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I See Foundations Shaking: Transnational Modernism  
from the Great Depression to the Cold War

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

in

Literature

by

Benjamin Balthaser

Committee in charge:

Professor Michael Davidson, Co-chair  
Professor Shelley Streeby, Co-chair  
Professor Natalia Molina  
Professor Rosaura Sánchez  
Professor Lisa Yoneyama

2010



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Co-Chair

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Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego

2010

## DEDICATION

To Hyman Mozenter, victim of the Cold War blacklist, to Syd Resnick for telling the stories, and to all others who part of the movement and its memory.

## EPIGRAPH

And as he lay there dying  
In a village we had taken,  
I looked across to Africa  
And seed foundations shakin'....

--from "Dear Brother at Home," published in *Addressed to Alabama*, a Spanish Civil War poetry broadside by Langston Hughes

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The librarians at the San Francisco Labor Archive and Research Center were an immeasurable help guiding me through the labor newspapers of the 1930s. I give my special thanks to Labor Archive librarian Catherine Powell who invited me to

present my second chapter with the long-standing Bay Area Labor Historians' Workshop, where I met many intellectuals and activists who lived intimately the material I presented. I would also like to thank the librarians and activists at the Southern California Library who allowed me to roam through the many pamphlets and posters in their upstairs holdings. And the librarians at the Billy Rose Theater Division of the New York Public Library, the UCLA film archive, and the Library of Congress were more patient than I deserved with my many requests and my inexperience at archival research. I want to express my most profound debt to Curtis Marez in his role as editor of *American Quarterly* for the suggestions he made for the article version of my final chapter. Not only did his insight greatly help expand my thesis for the chapter, it was a kinder and more engaged introduction to academic publishing than I could have hoped for.

This project owes a great deal to the many friends I've made in graduate school both at UCSD and UMass-Amherst. Armagan Gezici, Josh Mason, Kyla Schuller, José Fusté, Chase Smith, Aimee Bahng, John Higgins, Michelle Stuckey, Scott Boehm, Laura Tanenbaum, and Adam Lewis helped push my thinking on literature, race, empire, and social movements, and in no small way have they helped keep me going. Chris Vials has been there for picket lines and deadlines: his work on the 1930s has been a model for me intellectually as well as in the practical sense of learning how the stuff is done. And to Martín Espada, all I can say is you taught me that poetry and politics do mix, and I stayed in school because you showed me literature is valuable. I would also like to thank the militant, democratic staff and membership of Western Massachusetts' United Auto Workers Local 2322: my work

for this union has taught me how to bridge the gap between theory and praxis. And I would also like to express my appreciation for the Western Massachusetts Global Action Coalition, ARISE for Social Justice, and the Students for Economic Justice for giving me my post-baccalaureate political education.

I would also like to express my love and thanks to my wonderful parents, Susan and Lawrence Balthaser whose support throughout the years has made all the difference. And my thanks for my brother Nicholas who kindly refrains from reminding me what we all know: that he is really the smart one in the family. And finally, I need to express my love and thanks to my late grandfather, Hyman Mozenter, who as a union organizer, victim of the Cold War blacklist, and unrepentant revolutionary set an example for the entire family and is the reason I write what I write.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### PRESENT POSITION

Assistant Professor of 20<sup>th</sup> Century U.S. Multi-Ethnic Literature  
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### EDUCATION

Ph.D., Literature	2010	University of California, San Diego
M.F.A., English	2003	University of Massachusetts, Amherst
B.A., English	1998	University of Washington, Seattle, with distinction

### RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Nineteenth and twentieth century multi-ethnic U.S. literature  
American Studies in a transnational context  
Transnational social movements  
Modernism in a global context  
Expository and creative writing  
Literature of U.S. expansionism, nineteenth and twentieth century  
Post-colonial studies and theory  
Film and popular culture  
The American Renaissance in a transnational perspective

### REFEREED PUBLICATIONS

"Cold War Re-visions: Negotiating Representation and Resistance in the Unseen *Salt of the Earth*," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2, (June 2008): 347-72.

"Re-staging the Great Depression: Genre as Social Memory in Darren Aronofsky's *The Wrestler*," *Cultural Logic*, forthcoming.

"From Slacker to Revolutionary: Generation X and the Rise of the American Global Justice Movement," *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*," forthcoming.

"Fantasies of Empire," *Darkmatter*, (2008) September,  
<http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2008/09/11/fantasies-of-empire/>

### NON-REFEREED PUBLICATIONS

"Dedication 2 for Sid Grossman: Philippines," "Dedication 7 for Sid Grossman," "Dedication for Moe Stein: Brooklyn Bridge," "Dedication for Aaron Isaacson," "Dedication for Rachel Grossman," poems, *Omega: a publication of Howling Dog Press*, forthcoming.

