing his praise of the German musical tradition with international ideological routes of race theory, it is possible that Du Bois attempted to divulge the paradoxical twoness of German nationalism without inviting censorship. Chamberlain was not American, as Du Bois claimed, but British. Perhaps Du Bois mistakenly conflated Chamberlain with the American racial anthropologist Madison Grant, whose theory of

⁹⁴ Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 175.

⁹⁵ Spotts, 175.

⁹⁶ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Shrines.”

⁹⁷ Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival*, 188.

Nordic superiority also exerted great influence on Nazi ideology.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, Du Bois evidently intended to introduce an international axis of race theory transversing Bayreuth. Marable notes that Du Bois's "lifelong reliance on international tours and brief visits to provide ethnographic windows into interpreting the workings of various societies was all too frequently notoriously unreliable."⁹⁹ However, Du Bois here supplemented his limited, ethnographic observations by threading Germany's presently-operative "theory of Nordic superiority" with the ideologues of white supremacy historically reproduced in the United States. By juxtaposing this historical insight with his praise of Wagner, Du Bois laid bare the paradox and contradiction of Germany in his eyes.

Du Bois's clear admiration of Wagner nonetheless calls into question his Germanophilia. Wagner's influence on Du Bois is evident from as early as his writing in *Souls*. Literary scholar Anne E. Carroll argues that, while there is little explicit evidence linking the book to Wagner, its structural composition suggests the "relevance of [Wagner's] idea of the total work of art [*Gesamtkunstwerk*]," which would have been "widely disseminated and hugely influential in Germany in the years when Du Bois lived there as a graduate student."¹⁰⁰ More explicit however is the short experimental fiction in the collection, titled "Of the Coming of John," which introduces Wagner's "Lohengrin" opera both in the plot and as intertext. Rather serendipitously, during the summer of Du Bois's 1936 sojourn in Germany, the Bayreuth Festival selected "Lohengrin" as one of its operas, and Du Bois attended on August 19; in the October 31 column for the *Courier*, Du Bois asserted that he knew the opera "by long acquaintance. I have heard it

⁹⁸ Stefan Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1994), 73–74, 85, 130n20, 131n33.

⁹⁹ Marable, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat*, xix.

¹⁰⁰ Anne E. Carroll, "Du Bois and Art Theory: The Souls of Black Folk as a 'Total Work of Art,'" *Public Culture* 17, no. 2 (2005): 236.

six or eight times, under many circumstances, in different languages and lands. . . it rises to a great and glorious drama, which at times reaches the sublime.”¹⁰¹ Wagner’s opera recounts the tale of a mysterious knight Lohengrin who arrives in the Duchy of Brabant to defend the noble Elsa from an accusation of murdering her brother, on condition that neither she nor anyone else inquires of his name or origin; Lohengrin and Elsa marry but, after breaking her promise not to inquire, Lohengrin must leave and return home to the castle of the Holy Grail. In Du Bois’s “On the Coming of John,” the title character John Jones, a Black college student from Georgia, is enraptured by the opera’s Swan Song at a performance at New York City’s Metropolitan Opera; he also recognizes a white childhood playmate from Georgia in the audience—John Henderson, whom Russell A. Berman labels John Jones’ “white double.”¹⁰² The white Henderson has the Black Jones ejected from the audience for sitting next to a white woman, enforcing Jim Crow segregation just after Jones had recognized “his full freedom and humanity while listening to the prelude to act 1.”¹⁰³ The story thus narrativized both a Black identification with Wagner’s music and the socio-spatial structures of white supremacy that disrupted a simple, unraced ideal—an experience Du Bois repeated in his documented visit to Bayreuth as he juxtaposed Wagner’s charm with the spatial routes of race theory.

Jones eventually returns to his hometown Altamaha where he encounters Henderson attacking his sister; Jones kills Henderson and, as a lynch mob approaches, Jones hums the melody of Wagner’s wedding march. Berman argues that while “Wagner’s revolutionary nationalism, coupled with a deep illiberalism, was symptomatic of the politics in Germany on the

¹⁰¹ “Ticket to Lohengrin, August 19, 1936” (Bayreuther Bühnenfestspiele, August 19, 1936), MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b081-i113>; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Opera and the Negro Problem.”

¹⁰² Berman, “Du Bois and Wagner: Race, Nation, and Culture between the United States and Germany,” 127.

¹⁰³ R.A. Judy, *Sentient Flesh: Thinking in Disorder, Poiesis in Black* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 26.

eve of the 1848 revolution,” Du Bois’s attraction to the opera reflected a comparable “tragedy of egalitarianism” in the context of Reconstruction and “the dismantling of equality and institutionalization of segregation.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, comparable contradictions and crises of liberalism enabled the convergence of “Wagnerian romanticism and the emancipatory ideals of black culture.”¹⁰⁵ Ronald A. Judy, however, suggests that this convergence does not reflect comparable tragedies; rather, the character Jones—identifying with the swan at the Metropolitan Opera and humming its melody as he faces imminent murder in the South—

represents the possibilities of thinking-in-action, of thinking freedom in the mist of contingency and disorder, occurring “between chance and law . . . possibility and necessity.” It is by chance Jones comes to the Metropolitan Opera, where hearing the Prelude he knows his freedom as a human being, as well as his duty to transform the world of Altamaha; and it is by the same chance he recognizes at precisely that moment his white childhood playmate from Altamaha, who, functioning as the force of law, of Jim Crow, has him expelled. Thinking freedom is related to the aleatory as the event occurring in the break between chance and law, and the music of *Lohengrin* is its emblem.¹⁰⁶

Du Bois’s travel to Bayreuth, the performance of this Wagnerian opera he had admired since youth, and the unavoidable urban cartography of racial doctrine similarly represent the contingency and disorder of Du Bois’s freedom in the world; there is consequently no resolution to the paradox he elaborates, as the contingencies of international travel, ideological transmission, and nationalist culture intercept one another in the space of Bayreuth. There

¹⁰⁴ Berman, “Du Bois and Wagner: Race, Nation, and Culture between the United States and Germany,” 130.

¹⁰⁵ Berman, 130.

¹⁰⁶ Judy, *Sentient Flesh: Thinking in Disorder, Poiesis in Black*, 147.

appears no Wagner as antisemite or Nazi icon in the columns, which would displace twoness for a universal condemnation.

Rather, and partly determined by the specter of censorship, Du Bois presented not only the contingency and disorder but most of all the ambivalence of race and nation when navigated on an international scale; he maintained Wagner's transcendent relevance for Black Americans—"I can see a certain type of not unthoughtful American Negro saying to himself: 'Now just what has Bayreuth and opera got to do with starving Negro farm tenants in Arkansas or black college graduates searching New York for a job?...I think it has...The musical dramas of Wagner tell of human life as he lived it, and no human being white or black, can afford not to know them if he would know life'"—while exposing this German national culture's always already implication in orders of subjugation and inequality. In the next column, he shifted from Bayreuth to Nuremberg and repeated his attention to the urban palimpsest of national splendor and international race-making: "You can walk in a castle that was old when Shakespeare wrote 'Hamlet,' and thread narrow streets which heard the earliest echoes of the far-off African slave trade."¹⁰⁷ At the same time, Du Bois implied a parallel between the subject matter of Wagner's "Mastersingers of Nuremberg" and modern organized labor's exclusion of Black Americans: "The drama in music which Wagner wrote of this town was a tale of the old labor guilds, and how they organized in those days not only handworkers but artists. It tells of the effort of a natural untaught singer to triumph over the jealousy and petty rules of a labor union."¹⁰⁸ On the one hand, Du Bois implicated Nuremberg in the international history of European enslavement and trafficking of Africans. On the other hand, there is a link between the opera's tribute to national folk artistry and (not the proverbial Black American folk artist but) Du Bois's ongoing

¹⁰⁷ Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Opera and the Negro Problem."

¹⁰⁸ Du Bois.

criticism of the racial hierarchies and exclusions of interwar labor unions in the United States. Paradox and contradiction therefore appear not only as effects of German society's internal cleavages, both ideological and material. Paradox and contradiction describe also how such cleavages produce multiple lines of connection that intercept one another at an international scale in disordering ways.

IV. Fascism, Race, and Reconstruction

This disorder ultimately generates comparative possibilities by illuminating the synchronic and diachronic relationality of social contradictions, economic and ideological; the medieval German folk singer, for example, becomes comparable to Black Americans as workers excluded from organized labor. Conversely, there is no conceptual unit in Du Bois's writing that unites German antisemitism and US anti-Blackness as such; the closest approximation is "race prejudice," yet that title fails to stabilize an analogical relationship between them. Du Bois's consistent descriptive specification of the "Nordic" supremacy organizing Germany's racial regime, even in one of his early research proposals, reflected how Germany's racial categories coalesced synchronically with those deployed in the United States. Matthew Frye Jacobson argues that the period from the 1840s to 1920s witnessed a "fundamental revision of whiteness itself," a nativist response to "the political crisis created by the 1790 naturalization law—the over-inclusivity of the category 'white persons.'"¹⁰⁹ The result was the growing perception, and institutionalization, of hierarchical differentiations within whiteness. Madison Grant's scheme organized "Nordics," "Alpines," and "Mediterraneans" in descending order of migration merit and was codified as law in the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act's immigration quotas; Grant chaired the

¹⁰⁹ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 68.

United States Committee on Selective Immigration that provided the political formula for immigration restriction.¹¹⁰ Du Bois's presupposed translation of Aryan to Nordic (rather than simply "white") followed the precision and sophistication with which racial hierarchies had come to discriminate among Europeans and thereby demonstrates a sensitivity to the dynamic and unsettled structure of racial hierarchization. In the 1933 *New York Times* review of Grant's *The Conquest of a Continent*, the reviewer asserted, "substitute Aryan for Nordic, and a good deal of Mr. Grant's argument would lend itself without much difficulty to the support of some recent pronouncements in Germany."¹¹¹ Franz Boas had already anticipated such substitutions in a 1925 article, titled "This Nordic Nonsense," which responded directly to Grant's claims: the development of immigration quotas that establish Nordic superiority "is merely a symptom of the world-wide 'complex' of race-consciousness that has grown up during the past century... Stewart Houston Chamberlain [sic] in Austria, Vacher de Lapouge in France, Hans Gunther in Germany, Madison Grant in America."¹¹² Boas's list concatenates national theorists of Nordic superiority into a globally synchronized unity, integrating (or translating) Aryan supremacy into this international set.¹¹³

In the column on Wagner, Du Bois alluded to the material basis on which such ideologues (and their ideologies) relate transnationally, but this relation did not sustain a direct comparison between anti-Blackness and antisemitism. Indeed, as historian Jonathan Rosenberg writes, Du Bois "did not link the plight of German Jews to that of Black Americans, nor did he

¹¹⁰ Jacobson, 83.

¹¹¹ Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*, 74. During the war, the March on Washington's pamphlet *The War's Greatest Scandal* asserted, "'White Supremacy,' which is simply Hitler's 'Nordic Supremacy' in Cracker Lingo has become the official policy of the American armed forces." Qtd. in Webb, "The Nazi Persecution of Jews and the African American Freedom Struggle," 349.

¹¹² Franz Boas, "This Nordic Nonsense," *Forum* 74 (October 1925): 502.

¹¹³ Similarly, at the close of the war, Langston Hughes would write an article in the *Chicago Defender* comparing "Nazi and Dixie Nordics." Qtd. in Webb, "The Nazi Persecution of Jews and the African American Freedom Struggle," 351.

parallel German and American racial practices.”¹¹⁴ And race itself does not appear central in Du Bois’s understanding of the development of Nazism. The December 5 column narrated the political and economic background to Hitler’s rise without mentioning antisemitism, Jews, or race at all. The historical timeline Du Bois outlined is defined by “War; the Treaty of Versailles; Inflation; Depression, and Revolution” and squarely focused on what Du Bois described as the revolutionary magnitude of bankruptcy imposed by the capitalist victors of the First World War.¹¹⁵ Detailing the extent of dispossession and expropriation, Du Bois wrote that the Treaty of Versailles

deprived Germany not simply of one-eighth of her territory, population and arable land, but what was far more important, of a fifth of her coke; three-fourths of her iron, one-fourth of her blast furnaces, two-thirds of her zinc foundries, one-fifth of her livestock, all of her merchant marine, and most of her railway equipment. And then saddled her with a debt based on unheard-of principles, which no land could or did pay. In other words, in order to establish peace, the capitalists of England, France and America made the orderly return of Germany to work and self-support impossible without internal revolution.¹¹⁶

In this passage, Du Bois emphasized the international system of material deprivation and financial debt that created a revolutionary crisis internal to the German nation. Nazism emerged from the contradiction between imperialist peace—“a senseless peace”—and national impoverishment: “The accumulated savings of the nation disappeared; pensions in a land of pensioned civil servants, were stopped; loans were paid in worthless money; property values

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land?: World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 117.

¹¹⁵ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Germany.”

¹¹⁶ Du Bois.

dropped to nothing; industry was in bankruptcy and labor out of work.”¹¹⁷ Illustrating the contradiction between international and national scales of political economy, Du Bois conveyed the misery caused by expropriation and debt, quantifying its costs in an exhausting description.

He concluded with a dramatic narration of a Nazi counter-revolution, seeming to follow a Comintern approach that equated “economic crisis...with a revolutionary situation and a proletarian offensive,” and in turn characterized fascism’s rise in Germany via a defensive, reactionary coalition of finance capital, traditional conservatives, and the petty bourgeois.¹¹⁸ Du Bois wrote,

Adolf Hitler rode into power by accusing the world of a conspiracy to ruin Germany by economic starvation. He promised to remedy this by making Germany self-sufficient and giving her an army capable of defending her rights. Revolution was staring Germany in the face, and a Marxian revolution which would make a dictatorship of the proletariat and made a socialistic state. Industry was frightened; the Junkers (landed nobility) were frightened; the managers, engineers and small shopkeepers were frightened; they all submitted to a man who had at first been a joke, then a pest, and who suddenly loomed as a dictator. Union labor, with its 8,000,000 members, holding the wide balance of power in the state, proceeded to squabble as to whether to usher in the millennium immediately or gradually, and through this squabble Adolf Hitler and Big

¹¹⁷ Du Bois.

¹¹⁸ Martin Kitchen, *Fascism* (Hampshire: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1976), 9. Kitchen criticizes this approach for its “undialectical economism”: “Seen in these terms fascism was a defensive action by monopoly capitalism in response to growing proletarian militancy or, in Dimitroff’s terms, a counter-offensive. In fact fascism was an offensive by capitalist forces which followed significant working-class defeats...Clara Zetkin had been almost alone in stressing the way in which fascism had enabled the creation of an alliance between the big bourgeoisie and the petit bourgeoisie which, with all its internal contradictions, was extraordinarily powerful. The Comintern failed to see the importance of the mass base of fascism and thus underestimated both its offensive strength and its staying power.”

Industry drove a carriage and four. He made a state without a single trade union and where the discussion of change is a crime.¹¹⁹

The absence of “race prejudice” or any mention of Nazi rhetoric and policy vis-à-vis Jews was not uncommon in Marxist discussions of the development of Nazi power. The official theory promulgated at the Third International (1935) considered National Socialism, the “German type” of fascism, the product of “an increased need on the part of the most reactionary and powerful groups within the now highly-concentrated finance capital to secure their imperialist aims by manipulating a mass movement capable of destroying the revolutionary working class.”¹²⁰ Such economistic explanations, which only alluded to race through terms such as “jingoism” and “chauvinism—this main instrument of ideological influence of the fascists upon the masses,” were not articulated exclusively in Communist Party organs and publications and cannot be entirely explained by Marxist dogmatism.¹²¹ Jonathan Rosenberg argues that Du Bois, “social scientist that he was,” did not omit race as an apology for Nazism but rather attempted to understand historically “how a nation that he knew so well...had embarked on its current path.”¹²²

In addition to such a methodological and personal rationale for Du Bois’s hermeneutic frame, however, Du Bois seems to have been particularly influenced by Mary van Kleeck, the

¹¹⁹ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Germany.”

¹²⁰ Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), 31. The 1935 report defined fascism as “the power of finance capital itself. It is the organization of terrorist vengeance against the working class and the revolutionary section of the peasantry and intelligentsia. In foreign policy, fascism is jingoism in its most brutal form, fomenting bestial hatred of other nations.” See Georgy Dimitrov, “The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International in the Struggle of the Working Class against Fascism: Main Report Delivered at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International,” in *Selected Works*, vol. 2 (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1972), 9.

¹²¹ Dimitrov, “The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International in the Struggle of the Working Class against Fascism: Main Report Delivered at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International,” 9, 77.

¹²² Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land?: World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam*, 116–17.

socialist and feminist militant and director of the Russel Sage Foundation's Department of Industrial Studies whose "Observations on Hitlerism" had appeared in *The Crisis* magazine in February 1934—while Du Bois was still editor.¹²³ Walter White originally wrote to Du Bois in October 1933, after van Kleeck presented her analysis to the Joint Committee of the National Recovery Act, commenting that it was "the ablest analysis I have yet heard of the Hitler movement especially in relation to the Negro in the United States" and that van Kleeck had spent the past six summers in Germany to "see and interpret the rise of the Hitler movement."¹²⁴ Van Kleeck's analysis inverted the argument of German philosopher Oswald Spengler in his 1933 book *Jahre der Entscheidung* (The Hour of Decision), which foregrounded a global "racial conflict" and called on Germany as the white vanguard in the "struggle of the races for dominance."¹²⁵ Van Kleeck demonstrated that in fact "the anti-Semitic program of Hitlerism is not racial but economic," for "international submission" and the "failure of the Social Democrats and the trade unions to give economic security" created an economic conflict that the capitalist class disguised as racial in order "to promote unity as a nation."¹²⁶ Put simply, "the central delusion of Hitlerism is to suppress the class struggle by diverting attention to the race struggle."¹²⁷ Antisemitism functions as an ideological diversion. The significance of van Kleeck's analysis for Black Americans was its prediction of a similar formal relation between

¹²³ Mary van Kleeck, "Racial Conflict and Economic Competition: Some Observations on Hitlerism," *The Crisis*, February 1934. In Du Bois's papers, a typed copy of the article sent to him from van Kleeck on January 3, 1934, is preserved. Mary van Kleeck, "Letter from Mary Van Kleeck to W. E. B. Du Bois: Some Observations on Hitlerism, January 3, 1934," Correspondence, January 3, 1934, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b196-i007>.

¹²⁴ Walter White, "Letter from Walter White to W. E. B. Du Bois, October 17, 1933," Correspondence, October 17, 1933, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b194-i462>.

¹²⁵ van Kleeck, "Racial Conflict and Economic Competition: Some Observations on Hitlerism," 45.

¹²⁶ van Kleeck, 45.

¹²⁷ van Kleeck, 46.

race and class in the United States, concluding that “the deepening economic crisis involved in the lowering of standards of living the economic struggle will take the form of racial conflicts.”¹²⁸ Du Bois’s own analysis certainly seems indebted to van Kleeck’s, suggesting the absence of race in his narration of Hitler’s rise responded affirmatively to her inversion of Spengler; in other words, in foregrounding the economic determinants that gave international and national shape to Hitler’s rise, Du Bois avoided confirming the German ideological discourse that naturalized the Nazi ascent within a global conflict of racialized nations and authorized the regime’s antisemitic ‘diversions.’¹²⁹

But Du Bois did not maintain van Kleeck’s strict distinction between race and class, wherein the former diverts focus from the latter, in either his contemporary writing on the ‘Negro problem’ in the United States or his analysis of Germany. In a November 14 column that begins with a visit to Munich, and just two weeks before he divulged his uncensored “letters,” Du Bois addressed a section to “Race and the Laboring Classes.” This section contains some of Du Bois’s most explicit writing to date on the concept of race and clarifies his characteristic ambivalence. Du Bois began by discussing the change in the “scientific basis” of “our so-called race problem,” critiquing the assumption of the scientific existence of different races and suggesting that the struggle for racial equality be transformed into a struggle of “work and wage.” But this, Du Bois argued,

¹²⁸ van Kleeck, 46.

¹²⁹ As Mark Neocleous writes, criticizing *Sonderweg* historiography, “such arguments concede to fascism its own central claim: that nations are natural phenomena which shape our character and which thus determine our place in history.” Neocleous continues, “Rejecting the claim that Nazism can be understood through German peculiarity does not mean that one makes no reference to historical specificity; it *does*, however, mean that our major conceptual tool for the understanding of fascism is not reduced to national ‘peculiarities.’ The question, then, is how to incorporate the phenomenon of Nazism and its biological racism and anti-Semitism into the account of fascism being developed here.” See *Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 28.

is a mistake. Whatever the scientific dicta are concerning race, the fact remains that the colored people of the world, compared with other people, are poor, ignorant, disorganized; and against such facts no theories can for a moment maintain themselves. The reasons...are truly enough to be sought today, not in innate racial differences, but in much more explicable differences of history and subjugation and prejudice. We may and must, therefore, re-word our problem, but it is still a problem. It is still a problem of a group which we must by the necessity of language call a race, and which is “Negro” by historical wording.¹³⁰

Du Bois admitted that racial difference itself has no scientific basis but resists a premature abandonment of the concept. The historical development of group differentiation and its concomitant incapacitations (what Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines as the “production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability”) is not resolved by “scientific dicta” alone and thus remains a problem.¹³¹ Economic analysis cannot in and of itself demystify the ideological diversions of racial conflict, for racial conflict itself is the real expression of a historical contradiction of power and resources between racialized groups. Consequently, Du Bois continued, the struggle for racial equality continues under the title “the problem of the colored and black working classes, and the burden of its effort must not be to prove biological and cultural sameness...But it must be to insist on the identity of the Negro problem and the Yellow peril and the ‘menace’ of the lower classes; and the identity of all these problems with the labor problems of the world.”¹³² Here Du Bois explicitly displaced the frame of egalitarian inclusion

¹³⁰ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Munich,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, November 14, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/201995499?accountid=14512>.

¹³¹ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 28.

¹³² Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Munich.”

and assimilation into a universal humanity (“biological and cultural sameness”) in favor of a set of isomorphic “problems” in which racialization and economic dispossession take on varied but relational forms. Du Bois’s insistence on identity here may exaggerate his claim. But the descriptive chain connecting “the Negro problem and the Yellow peril and the ‘menace’ of the lower classes” established an uneven and diverse terrain on which particular racializing assemblages and economic contradictions approach international equivalence.

Furthermore, Du Bois’s interest in Black American industrial education, both as a research purpose for his travel and in his earlier writing in the *Courier*, as well as his campaign elaborated in his *Courier* columns for Black American consumers’ cooperatives attest to his understanding that the economic basis for racial conflict nonetheless required racially distinct solutions. In his “creed for American Negroes today,” published in the *Courier* on June 20, 1936, Du Bois asserted,

(a) As American Negroes, we believe in unity of racial effort, so far as this is necessary for self-defense and self-expression, leading ultimately to the goal of a united humanity and the abolition of all racial distinctions.

(b) We repudiate all artificial and hate-engendering deification of race separation as such; but just as sternly, we repudiate an enervating philosophy of Negro escape into an artificially privileged white race which has long sought to enslave, exploit and tyrannize over all mankind.¹³³

He continued,

(e) ... We believe that, if carefully and intelligently planned, a co-operative Negro industrial system in America can be established in the midst of and

¹³³ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” June 20, 1936.

in conjunction with the surrounding national industrial-organization and in intelligent accord with that reconstruction of the economic basis of the nation which must sooner or later be accomplished.

...

(g) We believe in the ultimate triumph of some form of Socialism the world over; that is, State ownership and control of the means of production and equality of income.¹³⁴

The basis of absolute racial difference may have shifted from science to mythology—the “deification of race separation”—but it did not necessarily follow that racial difference was invalidated as a principle of political and economic organization. On the contrary, it was necessary to organize politically and economically according to race, yet “in the midst of and in conjunction with the surrounding national industrial-organization,” in order to achieve a total “reconstruction of the economic basis of the nation” and ultimately universal socialism. Du Bois advocated an economic agenda of industrial education and employment, and one in “accord” with national and universal transformations, while decidedly affirming the need for a racially particular basis of organization and expression.

Du Bois’s conception of race via the ‘color line,’ especially in his column on “Race and the Laboring Classes,” did possibly prevent the integration of antisemitism into his otherwise expansive analysis. However, as a column sent from within Germany, state censorship would have been the decisive factor, muting explicit coverage. Furthermore, his reference to the “Yellow peril and the ‘menace’ of the lower classes” does intimate discursive combinations of racial invasion and labor agitation that would have been rather commonplace in Nazi propaganda

¹³⁴ Du Bois.

in the form of claims of “Jewish Bolshevism.”¹³⁵ But Du Bois struggled also in the uncensored “letters” to consider antisemitism in such international and dynamic terms, and certainly in relation to the US ‘Negro problem’ in particular. In 1933, before van Kleeck’s presentation and article, Du Bois delivered a lecture at a conference at Howard University sponsored by the Rosenwald Fund in which, in the course of critiquing the US government’s response to the Depression, he related Nazi antisemitism to US society in the terms of authoritarian executive power. He argued, “If we give Mr. Roosevelt the right to meddle with the dollar, if we give Herr Hitler the right to expel the Jew, if we give to Mussolini the right to think for Italians, we do this because we know nothing ourselves. We are as a nation ignorant of the function as meaning of money, and we are looking around helplessly to see if anybody else knows... We have lied so long about money and business, we do not know where truth is.”¹³⁶ In this estimation, national mythology—what Du Bois would name in his 1935 *Black Reconstruction* “the propaganda of history”—concealed the determinant economic contradictions of capitalist democracy, and submission to various forms of authoritarian rule emerged as desperate and naïve attempts at resolving them.¹³⁷ Du Bois identified Nazi antisemitism—specifically, the radical exclusion of Jews from German society—with both Italian fascism and the emergency measures passed in

¹³⁵ Du Bois would note the historic Christian fear of “contamination” as well as German propaganda against “Jewish-Bolshevist countries” in a later column sent after his departure. See “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Germany.” On the myth of “Jewish Bolshevism” in the Third Reich, see Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 83–121. Hanebrink summarizes, “Adolf Hitler made the image of the Jewish Bolshevik central to Nazi ideology from the earliest days of the movement. Memories of struggle—against revolutionaries in Munich; against Communists in the streets of Berlin—animated party members and justified Nazi leaders in calling for extreme measures to guarantee domestic order and internal security, concepts they always understood in racialized terms. After the Nazis took power in the 1933, they crushed their Communist opponents. Consequently, the location and meaning of the Judeo-Bolshevik menace shifted, becoming a powerful symbol for external, rather than internal, defense. As the Nazi regime began to assert itself more aggressively on the international stage, the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism helped to crystallize a useful and exceedingly flexible vision of a Europe of nations, united by German example and under German leadership, in a common struggle against the Communist enemy.”

¹³⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, “U. S. Will Come to Communism, DuBois Tells Conference,” *Afro-American*, (May 20, 1933), 3.

¹³⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 711.

Roosevelt's "The First 100 Days." Du Bois's understanding that the early New Deal reorganized state power in ways comparable to contemporary fascist regimes, including the Third Reich, is consistent with his *Courier* writings on Roosevelt's "Fascist methods." In this scheme, Nazi antisemitism functioned essentially as a particular, national expression of ill-informed ("ignorant"), reactionary solutions to synchronic crises of capitalist democracy. "Race prejudice" itself does not appear as an abstract and general basis for international equivalence at all.

While Du Bois's lecture signaled a conceptual ground for considering Nazi antisemitism in relation to the United States, his uncensored columns on Germany demonstrate an immediate difficulty relating Nazi antisemitism to the 'Negro problem.' The columns invoked the synchronic, ethnographic access promised by international travel and correspondence but they nonetheless fall short of elaborating an international scheme in which national relations of racial oppression are comparable as such. After mentioning the "campaign of race prejudice... against all non-Nordic races, but specifically against the Jew," in the first column, Du Bois referred to antisemitism twice in the second column, published on December 12, 1936, as a component of the "philosophy of Hitlerism" and as scapegoating propaganda.¹³⁸ A subsequent column, on December 19, was devoted specifically to "Race Prejudice in Germany," "Anti-Semitism," and "The Present Plight of the German Jew."¹³⁹ The December 12 column clarified Du Bois's understanding of the Nazi state and the phenomenon of mass German consent. He admitted that "Hitler set up a tyranny" but added that "he showed Germany a way out when most Germans saw nothing but impenetrable mist."¹⁴⁰ The demystifying solutions worth sacrificing their

¹³⁸ Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Germany."

¹³⁹ Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Germany."

¹⁴⁰ Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: The Hitler State," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, December 12, 1936, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/201990849/E9364DEFAD94146PQ/1?accountid=14512>.

liberties for involved employment, housing, insurance, “an end of strikes and labor troubles,...new ideals, a new state, a new race.”¹⁴¹ Here, Du Bois placed the regime’s revolutionary propaganda at the end of a long description of Nazism’s economic rewards. Emphasizing the unity of ideal, state, and race, Du Bois illustrated an ideological futurism accompanying and giving shape to Hitler’s materialist promises and policies. Race here does not appear as a category of an oppressed group, or even of relations of oppression, but rather one of national resurrection. Du Bois in turn added to his previous description of the Nazi ascent by emphasizing that when “capital made desperate effort to save German capital investment...they sought to build a national German socialism, to avoid international working class movements, and to save capital and private profit, by yielding enough to the German worker to keep him quiet and satisfied.”¹⁴² Unlike Dimitrov’s dismissal of the ‘National Socialist’ moniker as sheer “effrontery,” Du Bois took Nazism as National Socialism seriously, a reading perhaps informed by his previous criticism of racial chauvinism in organized labor in the United States as well as the New Deal’s ultimate submission to the racial prerogatives of Southern senators.

He noted the nationalist framework of National Socialism’s redistributive solutions, which structurally and ideologically disrupted international working-class solidarity. This observation is comparable to his earlier one, in *The Crisis* magazine, that

common labor in America and white Europe far from being motivated by any vision of revolt against capitalism, has been blinded by the American vision of the possibility of layer after layer of the workers escaping into the wealthy class...the capitalists have consolidated their economic power, nullified universal suffrage

¹⁴¹ Du Bois.

¹⁴² Du Bois.

and bribed the white workers by high wages, visions of wealth, and the opportunity to drive “niggers.”¹⁴³

Yet Du Bois’s narration of “national German socialism” also evokes his contemporaneous argument, in *Black Reconstruction*, on the resurgence of racial ideologies and “anti-Negro propaganda” that dismantled Reconstruction in the postbellum United States. In the chapter titled “Counter-Revolution of Property,” Du Bois wrote, “The efforts at reform...one by one began to go down before a new philosophy which represented understanding between the planters and poor whites...Race repulsion, race hate, and race pride were increased by every subtle method.”¹⁴⁴ Interestingly, Du Bois named the cross-class racial unity that would resurrect the South as a “new philosophy,” connecting his description of the Southern “counter-revolution” with the ideological futurism of National Socialism; in fact, the section in the December 12, 1936, *Courier* column on the “philosophy of Hitlerism” is titled “The New Philosophy.” Furthermore, he continued in the chapter,

Out of that there has arisen in the South an exploitation of labor unparalleled in modern times, with a government in which all pretense at party alignment or regard for universal suffrage is given up. The methods of government have gone uncriticized, and elections are by secret understanding and manipulation; the dictatorship of capital in the South is complete.¹⁴⁵

This passionate denunciation of the blatant lack of democratic liberties and the complete “dictatorship of capital” in the post-Reconstruction US make quite a suggestive allusion to contemporaneous theories of fascism, both the official Comintern position and those

¹⁴³ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Marxism and the Negro Problem,” *The Crisis*, May 1933, 104.

¹⁴⁴ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, 623–24.

¹⁴⁵ Du Bois, 630.

emphasizing totalitarianism, dictatorship, and authoritarianism. By characterizing the post-Reconstruction US as a proto-fascist regime, Du Bois suggested the role of race in the reactionary and counter-revolutionary movements of capital, providing an identitarian ideology that would retrieve relations of subjugation and exclusion after emancipation ostensibly displaced them.

Cedric Robinson's reading of *Black Reconstruction* emphasizes that Du Bois did not see "the relationship between the destruction of slavery and the emergence of modern capitalism and imperialism" as "inevitable due to the contradiction between the modes of production and the relations of production."¹⁴⁶ Rather, "Du Bois argued that it was made possible by the ideologies of racism," which "as historical forces...had precluded the emergence of a powerful labor movement in the United States." In Du Bois's earlier *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (1920), he asserted directly, "Reconstruction became in history a great movement for the self-assertion of the white race against the impudent ambition of degraded blacks, instead of, in truth, the rise of a mass of black and white laborers. The result was the disfranchisement of the blacks of the South and a world-wide attempt to restrict democratic development to white races and to distract them with race hatred against the darker races."¹⁴⁷ This anti-labor disruption of an 'internationalism' of Black and white workers that would have threatened capital mirrors the development of the Nazi race ideal, as described by Du Bois; it also seems to mirror van Kleeck's argument on racial conflict as an ideological diversion. Amiri Baraka's reading of *Black Reconstruction* is most explicit in drawing out Du Bois's allusions to fascism while modulating them to official Marxist theory:

¹⁴⁶ Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 229.

¹⁴⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999), 80.

The overthrow of the Reconstruction actually united fronts of workers and small farmers, heaved Afro America into fascism. There is no other term for it. The overthrow of democratically elected governments and the rule by direct terror, by the most reactionary sector of finance capital, as Dimitrov termed it. Carried out with murder, intimidation and robbery, by the first storm troopers, again the Hitlerian prototype, the Ku Klux Klan, directly financed by northern capital.¹⁴⁸

Du Bois's comparative allusions to fascism are made all the more striking in light of Robinson's brief argument on the topic while introducing his conception of racial capitalism. The emergence of nineteenth century nationalisms in Europe resulted from the "competitive anarchy" of international capitalism, he argues, but

in Germany and Italy, where national bourgeoisies were relatively late in their formation, the marshaling of national social forces (peasants, farmers, workers, clerics, professional classes, the aristocracy, and the state) was accomplished by the ideological phantasmagoria of race, *Herrenvolk*, and nationalism. This compost of violence, in its time, became known under the name of fascism. With the creation of fascism, the bourgeois retained the full range of its social, political, and economic prerogatives.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Amiri Baraka, "Black Reconstruction: Du Bois & the U.S. Struggle For Democracy & Socialism," *Conjunctions*, no. 29 (1997): 77. Robert Paxton, who does not cite Du Bois, also proposed that the post-Reconstruction Klan was the earliest phenomenon "fundamentally related to fascism," for the Klan was a militia set up "to restore an overturned social order. The Klan constituted an alternate civic authority, parallel to the legal state, which, in the eyes of the Klan's founders, no longer defended their community's legitimate interests. By adopting a uniform (white robe and hood), as well as by their techniques of intimidation and their conviction that violence was justified in the cause of their group's destiny, the first version of the Klan in the defeated American South was arguably a remarkable preview of the way fascist movements were to function in interwar Europe." See *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 49.

¹⁴⁹ Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 27–28.

Robinson thus describes fascism as a historical process in which nationalist race ideologies are recruited to violently accomplish the capitalistic domination of “social forces,” just as race repulsion, race hate, and race pride were recruited to restrict the potential of a mass labor movement in the United States. Robinson ends by noting the historically regressive nature of fascism’s development: “Again, not unexpectedly, slavery as a form of labor would reappear in Europe.”¹⁵⁰ Quite interestingly, the penultimate chapter of Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* was titled, “Back Toward Slavery,” suggesting a link between German fascism and Reconstruction as reactionary re-assertions of racial supremacy.¹⁵¹ Tracing these allusions stabilizes race as an ideological relation to material subjugation, enabling the mapping of correspondences across time and space. Therefore, although Du Bois appeared to pay little attention to antisemitism in his analysis of German fascism in the columns, and he failed to stabilize a comparison between German Jews and Black Americans, his attention to the re-assertion of Nordic supremacy (“a new race”) signals the comparable political and economic contradictions of Reconstruction in the United States. Fascism becomes the interwar name for an ideological arrangement of race and nation that reappeared in located zones and phases of capitalist development, an ideological arrangement in which the national resurrection of the supreme race ensured capital’s domination of labor. While Du Bois avoided comparing races as such, he opened up a strategy of tracing corresponding patterns of racial ideology and economic domination.

Du Bois did nonetheless emphasize important historical and national differences in the reproduction of race in Germany. Du Bois explained the “new philosophy” of Germany thusly: “There must be a dictatorship—that was absolutely necessary to put the state in order. If

¹⁵⁰ Robinson, 28.

¹⁵¹ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, 670.

democratic forms persisted, this dictatorship might get in the hands of the workers.”¹⁵² While fear of a dictatorship of labor links to the analysis of Reconstruction’s downfall, National Socialism is also described here in similar terms to those Du Bois used when describing the New Deal: “Roosevelt came to power just as the depression reached its lowest point and threatened the whole financial structure of the country. It was necessary, therefore, to restore normal life and industry by Fascist methods; that is, by a dictatorship which did not depend upon Democratic control.”¹⁵³ Du Bois isolated fascism here as a political method of dictatorship latent to capitalist democracy and mobilized in times of financial crisis. But Germany’s trajectory required a racial populism and the technological means to propagate it. Du Bois continued,

The dictator must be a popular figure. Hitler fits the bill. He was an artisan, and a private in the war. He came from a part of Austria where the anti-Jewish feeling was strong, and his own economic rivalry with Jews as a worker had strengthened this. Here was an asset which would appeal to artisans, small shopkeepers and racial fanatics. He was a popular orator just at the time that the radio and loud speaker made speaking a possible state monopoly. All that was needed as a plausible philosophy, and propaganda.¹⁵⁴

Regardless of the debatable empirical precision of Du Bois’s conclusions on the personal and provincial nature of Nazi antisemitism, he understood pre-existing “anti-Jewish feeling” became an “asset” for capitalist interests to marshal petit bourgeois (and downwardly-mobile) social groups—an “asset” that, through innovative audio and telecommunication technologies, could be reproduced with hegemonic force and consumed on a mass scale.

¹⁵² Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: The Hitler State.”

¹⁵³ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: A Negro Book-of-the-Year Club.”

¹⁵⁴ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: The Hitler State.”

Du Bois described the resultant philosophy, “based on the old German idea of the state,” as the declaration that “the state and not the working class is the real unit to be developed...The interests of the capitalist and worker are one. They must, by superior authority, be forced into unity, and then the resultant state must be conducted in the interests of all.”¹⁵⁵ The primacy of the state enforces an identity of interests between capitalist and worker, signaling also the identity of interests between poor whites and planters that Du Bois recognized in the US South. And the representation of this self-identical, national unit in Germany simultaneously endowed ideological purity and demands racial subjugation and exclusion. For “this new state which Germany is building is something holy and superior. It is composed of pure Nordics, with no contamination of Jews nor of inferior races.”¹⁵⁶ Finally, in concluding the column, Du Bois described the deep and total system of propaganda that ensured the ideological reproduction of German supremacy, fear of Bolshevik impoverishment, and accusations of Jewish enmity:

Newspapers, public speakers, the radio, expositions, celebrations, books and periodicals, every possible vehicle of information and training, including schools, is being used today on German people to teach them that they are the most remarkable people on earth; that the national socialist government is the best in the world; that other countries, especially Russia, are in the depths of misery, and that Jews are responsible for all criticism heaped on Germany and for most of the other ills of modern countries.¹⁵⁷

On the whole, this column therefore does not isolate racial supremacy and racial oppression as reducible elements of National Socialism but analyzes distinct racial ideologies and relations that

¹⁵⁵ Du Bois. Cf. Du Bois’s early writing on the German conception of the state in “The Present Condition of German Politics (1893),” *Central European History* 31, no. 3 (September 1998): 171–87.

¹⁵⁶ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: The Hitler State.”

¹⁵⁷ Du Bois.

develop historically within the complex context of Germany's economic crisis. Antisemitism was an ideological asset for consolidating popular support for dictatorial government. The philosophy of radical unity with the state declared a national culture of racial purity, which in turn implied the subjugation or removal of Jews and "inferior races." And the ideological reproduction of national and racial supremacy made Soviet Russia the foil and the Jew the enemy. Even as Du Bois addresses the role of antisemitism in the development and maintenance of Nazi power, he does not rely on a general theory of racial oppression to do so; and although his analysis suggests comparisons to his analysis in *Black Reconstruction*, he does not explicitly concatenate anti-Blackness and antisemitism.

V. On "Race Prejudice": Anti-Blackness and Antisemitism

Resistance to analogizing anti-Black and anti-Jewish oppression as such is most explicit in the next column, published on December 19, 1936. The column begins with a general discussion of "Race Prejudice in Germany" in which Du Bois clearly struggled to understand anti-Blackness and antisemitism under that single heading. The concept of "race prejudice" is admittedly vague, marking the difficulties of abstracting specific experiences and relations of racial segregation, subjugation, and violence. In Du Bois's own writing, "race prejudice" is somewhat ubiquitous, even as Du Bois's conception of race and racial oppression shifted radically. In one of his earliest essays, "The Conservation of Races" (1897), Du Bois defined the term explicitly: "If we carefully consider what race prejudice really is, we find it, historically, to be nothing but the friction between different groups of people; it is the difference in aim, in feeling, in ideals of two different races."¹⁵⁸ Presupposing the existence of races, Du Bois then

¹⁵⁸ W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," in *The American Negro Academy Occasional Papers*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: the Academy, 1897), 11.

advocated a political program that would conserve racial difference while fighting against racial inequality. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois described “prejudice” with more clarity and historicity as a false explanation for Black despair: “Men call the shadow prejudice, and learnedly explain it as the natural defence of culture against barbarism, learning against ignorance, purity against crime, the ‘higher’ against the ‘lower’ races.”¹⁵⁹ Here, then, “prejudice” functioned as an imperial justification and naturalization of existing inequalities. Likewise, in the chapters criticizing Booker T. Washington, who “practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro races” and represents an “old attitude of adjustment and submission,” Du Bois asserted first that “slavery and race-prejudice are potent if not sufficient causes of the Negro’s position” (supplementing what he called Washington’s “half-truth”) and then, while criticizing the industrial education movement in general, described the “tendency...born of slavery and quickened to renewed life by the crazy imperialism of the day, to regard human beings as among the material resources of a land to be trained with an eye single to future dividends. Race-prejudices, which keep brown and black men in their ‘places,’ we are coming to regard as useful allies with such a theory.”¹⁶⁰ In these instances, race prejudice was companion to the material subjugation of slavery, equally causative of “the Negro’s [present] degradation” and theoretically authorizing new, imperialist forms of extraction.¹⁶¹

Two decades later, in *Darkwater*, Du Bois emphasized the naturalizing effect that the historical accumulation of such ideological justifications had on social life:

One cannot ignore the extraordinary fact that a world campaign beginning with the slave-trade and ending with the refusal to capitalize the word "Negro," leading

¹⁵⁹ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 9–10.

¹⁶⁰ Du Bois, 43, 49, 79.

¹⁶¹ Du Bois, 46. Du Bois here stated clearly that “relentless color-prejudice is more often a cause than a result of the Negro’s degradation,” opting for “color” in place of race.

through a passionate defense of slavery by attributing every bestiality to blacks and finally culminating in the evident modern profit which lies in degrading blacks,—all this has unconsciously trained millions of honest, modern men into the belief that black folk are sub-human. This belief is not based on science...; the belief is not based on history...; nor is the belief based on any careful survey of the social development of men of Negro blood to-day in Africa and America. It is simply passionate, deep-seated heritage, and as such can be moved by neither argument nor fact. Only faith in humanity will lead the world to rise above its present color prejudice.¹⁶²

Du Bois seemed to approach the concept of “instinctive prejudice” found in the columns from Germany by narrating a global “campaign”—the same term Du Bois would eventually use to introduce the Nazi “campaign of race prejudice”—in which the “passionate defense” of anti-Black exploitation and extraction became “deep-seated heritage,” perhaps even instinct.¹⁶³ In this regard, Du Bois emphasized the social and psychological facticity of prejudice. In another chapter in *Darkwater*, Du Bois cautioned against leaving one’s “children to sink or swim in this sea of race prejudice... thrust[ing] them forth grimly into school or street and let[ting] them learn as they may from brutal fact.”¹⁶⁴ The brutal facticity of “race prejudice,” its naturalization, materialized at the social level of “school” and “street.” Unlike Marxists who insisted that “race prejudice” was ultimately subordinate to problems of labor in the abstract, Du Bois was unequivocal that its brutal facticity made it more durable than strictly economic solutions would allow. Indeed, already in *Souls*, Du Bois wrote, “We must accept some of the race prejudice in

¹⁶² Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*, 41.

¹⁶³ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Germany”; Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Germany.”

¹⁶⁴ Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*, 120.

the South *as a fact*,—deplorable in its intensity, unfortunate in results, and dangerous for the future, but nevertheless a hard fact which only time can efface.”¹⁶⁵ Already one witnesses Du Bois’s careful attention to the autonomy of “race prejudice.” While it did not emerge in a vacuum, insulated from material relations of slavery, it did seem to have an ideological, social, and psychological life of its own that could not be immediately abrogated by ameliorating material subjugation.

In an essay published just as Du Bois began writing for the *Courier* in 1936, Du Bois briefly discussed socialism, race, Jews, and “American Negroes” together in his analysis of Marxism’s promise. He first admitted, “I am convinced of the essential truth of the Marxian philosophy and believe that eventually land, machines and materials must belong to the state; that private profit must be abolished; that the system of exploiting labor must disappear; that people who work must have essentially equal income; and that in their hands the political rulership of the state must eventually rest.”¹⁶⁶ He then however considered Marxism’s ability to solve racial inequality:

Notwithstanding the fact that I believe this is the truth and that this truth is being gradually exemplified by the Russian experiment, I must, nevertheless, ask myself seriously; how far can American Negroes forward this eventual end? What part can they expect to have in a socialistic state and what can they do now to bring about this realization? And my answer to this has long been clear. There is no automatic power in socialism to override and suppress race prejudice. This has

¹⁶⁵ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 140; emphasis added.

¹⁶⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Social Planning for the Negro, Past and Present,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 123.

been proven in America, it was true in Germany before Hitler and the analogy of the Jews in Russia is for our case entirely false and misleading.¹⁶⁷

This passage is fascinating for a number of reasons. First, it is clear that, on the eve of his journey to Germany, Du Bois understood the relative autonomy of “race prejudice” vis-à-vis socialist power and economic conflict. Second, he paralleled the American case—in which “race prejudice” disrupted mass working-class solidarity—to “Germany before Hitler,” the implication being that labor organizing before the Third Reich’s establishment was ultimately incapable of “overriding” and “suppressing” the “race prejudice” with which the National Socialists rode into power.¹⁶⁸ Finally, in the very same move, Du Bois forcefully rejected an analogy to “Jews in Russia,” which would have ostensibly demonstrated the successful socialist suppression of “race prejudice.” This last point is especially interesting given that Black American writers had, since 1917, often evoked the Soviet Revolution and its supposed eradication of antisemitism as a model for dismantling racial oppression.¹⁶⁹ Du Bois however rejected the analogy explicitly, asserting the incommensurability of antisemitism in Russia and anti-Blackness in the United States.

Considering the long, dynamic development of Du Bois’s thinking on “race prejudice,” the analysis in his 1936 column from Germany reflected a tension between, on the one hand, the undeniably international context in which local economic contradictions parallel and interrelate and, on the other, the historical autonomy of race as a factor of local power relations and political identity. Du Bois stated unequivocally, “There is race prejudice in Germany, and a regular,

¹⁶⁷ Du Bois, 123.

¹⁶⁸ This implication also suggests a disagreement with van Kleeck’s assessment and prescription.

¹⁶⁹ Brendan McGeever, *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1–4.

planned propaganda to increase it and make it characteristic of the Third Reich.”¹⁷⁰ Yet he continued to qualify this statement in ambiguous ways: “But it is not instinctive prejudice, except in the case of Jews, and not altogether there. I mean that German prejudice is not the result of long belief, backed by child teaching, and outward insignia like color or hair. It is a reasoned prejudice, or an economic fear.”¹⁷¹ Du Bois’s writing here is remarkably tortured and opaque. He seems first to describe antisemitism as “instinctive prejudice,” and then distinguishes antisemitism from “German prejudice,” which is “reasoned” and “economic.” Du Bois continued in the column by describing the minimal social prejudice he experienced as a Black man. It is possible to parse his remarks thusly: Race prejudice against Jews was instinctive (i.e. heritage); race prejudice against Blacks (i.e. “German prejudice”) was not instinctive and did not appear brutally as social fact; and German ‘race prejudice’ in general, as a national ideology, was immediately determined by economic fears that, given the historic, “instinctive” nature of antisemitism and the contemporary organization of the national economy, rendered Black people in Germany *relatively* invulnerable as a group. “Race prejudice” seems both national, a particular tendency determined by history, and also differentiated in its manifestation vis-a-vis particular groups. More instructive than discerning a hidden order to his language, however, is the imprecision of his phrasing itself, which evinces the comparative tension between “race prejudice” as a generalizable category uniting oppression across various nations and “race prejudice” as locally and historically determined relations.

Similarly, Du Bois did not conjure a coherent system of white world supremacy that uniformly organized anti-Blackness and antisemitism into stable, interrelated roles; and white supremacy in the United States and Nazism in Germany did not unite as commensurate regimes

¹⁷⁰ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Germany.”

¹⁷¹ DuB ois.

of race. In the rest of the column's first section on "Race Prejudice in Germany," Du Bois described his muted experience of prejudice as a Black man, only to contrast this description in the following section on "Anti-Semitism." He wrote, "In the case of Negroes, [race prejudice] does not show itself readily...I have complete civic freedom and public courtesy. Of course, if my appearance is pronounced, I shall be an object of curiosity and even excited attention."¹⁷² Certainly, Du Bois may overreach by eliding his individual experience, as an American academic, with the "case of Negroes" at large, including, for example, colonial subjects and Black Germans derogatorily named 'Rhineland Bastards.'¹⁷³ Yet his reported experience nonetheless indicated that the Nazi regime did not merely mirror or extend the racializing hierarchies and relations of the United States. Nazi antisemitism did not simply represent an augmentation of racial oppression onto a global scale. One could make such an argument, although still tenuously, by focusing exclusively on a comparative study of representative race ideologues, such as Rosenberg and Grant; this approach is limited not only because intellectual elites do not necessarily determine racial practices and policies but also because, as Devin O. Pendas demonstrates, neither Nazi race doctrines nor the state itself were "internally coherent and consistent... There were multiple intellectual strands at work within the broad stream of Nazi ideology, not all of them mutually compatible."¹⁷⁴ Du Bois's writing divulged how his local

¹⁷² Du Bois.

¹⁷³ Du Bois did note that interracial sexual intimacy is strictly policed. He wrote, "no German woman of good standing would think of marrying a Negro under ordinary circumstances; nor could she do so legally. It is a question if she could legally marry a Japanese." Werner Sollors notes, "That was a keen observation, illuminating the tension that existed between foreign-policy goals (and Germany's courting of Japanese support) and racial ideology after the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 prohibited interracial marriage between 'Aryans' and Jews." See "W.E.B. Du Bois in Nazi Germany: A Surprising, Prescient Visitor," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 12, 1999.

¹⁷⁴ Devin O. Pendas, "Racial States in Comparative Perspective," in *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany*, ed. Mark Roseman and Richard F. Wetzell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 117–18. For example, "the continuities with Christian thought that Richard Steigmann-Gall has identified in Nazi ideology co-existed uneasily with strains of both pantheism and neo-paganism." Pendas also notes, in terms of the structure of the Nazi state itself, "to a greater extent even than most states, the Third Reich was characterized by internal fragmentation and contestation, with overlapping jurisdictions and a dispersal of authority at various levels of the hierarchy... There were multiple intellectual streams at work within the broad stream."

experience complicated any simple consonance between regimes of race in the US and Germany.¹⁷⁵

Du Bois made this point unequivocally as he moved on to a discussion of antisemitism itself. He began, “In the case of Jews, one meets something different, which an American Negro does not readily understand. Prejudice against Jews in Germany comes nearer being instinctive than color prejudice.”¹⁷⁶ Not only does Du Bois distinguish the “instinctive” German prejudice against Jews from “color prejudice” against Blacks, he also asserted that this form of anti-Jewish prejudice was not easily grasped from the Black American viewpoint. He continued, “For many centuries Germans have disliked Jews. But the reasons have varied and are not at all analogous to white dislike of blacks in America.”¹⁷⁷ Noting the magnitude of the historic accumulation of anti-Jewish antagonisms, Du Bois stated squarely that its manifold and diverse production made it not at all analogous to anti-Blackness—more precisely, to “white dislike of blacks in America.” This assertion of incommensurability does not in fact represent an entirely new turn in Du Bois’s thinking. In his notebook from his student years in Berlin in the late nineteenth century, he made a similar argument with respect to the differences between Black American and German Jewish oppression.¹⁷⁸ But what is notable in the 1936 column is Du Bois’s attempt to

¹⁷⁵ Pendas explains, “Most modern racializing regimes operated along what Du Bois called the ‘global color line.’ There was a long history of European thinking about the ‘colored races,’ which the Nazis could and did draw upon... But the core genealogy of Nazi racism, from Gobineau and Chamberlin to Hitler himself, was strikingly obsessed with intra-European racial difference not easily reduced to phenotypic differences of skin color.” Consequently, the Nazis “concentrated their racial animus on their fellow Europeans—Jews most obviously but also Slavs and Sinti and Roma.” Pendas seeks to complicate assumptions that racial regimes work in “identical” ways, emphasizing the “obvious difference between the Third Reich and... the Jim Crow South and Apartheid-era South Africa”: the racializing mark of color. Interestingly, he refers to Du Bois’s global integration of racial regimes according to the “color line” as an example of a comparative frame that fails to capture the National Socialist state. Du Bois’s own column from Germany, however, reveals a latent awareness of—or, at the very least, struggle with—the limitations of the “color line” in modulating anti-Blackness in the United States and antisemitism in Germany. See Pendas, 118.

¹⁷⁶ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Germany.”

¹⁷⁷ Du Bois.