"There is No Outside: Obama and the Global Justice Movement," essay, *Politics and Culture*, Issue 1(2), 2009, <http://aspen.conncoll.edu/politicsandculture/arts.cfm?id=79>

"Dedication: Campaign," poem, *Blue Collar Review: working people's poetry award*, (summer 2008): 35-6

"Dedication 1 for Hy Mozenter," "Dedication 1 for Sid Grossman," "Dedication 4 for Sid Grossman," "Dedication for Arrival," "Dedication for Salt," "Dedication for the Librarian Who Named Names," poems, *Pemmican: an on-line magazine of poetry*, (2008), <http://www.pemmicanpress.com/>

"At Cabrillo Military Cemetery," poem, *Poetry International*, 11 (2007): 78-9

"Dedication #1: May Mozenter," poem, *Minnesota Review*, 63-64 (Spring/Summer 2005): 56

"A New Orientalism: Another Look at Pre-War Coverage of Iraq," article, *Left Curve*, 28 (2004), 25-34

"Dedication #2: HUAC," poem, *Another Chicago Magazine*, 44-45, (2004): 167-8

"Poetry of the Political Imagination -- Alabanza: New and Selected Poems of Martín Espada," review, *Rattle* 9(2) (Winter 2003): 125-6

"After Long Illness," "The Leaf Blowers," poems, *14 Hills* 7(1) (Fall-Winter 2000): 126-129

"Nostalgia Principle, Modesto CA," "Erasing the notes on a library copy of Merwin's *The Lice*," *Slope* 2(2000), <http://www.slope.org/balthaser/poems.html>

"For M," poem, *Quarterly West* 50 (Spring-Summer 2000): 80

"Pyrocantha," "October," *Bricolage*, poems, 15 (1998), 14, 49-50

## BOOKS

*Dedication*, a collection of poetry based on the lives of blacklisted Communist Party activists. Forthcoming from *Partisan Press*

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND INVITED LECTURES

"Ballads for Post-Americans: Revisiting the Nationalism of the Popular Front," American Studies Association, panel session organizer, Washington D.C., November, 2009.

"Images of Violence and California Labor Movement of the Great Depression," Bay Area Labor Historian's Workshop, San Francisco, October 2009

"Let Terror Unite Us: Anti-Imperial Imagery in the Californian Popular Front," Futures of American Studies Institute, Seminar Participant, Dartmouth University, June 2009

"It Did Happen Here: Anti-Imperial Memory in the California Popular Front," American Studies International Conference, American Studies and Imperial Designs: New Scholarship and Perspectives on the U.S. in the World, Purdue University, September 2008

"Traveling Against Empire: U.S. Writers in Cuba in the Great Depression," American Comparative Literature Association, Long Beach, May 2008

"Salt of the Earth: May Day Celebration," featured speaker, Committee for World Democracy Film Series, UC San Diego, May 2007

"Cold War Revisions: the original script of *Salt of the Earth*," Crossing Borders: 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Ethnic Studies Conference, UC San Diego, La Jolla, February 2007

"Go Left, Young Man: the Frontier and Great Depression Migration Narratives," Multi-Ethnic Literatures in the United States (MELUS) Annual Conference, Fresno, March 2007

"*The Matrix* and postmodern political agency," invited lecture, Professor Abbie Corey, Dimensions of Culture Program: Imagination, UC San Diego, La Jolla, spring quarter 2006

"Poets in Wartime: a history of modern poetry and warfare," guest lecture, Professor Rae Armantrout, *Literature Writing 8B: Poetry*, UC San Diego, fall quarter 2005

"Blacks in Whiteface, or the Political Exotic: Haiti in *The Emperor Jones* and '*Voodoo*' *Macbeth*." Popular Culture/American Culture Association, San Diego., March 2005

"Subjects of Empire, Subjects of Liberation: Carlos Bulosan and the Literature of the Popular Front." Re-Thinking Marxism, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, October 2004

## SELECTED HONORS

Graduate Student Leadership Award, Graduate Student Association, 2008-09.

Year-Long Dissertation Fellowship, Department of Literature, UC San Diego, 2008-09

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Community Service Award, Dimensions of Culture Program, Thurgood Marshall College, UCSD, 2007

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UC Poet Laureate Award, University of California, 2006

John D. Hicks Essay Award, Dept. of English, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2002

John D. Hicks Essay Award, Dept. of English, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2000

Graystone fellowship for poetry, Department of English, University of Washington, 1998

American Writing Programs Intro Journals Award for Poetry, University of Washington, 1997

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor

"Film Noir and Cold War Social Life," Department of Literature, UC San Diego, Summer 2009

- Created new upper division course that examines U.S. film noir in the context of changing racial, class, gender, transnational, and geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War

"Literature and Empire, 1848-1898," Department of Literature, UC San Diego, Summer 2007

- Created new upper division course that examines 19<sup>th</sup> multi-ethnic literature of the U.S. in light of manifest destiny and U.S. overseas empire

"Film in Social Context," "Popular Culture," Academic Study Associates, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Summer 2004-5

- Created new courses in film and popular culture for advanced, college bound high school students

"American Dreams and Nightmares: Intro to American Studies," Division of Continuing Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Winter 2003