¹⁷⁸ Kenneth Barkin writes, “Of course, Du Bois did ponder the similarities and differences in the situations of German Jews and African Americans. His conclusion was that both groups suffered from discrimination; however,

modulate them together under the heading of “prejudice,” implying a certain measure of commensurability while at the same time squarely denying their correspondence. In Melas’s terms, one can recognize a “ground for comparison” but no “basis of equivalence,” generating “the possibility of an intelligible relation.”¹⁷⁹

The concept of “race prejudice,” as has been demonstrated, was deployed across Du Bois’s long span of writing thus far. It also evoked contemporary American sociological and psychological discourses on so-called “race relations” that relied extensively on it.¹⁸⁰ While mostly white and liberal sociologists referred to “race prejudice” as a natural effect of interaction between naturally different groups, others, like Du Bois, ventured a more structural explanation. Oliver Cox, for example, in his 1948 classic *Caste, Class, and Race*, wrote that “race prejudice is

to him, any similarities were superficial and misleading. In Germany, Jews served in the leadership of three national political parties, attended integrated universities in large numbers, directed some of the nation’s major corporations such as the Hamburg-America Line and A.E.G., the largest electric company, as well as many department store chains. Per capita, they also earned more than their Christian fellow countrymen. Perhaps more importantly, they did not face lynching almost monthly by populist mobs, or Jim-Crow-type segregation in everyday life. Another significant difference lay in the growing number of conversions by Jews to Christianity and the increasing number of intermarriages between Jews and Christians. The differences were so great, Du Bois concluded, that, although Jews and blacks were both minorities in their respective countries, comparisons between the two situations were incommensurable.” “W. E. B. Du Bois’ Love Affair with Imperial Germany,” 287.

¹⁷⁹ Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison*, 31.

¹⁸⁰ “Race relations” names a conventional sociological paradigm attributed to sociologist Robert E. Park of the University of Chicago. In his incisive analysis of the paradigm, Stephen Steinberg writes, “While the term ‘race relations’ is meant to convey value neutrality, on closer examination it is riddled with value. Indeed, its rhetorical function is to obfuscate the true nature of ‘race relations,’ which is a system of racial domination and exploitation based on violence.” In particular, “race relations” takes group differentiation for granted and merely attempts to regulate their interaction and resolve conflict via assimilation. Steinberg considers the difference between “race relations” and a term such as “racial oppression.” “‘Race relations’ obscures the nature of the relationship between the constituent groups in a cloud of ambiguity. In contrast, ‘racial oppression’ conveys a clear sense of the nature, magnitude, and sources of the problem. Whereas the race relations model assumes that racial prejudice arises out of a natural antipathy between groups on the basis of difference, ‘racial oppression’ locates the source of the problem within the structure of society. Whereas ‘race relations’ elides the issue of power, reducing racism down to the level of attitudes, ‘racial oppression’ makes clear from the outset that we are dealing here with a system of domination, one that implicates major political and economic institutions, including the state itself. Whereas ‘race relations’ implies mutuality, ‘racial oppression’ clearly distinguishes between the oppressor and the oppressed. Whereas ‘race relations’ rivets attention on superficial aspects of the racial dyad, ‘racial oppression’ explores the underlying factors that engender racial division and discord. Whereas the sociologist of ‘race relations’ is reduced to the social equivalent of a marriage counselor, exploring ways to repair these fractured relationships, the sociologist of ‘racial oppression’ is potentially and agent of social transformation, forging a praxis for remedying racial inequities.” See Stephen Steinberg, *Race Relations: A Critique* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 16–17.

only a symptom of a materialistic social fact.”¹⁸¹ The overwhelming trend, however, was certainly the former. In a 1951 article in the *American Journal of Sociology*, Fisk University sociologist Herman H. Long wrote, “In both the scientific and the popular literature of race relations reference is commonly made to the concept of ‘race prejudice.’ Whether in this form or in some alternative expression, the concept is used to describe and explain a wide range of phenomena which encompasses forms of group conflict and social distance as well as antipathetic individual attitudes.”¹⁸² Long argued that while “the term has been a valuable linguistic tool for expressing compactly a body of social conflicts and pathologies,” it implies a causal explanation between attitudes and “current social practices of discrimination and segregation,” such that the “modification of existing racial practices and policies” devolves into a modification of “personal, individualistic, and subjective” factors in the majority group.

This criticism came just as the concept of “racism,” which would ultimately supplant “race prejudice,” was consolidating in American discourse as a matter of moral psychology; David Theo Goldberg notes, “Racism was formatively understood in the 1950s as a prejudice, as an irrational premodern bias.”¹⁸³ More specifically, Leah Gordon describes the powerful framework of “*racial individualism*” that coalesced in the post-war United States—in contrast to the varied psychological, legal, sociological, and economic approaches to “the race problem” in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s—which brought “together psychological individualism, rights-based

¹⁸¹ Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Caste, Class, & Race* (New York: Modern Reader, 1948), 463.

¹⁸² Herman H. Long, “Race Prejudice and Social Change,” *American Journal of Sociology* 57, no. 1 (July 1951): 15.

¹⁸³ David Theo Goldberg, *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 19. See also Barnor Hesse, “Racism’s Alterity: The After-Life of Black Sociology,” in *Racism and Sociology*, ed. Alana Lentin and Wolf D. Hund (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014), 141–74. Hesse demonstrates that the “emergent white conviction” in the post-civil rights era that “racism was ideologically erratic and deviant led to the development of the idea of racism as a morally excommunicated ideology. It meant that in the absence of a state centralizing force like Nazism or Jim Crow, racism was understood to be located in the imaginations of ignorant or pathological individuals and extremist groups marginalized by the liberal and democratic structures and ethos of American society.”

individualism, and belief in the socially transformative power of education.”¹⁸⁴ This framework “presented prejudice and discrimination as the root cause of racial conflict, focused on individuals in the study of race relations, and suggested that racial justice could be attained by changing white minds and protecting African American rights.”¹⁸⁵ It is within such a framework that psychologist Gordon W. Allport published his seminal *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), which grouped together different forms of oppression in a cascading series of prejudicial antagonisms. He wrote, “If a person is anti-Jewish, he is likely to be anti-Catholic, anti-Negro, anti any out-group.”¹⁸⁶ This statement came as a preface to the section titled “Prejudice as a Generalized Attitude,” demonstrating how an interpretation of “prejudice” as general and psychological enabled assumptions that anti-Jewish and anti-Black violence are essentially equivalent.

In the 1930s and 40s, however, scholars and activists engaged various frameworks irregularly, and the nebulous term “race prejudice” was deployed frequently across various discourses on racial inequality.¹⁸⁷ As demonstrated, Du Bois himself used the term in writing

¹⁸⁴ Leah N. Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 2.

¹⁸⁵ Gordon, 2.

¹⁸⁶ Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice: 25th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Perseus Book Publishing, LLC, 1979), 68.

¹⁸⁷ Sociologist Naomi Friedman Goldstein noted in 1944 that “the mutual interactions between the white and the Negro people in America have been described most frequently in terms of prejudice,” yet “social scientists in the past generally avoided the definition of race prejudice.” Interestingly, this dissertation began with a quote from *Mein Kampf*, writing, “The enigma of racism is one of the most confusing offshoots of the phenomena of nationalism and ethnocentrism in the twentieth century... Concealing as far as possible its economic roots, Fascism has openly proclaimed its racist dogmas, for which the scientific discoveries of its Herr Gunthers provide bases.” “The Roots of Prejudice against the Negro in the United States” (Dissertation, Boston, Boston University, 1944), 32–33, 1. In his article, Long cites Friedman’s review of the contemporary sociological and psychological literature on “race prejudice” in the 1948 book version of her dissertation published after she was tragically killed in a car crash in 1946 at the age of twenty-six. In the dissertation, Goldstein disqualified an understanding of “race prejudice” as “a necessary result of race” and attempted to reorient the concept as an effect of “race ideas.” She argued, “The history of race ideas is a history of defense of inequality and exploitation. Where the defense of such disparities between ideals and practices is not yet required, theories of race, racial superiority, pure races, etc., do not make their appearance.” See Goldstein, 23. This argument parallels Hannah Arendt’s, published the very same year in *The Review of Politics*, that “racism is the main ideological weapon of imperialistic politics.” See “Race-Thinking Before Racism,” *The Review of Politics* 6, no. 1 (January 1944): 41.

some forty years previous up through *Black Reconstruction* and his article in *The Journal of Negro Education*. Rather than attempt to decipher some stable meaning in the column by contextualizing the term in either Du Bois's oeuvre or in contemporary sociological and psychological literature—and thereby attempt to anchor definitively the relation between anti-Blackness and antisemitism in his writing—it is worth considering the necessity of the term's instability in Du Bois's comparison. In other words, the instability of the term, under which Du Bois considered anti-Blackness and antisemitism together, registers that which of each it cannot contain. Du Bois's columns therefore mark that which exceeds generalizing comparisons of anti-Blackness and antisemitism in political and economic frames of race. Before the racism concept and the framework of “racial individualism” would conceptually stabilize the comparison by stressing prejudice as racial oppression's core, generalizing it as a moral or educational flaw in individuals, and applying it deductively to particular, historically and spatially disaggregated cases, Du Bois's columns reveal an unstable comparative ground. What remains?

When Du Bois in the December 19 column explained the “not at all analogous” reasons for German antisemitism, he mixed a sweeping history of Christian Europe with specific observations from his first-hand journey. In doing so, he foregrounded for his readers both the historical determination and local expression of ‘race prejudice.’ Du Bois argued,

Economic reasons, built on a foundation of religion and clan solidarity, are the real explanation. In the middle age strangers who did not believe in Christ were largely excluded from land-holding and work as artisans or shop-keepers, and found a way to make a living in the new commerce and money-lending. I have seen the old Juden-gasse in Frankfort, where the Rothschils [sic], Schiffs and other great capitalists were caged up of nights in narrow quarters, lest they

contaminate Christians; and where they laid the foundations of wealth and power, despite insult and oppression.¹⁸⁸

It is tempting to read this explanation as a naïve naturalization of German antisemitism and a tacit confirmation of its stereotypes about “capitalist” Jews.¹⁸⁹ But Du Bois oriented antisemitism within a millennial history of Christian exclusion, expressed in economic and residential segregation that sedimented it over time and ultimately took on the particular ideological shape of Nazism. Du Bois highlighted the Christian fear of contamination involved in reproducing forms of segregation, intimating a link between the Nazi interest in racial purity and pre-existing European Christian ideologies and policies vis-à-vis Jews. Nazism was therefore situated in a long and notable history of Christian anti-Jewish oppression that would have been difficult to translate to the history of Black people in the United States. Du Bois’s geographic detail materialized and localized this history further, emphasizing to readers the determinations of anti-Jewish expression that would have been less immediately salient to interpreters from afar yet making the historical distance between race in Germany and the US all the more real. Du Bois’s comments on the communal accumulation of wealth and power in Europe’s capitalist economy

¹⁸⁸ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Germany.”

¹⁸⁹ Although, these remarks on Jewish capitalism are considerably more muted than what Du Bois had written on Germany in 1893: “It may surprise one at first to see a recrudescence of anti-Jewish feeling in a civilized state at this late day. One must learn however that the basis of the neo-antisemitism is economic and its end socialism. Only its present motive force is racial hatred. It must be ever remembered that the great capitalists of Germany, the great leaders of industry are Jews; moreover, banded together by oppression in the past, they work for each other, and aided by the vast power of their wealth, and their great natural abilities, they have forced citadel after citadel, until now they practically control the stock-market, own the press, fill the bar and bench, are crowding the professions,—indeed there seems to be no limit to the increase of their power. This of course is a menace to the newly nationalized country, and a thorn in the side of the exclusive German aristocracy. One can easily see that on this legitimate race question, it only required a little demagoguery and credibility, to enable Socialism, cloaking itself under race antipathies, and joining hands with aristocratic and democratic suspicion, to pile on the shoulders of the Jew, all the evils ever attributed to capitalism. All that Marx, Blanc, or Bellamy ever laid at the door of capitalism, is, by the German Antisemitic party, charged upon the Jew because the Jew happens to be the great capitalist of Germany.” See Du Bois, “The Present Condition of German Politics (1893),” 175.

dovetailed with his push for consumers' cooperatives among Black Americans; and a consistent reader would have learned both from Du Bois's columns.

Du Bois continued by narrating the contradiction of Jewish assimilation in Germany and does conclude by seeming to give some credence to Nazi propaganda. He wrote,

As time went on, Jews became free and honored citizens of Germany, contributing to science and art, to finance and banking; still, while intermarrying now and then, excluded from the socially elect...But, curiously enough, the chief indictment against the Jews at this time was not what they did, but that they would not intermarry with Germans and lost their identity in the German state. They thus became the objects of envy, fear and hatred among the workers and less educated folk of the middle class.¹⁹⁰

Here Du Bois emphasized the curious contradiction between Jewish inclusion as citizens and "waves of new anti-semitism" that played on age-old accusations of Jewish misandry. Still within a class-inflected frame, Du Bois attended to the specificity of antisemitism's nineteenth-century formation alongside and after Jewish emancipation. Du Bois concluded this historical section claiming,

After the war, bankers, financiers and merchants had many opportunities to profiteer at the expense of the workers and middle class. Jews were prominent in such happenings because they were so largely represented in these callings. Their success in professions and in the competitive civil service brought all the envy and jealousy of the wretched to bear upon them, and Adolf Hitler, born to dislike of Jews, was the appropriate instrument for the undoing of the Jew in Germany.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Germany."

¹⁹¹ Du Bois.

Du Bois's assertion of the real Jewish over-representation in banking, finance, and trade is debatable. But given his attention to the dynamic interplay of theological, economic, and social relations of exclusion across Jewish history in Christian Europe, it is equally dubious to indict Du Bois's historical understanding as a simple endorsement of antisemitism. Du Bois's final remark intertwined critical economic determinations of antisemitism with popular "dislike of Jews," suggesting the inseparability of economic crisis and preexisting "race prejudice" in his explanation of Nazi antisemitism. It is precisely this inseparability, the essential articulation of local, national, and international developments in ideology and political economy, that expressed what exceeds an analogy between antisemitism and anti-Blackness—yet also provides the ground for comparison.

VI. Unevident Relations

The final section of the column, titled "The Present Plight of the German Jew," did however briefly bring the two together, both at diachronic and synchronic scales. Du Bois spent the bulk of the section relating in harrowing detail the propaganda and discrimination against Jews. He stirringly declared, "There has been no tragedy in modern times equal in its awful effects to the fight on the Jew in Germany. It is an attack on civilization, comparable only to such horrors as the Spanish Inquisition and the African slave trade...In particular, it has made the settlement and understanding of race problems more difficult and more doubtful."¹⁹² Du Bois's superlative and comparative designation of present German Jewish oppression was a dramatic turn in his correspondence. On the one hand, German Jewish oppression was a horror unparalleled "in modern times." Du Bois had suggested as much already in the opening column

¹⁹² Du Bois.

of the letters, describing the “campaign of race prejudice carried on...against all non-Nordic races, but specifically against the Jew, which surpasses in vindictive cruelty and public insult anything I have ever seen; and I have seen much.”¹⁹³ On the other hand, Du Bois admitted a sort of comparison at the limit, “an attack on civilization, comparable only to the Spanish Inquisition and the African slave trade.”¹⁹⁴ This comparison abstracted Nazism onto a world-historical scale, relating to the Spanish Inquisition and transatlantic slave trade more as archetypal moral atrocities than as particular regimes of race. However, it is impossible to ignore that the combination of “the Spanish Inquisition and the African slave trade” evokes together the Christian expulsion/persecution of Iberian Jews (and Muslims) and the subjugation/commodification of Africans. In doing so, Du Bois’s world-historical perspective affirmed the foundational coexistence of racializing assemblages of anti-Jewish and anti-Black violence in modern Western civilization—while also maintaining each’s incommensurability. Webb argues that “in reaching further back in history to the African slave trade as a point of comparison,” Du Bois “reaffirmed a sense of affinity between African Americans and Jews.”¹⁹⁵ Yet this “affinity” remains vague and unexamined in Webb’s analysis, reproducing the ambiguity of the resemblance in the column. Du Bois did not turn to the concept of race, or race prejudice, or racism—which, given the examples, he certainly could have—to make one transparent with the other. And he admitted the difficulty Nazism posed to the “settlement and understanding of race problems.”¹⁹⁶

Du Bois then considered Nazi antisemitism in a more synchronic relation to anti-Blackness in the United States. Here he drew attention especially to propaganda while circling

¹⁹³ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Germany.”

¹⁹⁴ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Germany.”

¹⁹⁵ Webb, “The Nazi Persecution of Jews and the African American Freedom Struggle,” 341.

¹⁹⁶ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Germany.”

back to the veiled construction of Nazi society and the consequent necessity of intimate discernment. He noted, “It is widely believed that the Jewish problem in Germany...is already passing. Visitors to the Olympic Games are apt to have gotten that impression. They saw no Jewish oppression. Just as Northern visitors to Mississippi saw no Negro oppression.”¹⁹⁷ Without analogizing Jewish and “Negro oppression” per se, Du Bois did analogize the ways in which state spectacle and domination of space concealed both in the United States and Germany. Du Bois compared Berlin to Mississippi, repeating his allusion to the proto-fascist character of the Jim Crow regime. He wrote, “an integral part of National Socialist policy” was “world war on Jews. The proof of this is incontrovertible.”¹⁹⁸ Du Bois illustrated an example from personal experience, relaying the view from his window: “a great red poster, seven feet high, asking the German people to contribute to winter relief of the poor, so that Germany will not sink to the level of the ‘Jewish-Bolshevist countries of the rest of the world.’”¹⁹⁹ In this detail, Du Bois demonstrated the interrelated dynamic of economic policy, antisemitism, and modern propaganda; the techniques of public marketing and developments in media technologies combined with statecraft to mass produce race. Du Bois wrote, “Adolf Hitler hardly ever makes a speech today—and his speeches reach every corner of Germany, by radio, newspaper placard, movie and public announcement—without blaming or cursing the Jews,” giving examples of his conspiratorial rants. Du Bois focused on the public reproduction of anti-Jewish propaganda characterizing the Nazi regime of race; his mention of “newspaper placard” as opposed to a

¹⁹⁷ Du Bois.

¹⁹⁸ Du Bois.

¹⁹⁹ Du Bois. It is possible that this poster was the work of graphic artist Hans Schweitzer, appointed by Hitler in 1936 as Reich representative for the creation of artistic form. See Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda During World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 29.

newspaper itself confirms this attention to the public dissemination of ideology in the modern city's swirl of images.

Finally, he listed cases of discrimination he read in newspapers over his long stay in Germany—carceral regulation of sexual intimacy, exclusion from public office, disenfranchisement and denaturalization, discrimination in education and trades, consumer boycotts—and concluded with “the continued circulation of Julius Streicher’s *Stürmer*, the most shameless, lying advocate of race hate in the world, not excluding Florida.”²⁰⁰ Here, again, Du Bois compared Germany to the US South in particular, but as a relative reference rather than analogy. In this sense, Du Bois put newspaper circulation in Germany and the US South in synchronic relation, comparing the local dissemination of ideological justifications of “race hate.” Du Bois thus compared the structures that reproduced and subjectivized “race hate,” just as he had illustrated a transnational network of race ideologues in the earlier column on Wagner. Du Bois’s comparative frame then is not the representations of “race hate” themselves, such as anti-Black and antisemitic language or aesthetics, but the functional role newspapers played in advocating it. This conclusion summarizes Du Bois’s ambivalent approach to the synchronic comparison of regimes of race; he isolates their structural elements for comparison while maintaining the autonomy of anti-Blackness and antisemitism as locally developed and determined ideologies. The comparison is thus ever unstable and, to use Du Bois’s phrase, “not altogether there.”²⁰¹ It remains a horizon. Even the reference to Florida comes as a marginal footnote after an extensive and relatively detailed description of the “Present Plight of the German Jew” alone. Du Bois’s columns did therefore identify particular ways the regimes of race relate, both diachronically and synchronically—although the form of the columns made

²⁰⁰ Du Bois.

²⁰¹ Du Bois.

even these conclusions precarious. Corresponding from international travel with the hopes of provoking *Courier* readers to consider the American “Negro problem” in the context of the “modern world” itself, the columns exposed, in contrast to the bulk of reporting on Nazi Germany in Black American periodicals, how very *unevident* it was to relate anti-Blackness in the United States and antisemitism in Germany.

In his last two uncensored columns, Du Bois evinced again a contradictory gaze, refracting the contradictions of the Third Reich itself, and he resisted isolating the Third Reich as a unique, *sui generis* regime. Describing Hitler’s “policy” as both “negative and positive,” he explained the “positive in bettering the position of the worker; he has not raised wages, but he has kept down prices, reduced unemployment, and furnished large and intriguing spiritual satisfaction...Hitler’s negative policy of satisfying his folk is to picture the distress of the masses in countries which do not have National Socialism.”²⁰² Du Bois thus reiterated the compatibility, even complementarity, of economic transformation and nationalist exclusion. He identified the “one great problem of the industrial age” as one of private profit against social welfare and interestingly interpreted “Hitler’s solution” as an “extraordinary straddle”: “with unreasonable bitterness he and his followers denounce communism, recount its crimes and foretell its inevitable failures and at the same time imitate nearly every method and adopt theoretically nearly every goal that Russia has followed or announced. Germany today is, next to Russia, the greatest exemplar of Marxian socialism in the world, and at the same posing as the bulwark of Europe against the Red Menace!”²⁰³ Du Bois obviously did not link Nazism and Soviet communism because of a Cold War perspective that would collapse anti-fascism and anti-communism in a liberal struggle against totalitarianism. He rather highlighted a volatile

²⁰² Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: Christmas, 1936.”

²⁰³ Du Bois.

contradiction at the heart of the Third Reich while dispelling the Germanic mythology that represented the regime as the pure and superior expression of national identity.²⁰⁴

The January 2, 1937, column interestingly concluded the uncensored “letters” by recounting a conversation Du Bois had with a German friend on the eve of his departure from Berlin; Du Bois described him vaguely as an academic, war veteran, and now government official.²⁰⁵ Du Bois wrote, “I wanted to talk to him frankly and openly and see how far my conclusions agreed with his.”²⁰⁶ For the most part, Du Bois recorded their conversation without comment, allowing his friend’s remarks to speak for themselves. Du Bois pressed him on questions of private profit and rearmament, fearing the latter especially for its possible colonial designs. In a section of the column titled “National Or International Economy,” Du Bois asked, “Could Germany really expect to be a self-sufficient economic unity, independent of foreign raw materials?”²⁰⁷ National, economic unification and autarky necessarily implied, for Du Bois, a contradiction that would produce imperialist expansion. The final section is titled “The German Case Against Jews.” After asking his friend about private profit, anti-communism, the regime’s colonial interests, and state uniformity, Du Bois narrated, “Then I took the bull by the horns, and asked: ‘How can Germans support race prejudice?’” The question itself belies some of Du Bois’s

²⁰⁴ This December 26 column concludes with a two-column chart that lists the parallels of “Hitlerism” and communism. Under Russia on the left and Germany on the right, the rows of “likenesses” list: “One party rule” and “One party rule;” “State organization of youth” and “State organization of youth;” “Assassination of opponents” and “Blood purge;” “Trade unions run by government” and “Trade unions run by owners, workers and government;” “Collective farms” and “Experiments with collective farms;” “Persecution of religion” and “Persecution of religion;” “Vacations, plans, entertainment for workers” and “Vacations, plays, entertainment for workers;” “Housing and public works” and “Housing and public works;” “Propaganda at home and abroad” and “Propaganda at home and abroad;” “Army” and “Army;” and “Ownership of all land and nearly all capital; little private profit” and “Government owns 15% of all industry, strictly controls the rest, and steadily increases taxation of profit.” It is interesting to note that race does not appear in this comparative chart, although “persecution of religion” does.

²⁰⁵ Du Bois continued, “He had the eyes and deep earnestness of the German idealist—the sort leidenschaft and empfindlichkeit that in the past has made Germany great.” Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion: What Germans Think.”

²⁰⁶ Du Bois.

²⁰⁷ Du Bois.

Germanophilic biases and his consequent confusion about antisemitism.²⁰⁸ The January 2 column ended with his friend's extended reply:

He said earnestly, 'Much has been done to the Jews that we are sorry for...But, remember this: the Jews, forming but 5 or 6 per cent of our population, former [sic] 75 per cent of the membership of our stock exchanges...in some German states they were in majority in the ruling councils of the state...they came in in increasing numbers as immigrants from the East, and brought in a new, more greedy and less scrupulous element than the older German Jewry...The German people in the depths of their post-war misery felt a bitter jealousy and fear of this foreign element that was usurping power in their own state. It needed only a demagogue to capitalize this feeling. Much has been done of which we are ashamed. But the worst is over. Betterment will slowly follow in time.'²⁰⁹

The column ends there. Why? The concluding mollification is, of course, quite disturbing from a postwar perspective. However, situating Du Bois's writing in 1936 also suggests that he specifically chose to present transparently a German (Nazi) perspective on race and antisemitism that detailed its eminently localized production; in doing so, he concluded the correspondence from Germany by displaying self-expressions of German society and politics that, again, would have had little to no obvious correspondence in the lives of *Courier* readers.

In his columns written from Germany, Du Bois failed to invoke a schematic method or frame in which the racial oppression of Black Americans and German Jews match. The columns

²⁰⁸ Furthermore, as he exclaims in the next column, published on January 9, "I cannot get over the continual surprise of being treated like a human being," contradicting a simplistic conclusion on German "race prejudice." See Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: Music," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 9, 1937, City Edition, sec. Feature Page, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202038704?accountid=14512>. See also Barkin for a longer discussion of Du Bois's self-reported treatment in Germany across his long career and multiple visits.

²⁰⁹ Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion: What Germans Think."

put pressure on the concept of “race prejudice” as an insufficient generalization of race, for both anti-Blackness and antisemitism appeared to exceed the concept and failed to coalesce within it. In doing so, the columns expose differences that are sutured and an uneven terrain that is leveled when the two are presupposed as analogical, isomorphic, or in clear and stable relation—whether as “prejudice,” “hate,” “racism,” or otherwise. Additionally, in light of Du Bois’s columns, Nazism does not appear as an additional, discrete regime exemplifying white supremacy. Both the regime of race in the US and in Germany expressed local, national, and international histories that dynamically articulated more than they could be abstractly compared. And it was foreign correspondence itself—its attempt to modulate information synchronically across an international scale of politics and writing—that ironically further obstructed the task of locating correspondences. First-hand immersion was limited and overdetermined—by the imprecision of generalization, by the state organization of social space, and by the vagaries of printed representation. The paradox and contradiction that was constitutive to unequal (and racialized) societies demanded not only careful navigation and analysis but also a nuanced perspective that did not eschew conceptual ambivalence and instability for certainty and settlement.

As suggested by Hesse, one notices the undecidability of race in Du Bois’s writing. On the one hand, race described the enduring material relations of Black impoverishment and anti-Black violence. On the other, it could be recruited and refocused ideologically in service of national reorganization and purification. After all, as Du Bois wrote in his June 6, 1936, column on segregation, “passionate provincialism today has not only had notable and undeniable results, but is, to uncounted millions, the only path to safety.”²¹⁰ One hears in this statement echoes of Du Bois’s youthful admiration for Bismarck’s national unification of Germany and also his

²¹⁰ Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” June 6, 1936.

understanding of the fascist escape route from Weimar failures.²¹¹ Du Bois's correspondence from Germany in 1936 therefore conjured a Black geography that tested the extension of the "color line" to Germany while also challenging it, exploring transversal relations across Black Americans, white Americans, German Aryans, and German Jews without organizing them into a structural whole. Unlike at the remains of the Warsaw ghetto, Du Bois left Germany with no more "complete" understanding of the 'Negro problem' but rather profound unsettlement.²¹² If, as literary scholar Eric J. Sundquist has documented, an "analogical attraction of the Holocaust...began with black reactions to the Genocide Convention [and] gained ground through assertions by black militants in the 1960s that the government was targeting African Americans for extermination," then Du Bois's columns from Germany demonstrate the erstwhile incoherence, instability, and unsettlement often occluded or displaced in such retrospective analogies.²¹³ Such unsettlement is no mere dead-end as a negation of comparison itself. Rather, as the real-time elaboration of "a practice of comparison that doesn't begin from the foundation of empirical unities and in which comparison is not put to work in the service of a distinct project," Du Bois's unsettlement of comparison is an inventive mode, generating multiple, relational conceptions of fascism, race, anti-Blackness, and antisemitism that are otherwise occluded by analogical orthodoxies.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Berman, "Du Bois and Wagner: Race, Nation, and Culture between the United States and Germany," 123.

²¹² Du Bois, "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto," 15.

²¹³ Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 6–7.

²¹⁴ Melas, "Merely Comparative," 657.

**Chapter Two:
Assimilation Without Guarantees: The Third Republic and The Third Reich**

*I feel ridiculous
in their shoes in their dinner jacket
in their shirt front in their detachable collar
in their monocle in their bowler hat*

...
*I feel ridiculous
among them complicit
among them pimp
among them cut-throat
my hand horrendously reddened
by the blood of their ci-vi-li-sa-tion*

Léon-Gontran Damas, “Solde” (1937)

*Either the other is assimilated, or else it is
annihilated.*

Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (1990)

In 1935, one year after editing *Negro: An Anthology* with George Padmore, Nancy Cunard passed off her Minerva printing press to nascent avant-garde publisher Guy Lévis Mano.¹ Two years later, and six days before the fascist bombardment of Guernica, Mano printed 300 copies of Léon-Gontran Damas’s debut collection of poetry, *Pigments*.² Mano was a young Sephardic Jewish poet and publisher, sent from Salonica to Paris by his parents in 1918; the Greek annexation of the Ottoman port city in 1912, and a devastating fire in 1917 had created a precarious situation for its outsize Jewish community.³ Welcomed into his sister’s apartment,

¹ Antoine Coron, “‘Un Artisan de Belles Formes Vraies,’” in *Les Éditions GLM, 1923-1924: Bibliographie*, ed. Antoine Coron (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1981), ix; Carrie Noland, *Voices of Negritude in Modernist Print* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 105.

² Antoine Coron, ed., *Les Éditions GLM, 1923-1924: Bibliographie* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1981), 31–32.

³ Sandy Rémy, “L’œuvre typographique et éditoriale de Guy Lévis Mano : un acte d’allégeance à la poésie.” (Diplôme national de master, cultures de l’écrit et de l’image, Lyon, Université Lumière Lyon 2, 2009), 12, <https://www.enssib.fr/bibliotheque-numerique/documents/40475-1-oeuvre-typographique-et-editoriale-de-guy-levis-mano-un-acte-d-allegeance-a-la-poesie.pdf>. Sarah Abrevaya Stein documents how Salonica came under Greek control after the Second Balkan War in June 1913, which led to a “process of Hellenization” that sought to “banish all evidence of Ottoman society and to efface the city’s Jewish and Muslim characteristics...The city remade by the

Mano mingled in Paris's modernist and surrealist coteries of poets and editors, writing poetry of his own and publishing a number of revues.⁴ He soon turned his attention to printing and, especially, experimental typography. Acquiring Cunard's press in 1935 enabled Mano to print in larger formats and greater quantities. His typographic creativity quickly made him and his *Éditions GLM* a desired editor and printer of modernist and surrealist writers.⁵

The press with which Cunard had printed Samuel Beckett's *Whoroscope* (1930) and Laura Riding's *Twenty Poems Less* (1930) went immediately to work printing original poetry by Paul Éluard (1935, 1936), Tristan Tzara (1935, 1936), and André Breton (1936); French translations of Franz Kafka's short stories with drawings by Max Ernst (1937); and Damas's *Pigments* (1937), complete with a preface by renegade surrealist Robert Desnos and woodcut prints by Frans Masereel.⁶ What Lilyan Kesteloot would canonize in *Les écrivains noirs de langue française* (1963) as "the first collection of poems in French to carry the mark of the new negritude" was also therefore the product of transnational avant-garde print cultures, the encounters and intimacies arranged by interwar migration, and the international specters of fascism.⁷ While Damas himself, in a 1972 interview, described *Pigments* as "the manifesto of the negritude movement," equally important is his retort in a 1971 interview with magazine *Jeune*

Balkan Wars was, in the eyes of many Jews, doomed to financial strangulation by Orthodox Christian and Greek rule." Then, the 1917 fire in the city resulted in a billion francs worth of damages, 75% of which was Jewish-owned property. For Salonica's growing number of Jewish émigrés, Paris was a popular destination, with a burgeoning Sephardic community of around six thousand. See *Family Papers: A Sephardic Journey Through the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 53–54, 71, 83.

⁴ Rémy, "L'œuvre typographique et éditoriale de Guy Lévis Mano : un acte d'allégeance à la poésie," 12.

⁵ Coron, "Un Artisan de Belles Formes Vraies," ix–x. In 1936, Paul Éluard exalted "Guy Lévis Mano, worker and poet" for "working to give typography a new perspective, a new voice." See Paul Éluard, "Espérer Réaliser La Véritable Lisibilité," in *Les Éditions GLM, 1923-1924: Bibliographie*, ed. Antoine Coron (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1981), xv; my translation.

⁶ Coron, *Les Éditions GLM, 1923-1924: Bibliographie*, 15–32. The precise nature of Mano and Damas's meeting and relationship remains unknown. It is possible Mano first read Damas's poetry when it appeared in a 1934 issue of *Esprit* or, just as likely, that they encountered one another through mutual friend Robert Desnos.

⁷ Lilyan Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude*, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1991), 123.

Afrique that “some of those who today dispute négritude were not even born when we were fighting in the Latin Quarter in 1934, during the Spanish Civil War or the war in Ethiopia. We felt at that time that, had Hitler won, he’d had [sic] destroyed us all—blacks, whites, Jews.”⁸

Pigments is a text whose very production straddles Black and Jewish interwar diasporas, surrealist letters and negritude poetics, and multiple political contexts of overlapping fascist and imperial violence.

Pigments was, at its most straightforward level, a provocation to assimilated Blacks and an arousal to anti-colonial Black consciousness. At the same time, it already evinced the contextual perspective Damas would emphasize in 1971, both his reference to multiple geopolitical zones and scales of fascist violence and his illustration of its trajectory across them. Césaire famously asserted after the war that Hitler “applied to Europe colonialist procedures,” tacitly reifying a Manichean binary distinguishing metropolitan (i.e. European) and colonial zones. Damas’s poem “Save Our Souls,” however, asserted that imperial France would apply Hitler’s fascist, anti-Jewish procedures to Blacks; and, more specifically, to Black colonial subjects who had migrated to the metropole and were now populating “their boulevards.”⁹ Fascism was not Europe’s “punishment” but a novel form of racializing violence emergent in metropolitan Europe.¹⁰ The import of Damas’s perspective is two-fold. Unlike Césaire’s comparative attention to the movement of colonial violence across colony and metropole, Damas’s poem takes *fascist* violence as its primary object of comparison and transnational movement.¹¹ And among the prewar perspectives equally concerned with fascist violence as

⁸ Kesteloot, 123; Keith Q. Warner, ed., “Négritude Revisited—An Interview with Léon Damas,” in *Critical Perspectives on Léon-Gontran Damas* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), 24; Léon Damas, “La Négritude En Question (Jeune Afrique),” in *Critical Perspective on Léon-Gontran Damas*, ed. Keith Q. Warner (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), 17.

⁹ Léon-Gontran Damas, *Pigments* (Paris: Éditions G.L.M., 1937), 23; my translation.

¹⁰ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 39.

¹¹ Aimé Césaire, *Discours Sur Le Colonialisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2004), 13.

such, Damas diverges by positing the direction of its analogical replication from the Third Reich to the Third Republic.¹²

For example, and in contrast to such an analogical approach, Mali-born activist Tiémoko Kouyaté concatenated anti-Blackness in the French Empire and the Third Reich in his manifesto for a Negro World Unity Congress, planned for 1935. He wrote, “Everywhere, the forces of reaction are mobilized against us. Everywhere those who oppress us and deny us all ‘human rights’ are feverishly preparing a new war...to use us as cannon fodder—thus bringing about the extermination of our race so as to complete the criminal project of mass sterilization proposed by HITLER.”¹³ For Kouyaté, the French imperial deployment of colonized Africans as front-line infantry would collude with and consummate the Nazi sterilization program.¹⁴ French colonial military recruitment and German eugenics unite on a transnational ground of anti-Blackness. Kouyaté refers to genocidal anti-Blackness in the Third Reich so as to emphasize the genocidal specters of imperial regimes dominating Blacks elsewhere. For Damas, however, it is the Third Reich’s violence against German Jews that anticipated fascist violence against Blacks; and not Blacks around the world, but specifically against aspirational, francophone Blacks who had migrated to the French imperial metropole. Damas’s approach to fascism’s trajectory is therefore

¹² Damas’s 1937 perspective on fascism’s trajectory differs from the one illustrated in the 1971 interview. There, he says, “We felt at that time that, had Hitler won, he’d had destroyed us all—blacks, whites, Jews.” Damas, “La Négritude En Question (Jeune Afrique),” 17.

¹³ Translated in Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 279.

¹⁴ The Nazi regime enacted the compulsory sterilization program in July 1933 under the Law to Prevent Hereditarily Sick Offspring. Although the vast majority of sterilizations against Black German Rhineland children were carried out in the second half of the decade, official calls for their sterilization were prevalent even before the law was passed; Minister of the Interior Hermann Göring, for example, requested in April 1933 that all so-called “Rhineland Bastards” in Düsseldorf, Cologne, Koblenz, and Aachen be registered with state health officials. See Tina M. Camp, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 63–80.

both relational and provincializing, asserting the instructive resemblance of particular racializing assemblages located in the Third Republic and the Third Reich.

This comparison reappears in different form in the poem “Nuit Blanche.” The Black speaker, boasting of his impeccable assimilation, fantasizes a waltz along the Danube that ends with him trading “uncle Gobineau” and “cousin Hitler” for dance partners.¹⁵ Having assimilated into the mythological French family, he explores the family tree. As Edwin C. Hill Jr. observes, “Damas represents popular dance culture as a site of historic complicity” and also as a “(homosexual-incestuous) colonial family romance.”¹⁶ The speaker’s embodied performance in the poem illustrates a particular genealogy of racial doctrine and imagines filiation with it. The intimacy that structures this filiation marks the desire and subjectivity generated by French republican ideology. Françoise Vergès explains,

French republican colonial rhetoric filled the tie between France and its colony with *intimate* meaning, creating what Freud has called a ‘family romance,’ the fiction developed by children about imagined parents. In the colonial relation, however, it was a fiction created by the *colonial power* that substituted a set of imaginary parents, La Mère-Patrie and her children the colonized, for the real parents of the colonized, who were slaves, colonists, and indentured workers.¹⁷

In “Nuit Blanche,” the speaker traces the absurd consequences of this substitution, as inclusion in the French family romance brings the colonized face-to-face with his new racist uncle and

¹⁵ Damas, *Pigments*, 26; my translation.

¹⁶ Edwin C. Hill, Jr., *Black Soundscapes White Stages: The Meaning of Francophone Sound in the Black Atlantic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 48. This layering of embodied performance and historic complicity is registered as well in the poem I have used as an epigraph, “Solde.” Like “Nuit Blanche,” its anaphoric structure codes complicity to assimilation: “I feel ridiculous / in their shoes in their dinner jacket // ... // I feel ridiculous / among them complicit.”

¹⁷ Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 3; emphasis added.

cousin. The poem's ultimately playful, if jarring, critique of assimilation thus provides another form of comparison. As the speaker strives to correspond ever more perfectly to the French nation, the centripetal force of the French imperial project sets him along a path that ultimately exceeds the French nation.

"Save Our Souls" posits the replication of fascist violence as a metropolitan reaction against those assimilated within. In order to do so, it analogizes anti-Jewish violence in Germany as a specter of anti-Black violence in metropolitan France. The poem conceptualizes fascism as a return of racialization, re-subjugating and enabling renewed violence against minorities who, through assimilation, believed they had transcended racialization. "Nuit Blanche," however, mimes the figure of the assimilated Black parvenu himself to illustrate the ground (or dance floor) on which the French family romance convenes with Hitler. That is, the unique vantage point of the Black French parvenu demystifies French republicanism's international entanglement with fascist nationalism. Both poems therefore offer examinations of how French and German imperialisms interact and overlap, through analogical sequences of inclusion and subjugation and haunting filiations of racializing doctrine. Furthermore, Damas's sustained focus on the trials of Black assimilation in France also traces the routes through which such assimilated Blacks in France come into synchronic relation with assimilated Jews from Germany, generating critical strategies for fabulating located correspondences, intimacies, and isomorphisms across diasporized Black and Jewish groups. Damas therefore departs from the unsettlement and incommensurability elaborated by Du Bois, which rejected analogy in favor of rehearsing various, provisional relations across racializing regimes of white and Aryan supremacy. But Damas does not conversely claim the analogical integrity of Blacks and Jews, or anti-Blackness and antisemitism, as transhistorical unities. Rather, through the figure of the assimilated, he

isolates precise historical resemblances and adjacencies—between francophone Blacks and germanophone Jews, and between the Third Republic and the Third Reich. These resemblances and adjacencies in turn evince corresponding relations and breakdowns of imperial inclusion and expose the filiative ground of race-making on which the supposedly adversarial Third Republic and Third Reich are correlated. Rather than merely identifying correspondences, however, the textual production of such corresponding discourses reveals a “thick historical relation” in which the regimes of inclusion and racialization of the Third Republic and the Third Reich are imbricated and the concomitant Black and Jewish critiques of assimilation entangled.¹⁸

I. Negritude and Class Betrayal

The negritude movement typically demarcates a francophone Black “cultural renaissance” inaugurated by poets Léon-Gontran Damas, Aimé Césaire, and Léopold Senghor in the late 1930s and 40s.¹⁹ Although Damas remains no doubt the least studied and most forgotten of negritude’s holy trinity, the three men nonetheless continue to serve as a representative triumvirate as “the Negritude poets,” “founders,” and “major theorists.”²⁰ Both Edwards and T.

¹⁸ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 36.

¹⁹ Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude*, 16.

²⁰ Noland, *Voices of Negritude in Modernist Print*, 1; Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 166; Reiland Rabaka, *The Negritude Movement: W.E.B. Du Bois, Leon Damas, Aime Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and the Evolution of an Insurgent Idea* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), xi–xii. In the interview with Warner, Damas illustrated Negritude’s pedigree thusly: “Now, the man who coined the word ‘Negritude’ was Aimé Césaire, and Senghor has been obliged to admit this. But, for many reasons, Senghor is first now, the father of negritude. In Vermont they asked me who I was among the three. I said, ‘Perhaps I’m the Holy Spirit.’” See “Négritude Revisited—An Interview with Léon Damas,” 24. On Damas’s enduring marginalization, see Keith Q. Warner, “Introduction,” in *Critical Perspectives on Léon-Gontran Damas* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), 1–10; Kathleen Gyssels, “‘Give Me Back My Black Dolls’: Damas’s Aframérind’: Mapping the Trans-Caribbean, Transgender and Trans-Atlantic Other,” *Cincinnati Romance Review* 40, no. 2 (2016): 106–24. Scholarship that does address Damas continues to subordinate Damas to Césaire and Senghor in problematic ways. Jennifer Anne Boittin, for example, frames her argument—that Black migrants in interwar Paris “found ways to theorise and politicise their connectivity” through the “shared common bonds including race, colonisation and relocation”—by illustrating a networked chain that links Damas’s *Pigments* poem “Solde” (epigraphed here) to Aimé Césaire’s 1935 article “Black Youth and Assimilation.” Boittin notes that Damas dedicated the poem “to a fellow negritude writer, the Martinican Aimé Césaire... The dedication is fitting since in

Denean Sharpley-Whiting have asserted that the hagiographic focus on negritude “fathers” enacts a methodological closure, obscuring the movement’s multiple genealogies. Sharpley-Whiting writes, “in efforts to provide a genealogy of Negritude, many literary historians begin its evolution by simply recovering the earliest writings of Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor.”²¹ In turn, both Sharpley-Whiting and Edwards reveal “‘silenced’ genealog[ies]” that highlight the intellectual “circuits” of Black diasporic women—including Jane and Paulette Nardal and Suzanne Césaire—who theorized and articulated diasporic and internationalist forms of Black consciousness and critiques of assimilation before and alongside the prized student intellectuals.²² Additionally, Edwards demonstrates the importance of Black anti-colonial and working-class organizations to the development of negritude poetics. For if, as Aimé Césaire would assert in a late interview with René Depestre, the concept of negritude was born from a “resistance to the politics of assimilation” and a “struggle against alienation,” and even if, as Damas would claim, *Pigments* was the “first book of its generation” and “all the poets who came later...were obliged to use material from the poems that *comprise* it,” it remains the case that their strategic appropriation of the term *nègre* in the second half of the 1930s came on the heels of organizing and publishing among thousands of Black Africans, Malagasies, and Antilleans—

1935 Césaire had written an article that referenced the psychological burden of living in France by drawing upon the theme of European clothes.”²⁰ However, the original 1937 edition of *Pigments* does not contain a dedication to Césaire, which was only added in the edition published by *Présence Africaine* in 1962 and reprinted with *Névralgies* in 1972. Furthermore, “Solde” appeared in literary magazine *Esprit* in 1934, contradicting Boittin’s imagined genealogy from Césaire’s article in *L’Étudiant Noir* to the 1937 publication of the poem in *Pigments*. See “‘Among Them Complicit’? Life and Politics in France’s Black Communities, 1919-1939,” in *Africa in Europe: Studies in Transnational Practice in the Long Twentieth Century*, ed. Eve Rosenhaft and Robbie Aitken, Migrations and Identities (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 55–56.

²¹ T. Denean-Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 1. See also Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 121.

²² Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 122.

overwhelmingly men—who had migrated to metropolitan France during and after the first World War.²³

As *ex-tirailleurs*, labor migrants, students, and civil servants converged in the imperial metropole, organizations such as the Communist Party-affiliated *Union Intercoloniale* and the *Comité de défense des intérêts de la race noire* worked to coordinate Black colonial migrants into a political collective. In 1926, Senegalese Marxist and *ex-tirailleur* Lamine Senghor formed the *Comité de défense de la race nègre*, and, in January 1927, the *Comité*'s short-lived newspaper (*La Voix des Nègres*) published a front-page editorial whose headline boldly promised to confront head-on “The Word ‘Nègre.’”²⁴ Invoking a fraternal racial community, the editorial began, “It’s the naughty word of the day, the word some of our brothers in the race don’t want to be called any longer,” and explained that, in order to better dominate the “*race nègre*,” the colonizers have employed an “abominable, divisive maneuver” by dividing the race into three categories: “hommes de couleurs,” “noirs,” and “nègres.”²⁵ The editorial continued,

We thus refuse to admit that only those who live in the depths of the Senegalese jungle, those who are exploited in the cotton fields of the Niger valley, the sugarcane cutters in the plantation fields of Martinique and Guadeloupe, are

²³ Aimé Césaire and René Depestre, “An Interview with Aimé Césaire, Conducted by René Depestre,” in *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 88–89; Warner, “Négritude Revisited—An Interview with Léon Damas,” 24. In the interview with Depestre, Césaire asserted without qualification that “since there was shame about the word *nègre*, we chose the word *nègre*... There was in us a defiant will, and we found a violent affirmation in the words *nègre*, and *négritude*,” making no reference to the strategic use of the term by francophone activists and theorists before him. On the overwhelmingly masculine composition of Black migrants to the French metropole, Jennifer Anne Boittin estimates that “approximately 2 percent of all Africans [in metropolitan France] were women.” See Boittin, “‘Among Them Complicit’? Life and Politics in France’s Black Communities, 1919–1939,” 57.

²⁴ *La Voix des Nègres* 1, January 1927, SLOTFOM V, Box 3, Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, Archives Nationales, France; my translation. Working-class Blacks inclined more toward anti-imperialist politics eventually defected from the *Union Intercoloniale* as they felt sidelined by the Communist Party’s attention to rebellions in Morocco and Indochina over West Africa and the Caribbean. See Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 29–30.

²⁵ *La Voix des Nègres* 1, January 1927, SLOTFOM V, Box 3, Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, Archives Nationales, France; my translation.

nègres. Whereas one of our brothers holding a diploma from a European institution of higher learning would be a *homme de couleur*, and another who hasn't reached that level, but who works the same job as a white man and who adapts like white men to their life and their customs—the worker—would be simply a '*noir*.' ... The youth of the *Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre* have made it their duty to take this name [*nègre*] out of the mud where you are dragging it, so as to make of it a symbol.²⁶

In refuting the division and hierarchization of "*la Race Nègre*," the *Comité* refused to concede that the racial terms dividing the "*race nègre*" corresponded to biological or ontological realities.

Instead, the *Comité* argued that they corresponded to racialized class positions within the French imperial matrix of colonial capitalism. In turn, the strategic appropriation of *nègre* appears less a valorization of essential African identity or values, as Senghor has been charged with (mis)representing negritude.²⁷ Rather, identification as *nègre* expressed a process of anti-colonial realignment within the French imperial regime of race. As Edwards argues, "It should be clear that Lamine Senghor's claiming of the word *Nègre*... does not propose a usable originary blackness or a single African identity, but instead begins by accepting the historical fact of colonization and the contemporary racialized ideologies of exploitation in order to construct an appeal for solidarity."²⁸ The categories *homme de couleur* and *noir* do not merely signify stages of proximity to and internalization of white civilization—stages of assimilation—but also specific locations within the French imperial hierarchy of inclusion and exploitation.

²⁶ Translation from Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 32–33.

²⁷ Souleymane Bachir Diagne complicates readings of Senghor's essentialism in "La Négritude Comme Mouvement et Comme Devenir," *Rue Descartes* 4, no. 83 (2014): 50–61.

²⁸ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 36.

And identification as *nègre* was a conscious attempt to “realign the term in the ideological ‘service’...of a new anti-imperialist solidarity,” disrupting the ideological hierarchies that served French imperialism.²⁹

When considered in the light of this earlier strategic theorizing, the literary movement named negritude does not appear the aesthetic affirmation of an abstract Black consciousness.³⁰ Rather, the “violent affirmation” of negritude appears as the bourgeois-educated *noir*’s affirmation of the *Comité*’s class-inflected rallying cry.³¹ In other words, negritude was indeed, as Césaire asserted, a “resistance to the politics of assimilation.”³² But it was so because that was the form of resistance anti-imperialist solidarity demanded of Parisian *noirs*. The negritude movement therefore also responded to the trenchant critique of the “*bourgeoisie de couleur*” found in *Légitime Défense* (1932), a revue composed by a group of Martinican intellectuals that evinced a unique combination of surrealism, Marxism, and anti-colonialism. Philippe Dewitte observes that in this document “young Antillean intellectuals took up a language that until then has been reserved for activists, mostly Africans... These children of the ‘*bourgeoisie de couleur*’ pronounced themselves determined to betray their class.”³³ Dewitte’s observation of the group’s

²⁹ Edwards, 33. For a more dynamic reading of Senghor’s conception of negritude, see Diagne, “La Négritude Comme Mouvement et Comme Devenir.”

³⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre popularized this reading with his preface to Senghor’s *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (1948), “Orphée Noir.” Sartre wrote, “And so he is backed up against authenticity: insulted and enslaved, he stands up, he picks up the word ‘*nègre*’ thrown at him like a stone, he proclaims himself a black man [*noir*], opposite the white man, with pride.” See “Orphée Noir,” in *Anthologie de La Nouvelle Poésie Nègre et Malgache de Langue Française*, ed. Léopold Sédar Senghor (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948), xiv; my translation.

³¹ Césaire and Depestre, “An Interview with Aimé Césaire, Conducted by René Depestre,” 89.

³² Césaire and Depestre, 88.

³³ Philippe Dewitte, *Les Mouvements Nègres En France* (Paris: Editions L’Harmattan, 1985), 270; my translation. Indeed, the closing lines of the revue’s manifesto—signed by Étienne Léro, René Ménénil, Pierre Yoyotte, and others—seethed, “Emerging from the French black bourgeoisie, which is one of the saddest things on this earth, we declare...that we are opposed to all the corpses: administrative, governmental, parliamentary, industrial commercial and all the others. *We intend, as traitors to this class, to take the path of treason as far as it will go.*” See Étienne Léro, “Légitime Défense Manifesto,” in *Black, Brown, & Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora*, ed. Robin D.G. Kelley and Franklin Rosemont, trans. Alex Wilder (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 37; emphasis added.

transatlantic, racial realignment and consequent class betrayal likewise suggests the class betrayal implied by negritude strategies of identification.

The negritude poets' self-affirmation had structural effects. Transgressive identification within the French empire's ideological and juridical grid of racialization implied a transgressive realignment toward anti-imperialist solidarity and a betrayal of the interests of the Black bourgeoisie. Damas in *Pigments* vividly registered the play of hierarchized racial identities through which one expressed this betrayal. In "Hoquet," a *mulâtre* mother reproaches her child for playing the banjo: "A banjo / you say a banjo / what did you say? / a banjo you really said a banjo / no sir / you should know that this house does not allow / neither ban / nor jo / nor gui / nor tar / the *mulâtres* do not do that / leave it to the *nègres*."³⁴ The punchline codes elitist judgements of popular culture to hierarchicizing assumptions about racial identity. It is well known that Stuart Hall described race as the "modality in which class is 'lived'"; it is lesser known that he continued by clarifying that race is "the form in which [class] is appropriated and 'fought through,'" giving shape to struggles of solidarity.³⁵ In the case of negritude, this form was the sign *nègre*. As the editorial suggested, *nègre* signified the position of colonized workers while *noir* signified a position of relative assimilation into the industrial (white) working class or petit bourgeois.³⁶ As Hall explains, with respect to racial categories and identification, "it is the position [of the racial term] within the different signifying chains which 'means,' not the literal,

³⁴ Damas, *Pigments*, 14; my translation.

³⁵ Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), 341.