- Created new interdisciplinary course focusing in popular culture, film, and U.S. social movements

"Junior Year Writing Seminar," Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Spring 2003

- Developed syllabus and assisted junior year sociology students with their writing projects

"Creative Writing," Department of English, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Fall 2000

- Developed creative writing syllabus and led workshop for writing majors in poetry and fiction

"College Writing," Writing Program, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, 1998-2002

- Developed syllabus with various topics, including mass-media, consumerism, and counter-cultural movements for freshman composition class

Teaching Assistant

- Responsibilities for each course included teaching two sections once or twice per week, grading students' work, holding office hours, collaborating with faculty on course content, and attending lectures

"Sixth College Practicum Writing: Senior Writing Seminar," Culture, Art & Technology Program, UC San Diego, Winter-Spring, 2010.

"Multi-Ethnic U.S. Literature Sequence," Department of Literature, UC San Diego, Fall-Spring, 2007-08

"Imagination: Twentieth Century U.S. Culture," Dimensions of Culture Program, UC San Diego, Spring 2004-7

"Justice: Race and Gender in U.S. Legal History," Dimensions of Culture Program, UC San Diego, Winter 2003-7



"Diversity: An Introduction to Ethnic Studies," Dimensions of Culture Program, UC San Diego, Fall 2003-06

"Creative Writing: Poetry," Department of Literature, UC San Diego, Fall 2005.

"Pablo Neruda in English Translation," Department of English, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Fall 2000

## ACADEMIC SERVICE

Search Committee member, Associate to Full Professor of Creative Writing, Department of Literature, UC San Diego, 2007-08

Graduate Student Representative, PPM-510 Campus-wide Committee on Advocacy and Free Speech, UC San Diego, 2007-10

President, Graduate Student Council, Department of Literature, UC San Diego, 2006-7.

Conference organizer and speaker, National Conference on Academic Freedom, "Defending Academic Freedom," UC San Diego, 2006.

Graduate Student Representative, Academic Freedom Committee, UC San Diego Academic Senate, 2005-6

Literature Department Representative, Graduate Student Association, 2005-09

Board Member, Students for Economic Justice, UC San Diego, 2004-6

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## LANGUAGES

Russian – Read, write, and speak with proficiency

Spanish – Elementary reading ability

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

I Hear Foundations Shaking: Transnational Modernism  
from the Great Depression to the Cold War

by

Benjamin Balthaser

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2010

Professor Michael Davidson, Co-Chair  
Professor Shelley Streeby, Co-Chair

"I See Foundations Shaking" explores how African-American, Native American, Chicano/a, and working-class writers and filmmakers during the Great Depression engaged in transnational modernist movement that stretched from the late 1920s to the start of the Cold War. Challenging a dominant modernist aesthetic of a previous generation, writers such as D'Arcy McNickle, Carlos Bulosan, Josephine Herbst, and Langston Hughes adapted modernist ideas of experimentalism and internationalism to create a modernism of their own. My dissertation suggests that the 1930s witnessed an alternative internationalist moment, replacing an aesthetic of expatriation that focused on Europe with a southward-looking transnational vision of multiethnic solidarity. Writers who embraced this "transnational modernism" viewed the Americas as a new source of inspiration, with Mexico City and Havana as centers of intellectual production and experimentation. As a project of cultural recovery, I rely extensively on archival material, including unpublished work by Clifford Odets; farm labor and literary journals from California such as *UCAPAWA News*, *The*

*Agricultural Worker, Lucha Obrera*; Carlos Bulosan's *The New Tide*; and D'Arcy McNickle's papers at the Newberry Center.

My dissertation begins in Havana, examining the way Cuba emerged as a site of political imagination for intellectuals such as Langston Hughes, Josephine Herbst, and Clifford Odets. In my second chapter, I investigate the ways visual and literary representations of racial violence in California were employed to critique the sentimental nationalism of John Steinbeck and the Farm Security Administration photographs of Dorothea Lange. Rather than read California as part of the American nation, my third chapter focuses on the way these intellectuals, Emma Tenayuca, Carey McWilliams, Carlos Bulosan, framed the state as imperial space, a site of conflict intersected by transnational flows of capital and labor. In my fourth chapter, I analyze how D'Arcy McNickle and Richard Wright situated their work between calls for radical nationalism and pluralist belonging. The final chapter investigates the way the Cold War both suppressed and reshaped the public imaginary of the transnational Popular Front, using film to explore the production of a sanitized, nationalist 1930s nostalgia.

Posing Depression-era culture as a transnational modernism can help not only frame the decade within a larger debate about modernism, but it can also help us to rethink the way basic aesthetic and political categories are implicated within discourses of nationalism. Thus I take my project's title from a poem by Langston Hughes. As Hughes wrote in 1938 looking from Republican Spain to the shores of Africa, "foundations were shaking" all over the world at the possibilities of socialism and de-colonization. Considering that transnational moment – an African-American

poet reporting on the International Brigades in Spain while metaphorically gazing off to Africa – needs to be reclaimed as a key "foundation" in the history of U.S. cultural and aesthetic practice.

## INTRODUCTION

### **I See Foundations Shaking: Transnational Modernism from the Great Depression to the Cold War**

On the same night in 1936, Orson Welles directed Shakespeare's *Macbeth* staged as a Haitian revolution, while down Lennox Avenue an anti-imperialist protest against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia competed for attendees. That year, New York City also saw student strikes shut down most college and high school campuses, protesting war and imperialism, and in Cuba, a general strike ignited a wave of anti-colonialist fervor drawing on extensive support within the U.S., including labor and artist delegations to investigate conditions on the island. Usually thought of as the decade of labor unions and the New Deal, the 1930s witnessed the flowering of a transnational culture that explored the links among fascism, racism, militarism, and U.S. and European colonialism in a diverse array of cultural productions, including farm-labor photography, travelogues, plays, novels, and poems by intellectuals such as Clifford Odets, Orson Welles, Josephine Herbst, Carlos Bulosan, Langston Hughes, Edmund Wilson, and countless journalists and photographers for labor and African-American newspapers. Supported by social movements, institutions such as the Council on African Affairs, Group Theater, and the American League Against War and Fascism helped to produce a multiethnic and transnational modernist culture. Not only does such a movement challenge the way in which the decades between Great Depression and the Cold War are remembered, it also challenges many of the aesthetic assumptions around modernism, realism, and working class political culture

in the 1930s. While there have been other moments of inter-, intra-, and transnational culture in the U.S., in perhaps no other decade in U.S. history were domestic concerns of race, labor, and art seen in such an international light.

The Depression decade to the beginning of the Cold War is often remembered as a narrative of crisis and return, a sudden split or antinomy in the national subject healed by the progressive New Deal state. It's a narrative mediated through images and tropes of national belonging, the Farm Security Administration photographs celebrating the myth of the yeoman farmer, the inclusive patriarchy of Frank Capra films, the working-class populism inscribed in wartime propaganda, even the Communist Party's use of the U.S. National Anthem to replace the Internationale at national congresses. The progressive paternalism of the 1930s and 40s is often culturally marked with the teleology of national unity, celebrating the incorporation of working class ethnic Americans, blacks, and Native Americans into new government, civic, and cultural institutions through the economic logic of Keynesianism and welfare capitalism. Yet this cultural memory has been challenged critically by scholars pointing out the implicit racialism of state policy. Whatever "return" may have included white-ethnic workers as an integral part of the new social formation, it excluded racial minorities from the New Deal, creating, instead of national unity, a new 'white republic' aided by unions, state agencies, and corporate regulation.<sup>1</sup> Rather than an exception or epistemic break with the past, this

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<sup>1</sup> George Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness* (New York: Basic Books, 2005). Both have emphasized the institutional continuities of racist thought and policy as they structured the development of New Deal welfare policy,

scholarship understands the New Deal as the final fulfillment of a racialized modernity. As much as such criticism accurately describes the dominant post-World War II state and cultural apparatus, it doesn't question the basic assumption that the Depression era was marked by a structure of national belonging. Rather, it merely points out that the formations of race and national identity were not challenged so much as reinforced by the institutional structures formed during the Great Depression.

Michael Denning's formulation of the "long Popular Front" is perhaps the most comprehensive challenge to the state-institutional view of the Depression.<sup>2</sup> Arguing against a narrow focus on political parties, unions, and governmental policy, as well as the periodization of history that locates the Popular Front as the three years from 1936 to 1939 when the Communist Party and liberal anti-fascists formed a common alliance, Denning identifies the Popular Front era as a long social movement beginning in the late 1920s and lasting until the late 1940s. Rather than argue for a totalized portrait of the Depression, Denning focuses on oppositional movements comprised of varying and often contradictory elements, the ultimate meaning of which are overdetermined by the multiplicity of actors as well as the way in which the movement is remembered in popular culture. *The Cultural Front* proposes a more diffuse understanding of historical moments, formulating the Front as a "bloc" within the Depression, a moment in which an "alternative hegemony" articulated itself through social movements, proletarian cultural production, and aspects of state and

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labor rights, union membership, college loans, and housing development in the post-war era.

<sup>2</sup> Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front* (Verso: London, England. 1997).

mass culture. It's not to say Denning argues the Popular Front had no discernable meaning, but rather that we cannot locate the meaning of the Popular Front within a single discourse or institution. We instead must look at a broader network of alliances, cultural alignments, and structures of feeling that may not be reducible to a single narrative of inclusion or exclusion, neither "a party nor a liberal wing of the New Deal" but consisting at times of both.<sup>3</sup> It's also important to note that Denning takes up Gramsci's ideas of "failure," as well as Raymond Williams' definition of "residual culture," those elements of the past that have been reincorporated into dominant culture, but may still play an oppositional role.<sup>4</sup> To the extent that residual elements of culture are fragmentary, Denning persistently leaves open the meaning of movements and texts, both in the past in which they were read, but also to a future that may recover them in new ways, refusing the act of narrative closure that other works about the period attempt.