³⁶ Edwards historicizes these significations: "As the French entered the slave trade...there developed an association between *nègre* and *esclave* ('slave') as synonyms... We find French abolitionists adopting the latter term [*noir*] in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, attempting to invest it with connotations of humanity and citizenship. As Serge Daget notes, 'With the word *Noir*, the abolitionist considered himself the master of a relatively new term, one which he would consider capable of introducing ideological substratums into his literature of combat.' This set of circumstances helps to explain the reasons black French citizens in the early twentieth century tended to describe themselves as 'Noirs'—which indeed was second only to 'hommes de couleur' as a self-designation among the elite." See *The Practice of Diaspora*, 26–27.

fixed correspondence between an isolated term and some denotated position in the color spectrum.”³⁷ It is the classificatory system of French colonial humanism, its organized semantic field, that gives each term specific meaning. Consequently, negritude strategies of identification did not only emerge from an “ideological struggle” over the term *nègre* itself, a poetic attempt “to win some new set of meanings...[or] dis-articulat[e] it from its place in a signifying structure.”³⁸ The negritude ideological struggle expressed *at the same time* a counter-hegemonic process in which Black student intellectuals declared an identity in solidarity with the global Black colonized.³⁹

This formal perspective on the race/class nexus is also evident in the relationship between Damas’s *Pigments* and the *Légitime Défense* revue that preceded it. Damas credited Martinican poet Étienne Léro with “initiating the revolution that was taking place in the thinking of black francophone writers,” quoting from Léro’s *Légitime Défense* essay, “Misère d’une poésie,” in the introduction to his 1947 anthology, *Poètes d’expression française: 1900-1945*. In the essay, Léro excoriated the Black poet who “does not want, in his verses, to ‘seem like a *nègre*.’ It is a point

³⁷ Stuart Hall, “Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2, no. 2 (June 1985): 108.

³⁸ Hall, 112. Such struggles are evident in rearticulations of the term Black in colonial and postcolonial Jamaica, as discussed by Hall, and also in the African American “‘legitimation by reversal’ of terms of racial designation during the 1920s and 1930s,” such as the term “negro.” See Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 28.

³⁹ In this regard, negritude strategies diverge from Hall’s description of ideological struggles over the term Black in colonial and postcolonial Jamaica. Whereas, for Hall, the history of these latter struggles demonstrates that the term Black “itself has no specific class connotation,” it was precisely the class positionality of *nègre* that provoked a process of identification and realignment. Negritude thus appears as a war of position, but not the war of position described by Gramsci—a counter-hegemonic strategy in which intellectuals harness and hone the spontaneous revolt of the working-class—which implies an elitist posture that does not quite capture the process of identification elaborated by negritude. More apt is the revised, and more interactive, notion described by Franco-Tunisian activist and theorist Sadri Khiari: “a strategy of constructing alliances between those at the autonomous centre and those at the amorphous periphery of anti-colonial projects” in order to construct a “*broad* anti-colonial camp.” This description of Khiari’s thought is Stefan Kipfer’s in “Decolonization in the Heart of Empire: Some Fanonian Echoes in France Today,” *Antipode* 43, no. 4 (2011): 1167. Khiari, and the *Mouvement des Indigènes de la République* he co-founded in 2005, are important interlocutors for theorizing negritude strategy as they represent a self-defined Francophone ‘intellectual movement’ set on developing a political vocabulary of “postcolonial anti-colonialism,” that is, a political vocabulary that could mobilize postcolonial subjects reterritorialized and recomposed inside the metropole into an international anti-colonial bloc.

of honor that a white man can read an entire book of his without guessing his pigmentation.”⁴⁰

Almost as if in explicit response, Damas bluntly named his 1937 collection *Pigments*, staging the relationship between race and writing. Damas refused to let his poetry collection pass under the sign of white universalism, which seems entirely possible considering it was printed in limited quantities by an avant-garde publisher known primarily to white modernist and surrealist poets.

After turning the cover page, Robert Desnos’s preface was unequivocal: “His name is Damas. He is a *nègre*.”⁴¹ Desnos’s assertion of Damas’s negritude comes in contrast to the title’s description of a plurality of color-coded identities. While the title promised to assemble poems that limn multiple locations in the French empire’s ideological and juridical grid of racialization, Desnos’s preface underscored the poet’s conclusive identification as *nègre*. Following Desnos’s preface is an English epigraph quoting three lines from Claude McKay’s poem “To the White Fiends,” exaggerating Damas’s identification: “Be not deceived, for every deed you do, / I could match, outmatch: Am I not Africa’s son / Black of that black land where black deeds are done!”⁴² The debut collection marking Damas’s poetic expression of racial self-affirmation thus implied both a realignment away from the assimilationist pretensions of the educated *bourgeoisie de couleur* and a diasporic elaboration of anti-imperial Black consciousness.

II. An SOS from the Metropole

⁴⁰ Étienne Léro, “Misère d’une Poésie,” in *Légitime Défense*, Reproduction anastaltique (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1979), 10; my translation.

⁴¹ Desnos continues, “This is what will perk up the ears of certain civilizers who find it just that, in exchange for their freedoms, their land, their customs and their health, people of color [*gens de couleur*] are honored with the name ‘Noirs.’ Damas refuses this title and takes back what’s his.” See Desnos, “Preface,” in *Pigments*, by Léon-Gontran Damas (Paris: Éditions G.L.M., 1937); my translation.

⁴² This untranslated epigraph confirms Edwards’s conclusion that “the function of *nègre* in French... may be closest to the word *black*,” adding, “the best ‘translation’ of *nègre*, though, might not be a literal translation at all, but a linguistic nuance, an effect achieved in a particular nongeneralizable discursive instance.” See Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 34–35.

“Save Our Souls” takes the form of a cynical and accusatory description of the Parisian *noir*’s fate. The speaker addresses a plural “you” who, in the speaker’s estimation, fatally lack an understanding of their dangerously precarious presence in the imperial metropole. The poem’s name alluded to a popular anglophone explanation of the international distress signal code SOS, introducing the poem as an earnest and acute cry for help. Most striking is that the speaker illustrates the impending crisis by evoking likeness to Nazi Germany’s contemporary violence against German Jews:

A ce moment-là seul comprendrez-vous donc tous
quand leur viendra l’idée
bientôt cette idée leur viendra de vouloir
vous en bouffer du nègre
à la manière d’Hitler bouffant du juif
sept jours fascistes sur sept
[At that moment alone you will understand at last
when the idea comes to them
soon this idea will come to them to want
to gobble you up, some *nègre*,
like Hitler gobbling up some jew
seven fascist days out of seven]⁴³

Hitler’s cannibalistic violence against Jews serves as a particular reference point for the Black addressees’ fateful trajectory. Nazi violence against Jews prefigures French violence that “will come” in the future to Blacks. Just six months following *Pigments*’ publication, George Padmore

⁴³ Damas, *Pigments*, 23; my translation.

warned, in inverse, that “Hitler Will Treat Jews Like Blacks,” referring to contemporary conditions in South Africa and the U.S. South.⁴⁴ Damas’s speaker, however, warns that the French will treat Blacks like (Hitler treats) Jews, predicting the replication of fascist violence outward from Germany.

Damas repeats the vulgar, gluttonous “bouffer [to gobble up]” in successive lines, sounding the successive repetition of Hitler’s violence against Jews and “their” violence against Blacks in a structural parallel. This repetition seems endemic to fascism itself in the poem, described in a totalitarian cycle of “seven fascist days out of seven.” In addition to replicating across different sets of racializing relations, then, fascist violence also sets in motion an internal cycle of automated repetition. The expression “seven fascist days out of seven” indicates a work cycle without pause. The particular verb repeated in the poem, “bouffer,” contrasts the more normative *manger* (to eat). The mother in the poem “Hoquet” again offers a useful counterpoint. Once more, she scolds her child for not behaving like a good *mulâtre*: “Un os *se mange* avec mesure et discrétion [One eats a bone with measure and discretion].”⁴⁵ In “Save Our Souls,” therefore, “bouffer” enacts an ironic reversal wherein uncivilized behavior and even cannibalism are not coded to the savage *nègre* but to a European political figure.⁴⁶ This rhetorical strategy, foundational to francophone anti-colonial letters, deployed colonialist tropes to subvert claims of

⁴⁴ George Padmore, “Hitler Will Treat Jews Like Blacks,” *Chicago Defender*, November 13, 1937, sec. Chicago Defender Foreign News Page.

⁴⁵ Damas, *Pigments*, 12; my translation. Emphasis added.

⁴⁶ Fanon emphasizes the racist figure of the Black cannibal multiple times in *Black Skin, White Masks* when describing assimilation’s effects on Antillean subjectivity. He writes, “At the start of my history that others have fabricated for me, the pedestal of cannibalism was given pride of place so that I wouldn’t forget. The inscribed on my chromosomes certain genes of various thickness representing cannibalism;” and, “Confronted with the black man, today’s white man feels a need to recall the age of cannibalism. A few years ago, the Association for Overseas Students in Lyon asked me to respond to an article that literally likened jazz to cannibalism irrupting into the modern world.” Interestingly, Fanon also notes the stereotype of cannibalism when emphasizing differences between antisemitism and anti-Blackness: “The Jewishness of the Jew, however, can go unnoticed...He belongs to the race that has never practiced cannibalism.” See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 100, 200, 95.

European moral superiority. Aimé Césaire, for example, wrote in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), “First we must study how colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer...A poison has been distilled in the veins of Europe and, slowly but surely, the continent proceeds toward *savagery*.”⁴⁷ Michael Rothberg notes that “while it is impossible to be sure of Césaire’s intentions, of course, the highly parodic (and often darkly comic) style of the text suggests the value of an ironic reading of Césaire’s citation of colonial clichés.”⁴⁸ Damas’s contrast between *bouffer* and *manger* in the collection suggests the same sort of parody, and an even more darkly comic parody will become evident in the later poem “Nuit Blanche.”

Here, in “Save Our Souls,” the successive repetition of “*bouffer du nègre*” and “*bouffant du juif*” enacts not a return of violence from the colony to the metropole but a replication of violence across European metropolises. This replication does not follow Césaire’s trajectory of return, wherein Nazi violence appears as the fruit of colonial exploitation. Rather, Damas portrays the replication as analogical—they will “gobble you up, some *nègre*, / like Hitler gobbling up some Jew.” The original French includes the modifying phrase “*à la manière d’Hitler*,” somewhat difficult to translate literally into English. While the simplest translation would reduce the phrase to a direct simile—“like Hitler”—it is worth considering that which escapes translation here.⁴⁹ The original French is an adverbial phrase of manner, describing mode, form, method, or style. The relation between present fascist violence against Jews in Germany and future fascist violence against *nègres* in France is represented as analogical in method or form; it is the manner of fascist violence that replicates, not necessarily its exact, local

⁴⁷ Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 35–36.

⁴⁸ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 75.

⁴⁹ Such is Alexandra Lillehei’s translation, for example. See “Pigments in Translation” (Honors Thesis, Wesleyan University, 2011), 43.

ideologies or technologies. What Damas emphasizes therefore is fascism's method of producing racial violence, contextualized as by local regimes of race and their racializing assemblages.

But more specifically, what does “gobbling up some jew” mean in 1937, and to what manner of racial violence does it allude? Or even in July 1936, when a version of “Save Our Souls” appeared in the *Soutes* literary magazine? While the vulgar cannibalism illustrated in the phrase tempts one to point to the mass murder of Jews in the camps, forests, and towns of Central and Eastern Europe, such would be an anachronistic explanation of the poem's language.⁵⁰ More likely is an allusion to what George Mosse labels “the first phases of Jewish policy, which involved exclusion and emigration” and thus enacted the systematic subordination of Jews in German biopolitical space.⁵¹ These phases included the boycott against Jewish businesses, the removal of Jewish lawyers and judges from German courts, restrictions on Jewish participation in German schools and universities, and the adoption of an “Aryan paragraph” in many professional organizations that excluded Jewish involvement. Although these official policies were accompanied by extrajudicial violence in the streets—the S.A. (*Sturmabteilung*), for example, provoked anti-Jewish riots—“the position of Jews was to be undermined legally or by administrative means,” and Hitler was suspicious of S.A. actions that undermined a “rationally constructed system of Jewish exclusion.”⁵² In fact, the 1935 Nuremberg Laws—

⁵⁰ As George Mosse asserts, “Once racism became the official policy of a powerful and dynamic government, the doors were opened to its logical conclusion. Racism was, after all, a total commitment. But for most men, including many Nazis, a policy of mass murder would have been unthinkable in the enlightened twentieth century. One could accept the Nazi propaganda that Jews were aliens in Germany and, assuming this was all that was needed, close one's eyes to any measure which went further than expelling them from the nation. Furthermore, Nazi anti-Jewish policy unfolded very slowly indeed” and it was “the end of 1937 and beginning of 1938 [that] saw the sharp turn in Jewish policy.” See *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 203–9.

⁵¹ Mosse, 203.

⁵² Mosse, 207. Hitler's interest in a *rational* system of antisemitism is evident in his earliest known political writing. In his “Letter to Adolf Gemlich,” Hitler asserted, “Anti-Semitism as a political movement may not and cannot be defined by emotional impulses, but by recognition of the facts...An anti-Semitism grounded solely on emotion will find its ultimate expression in the form of pogroms. An anti-Semitism grounded in reason, however, must lead to systematic legal eradication and elimination of those privileges that distinguish the Jew from the other aliens who

apotheosis of these first phases of Nazi anti-Jewish policy—came precisely to reassert Party control and rehabilitate Germany’s international reputation in the face of widespread street violence. Legalization was thus a key component of what Doris Bergen calls “routinization,” describing the systematization of racial subordination and violence that Damas represented through repetition.⁵³ The Laws formalized Jewish subordination in German society, demoting (emancipated) Jews from horizontal relations of political equality and subordinating them to the master Aryan race.⁵⁴ Charles Mills’s graphic conception of “*Herrenvolk* Kantianism” rather suggestively names such shifts in relations; for although Mills’s analysis primarily reflects “the social ontology of the world of slavery, colonialism, and segregation,” he exposes how ideal “horizontal relations of respect between equalized, raceless individuals are supported, perhaps even produced, by vertical relations of subordination with non-white sub-persons.”⁵⁵ The qualifier *Herrenvolk* that Mills uses to expose this constitutive subordination accompanying ideal

live among us (through Legislation Concerning National Aliens). The ultimate objective [of such legislation] must, however, be the irrevocable removal of the Jews in general.” See Adolf Hitler, “Letter to Adolf Gemlich,” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Sander L. Gilman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 6–7.

⁵³ Doris L. Bergen, *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, 2nd ed. (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 70. James Q. Whitman notes, “the Nuremberg Laws were promulgated in response to radical street violence. In 1933 and again in 1935, during the chaotic early years of the ‘National Revolution,’ there was widespread violence ‘from below’—what Nazis called ‘individual actions’ against Jews,” and the central Nazi leadership “viewed these ‘individual actions’ as deplorable for two reasons. First, they made for bad foreign press... Second, the ‘individual actions’ reflected a breakdown in the central party control of affairs.” Consequently, “concerned that the ‘National Revolution’ might slip out of control, the party set out to calm matters by creating ‘unambiguous laws’ that would put the business of persecution securely in the hands of the state.” The Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor banned marriage and sexual relations between Jews and Aryans, banned German Jews from flying the German flag, and made it illegal for them to employ German women under forty-five in their homes. The Reich Citizenship Law declared a Reich citizen “exclusively” someone with German blood and “the sole bearer of full political rights.” A regulation issued pursuant to the Reich Citizenship Law clarified that “a person counts as a Jew, if he is a mongrel descended from two fully Jewish grandparents,” determined either by affiliation to the “Jewish religious community” or through marriage to a Jew. See James Q. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 82, 83, 30, 130.

⁵⁴ Although “Hitler subsequently declared that this law was his final word on the Jewish question,” the incoherent, vague, and tautological amalgamations attest to their rather functional role as the state centralized authority and systematized anti-Jewish subjugation. See Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, 208.

⁵⁵ Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 71.

Enlightenment respect and recognition between white persons suggests that the German Jewish juridical racialization shifted them into subordinate relations that simultaneously ensured the equality of the Aryan *Volksgenossen* (national comrades).

Bergen summarizes the Nuremberg Laws' consequences thusly: "The Nuremberg Laws proved to be a crucial step toward the destruction of Germany's Jews. All kinds of attacks on Jews were now directly sanctioned, even mandated, by law. Moreover, once Jews were defined, it would be much easier to isolate, rob, deport, and eventually kill them."⁵⁶ The Nuremberg Laws as a juridical apparatus of racialization did not so much code existing political violence and wounds as it generated possibilities for new ones. It would have been hard for Damas to remain unaware of reports of Nazi Germany in mass-circulation in Paris. It is remarkable, nonetheless, that Damas's comparison presciently traced the trajectory described by Bergen. Following the speaker's analogy to Hitler's Jewish victims, the speaker illustrates the trajectory of terror for Blacks in metropolitan France:

A ce moment-là seul comprendrez-vous donc tous
quand leur supériorité s'étalera
d'un bout à l'autre de leurs boulevards
et qu'alors vous les verrez
vraiment tout se permettre
ne plus se contenter de rire avec
l'index inquiet de voir passer un nègre
mais froidement matraquer mais froidement
descendre mais

⁵⁶ Bergen, *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, 72.

froidement étendre mais froidement
matraquer descendre étendre
couper leur sexe aux nègres
pour en faire des bougies pour leurs églises.
[Only at that moment will you understand at last
when their superiority will spread
from one end to the other of their boulevards
and then you will see them
truly doing whatever they want
no longer content to laugh with
an anxious index finger when a *nègre* goes by
but coldly bludgeon but coldly
take down but
coldly knock out but coldly
bludgeon take down knock out
slice off the penises of *nègres*
to make them into candles for their churches.]⁵⁷

The speaker narrates a transition from passive contempt to violent subordination, culminating in the pornotropic dismemberment of the dominated (male) *nègre*'s body. Complementing the speakers' description of a routinized, totalitarian "seven fascist days out of seven," the violence repeats here in a claustrophobic yet magnifying spiral, its accelerating, chaotic tempo simulating an inability to dodge or escape. The implied white "they" repeatedly bludgeons, takes down, and

⁵⁷ Damas, *Pigments*, 23; my translation.

knocks out the *nègre* across multiple lines that run over without any discernible pattern or logic; and the spiraling acts of violence themselves—bludgeoning, taking down, knocking out—materially territorialize the vertical relations of domination alluded to by “their superiority.” The speaker’s paradoxical image of (white) superiority expanding horizontally “from one end to the other of their boulevards” thus illustrates the collapse of vertical into horizontal relations of domination.

Such a collapse of the vertical into the horizontal was evident in the ways the juridical assertion of German racial superiority functioned to remove Jews from German social space.⁵⁸ Following Bergen’s claim that the Nuremberg Laws sanctioned “all kinds of attacks on Jews,” it is the white French men’s assertion of superiority in Damas’s poem that empowers them to do “whatever they want.”⁵⁹ When discussing nineteenth century antisemitism in Central Europe, Wolfe argues that “Jews were racialised in a manner reliant on colonial precedents,” although he denies that “Jews were colonised” and “distinguish[es] between metropole and colony.”⁶⁰ Wolfe clarifies this distinction with his argument that “race is colonialism speaking...As a colonial invention, race was inherently spatial...Inscribed within race, the spatial implication persists as a trace, distancing racialized communities within.”⁶¹ Fascism may entail the activation of this trace such that race recruits the spatial dynamic of settler-colonialism’s “relations of invasion” to enact relations of inequality in the metropole.⁶²

Furthermore, just as Bergen’s trajectory implies that the juridical classification of the Jew enabled lethal domination, so too Damas’s speaker emphatically interpellates the addressee as

⁵⁸ Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*, 30.

⁵⁹ Bergen, *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, 72; Damas, *Pigments*, 23; my translation.

⁶⁰ Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2016), 100.

⁶¹ Wolfe, 101.

⁶² Wolfe, 24.

nègre in order to predict his spiraling murder and castration. The poem thus calls attention to not only how racialization enables violence and how assemblages of racial classification unevenly distribute vulnerability to that violence. It also calls attention to the illusions of assimilation and racial transcendence that prevent racialized groups from recognizing their fate. Hannah Arendt observed already in 1933 that social antisemitism’s “official legitimation [in Germany] affects in the first instance assimilated Jews, who can no longer protect themselves through baptism or by emphasizing their differences from Eastern Judaism.”⁶³ By 1935, such legitimation was reflected in and mandated by state law. Similarly, when Damas’s speaker reminds the addressee that concomitant to his victimhood is his racializing classification as *nègre*, the speaker intimates that the addressee’s assimilation in Paris, like bourgeois Jews in Berlin, will end a tragic failure—despite the addressee’s aspirational identification as *noir* or *homme de couleur*. Damas’s organization of the French phrasing on the page bluntly emphasizes this interpellation of the poem’s “you”:

bientôt cette idée leur viendra de vouloir

vous en bouffer du nègre⁶⁴

By placing “vous [you],” the direct object pronoun of “bouffer [to gobble up],” at the start of a new line, the speaker’s explanation becomes a provocative accusation, as if to forcefully remind the addressee of the negritude he believed he had transcended.

Indeed, the threatened castration functions as a specifying reminder of the addressee’s Blackness, introducing a comparative difference into the otherwise analogical frame. As Fanon

⁶³ Hannah Arendt, “Original Assimilation: An Epilogue to the One Hundredth Anniversary of Rahel Varnhagen’s Death,” in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman, trans. Edna Brocke (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 22.

⁶⁴ Damas, *Pigments*, 23. Emphasis added

would astutely interpret, “No anti-Semite... would ever think of castrating a Jew.”⁶⁵ Fanon’s adjudication of resemblance and difference is pertinent precisely because his writing reflects a located interrogation, in the wake of Nazism, of Black assimilation in relation to Jewish assimilation. The particular regimes of race and racializing assemblages not only shape the direction of the analogized fascist violence but also shape the form of this violence in ultimately incommensurable ways. The ritualism of the phantasmagoria in the poem, culminating in a grotesque image of Catholic atrocity, of course recalls the rituals of lynching in the US South while at the same time modulating them to the governmental structures and pornotropic desires of French coloniality.⁶⁶ The mutilation in the poem translates the white Southerner’s ritualized, phobic mutilation of the Black phallus to the French metropolitan context, in which it is not the white mob but the white Catholic Church that mutilates and consumes the Black phallus—not as trophy but as ornamentation and ritual object. Damas therefore exposed the particular lethal and monstrous violence of Catholic inclusivity and metropolitan negrophilia as French imperialism’s fascist telos. The image Damas evinces is not quite one of “the enactment of black suffering for a shocked and titillated audience,” as is evident, for example, in abolitionist narrative and performance as well as the photographic practices accompanying the violence of lynching.⁶⁷ In French metropolitan space, the colonized’s enfleshment is consigned to an exceedingly formalized and self-consciously ritualistic consumption. Catholic church candles, after all,

⁶⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 2008, 146.

⁶⁶ “Pornotroping” is a concept formulated by Hortense Spillers and elaborated further by Weheliye. Weheliye writes, “Pornotroping... names the becoming-flesh of the (black) body and forms a primary component in the processes by which human beings are converted into bare life... The violence inflicted upon the enslaved body becomes synonymous with the projected surplus pleasure that always already moves in excess of the sovereign subject’s jouissance; pleasure (rapture) and violence (bondage) deviate from and toward each other, setting in motion the historical happening of the slave thing: a potential for pornotroping.” See Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 64-81; and Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 91.

⁶⁷ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 90.

symbolize “the pure flesh of Christ,” so the substitution of the Black phallus marks the precise enfleshment and fungibility of Black (male) flesh in the metropole. In doing so, Damas suggests the sadistic erotics of fascist violence while also maintains that such erotics take shape according to particular racializing assemblages and regimes of race—in this case, the anti-Black negrophilia of French Catholicism. The pornotropic dimensions of European Jewish enfleshment, to which Weheliye alludes in his critique of Agamben and which are related but not equivalent to Black enfleshment, would not quite become legible until the terror of the ghettos and camps became fully known.⁶⁸

The context depicted in Damas’s poem thus becomes more and more situated. The poem is an SOS after all, which begs the question from *where* exactly this distress signal is transmitted. The white perpetrator’s expansive superiority does not spread in abstract space and does not dominate at random. Rather, his superiority spreads across Paris’s grand boulevards—“*their* boulevards.” In an earlier poem in *Pigments*, “Un clochard m’a demandé dix sous,” the speaker begs on these boulevards, spiting, “Me too / I was hungry in this holy country / and I believed I could / ask for ten sous / out of pity for my hollow belly // Me too to the end of / eternity of their cop boulevards / ... // ... / until the day I got / sick / of seeing them mock / ... / and laugh at seeing a *nègre*.”⁶⁹ In “Save Our Souls,” the white “they,” perhaps also cops, are “no longer content to laugh...when a *nègre* goes by,” representing an escalation in the poetry collection’s internal drama. But, as the speaker underscores, “they” do continue to mark the victim of their violence as *nègre*. Damas’s poem, and so too his comparison, refers not to “Blacks” in the abstract but to a located figure: the Parisian *noir*. The assimilated *noir* who takes his presence in the metropole for granted—and whose migration to the metropole, as we will see in “Nuit

⁶⁸ Weheliye, 97–98.

⁶⁹ Damas, *Pigments*; my translation.

Blanche,” produces a hallucination of intimacy with white power, of full inclusion in the white imperial state—is lethally expelled, instrumentalized as Black flesh. Damas does not magnify abstract Black subjects in danger of white violence but an assimilated (petit) bourgeois Black man in danger of exclusion within and from the imperial capital. In turn, Damas’s analogy between “Hitler gobbling up some jew” and the white French gobbling up “some *nègre*” does not produce an abstract analogy between Jews and Blacks as discrete, ontological or transhistorical unities (and, by implication, between antisemitism and anti-Black racism as discrete, ideological unities). The poem’s analogy of fascist violence activates a particular, historicized comparison relating assimilated German Jews in the Third Reich and assimilated Antilleans and West Africans in the late Third Republic’s imperial metropole.

III. The Third Republic and the Third Reich: Damas and Arendt on Assimilation

Damas was not alone in outlining such particular, historicized forms of comparison and relation across colonized francophone Blacks and German Jews. C. L. R. James made a similar, but seemingly even more uneven, comparison in his 1938 *The Black Jacobins*, shifting from a synchronic to diachronic axis by relating assimilated Jews in Nazi Germany to the earliest structures of French imperial inclusion—in Haiti. James visited Paris in the winter of 1933 to conduct research in French archives for *Black Jacobins*; and in fact it was Damas who primarily welcomed James and guided him through Paris’s libraries, archives, and negritude networks. Rachel Douglas argues that the negritude networks of “political meetings, cafés, restaurants, bookshops, poetry readings, dance halls, and ‘the spirit of Paris’ collectively created the discursive field that nourished *The Black Jacobins*.”⁷⁰ In that text, published just one year after

⁷⁰ Rachel Douglas, *Making The Black Jacobins: C. L. R. James and the Drama of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

Damas's *Pigments*, James made an off-hand, and oft-overlooked, comparison between the free class of *mulâtres* in pre-revolutionary Saint-Domingue and contemporary German Jews. He wrote,

Increasing numbers, increasing wealth were giving the Mulattoes greater pride and sharpening their resentment against their humiliations. Some of them were sending their children to France to be educated...And as the Mulattoes began to press against the barriers, white San Domingo passed a series of laws which for maniacal savagery are unique in the modern world, and (we would have said up to 1933) not likely to be paralleled again in history. The Council of Port-au-Prince, holding up the race question as a screen, wanted to exterminate them. Thus the whites could purge their system of a growing menace, get rid of men from whom they had borrowed money, and seize much fine property....But the colonists could not carry out these sweeping plans. The Mulattoes, unlike the German Jews, were already too numerous.⁷¹

James's parenthetical suggests that the Nazi regime offered a unique historical correspondence to the "maniacal savagery" of white settler-colonial law, highlighting the reactionary exclusion of upwardly-mobile, assimilated *mulâtres*. The correspondence he locates in both reactionary legislation and the nexus of exclusion and extermination provides an interpretation of the contemporary situation of German Jewry in the terms of the *longue durée* of French imperialism.

Hannah Arendt's early writings from Paris as a German Jewish refugee are called into relation, most especially because of their adjacent attention to the lethal failures of assimilation. In the same year that Damas published *Pigments*, Hannah Arendt prepared a speech to be

⁷¹ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, Second Edition, Revised (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 40–41.

delivered to German-speaking émigrés and refugees in Paris, a fiery criticism of German Jewish reactions to the Nazi rise to power.⁷² Herself a young German Jewish refugee living in squalor near Montparnasse, Arendt bitterly demonstrated the illusions of Jewish assimilation in Germany. She wrote,

The Jewish question is a genuine question or a genuine problem... wherever truly large masses of people reside in the midst of another people from whom they are clearly set off by custom, wardrobe, the monopolization of certain professions, and historical development... In this sense there was no Jewish question in Germany in 1933. Which makes it all the more important to ask why in Germany of all places antisemitic slogans held such promise of success and why of all places it was possible in Germany to remove Jews totally from the life of the German nation.⁷³

Notwithstanding Arendt's totalizing depiction of German Jewry as assimilated and bourgeois, her concluding rhetorical question stages the surprising trajectory in Damas's poem, from cultural assimilation and social integration to total removal. Fascism thus appears as not only the fruition of settler-colonial "relations of invasion" in European metropolises but as racializing relations that seek to subjugate and exclude previously included and assimilated minority groups.⁷⁴

Arendt however had already answered her rhetorical question in a journal article published on the very eve of her arrest in Berlin in the spring of 1933; she fled to Paris soon

⁷² Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman, eds., "A Note on the Text," in *The Jewish Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), xxxiii–xxxiv.

⁷³ Hannah Arendt, "The Jewish Question," in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 42–45.

⁷⁴ Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, 24.

after. The journal article, published in the *Kölnische Zeitung* and then *Jüdische Rundschau*, was an excerpt from her in-progress *Habilitationsschrift*, an extended study of Jewish assimilation and emancipation in Germany in the form of a biography of Rahel Varnhagen. Arendt opened by declaring assimilated Jews as the principal target of impending Nazi policy: “Today in Germany it seems Jewish assimilation must declare its bankruptcy. The general social antisemitism and its official legitimation affects in the first instance assimilated Jews, who can no longer protect themselves through baptism or by emphasizing their differences from Eastern Judaism.”⁷⁵ The references to both baptism and Eastern Judaism in particular are salient to the comparison at hand. Damas draws on parallel dynamics of assimilation in “Save Our Souls.” The poem’s final image implies the assimilated *noir*’s gruesome exclusion from the Catholic Church into which he thought he had been assimilated, an exclusion, however, enacted via enfleshment and extractive mutilation.⁷⁶ Additionally, the assimilated German Jew’s drive to secure her equality by distinguishing herself from the supposedly uncivilized and unenlightened Eastern Jews (*Ostjuden*) migrating to Berlin is matched in “Save Our Souls” by the Parisian *noir*’s presupposed self-distinction from *nègres*.⁷⁷ Wolfe, commenting on an earlier phase of German antisemitism, asserts, “The full development of race was realised in antisemitism’s collapsing together of the Eastern and the German Jews.”⁷⁸ The German Christian denial of sameness with assimilated German Jews combined with nationalist panic and fear of Eastern Jewish migrants to produce “an indiscriminate racial targeting that did not acknowledge any exceptional Jews.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Arendt, “Original Assimilation: An Epilogue to the One Hundredth Anniversary of Rahel Varnhagen’s Death,” 22.

⁷⁶ This form of assimilation is also vividly represented by the mother in “*Hoquet*”: “just let me catch you in the street / ... / playing around with So-and-so / with So-and-so who was never baptized.” Damas, *Pigments*, 13.

⁷⁷ This distinction is also present in “*Hoquet*,” as the mother’s final rebuke declares, “the *mulâtres* do not do that / leave it to the *nègres*.” Damas, 14.

⁷⁸ Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, 97.

⁷⁹ Wolfe, 97.

This reading of race's development vis-à-vis Jews in Germany underscores "indiscriminate racial targeting" across class-differentiated groups, evoking the "indiscriminate racial targeting" predicted by the speaker in "Save Our Souls." The speaker's rebuke contends that the exceptional *noir* will be (re)classified as *nègre*, his very assimilation to/in Paris positioning him at the end of an impending trajectory of violence. Likewise, in Arendt's estimation, it is the assimilated Jews who are affected "in the first instance" by the Nazi rise to power.⁸⁰

While it is more than evident that substantial differences distinguish assimilated German Jewry and assimilated Black Antilleans and West Africans, their ambivalent social and governmental inclusion as exceptionally reformed and/or evolved subjects highlights key, international correspondences as minoritized groups integrated into metropolitan and imperial centers of power. Arendt fled Berlin for Paris in 1933, following an arrest, and eight-day interrogation, by the newly-formed Gestapo; she had been illegally copying antisemitic newspaper and journal articles from the Prussian State Library (where she was doing research on Varnhagen) for the German Zionist Organization to present at the 18th Zionist Congress in Prague.⁸¹ A refugee moving from room to room in the Latin Quarter, Arendt found work first as a secretary for *Agriculture et Artisanat*, a Zionist organization training youth for kibbutz labor, and then for the Baroness Germaine du Rothschild, advising the French arm of the international banking dynasty on Jewish charities asking for financial support.⁸² This work was crucial in exposing Arendt to the intimate machinations of bourgeois Jewish leadership and philanthropy,

⁸⁰ Arendt, "Original Assimilation: An Epilogue to the One Hundredth Anniversary of Rahel Varnhagen's Death," 22.

⁸¹ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 105–6; Anne C. Heller, *Hannah Arendt: A Life in Dark Times* (Boston: New Harvest, 2015), 63–64.

⁸² Heller, *Hannah Arendt: A Life in Dark Times*, 66.

her distaste for which would become a hallmark of subsequent writing. Arendt biographer Anne Heller notes that Arendt

observed with keen interest the family's public exhibitions of social privilege and material splendor—as well as their unwitting displays of an ancient aversion to politics that kept them and their fellow 'notables' and social parvenus at a safe remove from government policy, except where their financial interests were concerned, and made them hesitant to offer support to the wave of so-called Ostjuden [Eastern Jews] making its way to France. They worried that the newcomers' poverty, religiosity, and illiteracy in French and other European languages might further awaken the anti-Semites of France...[Arendt] knew that, given the chance, Hitler's thugs would not exempt a Rothschild.⁸³

In other words, assimilation would not save them from the impending fascist threat, just as Damas's speaker warns the Parisian *noir*.

It is not surprising, as Haun Saussy suggests, that Arendt's brief experience working for Rothschild "shaped her thinking about the difference between *parvenus*, those Jews who successfully negotiate the demands of assimilation through luck, ability, or wealth, and *pariahs*, the Jews whom the majority culture imagines only as an irreducibly alien mass of inferiors."⁸⁴

Arendt borrowed these fabled terms from French Jew Bernard Lazare, whose *fin-de-siècle* writings on Jewish assimilation and antisemitism in France she encountered during this Paris period.⁸⁵ In a footnote to her eventual essay "From the Dreyfus Affair to France Today" (1942),

⁸³ Heller, 66.

⁸⁴ Haun Saussy, "The Refugee Speaks of Parvenus and Their Beautiful Illusions: A Rediscovered 1934 Text by Hannah Arendt," *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 1 (Autumn 2013): 3.

⁸⁵ Michael R. Marrus writes, "She assiduously collected information on the French far right, its history, contemporary manifestations, and particularly its anti-Semites. She lectured on these subjects in French and refined her ideas in discussions with her friends; later, in New York, she drew extensively upon this material in her writings

Arendt cited a 1901 article of Lazare's from *L'Echo Sioniste* that highlighted assimilated French Jewry's excessive identification with the French nation: "Take our French Jews...It isn't enough for them to reject any solidarity with their foreign-born brethren; they have also to go charging them with all the evils which their own cowardice engenders. They are not content with being more jingoist than the native-born Frenchmen; like all emancipated Jews everywhere they have also, of their own volition, broken all ties of solidarity."⁸⁶ It was Lazare's struggle with the French republican promise of inclusion that "prompted [Arendt] to form the category of conscious pariahs, Jews who could aspire to assimilated status but preferred for reasons of conscience to stand with the rejected masses."⁸⁷ But, Arendt concludes, Lazare's "criticism of his people" ultimately failed; "he could find no supporters in France."⁸⁸ The assimilated would only understand when it was far too late; indeed, the Rothschilds who had employed Arendt would be forced to flee France following the German invasion in 1940.⁸⁹

Arendt's archival journey in Paris modulated her experience as a German Jewish refugee to the terms of Jewish life in the French Empire. In moving between German and French Jews, Arendt's writing from this period articulated the dark fate of assimilated Jews in Nazi Germany to the assimilationist posture of French imperial ideology, making Damas's comparison even more vivid and suggesting a filiative relationship between the regimes that Damas would trace through the movement of the Black parvenu in "Nuit Blanche." In a period of large-scale Black colonial migration to the imperial capital, Damas focused squarely on the assimilated *noir* who will only understand when it is far too late. Like the Jews described by Lazare and Arendt

on the Dreyfus Affair." See "Hannah Arendt and the Dreyfus Affair," *New German Critique*, no. 66 (Autumn 1995): 150.

⁸⁶ Hannah Arendt, "From the Dreyfus Affair to France Today," *Jewish Social Studies* 4, no. 3 (July 1942): 239f162.

⁸⁷ Saussy, "The Refugee Speaks of Parvenus and Their Beautiful Illusions: A Rediscovered 1934 Text by Hannah Arendt," 3.

⁸⁸ Arendt, "From the Dreyfus Affair to France Today," 239–40.

⁸⁹ Heller, *Hannah Arendt: A Life in Dark Times*, 67.

whose sense of Frenchness or Germanness emerges via their distinction from Eastern Jews, the assimilated *noir* remains ignorant of his fate precisely because he imagines himself the same as a native-born Frenchman, subscribing to the conceits of French republican emancipation. Fanon described this process of self-differentiation as *comparaison*, writing, “The Antillean does not possess a personal value of his own and is always dependent on the presence of ‘the Other.’ The question is always whether he is less intelligent than I, blacker than I, or less good than I...It’s on the ruins of my entourage that I build my virility...It is because the black man belongs to an ‘inferior’ race that he tries to resemble the superior race.”⁹⁰ Introducing his ternary concept of comparison, Fanon observed that the assimilated Black man compared himself not simply with an abstract (white) Other but against a Black other under the sign of white society. Arendt likewise revealed that the assimilated German Jew compared herself against the Eastern Jew under the sign of Western (Christian) society. That Damas’s speaker was vulnerable to a form of fascist violence that replicated the violence against Jews in Nazi Germany resulted from the corresponding dynamics of emancipation and assimilation that constrained both Antilleans and West Africans relocated to Paris and Jews living in Germany.

Damas ultimately depicted fascist violence then as a structure of reactionary exclusion that mobilized racializing assemblages in order to violently withdraw liberal offers of inclusion in the imperial nation-state. The poem’s speaker warns that the white Frenchmen will be “no longer content to laugh...when a *nègre* goes by”—in other words, when *you*, the colonized *noir*, shares social space with them in Paris. They will instead monstrously reassert superiority, spreading it “from one end to the other of their boulevards.” White superiority in a fascist idiom takes the form of horizontal domination of metropolitan social space. Damas splits the phrase

⁹⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 2008, 187.

over two lines so that the momentum of “s’*étalera* [will spread],” stressed on the final, open syllable, mimics an expansive lateral movement. If “racialisation represents a response to the crisis occasioned when colonisers are threatened with the requirement to share social space with the colonised,” then such was the threat—transferred from settler-colony to metropole—that provoked the “indiscriminate racial targeting” of German and Eastern Jews, and *noirs* and *nègres*.⁹¹ Given the French empire’s spatial disaggregation across the globe, unlike the compressed zones of power and subordination in an independent settler-colony like the United States or a nascent imperial state like the Third Reich, the equalizing principle of legal emancipation would not significantly provoke a reaction against Blacks there until colonized subjects literally migrated into the hexagonal metropole, and especially its capital. In the terms of Damas’s analogy, then, just as the Nuremberg Laws formally withdrew citizenship from Jews in the Third Reich on the basis of race, the poem’s speaker predicts a violent and gruesome withdrawal of such assimilated bonafides from Parisian *noirs*. If “race’s role becomes particularly apparent in its retrieval of the inequities that the extension of citizenship has theoretically abolished,” then Damas’s analogy suggests that the fascist development of race involved an actual withdrawal of democratic inclusion and the retrieval of exterminationist relations of exclusion.⁹²

Damas’s analogy also suggests that forms of fascist violence can analogously replicate across imperial nation-states precisely because corresponding governmental and cultural regimes of differential inclusion exist across them. Sartre’s hasty “reflections” on (French) antisemitism in the fall of 1944 would include the infamous proposition that “if the Jew did not exist, the antisemite would invent him,” foregrounding the negative constitution of the antisemitic self

⁹¹ Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, 14, 97.

⁹² Wolfe, 14.

against the preconceived abjection of the Jew.⁹³ Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* translated Sartre's proposition into colonial terms: "Inferiorization is the native correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say: *It is the racist who creates the inferiorized.*"⁹⁴ As Bryan Cheyette argues, "Fanon understood his own status as a europeanised colonial subject, belittled by a dominant French culture, partly in relation to assimilated but racially abused metropolitan Jews," and thus "the figure of the Jew...is a means by which Fanon can reflect upon his own [post-war] status as a Europeanised victorious Antillean soldier who is nonetheless racially abused and belittled by a dominant French culture."⁹⁵ Damas's analogy not only predicted this comparison but also intervened into the Manichean loop proposed by Sartre. For Damas's analogy illustrates the reinvention of antisemitic violence by introducing a third figure: the *nègre*. It is not simply that, on the abstract level, the antisemite would inevitably invent the (singular) Jew; or that, per Fanon, an "analogy with the anti-Semite's mentality" in *metropolitan* Europe clarifies anti-Blackness in *colonies* (more specifically here, the settler-colony of South Africa).⁹⁶ Damas's analogy proposed that the metropolitan bourgeois citizen of the Western imperial nation-state, including the German Reich and the French Empire, will inevitably (re-)racialize, subordinate, and expel its assimilated others.

While Sartre's figural abstractions project antisemites and Jews into an eternal and ubiquitous game of subjectivity, Damas's analogy between "Hitler gobbling up some jew" and "them... / ...gobbl[ing] you up, some *nègre*"—"seven fascist days out of seven"—suggests not only how fascist violence reproduces across regimes of race but also how this reproduction

⁹³ The economic basis of this negative self-constitution is mimicked as follows: "By treating the Jew as an inferior and pernicious being, I affirm at the same time that I belong to the elite." See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1995), 13, 27.

⁹⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 2008, 73.

⁹⁵ Bryan Cheyette, "Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre: Blacks and Jews," *Wasafiri* 20, no. 44 (2005): 7–8.

⁹⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 2008, 67.

breaks from a binaristic bind between perpetrator and victim (Aryan and Jew). From Damas's vantage point, the fascist selection of victims was determined less by an essentially antisemitic ideology than by particular structures of differential inclusion, paralleled across imperial nation-states.⁹⁷ Comparisons between Nazism and colonialism as discrete zones of racialized violence, and comparisons between the Jew and the Black as discrete, abstract unities, can no longer be sustained. Césaire's *Discourse* edified the former into a sequential relation by asserting that "Hitler applied to Europe colonialist procedures."⁹⁸ Damas's prewar poem, however, did not establish an analogical relation between Nazism and colonialism as distinct, geopolitical units; impoverished Polish Jews and laboring West Africans, for example, do not seem part of the comparative frame. Rather, the poem established an analogical relation between metropolitan fascism in the nascent Third Reich and metropolitan anti-Blackness in the late Third Republic; between the racialization and subsequent violence directed at assimilated German Jews and that directed at assimilated *noirs*. While Damas's abstract language appears to invoke an abstract Jew and an abstract Black, it does not reify these categories but marks precisely how assimilated German Jews and assimilated *noirs* in Paris are reductively and violently (re)racialized into them.

IV. The *Noir* and the Parvenu

Like in "Save Our Souls," the speaker of "Nuit Blanche" ("White Night") directly addresses his readers. The speaker here, however, is no longer cynical and fatalistic, half-pitying and half-pleading with the *noir* to anticipate the violent fruits of his integration. The speaker is

⁹⁷ It bears noting, however, that Hitler's eventual race war in the East would ultimately exceed such a limited selection of victims.

⁹⁸ Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 36.

rather the *noir* himself and he is speaking to friends. He begins with a notorious allusion to his colonial education:

Mes amis j'ai valsé
valsé comme jamais mes ancêtres
les Gaulois
[My friends I have waltzed
waltzed like never did my ancestors
the Gauls]⁹⁹

This declaration of Gallic ancestry pours over two lines, regurgitating the infamous words of textbooks mandated across the French empire since the late 19th century: “Our ancestors the Gauls...” The phrase, lifted from the *Petit Lavissee* history manual published in 1876, is a frequent synecdoche in francophone literature representing the process of assimilation imposed by the French Empire’s universal education apparatus, for “convincing colonized subjects that their ancestors were also ‘the Gauls’ was central to the French imperial ambition.”¹⁰⁰ Why? Janice Gross notes the history manual’s context following French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, during which “the latent potency of the Vercingétorix legend saw its greatest revival.”¹⁰¹ Anticlerical Republicans understood the French defeat as a sign of Prussia’s superior education system, which had better trained Prussian soldiers and better developed Prussian technological capacities. When pushing through his eponymous education reforms from 1879-1885, which established public education in France as mandatory and laic, Minister of Public Instruction and

⁹⁹ Damas, *Pigments*, 26.

¹⁰⁰ Dominic Thomas, *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 43.

¹⁰¹ Janice Gross, “Revisiting ‘nos Ancêtres Les Gaulois:’ Scripting and Postscripting Francophone Identity,” *The French Review* 78, no. 5 (April 2005): 949.

anticlerical Republican Jules Ferry “hoped to capitalize on the feelings of many Frenchmen regarding *revanche*, or revenge, against the loss of prestige and land (Alsace-Lorraine).”¹⁰² Vercingétorix, the Gallic warrior, provided a unifying and bellicose mythological figure for national rehabilitation. Lavissee’s history manual unequivocally reveals the figure’s patriarchal role in producing *petits français*: “All the children of France must recall Vercingétorix and love him.”¹⁰³

All the children of France indeed. The enslaved Blacks of France’s so-called “old” colonies, including Damas’s Guiana, had been emancipated in republican form in 1848.¹⁰⁴ Myriam Cottias notes that although real and concrete rights in the colonies lagged behind their formal declaration, the formerly enslaved did become theoretically full Frenchmen; and that is why “‘nos ancêtres les Gaulois,’ the founding French myth, would be taught in the colonies.”¹⁰⁵ Integration into the French nation required an “oubli politique,” or political forgetting, of slavery.¹⁰⁶ Suzanne Césaire emphasized this point in her 1942 *Tropiques* essay “Malaise of a Civilization,” which criticized the lack of authentic (what she codes as *nègre*) Martinican culture. When explaining the reasons for this lack, Suzanne Césaire asserted, “we have too quickly forgotten [oubli] the slave traders and the suffering of our slave fathers [nos pères esclaves]. Here forgetting equals: cowardice.”¹⁰⁷ In the same way, ‘Nos ancêtres les Gaulois’ equals forgetting ‘nos pères esclaves.’ This forgetting was promoted by both the integrationist elite in the French Antilles and the foundational historians of the Third Republic alike, who, “when

¹⁰² Troy J. Hinkel, “Jules Ferry and Henri Maret: The Battle of Church and State at the Sorbonne, 1879-1884” (Dissertation, Lawrence, University of Kansas, 2011), 44.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Gross, “Revisiting ‘nos Ancêtres Les Gaulois:’ Scripting and Postscripting Francophone Identity,” 949; my translation.

¹⁰⁴ However, free *gens de couleur*, born of free parents, were accorded equal rights as citizens as early as May 1791.

¹⁰⁵ Myriam Cottias, Crystal M. Fleming, and Seloua Luste Boulbina, “Nos Ancêtres Les Gaulois... La France et l’esclavage Aujourd’hui,” *Cahiers Sens Public* 2, no. 10 (2009): 48–49; my translation.

¹⁰⁶ Cottias, Fleming, and Boulbina, 49.

¹⁰⁷ Suzanne Césaire, “Malaise d’une Civilisation,” *Tropiques*, no. 5 (1942): 44; my translation.

defining the French nation, . . . affirm that it was progressively constructed into a territorial unit that is none other than the [metropolitan] hexagon,” making no mention of the Caribbean or the abolition of slavery and emancipation.¹⁰⁸ The national education reform and colonial expansion that followed the 1870 defeat formally synchronized the educative reproduction of this theoretical nation with the imperial reproduction of national subjects.¹⁰⁹

The theoretical coherence of the chimerical French nation thus relies on routine repetition, whether through universal, state-mandated education or declarative impositions of the political elite. The multiple forms of repetition in Damas’s manifesto against Black assimilation demonstrate how the ideological reproduction of the French nation inevitably produces geographical and ethnic incoherence. When the colonized is made to parrot Gallic ancestry, the unequal and uneven relations of French imperialism are forgotten. Ironically, it is this *oubli* that ensures the colonial imitation will always remain just that—“almost the same, *but not quite*.”¹¹⁰ For the colonized’s self-identification with Gallic ancestry appears both earnest and, in Damas’s word from “Solde,” ridiculous. Fanon also remarks, in a footnote, “one often provokes a smile when one reports this aspect of education in Martinique. The comical character of the thing is readily observed, but rarely are its later consequences. Yet it is these that matter, since it is after

¹⁰⁸ Cottias, Fleming, and Boulbina, “Nos Ancêtres Les Gaulois... La France et l’esclavage Aujourd’hui,” 49; my translation.

¹⁰⁹ “For its supporters during the first generation of the Third Republic colonial expansion was, first and foremost, the road to national recovery after the traumatic defeat of 1870.” See C.M. Andrews, “The French Colonialist Movement during the Third Republic: The Unofficial Mind of Imperialism,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 26 (1976): 148. The remarkable endurance of both this founding mythology and its imperial imposition were plainly exhibited by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy in a 2016 campaign speech made in the Franconville suburb north of Paris during his run in the presidential primary for The Republicans party. On the heels of the comically explosive “burkini” debate, Sarkozy decreed, “If you want to become French, you speak French, you live like a Frenchman. . . We will demand assimilation. As soon as you become French, your ancestors are the Gauls. I love France, I learn the history of France, I live as a Frenchman.” Sarkozy himself is the issue of Hungarian and Greek immigrants. See “Pour Nicolas Sarkozy, «dès que l’on devient Français, nos ancêtres sont Gaulois»,” *Le Figaro*, September 19, 2016.

¹¹⁰ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *October* 28, no. Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis (Spring 1984): 127.

three or four repetitions of these phrases that the young Antillean's vision of the world takes shape."¹¹¹ The self-affirming refrain opening each of the stanzas in Damas's poem, "My friends I have waltzed," attests to the speaker's sincere desire for imitation. He boasts of his full-bodied coordination to French civilization, stressing the dance over two lines, "My friends I have waltzed / waltzed," and repeats this structure at the start of the next two stanzas. Gleefully oblivious to the implicit gap between colonial imitation and metropolitan authenticity, the speaker exhibits what Suzanne Césaire described in the 1942 essay: "Not one Martinican *évolué* will admit that he is only imitating, his present situation seeming to him so natural, spontaneous, and born of his most legitimate aspirations. And, in so doing, he will be sincere. He does not KNOW that he is imitating."¹¹² Suzanne Césaire describes colonial imitation in terms of its subjective internalization, a naturalized structure of colonized subjectivity.¹¹³ Her sharp description underscores the solipsistic sincerity of the speaker's claim as an *exceptional* Black man.

Damas's depiction of this subjectivity reveals its incoherence and even absurdity as the speaker's sincerity *over-*estimates his identity with France. In contrast to the repetitions, the disjointed phrasing that extends "my ancestors / the Gauls" across two lines, delivers the waltzing *noir*'s identification with Gallic ancestry as a humorous punchline, recalling Homi Bhabha's location of colonial imitation in the "area between mimicry and mockery."¹¹⁴ Damas's *noir* exaggerates his sincere claim to French authenticity with the ironic assertion that he and his

¹¹¹ *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 120n9; my translation.

¹¹² Césaire, "Malaise d'une Civilisation," 47–48; my translation.

¹¹³ Césaire's intimation of colonialism's subjective effects seems to anticipate what Althusser would later describe in the universal terms of ideological subjection. See, for example, Stuart Hall's gloss that Althusser "put on the agenda the whole neglected issue of how ideology becomes internalized, how we come to speak 'spontaneously,' within the limits of the categories of thought which exist outside us and which can more accurately be said to think us." See "The Problem of Ideology-Marxism Without Guarantees," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): 32.

¹¹⁴ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," 127.

waltz have so surpassed the model of his Gallic ancestors that his “blood / still beats / *à la viennoise*.”¹¹⁵ The notion of blood invokes racial claims of national organicity that exceed the assimilative posture of French colonial humanism. The French press, and especially its right-wing newspapers, dissociated themselves primarily from Nazi Germany’s biological racism; it is Damas’s assimilated *noir* who, in his expedition across the French discursive repertoire, reveals the flimsy and largely self-deceptive basis of these dissociations.¹¹⁶ The reference to the “Viennese” exaggerates the speaker’s over-estimation by locating the national origin of the elegant waltz outside of metropolitan France’s hexagonal borders; this exaggeration also makes a subtle allusion to viennoiseries, such as croissants, and locates these French cultural metonyms also outside of metropolitan France’s hexagonal borders. In the form of excess rather than lack, the colonial imitation fails to achieve perfect correspondence to the metropole. Damas’s speaker continues this overestimation and excess, inflating himself with imaginative grandeur:

My friends I have waltzed
waltzed all of my childhood roaming
on some blue Danube
white Danube
red Danube
green Danube
pink Danube
blue white red green pink Danube

¹¹⁵ Damas, *Pigments*, 26; my translation.