As important as Denning's work is to opening up fields of meanings with which to read the 1930s and 1940s, his work often remains within the bounds of what Gramsci terms "the national-popular," the attempt to forge a democratic culture

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<sup>3</sup> Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> The subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unify until they become a state," Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Trans. Hoare and Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971). In Chapter 8 "Dominant, Residual, Emergent," Raymond Williams discusses the way in which "residual" and oppositional cultures can be absorbed or remain as an irritant within dominant structures of power, to later reemerge in a time of crisis. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1977), 122-4.



within the bounds of a populist, national frame.<sup>5</sup> To the extent that Denning focuses on tropes of national belonging, I would suggest that he implicitly participates in the dominant reading of the Depression years. In this dissertation, I suggest that the social and cultural movements of the Depression era offered a far more expansive vision of national and international belonging that cannot be traced solely through the institutional legacy of the New Deal and later welfare programs, nor through a national-popular imaginary. While the Popular Front did not achieve political power in the U.S., in the years between the Great Depression and the Cold War, many of the central U.S. ideologies of race, empire, and national identity were challenged not only by marginal groups and movements, but by an entire social and cultural imaginary. I will argue that much of the period was infused with a Gramscian “common-sense” that privileged international solidarity, anti-colonial self-determination, and cross-race and cross-border alliances that cannot be located in a single movement.<sup>6</sup> Transnationalism, in so many words, was constitutive of the Popular Front as well as the modernist imaginary.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Denning, 134.

<sup>6</sup> “Common sense is not something rigid and stationary, but is in continuous transformation, becoming enriched with scientific notions and philosophical opinions that have entered into common circulation. ‘Common sense’ is the folklore of philosophy and always stands midway between folklore proper (folklore as it is normally understood) and the philosophy, science, and economics of the scientists. Common sense creates the folklore of the future, a relatively rigidified phase of popular knowledge in a given time and place. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Cultural Writings* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985), 421.

<sup>7</sup> The Popular Front is defined in its most limited meaning as a global coalition against fascism. “Popular Front” also refers to a global social democratic, anti-imperialist

As a study of modernism, my dissertation complicates narratives of modernism by showing how working-class, Native American, Chicano/a, and radical U.S. writers and intellectuals such as D'Arcy McNickle, Carlos Bulosan, Josephine Herbst, and Langston Hughes adapted ideas of experimentalism and internationalism to create a modernism of their own. In studies of modernism, the Great Depression is often remembered as the moment in which, as Malcolm Cowley said, the Parisian literary exiles "returned." Cowley came back to the U.S. to focus on domestic themes of labor, economics, and politics and was thought to have given up on the internationalist modernism of a previous generation. Rather than seeing modernist internationalism ending with the Depression however, I suggest that the 1930s witnessed an alternative internationalist moment, replacing the aesthetic of expatriation with a transnational vision of multiethnic solidarity. Supplanting the focus on Europe, writers who embraced this "transnational modernism" viewed Africa and the Americas as a new source of inspiration, with Mexico City and Havana as centers of intellectual production and experimentation and the invasion of Ethiopia as the moral cause of the decade.

I formulate this as a project of cultural recovery and cultural memory. I do not propose to prove that other studies of the Great Depression that privilege the continuities with earlier racialized structures of power are incorrect. I will argue however, that such analyses implicitly participate in the Cold War construction of the

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movement, witnessing elections of popular front governments in Chile, Argentina, Spain, and France. Other Popular Front movements existed in much of Latin America, as well as North America and Western Europe. To this day, many progressive governments in Latin America still use a Popular Front vocabulary.

Popular Front, which entails a kind of collective forgetting of the social formations and movements of the previous decades. What has not been taken into account is the extent to which the Cold War has shaped our cultural memory of the Popular Front era, beyond anti-communism to the erasure of a whole fabric of political and cultural internationalism. Recent Cold War cultural history has brought to light the extensive anti-imperialist movements that existed within communities of color before the Cold War, as well as the (successful) efforts by the FBI and House Un-American Activities Committee to discredit, harass, and forcibly suppress activists and intellectuals questioning U.S. imperialism.<sup>8</sup> Equally, Cold War historians have pointed out the extent to which the state department and major Hollywood studios enlisted the cultural logic of international solidarity movements into the cause of U.S. supremacy, reshaping earlier commitments into a language that met with State Department goals.<sup>9</sup> This is not to mention the extensive documentation of labor union suppression of members and labor organizations that fostered international solidarity.<sup>10</sup> Together

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<sup>8</sup>See Thomas Borstelmann, *Cold War and the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Penny Von Eschen *Race Against Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Paul Robeson, *Paul Robeson Speaks: Writing, Speeches, and Interviews 1918-1974*, Philip Foner, ed. (New York: Citadel Press, 1978).