¹¹⁶ Robert J Soucy, “French Press Reactions to Hitler’s First Two Years in Power,” *Contemporary European History* 7, no. 1 (1998): 37. See also Barnor Hesse’s discursus on how this dissociation was elaborated in post-war conceptions of racism in “Racism’s Alterity: The After-Life of Black Sociology,” in *Racism and Sociology*, ed. Alana Lentin and Wolf D. Hund (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014), 141–74.

your choice.¹¹⁷

Richard Serrano names Damas's poetic technique of inventories as "incremental repetition, meaning that the repetition of key words or phrases is coupled with either discordant or increasingly distant words or phrases"—a technique Serrano draws to the influence of Desnos.¹¹⁸ The speaker's incremental repetition here offers exchangeable variations of his imagined waltz along the Danube, transforming the bohemian hallucination into a revolving door of self-aggrandizing performances.

James's *The Black Jacobins* is again instructive, for it invokes a specter of comparison with German Jews concentrated precisely on this kind of hallucination. After evoking a correspondence between Nazi Germany and pre-revolutionary Saint-Domingue, James shares a story to demonstrate how "Hitlerism" illuminates the historical predicament of upwardly-mobile *mulâtres* in the former French colony: "Until the Bastille fell the efforts of the Mulattoes to emancipate themselves assumed strange forms. De Vaissière has unearthed a story, which we can understand better after Hitlerism than we could have done before."¹¹⁹ He therefore suggested how contemporary events in Nazi Germany mediated historical understanding of the French empire, similar to Damas's analogy in "Save Our Souls." The story tells of a Sieur Chapuzet who in 1771 secured a decree from the colonial Council of Le Cap that "gave him the privileges of a white man."¹²⁰ When he attempted to become a militia officer, however, four white lieutenants successfully protested by providing genealogical records proving Chapuzet had a Black maternal ancestor from the island of St. Kitts. Three years later, however, Chapuzet reemerged with the

¹¹⁷ Damas, *Pigments*, 26 my translation.

¹¹⁸ Richard Serrano, *Against the Postcolonial: "Francophone" Writers at the Ends of French Empire* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), 156. See, for example, Desnos' "The Night of Loveless Nights."

¹¹⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 41.

¹²⁰ James, 42.

aristocratic name Monsieur Chapuzet de Guérin and sued in court to be considered a white man. He was ultimately successful, arguing that this ancestor “was no Negro, but a Carib, a free-born Carib, a member of ‘that noble race on whom the French and Spaniards had imposed the law of conquest.’”¹²¹ He thus navigated state classificatory regimes of racial identity in an attempt to transcend his Blackness; as Suzanne Césaire commented on the Antillean *homme de couleur*’s mindset since the eighteenth-century, “a disastrous confusion takes place...[in which] *liberation equals assimilation*.”¹²² Chapuzet was, however, mistaken; although two decrees in 1779 declared Chapuzet’s claims justified, “the local officials dared not appoint him” for “following the publication of the decrees, the people of colour abandoned themselves to such demonstrations of joy and foolish hopes that the consequences of Chapuzet’s appointment might have been very dangerous.”¹²³

The obvious comparison James’s story makes is not only to the Nuremberg Laws, which demanded decisive genealogical classifications that overruled subjective claims to community, nation, or identity, but to the effects of Nazi antisemitism’s state legitimation in general. In an unpublished essay from 1937, Arendt reminded that “the year 1933 struck nothing but isolated Jewish individuals, but not Jewry,” meaning that its decisive blow was struck against individualist attempts to assimilate as exceptional Jews.¹²⁴ As for James’s comparison, one can point to, for example, the pitiful choice made by baptized Jewish “*Mischling*”—the operative German term for “*mulâtre*”—Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno, when applying for US citizenship. He jettisoned his first last name in favor of exclusively using his Catholic mother’s, even after his exile from Nazi Germany; and Adorno’s friend Peter von Haselberg noted the former’s

¹²¹ James, 42.

¹²² Césaire, “Malaise d’une Civilisation,” 47; my translation.

¹²³ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 42.

¹²⁴ Arendt, “The Jewish Question,” 43.

obsession with his princely pedigree from Genoa and the Colonna family.¹²⁵ In a 1934 British questionnaire, when forced to explain why he was dismissed from his academic position, Adorno wrote “Non pure ‘Aryan’ descendance” [*sic*]—a description that refuses identification with Jewishness.¹²⁶ Additionally, at the same time that she wrote the unpublished “Jewish Question” essay in Paris, Arendt completed the final two chapters of her book *Rachel Varnhagen*, formerly her dissertation, in which she made some of her first original comments on the figure of the Jewish parvenu. Uncannily describing Damas’s play between exaggeration and integration, Arendt wrote, “The parvenu’s overestimation of himself, which often seems quite mad, arises out of the tremendous effort, and the straining of all his forces and talents, which are incumbent upon him if he is to climb only a few steps up the social ladder. The smallest success, so hard-won, necessarily dazzles him with an illusory: everything is possible.”¹²⁷

This inflated, illusory “everything is possible,” and its repetitive strain, finds representation in the speaker’s claim to have perfected the waltz of his Gallic ancestors along some pink Danube; and also in Chapuzet’s belief that navigating the state’s classificatory grid could provide him with an exceptional liberation from Blackness. In another unpublished essay composed in 1937, Arendt concluded more directly that the Jewish assimilationist perspective rested upon the “uncritical assumption of a *100 percent correspondence* between Jews and their

¹²⁵ Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 17–18.

¹²⁶ Evelyn Wilcock, “Negative Identity: Mixed German Jewish Descent as a Factor in the Reception of Theodor Adorno,” *New German Critique*, no. 81 (2000): 170. This response is rather different from the ambivalence of assimilated Jew Jean Améry, described by Primo Levi: “To him being Jewish is not important, but for the Nazis his opinions and tendencies have no weight whatsoever...His way of escaping this is paradoxical and contradictory: to accept one’s destiny, in this case Judaism, and at the same time rebel against the imposed choice. For the young Hans [later, Jean], a prodigal Jew, being Jewish is simultaneously impossible and obligatory...Out of dignity, and for no other reason, he will accept Judaism.” See Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1988), 114–15.

¹²⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess*, ed. Liliane Weissberg, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 239.

entire host nation.”¹²⁸ Damas’s speaker too uncritically assumes total correspondence between his identity and France, although here the example of the speaker diverges from the comparison to German Jewry. The speaker’s assumption, rather than entirely based in his autonomous aspirations, is also the product of an enforced colonial education. For it was the perspective of the French state that, as Arthur Girault’s wildly popular colonial manual, *Principes de colonisation et de législation coloniale*, confirmed, “The principal of assimilation makes no distinction between the different parts of the territory. There is complete uniformity between the organization of the colonies and that of the metropole.”¹²⁹ 100 percent correspondence was therefore not only the illusion of the colonized but the ideological charade of the colonizer.

Damas represented the playful hubris of the Black parvenu as an absurd phantasm. But the centripetal force of French colonial education made it difficult for the upwardly-mobile strata of the colonized to resist. Damas’s own childhood outlines the overlapping ideological and geopolitical routes leading the *noir* closer to the French metropole. Born the son of a *mulâtre* father and *métisse* mother in French Guiana, Damas received a state education that brought him progressively from a peripheral penal colony (French Guiana), to the “Little Paris” on France’s colonial “crown jewel” (Fort-de-France, Martinique), and finally to the imperial capital itself (Paris).¹³⁰ In the estimation of Damas biographer Daniel Racine, his “middle-class, mulatto family...endeavored to raise him like a white child of the French Bourgeoisie.”¹³¹ Damas attended primary school in his native Cayenne, a city on South America’s Caribbean coast settled by French planters as early as 1630, made a destination along the transatlantic slave trade

¹²⁸ Hannah Arendt, “Antisemitism,” in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 50.

¹²⁹ Arthur Girault, *Principes de Colonisation et de Législation Coloniale: Les Colonies Françaises Avant et Depuis 1815*, ed. Maurice Besson, Sixth (Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1943), 34.

¹³⁰ Denean-Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 20–21.

¹³¹ Daniel L. Racine, “A Profile of Léon-Gontran Damas,” *Negro History Bulletin*, 61-63, 42, no. 3 (September 1979): 61.

by 1654, and transformed largely into a French penal colony by the mid-19th century. It was here, on the margins of both France's civilizing mission and colonial economy, that Damas would already be subjected to repeating the notorious phrase, "nos ancêtres les Gaulois." Ferry's nationalized school system made it so; as Cottias candidly reminds, "For what reason did one teach it ['nos ancêtres les Gaulois'] in territories located more than 7000 miles away? Because they were France!"¹³² From this early moment, the itinerary toward the *Mère-Patrie* seemed inevitable; all there was left to do was embark upon it.

This itinerary from the colony to the metropole is the itinerary of the young Black student's integrationist liberation, in Suzanne Césaire's terms. Although he is administratively and ideologically subjected to the hegemonic sign of France in the colonies, the French nation "thinks of itself in a territorial framework that excludes the colonies [i.e. the framework of the hexagon]; it thinks of itself belonging to a uniquely white variable," rather than a racially or ethnically diverse one.¹³³ Fanon described the effects of French colonial education in the context of his psychoanalytical interrogation of Black ontogeny, evoking the notorious phrase in Damas's poem and interpreting it within the Freudian family romance. He demonstrated how the circulation and consumption of mass culture in the colonies produced an internalization of the white gaze, the work of bourgeois cultural hegemony on the colonized, and then illustrated a comparable process at the colonial school: "In the Antilles, the young *Noir*, who at school never ceases repeating 'our fathers, the Gauls,' identifies with the explorer, the civilizer, the White man who brings truth to the savages, an all-white truth. There is identification—that is, the young *Noir* subjectively adopts the White man's attitude."¹³⁴ Like in Damas's poetic stylistics, it is

¹³² Cottias, Fleming, and Boulbina, "Nos Ancêtres Les Gaulois... La France et l'esclavage Aujourd'hui," 46; my translation.

¹³³ Cottias, Fleming, and Boulbina, 49; my translation.

¹³⁴ Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, 120; my translation.

unceasing repetition that Fanon underscores. Adopt seems an especially apt word here, suggesting the gap between a genealogy elaborated by heterosexual reproduction—the biological terrain on which the racial imaginary both relies and is routinely deconstructed—and a fraternal kinship authorized by the law. James’s Monsieur Chapuzet, for example, assumed the latter sufficient for his declaration of whiteness. For Fanon, the young *noir* internalizes this gap via subjective identification with Gallic ancestors. This process of adoptive identification was not restricted to colonized Blacks in the French empire; Bernard Lazare’s portrayal of assimilated German and French Jewry in an 1897 lecture described “those Jews who like to fancy that they had fought alongside Arminius in the Teutoburger Wald, or beside Vercigetorix at Alesia.”¹³⁵ And Hannah Arendt’s first column for *Aufbau* in 1942 excoriated the “growing number of [Jews] who believe they must replace Moses and David with Washington or Napoleon.”¹³⁶

The gendered nature of these fanciful identifications and replacements is not incidental. The colonized and/or assimilated subject exchanges patriarchal figures on a homosocial ground of assimilation, echoed in “Nuit Blanche” when the speaker ultimately dances past his Gallic ancestors and towards “uncle Gobineau” and “cousin Hitler.” Vergès argues that the colonial family romance imposed a process of identification on the colonized wherein their two real parents were replaced with an invented singular parent, the *Mère-Patrie*. In doing so, “the French state aspired to substitute an ideal model of filiation for the historical colonial filiation... The construction of an ideal parent associated with whiteness and Europe denied the dimension of race in the making of colonial identity.”¹³⁷ In the case of “Nuit Blanche,” however, the speaker’s

¹³⁵ Bernard Lazare, “Jewish Nationalism,” in *Job’s Dungheap*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Lorin Binsse (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1948), 61.

¹³⁶ Hannah Arendt, “Moses or Washington,” in *Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 150. It is worth noting that Arendt’s column in the German journal (and all subsequent ones), was epigraphed with the English parenthetical, “(This Means You),” similar to the accusatory “you” in Damas’s “Save Our Souls.”

¹³⁷ Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage*, 4–5.

internalization of Gallic ancestry is not represented as a replacement of his parents but as gleeful, embodied performance. The *Mère-Patrie* is remarkably absent, and the contrasting presence of an uncle and cousin at the poem's conclusion further emphasizes that absence. If, as Vergès argues, "the family romance is the invention of children," and, "in the case of the colony, it was the invention of men constructing France as the parents of the colonized," it is then remarkable how the speaker's assimilation propels him beyond such filiation.¹³⁸ It is as though, somewhere along the colonized's journey, the *Mère-Patrie* had abandoned him, the inertial movement of assimilation propelling him instead into intimacy with figures of patriarchal, racial tyranny. If the fraternal fiction of the French Republican revolution produced "a regime predicated on male homosociality," then it appears as though the imperial movements of assimilation represented in "Nuit Blanche" trace the excesses of this homosocial filiation.¹³⁹ For the speaker explores a family tree more expansive than the bourgeois household posited by the colonial family romance.

Vergès also stresses the "particular importance" of the mother-son relation in the colonial family romance: "the fraternal order was also the order of the mother and the son. The central question of the colonized brothers was the relation to the mother, or rather to their two mothers: the native mother and the *metropole*, the 'mother country.'"¹⁴⁰ This question was not only one of subjective identification but also one that coded the material relations of dependence and debt binding the colonized to the metropole. Given the importance of the maternal relation, the absence of a mother, of even a singular *Mère-Patrie*, in "Nuit Blanche" contrasts with the presence of the maternal figure in "Hoquet." The assimilationist, *mulâtre* mother scolds, "did I

¹³⁸ Vergès, 5.

¹³⁹ Vergès, 25–26.

¹⁴⁰ Vergès, 26.

not tell you you must speak French / the French of France / the French of the French / French French.”¹⁴¹ As Fanon would explain this logic just two decades later, framing the primary problem of the Antillean *nègre*, “the more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets.”¹⁴² Damas depicted the mother as complicit in her own eventual replacement by the hexagonal *Mère-Patrie*, already subordinated to the colonial family romance. In “Nuit Blanche,” the speaker has progressed well beyond the “French of the French” demanded by the mother, for his waltz surpasses even those of his Gallic ancestors; consequently, the speaker is left without any parent at all but instead is propelled into a homosocial dance with only surrogate patriarchal and fraternal figures.

Not only has he adopted Gallic ancestors, not only is he enraptured by the sounds of the violin—the lead instrument of Strauss’s “Blue Danube” waltz and the instrument the mother in “Hoquet” contrasts with the banjo and guitar—but he has also progressed from mastering French language and speech to regulating and coordinating the movements of his very body. Suzanne Césaire suggested a link between the speaker’s waltz and more violent relations of colonial inclusion when she described civilization as “style.” She noted first the colonized’s “compulsory submission, under pain of whip and death, to a system of ‘civilization,’ to a ‘style’ even more foreign to the brutally transplanted Africans than was the Antilles’ tropical soil.”¹⁴³ After emancipation, Suzanne Césaire argued, comes the following collective error: “Since the superiority of the colonizers comes to them from a certain life-style, we will acquire strength

¹⁴¹ Damas, *Pigments*, 12–14; my translation.

¹⁴² Add citation and check original in French

¹⁴³ Césaire, “Malaise d’une Civilisation,” 44; my translation. It is remarkable to compare Césaire’s critique of the post-emancipation assimilation of Antillean Blacks with Bernard Lazare’s strikingly similar conclusions in an 1899 lecture about Western Jews: “By a crass distortion emancipation is made synonymous with assimilation. Emancipation is not assimilation. We want the emancipation of the Jews, we do not want their assimilation.” See Bernard Lazare, “Nationalism and Jewish Emancipation,” in *Job’s Dungheap*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Lorin Binsse (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1948), 102.

only by dominating in our turn the technique of this ‘style.’” Damas, in “Solde,” had already intimated the link between embodied stylistics and assimilation to Western civilization: “I feel ridiculous / in their shoes in their dinner jacket / in their shirt front in their detachable collar / in their monocle in their bowler hat.”¹⁴⁴ The speaker of “Nuit Blanche,” however, certainly does not feel ridiculous. His declaration to “have waltzed like never did my ancestors” is nothing if not a boast of his comfort regulating his body according to Western styles. And where the speaker of “Solde” comes to the realization that he “feel[s] ridiculous / among them complicit / ... / my hand horrendously reddened / by the blood of their ci-vi-li-sa-tion,” “Nuit Blanche” concludes with the speaker blithely recalling an imagined choreography in which he leads, or follows, both Gobineau and Hitler.

V. White Night: Waltzing with Hitler

The poem’s final stanza delivers this nightmarish revelation with haunting casualness, suggesting that the speaker’s progressively perfected stylistics naturally lead him to an entanglement with Aryan ideologues and politicians. The speaker concludes,

Mes amis j’ai valsé
valsé follement au point que souvent
souvent
j’ai cru tenir la taille
de tonton Gobineau
ou de cousin Hitler
ou du bon aryen

¹⁴⁴ Translation from Boittin, “‘Among Them Complicit’? Life and Politics in France’s Black Communities, 1919-1939,” 55.

qui mâchonne sa vieillesse sur quelque banc de
square
[My friends I have waltzed
waltzed madly to the point that often
often
I imagined holding the waist
of uncle Gobineau
or of cousin Hitler
or of some good Aryan
who gums his old age on some bench in the
park]¹⁴⁵

The repetition of the speaker's declaration to "have waltzed" produces a spiraling rhythm that finally brings him into an imagined, face-to-face encounter with white—and, more specifically, Aryan—power. This specificity is crucial given the speaker's identification with Gallic ancestors. The poem stages a confrontation between contradictory racial discourses. Contrasting the discursive history of the "Caucasian race" myth, political theorist Bruce Baum describes how "the 'Aryan race' myth was cobbled together from various sources in the mid-nineteenth century...and championed by such nineteenth-century racialists as Comte Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau, the German-born English philologist Friedrich Max Müller (for a time), and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, before it became a linchpin of Nazism."¹⁴⁶ Gobineau infamously argued for the existence of an eternal and "irreconcilable antagonism between races and cultures,"

¹⁴⁵ Damas, *Pigments*, 26 my translation.

¹⁴⁶ Bruce Baum, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: A Political History of Racial Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 7.

setting up a zero-sum game in which one race/culture's gain is necessarily another's loss, and asserted "there is no civilization among European peoples where the Aryan branch is not predominant."¹⁴⁷ In other words, as American scholar Arnold Rowbotham argued in his 1939 "Gobineau and the Aryan Terror," "'Aryanism' is the expression of the conviction that the moral excellencies of our civilization are derived from a single race, the Aryans, who are supposed to have sprung into being somewhere in the plateaux of Central Asia," and as such it "is the expression of an aristocratic [i.e. anti-republican] ideal, an essential belief in pure racial stock as a necessary basis of leadership in human affairs."¹⁴⁸

Gobineau's Aryanism thus leant itself less to global racial hierarchies than to racialized class distinctions among Europeans. This was not "the racism of imperial anthropology," from which Pendas distinguishes Nazi racism's core genealogy; Gobineau's was rather a racism "strikingly obsessed with intra-European racial difference."¹⁴⁹ The former deployed ideological modes of differential inclusion and hierarchy to justify the domination and subjugation of non-white and/or lesser white races. The latter justified an enforced, racial homogenization of the European nation-state, shoring up its borders from other races without and expelling other races within.¹⁵⁰ As such, Gobineau's "Aryan race" myth, and especially the myth of the Aryan race's supremacy, disputed French republican historians invoking the Gallic Vercingetorix as unifying national patriarch. Arendt thus described Gobineau in *Origins* as "the last heir of Boulainvilliers and the French exiled nobility who... simply (and rightly) feared the fate of aristocracy as a caste. With a certain naïveté [Gobineau] accepted almost literally the eighteenth-century doctrines

¹⁴⁷ Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races*, trans. Adrian Collins; qtd. in Baum, 128.

¹⁴⁸ Arnold H. Rowbotham, "Gobineau and the Aryan Terror," *The Sewanee Review* 47, no. 2 (June 1939): 152–53.

¹⁴⁹ Devin O. Pendas, "Racial States in Comparative Perspective," in *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany*, ed. Mark Roseman and Richard F. Wetzell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 116.

¹⁵⁰ These two racisms are of course not mutually exclusive both often concomitant.

about the origin of the French people: the bourgeois are the descendants of Gallic-Roman slaves, noblemen are Germanic.”¹⁵¹ Gobineau published his book in two volumes from 1853-1855, before French defeat at the hands of the Prussians would cause the defensive consolidation of national mythology that would universalize “our ancestors the Gauls” across the French imperial nation and refocus away from Germanic (i.e. Aryan/Teutonic) ancestors. Gobineau’s paternal filiation with Hitler in the poem therefore signals the twentieth-century retrieval of Gobineau’s obsession with civilizational decline. Hannah Arendt explains, “Step by step, [Gobineau] identified the fall of his caste with the fall of France, then of Western civilization, and then of the whole of mankind. Thereby he made that discovery for which he was so much admired by later writers and biographers, the discovery that the fall of civilizations is due to a degeneration of race and that the decay of race is due to the mixture of blood.”¹⁵²

The speaker’s waltz thus brings together two genealogies of European race doctrine; the differentially-inclusive regime of French imperialism that subjected the colonized to a mythological French identity, and the racial theories of European civilizational decline that rejected ideological inclusivity in favor of conservative racial purity. The two are not, however, simply conflated or collapsed. Damas’s point was not, as Stuart Hall theorized, to conjure a “single stream of ‘dominant ideas’ into which everything and everyone has been absorbed, but rather the analysis of [racial] ideology as a differentiated terrain, of the different discursive currents, their points of juncture and break and the relations of power between them.”¹⁵³ It is Damas’s *noir*, spiraling madly into intimacy with Aryan power, who illustrates the points of juncture that unify discrete regimes of race and racializing assemblages into a discursive

¹⁵¹ Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 171.

¹⁵² Hannah Arendt, “Race-Thinking Before Racism,” *The Review of Politics* 6, no. 1 (January 1944): 57.

¹⁵³ Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 5 (1986): 22.

formation named Western civilization. The assimilated's imperial, geographic movement from colony to metropole is thus complemented by an ideological movement from identification with the Gauls to intimacy with the Aryans. Through the figure of the *noir* and his assimilation dance, Damas puts these two genealogies of European race doctrine into an intimate, familial relation—just as Arendt put German and French imperial contexts in relation. After all, as Fanon retorted to colonial psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni, “it is utopian to try to ascertain in what ways one kind of inhuman behavior differs from another kind of inhuman behavior.”¹⁵⁴ His subsequent rhetorical question was even more on the nose: “I should simply like to ask M. Mannoni whether he does not think that for a Jew the differences between the anti-Semitism of Maurras and that of Goebbels are imperceptible.”

For the poem's speaker, the differences are less salient than their genealogical filiation. Damas showed how the colonial family romance itself created filiations that transgressed the national borders of racializing assemblages: the *noir*'s successful assimilation, his identification with the Gallic Father, eventually leads him to an imagined filiation with “uncle Gobineau” and “cousin Hitler.” For once assimilated onto the “ideological terrain” (or dance floor) of Western civilization, the speaker's repetitive rhythmic movements spiral him into horizontal relationships that exceed the purely vertical relation to the *Mère-Patrie*, or the Gallic Father.¹⁵⁵ Borders between French imperialism and Nazi race doctrine evaporate, as the two appear in the terms of what Fanon aptly called “family quarrels.”¹⁵⁶ As noted, Vergès argued that the family romance imbued colonial relations with “intimate meaning.”¹⁵⁷ And indeed, Girault's manual plainly

¹⁵⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 63.

¹⁵⁵ I take this term “ideological terrain” specifically from Stuart Hall, which “replaces the notion of fixed ideological meanings and class-ascribed ideologies with the concepts...of struggle and the task of ideological transformation.” See Hall, “The Problem of Ideology-Marxism Without Guarantees,” 40.

¹⁵⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 2008, 87.

¹⁵⁷ Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage*, 3.

asserted that the ideal of the French policy of assimilation was “an ever more *intimate union* between the colonial territory and the metropolitan territory.”¹⁵⁸ The speaker reveals how the successful production of this union, the successful interpellation of the colonized into a family romance, had ideological effects that exceed this family unit. What appeared merely as a phantasm of performed technique becomes a phantasm of proximity to racial doctrinaires. And what had appeared as the speaker’s somewhat humorous and plainly absurd declarations become a nightmare in which the speaker hallucinates intimacy with Gobineau and Hitler.

Or rather, not a nightmare but a “sleepless night.” The poem’s title, “Nuit Blanche,” plays on the French phrase’s literal and idiomatic meanings. Literally “White Night,” the title suggests a disorienting whiteness overtaking a temporal zone of blackness. At the same time, the phrase idiomatically signifies a “sleepless night” in which the speaker waltzes like a zombie through the darkness. In his comments on Black Surrealism, Robin Kelley argues that “for black folk... the night represents pleasure *and* danger, beauty *and* ugliness. Besides its blackness, with all its mystery and elegance, richness and brilliance, the night is associated with hooded Klansmen and burning crosses, the long night of slavery, the oppression of dark skin.”¹⁵⁹ Damas’s white and sleepless night suggested how the “mystery and elegance, richness and brilliance” of Blackness were foreclosed to the assimilated speaker. It also illustrated how dreaming itself was therefore deferred—the dreaming Kelley contends is foundational to Surrealism’s urge “to improvise and invent” and to recognize “the imagination as our most powerful weapon.”¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, while the speaker’s waltz suggests an automatized movement that resembles the surrealist practice of automatic writing, which claimed to “plunge below the surface of consciousness,” the speaker’s

¹⁵⁸ Girault, *Principes de Colonisation et de Législation Coloniale: Les Colonies Françaises Avant et Depuis 1815*, 32; emphasis added.

¹⁵⁹ Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, 157.

¹⁶⁰ Kelley, 159.

movement is in fact regulated by a particular, internalized choreography. Assimilation has invaded and ordered even the unconscious.¹⁶¹ As in the “incremental repetition” that led the speaker to claim his waltz on “some blue Danube / white Danube / red Danube / green Danube / pink Danube,” assimilation itself, and its reliance on performed repetitions, appears as its own kind of automatism. If surrealism, as described by Breton, entails “a certain psychic automatism that corresponds rather well to the dream state,” then Damas suggested the foreclosure of pure or primordial automatism and dreaming for the assimilated, as such an automatism/dreaming assumes access to a pure, primordial unconscious unstructured by racializing assemblages.¹⁶² Damas thus situated automatism in the poem on a particular ground, or dance floor—a particular ideological terrain. For the assimilated, this situated automatism reveals the repetitive rhythm that arranges him into various positions and encounters across the assimilating civilization’s cultural and discursive repertoire.

Damas mimicked the surrealist impulse “to lessen and eventually to completely resolve the contradiction between everyday life and our wildest dreams” by highlighting the resolution of everyday life with the assimilated’s wildest dreams.¹⁶³ The poem’s concluding lines exchange the singular figures of “tonton Gobineau” and “cousin Hitler” with a dancing partner both frightening and mundane: “j’ai cru tenir la taille / ... / du bon arien / qui mâchonne sa veillesse sure quelque banc de / square [I imagined holding the waist...of some good Aryan who gums his old age on some park bench].”¹⁶⁴ The speaker’s nightmarish waltz through European ideology, dancing with patronymic figures of racial supremacy, ends at a social encounter with an

¹⁶¹ Kelley, 160.

¹⁶² André Breton, “The Mediums Enter (1922),” in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 742.

¹⁶³ This definition comes from the Chicago Surrealist Group (1976), quoted in Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, 158.

¹⁶⁴ Damas, *Pigments*, 26; my translation.

unremarkable and anonymous, old, white Frenchman. The solitary “square” concluding the poem emphasizes that the triangular waltz has come to an abrupt halt. Through their choreographed exchangeability, the grand Gobineau and Hitler are reduced by the speaker to a nameless white Frenchman past his prime, but an “Aryan” nonetheless. The speaker’s “bon arien” is also a *calembour*, a common French form of wordplay that creates homophonic irony. For “bon arien,” when spoken, creates the double sense of “bon à rien,” or “good for nothing.” The speaker’s mastery of the French language thus allows for a humorous and dismissive pacification of white French claims of racial superiority as mere annoyances.

The assimilated speaker’s intimacy with European ideology is compressed in the poem’s final lines at a local site of social encounter in Paris, his colonial education and mimicry bringing him into jarring proximity to differentially hostile neighbors. Wolfe argues that race synchronically gathers “colonialism’s coexistent social discourses” and “compresses colonialism’s cumulative history” such that “aggregated historical disparit[ies]” are “telescoped at individual sites of confrontation.”¹⁶⁵ In the poem, Damas gathers the historic movements of colonial assimilation and the synchronic discursive figures of a revived Gobineau and extant Hitler in order to telescope an encounter between a *noir* and an Aryan in a Paris park, provoking an uneven confrontation between imperial inclusion and racial hierarchy and/or exclusion. Wolfe suggests, as noted, that “racialisation represents a response to the crisis occasioned when colonisers are threatened with the requirement to share social space with the colonised,” including when imperial or juridical forms of inclusion remove spatial or ideological barriers in metropolitan spaces.¹⁶⁶ Damas’s poem then appears to have provoked such a crisis in poetic form and in doing so revealed the French regime’s filiation with the Third Reich.

¹⁶⁵ Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, 19–21.

¹⁶⁶ Wolfe, 14.

Damas therefore extended the strategic surrealist translation of Leninist anti-imperialism into textual form. Initially radicalized by the 1925 Rif uprising against Spanish colonialism and French intervention in Morocco, the Paris Surrealist Group published a revolutionary manifesto (1934) in Cunard's *Negro* anthology that Kelley has described as "its most militant statement on the colonial question to date."¹⁶⁷ Anticipating much of the anti-colonial, confrontational stylistics of Aimé Césaire's *Discourse*, and especially its play of metropolitan and colonial contradiction, the Surrealist Group's text—titled "Murderous Humanitarianism"—appears both as a spiteful eulogy for and urgent warning to imperial France. Unlike the intellectuals who "assert their complicity with the hangmen of jingo and capital," the text declared "*Revolution first and always*."¹⁶⁸ More to the point, "in a France hideously inflated from having dismembered Europe, made mincemeat of Africa, polluted Oceania and ravaged whole tracts of Asia," the Surrealists pronounced themselves "in favour of changing the imperialist war, in its chronic and colonial form, into a civil war."¹⁶⁹ The Surrealist Group modified the revolutionary, anti-war slogan formulated by Lenin and Zinoviev in their 1915 pamphlet "Socialism and War," which defined Russian Social Democratic Labor strategy at the beginning of the first World War: "convert the imperialist war into civil war."¹⁷⁰ The Surrealist Group's modification—change "the imperialist

¹⁶⁷ Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, 160.

¹⁶⁸ André Breton et al., "Murderous Humanitarianism," in *Beckett in Black and Red: The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro*, ed. Alan Warren Friedman, trans. Samuel Beckett (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 56.

¹⁶⁹ It is worth comparing in detail the early Surrealist text and Césaire's later *Discourse*. Césaire uncannily writes, "We must show that each time a head is cut off or an eye put out in Vietnam and in France they accept the fact, each time a little girl is raped and in France they accept the fact, each time a Madagascan is tortured and in France they accept the fact, civilization acquires another dead weight, a universal regression takes place, a gangrene sets in, a center of infection begins to spread." And as the Surrealist Group's text concludes by warning the metropolitan bourgeois of "the torrent of those [exotic] energies which soon, much sooner than he thinks, will close over his head," so too Césaire concludes with a similarly figurative warning that unless Western Europe undertakes "a new policy founded on respect for peoples and cultures...[it] will have deprived itself of its last *chance* and, with its own hands, drawn up over itself the pall of mortal darkness." See Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 35, 78.

¹⁷⁰ Lenin and Zinoviev write, "The war has undoubtedly created a most acute crisis and has increased the distress of the masses to an incredible degree. The reactionary character of this war, and the shameless lies told by the bourgeoisie of *all* countries in covering up their predatory aims with 'national' ideology, are inevitably creating, on

war, in its chronic and colonial form, into a civil war”—shifts focus from a war declared between imperial nation-states towards the chronic imperial war declared against the proletariat and colonized at once.

Damas’s “Nuit Blanche,” however, revealed the imperialist war was already a civil war. The mythological geography leading the *noir* back to the Gauls and onward to Gobineau and Hitler was but the ideological dimension of his imperial route into metropolitan civil society. The speaker’s dancing partners are stacked as exchangeable alternatives—

de tonton Gobineau

ou de cousin Hitler

ou du bon aryen

—with the effect that the ideological dance-floor of racial doctrine reduces quite simply to the literal dance-floor of metropolitan Paris. French imperialism’s centripetal ideological pull was matched by a spatial pull, bringing the assimilated quite literally face-to-face with an Aryan supremacy that seemed both moribund and common—and an Aryan supremacy disavowed by the French state and political class. France’s imperialist war already implied a civil one for its inclusive mode of domination generated explosive intimacies in the heart of the metropole, both spatial and ideological. “Nuit Blanche” mimed the figure of the assimilated *noir* to mark the breakdown of national mythology as a discrete unity and the inability of its family romance to confine its included subjects to the nation’s imagined borders. The civil war alluded to in its final

the basis of an objectively revolutionary situation, revolutionary moods among the masses. It is our duty to help the masses to become conscious of these moods, to deepen and formulate them. This task is correctly expressed only by the slogan: convert the imperialist war into civil war; and *all* consistently waged class struggles during the war, all seriously conducted ‘mass action’ tactics inevitably lead to this.” V. I. Lenin, “Socialism and War,” in *Collected Works*, ed. Julius Katzer, vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 313.

line likewise exceeds French national borders, confusing distinctions between the imperial Third Republic and the Third Reich.

Damas's comparative work analogizing assimilated Jews and assimilated Blacks and charting, through these very figures, a particular, historical relation of overlapping regimes avoids reifying Jews and Blacks as "empirical unities" while nonetheless mining their relationality.¹⁷¹ Such work does not foreclose comparison by merely retreating into historical specificity but rather suggests the alternative, fecund possibilities of comparison when specific, historical processes of imperial governance and racialization are put into relation. Damas's focus on the figure of the assimilated makes metropolitan Europe the generative ground of fascist violence, but not at the expense of marking its colonial dimensions. Damas's own negritude journey from Cayenne to Paris, and from assimilated *noir* to class-conscious *nègre*, led him to identify a correspondence with Jewish victims of fascist violence in Germany, in turn illuminating the spectral replication of fascist violence in France. The homology he proposed between racialized Jews and racialized Blacks thus suggested a conception of fascism as a violent imperial relation that re-racializes the included other, taking particular, violent shape according to the racializing assemblages in question. At the same time, and again through the figure of the assimilated *noir*, Damas exposed the ideological overlap and interaction of French and German regimes of race. In doing so, he not only exposed the fiction of their respective national mythologies but also mapped a genealogical relation of European imperialisms inclusive of Nazism.

Furthermore, while Brent Edwards emphasizes interwar, transatlantic Black print culture as the central "ground of a nascent black internationalist discourse" aimed at constructing the

¹⁷¹ Natalie Melas, "Merely Comparative," *PMLA* 128, no. 3 (May 2013): 657.

“‘fact’ of blackness,” this chapter extends Edwards’s scholarship by assuming transatlantic Black print culture’s mutual contextuality with white avant-garde print cultures, the historical rise of fascism, and Jewish diaspora.¹⁷² Edwards frames negritude as a *décalé* articulation of Black diaspora—a point of separation and a point of linkage. Yet such points are imbricated in relations that stretch negritude beyond the Black diaspora itself, for the movement’s so-called “manifesto,” Damas’s *Pigments*, was published by Guy Lévis Mano’s *Éditions* and relied on allusions to Hitler and the persecution of Jews.¹⁷³ In addition to putting the material and ideological context of negritude’s elaboration in relation to other international and Jewish print cultures, such as those derivative of Jewish diaspora, *Pigments* mobilized the overlapping and synchronic contexts of the Third Reich and its persecution of German Jews and, in doing so, invoked the underexplored encounters, intimacies, and adjacencies of negritude strategies of class betrayal and European Jewish politics of assimilation.

¹⁷² Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 265, 8.

¹⁷³ Furthermore, the previously published poems from the collection, including “Save Our Souls,” had been printed not in Black periodicals but primarily white literary ones *Esprit* and *Soutes*.

**Chapter Three:
The Multiplication of Bigger Thomas
Part I: The Data of Fascism**

The vulgar Marxist simply negates, instead of offering constructive criticism, and feels himself to be a 'materialist' when he rejects facts such as 'drive,' 'need,' or 'inner process,' as being 'idealistic.'

Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933)

An assumption which says that a Communist writer must follow well-established lines of perception and feeling...might seem sound. But I think those who put forward this reasoning forget the international framework in which we live and struggle today.

Richard Wright to Mike Gold (1940)

I. Preface: "A Race with Fate and Disaster"

On April 17, 1940, the *Daily Worker* published Mike Gold's second column devoted to reviewing and defending Richard Wright's debut novel *Native Son*. This intervention in the official newspaper of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) largely took the form of a response to the review published on April 14, composed by *Daily Worker* associate editor and Harlem bureau head Ben Davis, Jr. Addressing the "complaints" made by "Comrade Ben," who had summarized party dissatisfaction by criticizing the protagonist's hopelessly non-progressive point of view and the unflattering portrayal of Communists attempting to organize him, the prophet of U.S. proletarian fiction himself clarified that "it is a fallacy to demand of proletarian fiction that its characters shall only represent the finest and most militant elements of the working class," for "there is more danger in fooling yourself than in worrying as to what the

enemy will say.”¹ Following Gold’s columns, which, according to Wright biographer Michel Fabre, “constituted official Party verdict,” Wright wrote Gold a lengthy letter in gratitude, but with exasperation:

To be quite frank, until you spoke up in its defense, I’d all but given up hope that our movement could look deeper into the book, that we could doff our set of stock-reactions and think creatively...The most startling thing about those reactions [to *Native Son*] is that so few have come forward to insist upon the humanity of Bigger, and the entire novel was written to sear that one idea into the reader’s mind. Are we going to let what capitalism has done to Bigger make us reject him?...Shall we, like sleepwalkers, reject Bigger and leave him to the fascists? Do not the sound of the roar of thousands of bombing planes over Europe—piloted by thousands of white Biggers—tell us *nothing*?...Mike, they forget that we are in a race with fate and disaster. They forget that the issues and the ground of our struggle are being stated and projected today by fascists who know no law and reason, fascists who will use *any scheme* to enlist the loyalties and sympathy of men. Are we Communist writers to be confined merely to the economic sphere of reality and leave the dark and hidden places of the human personality to Hitler and Goebbels? I refuse to believe such. Hitler yells about ‘Strength through Joy,’ and so forth. Well, the old fascist butcher has a good point but he is twisting it for his bloody ends. Unfortunately, there are enough men with

¹ Mike Gold, “Change the World: Some Reflections on Richard Wright’s Novel, ‘Native Son,’” *Daily Worker*, April 17, 1940, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library. Benjamin Balthasar notes that Gold’s *Jews Without Money* (1930) is understood as “the ur-proletarian novel of the ‘Red Decade’ of the 1930s” and that, quoting scholar Paula Rabinowitz, “it was seen then and in retrospect as ‘a road marker to guide the proletarian literature that followed.’” “The Race of Class: The Role of Racial Identity Production in the Long History of U.S. Working-Class Writing,” in *Working-Class Literature(s): Historical and International Perspectives* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2017), 45.

starved sensibilities in capitalist society to follow the Hitlers. Germany's Nazi movement proves it. I, for one, am not going to leave the field to Hitler and his cohorts. Not to plunge into the complex jungle of human relationships and analyze them is to leave the field to the fascists and I won't and can't do that. If I should follow Ben's advice and write of Negroes only within the confines of how the Party views them through political theory, I'd abandon the Biggers. I'd be admitting that they are lost to us, that fascism will triumph, because it alone can enlist the active allegiance of these men whom capitalism has crushed. No. I say, wherever the fascists go with their doctrines, I go. Wherever they seek to claim the souls of men, I, too, make my claim...I wrote *Native Son* to rouse, to agitate, to stir the minds of people to the quicksilver potentialities of the present...*Native Son* agitates not for the conduct of any one person, but for the impending clash of forces which hold our fate. Those forces are locked and snarled in the personality of Bigger. Are we going to run from him and disclaim him? Shall we leave him to the fascists?²

² He continued, "I do not agree with Ben when he implies that the majority of the Negroes are already with us. Such an implication can become a tragedy as grave as that which the German working class made in estimating Hitler's chance for success...Despite all Ben's good intentions, in spite of all the Party has done to win the Negro, it is possible, Mike, for a wave of nationalism to sweep the Negro people today...It is possible that the fascists will make an appeal to them (they are already starting in Cuba!) that will surprise us by its cleverness! If this happens, then it will not be because we have not been heroic in our efforts to win the Negro masses, but because we Communists have been thinking too smugly about the Negro, because we have not been bold enough and courageous enough to admit all the deep nationalist lava damned up in Negro life...Mike, if ten years ago someone had drawn the picture of a German Bigger Thomas and said to the German people: 'Here, in this man lies the key to your future...', the people of Germany would have rejected him, just as today timid people reject Bigger. But it developed that there existed within intelligent Germany millions of spiritually and bodily starved Biggers, Biggers who found their salvation (a tragic one!) in following Hitler and marching in the columns of the Storm Troops!" This text of the Wright's letter to Gold follows the corrected draft in Wright's papers; see Richard Wright, "Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright," 1940, 1-8, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library. There are two other versions of the letter quoted by Wright biographer Michel Fabre, in *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* (1973) and *Richard Wright: Books and Writers* (1990), respectively. In the latter, Fabre quotes a lengthier description of Hitler's appeals: "Hitler yells about 'strength through joy, organic satisfactions,' 'the organic state,' 'a solidarity of ideals,' etc." Fabre speculates the letter was composed and sent in May following Gold's third column. However, it is possible that Wright sent it between Gold's second and third columns and that the letter, and its international turn,

Wright's pressing attention to the international threat of the Nazi offensive in Europe—a situation he does not hesitate to describe as “an emergency” for the CPUSA—is perhaps an unlikely defense of *Native Son*. Certainly, by March 1940, the ruling Nazis had consolidated a racial state in Germany, annexed Austria, occupied Czechoslovakia and Poland, and were preparing to invade France. But, in contrast to these international events, the novel chronicles, in harrowing psychological detail, a brief period in the life of Bigger Thomas, an impoverished and adrift teenager from Chicago's Black Belt. Bigger is briefly employed as a chauffeur for the rich, white, and liberal Dalton family; the reformist philanthropist Mr. Dalton is a real-estate magnate whose company owns the slum-like tenement apartment in which Bigger's family lives. In a horrifying moment of fear and frenzy, Bigger kills Mr. Dalton's daughter Mary and, in the panic and paranoia that follows, brutally rapes and murders his lover Bessie Mears. The novel concludes with Bigger's dramatic trial (which overwhelmingly fixates on the death of the white Mary) and impending execution by the state. Wright's defensive pivot, beseeching attention to the rise of the “Nazi movement,” appears less than straightforward.³

Davis's assumption that the Black American poor possessed, by and large, a naturally “progressive” character led to his characterization of Bigger Thomas as an unfortunate deviation ill-suited for revolutionary representation. Davis's limited criticism focused on Wright's representation of both a poor Black man without any “progressive” attitude toward his oppression and purportedly atypical white Party members.⁴ Wright's pivot pointed to the spectacular failure of Davis's approach on an international scale; in another version of Wright's

therefore influenced Gold's writing of his subsequent column. See Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, trans. Isabel Barzun (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1973), 185; Michel Fabre, *Richard Wright: Books and Writers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 73.

³ Wright, “Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright,” 5.

⁴ Ben Davis, Jr., “Richard Wright's ‘Native Son’ a Notable Achievement,” *Sunday Worker*, April 14, 1940, 6, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

letter to Gold, he suggested the homology of literary and national constraints, arguing that those who assert Communist writers “must follow well-established lines of perception and feeling...forget the international framework in which we live and struggle.”⁵ Illustrating this international framework, Wright did not position Black Americans as potential victims of the Nazi offensive but rather invoked a specter of fascism sweeping the “Negro people today.”⁶ Instead of limiting his debate with Davis to the CPUSA’s “efforts to win the Negro masses,” Wright went further by illustrating that the Party’s literary prescriptions not only remained “trapped with the nice concepts of bourgeois thought and dignity” but also occluded the very people—the thousands of Biggers “whom capitalism has crushed”—that fascist movements had so successfully enlisted.⁷ Wright wrote to Gold,

When a reader rejects Bigger, he is not rejecting a Negro boy, but he is refusing to try to understand the drift of complex forces which are striving for mastery and dominance in the world today. With Manchuko, China, Ethiopia, Spain, Austria, Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, Denmark, and Norway behind us, had we better not examine clearly the lives of men and see why it is that fascism is snatching so many of them from us?⁸

Wright did not merely counter Davis’s somewhat mechanical failure to take Bigger’s consciousness seriously —its “deep nationalist lava” and “stress and strain”—but mapped this failure onto the fatal international inadequacy of Comintern approaches to fascism, which had by 1940 provided a tragic salvation to “millions of spiritually and bodily starved Biggers.”⁹

⁵ Qtd. in Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 185.

⁶ Wright, “Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright,” 6.

⁷ Wright, 4, 5.

⁸ Wright, “Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright.”

⁹ Wright, 7, 5, 8.

II. Paratexts and Periscopic Comparison

Wright's letter to Gold condenses the multiple concerns animating this chapter: the Nazi imperialism in Europe synchronic to Wright's story of Bigger Thomas; the affective and psychic registers in which Wright implied the Nazi movement established its hegemony; the multiplication of Bigger Thomas across an international capitalist machine; the dispersed lumpenproletariat that evades Marxist schema; the consequently twinned critique of approaches to organizing Black masses and countering the rise of fascism; and the paratextual realm in which Wright inscribed these concerns. Notably, Jews as such are absent in the letter to Gold, mirroring the submerged, disguised, and ambiguous role assigned to Jewishness in the novel. However, in "How 'Bigger' Was Born," the lecture eventually published as an individual pamphlet and added as a preface to the novel, Wright did allude to the "reactions, moods, phrases, attitudes" of oppressed German Jews as important clarifications of Bigger's personality; and, in a June reply to David L. Cohn's caustic review of the novel in the *Atlantic*, Wright activated a particular comparison between Bigger Thomas and Herschel Grynszpan, a seventeen year old Polish Jewish refugee who assassinated Nazi diplomat Ernst vom Rath in Paris in 1938; Nazi leadership organized the notorious *Reichspogromnacht* in response.¹⁰ Modulating his observations of Black Americans to the reported tempers of both fascisized Germans and oppressed Jews, Wright not only multiplied narrativized analogies between white supremacy and antisemitism, and between Blacks and Jews. He also exposed a particularly degraded and dispossessed lumpen type multiplying across radically different, and often ostensibly incommensurable, locations of an international capitalist machine.

¹⁰ Richard Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born: The Story of Native Son, One of the Most Significant Novels of Our Time, and How It Came to Be Written* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 16.

The novel's naturalist form, chronicling the environmental formation of a Black teenage criminal in Chicago, magnified Bigger Thomas's consciousness, domesticating and containing its development within the localized regime of white supremacy in industrial Chicago.¹¹ As if these alone fail to account adequately for Bigger, however, Wright chased the novel's interpretation in public and private paratexts.¹² In the letter to Gold, he admitted that "under ordinary circumstances, I would feel that a book ought to stand or fall on its own. But it is not, specifically for *Native Son* that I'm speaking now; there are graver and deeper issues involved."¹³ Indeed, Wright's offensive and defensive paratexts abruptly expanded the novel's heuristic geography, augmenting and twisting what Wright considered the parochial and dangerously shortsighted CPUSA approach to organizing Black Americans.¹⁴ The pamphlet "How 'Bigger' Was Born," published by Harpers & Brothers in July, was first delivered as a lecture at Columbia University's Institute of Arts and Sciences on March 12, just a week and a

¹¹ Literary scholar Nathaniel Mills summarizes the critical consensus when he writes, "In African-American literary history, conventions of naturalist political protest have been most frequently associated with the work of Richard Wright." Harold Bloom asserts, "Wright's narrative strength depends upon Bigger's personal intensity and detailed, naturalistic vividness," and "the nihilistic aspect of *Native Son* is less persuasive than its Dreiserian, naturalistic element, where Bigger is more at home." Robert Bone, writing just under two decades after *Native Son*'s publication, also connected Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* to *Native Son* by pointing out that both "make use of criminality as their chief dramatic device, and in each case the crime is the natural and inevitable product of a warped society. Both authors draw the data for their trial scenes, in classic naturalist fashion, from authentic court records. . . . Both authors advance a guilt-of-the-nation thesis as a corollary to their environmentalist view of crime." See Nathaniel Mills, "Cleaver/Baldwin Revisited: Naturalism and the Gendering of Black Revolution," *Studies in American Naturalism* 7, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 50; Harold Bloom, "Introduction," in *Richard Wright's Native Son (Bloom's Guides)*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 7–8; Bone qtd. in Gary Scharnhorst, "Naturalism and Crime," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Literary Naturalism*, ed. Keith Newlin (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011), 348.

¹² Paratexts, according to Gérard Genette, include both epitext and peritext. The epitext is "any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space. The location of the epitext is therefore anywhere outside the book—but of course nothing precludes its later admission to the peritext [materially appended to the book itself]." This later admission would be the case for the lecture, "How 'Bigger' Was Born." See *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 344.

¹³ Wright, "Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright," 1.

¹⁴ In the letter to Gold, Wright wrote, "But the reactions to my book in the Daily Worker did not betray any knowledge of what role Bigger (white and black) would play in time of war or fascism in this country! Rather, they were sectarianly [*sic*] concerned with whether I depicted Bigger in the light of the Scottsboro Case!" See Wright, 8.

half following the novel's publication.¹⁵ Fabre translates its intended intervention in the terms of Marxist theory: "Wright was not merely giving the behind-the-scenes story of the several stages in the composition of the novel, nor a reminiscence of his youth. Rather, he wanted his public to realize the dangerous potential of the black *Lumpenproletariat*, wavering between fascism and communism."¹⁶ The pamphlet's composite etiology of Bigger was, in this regard, a Brechtian direct-address to readers that sought desperately to provoke an awareness of Bigger's political impulses. Dislocated and excluded from industrial labor by ongoing divisions and crises of interwar capitalism, the novelistic Bigger embodied the infamous lumpenproletariat—a classed category Marx and Engels dismissed as "social scum" and Engels declared "the worst of all possible allies," not only void of revolutionary subjectivity but a threat to Communist organizing. The pamphlet revealed the multiplication of (white and Black) Biggers on an international scale, serially linked to communists and fascists. It thus compels one to reconsider the political volatility and exigency of the Black lumpen Bigger Thomas. Turning the interpretive gaze outward from the novel, both literally and figuratively, the pamphlet illustrated Bigger's international commensurabilities.

By disclosing his authorial process in private correspondence, lectures, pamphlets, and public responses—textual sites materially external to the novel itself—Wright enabled what I term a *periscopic* approach to representing synchronic, international relations across particular

¹⁵ Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 180, 187. Wright repeated the lecture on April 16 for the Schomburg Collection in Harlem. He then edited the lecture for publication in the *Saturday Review of Literature* on June 1.

¹⁶ Fabre, 187. While Wright never explicitly characterized Bigger as such, this theoretical determination had been made as early as Gold's explicit classification of Bigger as lumpen in a September 1940 column. Furthermore, the third section ("Chicago") of the novel from which Wright lifted the titled *Native Son*—his friend Nelson Algren's *Somebody in Boots* (1935)—opened with an epigraphed quote on the lumpenproletariat from the Communist Manifesto: "The 'dangerous class,' the social scum (lumpenproletariat), that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue." See Mike Gold, "Change the World: Open Letters to a Fighting Dentist and to a Famous Author," *Sunday Worker*, September 29, sec. 2; Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 175; Nelson Algren, *Somebody in Boots* (New York: Ig Publishing, 1935), 215.

regimes of race and their racializing assemblages, revealing that which is obstructed by the naturalist fixation on Bigger Thomas in industrial Chicago alone. Originally used by submarines to view objects above water, a periscope is “an apparatus containing a system of prisms or mirrors so as to give a viewpoint displaced from the observer's eye...thereby enabling a person to observe objects which would otherwise be out of sight.”¹⁷ The novel’s paratexts work as periscopes, refracting the reader’s gaze obliquely; they enable observations occluded by the novel’s narrative point of view but without smoothening the novelistic and paratextual viewpoints into a coherent whole or plane of equivalence. Reading *Native Son* with its paratexts instantiates a method of periscopic comparison in which locations and scales foreclosed by the novel itself become obliquely visible. The paratexts do not merely resituate the novel’s viewpoint within a globalized landscape but rather enact provisional displacements of this viewpoint, tracing slanted lines of connection to incommensurable elsewhere that in toto defy a common ground of comparison (e.g. Bigger’s simultaneous relation to both German fascists and oppressed Jews). These displacements are provisional in an optic sense, a vision of the obscured or out of view that only temporarily replaces the novel’s magnified gaze. Periscopic comparison is therefore a precarious method of illuminating a text’s distant relations without neutering or abstracting its localized viewpoint, provisionally exposing connections between the novel’s psychic magnification of Bigger—its fixed focalization—and the multiscalar commensurabilities that together, in sum, appear radically incommensurable.¹⁸ In other words, identities, subjects,

¹⁷ “Periscope, n.,” in *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, March 2021), <https://oed.com/view/Entry/141048>.

¹⁸ Genette uses the term *focalization* in order “to avoid the too specifically visual connotations of the terms *vision*, *field*, and *point of view*.” He distinguishes internal and external, and fixed and variable forms of focalization. Internal focalization describes a narrative focused through the consciousness of a character; it may be fixed, restricted entirely to a single character’s point of view, or variable, shifting from character to character. External focalization describes a narrative focus on a single character but without disclosing to the reader the character’s interiority. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 189–90.

and regimes that appear incommensurable at the scale of the novel's focalization become commensurable only via periscoping paratexts. Periscopic comparison does not complete or amend the primary text, in static addition, nor does it conclusively provincialize it. Rather, periscopic comparison stabilizes geographic, political, and psychic modulations, locating multiple commensurabilities without conjuring any universal ground of comparison at all.