<sup>9</sup>Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Klein discusses the way the rhetoric of Popular Front internationalism was conscripted by the State Department, as well as by Hollywood, into supporting anti-communism abroad.

<sup>10</sup>Kim Scipes, "It's Time to Come Clean: Open the AFL-CIO Archives on International Labor Operations," *Labor Studies Journal* 25(2) (Summer 2000), 4-25.

these often isolated pieces suggest the active presence of such movements, and the way in which institutional and cultural forces during the Cold War both suppressed as well as refashioned the Popular Front in its own image. Remembering is always already embedded in the process of forgetting – re-creating the Depression New Deal for the Cold War also meant the suppression of those elements that challenged the post-war social order.<sup>11</sup> To the extent the Cold War spoke through a new, muscular language of race, frontier, and empire, it relied on the collective forgetting – and forcible suppression - of earlier artistic and social movements that questioned such projects.

"I See Foundations Shaking" looks to multiple sites to analyze the transnational imaginary of U.S. modernism in the years around the Great Depression. I begin my dissertation by tracing how Havana emerged as a site of political imagination for intellectuals such as Langston Hughes, Josephine Herbst, and Clifford Odets. Inspired by Cuba's long history of anti-racist and anti-imperialist movements, all three traveled to Cuba to envision a mestizo America based on egalitarian multi-ethnic solidarity. In my second chapter, I investigate the ways visual and literary representations of racial violence in California were employed to critique the sentimental nationalism of John Steinbeck and the Farm Security Administration photographs of Dorothea Lange. Employing photographs of "terror" in English and Spanish-language labor and socialist newspapers such as *Lucha Obrera* and

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Also, Kim Scipes, "Labor Imperialism Redux?: The AFL-CIO's Foreign Policy Since 1995," *Monthly Review* 57(1) (May 2005), 17-38.

<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of the politics of memory, see Marita Sturken. *Tangled Memories* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1997).

*UCAPAWA News*, these photographs linked acts of violence against farm-workers in the U.S. with anti-fascist and anti-imperialist struggles abroad. Such images formed a central counter-discourse to the patriarchal, nationally, and racially bound images produced by the Farm Security Administration and Hollywood film studios.

Rather than read California as part of the American nation, I continue to focus on the way three intellectuals, Emma Tenayuca, Carey McWilliams and Carlos Bulosan framed the state as imperial space, a site of conflict intersected by transnational flows of capital and labor. Bulosan constructs California through travel, writing of the contact with the Pacific Ocean as a continuous imperial arc of U.S. power that stretches from Washington D.C. to the Philippines. For McWilliams and Tenayuca, California and the Southwest are still "outposts of empire" to use McWilliams' phrase, in which the conquest of Mexico and the industrial scope of agriculture function to render the "Lincoln Republic" of a producers' democracy impossible. This visual and rhetorical system of representation allowed both English and Spanish-language activists in California to link their local struggles with struggles in Africa and the broader Americas by connecting forms of violence directed against workers in the U.S. with those inflicted on colonial subjects abroad. In doing so, these writers, activists and scholars produced a transnational, modernist subject that shared a common history united through a common sense of dislocation, migration, and rupture.

Continuing to think about questions of empire within a U.S. national context, I analyze how questions of minority self-determination impacted the work of Richard Wright and Salish writer D'Arcy McNickle. Looking at the way African-American

and Native American texts negotiated conflicting tensions between nationalism and pluralism, I suggest that McNickle's novel *The Surrounded* and Wright's *Native Son* are both complex and often contradictory meditations on racial nationalism. As both novels focus on young male characters implicated in acts of violence against white authority figures, I suggest that nationalism is the inevitable if ultimately doomed response to U.S. imperial power. Such novels point out that questions of race and empire are as much national questions as they are international questions. Or rather, for victims of U.S. empire, the national is always-already the transnational. Rather than see Native American writing as separate from political movements of the 1930s, I argue that both writers were crucially informed by other socialist and minority discourses on black nationalism and alternative modernities.

The final chapter investigates the way the Cold War both suppressed and reshaped the public imaginary of the transnational Popular Front, using film to explore the production of a sanitized, nationalist 30s nostalgia. My argument centers on archived revisions of the blacklisted film *Salt of the Earth*, citing the way the constraints of the Cold War limited what was initially a film that was internationalist in scope. I also argue that film noir, while critical of Cold War domesticity, reified a conservative vision of the Popular Front era. At stake is a historical question about the meaning of the Popular Front as a political movement, as well as larger theoretical/political questions about the meaning of empire. To the extent that the Cold War reshaped U.S. attitudes towards race and imperialism, internal expansion and overseas colonies, looking at a moment in history in which these issues were

intertwined becomes crucial in the development of anti-systemic, anti-imperialist thought.