Analyses of the internationally expansive, comparative work in Wright's writing, including in the pamphlet, often attempt to regulate its movement between binaries of the local and global, particular and universal, Black and white. Paul Gilroy's seminal *The Black Atlantic* made Wright one of its representatives of Black "routes," a diasporic corrective to the "unsatisfactory alternatives of Eurocentrism and black nationalism."¹⁹ Gilroy identified a critical tendency to bifurcate Wright's oeuvre into discrete phases before and after his relocation to Europe in 1947, the latter phase often dismissed as a period of flirtations with European philosophies alienated from the Black American folk.²⁰ Gilroy attempts to demonstrate a geography of Wright's political and philosophical development that does not invert this critical consensus but instead considers the "value" of Wright's overall "restlessness."²¹ To deem the European works inferior reflects, for Gilroy, romantic, nationalist essentialisms that denied Wright a claim to cosmopolitan modernity. In response, Gilroy's examination of Wright's "route from the particular to the general, from America to Europe and Africa" replaces the "unsatisfactory alternatives of Eurocentrism and black nationalism" with the double consciousness of Black modernity.²² In Gilroy's study, Wright's "routes" across the United

¹⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 19, 186.

²⁰ Gilroy, 155.

²¹ Gilroy, 150.

²² Gilroy, 156, 186.

States, Europe, and Africa converge at the singular destination of the general, implicitly reordering Wright's triangulated geography according to linear and progressive development. Considering the existentialist novel *The Outsider* (1953), for example, Gilroy describes Wright's confrontation with the general psychic alienation of Western civilization as Wright's "mature position."²³ Having arrived at the universal implications of Black consciousness, Wright's global movements become a dialectical advance from a provincial frame.

Nicholas Rinehart recently made a somewhat obverse argument. Rather than revalue Wright's latter European writings, Rinehart uncovers the "globalism" that was "present from the outset" of Wright's career.²⁴ He argues that a "globalist imagination... unites [Wright's] oeuvre with a single continuous thread," considering this oeuvre a totality.²⁵ Rinehart situates Gilroy's narrative of generalizing maturation within Wright's enduring global vision. Wright does not move literarily from the particular to the general as he personally moved from the local to the global. Instead, "Wright's aesthetic theory always understands the particular/local as the proper route to the general/global."²⁶ From a nuanced analysis of *Native Son*'s earlier manuscripts, Rinehart concludes that, "though conventionally read as a quintessential American race narrative, *Native Son* should be understood on its own terms: as a work of world literature addressing economic oppression on a broader, global scale."²⁷ He also addresses the pamphlet, alluding to the "considerable difficulties" Bigger's multiplication and comparison to fascists have posed to critics.²⁸ Rinehart, however, only briefly mentions these difficulties so as to avoid getting "stuck" in them, for "the central insight to be gleaned from Wright's essay is its

²³ Gilroy, 159.

²⁴ Nicholas T. Rinehart, "Native Sons; Or, How 'Bigger' Was Born Again," *Journal of American Studies* 52, no. 1 (2018): 184.

²⁵ Rinehart, 166, 184.

²⁶ Rinehart, 184.

²⁷ Rinehart, 165.

²⁸ Rinehart, 191.

continuation and vivid elaboration of the globalist rhetoric presaged” in some of Wright’s earlier non-fiction essays.²⁹ Rinehart therefore illustrates the global register of Wright’s writing from the start. Although he consequently affirms scholarly reconsiderations of Bigger as a generalized “global type,” quoting Yung-Hsing Wu’s description, his critical concern with the totality of Wright’s oeuvre directs attention back to Wright himself.³⁰ The global typicality of the single character Bigger is, for Rinehart, “far less interesting than the authorial construction of that condition.”³¹ Rinehart underscores how Bigger’s multiplicity reflects his author’s globalized intellectual routes, situating Bigger within Wright’s broader “intellectual trajectory,” but does not trace the specificity of Bigger’s zig-zagging multiplication.

Whether or not Wright progressively developed a universal perspective or always evinced a global vision, both Gilroy and Rinehart characterize the “particular/local” and “general/global” as opposite poles regulating Wright’s literary production. In doing so, they pass over the specificity of Wright’s “routes” and especially that of Bigger’s itinerary through Nazi Germany.³² The all-consuming scale of the general and global inevitably homogenizes and flattens specificity across this globe, such that both Wright’s own migration from the South to Chicago and Bigger’s multiplication in Imperial Russia and Nazi Germany dissolve into an undifferentiated sea of flows. A persistent binary between an unexplored “particular/local” and an abstracting “general/global” structures these interpretations of Wright’s comparative logic,

²⁹ For example, Wright’s “Notes on ‘Personalism’” (1935) and “Blueprint for Negro Literature” (1937). Rinehart, 181.

³⁰ Rinehart, 184; Yung-Hsing Wu, “Native Sons and Native Speakers: On the Eth(n)ics of Comparison,” *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (October 2006): 1460–74.

³¹ Rinehart, “Native Sons; Or, How ‘Bigger’ Was Born Again,” 184.

³² These assessments also necessarily pass over the specificity of Bigger’s itinerary through Russia. However, attention to Wright’s involvement with the Communist Party and John Reed Club in Chicago as well as the recurring role played by Communism in the novel have afforded considerable analysis of Bigger’s relation to the prototypical Russian revolutionary subject. See, for example, Nathaniel Mills, *Ragged Revolutionaries: The Lumpenproletariat and African American Marxism in Depression-Era Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017).

rendering the pamphlet a colossal expansion from the novel's microscopic focalization and catapulting its local and particular narrative into a global representation of the oppressed "Bigger Everyman."³³ Periscopic comparison, however, retreats from the abstract scale of the general and the global by enabling the identification of specific international routes, trajectories, and itineraries.

The pamphlet does not simply multiply Bigger into an undifferentiated mass of replicants or a universal working-class subject; or, at least, its universalist aspirations should not be allowed to swallow the specific locations and subjectivities marked by Bigger's multiplication. Attention to Wright's specific movements, both material and textual, reveals the interpolation of this Black lumpenproletarian figure into a fecund series of communists, fascists, and Jews. Wright's paratexts work as periscopes, revealing that which is obstructed by the novel's microscopic focalization on Bigger Thomas in Chicago's Black Belt and that which escaped the novel's initial production and distribution ("How Bigger Was Born," for example, was later added as a preface). In the novel, for example, while incarcerated at Cook County Prison, Bigger admits to his lawyer Max, "I wanted to be an aviator once. But they wouldn't let me go to the school where I was suppose' to learn it. They built a big school and then drew a line around it and said that nobody could go to it but those who lived within the line."³⁴ The pamphlet, however, periscopes from Chicago to Lenin and Gorky in exile in London. Wright shares his memory of "reading an interesting pamphlet" in which Lenin remarked, "'Here is *their* Big Ben.' 'There is *their* Westminster Abbey.' 'There is *their* library.'"³⁵ Wright identified an identical "sense of

³³ Wu, "Native Sons and Native Speakers: On the Eth(n)Ics of Comparison," 1467.

³⁴ Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), 353.

³⁵ Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 1940, 14–15. The original source of this story is Trotsky's biography of Lenin, first published by the Soviet State Publishing House in 1924. In the original, it is to Trotsky himself, rather than to Gorky, that Lenin makes his remarks. Nathaniel Mills suggests that Wright intentionally changed Trotsky to Gorky, either for "situated political reasons" or, through the literary figure of Gorky, "to project himself into the anecdote as the committed writer taking from Lenin a lesson he would implement in his fiction." This speculation assumes that

exclusion....It was this intolerable sense of feeling and understanding so much, and yet living on a plane of social reality where the look of a world which one did not make or own struck one with a blinding objectivity and tangibility.”³⁶ Wright’s reference to the Communist pamphlet, like the material production of his own pamphlet, maneuvers around the novel’s focalization to coordinate multiple scales and registers of material and psychic dispossession across what Wright described as a vast “commodity-profit machine.”³⁷ The periscopic comparison prefigures Deleuze and Guattari’s assertion of the correspondence between political and libidinal economies as well as their notion (itself indebted to Egyptian French economist Samir Amin) of a “world-wide capitalist machine” that integrates and enfolds centers and peripheries.³⁸ The pamphlet’s coordination of these scales and registers suggests that the United States and the Third Reich represent neither parallel regimes of racialized oppression nor discrete phases in the international development of racial capitalism. Rather, they are networked appendages of an expansive “machine” in which components replicate, rearrange, and recode spasmodically.³⁹

Wright’s literary attempt to anticipate Bigger’s revolutionary/reactionary valence—Bigger’s “quicksilver potentialities”—also adumbrates Deleuze and Guattari’s “schizoanalysis”

Wright was aware of the original, a difficult assumption given that, in Wright’s contribution to the 1949 collection of essays *The God That Failed*, Wright divulged that he “had not read any of Trotsky’s works” at the time he was considering joining the Communist Party—and the party certainly would not have been distributing Trotsky’s writings by that point. There is no reason to assume Wright would have been under political pressure to lie in the 1949 essay, which came seven years after he had left the party and which was precisely focused on his disillusionment with it. Furthermore, there were no works of Trotsky found in Wright’s library as catalogued by Michel Fabre. It therefore seems more likely that there was indeed a pamphlet distributed to Wright by the party in the 1930s that plagiarized the story from Trotsky’s biography but, for party propaganda reasons, swapped Trotsky out for Gorky. See Leon Trotsky, *Trotsky on Lenin* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 219; Nathaniel Mills, “Marxism, Communism, and Richard Wright’s Depression-Era Work,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Wright*, ed. Glenda R. Carpio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 70; Richard Wright, “Richard Wright,” in *The God That Failed: A Confession*, ed. Richard Crossman (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1949), 130.

³⁶ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 15.

³⁷ Wright, 12.

³⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 231.

³⁹ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 12.

of the oscillations between revolutionary and reactionary poles of desire.⁴⁰ Heavily influenced by the “materialist psychiatry” of anti-fascist Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich—whose *Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933) will be a key synchronic interlocutor to Wright’s writings in this chapter—Deleuze and Guattari set out to “analyze the specific nature of the libidinal investments in the economic and political spheres, and thereby to show how, in the subject who desires, desire can be made to desire its own repression...All this happens, not in ideology, but well beneath it. An unconscious investment of a fascist or reactionary type can exist alongside a conscious revolutionary investment.”⁴¹ By shifting political analysis from ideology to desire, Deleuze and Guattari not only make legible subjective ambivalence and multiplicity but also the international commensurabilities that traverse historically constituted political regimes and self-conscious political subjects. Deleuze and Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* was itself indebted to the theorizations of Black American militants, primarily through the dossier on George Jackson’s assassination published by Michel Foucault’s *Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons* (of which Deleuze was a key participant). There is therefore a temporally disjointed convergence between Wright and Deleuze and Guattari’s thought as mediated by Wright’s influence on theoreticians of the Black Panther Party (BPP).

For Wright, and especially his *Native Son*, would influence a number of Black anti-capitalist and anti-colonial militants. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1955), Frantz Fanon found in Bigger Thomas a fearsome illustration of the Black man’s explosive agency: “Bigger Thomas acts. He acts to put an end to the tension. He answers the world’s expectations.”⁴² For BPP Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver, Bigger Thomas, the “black rebel of the ghetto and a

⁴⁰ Wright, “Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright,” 8.

⁴¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 118, 105.

⁴² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 118.

man,” sharply spotlighted the dangerous yet awesome potential of masculine Black rebellion.⁴³ Black nationalist essayist and scholar Addison Gayle Jr. also described twentieth-century Black American men “capable of resurrecting our manhood” as “full-bodied Bigger Thomases.”⁴⁴ Yet, in another essay, Gayle noted the context of Wright’s writing and curiously asserted that Bigger Thomas reflected what he called a “concentration camp environment”:

In Europe, German aggression was well under way. In a short time almost the whole of Europe would come under the sway of a tyranny as vicious as that under which Blacks have lived in this country for over two hundred years. In America, the detention camps would later house American citizens of Japanese descent, who would be subjected to persecution and abuse. The paranoiac attacks on the Jewish population of Germany would be reiterated in the propaganda attacks on the Jewish population in America. For Blacks, the journey from South to North would prove to be no more than a journey from one kind of oppression to another. For any sensitive individual living in this tumultuous period, the symbol of man’s reality was...the concentration camp.⁴⁵

Gayle puts the novel in an expansive international and comparative frame, linking the carceral internment of Black Americans, Japanese Americans, and European Jews—and certainly complicating Gilroy’s later implication that Black nationalist criticism confined Wright’s work to the narrow particular. Gayle does praise Wright’s “nationalistic formula,” yet he does so only after examining the novel’s existential chaos and violence “in light of the concentration camp

⁴³ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1992), 131.

⁴⁴ Addison Gayle Jr., “The Children of Bigger Thomas (1968),” in *Addison Gayle Jr. Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment Jr. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 438.

⁴⁵ Addison Gayle Jr., “Cultural Nationalism: The Black Novelist in America (1971),” in *Addison Gayle Jr. Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment Jr. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 95.

metaphor.”⁴⁶ The figural abstraction of the concentration camp reflects less a historicization of the novel than the Black nationalist and anti-capitalist discourses prevalent at the time of Gayle’s writing, which constructed a genealogy of political violence that linked fascism to the postwar “prison regime” and compared the political and economic conditions of Black Americans to those of concentration camps.⁴⁷ It is not clear (and indeed is unlikely) that Deleuze and Guattari had access to or were aware of Gayle’s writing but it is striking that Gayle describes German fascist antisemitism in the psychoanalytic register of paranoia, identical to Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of the “paranoiac fascisizing type.”⁴⁸

A focused examination of paratexts surrounding the novel immediately after its publication traces a complex comparative geography in which Bigger is inserted into a multiplying chain of volatile, revolting personalities. Considering these paratexts’ periscopic capacities will demonstrate their circumvention or suspension, but not dissolution, of the novel’s immersive focalization on the individual Bigger Thomas. The paratexts curve this Bigger Thomas onto an international scale of analysis, making visible the diachronic and synchronic lines of connection through which Bigger Thomas in red-lined Chicago is modulated to Biggers around the world. And, furthermore, they reorient CPUSA criticism of the novel by answering its insular debates on proletarian art and the Black American poor with the international emergency of real-existing fascism. Wright therefore established a tension between the naturalist Chicago

⁴⁶ Gayle Jr., 96, 95.

⁴⁷ See Dylan Rodriguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 113–44; Meredith Roman, “The Black Panther Party and the Struggle for Human Rights,” *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men* 5, no. 1: The Black Panther Party (Fall 2016): 19. Consider James Baldwin’s 1971 open letter to Angela Davis, in which he asserted, “Only a handful of the millions of people in this vast place are aware that the fate intended for you, Sister Angela, and for George Jackson, and for the numberless prisoners in our concentration camps—for that is what they are—is a fate which is about to engulf them, too.” See James Baldwin, “An Open Letter to My Sister, Miss Angela Davis,” *New York Review of Books*, January 7, 1971, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1971/01/07/an-open-letter-to-my-sister-miss-angela-davis/>.

⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 277.

novel and its international political field that managed to maintain the localized production and expression of Bigger's psychic dispossession while refusing his provincialization. In doing so, Wright circuited the illegibility of the Black lumpenproletariat in the eyes of the CPUSA to the rise of fascism in Europe.

III. An Imperfect Proletarian Protagonist

When *Native Son* was published in March 1940, the book was an immediate bestseller. Thanks to the advanced marketing campaign provided by the Book-of-the-Month club—Charles Poore acknowledged in the *New York Times* that “few other recent novels have been preceded by more advance critical acclamation”—*Native Son* sold out of its exceptional first print run of 170,000 copies in just a few days.⁴⁹ Although the novel was extremely well-received, Wright's letter to Gold disclosed his disproportionate concern with the Party's reception of it. Davis had largely praised the novel in his initial *Daily Worker* review, describing its literary excellence in superlative terms and meticulously unpacking its political power. He took pride in its national notoriety, which attested to “the deep cultural genius of the Negro people” and projected the Communist Party as “the only organization which can give the ray of light to penetrate the swamp of degradation into which the Negro people have been hurled.”⁵⁰ He located the novel's value in its realism, which gave a relentless depiction of “the existence of special oppression of the Negro people as a nation” and offered “a terrific indictment of capitalist America.”⁵¹ Davis described Bigger as an “anti-social criminal” and lauded Wright's ability to humanize such a figure, showing that he is not “a natural killer, a born monster” but a “living, thinking being,

⁴⁹ Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2001), 181, 191. According to Fabre, the novel's sales broke twenty-year records at Harper's. See *Unfinished Quest*, 180.

⁵⁰ Davis, Jr., “Richard Wright's ‘Native Son’ a Notable Achievement.”

⁵¹ Davis, Jr.

trying to reason out his way to freedom, equality and opportunity, and who becomes lost before he finds the way.”⁵² This praise seems to confirm the success of *Native Son* in Davis’s eyes.

Davis argued that Bigger enabled Wright not only “to make his indictment of capitalism airtight” but also to speak “to America in terms of the kind of Negro which they have been taught exists. America must listen because Wright talks to them in their own personal medium, and on their grounds.”⁵³ The novel internally mirrors this relationship with its readers when, in a moment of fantastic claustrophobia and suffocating pity and shame, a stream of close family and friends, lawyers, trial witnesses, and even the Daltons crowd around Bigger in an unnamed room in a Chicago municipal building after he awakens from fainting at the trial inquest. Taking stock of the Black and white eyes gazing at him and each other, Bigger rages, “*They ought to be glad!...Had he not taken fully upon himself the crime of being black?*”⁵⁴ Considering the novel in terms of its immediate reception, Davis understood Bigger’s affirmation of an abject Blackness as a literary revolt that mediated between the novel’s readers and their own monstrous creation—similar to Fanon’s allusion to Bigger, who “answers the world’s expectations.”⁵⁵ Davis not only considered the representational power of Bigger’s consciousness but also emphasized Bigger’s effect as a novelistic character consumed by a socially-determined set of (white) American readers. It is Bigger’s confirmation of hegemonic racial expectations that provided the language and conduit of Black revolt.

At the same time, however, Davis lamented Bigger’s symbolic status, unsurprisingly referring to the lengthy, dramatic defense plea of Bigger’s defense attorney Boris Max.

⁵² Davis, Jr.

⁵³ Davis, Jr.

⁵⁴ Wright, *Native Son*, 2005, 296.

⁵⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 118.

Delivering perhaps the novel's most infamous argument, Max gives this monologue over some twenty pages:

Multiply Bigger Thomas twelve million times, allowing for environmental and temperamental variations, and for those Negroes who are completely under the influence of the church, and you have the psychology of the Negro people... Taken collectively, they are not simply twelve million people; in reality they constitute a separate nation, stunted, stripped, and held captive *within* this nation, devoid of political, social, economic, and property rights.⁵⁶

Davis felt that the Labor Defense lawyer misrepresented Black Americans by making Bigger an integral type, metonymically standing for the "Negro people" as a whole; Gold would ultimately agree in a September column, supported by his classification of Bigger as lumpenproletariat.⁵⁷

Swiftly identifying Max's speech with Wright's own authorial argument, Davis criticized Wright's exaggeration of a "dangerous criminal...into a symbol of the whole Negro people."⁵⁸

Critics have long made this identification with respect to the extended defense plea, concluding that Max's "main function...is that of authorial mouthpiece."⁵⁹ Max's language of

multiplication, his assertion of the individual's representation of the group, and his attention to the interplay between social environment and individual psychology certainly reflect the

sociological idiom Wright had begun to absorb from debates and lectures at the Federal Writers'

Project's main Chicago office.⁶⁰ Robert Bone locates Wright in a circle of writers who developed

the research methods of the University of Chicago's Sociology School into "procedures of

⁵⁶ Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1940), 333.

⁵⁷ Gold, "Change the World: Open Letters to a Fighting Dentist and to a Famous Author."

⁵⁸ Davis, Jr., "Richard Wright's 'Native Son' a Notable Achievement," 6.

⁵⁹ Kenneth Kinnamon, *The Emergence of Richard Wright: A Study in Literature and Society* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 134.

⁶⁰ At this point in Wright's career, the primary influence was sociologist Louis Wirth. Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 127.

literary naturalism,” including methods of direct observation, extensive gathering of data, and case study.⁶¹ Indeed in the pamphlet Wright describes Bigger’s literary formation in such scientific terms: “Why should I not try to work out on paper the problem of what will happen to Bigger? Why should I not, like a scientist in a laboratory, use my imagination and invent test-tube situations, place Bigger in them, and...work out in fictional form an emotional statement and resolution of this problem?”⁶² Similarly, Max’s argument that the “Negro people” constituted a nation within a nation echoed some of the logic of the “Haywood-Nasanov thesis” that had been CPUSA orthodoxy since the Executive Council of the Comintern issued its resolution on the “Negro question in the US” in 1938; the thesis was especially influential in the period of Wright’s communist education at the John Reed Club but had been abandoned altogether by the time of Wright’s writing.⁶³

While Max’s courtroom argument clearly approximates some of Wright’s intellectual positioning, its insertion as monologue should not be read so transparently as an authorial attempt to directly address readers. Like Davis, Fabre also reduces the novel’s third section to “a repository for [Wright’s] ideological views, as articulated by Bigger’s lawyer,” but he also

⁶¹ Robert Bone, “Richard Wright and the Chicago Renaissance,” *Callaloo*, no. 28, Richard Wright: A Special Issue (Summer 1986): 457.

⁶² Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 20–21. In the introduction to St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton’s monumental sociological study *Black Metropolis* (1945), Wright further explained, “It was not until I stumbled upon science that I discovered some of the meanings of the environment that battered and taunted me. I encountered the work of men who were studying the Negro community, amassing facts about urban Negro life, and found that sincere art and honest science were not far apart, that each could enrich the other. The huge mountains of fact piled up by the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago gave me my first concrete vision of the forces that molded the urban Negro’s body and soul...It was from the scientific findings of men like the late Robert E. Park, Robert Redfield, and Louis Wirth that I drew the meanings for my documentary book, *12,000,000 Black Voices*; for my novel, *Native Son*; it was from their scientific facts that I absorbed some of that quota of inspiration necessary for me to write *Uncle Tom’s Children* and *Black Boy*. *Black Metropolis*, Drake’s and Clayton’s scientific statement about the urban Negro, pictures the environment out of which the Bigger Thomases of our nation come; it is the environment of the Bosses of the Buildings; and it is the environment to which Negro boys and girls turn their eyes when they hear the word Freedom.” See Richard Wright, “Introduction,” in *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, by St. Clair Drake and Horace Clayton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), xvii–xviii.

⁶³ Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2013), 71, 76–80; Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 95–97.

interestingly describes this section as an attempt to break from the novel's constraints: "Wright admitted that he had planned this section in order to express certain ideas which the nature of his main character made impossible to set forth earlier."⁶⁴ The naturalist novel's focalized adherence to the formation of Bigger's consciousness prevented the expression of a sociological or Marxist viewpoint on him. While in his cell, waiting in the limbo between his guilty verdict and execution, Bigger "recalled the speech Max had made in court and remembered with gratitude the kind, impassioned tone. But the meaning of the words escaped him."⁶⁵ The insertion of Max's extended monologue in the novel therefore recapitulates at the formal level the communicative gap between social theory and the consciousness of the dispossessed. Irving Howe summarized the tragedy thusly:

The endlessly repeated criticism that Wright caps his melodrama with a party-line oration tends to oversimplify the novel, for Wright is too honest simply to allow the propagandistic message to constitute the last word. Indeed, the last word is given not to Max but to Bigger. For at the end Bigger remains at the mercy of his hatred and fear, the lawyer retreats helplessly, the projected union between political consciousness and raw revolt has not been achieved.⁶⁶

Rather than Wright's own literary failure, the seemingly incoherent insertion of Max's speech displayed the very communicative limits of Party propaganda.

It is consequently ironic, and validating, that the Party leader Davis criticized Wright for failing to highlight Black progressive political consciousness and white and Black cooperation in

⁶⁴ Fabre, *Unfinished Quest*, 173.

⁶⁵ Wright, *Native Son*, 2005, 419.

⁶⁶ Irving Howe, "Black Boys and Native Sons," *Dissent*, Autumn 1963, 357. Early in the novel, while Bigger interviews for a relief job with Mr. Dalton, the progressive Mary Dalton taunts her rich father, teasing "'All right, Mr. Capitalist!' She turned again to Bigger. 'Isn't he a capitalist, Bigger?' Bigger looked at the floor and did not answer. He did not know what a capitalist was." Wright, *Native Son*, 1940, 45.

the labor movement. For Davis, Wright should have amplified the “power of the Negro people...shown in cultural achievement and in the developing alliance between the Negro people and white workers in the advancing Negro liberation movement.”⁶⁷ Fearing how the “capitalist enemies of the Negro” will exploit Bigger’s representative status, Davis revealed the moral economy and artistic protocols of Communist respectability politics.⁶⁸ Davis bemoaned that “every single Negro character...is pretty much beaten and desperate—utterly devoid of a smattering of the progressive developments among the Negro people...in a city like Chicago where the Negroes are so politically articulate.”⁶⁹ Bigger is a bad Black subject, unfit to represent the “Negro people.”⁷⁰ Yet it is this deviant subject’s exteriority to progressive political development that Wright exposed and struggled to analyze. Davis clarified by highlighting exactly this point: “It is true that Bigger symbolizes the *plight* of the Negro,” but he “does not symbolize the *attitude* of the entire Negro people toward that plight.”⁷¹ It is not Bigger’s degradation that proved problematic but that it failed to ennoble his political consciousness. Bigger’s failure to understand Max’s speech, then, and the speech’s formal incoherence in the novel, preemptively dramatize Davis’s critique.

Davis thus alluded to a transgression that was at once literary and political. Without a “progressive” attitude toward his oppression, and without literary foils “who are finding the correct way out,” Bigger was an imperfect proletarian protagonist.⁷² He did not narrativize the anticipated development of a working-class subject to revolutionary consciousness, according to the conventions of proletarian fiction. Barbara Foley demonstrates that the proletarian novels of

⁶⁷ Davis, Jr., “Richard Wright’s ‘Native Son’ a Notable Achievement.”

⁶⁸ Davis, Jr.

⁶⁹ Davis, Jr.

⁷⁰ Wright, *Native Son*, 2005, 397.

⁷¹ Davis, Jr., “Richard Wright’s ‘Native Son’ a Notable Achievement”; emphasis added.

⁷² Davis, Jr.

the 1930s appropriated the “bourgeois convention” of the *bildungsroman* by translating its “apprenticeship” plot into a “conversion” plot.⁷³ However, *Native Son*, she argues, exemplifies one of the rarer tales of “nonconversion, or antibildungsromans,” in which the hero “fail[s] to mature in a leftward direction.”⁷⁴ Bigger’s failure to cohere within the genre’s conventions signals the insufficiency of the genre’s presuppositions, all too confident in the natural development toward leftist politics. Yet Davis did not notice this critique. Bigger’s degradation remained useful symbolically but, because his criminal, anti-social behavior did not conform to a progressive program of development, he remained out of bounds for Communist organizing.

IV. Political Indeterminacy and the Lumpenproletariat

Davis’s practical abandonment of Bigger Thomas adhered to an orthodox Party position on the lumpenproletariat’s political value, a position that instructively demonstrates how Bigger seemed both to theoretically coalesce within Marxist schema and to challenge his consequent marginalization in the revolutionary narrative. The Marxist conception to which Davis adhered was more or less symptomatic of Marx and Engels’s early dismissal of the lumpenproletariat in the manifesto of the Communist Party (1848): “that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; [the lumpenproletariat’s] conditions of life, however, prepare it far more

⁷³ Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 323.

⁷⁴ Foley argues, “In what is undoubtedly the most famous proletarian antibildungsroman, *Native Son*, Richard Wright explores the irony that Bigger’s extreme alienation and political ignorance lead him to admire Hitler and Mussolini and to gain a sense of self through murdering first Mary Dalton and then Bessie Mears. Some youths on the fringes of the black working class, Wright warns, have been so abused by capitalism that they attack not only the bourgeoisie but the working class as well. In such tales of proletarian protagonists who align themselves with ideas and practices that contradict their class (and personal) interests, the authors demonstrate the necessity for revolutionary class consciousness—as well as the threat of developing fascism among those who reject this necessity.” Foley, 328.

for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.”⁷⁵ While Marx and Engels admit the multiple political potentialities of capitalism’s human refuse, their expectation is clear and sets the lumpen up as a foil for the proletariat’s revolutionary credentials. Marx and Engels disparagingly but descriptively mark the lumpenproletariat’s emergence as surplus—and not mere surplus but surplus that has been disposed, disarticulated from the capitalist systems of reproduction yet hovering around and within its force field. This mass became decisively reactionary for Marx in his history of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte’s 1851 coup; he described its composition of “vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, *lazzarone*, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, *maquereaus*, brother keepers, porters, *literati*, organ-grinders, ragpickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars—in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French term *la bohème*.”⁷⁶ Indefinite and disintegrated, the mass was a cumulative set of exceptionally dispossessed types rather than a class-conscious collective; in Marx’s exoticizing list, they appear as a “spectacle of heterogeneity.”⁷⁷

It is such a heterogenous mass, in contradistinction to the collectivity of the industrial proletariat, that formed Bonaparte’s loyal base: “This Bonaparte, who constitutes himself *chief of the lumpenproletariat*...who recognizes in this scum, offal, refuse of all classes the only class

⁷⁵ Karl Marx, “The Communist Manifesto,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 254. In the beginning of *The Peasants War in Germany* (1850), Engels describes the makeup of the “*plebeian opposition*” to the urban rich in sixteenth century Germany, including “the numerous beginnings of the *lumpenproletariat* which can be found even in the lowest stages of development of city life.” The number of these “vagabonds” increased as “the number of people without a definite occupation and a stable domicile was at that time gradually being augmented by the decay of feudalism.” Interestingly, Engels argues “that a large portion of this class...had not developed that degree of venality and degradation which characterise the modern civilised low-grade proletariat [*lumpenproletariat*].” See *The Peasant War in Germany*, trans. Moissaye J. Olgin (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1926), 45; “Der Deutsche Bauernkrieg,” in *Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels - Werke*, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, vol. 7 (Berlin/DDR: Dietz Verlag, 1960), 338, http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me07/me07_327.htm.

⁷⁶ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 2015), 75.

⁷⁷ Peter Stallybrass, “Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat,” *Representations*, no. 31 (Summer 1990): 70.

upon which he can base himself unconditionally, is the real Bonaparte.”⁷⁸ With attention to lumpen’s literal meaning of “rags and tatters,” Peter Stallybrass argues that the term lumpenproletariat suggests “less the political emergence of a class than a sartorial category. And, what is more, the term had been used by Marx and Engels earlier [in *The Peasant War*, for example,] to suggest a class immune to historical transformation.”⁷⁹ The lumpenproletariat in this sense was a classificatory designation not for a specific sector or deviation from the proletariat itself but a cross-class amalgamation of capital’s refuse (the “*Abhub* [refuse] *allen Klassen*” in both Marx and Engels’s respective texts), stylistically defined by the apparent transgression of liberal bourgeois norms of behavior and dress.⁸⁰ Dominick LaCapra notes that Marx’s treatment of the lumpenproletariat in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* “seems to corroborate the belief in an ultimately progressive development of history in relation to which phenomena may be seen as excrescences... The notion of parasite, however, promotes the tendency not to take certain phenomena ‘seriously,’ notably as serious threats to one’s own conception of society and the movement of history.”⁸¹ Marx not only betrayed a “bourgeois, indeed Victorian, sense of propriety” but attempted to disable politically the non-progressive discharge of capitalism that

⁷⁸ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 75. Engels repeats this assessment caustically in his 1870 preface to the second edition of *The Peasant War in Germany*, as he considers the weak German proletariat’s possible allies: “The *lumpenproletariat*, this scum of the decaying elements of all classes, which establishes headquarters in all the big cities, is the worst of all possible allies. It is an absolutely venal, an absolutely brazen crew. If the French workers, in the course of the Revolution, inscribed on the houses: *Mort aux voleurs!* (Death to the thieves!) and even shot down many, they did it, not out of enthusiasm for property, but because they rightly considered it necessary to hold that band at arm’s length. Every leader of the workers who utilises these gutter-proletarians [*Lumpen*] as guards or supports, proves himself by this action alone a traitor to the movement.” See Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, 18; Friedrich Engels, “Vorbemerkung [Zum Zweiten Abdruck (1870) ‘Der Deutsche Bauernkrieg’],” by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, vol. 16 (Berlin/DDR: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 398, http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me16/me16_393.htm.

⁷⁹ Stallybrass, “Marx and Heterogeneity,” 70.

⁸⁰ Karl Marx, “Der Achtzehnte Brumaire Des Louis Bonaparte,” in *Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels - Werke*, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, vol. 8 (Berlin/DDR: Dietz Verlag, 1960), 161, http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me08/me08_111.htm; Engels, “Vorbemerkung [Zum Zweiten Abdruck (1870) ‘Der Deutsche Bauernkrieg’],” 398.

⁸¹ Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 283.

would challenge his theory of history's revolutionary tendency.⁸² LaCapra's reading of Marx recalls Wright's reading of Davis as a moralistic, "stock-reaction" that defended Marxist theory from Bigger's challenge rather than taking him seriously.⁸³

In terms of potential for revolutionary subjectivity, these "drifters, transients, prostitutes, criminals, and outlaws"—excluded and alienated from the industrial proletariat—were either irrelevant at best or, duped by extreme desperation, susceptible to reactionary cooptation at worst.⁸⁴ There was therefore a continuum in Marx's writing between the embodiment of a transgressive social appearance/performance and political indeterminacy. This verdict remained more or less unchanged in official Marxist theory up through Kautsky, Lenin, and Bukharin.⁸⁵ Bukharin is nonetheless useful for highlighting the psychic volatility that defines this excrescence of industrial capitalism and that is operative in Wright's texts. By the time of Wright's writing, Bukharin's Right Opposition faction had been sidelined in the Soviet Union.

⁸² LaCapra, 284. Roderick Ferguson links the bourgeois morality that often lurks behind Marxist regulations to a normative heteropatriarchy, which excludes the deviant and non-heteronormative subjects from historical agency at the same time that these subjects come to represent the degradations of capital's expansion in the Marxist imagination. See Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 1–29.

⁸³ Wright, "Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright," 1.

⁸⁴ Mills, *Ragged Revolutionaries: The Lumpenproletariat and African American Marxism in Depression-Era Literature*, 2.

⁸⁵ Lenin was unequivocal in his defense of Kautsky's conception of the proletariat, whose dogmatic Marxism, according to populist critics, had driven the "*Lumpen proletariat*, domestic servants, handicraftsmen" from its ranks: "Kautsky examines the distinguishing characteristics of the 'modern proletariat' which created the modern 'Social-Democratic proletarian movement' ... but to date the Voroshilovs [i.e. populists] have produced nothing to show that tramps, handicraftsmen, and domestic servants have created a Social-Democratic movement." V. I. Lenin, "The Agrarian Question and the 'Critics of Marx,'" in *Collected Works*, by V. I. Lenin, ed. Victor Jerome, trans. Joe Fineberg and George Hanna, vol. 5 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960), 157. Furthermore, in his *Pravda* analysis of the Zurich general strike of July 1912, Lenin described the strike-breakers hired by capitalists as of the lumpenproletariat: "the capitalists resorted to the following method. In Hamburg, Germany, there is a firm, owned by Ludwig Koch, which specialises in supplying strike-breakers. The Zurich capitalists—patriots and republicans, don't laugh!—had that firm send in strike-breakers, who they knew included all sorts of criminals convicted in Germany for pandering, brawling, etc. The capitalists supplied this riff-raff or gang of convicts (lumpenproletarians) with pistols. The brazen band of strike-breakers filled the taverns in the workers' district and there engaged in unheard-of hooliganism. When a group of workers gathered together to eject the hooligans, one of the latter shot down a worker who was on strike." See V. I. Lenin, "In Switzerland," in *Collected Works*, by V. I. Lenin, ed. Clemens Dutt, trans. Stepan Apreysan, vol. 18 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963), 161.

However, his earlier *Historical Materialism* (1921) had reiterated and developed the official Marxist position, ascribing to the psychology of the lumpenproletariat “shiftlessness, lack of discipline, hatred of the old, but impotence to construct or organize anything new, an individualistic declassed ‘personality,’ whose actions are based only on foolish caprices” and ascribing to its ideology “a vacillating and hysterical anarchism.”⁸⁶ The lumpenproletariat emerged from a process of demotion or expulsion within industrial capitalism, marking a surplus “personality” whose unmooring from the social structure of reproduction implied a frightful indeterminacy. Davis’s criticism of Wright’s literary transgression indexed these moralizing theoretical positions and also enforced them, implying that Bigger’s literary representation need be supplemented with more normative proletarian and Communist subjects.

But Wright did not suggest alternatively that Bigger Thomas represented a vanguard, revolutionary subject, distinguishing his from a line of anarchist critique associated with Mikhail Bakunin.⁸⁷ And neither did Wright condemn Bigger to counterrevolutionary intrigue.⁸⁸ Bigger

⁸⁶ Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1925), 290.

⁸⁷ In “The International and Karl Marx” (1872), Bakunin wrote, “By the *flower of the proletariat*, I mean above all that great mass, those millions of the uncultivated, the disinherited, the miserable, the illiterates, whom Messrs Engels and Marx would subject to their paternal rule by a strong *government*—naturally for the people’s own salvation! All governments are supposedly established only to look after the welfare of the masses. By flower of the proletariat, I mean precisely that eternal ‘meat’ (on which governments thrive), that great *rabble of the people* (underdogs, “dregs of society”) ordinarily designated by Marx and Engels in the picturesque and contemptuous phrase *Lumpenproletariat*. I have in mind the ‘riffraff,’ that ‘rabble’ almost unpolluted by bourgeois civilization, which carries in its inner being and in its aspirations, in all the necessities and miseries of its collective life, all the seeds of the socialism of the future, and which alone is powerful enough today to inaugurate and bring to triumph the Social Revolution.” See Mikhail Bakunin, “The International and Karl Marx,” in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, by Mikhail Bakunin, ed. and trans. Sam Dolgoff (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 294.

⁸⁸ Social Democratic Party of Germany militant Rosa Luxemburg, in her analysis of the 1905 Russian Revolution, condemned anarchism to “the sign of the common thief and plunderer; a large proportion of the innumerable thefts and acts of plunder of private persons are carried out under the name of ‘anarchist-communism’—acts that rise up like a troubled wave against the revolution in every period of depression and in every period of temporary defensive. Anarchism has become in the Russian Revolution, not the theory of the struggling proletariat, but the ideological signboard of the counterrevolutionary lumpenproletariat, who, like a school of sharks, swarm in the wake of the battleship of revolution. And therewith, the historical career of anarchism is well-nigh ended.” See Rosa Luxemburg, “The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions,” in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg: Reform Or Revolution & The Mass Strike* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), 114.

illustrated the lumpenproletariat's unpredictable but certainly not condemned political trajectory, asserting the emergent necessity of taking the interwar Black lumpenproletariat seriously. As Wright pleaded to Gold, "We are in a race with fate and disaster... If I should follow Ben's advice and write of Negroes only within the confines of how the Party views them through political theory, I'd abandon the Biggers. I'd be admitting that they are lost to us, that fascism will triumph, because it alone can enlist the active allegiance of these men whom capitalism has crushed."⁸⁹ The political indeterminacy of the Biggers within Marxist theory created a fatal loop in which their abandonment in theory prefigured their reactionary cooptation in practice; the lumpenproletariat's theoretical underdevelopment in the Marxist canon demonstrates how their political indeterminacy made them indecipherable. Nathaniel Mills argues, "the conceptual nebulousness of the lumpenproletariat reveals Marxism's points of closure and limitation, and the individuals of the underclass manifest the margins, interstices, and underworlds where Marxism does not yet go and which it cannot yet adequately see."⁹⁰ Wright's critique of Davis therefore more closely resembles the critiques BPP co-founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, drawing on and adapting Fanon's political theory, would make of their Oakland-based predecessor organizations, Soul Students Advisory Council and Revolutionary Action Movement.

Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) had revised the official Marxist verdict by arguing that the lumpenproletariat in colonial territory tilts decisively toward (anti-colonial) revolution rather than reaction.⁹¹ Appropriating the Marxist category to describe the materially and psychically homeless among the colonized, alienated from both indigenous, national culture and

⁸⁹ Wright, "Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright," 2–3.

⁹⁰ Mills, *Ragged Revolutionaries: The Lumpenproletariat and African American Marxism in Depression-Era Literature*, 27–28.

⁹¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 80–81.

the colonizer's material abundance, Fanon considered how the racialized organization of colonial territory inflected this group's political impulses. Interestingly, Stallybrass suggests that Marx and Engels's notion of the lumpenproletariat itself bore the trace of racialization: "Marx and Engels, indeed, sometimes used *lumpenproletariat* as a racial category, and in this they simply repeated one of the commonplaces of bourgeois social analysis in the nineteenth century: the depiction of the poor as a nomadic tribe, innately deprived."⁹² The link between transgressive appearance and political indeterminacy suggests how racialization marks that which disrupts normative Marxist theory; and the depiction of this racialized poor as "nomadic" invokes precisely the "schizorevolutionary" pole that, in Deleuze and Guattari's theory, "follows the lines of escape of desire; breaches the wall and causes flows to move... What matters is to break through the wall, even if one has to become black like John Brown. George Jackson. 'I may take flight, but all the while I am fleeing, I will be looking for a weapon!'"⁹³ In this sense, the lumpenproletariat embodied a racialized surplus of capitalist immiseration, their racialization coding moralistically their exteriority to industrial labor and its progressive, teleological organization.⁹⁴ Seale extrapolated from Fanon's decolonizing agrarian context to the BPP's deindustrializing urban context but was less certain of the lumpenproletariat's political direction. He explained in *Seize the Time* (1970), "Fanon explicitly pointed out that...if the organization didn't relate to the lumpen proletariat and give a base for organizing the brother who's pimping, the brother who's hustling, the unemployed...who's not politically conscious—that's what lumpen proletariat means—...the power structure would organize these cats against you."⁹⁵ Like

⁹² Stallybrass, "Marx and Heterogeneity," 70.

⁹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 277.

⁹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari write that the schizophrenic is capitalism's "inherent tendency brought to fulfillment, its surplus product, its proletariat, and its exterminating angel," provincializing the proletariat as one iteration of surplus reaction. 254.

⁹⁵ Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of The Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991), 30. Newton did, however, express a vanguardist position on the lumpenproletariat, usually

for Wright, the lumpenproletariat was a critical site of struggle, the racialized surplus that oscillates ambivalently outside the industrialized economy and bourgeois order and therefore contained insurrectionary potential beyond the organizing ground of the factory floor.⁹⁶

While Fanon and Seale both asserted the lumpenproletariat's centrality to revolutionary struggle, they did so in the terms of located, spontaneous masses rather than as a world-historical category of revolutionary subjectivity. That is, whether Fanon's peasants "forced off the family land by the growing population in the countryside and by colonial expropriation" or Seale's "brothers standing on the block," the lumpenproletariat represented heterogeneous groups of racialized subjects positioned as the super-alienated surplus of capital.⁹⁷ This understanding opens the lumpenproletariat to international isomorphisms of surplus and racialization without losing sight of the particular regimes of race giving shape to focalized lumpen formations. The international heterogeneity of the lumpenproletariat results from heterogeneous but articulated compositions of capital, such that the international commensurability of Bigger as a lumpenproletariat figure signaled isomorphic processes of capitalist expulsion that nonetheless

associated with Cleaver's 1970 pamphlet "On the Ideology of the Black Panther Party." In a 1970 speech at Boston College, Newton elaborated Cleaver's claim—that "the left wing of the proletarians, the lumpen proletarians, have that revolutionary potential, and... would bring the people of the world to the final climax of the transformation of society"—and forcefully defended it, in part in response to accelerating deindustrialization in the United States. See Huey P. Newton, "Speech Delivered at Boston College: November 18, 1970," by Huey P. Newton, ed. David Hilliard and Donald Weise (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 165. See also Elaine Brown's memoir in which she records Ericka Huggins's description of the BPP's "digression from a strict Marxist analysis" in its position that the lumpenproletariat was "the most motivated sector in America to lead the revolution." *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 135–36.

⁹⁶ Marx himself did, in *The Class Struggles in France* (1850), express a more ambivalent attitude toward the lumpenproletariat. Describing the Parisian bourgeoisie's successful mobilization of twenty-four thousand teenage men into *mobiles gardes* to counter the proletariat, Marx writes, "They belonged for the most part to the *lumpenproletariat*... a recruiting ground for thieves and criminals of all kinds, living on the crumbs of society, people without a definite trade, vagabonds... varying according to the degree of civilisation of the nation to which they belong... at the youthful age at which the Provisional Government recruited them, thoroughly malleable, as capable of the most heroic deeds and the most exalted sacrifices as of the basest banditry and the foulest corruption. See Karl Marx, "The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850," in *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 220.

⁹⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 81; Qtd. in Mills, *Ragged Revolutionaries: The Lumpenproletariat and African American Marxism in Depression-Era Literature*, 33.

articulated to incommensurable racializing assemblages. A destitute, unemployed, juvenile delinquent in Chicago, driven as a child by desperation and violence from the agrarian south to the urban north, Bigger represented the racialized superfluity expelled by the machine of interwar capitalism in the United States. Wright's novel therefore limned the dangerous consequences of ignoring this iteration of what Joshua Clover theorizes as a "foundational contradiction" in which capitalist accumulation "expels its very source of value in living labor"; while the paratexts located commensurable personalities to this iteration without uniting them into a homogenous international class or assembling them into a frightful, rotting mass.⁹⁸

It is unsurprising that Davis also criticized, as mentioned, Wright's "confused" and "distorted" depiction of communists in the novel—Mary Dalton, her lover Jan Erlone, and lawyer Boris Max.⁹⁹ Davis bemoaned the lack of any genuine Black communists in the novel and asserted it misrepresented white Party members. Furthermore, the novel's courtroom drama left little room for representing communist action "among the masses," where Party members were "fighting for decent housing, for jobs, for the organization of the Negro workers into unions, against lynch justice, and for the day to day needs of the Negroes."¹⁰⁰ Young Party member Jan and his girlfriend Mary are "patronizing" and "dilettante" types. Stuffing Party pamphlets in his coat pockets, they direct Bigger to drive them to Ernie's Kitchen Shack on the South Side—"We want to go to a *real* place," Mary said."¹⁰¹ Subordinated as chauffeur, fetishized as poor, and exoticized as a Black man, Bigger is overwhelmed by this social arrangement. After they finish, Bigger drives the two back to the Dalton mansion while they drink alcohol and have sex in the back seat. Davis argued that such reckless, humiliating behavior was atypical of Party members

⁹⁸ Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot: The New Era of Uprisings* (London: Verso, 2019), 194.

⁹⁹ Davis, Jr., "Richard Wright's 'Native Son' a Notable Achievement."

¹⁰⁰ Davis, Jr.

¹⁰¹ Wright, *Native Son*, 2005, 69.

and consequently projected a false image. And although Davis agreed that Max's elaborate defense plea showed "an understanding of the responsibility of capitalism for Bigger's plight," he asserted that it nonetheless "must be categorically rejected as an example of the working class defense policies of the Communist Party or the I.L.D. [International Labor Defense]."¹⁰² Why did Max accept the idea that "Negroes have a criminal psychology?" Why did he not "challenge the false charge of rape against Bigger," and, more so, why didn't he argue for Bigger's acquittal? Why did Max not "deal with the heinous murder of Bessie," Bigger's lover? All good questions.

But by demanding a representation that mirrored the Party's own ideal self-image of revolutionary organization, Davis failed to consider the relations the novel *does* represent, repeating the very ideological error Wright's literary transgression attempted to expose. While Bigger, Mary, and Jan head back to the Dalton mansion from Ernie's Kitchen Shack, "Bigger listened; he knew that they were talking Communism and he tried to understand. But he couldn't."¹⁰³ Mary and Jan's talk of demonstrations and bail money, of comrades and lawyers, fails to enlist Bigger because he quite simply does not understand it, a failure compounded by Davis's criticism of Bigger, Mary, and Jan as insufficient proletarian and Communist characters. In his concern over the portrayal of communists, Davis remained in fact, like Mary and Jan, deaf to Bigger. In the letter to Gold, Wright made clear that his portrayal of communists was meant to force recognition of exactly this problem: "Some comrades are hurt because I stepped in and brutally drew a picture of a Communist making a mistake. But I did it deliberately, Mike. I did it to remind the most advanced sections of the Party that there lies a deep and tragic gulf between

¹⁰² Davis, Jr., "Richard Wright's 'Native Son' a Notable Achievement."

¹⁰³ Wright, *Native Son*, 2005, 76.

them and the oppressed Negro, a gulf created by capitalism.”¹⁰⁴ Whereas, within Marxist theory, the lumpenproletariat’s exteriority as excreted labor marks the contradiction of capital’s reproduction, within the novel the lumpenproletariat’s exteriority as racialized labor figures the revolutionary limitations of the real-existing Party.

V. “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,” Chicago, and the Internationalizing Pivot

Davis, however, ultimately lauded Wright’s novel as courageous and bold and did defend the character Bigger Thomas, even if he was not an ideal revolutionary. He applauded Wright’s attempt “to defend a people all of whom are ‘black things’ to the vicious white ruling class.”¹⁰⁵ And he took pleasure in the fact that Bigger is afforded a glimpse of human understanding only through his Labor-provided defense attorney, which for Davis amounted to “the fact that his allies include whites as well as blacks who will fight with him against the common capitalist enemy.”¹⁰⁶ Most importantly, Davis asserted unequivocally that “since it is clear that Bigger is a product of brutal national oppression, it is correct to defend him, and to hold guilty the capitalist oppressors who drove him to crime. It is very easy to defend a class-conscious white worker or Negro. But to give up Bigger, to abandon him, is to condone the system which crushed his social aspirations and enmeshed him in crime.”¹⁰⁷ This defense of Bigger puts a more discriminating light on Wright’s letter to Gold. Davis did not entirely abandon Bigger, even if only to indict the system that formed him rather than take him seriously as a political agent. His emphatic defense of Bigger suggests that Wright’s disagreement may exceed a limited critique of the CPUSA’s political and literary agenda. In his letter to Gold, Wright also resisted Davis’s national frame, in

¹⁰⁴ Wright, “Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright,” 6.

¹⁰⁵ Davis, Jr., “Richard Wright’s ‘Native Son’ a Notable Achievement.”

¹⁰⁶ Davis, Jr.

¹⁰⁷ Davis, Jr.

which—following Max’s argument in the novel—Bigger’s plight represented that of the Black nation captive within the capitalist United States. In contrast, Wright asserted the international significance and commensurability not of Bigger’s particular, racialized lumpen plight but his psychic vagrancy—the impulses, emotions, and drives that represent millions of multiplying subjects dispersed across communist and fascist fields of territorialization.

Wright’s letter to Gold began by illustrating the contemporaneous transformation of Europe into a Nazi empire, marking the extent to which the novel’s discursive frame materially and conceptually exceeded its literary form as produced and distributed by the Book-of-the-Month club in 1940. Given Nazism’s virtual absence in the novel, whose narrative point of view remains focalized, internally and externally, on Bigger’s psychic experience, Wright’s retroactive, paratextual remark reveals geographies that evade the novel. And emphasizing how fascists had succeeded enlisting millions of men in a destructive consolidation of racialized nationalism, Wright revealed the severe limitations of the Party’s ability to enlist these same men in an international working-class collectivity. They were engaged in nothing less than a war of position, and Wright asserted that the Communist failure to win this war of position with the Nazis in Europe both indexed and amplified the CPUSA dismissal of Bigger Thomas as “only a small and hopeless fragment” of the Black poor.¹⁰⁸ The implications of Wright’s apologia are disorienting. By defending his representation as a brave exploration of “the dark and hidden places of the human personality,” Wright characterized Bigger, the Black lumpenproletariat of Chicago’s interwar Black Belt, alongside European fascists.

But the international circuits of capital, flooding local and national social configurations with distant people and information, made it so. Nationalist ideologies traveled the paths of the

¹⁰⁸ Davis, Jr.

international market piecemeal, and their units of conceptual and affective information were exchanged and appropriated in unpredictable and disorienting ways. In “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,” Wright explained,

Sometimes I’d hear a Negro say: ‘God, I wish I had a flag and a country of my own’...They would suddenly sense how empty their lives were when looking at the dark faces of Japanese generals in the rotogravure supplements of the Sunday newspapers. They would dream of what it would be like to live in a country where they could forget their color and play a responsible role in the vital processes of the nation’s life.¹⁰⁹

The high-quality reproduction of photographs exhibiting Japanese militarism circulated through international routes of exchange and flooded dense urban spaces like Chicago; and Wright described the consequent psychic process in which the photographs produced nationalist fantasies, illustrating the imbrication of political and libidinal economies. Assimilating the images of Japanese generals to the local, epidermal regime of racialization, some Black people identified with the “dark faces” materialized in rotogravure print. But the gap between their racialized desire, stirred by identification with the image’s phenotypic representation, and their racialized subjugation, enforced by segregation, immiseration, and premature death, signaled a *misinterpellation*; they responded to a call not meant for them.¹¹⁰ The recognition of this

¹⁰⁹ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 10–11.

¹¹⁰ Misinterpellation occurs when “people respond to perceived calls (calls to freedom, calls to sacrifice, calls to justice, calls to participation, calls to identity) that are not meant for them.” James Martel argues that “the fact that they show up anyway can cause politically radical forms of subversion” within liberal capitalism. Martel asks, “What if the subject turns her fury at being rejected and humiliated into a source of resistance to the power structures that have denied her?” He answers this question by thinking about misinterpellation’s revolutionary (rather than reactionary, or fascist) potential. Martel argues that “misinterpellation is a principal way that radical change happens in a world dominated by global capitalism and liberal ideology,” their internal breakdowns enabling the emergence of subversive subjectivities that “do maximum damage from inside the apparatus of liberal orthodoxy.” See *The Misinterpellated Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 4–5.

misinterpellation in turn generated nationalist desires of transcendence. As the dominant order's geography of ideological exchange and transmission flooded the industrial city with information and images, Chicago's regime of race introduced accidental detours that stirred subversive desires.¹¹¹ Wright further explained, "because the blacks were so *close* to the civilization which sought to keep them out, because they could not *help* but react in some way to its incentives and prizes, and because the very tissue of their consciousness received its tone and timbre from the strivings of that dominant civilization, oppression spawned among them a myriad variety of reactions"—actualizations and repressions, rebellions and reactions.¹¹² The industrial city's spatial density combined with its racializing geography of subordinate inclusion meant that Black people were subjectivized by the dominant order while differentially subjugated within it.

The pamphlet therefore revealed how the international circulation of images and ideas contained possibilities of both territorialization and deterritorialization, coding and decoding, that were shaped and dominated by local processes of racialization. Interwar consumer capitalism and mass culture in the industrialized urban north produced desires to consume, possess, and triumph, while the racialized repression of these desires—their 'overcoding' in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari—had volatile consequences that were neither inevitably progressive nor safely ignored. Reading Wright's pamphlet with Deleuze and Guattari suggests one of the errant trajectories in which Black radical thought "insinuated itself quite unexpectedly" into multiple "cultural and political terrains" and "effused in myriad forms and locations."¹¹³ This insinuation does not suggest direct influence—as in the case of George Jackson and his concept of "lines of

¹¹¹ "Accidental" is Martel's term, used in contrast to "more 'deliberate'" ways of employing the recognition of misinterpellation. Martel, 52.

¹¹² Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 1940, 8. "Strivings of that dominant civilization" alludes to Du Bois's "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," in which Du Bois formulates the concept of double consciousness.

¹¹³ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xxxii.

flight,” for example—but a certain convergence in thinking the articulation of political and psychic economies via the production of volatile, errant, and fugitive personalities.¹¹⁴ The convergence is not merely conceptual, however; it marks a trajectory in which Wright’s thought made its way to Deleuze, mediated by the theories of the BPP. The pamphlet put forth a play between political possibility and closure that is thus usefully irradiated by Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the vacillating potentials of capitalist social formations: between “desiring-machines...causing their immanent connections to pass into the regime of social machines (the active schizophrenic line of flight)” and social machines “overcod[ing] desire through the transcendent syntheses of representation (the reactionary paranoid investment).”¹¹⁵ Yet the pamphlet also introduced racialization into this dynamic, which, as Weheliye demonstrates, is foreclosed in Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization.¹¹⁶ Racialization generated an ambivalent and fecund ground of political agency that escaped Marxist schema, manifested according to its articulation with other axes of domination. The novel and its paratexts thus together provided a way of detailing subjective, psychic processes as they unfolded in determined locales and social arrangements alongside the asubjective flows of people, ideas, and images that manufacture, interrupt, and divert these processes.

As an “attempt to account for” *Native Son*, “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born” promised to offer an etiology of its protagonist. The title of the pamphlet indicated as much to its readers, seeming to come as confirmation of the author’s naturalist process. However, Wright’s self-described account of the novel—“the sources of it, the material that went into it, and [his] own years’ long

¹¹⁴ See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 277.

¹¹⁵ Daniel W. Smith, “Flow, Code and Stock: A Note on Deleuze’s Political Philosophy,” *Deleuze Studies* 5 (2011): 41.

¹¹⁶ In celebrating racial admixture without interrogating the articulation of racialization with other axes of domination, Deleuze and Guattari ultimately territorialize racial difference as such. See Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 46–50.

changing attitude toward that material”—did not burrow deeper into the sedimented subjectivity of the novel’s individual protagonist. Almost immediately, it exposed a proliferating series of Biggers.¹¹⁷ Wright revealed, “The birth of Bigger Thomas goes back to my childhood, and there was not just one Bigger, but many of them, more than I could count and more than you suspect.”¹¹⁸ Numbering them 1—5, Wright proceeded to describe consecutively the Biggers he encountered as a child in Mississippi, Biggers who “would refuse,” who “wanted to live” and did, “whose only law was death,” who “consistently violated the Jim Crow laws of the South and got away with it, at least for a brief spell.”¹¹⁹ Each offered a contextually varied expression of criminalized revolt. After detailing the Manichean Jim Crow “environment” that provoked these reactions, Wright divulged his own “discovery”—by way of his migration to Chicago and “contact with the labor movement”—that “Bigger Thomas was not black all the time; he was white, too, and there were literally millions of them everywhere.”¹²⁰ Wright’s northward migration was synchronized with international labor migrations from the West’s peripheries—for in “the world-wide capitalist machine... the center itself has its organized enclaves of underdevelopment, its reservations and its ghettos as interior peripheries.”¹²¹ Their conjuncture in a hub of northern industrial capital engendered multiracial collectivities and spontaneous, transversal routes of ideological exchange. Wright’s personal narrative in the pamphlet therefore intimated how industrial capital compressed local, national, and international circuits of labor together in urban metropolises, reassembling multiple flows of people and culture into structured relations and compelling them to interact.

¹¹⁷ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 1.

¹¹⁸ Wright, 3.

¹¹⁹ Wright, 3–6.

¹²⁰ Wright, 6–11.

¹²¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 231.

A brief detour into Wright's biography and his representation of it in *Black Boy* (1945) is necessary to illuminate the pamphlet's concise allusions to a "discovery" in Chicago. After his migration from Jim Crow Memphis to industrial Chicago in 1927, Wright first found work as a porter at a delicatessen owned by Jewish immigrants, the Hoffmans; their Yiddish accents were so thick, Wright could barely understand when they spoke to him.¹²² In the autobiographical *Black Boy*, Wright recounted that when he asked his boss to write down what she wanted from the store, she shouted, "I can't vite!...Vat kind of boy ees you?"¹²³ Representing her voice in written dialect, Wright emphasized her foreignness while she revealed her lack of education. And yet, in industrial Chicago, this illiterate Jewish immigrant was his boss, conveying what Wright describes in his correspondence with Gold as "the complex jungle of human relationships" the modern city presented.¹²⁴ In the autobiography, Wright recalled wondering, "Why could she not have taken more patience? Only one answer came to my mind. I was black and she did not care."¹²⁵ Wright's racialized identity, and its assigned role in the local regime of race, comes to resolve his and his boss's mutual misapprehension. This biographical episode demonstrates how the city organized multiple, distant flows of people into localized, structured relations, compressing Jewish and Black diasporas into disorienting and overlapping arrangements of boss/worker, white/Black, native/foreigner, and literate/illiterate.

Subsequently, after Wright applied for a postal clerk position, he had to navigate requesting time off from Mr. Hoffman in order to study for the examination: "How could I get a free day without losing my job? In the South it would have been an unwise policy for a Negro to

¹²² Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*, 55.

¹²³ Richard Wright, *Black Boy (American Hunger): A Record of Childhood and Youth*, The Restored Text Established by the Library of America, Modern Classics (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 264.

¹²⁴ Wright, "Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright."

¹²⁵ In *Black Boy*, Wright continues "It was not until I had left the delicatessen job that I saw how grossly I had misread the motives and attitudes of Mr. Hoffman and his wife. I had not yet learned anything that would have helped me to thread my way through these perplexing racial relations."

have gone to his white boss and asked for time to take an examination for another job...he would have been risking an argument that might have led to violence.”¹²⁶ Understanding his relationship with Mr. Hoffman according to the Jim Crow regime’s binaristic coding, Wright decided simply to disappear for the few days before the exam and lie upon returning to the delicatessen with an excuse that his mother died in Memphis. When he did return after the exam, the Hoffmans immediately detect Wright’s lies, disavowed the Jim Crow regime, and press him for the truth: “Ve know. You come from ze Zouth. You feel you can’t tell us ze truth. But ve don’t bother you. Ve don’t feel like people in ze Zouth. Ve treat you nice, don’t ve?”¹²⁷ Mrs. Hoffman’s awareness of Wright’s racialized interpretation and her attempt to dissociate herself from white supremacy are futile. Wright explained, “I became angry because I knew that they knew that I was lying. I had lied to protect myself, and then I had to lie to protect my lie. I had met so many white faces that would have violently disapproved of my taking the examination that I could not have risked telling Mr. Hoffman the truth.”¹²⁸ The Hoffmans’ “white faces” intervene into the very possibility of mutual relations of respect and recognition. Wright was stunned—“Their attitudes had proved utterly amazing. They were taking time out from their duties in the store to talk to me, and I had never encountered anything like that from whites before”—but the realization that “that they were trying to treat me as an equal” ironically made his resistance to confession even stronger.¹²⁹ The Hoffmans’ (however unwitting) implication in regimes of white power—implication in the sense that they “inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes”—overwhelmed relations

¹²⁶ Wright, *Black Boy*, 267.

¹²⁷ Wright, 268.

¹²⁸ Wright, 269.

¹²⁹ Wright, 269.

between them and Bigger, reasserting the articulation of Southern and Northern racializing assemblages that Mrs. Hoffman attempted to disavow.¹³⁰

Wright eventually was offered a temporary clerical job at the Chicago Post Office, the largest in the world due to Chicago's position as a railroad center. Biographer Hazel Rowley writes that it was here that, "for the first time in his life, Wright made friends with white men."¹³¹ Wright himself however described them slightly differently in *Black Boy*: they "formed a 'gang' of Irish, Jewish, and Negro wits who poked fun at government, masses, statesmen, and political parties" and, as time went on, "discussed world happenings, the vast armies of unemployed, the rising tide of radical action."¹³² Unlike Rowley, Wright never described his Irish and Jewish friends as "white" in the passage, choosing instead, distinct from the labor relations represented with the Hoffmans, to emphasize multinational collectivity.¹³³ In an earlier passage that relayed his time working in an optical shop in Memphis, Wright described the "dozen white men" who "varied from Ku Klux Klanners to Jews, from theosophists to just plain poor whites"—an extraordinary description that included "Klanners" and Jews under a singular racial heading.¹³⁴ From Wright's point of view, whiteness was capacious enough to contain the antagonism of Klansmen and Jews, suggesting that antisemitism and anti-Blackness are not homologous at all but in some kind of much more complex relation. When Wright wondered which of the white

¹³⁰ Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 1–2. Rothberg continues, "An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles. Less 'actively' involved than perpetrators, implicated subjects do not fit the mold of the 'passive' bystander, either. Although indirect or belated, their actions and inactions help produce and reproduce the positions of victims and perpetrators. In other words, implicated subjects help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present; apparently direct forms of violence turn out to rely on indirection."

¹³¹ Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*, 60–61.

¹³² Wright, *Black Boy*, 285, 302.

¹³³ This difference does not necessarily suggest the anachronism of Rowley's racial ascription. For, as in the Hoffman episode and in *Native Son* (as we will see in the next chapter), Wright himself confirms Jewish whiteness as an integral and evident combination.

¹³⁴ Wright, *Black Boy*, 224.

men would help him get books from the library, he considered “Don, a Jew; but I distrusted him. His position was not much better than mine and I knew that he was uneasy and insecure...I was afraid to ask him to help me to get books; his frantic desire to demonstrate a racial solidarity with the whites against Negroes might make him betray me.”¹³⁵ Unlike the Hoffmans, whose whiteness in Wright’s eyes prevents them from establishing mutual trust with him, it is Don’s perceived fear of betraying a lack of “racial solidarity” with whites that prevented Wright from trusting him. These moments in *Black Boy* clarify Wright’s understanding of Jewish whiteness as an evident and unproblematic combination; whiteness does not replace or efface Jewishness but exists alongside it as Jews align themselves or are hailed into local and national regimes of race.¹³⁶ Don’s “frantic desire” to demonstrate “racial solidarity” with Southern Christians reflected his own subordinate and precarious position within an internally differentiated whiteness, while the Hoffmans’ labor relation with Wright signaled their implication in the epidermally racializing assemblages of Jim Crow and industrial Chicago.

Some years later, after Depression had hit and Wright was collecting food rations and stamps from the relief station in Chicago, Wright continued to join his post office friends on Friday evenings—several of whom had since joined the Communist Party.¹³⁷ Disclosing his desire to be a writer to his Jewish friend Abraham Aaron, Aaron introduced Wright to the John Reed Club, a national organization of proletarian writers and artists with clubs around the country. Wright was immediately recruited for the editorial committee of the club’s magazine *Left Front* and given back issues of *Masses* and *International Literature* for reading. He recalls

¹³⁵ Wright, 245.

¹³⁶ For more on Jewish whiteness in the United States as an “unproblematic combination,” see Ben Ratskoff, “‘Improbable Spectacles’: White Supremacy, Christian Hegemony, and the Dark Side of the Judenfrage,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 39, no. 1 (2020): 17–43; Ben Ratskoff, “James Baldwin’s Black Critique of Jewish Whiteness,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 27 (2020): 240–60.

¹³⁷ Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*, 71, 74–75.

being introduced “to a Jewish boy who was to become one of the nation’s leading painters, to a chap who was to become one of the eminent composers of his day, to a writer who was to create some of the best novels of his generation, to a young Jewish boy who was destined to film the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia.”¹³⁸ Here, as in his earlier description of his friends, the white/Black axis of racialization fades in favor of multinational collectivity. As he read the magazines, Wright was amazed to learn that “there did exist in this world an organized search for the truth of the lives of the oppressed and the isolated...It was not the economics of Communism, nor the great power of trade unions, nor the excitement of underground politics that claimed me; my attention was caught by the similarity of the experiences of workers in other lands, by the possibility of uniting scattered but kindred peoples into a whole.”¹³⁹ Wright was captivated by the international similitude and kinship exposed in Marxist texts, and so too the possibility of international solidarity.

It was here that Wright’s sense of Bigger’s multiplication extended into an international field. In the pamphlet, Wright asserted that his migration to this “fabulous city”—“a city of extremes: torrid summers and sub-zero winters, white people and black people, the English language and strange tongues, foreign born and native born”—and his “contact” with the John Reed Club convinced him that Bigger was a meaningful symbol, a personality with which Wright could illustrate the “stress and strain” of contemporary forces.¹⁴⁰ Extending his “sense of the personality of Bigger” from the series of Biggers he had observed in the South, the discovery that Bigger “was white, too, and there were literally millions of him” was, Wright noted, the very “pivot of my life,” curving the multiplying series of Jim Crow Biggers onto an international

¹³⁸ Wright, *Black Boy*, 317.

¹³⁹ Wright, 317–18.

¹⁴⁰ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 28, 11; Wright, “Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright,” 5.

scale.¹⁴¹ Like Chicago's geopolitical and economic role as a hub of interchanging flows of information, commodities, and people, so too did it pivot and slant Wright's perspective—like a periscope—beyond the viewpoint framed by Jim Crow. Wright continued, "I sensed, too, that the Southern scheme of oppression was but an appendage of a far vaster and in many respects more ruthless and impersonal commodity-profit machine."¹⁴² It is again difficult not to notice prefigurations of Deleuze and Guattari here, in the description of oppression as schema, its combined metaphors of body and machine, and its overlaying of the personal and impersonal. Wright registered how the Manichean Southern scheme of race and capital plugs into an international machine whose impersonal reproduction generated commensurable personalities. The pamphlet complicated and nuanced his earlier experience (although recorded later, in *Black Boy*) in which this "Southern scheme" dominated his perceptions. While the pamphlet's title surely implied an excavation of the novel's beguiling protagonist, the pamphlet revealed that the novelistic Bigger Thomas represented but one literary distillation of a "distinct type" whose patterned emergence and reproduction across an international capitalist machine, inclusive of the novel's Chicago, was "inevitable."¹⁴³

Whereas the novel's microscopic focalization—praised by Irving Howe as its "claustrophobia of vision"—naturalized, domesticated, and contained Bigger's consciousness within the environment of segregated, industrial Chicago, the pamphlet periscoped to locations such "claustrophobia of vision" occluded.¹⁴⁴ From the novel's iconic opening—"Brrrrrrriiiiiiiiiinnng!"—the reader is cast abruptly inside the tense and vulnerable psychic darkness of Bigger, without even a room of his own: "An alarm clock clanged in the dark and

¹⁴¹ Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 1940, 11–12.

¹⁴² Wright, 12.

¹⁴³ Wright, 10.

¹⁴⁴ Howe, "Black Boys and Native Sons," 354.

silent room. A bed spring creaked. A woman's voice sang out impatiently: 'Bigger, shut that thing off!'"¹⁴⁵ The novel repeatedly simulated Bigger's confinement in the city of Chicago and his consequently limited scope of vision. At the climactic conclusion of the novel's first book, just after Bigger realized he had accidentally suffocated Mary to death,

the reality of the room fell from him; the vast city of white people that sprawled outside took its place. She was dead and he had killed her. He was a murderer, a Negro murderer, a black murderer. He had killed a white woman. He had to get away from here. Mrs. Dalton had been in the room while he was there, but she had not known it. But, *had* she? No! Yes! Maybe she had gone for help? No. If she had known she would have screamed. She didn't know. He had to slip out of the house. Yes.¹⁴⁶

The narrator moves frantically between external and internal focalization, third-person omniscience and first-person narration, as Bigger imagined the "city of white people" compressing and overwhelming him in the enclosed bedroom at the dark scene of the crime.

But the pamphlet did something different, its periscopic lens pivoting point of view from the novel's great city by tracing a capitalist "machine" assembling multiple territories, across which Bigger's "behavioristic pattern" multiplied.¹⁴⁷ The periscope's provisional illumination of consonant personalities elsewhere signaled a vast international terrain of heterogenous isomorphisms without overriding the novel's dissection of Bigger's psychic becoming. As Wright wrote to Gold, Bigger "was not created to symbolize all Negroes, but white and Negro personality under stress and strain."¹⁴⁸ The pamphlet did not then diminish the novel's clear

¹⁴⁵ Wright, *Native Son*, 1940, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Wright, 75.

¹⁴⁷ Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 1940, 6.

¹⁴⁸ Wright, "Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright," 5.

depiction of anti-Black deprivation but destabilized it, plugging its oppressive scheme into an international machine of “stress and strain.” While “all Bigger Thomases, white and black, felt tense, afraid, nervous, hysterical, and restless,” the difference between “Bigger’s tensivity” in Chicago and

the German variety is that Bigger’s, due to educational restrictions on the bulk of her Negro population, is in a nascent state, not yet articulate. And the difference between Bigger’s longing for self-identification and the Russian principle of self-determination is that Bigger’s, due to the effects of American oppression, which has not allowed for the forming of deep ideas of solidarity among Negroes, is still in a state of individual anger and hatred.¹⁴⁹

Wright thus illustrated in the pamphlet both isomorphism and heterogeneity, both commensurabilities and incommensurabilities. Wright intimated a psychic symmetry across such disparate subjects as the “Bigger in America and Bigger in Nazi Germany and Bigger in old Russia” as well as expressive asymmetries according to local political regimes and their racializing axes.¹⁵⁰ The pamphlet thus worked with and against the novel’s “close-up” and “slow-motion” depiction of white supremacy and psychic racialization in Chicago—but did not negate this depiction.¹⁵¹ Evincing the tension between naturalist detail and international consonance, Wright explained, “I felt and still feel that the environment supplies the instrumentalities through which the organism expresses itself,” even if the “deep sense of exclusion” between Bigger Thomas in Chicago and Bolsheviks in Europe was “identical.”¹⁵² The narrative of Bigger’s fear, flight, and fate in the “urban environment of Chicago” was quite

¹⁴⁹ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 18, 20.

¹⁵⁰ Wright, 18.

¹⁵¹ Wright, 36.

¹⁵² Wright, 14–15.

literally the product of multiple, intersecting flows of information, people, and commodities. And yet it also nonetheless exceeded them.¹⁵³

VI. Racial Capitalism and Periscopic Schizophrenia

Critical debates over the novel's generic qualities have consumed a large segment of scholarship on it, especially in terms of the novel's debt to (or advance on) the naturalist tradition. Gayle argued, *pace* Ralph Ellison, that Wright was not so much "stifled and restricted by the form of the naturalistic novel" but, "in the light of his myriad experiences, Wright could not completely adhere to the naturalistic formula."¹⁵⁴ Wright described his process in the pamphlet in similar terms, explaining that his goals while writing were "to tell the truth as I saw it and felt it," to catch in prose, "in the same instant of time, the objective and subjective aspects of Bigger's life," and "to *render, depict*, not merely to tell the story. If a thing was cold, I tried to make the reader *feel* cold."¹⁵⁵ Consequently, he could not constrain himself to a single style. Gayle's subtle distinction between stylistic repression and disobedience foregrounds Wright as a formally productive rather than passively restricted writer. Gayle asserts that Wright's writing "would always contain a schizophrenic quality, wavering, as did the lives of those whom he wrote about, between pragmatism and transcendence."¹⁵⁶ Gayle uses the term "schizophrenic" to describe a break in the order of genre via the relation of incommensurable or contradictory forms. This "schizophrenic quality," mediating the novel's realism and existential (anti-)heroism, was necessary to compose the unique psychic process of Bigger, produced by interwar capitalism

¹⁵³ Wright, 13.

¹⁵⁴ Addison Gayle, Jr., "Richard Wright: Beyond Nihilism," in *The Addison Gayle Jr. Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, Jr. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 208.

¹⁵⁵ *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 1940, 34–35.

¹⁵⁶ Gayle, Jr., "Richard Wright: Beyond Nihilism," 208.

but resisting its territorializations. In the pamphlet, Wright seemed to concur with Gayle's assessment but detailed an even more textured process:

Sometimes I'd find it necessary to use a stream of consciousness technique, then rise to an interior monologue, descend to a direct rendering of a dream state, then to a matter-of-fact depiction of what Bigger was saying, doing, and feeling. Then I'd find it impossible to say what I wanted to say without stepping in and speaking outright on my own; but when doing this I always made an effort to retain the mood of the story, explaining everything only in terms of Bigger's life and, if possible, in the rhythms of Bigger's thought (even though the words would be mine). Again, at other times, in the guise of the lawyer's speech and the newspaper items, or in terms of what Bigger would overhear or see from afar, I'd give what others were saying and thinking of him. But always, from the start to the finish, it was Bigger's story, Bigger's fear, Bigger's flight, and Bigger's fate that I tried to depict.¹⁵⁷

Wright relayed a flurry of stylistic devices deployed and articulated to one another in the novel, disclosing his struggle to assemble a form that would adequately represent the stratified layers of Bigger's consciousness. Notably, Wright described Max's speech as a literary "guise" that could convey other characters' thoughts of Bigger without stretching the novelistic focalization too far from Bigger's own mind. If readers felt the speech was an incoherent, political interruption of Wright's exploration of Bigger's consciousness, that was inevitable and exactly the point.

The disobedient schizophrenia that marks the novel's style also extends to the pamphlet's paratextual relation to the novel. This relation too reflects Wright's creative struggle with form,

¹⁵⁷ Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 1940, 35.

as if Wright could not adhere not only to a “naturalistic formula” but also to the novel form itself. This stylistic and material exorbitance is symptomatic of the novel’s narrative of domesticating reform and its prediction of violent surplus. After Mr. Dalton hires Bigger as a personal chauffeur, the Daltons’ Irish cook Peggy condescends to Bigger that the Daltons are “Christian people and believe in everybody working hard...Mr. Dalton’s a fine man...You know, he does a lot for your people...He gave over five million dollars to colored schools.”¹⁵⁸ Bigger’s mother too encourages him to “work hard and keep [the job] and try to make a man out of yourself. Someday you’ll want to get married and have a home of your own. You got your chance now. You always said you never had a chance. Now, you got one.”¹⁵⁹ Peggy and Bigger’s mother are spellbound by the Protestant grace, colonial philanthropy, and Alger-esque fantasy of upward mobility that working in the Dalton household represented. Peggy boasts of her domesticating labor, telling Bigger, “I’m always telling Mrs. Dalton that this is the only home I’ll ever know. I wasn’t in this country but two years before I started working here.”¹⁶⁰ Yet it is Bigger’s subordinate inclusion in the white house as essentially a Black servant that leads to the haphazard death of Mary. The attempt to reform him via domestic labor spasmodically generated a surplus violence. Peggy identifies with Bigger as an Irish woman, proposing a homology between English colonialism in Ireland and white supremacy in the US that did not consider their relation and obliterated their heterogeneity: “My folks in the old country feel about England like the colored folks feel about this country. So I know something about colored people.”¹⁶¹ This homology collapses difference between Peggy and Bigger as the comparison authorizes Peggy’s claim of knowledge about “colored people” as a homogenous, presupposed unit. But unlike

¹⁵⁸ Wright, *Native Son*, 1940, 48–49.

¹⁵⁹ Wright, 87.

¹⁶⁰ Wright, 49.

¹⁶¹ Wright, 49.

Peggy, Bigger remains in the country of his oppression, and her paternalistic gesture of inclusion does not provide refuge but compresses and aggravates the power relations sustaining it. It is Bigger's presence inside Mary's bedroom at night that triggers panic—"How could he get out of the room? He all but shuddered with the intensity of loathing for this house and all it had made him feel since he had first come into it."¹⁶² After Bigger realizes he suffocated Mary in his fear, this house dissolves into "the vast city of white people that sprawled outside... She was dead and he had killed her... a black murderer. He had killed a white woman."¹⁶³ His domesticating labor cannot shield him from Chicago's violent relations of racial subordination. On the contrary, it is Bigger's fear of these relations that causes a psychic invasion, which led him to kill Mary. This violence therefore expresses that which the Dalton household cannot contain and reform, that which Mr. Dalton's philanthropic paternalism cannot uplift—the Black lumpenproletariat that can neither be subjugated into labor nor civilized by bourgeois morality.

The pamphlet did not only recapitulate this failure of domestication as a paratextual supplement to the novel but drew an alternative line of flight for Bigger. In conceptualizing how "racializing assemblages" are "borne partially of political violence" but "cannot be reduced to it," Weheliye demonstrates how "instances of systemic political violence moored in the law... produce a surplus, a line of flight in Deleuze and Guattari's and George Jackson's parlance, that evades capture, that refuses rest."¹⁶⁴ Weheliye draws the link between racialized surplus and escape that imbues our Black lumpenproletariat figure with a revolutionary fugitivity (albeit one that ultimately fails to materialize in the novel). But the pamphlet draws these lines of flight in its paratextual periscoping to Biggers elsewhere. What Gayle described as Wright's

¹⁶² Wright, 75.

¹⁶³ Wright, 75.

¹⁶⁴ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 51–52.

“schizophrenic” stylistics therefore extends as well to his errant management of the novel’s publication and print reception. Interestingly, four years after Gayle published his essay in the *Negro Digest* in 1968, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari published the first volume of their trailblazing *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, in which “schizophrenia as a process” becomes a tool in the “political analysis of desire.”¹⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari’s “schizoanalysis” draws on their understanding of the schizophrenic experience’s “proliferation of the interconnected state of all things in order to cultivate a ‘break’ or fracture that allows the entity we mistakenly refer to as the ‘individual’ to make a jump, a leap onto the plane consistency where processes of becoming can take place.”¹⁶⁶ Schizoanalysis, like schizophrenia, illuminates the psychosis and anxiety produced by capitalism while escaping the domesticating repressions of paranoia and neuroses. It is not coincidental, I don’t think, that one of the stated goals of Deleuze and Guattari’s method of “schizoanalysis” is partly to demonstrate how “an unconscious investment of a fascist or reactionary type can exist alongside a conscious revolutionary investment,” and vice versa: just as Wright repeatedly emphasized in correspondence and the pamphlet that Bigger “contained within him the potentialities of either Communism or Fascism.”¹⁶⁷ Bigger’s internationalization revealed how he embodied “the paranoiac, reactionary, and fascisizing pole, and the schizoid revolutionary pole” of the political/libidinal economy *avant la lettre*.

For the analysis and representation of this particularly volatile subject demanded a process that the existing convention of the discrete novel could not provide. In a 1934 address at

¹⁶⁵ Mark Seem, “Introduction,” in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 19. A.T. Kingsmith explains that “literature is akin to schizoanalysis in the way that there is no ultimate goal, no attainable summit that it is reaching towards, and in itself it is only a process, a production of something.” A.T. Kingsmith, “An Introduction to Schizoanalysis,” *3:AM Magazine*, August 27, 2016, <https://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/an-introduction-to-schizoanalysis/>.

¹⁶⁶ Kingsmith, “An Introduction to Schizoanalysis.”

¹⁶⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 105; Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 19.

the Institute for the Study of Fascism, Walter Benjamin warned that “we are in the midst of a vast process in which literary forms are being melted down” and urged writers to make the necessary betrayal “from a supplier of the production apparatus” to “an engineer who sees his task in adapting that apparatus to the ends of the proletarian revolution.”¹⁶⁸ The anti-fascist urgency of the address, delivered by a German Jewish exile in Paris, aligned politically and relatively synchronically with Wright’s own expressed urge to “enlist the sympathies, loyalties, and yearnings of the millions of Bigger Thomases in every land and race” before the fascists do—rather similar to the contextually overlapping but nonetheless discrete discourses of assimilation broached by Damas and Arendt.¹⁶⁹ Wright’s inability to adhere to the novel apparatus reflected an isomorphic historical urgency. While the schizophrenic wavering of the novel’s internal stylistics is ultimately assimilated and contained by its discrete commodity form as a mass-distributed book, Wright’s periscope staged a “schizophrenic” tension between the personality contained in the novel’s pages and the paratexts that were not. Discussing the multiple, international flows of information, people, and commodities that made him “see Bigger clearly and feel what he meant,” Wright notes, as mentioned previously, that his arrival in Chicago thrust him into contact with

the labor movement and its ideology [i.e. the and John Reed Club and then the Communist Party]...Trade-union struggles and issues began to grow meaningful to me. The flow of goods across the seas, buoying and depressing the wages of

¹⁶⁸ Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), 86, 102. Benjamin adds, “We are confronted with the fact—of which there has been no shortage of proof in Germany over the last decade—that the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication is capable of assimilating, indeed of propagating, an astonishing amount of revolutionary themes without ever seriously putting into question its own continued existence or that of the class which owns it. In any case this remains true so long as it is supplied by hacks, albeit revolutionary hacks. And I define a hack as a man who refuses as a matter of principle to improve the production apparatus and so prise it away from the ruling class for the benefit of Socialism.” Benjamin, 94.

¹⁶⁹ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 18.

men, held a fascination. The pronouncements of foreign governments, their policies, plans, and acts were calculated and weighed in relation to the lives of people about me. I was literally overwhelmed when, in reading the works of Russian revolutionists, I came across descriptions of the ‘holiday energies of the masses,’ ‘the locomotives of history,’ ‘the conditions prerequisite for revolution,’ and so forth. I approached all of these new revelations in the light of Bigger Thomas, his hopes, fears, and despairs; and I began to feel far-flung kinships, and sense, with fright and abashment, the possibilities of *alliances* between the American Negro and other people possessing a kindred consciousness.¹⁷⁰

Wright consumed reporting on international trade and labor, international political news correspondence, and political ideologies distributed by the Communist Party. Modulating these “in relation to” his immediate social environment, Wright initiated a specific comparative process that approached “all of these new revelations in the light of Bigger Thomas, his hopes, fears, and despair.”¹⁷¹ Establishing the relation between Bigger’s felt reality and the international apparatus producing it, the pamphlet extended Bigger’s psychic multiplicity from that narrated by the novel’s internal, stylistic “schizophrenia” to that structured by the interactive convergence of multiple international flows.

VII. The Data of Fascism

In turn, the pamphlet stratified the “many realities” snarled in Bigger’s personality into multiple “levels,” which Wright “felt bound to account for and render.”¹⁷² Wright’s own

¹⁷⁰ Wright, 11–12.

¹⁷¹ Wright, 12.

¹⁷² Wright, 24.

mobility and the mobile lines of flight provided by the paratext were therefore key foils to Bigger's acute predicament.¹⁷³ These levels included Bigger's "elusive core of being, that individual data of consciousness," his dual "social consciousness" as both an American and inchoate "Negro nationalist," his unconscious level of "primitive fear and ecstasy," the "fabulous" and pivotal city enveloping him, and, finally, the "impliedly political" level, or level of political "impulses."¹⁷⁴ By stratifying Bigger's reality thus, the pamphlet not only dissected the novel's rendering of Bigger but also reordered it across a multilevel structure. It is at the latter level of political impulses, impulses that imply but do not amount to politics, that Wright described Bigger's relation to the "vast upheavals of Russia and Germany."¹⁷⁵ Between the particular "individual data of consciousness" and the universality of his primeval unconscious, there is then Bigger's political desire, replicating the kindred "revolutionary [or reactionary] impulse" Wright sensed was present in the Bolshevik revolution and Nazi rise to power.¹⁷⁶ Tuning Bigger to political frequencies in Russia and Germany, Wright illustrated the level of political desire at which seemingly incommensurable spatial and temporal zones of a vast capitalist machine produce provisionally commensurable subjects. Whether in Chicago, Russia,

¹⁷³ Referring at once to Wright's flight from the South to Chicago, his folk history *12 Million Black Voices* (1941), and the lumpenproletarian tactics of hitchhiking, trespassing, and robbery represented in Wright's 1936 poem "Transcontinental," Mills stresses that "the origin of the Great Migration in the need to escape Jim Crow... explicates Wright's perception of mobility as a liberatory practice of resistance... in *12 Million Black Voices* (1941), Wright's lyrical folk history of the African American people structured around historical materialist categories, he describes how industrialization during World War I led African Americans to defy their feudal white Southern overlords and escape for the North: 'If we have no money, we borrow it; if we cannot borrow it, we beg it,' and if Northern employers don't arrange transportation, 'we walk until we reach a railroad and then we swing onto a freight.' In this historical scenario, hopping a freight train is not being socially discarded but seeking out new possibilities: less a reflection of utter immiseration than a willed act of resistance to racial and economic exploitation. Wright's own circumstances also informed his interest in mobility. Only after escaping the South to Chicago could he join the Communist Party and the John Reed Club, becoming at once a radical and a writer... Wright's own discovery of the lumpenproletariat was informed by the migratory trajectories of African American modernity and yielded not merely sympathy for the those of the lower depths but conviction of their revolutionary potential." See *Ragged Revolutionaries: The Lumpenproletariat and African American Marxism in Depression-Era Literature*, 56.

¹⁷⁴ Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 1940, 24, 26–27.

¹⁷⁵ Wright, 27.

¹⁷⁶ Wright, 15.

or Germany, the “deep sense of exclusion was identical...this intolerable sense of feeling and understanding so much, and yet living on a plane of social reality where the world the look of a world one did not make or own struck one with a blinding objectivity and tangibility.”¹⁷⁷

Identifying Bigger’s relation to subjects in Russia and Germany at the affective level of political “impulses,” Wright transformed the novel’s dramaturgy of racialized violence in industrial Chicago into an international typology of “revolt.”¹⁷⁸ Returning to the anecdote of Gorky and Lenin in London, one reads how Wright unified the reproduction of a particular emotional pattern across multiple spatiotemporal scales. As an example of how he “culled information relating to Bigger from my reading,” Wright recognized in Gorky and Lenin a “deep sense of exclusion” that was “*identical*” to the “Bigger Thomas reaction.”¹⁷⁹ And this identity made Wright “grasp the revolutionary impulse in my life and the lives of those about me and far away.”¹⁸⁰ Wright continued elaborating his developing understanding of this identical impulse:

I remember reading a passage in a book dealing with old Russia which said: “We must be ready to make endless sacrifices if we are to be able to overthrow the Czar”...And again I’d hear Bigger Thomas, far away and long ago, telling some white man who was trying to impose upon him: “I’ll kill you and go to hell and pay for it.” While living in America I heard from far away Russia the bitter accents of tragic calculation of how much human life and suffering it would cost a man to live as a man in a world that denied him the right to live with dignity.

Actions and feelings of men ten thousand miles from home helped me to

¹⁷⁷ Wright, 15.

¹⁷⁸ Wright, 27, 9.

¹⁷⁹ Wright, 15; emphasis added.

¹⁸⁰ Wright, 15.

understand the moods and impulses of those walking the streets of Chicago and Dixie.¹⁸¹

Comparing the revolutionary violence against the Russian imperial state to individual rogue revolt in the Jim Crow South, Wright put multiple scales of political action in relation, suggesting how the former echoed and accented Wright's intimate knowledge of the latter. The "far away" enabled Wright to grasp the revolutionary potential contained in "the moods and impulses of those walking the streets of Chicago and Dixie," by way of commensurable political affect. This "plane of social reality," as Wright describes it, is one where "the look of a world which one did not make or own struck one with a blinding objectivity and tangibility."¹⁸² The simultaneous territorialization and hierarchical exclusion of capitalism produced a deep psychic alienation and, as Mills argues, "this revelation suggested that the 'Bigger Thomas pattern' might not be just a mode of fruitless black desperation, but instead a general anti-capitalist subjectivity with transformative potential."¹⁸³

Wright admitted he had not "heard any talk of revolution in the South."¹⁸⁴ But he did hear "the lisping, the whispers, the mutters which some day, under one stimulus or another, will surely grow into open revolt unless the conditions which produce Bigger Thomas are changed."¹⁸⁵ Ominously following the anecdote about Gorky and Lenin and this warning of "open revolt," Wright turned to Nazi Germany, splitting the kindred political impulse into two trajectories—communist and fascist. Wright continued,

¹⁸¹ Wright, 15–16.

¹⁸² Wright, 15.

¹⁸³ Mills, "Marxism, Communism, and Richard Wright's Depression-Era Work," 69.

¹⁸⁴ Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 1940, 16.

¹⁸⁵ Wright, 16.

In 1932 another source of information was dramatically opened up to me and I saw data of a surprising nature that helped to clarify the personality of Bigger. From the moment that Hitler took power in Germany and began to oppress the Jews, I tried to keep track of what was happening. And on innumerable occasions, I was startled to detect, either from the side of the Fascists or from the side of the oppressed, reactions, moods, phrases, and attitudes that reminded me strongly of Bigger, that helped to bring out more clearly the shadowy outlines of the negative that lay in the back of my mind.¹⁸⁶

The language of “data” appears for the first time in the pamphlet here, repeated later when Wright described Bigger’s “individual data of consciousness,” his “dreams, his fleeting, momentary sensations, his yearning, visions, his deep emotional responses.”¹⁸⁷ This language evokes the quantitative sociological methods informing Wright’s literary naturalism—after all, Wright asked, “Why should I not, like a scientist in a laboratory, use my imagination and invent test-tube situations, place Bigger in them, and . . . work out in fictional form an emotional statement and resolution of this problem?”¹⁸⁸ It also reflects the international circulation of information from which Wright extracted and collected units for analysis and representation. The “data” of German fascism therefore signals less a theoretical understanding of fascism than the sets of information synchronically circulating in Chicago from which Wright culled an idiosyncratic understanding; like Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of flow, code, and stock, Wright’s analysis was anchored in concepts like “data”, which reflected the contemporary state of capitalist circulation.¹⁸⁹ Newspapers, books, and other writings liquidated the rise of the

¹⁸⁶ Wright, 16.

¹⁸⁷ Wright, 24.

¹⁸⁸ Wright, 20–21.

¹⁸⁹ See Smith, “Flow, Code and Stock: A Note on Deleuze’s Political Philosophy.”

National Socialist empire into various collections of data, transmitting “reactions, moods, phrases, and attitudes” that Wright could identify, extract, and analyze to clarify Bigger further.¹⁹⁰

In particular, Wright marked out units of affective information for their uncanny relation to the Biggers Wright had already encountered, and in doing so coordinated the impulses of “dispossessed and disinherited” Black men in the United States to both German fascists and their Jewish victims.¹⁹¹ These lines of connection discombobulated the Third Reich’s regimes of race, for Bigger provided a third point (or points) that mediated the “reactions, moods, phrases, and attitudes” of the radically oppositional racial positions of Aryans and Jews.¹⁹² It is not that Wright dissolved perpetrators and victims into a primeval sea of human emotions, although those universalizing gestures are certainly present in the pamphlet. Wright admitted, “From far away Nazi Germany and old Russia had come to me items of knowledge that told me that certain modern experiences were creating types of personalities whose existence ignored racial and national lines of demarcation, that these personalities carried with them a more universal drama-element than anything I’d ever encountered before.”¹⁹³ But enfolded within these universalizing gestures are the specific sources of information bearing the specific affective units that Wright culled to clarify Bigger Thomas. In the first draft of the pamphlet, Wright wrote schematically, “Bigger was impatient; the fascists were impatient. Bigger was violent; the fascists were violent. Bigger longed in an ignorant way for a ritual and scheme of life that would slake the thirst of his sensibilities which American capitalist culture had dried and parched. The fascists yearned also

¹⁹⁰ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 16.

¹⁹¹ Wright, 19.

¹⁹² Wright, 16.

¹⁹³ Wright, 18.

for a way of life that would do the same. Bigger took wild and rash chances; so did the fascists.”¹⁹⁴

Wright was vague in the published pamphlet on the actual sources of his data, describing his voracious reading but never offering a specific reference. He explained, “I read every account of the Fascist movement in Germany I could lay my hands on, and from page to page I encountered and recognized familiar emotional patterns.”¹⁹⁵ The uncanny recognition of emotional patterns elsewhere—in fascist Germany—marked the international capitalist machine’s compulsively repetitive production of isomorphic subjects. Multiplication therefore describes the international multiplicity of becomings that are symmetrical and asymmetrical at once, elaborating international patterns while plugging these patterns into incommensurable, local appendages. A working draft of the text is more forthcoming on Wright’s sources. In that draft, Wright explained, “I remember reading Ludecue’s [*sic*] book, *I Knew Hitler*. That book excited me more than any book coming out of Germany I have read. Over and over, page after page, I encountered familiar emotional patterns, emotional patterns which I had met in my life and living.”¹⁹⁶ In addition to mentioning having read a number of books “coming out of Germany,” Wright highlighted exiled Nazi Karl Lüdecke’s exposé, published in New York City in 1937. Lüdecke was an early member of the NSDAP and had been a Party emissary to Italy and the United States as it grew in influence. After Hitler became German chancellor in 1933, however, Lüdecke returned to Berlin and, for unknown reasons, soon ran afoul of the Gestapo.¹⁹⁷ In May, he was incarcerated at KZ Oranienburg, a concentration camp outside Berlin, where he

¹⁹⁴ Richard Wright, “The Birth of Bigger,” n.d., 16, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

¹⁹⁵ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 16.

¹⁹⁶ Richard Wright, “How Bigger Was Born,” n.d., 9, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

¹⁹⁷ Arthur L. Smith, Jr., “Kurt Lüdecke: The Man Who Knew Hitler,” *German Studies Review* 26, no. 3 (October 2003): 601. Lüdecke claimed “that some Party members had lodged false charges of blackmail and swindling against him because they were jealous of his activities in America.”

remained until his escape to Switzerland in February 1934. Lüdecke's book would therefore have provided Wright primarily with intimate impressions and observations of German fascism from primarily before it seized the reins of statecraft, while the party aroused a mass base and developed its ideological appeal; a period known in Nazi parlance as the *Kampfzeit*, or time of struggle. In the pamphlet, Wright characterized Bigger in "a hot and whirling vortex of undisciplined and unchanneled impulses," waiting for a political direction to enlist his "sympathies, loyalties, and yearnings."¹⁹⁸ This in-between stage of unchanneled flows was the stage for which Lüdecke's book was most informative, the stage at which Wright identified German "emotional patterns"—"tense, afraid, and hysterical"—and political impulses that both reminded of and illuminated Bigger's.¹⁹⁹ At such a stage, there are, as Deleuze and Guattari describe, "astonishing oscillations of the unconscious, from one pole of delirium to the other: the way in which an expected revolutionary force (puissance) breaks free...; inversely, the way in which everything turns fascist or envelops itself in fascism... These oscillations of the unconscious, these underground passages from one type of libidinal investment to the other—often the coexistence of the two—form one of the major objects of schizoanalysis."²⁰⁰ The process of fascisization in Germany was therefore a crucial site of inquiry into the potential trajectories of Bigger's desire.

In the working draft, Wright continued by making particular comparisons between Lüdecke's portrayal and the "black Bigger Thomas." But he first wrote,

Each time I came across a passage in which Ludecue [*sic*] painted a picture of a world so constructed that there would exist among all people a solidarity of ideals

¹⁹⁸ Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 1940, 18.

¹⁹⁹ Wright, "How Bigger Was Born," n.d., 9.

²⁰⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 277–78.

and beliefs, I would be reminded of the Negro preacher in the South telling of a life beyond this world in which there would be no rich and no poor, no white and no black, a world in which every man would know what his brother was thinking, a world in which every man would feel secure and at home.²⁰¹

Here, the Bigger Thomas personality does not figure in the comparison, which is rather between a party ideologue, which Lüdecke certainly was, and a Black Southern preacher. The Nazi's illustration of harmonious unity reminded Wright of the preacher's redemptive message of uniformity and purpose because both attempted to enlist the alienated masses adrift in the modern vortex. Wright matched Nazi propaganda to the proverbial preacher's sermon not because their respective audiences shared a social or political position but because both peddled order and union to soothe dispossession and precarity. Wright then turned to Bigger: "But more than anything else, I was struck by the similarity and identity of the tensity of the emotions involved. I began to sense that not only Bigger Thomas, that is, the black Bigger Thomas, feels tense, afraid and hysterical. But there was in the world white Bigger Thomases who felt that way too, in degress [*sic*] more or less conscious."²⁰² Here, in the working draft, Wright began to navigate the affective scale at which Bigger's multiplication extended into an international field. Sensing the "similarity and identity" of German and Black American "tensity," the symmetry of pre-neurotic and pre-psychotic affect, Wright paired ideological appeals to political impulses.

Wright then schematically matched references from Lüdecke to his observations of Black Bigger Thomases in Chicago. He started, "When Ludecue [*sic*] would speak of a solidarity of ideals, I could hear Bigger Thomas saying, I ain't going to turst [*sic*] nobody; everything is a

²⁰¹ Wright, "How Bigger Was Born," n.d., 9.

²⁰² Wright, 9.

racket and everybody is out to get what he can.”²⁰³ However, in the published pamphlet, the references to Lüdecke are removed, yet Wright expanded both his description of National Socialist ideology and its correlated desire in Bigger Thomas. He wrote,

“What struck me with particular force was the Nazi preoccupation with the construction of a society in which there would exist among all people (*German* people, of course!) *one* solidarity of ideals, *one* continuous circulation of fundamental beliefs, notions, and assumptions... And while reading these Nazi pages I'd be reminded of the Negro preacher in the South telling of a life beyond this World, a life in which the color of men's skin would not matter, a life in which each man would know what was deep down in the hearts of his fellow man. And I could hear Bigger Thomas standing on a street corner in America expressing his agonizing doubts and chronic suspicions, thus: ‘I ain't going to trust nobody. Everything is a racket and everybody is out to get what he can for himself. Maybe if we had a true leader, we could do something.’”²⁰⁴

Wright matched fascist ideologies of national solidarity and unity not to Bigger Thomas's corresponding ideologies but to his “doubts,” “suspicions,” and desires. Wright's comparative analysis did not parallel Bigger as an ideological fascist but illustrated a dialogic relationship between fascism's ideological appeals and the emotional tensions they soothed, concerned with the formation of political impulse rather than self-conscious agenda. Wright “could hear Bigger Thomas” in response to the call of National Socialist propaganda, offering a way out of the alienation, misanthropy, and disorientation of his life in industrial Chicago.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Wright, 9a.

²⁰⁴ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 16–17.

²⁰⁵ Wright, 17.

Wright continued the scheme in the working draft with another reference to Lüdecke, again asserting Bigger's identity with German fascists via a response to Nazism's ideological appeal: "When Ludecue [*sic*] would speak of the necessity of a symbolized and a ritualized life, I could hear a Bigger Thomas in Chicago saying: I am going to follow Marcus Garvey and build a nation of our own, have a flag of our own, an army of our own. I am going to organize Negroes into groups and make generals, officers, and so forth. The emotional patterns were, again, almost identical [*sic*]." ²⁰⁶ In the published version, Wright added, "We ought to take Africa and have a national home." ²⁰⁷ Here too it is Bigger's desire that forms the substance of the comparison, rather than a direct comparison between the discrete ideologies of Nazism and Garveyism. Bigger Thomas hungered for "spiritual sustenance," having "no culture which could hold and claim his allegiance and faith" in a world that had "sensitized him and had left him stranded, a free agent to roam the streets of our cities." ²⁰⁸ Deleuze and Guattari argue that "the decoding of flows and the deterritorialization of the socius... constitutes the most characteristic and the most important tendency of capitalism," yet they do not consider the racializing assemblages concomitant to capitalism. ²⁰⁹ The subjugation and commodification of Black people does not index a pure deterritorialization of the body; Weheliye demonstrates that "rather than entering a clear zone of indistinction, we are thrown into the vortex of hierarchical indicators: racializing assemblages. In the absence of kin, family, gender, belonging, language, personhood, property, and official records, among many other factors, what remains is the flesh, the living, speaking, thinking, feeling, imagining flesh." ²¹⁰ Bigger was "sensitized"—thinking, feeling, imagining,

²⁰⁶ Wright, "How Bigger Was Born," n.d., 9a.

²⁰⁷ Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 1940, 17.

²⁰⁸ Wright, 18.

²⁰⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 31.

²¹⁰ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 40.

desiring—but disarticulated from the channeling influence of social and cultural structures. Wright’s Bigger did indeed prefigure Deleuze and Guattari’s “schizophrenic out for a walk”—“a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst’s couch”—but he was also a *Black* schizophrenic out for a walk and his desires were acted upon accordingly.²¹¹

The nationalist culture and order offered by Garveyism formed the image of Bigger’s object of desire because it hailed him into a Black world of collective recognition and solidarity. That it is Bigger, rather than Garvey, who Wright heard underscores Wright’s relative disinterest in an ideological comparison between fascism and Garveyism. He identified rather the dimensions that trigger Bigger’s political impulses. This transversal approach, connecting Nazi leadership and Bigger Thomas in call and response, distinguishes Wright’s analysis from more structurally conventional comparisons between Garveyism and fascist ideology. In his *History of Negro Revolt* (1938), for example, C. L. R. James argued, “All the things that Hitler was to do so well later Garvey was doing in 1920 and 1921. He organized stormtroopers, who marched, uniformed, in his parades, and kept order and gave color to his meetings.”²¹² Of course, Garvey’s Universal African Legion, the paramilitary wing of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), did not publicly brawl with rival political groups nor violently terrorize racial enemies. There is an elision of power in James’s analyses that has led some to draw from it a generic conception of fascism as political style.²¹³ The National Socialist party and Garvey’s

²¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 9. It is also important to emphasize the material and subjective reality of Blackness, which Deleuze and Guattari reduce immediately to a figurative position of self-conscious identification in their collapse of the white John Brown with the Black militant George Jackson as ideal schizorevolutionaries.

²¹² C. L. R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 93. In a 1940 article for *Labor Action*, James similarly wrote, “long before Hitler, [Garvey] anticipated the Nazi leader in his emphasis on uniforms, parades, military guards, in short, the dramatic and the spectacular.” J. R. Johnson, “Marcus Garvey,” *Labor Action*, June 24, 1930, 3, marxists.org.

²¹³ Paul Gilroy, for example, draws on James’ analysis to consider whether Garvey might be labeled a “Black Fascist.” He asks “whether Garvey’s militaristic movement, with its exhortation to manhood and repeatedly stated desire to ‘purify and standardize’ the race, can be understood as a family member to the other, similar movements of

UNIA are assumed commensurable via aesthetic and ideological abstraction, linked by the generic conception's diachronic unfolding in the ocean of history.²¹⁴ Wright did not link Garveyism and fascism as much as he triangulated relations between Nazi leadership, Garvey, and Bigger Thomas, in the process destabilizing Garvey's role in the comparison. It is not fascism as such that grounds Wright's comparison but the political desire it gratified. As Wright wrote in the first draft of the pamphlet, "Bigger longed in an ignorant way for a ritual and scheme of life that would slake the thirst of his sensibilities which American capitalist culture had dried and parched. The fascists yearned also for a way of life that would do the same."²¹⁵ Wright's comparison between Bigger and fascists seems to correspond to the "segregative" type of social investment described by Deleuze and Guattari, "a paranoid fascisizing" type that "invests the formation of central sovereignty... yes, I am your kind, and I belong to the superior race and class."²¹⁶

Fascism is therefore symptomatic of Bigger's political desire, rather than the other way around. In other words, Bigger's subjective and affective lack and its potential social investment (rather than the representative content of political ritual and ideology) made him and "fascists" commensurable. Wright confirmed in the published pamphlet, "But more than anything else, as a writer, I was fascinated by the similarity of the emotional tensions of Bigger in America and

that period and whether the variety of authoritarian leadership that Garvey practiced was akin to the type that was being developed by fascist in Italy and Germany." From this "transracial symmetry" he elucidates two definitional attributes of a generic fascism: "brutalism and masculinism." The emergence of a "transracial symmetry" signals how Gilroy suspends the interactive, geopolitical specificities (the asymmetry) in which Garveyism and fascism take shape in order to illuminate their ideological kinship. See *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 231–34.

²¹⁴ James does nonetheless intimate the explosive political impulses to which Garvey and Hitler alike appealed. He continues, "Stupid people saw in all this merely the antics of backward Negroes. Recent events should give them an opportunity to revise their judgements. Everything that Hitler was to do afterwards in the way of psychological appeal, Garvey was doing in 1921." Johnson, "Marcus Garvey," 3.

²¹⁵ Wright, "The Birth of Bigger," 16.

²¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 277.

Bigger in Nazi Germany and Bigger in old Russia.”²¹⁷ In addition to reintroducing the figure of the communist Bigger, Wright repeated his attention to symmetrical affect. Parsing Wright’s later reflection on suspicion and violence among Black comrades in the CPUSA, Robinson writes, “It was not an ideology that lay at the base of their need to physically violate errant comrades. Their dogmatism was an enveloping shield against egocide. Their conformity was a symptom of their desperate and collective need for each other.”²¹⁸ Robinson here described the desperation and alienation among Black communists that the novel ascribed to Bigger Thomas and Wright’s paratextual writings corresponded to German fascists. The “emotional tensions” generated by aggravated dispossession in the United States, Third Reich, and Russian Empire provided the scale at which Bigger’s international multiplication unfolded and, in the process, fascism itself was provincialized.