### **No More (Bosses') Imperial War: Rethinking 1930s and 1940s Social Movements**

Given the diversity of literature on key terms such as empire, social movements, modernism, and historical memory, I would like to explain the particular interventions my dissertation makes into these issues. Rethinking the 1930s does more of course, than simply reframe the terms of debate on that time period and on its culture. Rethinking the long Popular Front also asks that we rethink social and cultural movements in the U.S. that occurred in its wake and thus the way in which such terms to describe them are defined. And yet social and cultural movements in the past always remain, it seems, just beyond full view, especially ones that for many challenge what we think we know of the historical record. As Frederic Jameson notes, images of liberation often appear in popular culture under the sign of their opposite, in reactionary cultural forms.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, social movements are never solely questions of discourse – often claims for freedom and equality exist within but are not contained by dominant cultural expression. As Laclau and Mouffe argue, politics is an “articulatory process” in which meaning is always mediated, unable to be fixed, and situated within various dimensions that lack the ideological closure of

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<sup>12</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* (1) (Winter 1979), 130-148.

dominant institutions.<sup>13</sup> To the extent that forms of knowledge are functions of power, the ability or desire to construct a stable discourse is questionable when applied to subaltern and marginal groups. Any reading of anti-imperialist culture within the 30s and 40s requires one to appraise the whole social environment, not as isolated statements or organizations, but in terms of what Raymond Williams calls “structure of feeling,” in which social forms do not necessarily articulate themselves in explicit public discourse.<sup>14</sup> Keeping readings of oppositional culture open in this way avoids the frequent pitfalls in which movements are read as a sum-total of discursive acts, ignoring the complex, dialectical relationship among oppressed groups, public statements, “on the ground” organizing, institutional pressures, and compromise with hegemonic forces to achieve immediate ends that often complicates any understanding of how people actually thought, felt, and acted.

With this in mind, to say that during the years of the Great Depression popular assumptions within the U.S. about empire were questioned implies that there is some agreement about what is meant by that term. To assume that intellectuals, artists, activists, and professional cultural producers agreed on these definitions, or that current understandings grounded in American Studies or Third World Studies literature were shared in the 1930s and 1940s, would be untrue. Yet to assume there are no continuities – as is often the case – would be to participate in a kind of radical ahistoricism. And most problematic, it would naturalize the distinction that is often

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<sup>13</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 130.



made between overseas colonies and internal expansionism, assuming that the same Cold War prohibition of linking racism to U.S. imperialism was operative ten years earlier. Still, one must ask: in what way was the long Popular Front an anti-imperialist movement? What did the word 'empire' mean in left circles in the 1930s? Was 'imperialism' thought to include Westward expansion and conquest, or was it reserved for overseas colonies only? What were the connections made between race, labor, and imperialism in the 1930s and 40s? I will argue that one of the critical aspects of the 30s and 40s movement, and what separates it from earlier anti-imperialist movements such as the Anti-Imperialist League, are the links often implicitly made between internal expansionism and overseas empire, among race, capitalism and colonization, and among fascism, militarism, and the imperial state.

Anti-war organizations were open about their anti-imperial politics in demonstrations and other activities. In the founding document of the first nationwide anti-war organization drafted a year after its organization, the American League Against War and Fascism (ALAWF) resolved:

to oppose the policies of American imperialism in the Far East, in Latin America and throughout the world; to support the struggles of all colonial peoples against the imperialist policies of exploitation and armed suppression<sup>15</sup>

The League, like the earlier coalition that organized the 1933 demonstrations, enjoyed a broad constituency that included civic, labor, religious, and ethnic organizations, in large part because critiques of U.S. imperialism were often combined with bread-and-

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<sup>15</sup> "Manifesto and Program of the American League Against War and Fascism: Second U.S. Congress," (Chicago: American League Against War and Fascism, 1934), University of California, Davis, Special Collections, 4.

butter issues of redirecting military budgets to relief programs and the arts. The League organized mass meetings, demonstrations, and pickets, and often organized within strategic unions to call for strikes against war materials. Perhaps most spectacularly, the League coordinated with the American Student Union one of the largest student strikes in U.S. history, one that shut down the entire U.C. and SUNY/CUNY systems and was estimated to have involved over million students, including 15,000 in Los Angeles alone.<sup>16</sup> As one historian writes, by the late 1930s, the League had registered the support of over four million people at its annual conferences.<sup>17</sup>

For the generation still fresh with the memory of World War I and the Mexican Revolution, "war" had a context that to a contemporary audience would not be available. By the 30s, it had become a kind of left-liberal common-sense that inter-imperialist rivalry between nation-states made war an inevitable by-product of imperialism. Lenin, Bukarin, and Luxemburg argued that the competition for world markets and the internationalization of finance capital within national economies made conflict between world powers inevitable. Modern "war," to put it simply, was a result of capitalism expanding beyond national borders; war was simply empire by another name. In this sense, the "anti-war" movement was not an anti-war movement at all, as it merely objected to the causes and beneficiaries of war, rather than the

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<sup>16</sup> H.M.R., "Million Students 'Strike' vs. War All Over U.S.A.," *Hollywood Now*, 1(13) May 1, 1937, 8.