For Wright stayed close to real, historical conditions and described this affective scale in located, political terms. Communism and fascism represented the actual—the located, historical, political movements—from which Wright discerned an internationally legible potential. They were commensurable but not identical political trajectories, commensurable because they registered symmetrical psychic experiences of dispossession. Wright was therefore quick to caution against overemphasizing a teleological understanding of Bigger’s political desire: “I don't mean to say that the Negro boy I depicted in *Native Son* is either a Communist or a Fascist. He is not either. But he is product of a dislocated society; he is a dispossessed and disinherited man; he is all of this, and he lives amid the greatest possible plenty on earth and he is looking and feeling for a way out.”²¹⁹ Wright reverted from the teleological to the etiological, answering

²¹⁷ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 18.

²¹⁸ Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 295.

²¹⁹ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 19.

the promise of the pamphlet's title. From the international actual of communist and fascist politics, Wright discovered an international potential in the shape of Bigger's political desire. But Wright did not in turn abstract a heuristic scheme that would make Bigger's trajectory intelligible in such terms, communist or fascist. From the international commensurability of political desire, Wright detected its ground—a vast geography of dislocation and dispossession, knit together by zones of radically unequal capital accumulation and relentless circulation. Wright's evocative suggestion of Bigger's political trajectory therefore gave way to the international capitalist machine that produced him.

While the pamphlet's periscope comparison outlines Bigger's "potentialities," the ominous ambivalent political trajectory of his desire is given complex subjective shape in the novel itself. The novel's dogged attachment to Bigger's acute, psychic digestion of segregated, industrial Chicago magnifies the dynamic play between the material and the psychic that reproduces him. Early in the novel, before the murder, Wright dramatized the Garveyite desire that information transmitted from fascist Europe had made audible. While loafing around with his friend Gus, Bigger gazes through the "steel and stone" landscape engulfing him and spots a plane weaving words of white vapor in the blue sky—"USE...SPEED..."²²⁰ This distant display of velocity stimulates awe and desire, accompanied by resentment of racial subordination and exclusion: "Bigger breathed with childlike wonder. 'Them white boys sure can fly,' Gus said. 'Yeah,' Bigger said wistfully. 'They get a chance to do everything.'... 'I could fly one of them things if I had a chance.'" Bigger imagines freedom via the speeding, soaring plane, an image of unbound will, vertical authority, and technical mastery. But, mocking him, Gus emphasizes the multiple, articulated regimes of race and capital constraining its actualization. He scorns, "If you

²²⁰ Wright, *Native Son*, 1940, 14.

wasn't black and if you had some money and if they'd let you go to that aviation school, you *could* fly a plane." Bigger's psychic resolution of this contradiction appears as a sneering fantasy of race war: "Maybe they right in not wanting us to fly... 'Cause if I took a plane up I'd take a couple of bombs along and drop 'em as sure as hell."²²¹ But Bigger's joke remains just that for, immediately after, the plane finishes its vapor advertisement in the sky: "Use Speed Gasoline." The unfolding advertisement enacts Bigger's misinterpellation, his desires taking shape in a world from which he is excluded. He will never own a car; in fact, he will soon, on the contrary, become appended to this machine of circulation as a private chauffeur. The plane's velocity and stature represent to Bigger the power of unbound will—"They get a chance to do everything," Bigger reflects—and a fantasy of flight from deprivation. Yet the plane's winding streaks are an instrument of the market from which Bigger is excluded—excluded from consumption, excluded from circulation.²²² As cars "whizzed" past, Bigger looked as though he "had been long confronted and tantalized by a riddle whose answer seemed always just on the verge of escaping him, but prodding him irresistibly on to seek its solution...he was anxious to do something to evade looking so squarely at this problem."²²³

Bigger's desire is partly stimulated by the propaganda of local Black nationalist organizations, such as Garvey's UNIA, but also by the political information circulating synchronically from locations elsewhere. The psychic appeals of fascism become references for national revolt and vindication. Bigger

felt that one way to end fear and shame was to make all those black people act together, rule them, tell them what to do, and make them do it...that there should

²²¹ Wright, 15.

²²² Wright, 14.

²²³ Wright, 15.

be a way in which gnawing hunger and restless aspiration could be fused....Of late he had liked to hear tell of men who could rule others, for in actions such as these he felt that there was a way to escape from this tight morass of fear and shame that sapped at the base of his life.²²⁴

A national order of patriarchal authority and submission appears as an escape from the delirium produced by racial capitalism in industrial Chicago, where a hallucinating circulation of commodities and wealth overlaps with racial deprivation and economic inequality. Bigger's imagined identification with patriarchal power brings specific allusions to fascism: "He liked to hear of how Japan was conquering China; of how Hitler was running the Jews to the ground; of how Mussolini was invading Spain. He was not concerned with whether these acts were right or wrong; they simply appealed to him as possible avenues of escape."²²⁵ This passage triangulates imperialism, racial domination, and war into a sort of fascist international, each marking an expression of belligerent, sovereign power. Bigger identifies with these nationalist regimes not out of ideological or moral alignment but as psychic inversions of his own dispossession. Assimilating these international images of escape, Bigger "felt that some day there would be a black man who would whip the black people into a tight band and together they would act and end fear and shame."²²⁶ Bigger's feeling here illustrates his desire for repressive, patriarchal governance, the desire for nationalism's palliative solution to alienation.

Wright's narrative language made precise allusions to elements of fascist political ideology. This image of the "tight band," whipped together by a patriarchal authority, strikingly evokes the eponymous fascist icon: the tight bundle of sticks, or Roman *fascēs*, representing

²²⁴ Wright, 97–98.

²²⁵ Wright, 98.

²²⁶ Wright, 98.

“strength through unity and discipline.”²²⁷ The allusion to the *fascies* marks a correspondence between Bigger’s organic, located desire and the international fascist ideology that would actualize it. As Anthony Dawahare explains, “the fascist father figure is the one who defines place for all” and so the “fascistic, nationalistic projects” are a way for Bigger to “imagine a freedom from [his] emotional tumult.”²²⁸ Alienated and unfree in the segregated “vortex of modern urban life,” collective repression and conformity appear in the form of national solidarity and individual freedom.²²⁹ This reading does not to characterize Bigger as a ‘Black fascist’ but notes the asymmetrical correspondence between his desire and fascism’s superficial psychic appeals, tracing a volatile trajectory of nationalist propaganda as it circulated across disaggregated but internationally linked zones of the capitalist machine. Wright exposed “the deep psychology of nationalism” not as a timeless pathology but as located symptoms of psychic deprivation that resonated internationally.²³⁰

Following the suggestive allusion to fascism, Bigger recalls an earlier moment when distrust and fear of his friends botched a plan to rob the white Blum’s delicatessen, revealing the local constraints on any simplifying homology between fascist Germans and Bigger. He confesses,

He distrusted and feared Gus and he knew that Gus distrusted and feared him; and the moment he tried to band himself and Gus together to do something, he would hate Gus and himself. Ultimately, though, his hate and hope turned outward from himself and Gus: his hope toward a vague benevolent something that would help

²²⁷ Dennis P. Doordan, “In the Shadow of the Fascies: Political Design in Fascist Italy,” *Design Issues* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 42. It was adopted as the official emblem of the Italian Fascist Party in 1926.

²²⁸ Anthony Dawahare, *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature between the Wars: A New Pandora’s Box* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 128.

²²⁹ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 17.

²³⁰ Dawahare, *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature*, 112.

and lead him, and his hate toward the whites; for he felt that they ruled him, even when they were far away and not thinking of him, ruled him by conditioning him in his relations to his own people.²³¹

The regime of race in industrial Chicago prevents the expression of Wright's nationalistic impulse, remaining, as it were, a potentiality. Even its projected expression is constrained to the form of petty crime, a merely momentary inversion of racialized power relations that lacks the patriarchal organization to sustain collective movement. Wright repeats the allusive language of banding individuals together, suggesting the quasi-fascist potential of Bigger's desire for Black leadership and unity. Twice with his lover Bessie, Bigger too describes "binding" her to him. Anxious that Bessie will divulge his plan to extort the Daltons through a false ransom note, Bigger decides "he had to bind her to him. 'Yeah, I killed the girl,' he said. 'Now, you know.'"²³² And after the discovery of Mary's body, a neurotic and desperate Bigger resolves to let Bessie "know everything; but let her know it in a way that would bind her to him...He did not want to be alone now."²³³ Both instances illustrate Bigger's vague yearning for social union, yearning to escape the compounding alienations of lumpenproletarianized Black consciousness in industrial Chicago.

But the subjective force of white supremacy determines and constricts the collectivizing channels available to his yearning. The racializing regime of industrial Chicago rules him by estranging him from other Black people, aggravating and disrupting the possibility of actualizing his desire to bond. The desire to band together with Gus reverts to hatred and Bigger's attempt to bind Bessie to him ends in her gruesome murder. In the seconds before killing her, Bigger recalls

²³¹ Wright, *Native Son*, 1940, 98.

²³² Wright, 153.

²³³ Wright, 191.

his “driving desire to escape the law. Yes. It *must* be this way. A sense of the white blur hovering near, of Mary burning, of [Detective] Britten, of the law tracking him down, came back.”²³⁴

Whiteness hovers over Bigger and Bessie, and turns Bigger’s panic into a motive for Black femicide. The violent hunt of white justice not only obstructs Bigger’s potential bond with Bessie but also generates the violent breakdown of relations between them. The racializing regime is decisive in the reproduction of social fragmentation and disorder, deforming relations among the racially subjugated by inhibiting mutual recognition and cooperation. Bigger marks the particular combination of capital and white supremacy that makes this alienation diabolical, redirecting nationalist impulses into acts of social violence (i.e. Gus and Bessie).

In his letter to Gold, Wright detailed even more specific terms of comparison, listing particular psychic appeals through which he felt the Nazi movement successfully enlisted the interwar German masses. Refusing to abandon “the dark and hidden places of the human personality to Hitler and Goebbels,” Wright asserted, “Hitler yells about ‘Strength through Joy,’ and so forth. Well, the old fascist butcher has a good point.”²³⁵ “Strength through Joy” [*Kraft durch Freude*] was the name of a social policy and organization that distributed bourgeois pleasures and leisure activities, such as picnic outings and concerts, to workers, uniting them under state organization for regulation and pacification following the abolition of unions.²³⁶ In the version of Wright’s letter to Gold quoted by Fabre, Wright listed two more specific elements of Nazi ideology: “Hitler yells about ‘strength through joy, organic satisfactions,’ ‘the organic state,’ ‘a solidarity of ideals,’ etc.”²³⁷ The “organic state” theory, assembled from the German

²³⁴ Wright, 200–201.

²³⁵ Wright, “Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright,” 2.

²³⁶ Tim Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich: The Working Class and the “National Community,”* trans. John Broadwin (Oxford: Berg, 1993); Hasso Spode, “Fordism, Mass Tourism and the Third Reich: The ‘Strength through Joy’ Seaside Resort as an Index Fossil,” *Journal of Social History* 381, no. 1 (Autumn 2004): 127–55.

²³⁷ Fabre, *Richard Wright: Books and Writers*, 73.

school of *Geopolitik*, posited the organic unity of state, territory, and *volk*, promoting racial autarky and justifying biopolitical race war.²³⁸ “Solidarity of ideals” was a term that appears in Lüdecke’s exposé as he describes “deep cravings of national unity...for that solidarity of ideals and culture which is the necessary foundation of a real and lasting political stability.”²³⁹ All of these elements signal key ways the Nazi movement anesthetized the psychic disorder and deprivation symptomatic of interwar capitalism. And it is through the psychic that Wright traced Bigger’s corresponding desire and political potential, shaped and constrained by Chicago’s regime of racial subordination and exclusion. After murdering Bessie, Bigger’s mind races while he lies on the floor of her apartment:

What did he want? What did he love and what did he hate? He did not know.

There was something he *knew* and something he *felt*; something the *world* gave him and something he *himself* had; something spread out in *front* of him and something spread out in *back*; and never in all his life, with this black skin of his, had the two worlds, thought and feeling, will and mind, aspiration and satisfaction, been together; never had he felt a sense of wholeness...It was when he read the newspapers or magazines, went to the movies, or walked along the streets with crowds, that he felt what he wanted: to merge himself with others and

²³⁸ Holger H. Herwig, *The Demon of Geopolitics How Karl Haushofer “Educated” Hitler and Hess* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2016).

²³⁹ Kurt G. W. Lüdecke, *I Knew Hitler: The Story of a Nazi Who Escaped The Blood Purge* (London: Jarrolds Publishers Limited, 1938), 296. Interestingly, the term also appears in a 1943 US State Department report on the basic principles of National Socialism. In a summary of Goebbels’ 1935 lecture on the “Nature and Form of National Socialism,” the report paraphrases, “It became the mission of the National Socialist movement to transfer to the whole German nation the spirit of the...community in which all existed and worked for the good of the whole and in which the worth of the individual was...measured entirely by values of character and personality. The establishment of this community is...giving [Germans] that solidarity of ideals that the lack of which resulted in the collapse of the nation and the loss of the war.” See Raymond E. Murphy et al., *National Socialism; Basic Principles, Their Application by the Nazi Party’s Foreign Organization, and Use of Germans Abroad for Nazi Aims* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 171–72.

be a part of this world, to lose himself in it is so he could find himself, to be allowed a chance to live like others, even though he was black.²⁴⁰

The appeals of fascism complemented Bigger's desires for organic wholeness and social integration, even though the located solution of Aryan supremacy was itself radically incommensurable with Bigger's problem.

VIII. Surplus Emotion & Fascist Lumpen

How do notions of racialized surplus and the Black lumpenproletariat correlate to Wright's allusions to German fascism? Bigger's dangerous presence in Mary's bedroom and the frenzy that subsequently seizes him is nothing if not an emotional experience of surplus. He is a Black juvenile delinquent recruited into domestic labor by reformist white capital, the same capital responsible for his immiseration; his structural superfluity positions him in the private spaces of white consumption rather than production. Bigger's intimate eruption of violence evades the discipline of communist organizing precisely because of his superfluity at the margins of the formal economy, moving precariously between petty crime and temporary domestic service. Indeed, this superfluity appears in the novel as acute domestic violence—precisely where Mary (and Jan's) misguided, paternalistic attempts at recognition failed. After Bigger tells Mary and Jan that his father was murdered by a white mob in the South, Jan responds, "Listen, Bigger, that's what we want to *stop*. That's what Communists are fighting. We want to stop people from treating others that way. I'm a member of the Party. Mary sympathizes. Don't you think if we got together we could stop things like that?" Mary adds, "You know, Bigger, . . . we'd

²⁴⁰ Wright, *Native Son*, 1940, 203–4.

like to be friends of yours.”²⁴¹ But it is through the experience and expression of surplus danger and surplus emotion in the bedroom that Bigger realizes the ambient racializing regime is “open to social contest.”²⁴² After dodging suspicion in an initial police interrogation, Bigger “felt a certain sense of power, a power born of a latent capacity to live... The knowledge that he had killed a white girl they loved and regarded as their symbol of beauty made him feel the equal of them, like a man who had been somehow cheated, but had now evened the score.”²⁴³ The patriarchal regime of race and capital in Chicago commodified Mary for white consumption, establishing a field of social contest outside the realm of production—or the formal economy—wherein Bigger’s superfluity perilously positions him to destroy this commodity in circulation.²⁴⁴ As Kautsky wrote derisively in *The Agrarian Question* (1899), “What social aspirations lumpenproletarians have tend towards an ideal of communism of the means of consumption... an aim which, in reality, leads to plunder where social circumstances facilitate acts of violence.”²⁴⁵

Similarly, Davis’s criticism of the novel theoretically neutered Bigger’s solitary, domestic rebellion as a hopelessly reactionary symptom and predictably demurred from analyzing Bigger’s “emotional tensions.”²⁴⁶ In doing so, Davis overlooked Bigger’s ominous

²⁴¹ Wright, 64–65. Recall as well Mary’s playful attempt to recruit Bigger into taunting her father: “‘All right, Mr. Capitalist!’ She turned to Bigger. ‘Isn’t he a capitalist, Bigger?’ Bigger looked at the floor and did not answer. He did not know what a capitalist was.” Or, Jan’s insistence, “Bigger, *please!* Don’t say *sir* to me... I don’t *like* it. You’re a man just like I am; I’m no better than you. Maybe other white men like it. But I don’t.” Wright, 45, 61. 61

²⁴² Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot: The New Era of Uprisings*, 2.

²⁴³ Wright, *Native Son*, 1940, 140.

²⁴⁴ In an early scene, Bigger and his friend Jack go to the movies, emphasizing the circulation (rather than production) of commodified white beauty and foreshadowing the violence to come: “Then came *The Gay Woman* in which, amid scenes of cocktail drinking, dancing, golfing, swimming, and spinning roulette wheels, a rich young white woman kept clandestine appointments with her lover while her millionaire husband was busy in the offices of a vast paper mill. Several times Bigger nudged Jack in the ribs with his elbow as the giddy young woman duped her husband and kept from him the knowledge of what she was doing... ‘She’s a hot looking number, all right,’ Bigger said. ‘Say, maybe I’ll be working for folks like that if I take that relief job. Maybe I’ll be driving ‘em around...’ ‘Sure,’ Jack said. ‘Man, you ought to take that job. You don’t know what you might run into... them rich white women’ll go to bed with anybody, from a poodle on up. Shucks, they even have their chauffeurs.’” Wright, 26–27.

²⁴⁵ Karl Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question*, trans. Pete Burgess, vol. 2 (London: Zwan Publications, 1988), 314.

²⁴⁶ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 18.

commensurability to lumpenproletarian subjects in Germany. As noted, Wright did not himself ascribe the Marxist label to either Bigger or to the Germans to which he compared Bigger. But his twinned warnings of their alarming avoidance of political analysis and oscillating potential undeniably bear its economic and psychic signs. In his introduction to *Black Metropolis* (1945), Wright wrote,

If, in reading my novel, *Native Son*, you doubted the reality of Bigger Thomas, then examine the delinquency rates cited in this book...Do not hold a light attitude toward the slums of Chicago's South Side. Remember that Hitler came out of such a slum. Remember that Chicago could be the Vienna of American Fascism! Out of these mucky slums can come ideas quickening life or hastening death, giving us peace or carrying us toward another war.²⁴⁷

The empirical verifiability of Wright's comparison here is questionable, to say the least; but more pertinent is Wright's evident perception that the economic superfluity signaled by delinquency and the decaying surplus space of the urban slum corresponded internationally to the production of psychic tensions that had already culminated in German fascism.

This perception of German fascism's lumpen elements had been made explicit in the same decade by leftists who had observed the Nazi movement's rise. In 1932, Trotsky's essay "What Next?" was published and circulated among Left Opposition groups in Berlin, as well as serialized in New York's Trotskyist newspaper *The Militant*. In it, he located Germany's crisis in capitalism's accelerating production of a lumpenproletariat: "The decay of capitalism results in social and cultural decomposition...bring[ing] in its trail only the pauperization of the petty bourgeoisie and the transformation of ever larger groups of workers into the lumpenproletariat.

²⁴⁷ Wright, "Introduction," xx.

In its most acute form, it is this threat that grips advanced capitalist Germany by the throat.”²⁴⁸

Further in the essay, he outlined fascism’s subsequent emergence, recounting,

At the moment that the “normal” police and military resources of the bourgeois dictatorship, together with their parliamentary screens, no longer suffice to hold society in a state of equilibrium — the turn of the fascist regime arrives. Through the fascist agency, capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed petty bourgeoisie, and bands of the declassed and demoralized lumpenproletariat; all the countless human beings whom finance capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy.²⁴⁹

In Trotsky’s analysis, the lumpenproletariat constitute a sector of decaying capitalism’s refuse and in turn a sector of fascism’s base. Evocatively, Trotsky described the fascist mobilization of lumpenproletarian desire in terms of setting in motion “bands of the declassed and demoralized,” equivalent to the language of Bigger’s yearning to *band* and *bind* in the novel. So too is Trotsky’s general location of fascist agency in the psychic “desperation and frenzy” of finance capital’s putrefaction.

The import of Trotsky’s analysis lies in his perception of lumpenproletarian desire among the dispossessed successfully organized by fascism. As early as the Spartacist uprising,

²⁴⁸ Leon Trotsky, “What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat (January 27, 1932),” in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, by Leon Trotsky, ed. George Breitman and Merry Maisel, trans. Joseph Vanzler (New York: Pathfinder Press, Inc., 1971), 143.

²⁴⁹ Trotsky, 155. It should be noted that in the explanatory notes addended to the essay’s publication in 1971 collection *The Struggle Against Fascism*, the collection’s editors define the term “lumpenproletariat” for readers thusly: “the outcast, degenerated, and submerged elements such as beggars, prostitutes, gangsters, petty criminals, the chronically unemployed, the old and broken, to be found in all modern industrial cities. ranks of these poor nonproducers are swelled by the addition of the unemployed in times of social crisis. Reactionary and fascist demagogues have found some of their mass base in the lumpenproletariat, whose atomized condition militates against their adopting class-conscious, proletarian attitudes.”

contemporaries described the organized Freikorps members as “lumpen” and uncontrollable.²⁵⁰ Some German communists named the murderers of Luxemburg and Liebknecht as “lumpen scoundrels.”²⁵¹ Later in *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism*, published first in 1942 and again in 1944, exiled German Jewish political scientist Franz Neumann specifically interpolated the German lumpenproletariat into the historical formation of the Nazi party’s *Sturmabteilung* (S.A.) and then also *Schutzstaffel* (S.S.). In his preface to the book, Neumann took stock of National Socialism’s “psychological warfare” against both liberalism and “Bolshevism.”²⁵² And he underscored the necessity of “psychological warfare” in response, “which cannot be disassociated from the domestic and foreign policies of Germany’s opponents...It consists in demonstrating to the German people that military superiority can be achieved by a democracy which does not claim to be perfect but which rather admits its imperfections, and does not shun the long and arduous task of overcoming them.”²⁵³ The lumpenproletariat, however, appeared in Neumann’s political analysis just once, as he discussed the “Theory of Racial Imperialism,” and its mass counterpart “proletarian racism.”²⁵⁴ Critiquing the Communist Party’s frantic turn to National Bolshevism, a doctrine that had developed as a quasi-fascist tendency in the Soviet Union and Germany, Neumann argued that the doctrine was only “accepted by the uprooted proletariat, by the *Lumpenproletariat*, especially by many groups belonging to the Red Fighting League, which, to a considerable extent, became absorbed by the Brown Shirts and the Black Shirts.”²⁵⁵ Through the appeal of nationalism, Neumann traced the

²⁵⁰ Walt Auerbach, “On the Lumpenproletariat,” *Prometeo*, February 15, 2019, https://prometeo.nyc/2019/02/15/on-the-lumpenproletariat/#_ftn121.

²⁵¹ Auerbach.

²⁵² Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), xix.

²⁵³ Neumann, xx.

²⁵⁴ Neumann, 184, 215.

²⁵⁵ Neumann, 216–17. Robinson captures the historical conditions that gave rise to such contradictory amalgamations of nationalism and communism in his assertion, “Nationalism defeated the Marxism of the Second

German lumpenproletariat's mercurial trajectory from left para-military organization *Roter Frontkämpferbund* to the fascist SA and SS.²⁵⁶

Most analogous to Wright's critique, however, is Austrian Marxist and psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* [*Massenpsychologie des Faschismus*], published in Berlin in 1933. Earlier that year, coinciding with Hitler's seizure of power, Reich fell from grace in the Kommunist Partei Deutschland (KPD) as leadership scrambled to disavow his provocative "sex-political" views. Reich had written groundbreaking texts synthesizing dialectical materialism and psychoanalysis, which were published in the Russian and German Communist Party journal *Under the Banner of Marxism* since 1929, and he had become a "mass psychologist bent on defeating fascism" in the years since.²⁵⁷ In 1932, while Moscow and Berlin waffled on the publication of Reich's pamphlet *The Sexual Struggle of Youth* [*Der Sexuelle Kampf der Jugend*], Reich printed it at his own Berlin-based publishing house, Verlag für Sexualpolitik—certain of the pamphlet's urgency in countering Nazi appeals to German youth.²⁵⁸

International (World War I), but ironically, was a basis of the Marxism of the Third International (the Russian revolutions; Stalin's socialism in one country; the conditions for membership in the Comintern) yet its primary world-historical significance was denied." See Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 64.

²⁵⁶ Recent research confirms Neumann's assessment of the German lumpenproletariat's role in the SA's composition. Auerbach quotes military researcher Jean-Denis Leplage, "The SA provided a haven for adventurous and romantic adolescents but also to undisciplined irregulars and the semi-criminal dregs of the urban slums. During the disastrous economic crisis of 1929-1932, the social background of the SA men underwent a significant change. The aging war veterans and ex-*Freikorps* men were gradually replaced with younger people of the declining lower and middle classes. SA men were not recruited from the soft or timid section of society. Many ruined shopkeepers, unemployed white-collar workers, impoverished farmers, jobless *lumpenproletarians*, poor students, and malcontent *déclassés* joined the SA. A number were young, attracted by the dynamism of the movement, by its fanaticism and rejection of any compromise, the untold opportunities for 'heroic' deeds, and the constant clashes with political enemies. To these must be added many opportunists, sexual deviants, juvenile delinquents and criminals, the dregs of society, who often rise to the surface in times of profound dislocation or collapse. Alongside the unemployed, criminal elements indeed infiltrated the SA and, as a result, the perennial underground struggle between the SA and their opponents took on a gang warfare aspect reminiscent of Al Capone's Chicago." See Auerbach, "On the Lumpenproletariat," n121.

²⁵⁷ Wilhelm Reich, "Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis," in *Sex-Pol: Essays, 1929-1934*, by Wilhelm Reich, ed. Lee Baxandall, trans. Anna Bostock, n.d., 3; Myron Sharaf, *Fury on Earth: A Biography of Wilhelm Reich* (New York: St. Martin's Press/Marek, 1983), 168.

²⁵⁸ Student and biographer Sharaf relates, "Reich believed that the only political answer to the distorted 'sex-politics' of Hitler was his own positive sex-politics. One did not answer Hitler's use of the Jews as scapegoats by

After Reich orchestrated a resolution at an October Dresden youth conference that endorsed “adolescent sexuality, within the framework of the revolutionary movement,” Berlin Party leadership terminated the circulation of pamphlets by Reich and he was eventually voted out of leadership in the organization he had urged the Party to found—the German Association for Proletarian Sex-Politics.²⁵⁹ When the Nazi newspaper *Volkischer Beobachter* attacked the pamphlet on March 2, 1933, Reich fled Germany.²⁶⁰ *Mass Psychology* was primarily an application of Reich’s method of “social psychology” to explain why fascism “had become an international reality and in many countries had visibly and undeniably outstripped the socialist revolutionary movement,” schematizing his “sex-economic” theories and merging his immanent critiques of Marxist and psychoanalytic methods.²⁶¹ In doing so, however, the book was also an extended criticism of the Communist Party’s theoretical and practical approach to fascism in the years 1929-1933 especially, approaches both promulgated from the Soviet Union and elaborated on the ground by the KPD. Reich charged that the Party’s practical “restriction to the sphere of *objective* economic processes and governmental policies” tragically overlooked the rebellious drives, impulses, and emotions seized by reactionary ideology.²⁶² Lacking an understanding of “*irrational, seemingly purposeless actions, ... of the cleavage between economy and ideology,*” the Party was doomed to stand dumb and silent as, “contrary to expectations,” the “acute

pointing out the intellectual fallacies of his argument or its function as a diversion from other issues. One countered by directly dealing with the people's sexual longings.” See Sharaf, *Fury on Earth: A Biography of Wilhelm Reich*, 166, 169.

²⁵⁹ Sharaf, 162, 169–70.

²⁶⁰ Sharaf, 170.

²⁶¹ Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, ed. Mary Higgins and Chester M. Raphael, M.D. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), 19, 3, 4.

²⁶² Reich writes, “The vulgar Marxist simply negates, instead of offering constructive criticism, and feels himself to be a ‘materialist’ when he rejects facts such as ‘drive,’ ‘need,’ or ‘inner process,’ as being ‘idealistic.’” And later, “The rally speeches of the National Socialists were very conspicuous for their skillfulness in operating upon the *emotions* of the individuals in the masses and of *avoiding relevant arguments as much as possible.*” Reich, 6, 15, 34.

economic crisis” led not in the direction of socialism but “in the direction of barbarism.”²⁶³ Both Reich’s trenchant criticism of the Party’s theoretical and practical obtuseness and his complementary analysis of reactionary psychology invoke Wright’s novelistic and paratextual interventions—“If I should follow Ben’s advice and write of Negroes only within the confines of how the Party views them through political theory, I’d abandon the Biggers.”²⁶⁴

Reich identified the lower middle classes in Germany as the “*mass basis of fascism*” and asserted that fascism “infiltrates workers’ groups from two sides: the so-called ‘lumpen proletariat’ . . . and from the ‘workers’ aristocracy.’”²⁶⁵ Yet the class classification of fascists was less important to Reich’s analysis given his corrective attention to reactionary psychology. The schematic class determinism of Party political theory imperiously neglected “the role of ideology and the emotional attitude of these masses. . . the *repercussion of the ideology on the economic basis*,” even as the electoral success of the NSDAP continued to prove that “*it was not the economic but the ideological distribution [of the German population] that was decisive.*”²⁶⁶ Reich’s criticism anticipated Robinson’s argument on the “nonobjective character of capitalist development.”²⁶⁷ Robinson demonstrates that the “the creation of capitalism was much more than a matter of the displacement of feudal modes and relations of production by capitalist ones.”²⁶⁸ It involved decisive “social, cultural, political, and ideological complexes,” especially those of racialism and nationalism, that constituted and generated prevailing “antagonistic differences.”²⁶⁹ In turn, Robinson argued, class consciousness “did not strictly adhere to the logic of working-class formation premised on capitalist exploitation and modeled by Marx from the

²⁶³ Reich, 23, 9, 15.

²⁶⁴ Wright, “Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright,” 3.

²⁶⁵ Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 6, 67.

²⁶⁶ Reich, 10–13.

²⁶⁷ Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 9.

²⁶⁸ Robinson, 10.

²⁶⁹ Robinson, 10.

histories of the French and English bourgeoisies.”²⁷⁰ That is, the “counterideology of international class solidarity and socialist hopes” often failed to gain the upper hand over reactionary nationalism.²⁷¹ Robinson developed his conception of racial capitalism in concert with this argument.

That Robinson’s critique of Marxism resembles Reich’s is not so surprising given that, two years before the publication of *Black Marxism*, Robinson included a lengthy quote from Reich’s *Mass Psychology of Fascism* in an article for the British journal *Race & Class*.²⁷² Additionally, in *Black Marxism* itself, Robinson refers to Reich’s 1934 essay “What is Class Consciousness” when interpreting *Native Son*’s critique of Comintern theory.²⁷³ It would seem therefore that Robinson’s argument about Western civilization and capitalist development as a totality appeared in Reich’s writing in the immediately local terms of German communism and fascism. In a 1942 preface to the English version of *Mass Psychology*, Reich asserted, “The racial theory is not a product of fascism. On the contrary: it is fascism that is a product of racial hatred and is its politically organized expression.”²⁷⁴ Like Robinson’s meticulous demonstration that racial ideology was not simply symptomatic of capitalist development, Reich inverted the contemporary Marxist theories that assumed racialized nationalism in Germany was produced determinedly by interwar contradictions of capitalist development. This counter-assertion anticipated Neumann’s theory and also approached Robinson’s own political theory of fascism.²⁷⁵ Reich subsequently claimed, “It follows from this that there is a German, Italian,

²⁷⁰ Robinson, 34.

²⁷¹ Robinson, 41.

²⁷² Cedric Robinson, “Coming to Terms: The Third World and the Dialectic of Imperialism,” *Race & Class* 22, no. 4 (1981): 364–65.

²⁷³ Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 296.

²⁷⁴ Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, xiv.

²⁷⁵ Robinson argues that fascism names the process through which the German and Italian national bourgeoisies used an “ideological phantasmagoria of race, *Herrenvolk*, and nationalism” to organize social forces. Describing the logical, historical sequence in which medieval citizenship was “supplanted by race and (to use the German phrase)

Spanish, Anglo-Saxon, Jewish, and Arabian fascism.”²⁷⁶ Reading Reich with Robinson, the former’s claim did not ahistorically universalize “racial hatred.” Rather, it identified fascism as not only the product of an international capitalist machine in which “racialism and its permutations persisted” but also the derivative transformation of preexisting racial ideologies and material antagonisms into self-consciously racialized political organization—that is, ideology becoming a material force.²⁷⁷

For Reich, fascism signaled the introduction of a “cleavage” between the economic and ideological bases of mass politics.²⁷⁸ The masses proletarianized by the 1929-1933 economic crisis failed to develop a left ideology; in fact, “the ideology of broad layers of society...developed to the Right.”²⁷⁹ Yet “this cleavage was overlooked; consequently, no one gave a thought to asking how broad masses living in utter poverty could become nationalistic.” The masses’ political trajectories and desires were neither theoretically legible nor practically contained by Marxist economism. For “to the vulgar Marxist, psychology is a metaphysical system pure and simple...The vulgar Marxist simple negates, instead of offering constructive criticism, and feels himself to be ‘materialist’ when he rejects facts such as ‘drive,’ ‘need,’ or ‘inner process,’ as being ‘idealistic.’”²⁸⁰ Wright’s novelistic practice thus paralleled Reich’s “sex-political” practice. Reich demanded analysis of and appeal to the “facts” of mass

Herrenvolk” and then “modern nationalism,” Robinson asserts that the relatively late formation of the German and Italian national bourgeoisies meant uneven ideological amalgamation emerged to maintain control over national society, expand domination and expropriation, and redress national insult at once; this amalgamation took political shape in the “compost of violence” that was fascism. See Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 26–27.

²⁷⁶ Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, xiv.

²⁷⁷ Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 28.

²⁷⁸ Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 8.

²⁷⁹ Reich, 8.

²⁸⁰ Reich, 15. Wright’s own experience joining the Communist Party, as described by Robinson, suggested a similar assessment: “Though he was then a hospital worker, he had identified himself as a writer, and as a writer, he was categorized by those in the party’s ranks as an ‘intellectual.’ This meant that Wright was to be subjected to the diffidence shown to intellectuals” and “also to be held in suspicious for ‘petit-bourgeois tendencies.’” See Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 295.

psychology just as Wright presumed that “the intelligentsia had the obligation to construct the ideological and symbolic means” of mass organization, and especially Black mass organization.²⁸¹ Yet beyond parallels in their respective arguments, Reich’s insistence on analyzing the emotional and ideological register of fascism indicated that its subjective basis could not be delimited by national borders; in doing so, the international scopes of Reich and Wright’s analyses overlap, similar to the overlapping contexts of imperial inclusion in the Third Republic and Third Reich as revealed by Damas and Arendt’s related yet discrete discourses on assimilation. In the added preface, Reich asserted, “The fascist madman cannot be made innocuous if he is sought according to the prevailing political circumstances, only in the German or the Italian and not in the American and the Chinese man as well.”²⁸² Later in the preface, he continued, “Hitlerism is not confined to the Nazi party or to the borders of Germany; it infiltrates workers’ organizations as well as liberal and democratic circles.”²⁸³

Reich was not merely warning of a threat of universal fascism. His social psychoanalytic interventions were reorganizing the Marxist frame by transforming its analytical categories. He explained in the preface,

Owing to its lack of knowledge of mass psychology, Marxist sociology set ‘bourgeois’ against ‘proletariat.’ This is incorrect from a psychological viewpoint... There are liberal capitalists and reactionary workers. *There are no ‘class distinctions’ when it comes to character.* For that reason, the purely economic concepts ‘bourgeoisie’ and ‘proletariat’ were replaced by the concepts

²⁸¹ Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 15; Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 293.

²⁸² Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, xvi.

²⁸³ Reich, xxiv.

‘*reactionary*’ and ‘*revolutionary*’ ... These changes were forced upon us by the fascist plague.²⁸⁴

This transformation drew new, transversal lines of international connection between groups who may not share commensurable positions in the capitalist political economy. It also laid the critical foundation for Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis three decades later. As translator Mark Seem writes, “*Anti-Oedipus* starts by reviving Reich's completely serious question with respect to the rise of fascism: ‘How could the masses be made to desire their own repression?’” Reich provided Deleuze and Guattari with a theory of psychic repression’s dependence on social repression, a “materialist psychiatry,” that was “so careful to situate desire in relation to the forms of social production, demonstrating thereby that there is no psychoneurosis that is not also an actual neurosis.”²⁸⁵ Unmarked but obvious is Deleuze and Guattari’s debt to Reich in their displacement of the terms “proletariat” and “bourgeois” in favor of “revolutionary” and “reactionary.” They explain,

the theoretical opposition is not between two classes... The theoretical opposition lies elsewhere: it is between, on the one hand, the decoded flows that enter into a class axiomatic on the full body of capital, and on the other hand, the decoded flows that free themselves from this axiomatic just as they free themselves from the despotic signifier, that break through this wall... The opposition is between the class and those who are outside the class. Between the servants of the machine, and those who sabotage it or its cogs and wheels. Between the social machine's regime and that of the desiring-machines.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Reich, xxiv.

²⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 118, 127.

²⁸⁶ They continue, “...That is why the problem of a proletarian class belongs first of all to praxis. The task of the revolutionary socialist movement was to organize a bipolarity of the social field, a bipolarity of classes...the

The opposition between proletarian and bourgeois cannot capture the psychological and ideological dynamics that produce repression and revolt, the imbrication of political and libidinal economies. In turn, revolution and reaction as international poles of political desire more accurately organize the unpredictable trajectories made evident by the “fascist plague.”²⁸⁷

Therefore, although Reich’s investigation ultimately ascribed the mass psychology of fascism to the authoritarian impulses of German middle class ideology, his methodological critique of Communist theory and his importunate demonstration of the desires that evaded it both further illuminate the international multiplication of Bigger Thomas and clarify how Wright circuited his critique of the CPUSA through the international threat of fascism. Writing on Germans, Reich argued, “The lower middle-class family...is continually harassed by food and other material worries. Hence the large lower middle-class family’s expansion tendencies also reproduce an imperialistic ideology: ‘The nation needs space and food.’ It is for this reason that the lower middle-class man is especially accessible to imperialist ideology.”²⁸⁸ Reich matched material deprivation and want to the reproduction of imperialist ideology. Granted the radical racial and economic differences between them, do we not hear Bigger here, described by Reich some four thousand miles away? Bigger also needs space and food. And Wright hears Bigger longing, “We ought to take Africa and have a national home.”²⁸⁹ The regime of race in industrial Chicago and the limitations of the Comintern’s local chapter would prevent the expression or political organization of Bigger’s longing in any kind of actual fascist or communist form; indeed, the city of Chicago condemned him, and his desire, to death. Capitalist subjection

socialist movement seems necessarily led to fix or assign a limit that differentiates the proletariat from the bourgeoisie—a great cleavage that will animate a struggle not only economic and financial, but political as well.” See Deleuze and Guattari, 255.

²⁸⁷ Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, xxiv.

²⁸⁸ Reich, 59.

²⁸⁹ Wright, *How “Bigger” Was Born*, 1940, 17.

produced internationally commensurable desires, even as these desires were stimulated, expressed, and organized in locally determined ways. The metabolic process in which the literary Bigger was born therefore revealed how Communist inadequacies in Chicago and Germany mirrored one another. The international development of racial capitalism in Chicago and Germany produced multiple, synchronic crises of surplus negation, signaling psychic volatility that transgressed operative class distinctions and trajectories. That figures analogous or directly derivative of Bigger would erupt in the writings of Fanon, Newton and Seale, and Deleuze and Guattari—reflecting on the charge of people in the urban slums and shantytowns of decolonizing cities in North Africa, in Oakland and beyond amidst rapid urban divestment, and in France following the political failures of the New Left—not only suggests the enduring international field of Bigger’s multiplication but also confirms the perceptive urgency of Wright’s symbolic distillation, Bigger Thomas.

Communism and fascism in Wright’s paratexts therefore indeed named oscillating poles of political desire rather than coherent actualizations of political agendas. They marked Bigger’s volatility, the multivalent potential and “astonishing oscillations” that evaded programmatic assessments.²⁹⁰ Culling data not from manifest ideological terms of real-existing communism and fascism but from the urges and impulses, the potentials and the desires, “well beneath” such terms, Wright displaced the teleology of reaction and revolution with Bigger’s quicksilver charge.²⁹¹ The periscopic comparisons enacted by the paratexts internationalized the novel without reductively generalizing or globalizing it, producing a complex literary apparatus, to use Benjamin’s term, that traced slanted lines of connection between not only the political volatility of the Black lumpenproletariat and the Nazi movement’s startling success but also between the

²⁹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 277.

²⁹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, 105.

theoretical indecipherability of both the Black lumpenproletariat and German proto-fascists in official Marxist schema. In a 1940 text composed between his internment at the Clos St. Joseph camp and his attempt to flee France via Spain in June, Benjamin notoriously argued that a dogmatic conception of progress, in which “‘historical materialism’ is to win all the time,” allowed for a self-assured complacency and conformism that tragically hamstrung German Marxists’ capacity to oppose fascism.²⁹² The periscopic comparison enacted by Wright’s paratexts bridges to Benjamin’s uncannily synchronic critique by circuiting criticism of German Marxists and their concept of progress to the CPUSA’s faith in the Black masses’ progressive point of view.

The synchronic isomorphism of Wright and Benjamin’s critiques escapes simplifying homologies between white supremacy and Nazism and between Black Americans and European Jews. For this isomorphism does not imply homogeneity but “allows, and even incites, a great heterogeneity.”²⁹³ Periscopic comparison thus reveals isomorphisms without obscuring heterogeneity, and, in this case, the novel’s naturalist dissection of Bigger Thomas in Chicago is maintained at the same time the pamphlet sequentializes his personality into an international set. Wright traced such forms of international isomorphism *and* heterogeneity through which political commensurabilities became visible—but only ever provisionally. Periscopic comparison is therefore a method that constructs symmetries and asymmetries beyond the comparison of static unities, instead providing “avenues for the conjuring of alternative possibilities.”²⁹⁴ The articulation of located political failures of the CPUSA and the KPD is but one of these periscopic

²⁹² Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 253.

²⁹³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 436.

²⁹⁴ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 30.

possibilities. Representative of millions deprived and dispossessed—millions “with starved bodies and sensibilities who will follow the Hitlers”—Bigger after the pamphlet, and after periscopic comparison, embodied an international specter of fascist desire.

**Chapter Three:
The Multiplication of Bigger Thomas
Part II: Whither the Jews?**

Indeed, Mr. Cohn writes as though he were recommending his 'two thousand years of oppression' to the Negroes of America! No, thank you, Mr. Cohn. I don't think that we Negroes are going to have to go through with it. We might perish in the attempt to avoid it; if so, then death as men is better than two thousand years of ghetto life and seven years of Herr Hitler.

Richard Wright, "I Bite the Hand that Feeds Me,"
The Atlantic (June 1940)

What of Jews, in the novel and in Germany? Is not the comparison between Bigger's plight in segregated Chicago and that of Jews in segregated Germany the most obvious one at hand? Jewishness appears submerged and peripheral in the novel, and sometimes it is present in the absence of Jews themselves. The owner of the delicatessen Bigger plans to burglarize early in the novel is only allusively Jewish by his name: Blum. Bigger's defense attorney Boris Max refers to his Jewishness scarcely, and it is never remarked upon by Bigger or the narrator—although it would be quickly seized upon by my early reviewers of the novel, especially white reviewers. For example, the review by Henry Seidel Canby presaging the novel's release in the *Book of the Month Club News* of February 1940 claimed that Max, "with the ancient wisdom of the Jews, pleads for [Bigger] on the broad basis of an America in grave danger from a conflict of races which only a deeper-going justice can ameliorate."¹ Max's Jewishness here is mawkishly stressed, it seems, as the ante-American moral ground that can provide redemption and absolution for the white supremacist society euphemistically described as beset by a "conflict of

¹ Henry Seidel Canby, "Native Son by Richard Wright: A Review by Henry Seidel Canby," *Book of the Month Club News*, February 1940, 2, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

racess.” This romanticism runs counter to the novel’s own characterizations of Jewishness, in which the police and Bigger refer to Jewishness in passing as a local signifier for, at turns, communism, foreignness, and white ethnic overlordship. And both manuscript drafts of the novel and other archived notes reveal a curious textual process in which the Jewishness of characters was effaced. Some have attempted to work out the novel’s elusive statement on “Black-Jewish relations” in the United States by decoding clues in the published or unpublished texts through which one can decode the novel’s localized representation of Jews within industrial Chicago’s regime of race and capital.²

Again, however, the novel’s paratexts—including the pamphlet, private correspondence, and public criticism—have a periscopic effect, curving the interpretive gaze and modulating the novel’s Blacks and Jews onto an international scale. What is submerged and peripheral in the novel’s magnifying focalization becomes visible and suggestive in the paratexts, producing a critical tension between Bigger’s local relations with white Jewish Chicagoans and his international identification with Jewish Biggers. Not only in the pamphlet but also in a printed response to *Atlantic* literary critic David L. Cohn, Wright compared Bigger Thomas to oppressed Jews in Europe and, in particular, to one Jew: Herschel Grynszpan, the seventeen-year-old Polish Jewish refugee who assassinated a Nazi diplomat in Paris on November 7, 1938. Wright’s response to Cohn’s anti-Black, paternalistic denunciation of the novel illustrated provocatively that Bigger Thomas was more synchronically commensurable to oppressed Jews in Europe than this white American Jew—incidentally the child of Polish Jewish immigrants himself—from Greenville, Mississippi. The novel’s acutely local focalization thus submerges Jewishness in whiteness while its paratexts pivot to uncover particular Jewish Biggers in a field of international

² Josep M. Armengol, “Blacks as ‘America’s Jews’? Revisiting Black–Jewish Relations in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*,” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 58, no. 5 (2017): 558–74.

multiplication. In doing so, the novel and its paratexts break down the static analogizing of even located Blacks and Jews, instead exposing the scalar imbrication of white/Black and Aryan/Jew axes of racialization. The territorialization of race occurs simultaneously across local and international scales, coding anti-Black and anti-Jewish racializing assemblages in overlapping and contradictory schemes that constantly organize and reorganize whiteness, Aryanness, Blackness, and Jewishness according to the shifting scale of relation or comparison.

I. Novel: Blum and Max

Jews appear in the novel as an absent presence, mostly in the form of allusions and abstract references. Blum and Max are the only two Jewish characters, and their Jewish identification is muted. Blum is never explicitly named a Jew, by either Bigger or the narrator; only his relatively common Ashkenazi last name and petit merchant occupation near Chicago's Black Belt signal what scholar Josep M. Armengol describes as "the 'ghostly' (non-)presence of Blum's Jewishness."³ Loafing around simply to escape the stifling tenement apartment he shares with his two younger siblings and widowed mother, Bigger's mind wanders to a robbery he has planned with his gang: "He thought of Gus and G.H. and Jack. Should he go to the poolroom and talk with them?...From three o'clock to four o'clock in the afternoon there was no policeman on duty in the block where Blum's delicatessen was and it would be safe."⁴ The delicatessen recalls Wright's first job in Chicago as a porter in the Jewish immigrant-owned delicatessen recounted in *Black Boy*. Fresh from Memphis, Wright was befuddled by the intricate and compressed relations of race and capital in industrial Chicago—"It was not until I had left the delicatessen job that I saw how grossly I had misread the motives and attitudes of Mr. Hoffman and his wife.

³ Armengol, 561.

⁴ Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1940), 12.

I had not yet learned anything that would have helped me to thread my way through these perplexing racial relations.”⁵ Wright misrecognized Mrs. Hoffman’s communicative frustration as anti-Black contempt, unable to “thread...through” the multiple national and international flows of labor and refugee migration that collided and coalesced in the urban US North.

Wright’s language depicted the fusion of these flows as an intricately assembled and complexly variegated terrain that, without delicate dexterity, resolved according to preexisting and dominant territorializations. Wright recalled, “I was not angry with her for speaking broken English; my English, too, was broken. But why could she not have taken more patience? Only one answer came to my mind. I was black and she did not care. Or so I thought...I was persisting in reading my present environment in the light of my old.”⁶ Wright described his misread as a mistransposition of the Jim Crow regime of race onto industrial Chicago (the autobiography itself is split into two sections: “Southern Night” in Mississippi and Memphis and “The Horror and the Glory” in Chicago). As such, he arranged the dynamic and confusing “racial relations” in industrial Chicago according to the white/Black axis of Jim Crow governance: “I reasoned thus: Though English was my native tongue and America my native land, she, an alien, could operate a store and earn a living in a neighborhood where I could not even live.”⁷ Although Wright retroactively reevaluated this reasoning in the autobiography, his initial interpretation registers how the spatialization and hierarchization of labor relations in industrial Chicago refracted Eastern European Jewish immigrants into racial whiteness. The racializing assemblages of Jim Crow governance and culture articulated *in dominance* with Wright’s labor relation,

⁵ Richard Wright, *Black Boy (American Hunger): A Record of Childhood and Youth*, The Restored Text Established by the Library of America, Modern Classics (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 265.

⁶ Wright, 264.

⁷ Wright, 264–65.

territorializing and coding relations between Black American natives and Eastern European Jewish immigrants as those between Blacks and whites at large.

It is thus unsurprising that Blum in the novel is always-already perceived by Bigger as a white man. Whether or not an 'Enlightened' Bigger might have reevaluated this representation is irrelevant to the novel's external and internal focalization on him, framed and contained by the spatialization of industrial Chicago's regime of race. As Bigger continues considering the planned robbery, he codes the holdup at the delicatessen as a fantasized revolt against white world supremacy itself:

It would be the toughest [job] that they had ever pulled... For months they had talked of robbing Blum's, but had not been able to bring themselves to do it. They had the feeling that the robbing of Blum would be a violation of ultimate taboo; it would be a trespassing into territory where the full wrath of an alien white world would be turned loose upon them; in short, it would be a symbolic challenge of the white world's rule over them.⁸

Robbing Blum involves transgressing and inverting the racial order as it appears in the form of spatial segregation and apartheid employment, imbuing these local, interpersonal relations of violence with symbolic value according to the territorialized relations they attempt to incapacitate (or reterritorialize). In this sense, and certainly from Bigger's perspective, localized relations of inequality and revolt become immediate, micropolitical codes of an international racial regime. Lacking the interpretive authorial dissection of *Black Boy*, Blum's Jewishness in the novel is rendered absent, a "'ghostly' (non-)presence," by such codes.⁹ The material relations

⁸ Wright, *Native Son*, 12.

⁹ Armengol, "Blacks as 'America's Jews'? Revisiting Black-Jewish Relations in Richard Wright's *Native Son*," 561.

of racial inequality that generate Blum's symbolic value as a white man overwhelm Bigger's field of perception. Armengol suggests that the young men "decide to attack a Jewish rather than a 'real' white man precisely because of the Jew's historically ambiguous (read inferior) racial categorization. To put it simply, they prey on a Jew because they do not dare attack a 'really white' man."¹⁰ Characterizing this subplot within a broad historical narrative of Jewish racialization in the US, Armengol argues that the literary ambiguity marks the historical instability of Jews across and within regimes of race. This historical frame supplements the novel's "claustrophobia of vision" in order to decode Blum's Jewishness, ultimately diminishing the narrative point of view that does not recognize Blum's Jewishness at all.¹¹

It is historically evident that the very literary appearance of a white Jewish delicatessen owner in the Black Belt of Depression-era Chicago is the product of broader social forces of Jewish migration and racialization. But suggesting that such forces were consciously relevant to Bigger ultimately emphasizes Blum's ambiguous Jewish "(non-)presence" at the expense of reading his unequivocal *white* presence.¹² While it submerges Blum's Jewishness, the novel's adhesion to the confined focalization on Bigger's consciousness—consumed by the white/Black axis of residential segregation and labor—represents Blum unambiguously. The proximity of Blum's delicatessen to the Black Belt perhaps indexes Blum's relative position—as an Ashkenazi Jew—in citywide regimes of race and capital, recruiting him into the structural role of a 'middleman' merchant between the Black poor and the white elite. But it is also this social proximity that, perhaps ironically, generates his symbolic value, in Bigger's eyes, as an emblematic, adversarial white man; Blum is, in other words, the real-existing white man Bigger

¹⁰ Armengol, 562.

¹¹ Irving Howe, "Black Boys and Native Sons," *Dissent*, Autumn 1963, 354.

¹² Armengol, "Blacks as 'America's Jews'?" Revisiting Black-Jewish Relations in Richard Wright's *Native Son*," 561.

most naturally encounters within Chicago's racialized urban geography. A writing note left in Wright's archives confirms both the possibility of Blum's ambiguous Jewish relation to Bigger and his ultimately decisive whiteness. In a box including manuscript drafts of the novel, a typed list of writerly tasks includes the following fascinating note: "Make the image of Blum a more racial one; make it carry more weight in terms of black and white relations."¹³ This note is one of the thirteen on the small paper that is crossed out in pen, suggesting that Wright did in fact make the Blum's image "more racial" such that it carried "more weight in terms of black and white relations." More racial as opposed to what exactly, and tending toward "black and white relations" as opposed to which? It is impossible to know for sure but it is clear that Blum's character implied to Wright multiple, articulated structures of subjectivization and identification that Wright decided to tilt toward the racializing assemblages of the Black/white regime. Wright's note to "make it carry more weight" acknowledges the multiple possibilities of arranging and coding Blum and Bigger's relation while registering Wright's intention to emphasize the Black/white axis as the historically and locally 'preferred tendency.'¹⁴ This note bares Blum's representational inclination toward racial whiteness in the novel, confirming both the possibility of Blum's ambiguity and the actuality of his conclusive interpellation by "black and white relations."¹⁵

¹³ Richard Wright, "Study Ways of Weaving More Active Background..." n.d., Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

¹⁴ This phrase alludes to Stuart Hall's discussion of the articulated combinations that produce social formations as complex unities in terms of "tendential combinations," which "which, while not prescribed in the fully determinist sense, are the 'preferred' combinations, sedimented and solidified by real historical development over time." Hall nonetheless cautions, "We must, however, see these 'combinations' as historically specific, rather than specified a priori: as 'laws of tendency'—which can be countermanded by 'counteracting tendencies'." See Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), 330.

¹⁵ Wright, "Study Ways of Weaving More Active Background..."

When Bigger does refer explicitly to Jews in the novel—even Jews who own food establishments in the Black Belt—he does not mention the individual Blum, who remains apparently, for Bigger, overwhelmingly white. The abstract reference to these “Jews” comes as Bigger desperately confronts the economic dispossession compounding spatial deprivation in the Black Belt.¹⁶ After the discovery of Mary’s body and Bigger’s frantic murder of Bessie, a white mob of five thousand police and three thousand volunteers is unleashed on the Black Belt amidst a snowstorm, hunting Bigger and terrorizing Black residents in a white flurry.¹⁷ As a starving and weak Bigger searches miserably for refuge and warmth, he remains trapped by the brutal racialization of urban space, gothically represented by the encumbering, atmospheric whiteness of the storm. He thinks, “How easy it would be for him to hide if he had the whole city in which to move about. They keep us bottled up here like wild animals, he thought. He knew that black people could not go outside of the Black Belt to rent a flat; they had to live on their side of the ‘line.’”¹⁸ As the white mob and the swirling snow attest, this line of segregation functions primarily to captivate Black people rather than strictly maintain separation between Blacks and whites. He passes a white-owned bakery, smelling its warm bread, but, “afraid that the white proprietor would recognize him” from the newspaper descriptions, he despairingly searches for a Black-owned one: “He knew that there were not many of them. Almost all businesses in the Black Belt were owned by Jews, Italians, and Greeks.”¹⁹ Here, Jewishness (and Italianness and Greekness) seems to combine seamlessly with whiteness, for the white-owned bakery is ostensibly included in Bigger’s description of the preponderance of “businesses in the Black Belt...owned by Jews, Italians, and Greeks.” Bigger therefore does recognize the Jewishness of

¹⁶ Wright, *Native Son*, 211.

¹⁷ Wright, 206.

¹⁸ Wright, 210–11.

¹⁹ Wright, 211.

proprietors in the Black Belt but as an abstract presence, an ethnic shade of white ownership and white domination of urban space that dissolves when Bigger is faced with a real-existing proprietor.

That is, Bigger does not ethnicize the proprietor he sees before him. The proprietor's whiteness alone is operative, even though Bigger's subsequent demographic description of business ownership in the Black Belt suggests he might be Jewish, Italian, or Greek as well. Similar to the weighted depiction of Blum's whiteness, this passage demonstrates how the local regime of race generating Bigger's acute vulnerability and hunger overdetermines his immediate field of perception, coding the proprietor as white. Interestingly, this narration of Bigger's perspective implicitly critiques the naturalization of urban segregation expounded by Chicago sociologists such as Robert Park and Louis Wirth, whose sociological concepts Wright used in developing *Native Son*.²⁰ In Park's forward to Wirth's *The Ghetto* (1928)—which Fabre suggests Wright possibly read in the early 1930s— Park wrote, “Our great cities turn out, upon examination, to be a mosaic of segregated peoples... each seeking to preserve its peculiar cultural forms and to maintain its individual and unique conceptions of life. Every one of these segregated groups inevitably seeks, in order to maintain the integrity of its own group life, to impose upon its member some kind of moral isolation.”²¹ Park presumed urban segregation reflected natural resistance to urban assimilation, reducing race to cultural difference and neutering the question of urban inequality. It is ironic that Park's assessment introduced a study of the Jewish community on Chicago's West Side, which, in tracing a genetic historical narrative of its formation, anchored Jewishness as a stable, transhistorical identity. The novel, in contrast, revealed how racial and economic inequality, rather than cultural centrism, produces Chicago's

²⁰ Michel Fabre, *Richard Wright: Books and Writers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 124.

²¹ Fabre, 175; Robert Park, “Foreword,” in *The Ghetto*, by Louis Wirth (New York: Routledge, 2019), lxv.

“mosaic of segregation.”²² In the process, the diachronic reproduction of Jewish subjectivity is intercepted and, in Bigger’s eyes, destabilized by the spatial organization of Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants within Chicago’s racial and economic order.

Max is the novel’s only self-identifying Jewish character, and the divulgence of his Jewishness comes late in the novel. But, first encountering Max in his holding cell, Bigger intriguingly foreshadows this revelation. When Max enters, Bigger saw “a head strange and white, with silver hair and a lean white face that he had never seen before.”²³ As Hilary Holladay points out, Max is described here in nearly identical terms to Mr. Dalton upon Bigger’s first encounter with him: “a tall, lean, white-haired man.”²⁴ On the one hand, Max is, undoubtedly, a white man, appearing in the template of the paternalistic white liberal whose philanthropic largesse rests alongside an exploitation of Black suffering. On the other hand, Max looks “strange,” a descriptor that distinguishes him from Dalton. Earlier in the novel, as detective Britten interrogates Bigger at the Dalton mansion about Jan Erlone, reporters present evince that it is precisely the Jewish that is fungible with the strange or foreign:

“Say, is this Erlone really a citizen?”

“That’s an angle.”

“Mention his foreign-sounding name.”

“Is he Jewish?”²⁵

The rapid succession of “angles” linking together the foreign and the Jewish reflect their equivalence in mass media; emphasizing this equivalence is the suggestive ascription of

²² Park, “Foreword,” lxxv.

²³ Wright, *Native Son*, 247.

²⁴ Wright, 39; Hilary Holladay, “‘Native Son’s’ Guilty Man,” *CEA Critic* 54, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 30.

²⁵ Wright, *Native Son*, 182.

Jewishness to Jan, even though he is not Jewish at all. The description of Max as “strange and white” evokes this link, not as a replacement but in combination with his whiteness.

Still, before and after Max announces his Jewishness, it is his whiteness that is repeatedly emphasized by Bigger and even himself. As Max attempts to convince Bigger to plead guilty to avoid capital punishment, he says, “Bigger, I know my face is white...And I know that almost every white face you’ve met in your life had it in for you, even when that white face didn’t know it...But I want you to know that you can trust me.”²⁶ Even as he attempts to disavow white power, Max asserts his embodied whiteness, his subjection to a racializing assemblage that “etch[es] abstract forces of power onto human physiology and flesh in order to create the appearance of a naturally expressive relationship between phenotype and sociopolitical status.”²⁷ Bigger considers trusting Max—“Was Max not taking upon himself a thing that would make other whites hate him?”—but the racial vulnerability that trust entailed is too great a risk: “He wanted to believe; but was afraid. He felt that he should have been able to meet Max halfway; but, as always, when a white man talked to him, he was caught out in No Man’s Land...Bigger stared at Max. He felt sorry for the white man.”²⁸ Not only is Max measured as a white man throughout Bigger’s consideration of an alliance with him, but Max’s exceptional goodwill also fails to unleash him from the ascriptive transformations of race that code his appearance to sociopolitical power.

Max’s first reference to his Jewishness soon follows, recruited in an attempt to complicate the white/Black axis structuring Bigger’s worldview. Yet even this first reference is not a transparent identification but the description of an external indictment. Bigger scoffs,

²⁶ Wright, 293–94.

²⁷ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 50.

²⁸ Wright, *Native Son*, 294.

“Aw, I don’t care what I say or do now...”

“Oh yes, you *do!*” Max said quickly.

...

“If you don’t care about what you say or do, then why didn’t you re-enact the crime out at the Dalton home today?”

“I wouldn’t do nothing for *them.*”

“Why?”

“They hate black folks,” he said.

“*Why*, Bigger?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Max.”

“Bigger, don’t you know they hate others, too?”

“Who they hate?”

“They hate trade unions. They hate folks who try to organize. They hate Jan.”

“But they hate black folks more than they hate unions,” Bigger said. “They don’t treat union folks like they do me.”

“Oh yes, they do. You think that because your color makes it easy for them to point you out, segregate you, exploit you. But they do that to others, too. They hate me because I’m trying to help you. They’re writing me letters, calling me a ‘dirty Jew.’”

“All I know is that they hate me,” Bigger said grimly.²⁹

It is not yet clear that Max is in fact Jewish, notwithstanding the evocative earlier description of Max’s “strange and white” face; it is even more unclear given the non-Jewish Jan’s proposed

²⁹ Wright, 294–95.

interpellation by reporters as Jewish.³⁰ Max divulges his harassment as a “dirty Jew” in an attempt to relativize anti-Black racialization, asserting the combination of its particular articulation of phenotype and biopolitical governance with other racializing processes. Max’s assertion that “they” classify, segregate, and exploit “others, too” seems to combine these processes merely additively, connecting anti-Black and anti-Jewish racialization as parallels in a set of hatreds. Yet Max’s description of his subjection to anti-Jewish harassment suggests not only their parallel structures of power—“they do that to others, too”—but also their relational dependency.³¹ It is Max’s juridical coalition with this racialized Black criminal that produces his social racialization by citizens aligned with state power. Anti-Jewish racialization combines with anti-Black racialization in this instance in a structured dependency, unfolding in response to a breach in the borders of the white coalition—whose internal solidarity reproduces Black servitude. Max’s anti-Jewish racialization does not therefore appear as a racialized polarity between Jewishness and whiteness but rather as structured in relation to extant processes of anti-Black racialization. However, Max’s attempt to reveal to Bigger his own oppression’s complex relation to and combination with other racialized groups fails to penetrate Bigger’s alienation. While Max’s description of harassment suggests relational dependency, his repetitive reduction of bio/political forms of oppression to “hatred” simplifies this relation into a set of parallels: “Don’t you know they hate others, too?...They hate trade unions. They hate folks who try to organize. They hate Jan...They hate me.”³² When Bigger asserts relational difference, disrupting the reductive parallelism that equates anti-Black racialization and anti-Communist policing—“They don’t treat union folks like they do me”—Max swiftly reasserts equivalence—“Oh yes,

³⁰ Wright, 247.

³¹ Wright, 295.

³² Wright, 295.

they do” (even as his subsequent description belies such equivalence, revealing instead a structured dependency).

This approach fails to convince Bigger. Bigger’s knowledge is limited to the particular hatred he experiences as a Black man, a hatred that apparently exceeds or escapes the commensurability Max seeks to assign it. In the subsequent course of their dialogue, Bigger comes to understand Max’s relation to anti-Black racialization, emphasizing his structured dependency in the same terms Max had; as such, he concludes that individual breaches in the white coalition, such as Max’s, ultimately call forth racializing processes that redraw the lines maintaining the biopolitical status quo. Bigger says, “If all folks was like you, then maybe I wouldn’t be here. But you can’t help that now. They going to hate you for trying to help me. I’m gone. They got me.”³³ The domination of a Black/white axis of racialization means that betrayals of whiteness generate forms of social animus and biopolitical classification not merely to divide discrete groups of working-class subjects but to neuter the multiracial coalitions that could disrupt anti-Black processes of racialization. Max’s response is his only self-identification as a Jew in the entire 1940 original publication: “Oh, they’ll hate me, yes...But I can take it. That’s the difference. I’m a Jew and they hate me, but I know why and I can fight...But you need not worry about their hating me for defending you. The fear of hate keeps many whites from trying to help you and your kind.”³⁴ Max moves ambivalently between describing anti-Jewish hatred as dependent on his alliance with Bigger and ascribing it an autonomous ground of historical development. It is also clear that Max does not assume such anti-Jewish hatred implies non-white racialization, as he compares himself to “many whites” other than himself who are afraid to help. As such, Max does not subsume anti-Jewish racialization within a Black/white axis,

³³ Wright, 304.

³⁴ Wright, 304.

making anti-Jewish racialization coeval with anti-Blackness, but proposes rather a supplementary relation in which anti-Jewish racialization works primarily to reterritorialize the Black/white axis of governance. Max's ambivalent formulation thus registers how "different axes of domination cooperate in founding racializing assemblages," for there is difference in the subjective dimensions of anti-Black and anti-Jewish racialization yet there is also an articulating principle structuring them in relation.³⁵ Most crucial to recognize in Max's self-identification is the evidently unproblematic combination of Jewishness and whiteness, wherein one does not necessarily override or subsume the other.

Again, Wright's writing process leaves traces of the gradual submerging of Max's self-identified Jewishness. In an intermediate draft of the novel, Max makes the following statements in his public defense plea, in which he not only fashions himself a racialized minority but emphasizes the broader social articulation of anti-Jewish and anti-Black racialization:

"Because I, a Jew, dared defend this Negro boy, for days my mail has been flooded with threats against my life...

"The hunt for Bigger Thomas served as an excuse to terrorize the entire Negro population, to arrest hundreds of Communists, to raid labor union headquarters and workers' organizations, to accost Jews and other racial minority groups...

"What is the cause of all his high feeling and excitement?...Did the feeling against the Jews in the city rise only because a Jewish lawyer is defending a black boy?

³⁵ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 49.

“Your Honor, you know that that is *not* the case! All of the factors in the present hysteria existed before Bigger Thomas was ever heard of. Negroes, Jews, workers, and labor unions were hated as much yesterday as they are today.”³⁶

These references also appear in a later, corrected draft.³⁷ However, the corrected, setting typescript draft began to remove these references. In particular, both the phrase “to accost Jews and other racial minority groups” and the “Jews” in “Negroes, Jews, workers, and labor unions” were blacked out.³⁸ Therefore, at this stage of writing, Max’s public self-identification and disclosure of antisemitic harassment remained while some of the references to broader, social processes of racialization, in which Jewish Chicagoans are racialized into anti-Black and anti-Communist biopolitics, were removed; Max’s rhetorical question—“Did the feeling against the Jews in the city rise only because a Jewish lawyer is defending a black boy?”—remained. It appears therefore that Wright restricted describing public antisemitism to such as would be derived from *Max*’s Jewishness, foregrounding its dependence on anti-Blackness. In contrast, the events describing anti-Jewish racialization as autonomous but commensurable to anti-Blackness are muted. Finally, in the galley proofs for the published novel, all the references to Max’s Jewishness are struck through with a pencil, including the statement, “because I, a Jew, dared defend this Negro boy...,” and the question, “Did the feeling against Jews in the city rise only because a Jewish lawyer is defending a black boy?”³⁹ The defense plea in the published novel of 1940 therefore squarely focused on the combination of anti-Black and anti-Communist violence and never once included Max’s self-identification as a persecuted “Jewish lawyer.” Max’s

³⁶ Richard Wright, “Intermediate Draft” (n.d.), 425–26, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

³⁷ Richard Wright, “Late Draft, Typescript Carbon, Corrected” (n.d.), 461, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

³⁸ Richard Wright, “Setting Typescript, Corrected” (n.d.), 481, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

³⁹ Richard Wright, “Galley Proofs” (n.d.), 120a, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

Jewishness was therefore gradually submerged in drafts of the novel, until only a single self-identification remained, also communicated privately, alongside the public's racializing interpellation of him as a "dirty Jew."

It is impossible to know the intentions of this process of erasure but it is difficult to ignore the ways it coincides with Wright's early writerly note to "make the image of Blum...carry more weight in terms of black and white relations."⁴⁰ Did Wright seek also to make Max's relationship with Bigger carry more weight in such terms, or at least prevent readers from considering Max a comparable victim based on the (ultimately removed) references to anti-Jewish violence in the defense plea? Ultimately, Max remained—in the eyes of the state and the eyes of Bigger—a white man. The state's attorney Buckley declares, "It is a sad day for American civilization when a white man will try to stay the hand of justice from a bestial monstrosity who has ravished and struck down one of the finest and most delicate flowers of our womanhood," emphasizing Max's whiteness at the very moment when his cooperative alliance with Bigger should have provoked an anti-Jewish racialization.⁴¹ The anti-Jewish racialization Max experienced through public harassment did not unsettle but was accompanied by his white re-racialization vis-à-vis the state. At the close of the novel, as Bigger awaits his impending execution, he starts and stops while trying to communicate and connect with Max:

He could not talk. Max reached over and placed a hand on his shoulder, and Bigger could tell by its touch that Max did not know, had no suspicion of what he wanted, of what he was trying to say. Max was upon another planet, far off in space. Was there any way to break down this wall of isolation?...

⁴⁰ Wright, "Study Ways of Weaving More Active Background..."

⁴¹ Wright, *Native Son*, 341.

Max looked at him sharply and rose from his cot. He stood in front of Bigger for a moment and Bigger was on the verge of believing that Max knew, understood; but Max's next words showed him that the white man was still trying to comfort him in the face of death.⁴²

Bigger recalls Max's whiteness, and thus the imposed gap between him and Max, following Max's attempt to morally recuperate him. Bigger subsequently responds by asserting his moral abjection, his self-realization via the crime of murder: "Maybe it ain't fair to kill, and I reckon I really didn't want to kill. But when I think of why all the killing was, I begin to feel what I wanted, what I am... What I killed for must've been good!"⁴³ Max can only look on with "eyes... full of terror," faced with the limits of his white empathy, the abject Black lumpen that evades both liberal and Communist domestication.⁴⁴ The novel ends on the next page. The relationship between Max and Bigger—distinct from Wright's own described relationship to white Jews in the Communist Party—represented at an interpersonal scale a relationship in which the Black/white axis of Chicago's regime of race submerged Jewishness in whiteness, (dis)ordering and (dis)figuring multiracial solidarity. The relationship therefore represented not merely the white limitations of the CPUSA approach to organizing the Black un- and under-employed but also how Black abjection coded the whiteness of Jewish Party members. That is, at the same time that the CPUSA was overwhelmingly Jewish and Jewishness itself was coded by the US state to Communist and anti-racist politics, the racializing assemblage reproducing Black abjection ironically reified the whiteness, in contrast, of even these Jewish Party members.

⁴² Wright, 353–54.

⁴³ Wright, 358.

⁴⁴ Wright, 358.

II. Paratext: Cohn and Herschel

Wright's paratextual writings on fascism and Jews both complicate and clarify the absent presence of Jewishness in the novel. Wright's pamphlet and correspondence with Gold internationalized the novel by periscoping to Germany, Russia, and elsewhere, circumventing the novel's thick local frame without simplifying or globalizing it. These paratexts articulated the novel's naturalist claustrophobia to an international field of vision, across which various and shifting commensurabilities became visible. This periscopic relation between the novel and its paratexts destabilized and resorted the ordered asymmetries of Black/white and Jew/Aryan by making visible the multiple lines of connection that traverse local and international scales. While the lines connecting the Black lumpenproletariat and German proto-fascist articulated Wright's critiques of Communist approaches to the "Negro Question" and to fascism, the lines connecting *Bigger* to Jews exposed how various scales and locations of racialization intercepted those presumably linking white American and European Jews; in turn, these lines throw into relief American Jewish whiteness and deconstruct the diasporic relationality of American and European Jews as a coherent collectivity. In the pamphlet, Wright only compared *Bigger* to Jews once, when he noted he "was startled to detect, either from the side of the Fascists or from the side of the oppressed, reactions, moods, phrases, attitudes that reminded me strongly of *Bigger*."⁴⁵ In his remarks to Gold on Germany, Wright didn't mention Jews at all. Like Du Bois, Wright struggled to stabilize a synchronic comparison between Black Americans and German Jews; the absent presence of Jewishness in the novel suggests that the local weight of whiteness constrained the visibility of commensurable anti-Black and anti-Jewish processes of racialization. Yet the periscopic apparatus of the paratext enabled Wright to stabilize a

⁴⁵ Richard Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born: The Story of Native Son, One of the Most Significant Novels of Our Time, and How It Came to Be Written* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 16.

multiscalar comparison that circumvented but did not displace these local constraints. In a response to David L. Cohn's review of the novel in the *Atlantic*, Wright located a commensurable biopolitical and psychic process of racialization in Herschel Grynzspan, a seventeen-year-old Polish Jewish refugee who assassinated Nazi diplomat Ernst vom Rath in Paris. Putting *Bigger* in international relation to Herschel, Wright disrupted Cohn's attempt to differentiate and hierarchize Black and Jewish oppression by turning Cohn's anti-Black dismissal of *Bigger* into a dismissal of Jews persecuted in Europe.

Gold's third column on *Native Son* in the *Daily Worker* expressed the paratextual's role in stabilizing this comparison and framed this paratextual comparison's relation to the novel. Following Gold's second column on the novel, Wright had written to Gold linking Davis's criticism of the novel to a failure to confront fascism. In Gold's subsequent column, Gold argued that criticism of the novel in the "white capitalist press" reflected "chauvinist complacency" comparable to British colonialism and Nazism.⁴⁶ He did not therefore consider *Bigger* in relation to German fascists but considered white and Aryan complacency in relation. Like Wright's assertion in the letter, Gold argued that "discussion" of the novel represented "a breach in the status quo," but he did not seem at first to speak in an international frame.⁴⁷ The novel stimulated discussion of "the great daily injustice that is done the Negro," which Gold detailed in terms of the urban segregation, labor and voting discrimination, and ritualized violence that composed the regime of anti-Blackness in the United States.⁴⁸ Yet to illustrate the productive implications of

⁴⁶ Mike Gold, "Change the World: Still More Reflections On Richard Wright's Novel, 'Native Son,'" *Daily Worker*, April 29, 1940, 7, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

⁴⁷ Gold, 7.

⁴⁸ He wrote, "He is locked up in segregated ghettos. He can't get jobs. His intellectuals are not permitted to practise their professions. He can't vote. In the South his life is considered less sacred than a pet dog's. Lynching is made a sadist holiday that deepens the degeneracy of Southern cities and villages. The President of the United States dares not speak out against lynching. The Congress refuses to pass any anti-lynching law." Gold, 7.

this stimulus, Gold likened anti-Blackness in the US to antisemitism in Germany and alleged their mimetic relation:

Fifteen million Americans born here under a constitution that makes every ‘native son’ a full partner in the democracy, are daily robbed, beaten, flouted, cheated, slandered, murdered, and generally treated with the same sort of horrible race-hate that Hitler and all his Storm Troopers must yet pay for on the revolutionary guillotine of the German folk. It was Birmingham that taught Berlin.

And it has been going on for more than a hundred years, this national horror whose entire mechanics were taken over by Hitler.⁴⁹

Parallel processes of racializing dispossession and violence not only conceptually unite the regimes but register a historical relation of influence. It is this influence that provided the contradiction when the “American press rarely utters a word about this great evil in our own front-yard...It is not a major political issue. They ignore it. They accept it as final.”⁵⁰ Gold mimicked German complacency to mime the American press’s evasion of “the great crime of Negro oppression”: “Hasn’t Hitler brought Germany imperial greatness? Why should anyone bother about a little issue like the Jews?”⁵¹ Gold identified similitude between techniques of racialization in the US and Nazi Germany in the course of addressing the controversy stirred by *Native Son* in public media discourse; isomorphic reactions to discussion in Germany of Jewish oppression signaled parallel and genetically linked racializing assemblages of subjugation and naturalization.

⁴⁹ Gold, 7.

⁵⁰ Gold, 7.

⁵¹ Gold, 7.

But Gold did not isolate the United States and Nazi Germany into an exceptional binary for he expanded the comparative field to include the British empire, considering German society's silence on Jewish oppression comparable to colonial hegemony over a *longue durée*.

He wrote,

For hundreds of years, your average Britisher has been just as annoyed and surprised when anyone brought the Hindus or the Irish to his attention. "The Irish are only madmen, the Hindus are disunited, backward heathen," were ever his cheap, smug, ignorant and self-deluding answer.

So it is plain that to force a discussion of Negro wrongs on America is like forcing a discussion of the Jewish problem in Nazi Germany, or India in England. It is in itself a step forward, a break in the huge wall of chauvinist complacency.⁵²

It is *Native Son*'s social effect, evident in public media discourse, that revealed its international parallels, confirming the paratextual stabilization of the novel's international comparisons. Gold framed this relation between paratext and novel by explaining that Wright's "esthetic mastery...lies in the exact spot where some of the critics have chosen to direct their fire—in his intensive use of the fictional spotlight."⁵³ Wright's focalization on Bigger Thomas forced a discussion on the psychic dispossession and depravation produced by racial capitalism in industrial Chicago; it was necessary that "his spotlight blacked out the rest of the world, and illuminated with an almost unbearable blaze a Negro slum boy, and his struggle against the nightmare world of whites."⁵⁴ The meticulous navigation of Bigger's melodramatic psychology and the naturalist magnification of Bigger's environment necessarily constrained the reader's

⁵² Gold, 7.

⁵³ Gold, 7.

⁵⁴ Gold, 7.

gaze to the imminently local. The metaphor of spotlight and blackout for Wright's literary method illustrates the periscopic relation between the novel's local focalization and its international framework. A constrained gaze makes visible that which would be swallowed under full-stage flood lights; and what is blacked out is not absent but temporarily out of view, requiring a paratextual supplement to obliquely shift the spotlight. Gold therefore exemplified how the naturalist novel is internationalized obliquely, in paratextual writings that provide for periscopic comparisons and that specifically drew lines of connection that Wright would extend and specify in his June response to David L. Cohn.

In the May 1940 issue of the *Atlantic* magazine, Cohn published his caustic and defamatory review of *Native Son*, "The Negro Novel: Richard Wright." Cohn was a popular writer from the Mississippi Delta, born in 1896 to Polish Jewish immigrants and dry goods merchants. He published numerous essays—including over sixty short ones for the *Atlantic*—as well as the 1935 amateur ethnography *God Shakes Creation*, largely focused on Black American life in the Delta. According to a review in the *New York Times*, Cohn spent the majority of the book picturing "the Negroes careless, improvident, easy-going, given to crimes of violence among themselves, clinging still to practices of would-be magic, unrestrained by ordinary standards of monogamy, on the whole cheerful, fatalistic and likable."⁵⁵ His review of *Native Son* did not improve much upon this position and quickly devolved into astounding apologetics for white supremacy and a diatribe against Wright himself. He began by asserting that "Richard Wright, a Mississippi-born Negro, has written a blinding and corrosive study in hate," describing the "malevolence and demoniac intensity" of Bigger's "race hatred."⁵⁶ Cohn was disturbed,

⁵⁵ Anonymous, "In the Delta," *The New York Times*, September 13, 1936, sec. The New York Time Book Review, 23.

⁵⁶ David L. Cohn, "The Negro Novel: Richard Wright," *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1940, 659.

apparently, by the suggestion of a relationship between Bigger's oppression and Bigger's violence; and, rejecting such a suggestion, encapsulated Bigger's rebellious subjectivity as a discrete variation of hatred manifested between presupposed, discrete races. Cohn bemoaned that "time after time, . . . Bigger bitterly complains that he is denied access to the broad, glittering world which the whites monopolize for themselves to the exclusion of Negroes," setting up the novel's ultimate charge that "Bigger's crimes and his fate in the electric chair . . . are consequently to be laid at the door of white society."⁵⁷

Cohn proceeded with a remarkable display of white innocence that almost too-perfectly demonstrates the "chauvinist complacency" to which Gold had alluded.⁵⁸ Opposed to Max's assertion, in the novel, of Black national captivity, Cohn calumniously and dishonestly harangued,

Mr. Wright might have made a more manly and certainly more convincing case for his people if he had stuck to fact. In all of the non-Southern states, Negroes have complete political rights, including the suffrage, and even in the South Negro suffrage is constantly being extended. . . . Nowhere in America save in the most benighted sections of the South, or in times of passion arising from the committing of atrocious crime, is the Negro denied the equal protection of the laws.⁵⁹

That selection should suffice to demonstrate the sorts of disavowal and self-delusion necessary to maintain Cohn's sense of white innocence. As Gold described, Wright "illuminated with an almost unbearable blaze" the violence produced by racial oppression and Cohn panicked for his

⁵⁷ Cohn, 659.

⁵⁸ Gold, "Change the World: Still More Reflections On Richard Wright's Novel, 'Native Son,'" 7.

⁵⁹ Cohn, "The Negro Novel: Richard Wright," 659–60.

life, a rather ironic admission of white guilt. For Cohn manically imputed to Wright the specter of race war (“a new civil war”), anticipating the postwar neo-Nazi cry of ‘white genocide’ in a paranoid nightmare in which dissatisfied Black Americans complete “the destruction of the society of the majority.”⁶⁰ The Jewish Cohn had thus far fashioned himself indisputably as a defender of the white status quo.

Cohn, however, then latched onto Max’s Jewishness to set up a hierarchy between Jewish and Black suffering and, in the process, naturalized anti-Blackness and disciplined Wright’s rebellion against it as fanatical insubordination. He wrote, “Bigger’s lawyer is a Jew. As a member of a race which has known something of oppression,—not for three centuries, the length of the Negro’s residence in America, but for more than twenty centuries in nearly every country of the world,—he pleads extenuation for his client.”⁶¹ Completely bypassing Max’s explicitly Marxist association in the novel, Cohn framed Max’s Jewishness as his motive, setting up a quantitative ledger of racial oppressions as the simultaneous ground of empathy and paternalism. But ultimately, Cohn read Max’s Jewishness in the novel as a crude and ignorant trick: “Mr. Wright uses a Jewish lawyer as his mouthpiece, but he has learned nothing from Jewish history, nor gleaned anything of the spirit of that group whom Tacitus called ‘a stubborn people.’” Jews and Blacks are thus united under the heading of ‘oppressed races’ only for Cohn to assert the moral and didactic superiority of the former. For Cohn claimed,

If repression of the members of a minority drives them to slay members of the majority, it would follow that the principal occupation of Jews in Tsarist Russia, Poland, Rumania, and other bitterly anti-Semitic countries would have been to use

⁶⁰ Cohn, 660. On the postwar discourse of ‘white genocide,’ see Paul Jackson, “‘White Genocide’: Postwar Fascism and the Ideological Value of Invoking Existential Conflicts,” in *The Routledge History of Genocide*, by Richard C. Maguire and Cathie Carmichael (New York: Routledge, 2015), 207–26.

⁶¹ Cohn, “The Negro Novel: Richard Wright,” 660.

their oppressors as clay pigeons. Jewish revolutionists there have been, indeed, but over the whole sweep of two thousand years of dark Jewish history the mass of these people, enduring greater oppression than Negroes knew here even in slavery, created within the walls of their ghettos an intense family and communal life and constructed inexhaustible wells of spiritual resource.⁶²

Cohn's sweeping characterization of transhistorical Jewish gentility and perseverance essentially put forth the ennobling effects of cultural resilience as a pacification of Black rebellion, naturalizing anti-Black subjugation via a comparison to the supposed courteous patience of oppressed Jews. The result was Cohn's politically sterilizing insistence on white innocence: "It is no fault of the Negro or of the present generation of whites that the Negro is here. But the preaching of Negro hatred of whites by Mr. Wright is on a par with the preaching of white hatred of Negroes by the Ku Klux Klan."⁶³ Cohn anticipated the framework of "racial individualism" that flattened structural illustrations of racial oppression into an exchangeable set of hatreds, evading the question of real-existing (white) power with a notion of individualized pathological animus.⁶⁴ Cohn's method of rejecting Wright's representation of Bigger relied on the combination of a hierarchizing comparison to Jews and a dogged defense of white innocence; such a combination was self-evident to Cohn.

Wright's response to Cohn in the June 1940 *Atlantic*—"I Bite The Hand That Feeds Me"—specifically addressed Cohn's paternalistic Jewish empathy while disrupting the comparative logic that presupposed the parity of Jews and Blacks as discrete races. Wright began with an audacious rejection of Cohn's prescribed patience that revealed the racial ideologies of

⁶² Cohn, 660.

⁶³ Cohn, 661.

⁶⁴ Leah N. Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 2.

uplift and assimilation structuring his comparison. He wrote, “In the eyes of the average white American reader, [Cohn’s] article made it more difficult for a Negro (child of slaves and savages!) to answer a cultured Jew (who has two thousand years of oppression to recommend him in giving advice to other unfortunates!) than an American white.”⁶⁵ Cohn’s comparison, ostensibly bringing Jews and Blacks into some kind of relation as oppressed groups, in fact widened a gap between them according to a racialized continuum of civilization and savagery. The shape of Cohn’s hierarchized comparison revealed his investment in a racially-coded cultural hierarchy, aligning Jews with white progress and thereby widening the gap between the ostensibly comparable terms. Wright continued with a polemical affirmation of Black impatience: “Indeed, Mr. Cohn writes as though he were recommending his ‘two thousand years of oppression’ to the Negroes of America! No, thank you, Mr. Cohn. I don’t think that we Negroes are going to have to go through with it. We might perish in the attempt to avoid it; if so, then death as men is better than two thousand years of ghetto life and seven years of Herr Hitler.”⁶⁶ There is something of a masculinizing battle of egos in Wright’s implication of Jewish feminine weakness, no doubt in reaction to Cohn’s nasty description of Wright’s unmanly case for Bigger. But Wright also once again emphasized the gap Cohn’s own comparative method produced—the gap of respectability and domestication, which Bigger certainly failed to bridge.

Wright continued to widen this gap between Black and (white) Jewish Americans, but he also redrew particular lines of connection between Blacks and Jews by internationalizing Cohn’s comparison. Like the argument that Bigger “contained within him the potentialities of either Communism or Fascism,” Wright responded to Cohn by locating international comparisons to

⁶⁵ Wright, “I Bite The Hand That Feeds Me,” *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1940, 826.

⁶⁶ Wright, 826.

both communism and fascism.⁶⁷ To Cohn's assertion that "the Negro problem in America is actually insoluble," a condescending naturalization of Black oppression, Wright asserted "the Negro problem in America is *not* beyond solution...Russia has solved the problem of Jews and that of all her other racial and national minorities."⁶⁸ Like some of Du Bois's declarations on Germany, the empirical accuracy of Wright's assertion is of less interest than his invocation of Jewish emancipation in the Soviet Union as an exemplar for the resolution of racial oppression. Wright denied Cohn's complacent endorsement of white supremacy by implying the commensurability of racialized social contradictions in the United States and Russia; by paralleling synchronic political formations of white supremacy and antisemitism, Cohn's own position in an international frame is put into question. Wright presumed "the Soviet solution is not to Mr. Cohn's liking, but I think it is to the liking of the Jews in Russia and Biro-Bidjan. I accept the Russian solution. I am proletarian and Mr. Cohn is bourgeois; we live on different planes of social reality and we see Russia differently."⁶⁹ Wright distinguished Cohn from Jews in Russia and identified himself with the latter, redrawing lines of connection that introduced a cleavage in Cohn's abstract notion of Jewish peoplehood. By coding these differences in the language of class, Wright suggested how upward mobility in the United States domesticated Cohn on a national scale, constraining his recognition of international Jewish parallels to anti-Black oppression. Wright emphasized this point when he maintained, "We Negroes prefer to take the hint of that great Jewish revolutionist, Karl Marx, and look soberly upon the facts of history, and organize, ally ourselves, and fight it out."⁷⁰ Unlike the reactionary echo Wright heard in German fascists, Wright put Black Americans here in a revolutionary call and response

⁶⁷ Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 19.

⁶⁸ Cohn, "The Negro Novel: Richard Wright," 661; Wright, "I Bite The Hand That Feeds Me," 826.

⁶⁹ Wright, "I Bite The Hand That Feeds Me," 826.

⁷⁰ Wright, 827.

with Jews. He declared, “I urge my race to become strong through *alliances*, by joining in common cause with other oppressed groups...workers, *sensible* Jews, farmers, declassed intellectuals, and so forth. I urge them to master the techniques of political, social, and economic struggle...crossing national and racial boundaries if necessary.”⁷¹ Wright responded to Cohn by elaborating an international terrain that unsettled Cohn’s oppositional hierarchy between Black and Jewish Americans, exposing Cohn’s investment in white supremacy and disarticulating him from racially oppressed Jews.

But this disarticulation does not reflect a simple opposition between Jewishness and whiteness, merely transferring Cohn to the white side of a singular, global axis of racial oppression; it is not racial whiteness per se that splits Cohn from Jews but his relative social and ideological position in a complex regime of race and capital. Wright made his most specific comparison between Bigger and Jews in a comparison to Herschel Grynszpan, but he makes this comparison not only to demonstrate Bigger’s commensurability to “Jewish boy[s]” but also at the very same time to “white boys.”⁷² In other words, Wright challenged Cohn’s Jewish identity and deconstructs his whiteness at once, suggesting Bigger’s synchronic commensurability to a white *and* Jewish subject and, in turn, exposing Cohn’s international incommensurability to this subject as a white *bourgeois* American. Cohn disavowed the novel’s racialized frame by attempting to displace it with class, claiming “so too are whites put in jail for no reason at all in Pittsburgh. This is the unjust fate, not of the Negro alone, but of the poor, the obscure, and the inarticulate everywhere, regardless of pigmentation.”⁷³ And he disciplined Wright’s depiction of Bigger’s rebellious violence by again hierarchizing it against Jewish suffering and perseverance:

⁷¹ Wright, 827.

⁷² Wright, 828.

⁷³ Cohn, “The Negro Novel: Richard Wright,” 660.

Wright “has chosen to make his hero so hopelessly despairing of making a good life for himself because of white repressions, that he drives him to crime and execution when his adult life has hardly begun. Contrast this with the experience of the Jews of England, who were first granted full civil rights only after five centuries of living in the country.”⁷⁴ Wright responded first by affirming the combination, rather than distinction, of racializing assemblages and capitalist immiseration, insisting, “Yes, white boys commit crimes, too. But would Mr. Cohn deny that the social pressure upon Negro boys is far greater than that upon white boys? And how does it materially alter the substance of my book if white boys do commit murder?”⁷⁵ The proposed commensurability of Bigger’s violence to acts perpetrated by white boys did not de-racialize the production of the former. Dispossessing and criminalizing capitalism produced various acts of violence whose material expression was racialized according to its location and source. “White repressions” provided less the singular cause of Bigger’s violence than its expressive shape.⁷⁶

Then, however, Wright turned to Europe, introducing a Jewish reaction to Nazi antisemitism that did not conform to Cohn’s depiction of genteel patience: “Does not Mr. Cohn remember the Jewish boy who shot the Nazi diplomat in Paris a year or two ago? No Jewish revolutionist egged that boy to do that crime.”⁷⁷ Wright’s allusion to Herschel Grynszpan suggested the racialized shape of individualized Jewish violence spontaneously produced by Nazi structures of oppression. It was synchronically commensurable to the spontaneous production of individualized Black violence in Chicago. By suggesting the possibility of Jewish Biggers in Europe reacting to Nazi antisemitism, Wright put Cohn’s transhistorical Jewish identification in crisis. On the morning of November 7, 1938, the seventeen-year-old refugee

⁷⁴ Cohn, 661.

⁷⁵ Wright, “I Bite The Hand That Feeds Me,” 828.

⁷⁶ Cohn, “The Negro Novel: Richard Wright,” 661.

⁷⁷ Wright, “I Bite The Hand That Feeds Me,” 828.

Grynszpan entered the German embassy in Paris and shot junior diplomat Ernst Eduard vom Rath. By the evening, the Reich's Propaganda Ministry gave instructions to the press framing Grynszpan's violence as indicative of an international Jewish conspiracy and evidence of Jewish brutality. Just four hours after the shooting, the German News Agency (DNB) distributed a report describing how Grynszpan acted "to avenge his Jewish racial comrades" and an instruction issued that evening charged German newspapers with printing the story so as to "fully dominate the front page" and that commentary should emphasize the necessity of "the most serious consequences for the Jews."⁷⁸ Alan E. Steinweis explains that editors were "directed not to express 'anti-French tendencies' in their reporting, but to keep the spotlight on the 'international Jewish criminal riff-raff' that was responsible for the crime. Grynszpan...was a 'tool of international Jewry.' German-Jewish émigrés in Paris, supported by international Jewish organizations, had 'put the murder weapon' in Grynszpan's hand."⁷⁹ Anti-Jewish mobs quickly formed in Germany, terrorizing Jews in Kassel on November 7 and 8, before Goebbels persuaded Hitler to "authorize a nation-wide pogrom" on the evening of November 9.⁸⁰ There is in this timeline an uncanny resemblance to the white mob in *Native Son* that terrorized Blacks in Chicago following newspaper reports that described a "Negro's rape and murder of the missing heiress."⁸¹ During the mob violence, the reports described, "men organized vigilante groups and sent word to Chief of Police Glenman offering aid" and "several hundred Negro employees throughout the city had been dismissed from jobs. A well-known banker's wife phoned this paper that she had dismissed her Negro cook, 'for fear that she might poison the children.'"⁸²

⁷⁸ Qtd. in Alan E. Steinweis, "The Trials of Herschel Grynszpan: Anti-Jewish Policy and German Propaganda, 1938-1942," *German Studies Review* 31, no. 3 (2008): 474.

⁷⁹ Steinweis, 474.

⁸⁰ Steinweis, 475.

⁸¹ Wright, *Native Son*, 207.

⁸² Wright, 207.

Cohn's own stated fears of a second civil war thus aligned not only with the racial neurosis of the banker's wife but also, most unsettlingly, with Nazi fantasies of mass Jewish rebellion.

The shooting was well-reported in the American press, from the *New York Times* to the *Chicago Defender*, and just a week following the Nazi pogrom popular journalist Dorothy Thompson organized a defense fund for the "assassin."⁸³ The first report of the assassination in the *New York Times* described on the front page a "German-born Polish émigré of Jewish extraction" who "declared he was out to kill all in the German Embassy in retaliation for 'Polish Jews just expelled from Germany.'"⁸⁴ The report also explained,

When arrested Grynszpan carried a passport issued by the Polish Consulate-General in Paris. According to a postal card mailed from the German-Polish frontier village of Zbaszyn on Oct. 31, Grynszpan's father, a Hanover tailor, and his family had just been expelled from Germany to Poland without being permitted to take anything but a few pieces of clothing. 'We are now penniless,' wrote the elder Grynszpan to his son in Paris... The police have been unable to establish whether Grynszpan arrived in France in 1935 or 1936. However, he was asked to leave the country in August, 1937.⁸⁵

The Rotogravure Picture Section of the Sunday, November 20, *New York Times*—precisely the kind of supplement that Wright referred to in the pamphlet as a site of Black international identification—narrated in large pictures, including one of "The Boy Killer," the following sequence of events: "The first act of the present grim drama was the Reich's deportation of

⁸³ Anonymous, "Nazi Rioters Burn Jewish Synagogue," *Chicago Defender*, November 19, 1938; Anonymous, "Thousands in U.S. Offer to Help Assassin; Dorothy Thompson Forms Defense Fund," *The New York Times*, November 16, 1938.

⁸⁴ Anonymous, "Reich Embassy Aide in Paris Shot to Avenge Expulsions by the Nazis," *The New York Times*, November 8, 1938.

⁸⁵ Anonymous.

Polish Jews; a despondent boy's brooding over his family's sufferings in that deportation led to the killing of a German embassy official in Paris; as the sequel came the widespread outbreak of anti-Semitic violence in Germany."⁸⁶ This narrative gives a sense of the exceptional racial dispossession and alienation that made this Polish-Jewish assassin resemble, to Wright, a Black lumpenproletariat figure on Chicago's South Side; a stateless Jewish teenager hiding from police in Paris, "overcome with anxiety," as Gerald Schwab describes, and agonizing over his parents' immiseration, Grynszpan was no doubt "a dispossessed and disinherited man...looking and feeling for a way out" and who, "granting the emotional state, the tensivity, the fear, the hate, the impatience, the sense of exclusion, the ache for violent action," would "not become an ardent, or even a lukewarm, supporter of the *status quo*."⁸⁷ In a December 1 report in the Times, Grynszpan is quoted in a headline disclosing "Slayer of Diplomat Acted 'In a Trance,'" which evokes the "the grip of a weird spell" Bigger felt after Mrs. Dalton's entrance into Mary's bedroom seized him with "hysterical terror."⁸⁸

Wright's response to Cohn thus did not evoke a comparison between antisemitism in the Third Reich and white supremacy in the United States wherein each represented discrete racial regimes. It rather located a Jewish personality synchronically commensurable to Bigger Thomas in its impulse toward criminalized revolt—"tense, afraid, nervous, hysterical, and restless."⁸⁹ In turn, Wright suggested the relative incommensurability of Cohn and Grynszpan, an incommensurability marked by Cohn's defense of white domination. Cohn had proposed the Jewish experience of oppression as the exemplar against which he condemned Bigger's

⁸⁶ Anonymous, "The Tragedy of a People," *The New York Times*, November 20, 1938, Sunday edition, sec. 8.

⁸⁷ Gerald Schwab, *The Day The Holocaust Began: The Odyssey of Herschel Grynszpan* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 71; Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 19.

⁸⁸ Wright, *Native Son*, 73–75.

⁸⁹ Wright, *How "Bigger" Was Born*, 18.

deviance. Disputing Cohn's notion of noble Jewish perseverance with an allusion to Grynspan's violent paroxysm, Wright parried Cohn's comparative allusion to the Jewish "race," disintegrating Cohn's invocation of a presupposed, transhistorical unit and tracing instead commensurable personalities as they multiply across national and racial lines in the international expanse of the industrial capitalist machine. Wright broke through the very ground of Cohn's comparative hierarchy—a reification of Black and Jewish difference as discrete absolutes—by periscoping from Bigger Thomas to Herschel Grynspan, drawing international lines of commensurability across Black and Jewish personalities while provincializing and excluding Cohn from them. The paratextual elaboration of this commensurability therefore clarifies the submerged representation of Jewishness in the novel as it curves the comparative gaze from the novel's localized representation of (Jewish) whiteness onto an international scale of (white) Jewishness. The Jewishness that is occluded by the novel's located viewpoint, ambivalently but ultimately coding Blum and Max as white men, becomes visible in the periscoping paratexts—not as a globalizing replacement of the novel's focalization but as an internationalizing supplement. And Cohn's review of the novel, trapped in the static unities of discrete races, confirms the necessity of such a periscopic intervention, for it reveals Bigger's international Jewish doubles while leaving exposed Cohn's self-evident American whiteness.

III. Conclusion

Wright's reply to Cohn was covered in the *Sunday Worker* on June 9, 1940, under the headline, "Richard Wright Answers a Lynch Apologist."⁹⁰ Predictably, the coverage emphasized Wright's comparison to the Soviet solution to race problems rather than the comparison to

⁹⁰ Anonymous, "Richard Wright Answers a Lynch Apologist," *Sunday Worker*, June 9, 1940, sec. 2.

Herschel Grynszpan but the coverage did clearly characterize Cohn as a “professional apologist” for the crimes of white supremacy. Ben Davis appeared in particular to have taken Wright’s reply to heart, for he quoted it at length in yet another article on the novel in the June 23 issue of the *Daily Worker*. In an about face from his initial criticism, Davis asserted that “the selection of Bigger as protagonist is a strength of ‘Native Son’” and reproached other progressives for “shrinking back from the unvarnished truth.”⁹¹ In an uncanny repetition of Wright’s private warning to Gold, Davis argued that there are still “thousands of potential Biggers—who have not been reached with knowledge of the solution, that is the ending of capitalism. Are we to surrender these victims, not talk about them, not write about them—or cover them up to keep from looking life squarely in the face?”⁹² Davis no longer considered Bigger an imperfect proletarian protagonist but asserted the necessity of facing the thousands who shared Bigger’s potentialities. Might Wright’s periscoping paratexts have contributed to Davis’s shift in argument? Did Bigger’s international commensurabilities aid Davis in realizing his error in rejecting Bigger?⁹³ Davis did not address Wright’s comparisons to fascists but did, as in the earlier *Sunday Worker* coverage, quote Wright’s comparison to “the Soviet solution” for “problems of the Jews and that of all her racial and national minorities.”⁹⁴ Davis thus described Cohn’s “anti-Negro review” as “the rage of a capitalist apologist.”⁹⁵ Like in Wright’s reply, Davis implicitly invoked Cohn’s Jewishness by referring to the “Soviet solution” while also breaking down Cohn’s identification as such. Davis depicted him as the defender of American capitalism and white supremacy against Soviet socialism and anti-racism, thereby turning to

⁹¹ Ben Davis, Jr., “Wright’s ‘Native Son,’ Gorky and Dostoyevsky,” *Daily Worker*, June 23, 1940, sec. 2, 4.

⁹² Davis, Jr., 4.

⁹³ Before it was published as a pamphlet, a version of “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born” appeared in the *Saturday Review of Literature* on June 1, 1940, coinciding precisely with Wright’s reply to Cohn in the June *Atlantic*.

⁹⁴ Qtd. in Davis, Jr., “Wright’s ‘Native Son,’ Gorky and Dostoyevsky,” 4.

⁹⁵ Ben Davis, Jr., “Richard Wright’s ‘Native Son’ a Notable Achievement,” *Sunday Worker*, April 14, 1940, 4, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

international locations to articulate Bigger's problem with others and disarticulate Cohn from his complacent Jewish identity.

Both the publisher and Wright felt that the exchange with Cohn in the *Atlantic* was such a significant addendum to the novel that they agreed to include it in a special "Documentary Edition" of the novel, which suggests the critical role the paratexts played in modulating the novel's reception and, in particular, modulating Bigger to both German fascists and European Jews at once.⁹⁶ A handwritten page in Wright's papers titled "CONTENTS" lists the original introduction by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, then the novel itself, and finally a third section titled, "BACKGROUND AND INTERPRETATION." Under this heading is listed "'How 'Bigger' Was Born,' by Richard Wright," "'The Negro Novel: Richard Wright,' by David L. Cohn," and "'A Reply to Mr. Cohn, by Richard Wright.'" ⁹⁷ The selection of Wright's exchange with Cohn as the sole addition to the pamphlet text is especially salient, demonstrating Wright's desire to shape interpretation of the novel not by globalizing Bigger Thomas into a "Bigger Everyman" but by attaching specific, periscopic apparatuses that illuminated Bigger's shifting and provisional relations to both fascists and Jews.⁹⁸ The addition of Cohn's review and Wright's reply are however scribbled out in the handwritten table of contents, for ultimately Cohn declined to give permission to print his review and so including Wright's reply in this new edition became irrelevant.⁹⁹ It is perhaps fitting, however, that the complex literary apparatus articulating novel and paratext remains, like periscopic comparison, disaggregated and provisional, escaping domestication within a discrete and bounded text. As such, the periscopic

⁹⁶ Edward C. Aswell, "Letter to Richard Wright from Edward C. Aswell," May 29, 1940, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

⁹⁷ Richard Wright, "CONTENTS," n.d., Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

⁹⁸ Yung-Hsing Wu, "Native Sons and Native Speakers: On the Eth(n)ics of Comparison," *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (October 2006): 1467.

⁹⁹ Edward C. Aswell, "Letter to Richard Wright from Edward C. Aswell," June 18, 1940, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

comparisons remain in motion, blocking and revealing different points of view but never illuminating at once a unified ground of comparison. The novel bares a process of submerging Jewishness in whiteness while the paratexts emphasize Wright's sustained interest in Jewishness itself; the resolution of such a seeming contradiction is Bigger's multiplication, which illustrates the reproduction of commensurable Bigger Thomas personalities at international locations while maintaining the located, focalized, subjective singularity of each personality. Du Bois conjured a ground of comparison between the United States and Third Reich without asserting any basis of equivalence for antisemitism and anti-Blackness. Damas located a precise, historical analogy, opening up particular encounters and overlaps between Black and Jewish discourses of oppression and suggesting, in turn, the incommensurability of Black and Jewish victimhood in a generalized register. The periscopic form of comparison enabled by Wright's texts, however, assembled such encounters and overlaps without analogizing, drawing lines that joined but did not conflate the United States and the Third Reich. In the place of static comparisons are relational intensities and multiscalar simultaneities that, articulating spasmodically across an international capitalist machine, become alternately visible through provisional displacements and movements of the scale of focalization.

Conclusion:

This dissertation begins to outline the inventive possibilities and “novel assemblages of relation” that emerge when anti-Blackness, antisemitism, fascism, and colonialism are considered from demonic grounds of comparison—vantage points external to dominant viewpoints and nondeterministic schema alternative to governing ways of knowing.¹ It focuses primarily on three sets of texts and three writers—W. E. B. Du Bois, Léon-Gontran Damas, and Richard Wright—who move from an unsettlement of comparison, to a form of analogy that identifies located resemblances and adjacencies, and finally to a structure of *periscopic comparison* that balances local focalization and international lines of connection in a shifting, multiscalar structure without reductively equivalizing them. In doing so, the dissertation limns the “quicksilver potentialities” of relation elaborated by an acute focus on synchronic comparison across the Third Reich, Third Republic, and United States.² And it generates multiple alternating approaches to considering the “thick historical relation” articulating anti-Blackness and antisemitism, and fascism and colonialism. As Kelley has noted, “there is a tendency to characterize racial regimes as global constructions by emphasizing what they hold in common.”³ While not displacing focus on commonalties or correspondences entirely, this dissertation examined the productive forms of qualitative difference and relation that allow for non-reductive and non-equalizing analyses of regimes of race as international constructions, without foreclosing comparison.

¹ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 13.

² Richard Wright, “Draft of Letter to Mike Gold from Richard Wright,” 1940, 8, Richard Wright papers, 1927-1978, Beinecke Library.

³ Robin D.G. Kelley, “The Rest of Us: Rethinking Settler and Native,” *American Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (June 2017): 269.

It is, however, only the start of an extended investigation into various forms of idiosyncratic and ambivalent comparison as articulated by Black writers in real-time. There are a number of further trajectories and clear gaps in analysis that can guide future research and writing. On the whole, writers from the African continent need to be integrated into this study. Similarly, it is essential to consider Afro-German writing, not only as a key counterpoint to Du Bois's 'on the ground' analysis but also for the ways it inevitably deconstructs the relation of anti-Jewish and anti-Black racializing assemblages within the Third Reich itself. The other crucial gap in the dissertation is gender and Black women's writing. Pandemic-related limitations on archival and microfilm research prevented me from incorporating certain Black women's analyses from the period. Additionally, more investigation into the gendered dimensions of both Damas and Wright's texts will certainly illuminate additional axes that complicate direct comparison. These are all directions in which I look forward to embarking in future publications; and I hope as well that they might stimulate others to advance interventions that mine the "thick historical relation" of antisemitism and anti-Blackness, and fascism and colonialism.⁴

⁴ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, 36.

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