<sup>17</sup> James Lerner, "American League Against War and Fascism," in *Encyclopedia of the American Left* ed. Paul Buhle, Mary Jo Buhle, and Dan Georgakis (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 25-7.

notion of armed conflict per se. As one editorial in a Communist newspaper stated without any sense of contradiction, the "anti-war movement" must "fight pacifism" to avoid "imperialist war."<sup>18</sup> And likewise, CIO president John L. Lewis and United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) president Donald Henderson's stance against early U.S. entrance into World War II had little to do with the union presidents' general preference for peace. In an insert distributed in UCAPAWA unions, joining the war in Europe would be understood as fighting for the side of "imperialist powers" and, like all imperialist wars, against the interests of working people.<sup>19</sup> The common 30s epithet, "no more bosses war" as one *Western Worker* headline put it, suggested that opposition to war was in defense of the working class, not a larger pacifistic vision of diplomacy or conflict resolution. Imperialism and fascism, one could argue, were as much targets of the anti-war movement as the notion of "conflicts between nation-states." With the German invasion of the Soviet Union, spokespeople for the anti-war movement argued that their support for U.S. entrance was consistent with their understanding of war. "The war changed" activist and author Mike Quin wrote in the *People's Daily World*, "yesterday it was a war between rival slave-drivers...protecting the foreign interests of Wall Street," today "it's fascism against socialism."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "Fight Pacifism in our Anti-War Work," *Western Worker*, 2(9), February 27, 1933, 4.

<sup>19</sup> "The President's Page: Our Union, the War, and National Defense," *UCAPAWA News*, 1(8) May-June, 1940, 3. "CIO Policy on National Defense," *UCAPAWA News*, 1(8) May-June, 1940, 2-3.

(Imperialist) "war" and "fascism" were of course, also inextricably linked within a left lexicon in the 30s. The ALAWF did not create, but merely named itself after, the popular front slogan. While the anti-fascist movement today is remembered largely as opposition to Nazis, Black Shirts, and Spanish Falangists, work by Alan Wald, Mark Naison, Mark Solomon, Paul Buhle, and Michael Denning discusses ways in which anti-fascist discourse was far broader than a narrow critique of European governments.<sup>21</sup> While many historians notice the way anti-fascism was used to battle U.S. racism, the stretch to U.S. and European imperialism was often not difficult to make. Germany's, Japan's and Italy's fascism was seen as an inevitable outgrowth of a global capitalism system. The three states were understood by many on the 30s left as historical "late-comers" to the project of empire-building, and their aggressive militarism a way to seize necessary colonies from competitors. To be against "war and fascism" for a certain segment of the more radical left meant, in short, that one supported a critique of capitalism and imperialism, a kind of common-sense reading of Lenin's volume by the same name. This is not to suggest that all anti-fascists were anti-imperialists, but rather that anti-imperialism was a major strand within the movement that up to this point has been marginalized. Not nearly enough

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<sup>20</sup> Mike Quin, "The War has Changed, says Murphy," *On the Drumhead: A Selection from the Writings of Mike Quin*, ed. P. Ryan, (San Francisco: The Pacific Publishing Foundation, 1948), 120-3. Originally published in *People's Daily World*.

<sup>21</sup> According to official CPUSA discourse, anti-fascist policy shifted to the right after 1936, from fighting for an end to imperialism to supporting imperialist "democracies" against major fascist powers. Yet a look at actual statements by activists in socialist, labor, and communist newspapers suggests a different story. See also, Anthony Dawahare, *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature Between the Wars* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 81-3.

has been made of the fact that the largest anti-fascist and anti-war organization in the 30s called for an end to U.S. imperialism in the Far East, Latin America, and "especially Cuba."<sup>22</sup>

To give a sense of the mood of the anti-war movement, at the site of the 1933 anti-war demonstration the *Western Worker* noted proudly that the crowd of 1,000 refused to drop their hats at the U.S. national anthem, yet "95% of the audience removed their hats when the International was sung."<sup>23</sup> To be "against war" in the 30s suggested, along with it, a whole range of other cultural sensibilities. The *Western Worker* frequently ran stories ridiculing imperial masculinity, such as the grinning caricature of Teddy Roosevelt above the caption: "100 men swore Roosevelt's a liar," detailing the way in which TR not only "did not make that charge" up San Juan Hill, but "Negro troops rescued Teddy from an ambush" earlier in the day.<sup>24</sup> Not only does the cartoon puncture the way in which imperial masculinity is a mythic construct, it also points out the way in which white manhood is threatened by a black masculinity it both suppresses and relies on. Other figures like Captain Bakcsy and LA Police Chief Hynes also received both scathing denunciations. In one *Western Worker* article, the career of National Guard Major General David Barrows is traced from his role as a "butcher" in the Philippines, to commander in the

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<sup>22</sup> Lerner, "American League Against War and Fascism," 26.

<sup>23</sup> "Aug. 1 Meetings Show Growing Opposition to Bosses' Wars," *Western Worker*, 2(33) August 14, 1933, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Beauvincent, "Did You Know?" pen and ink, *Western Worker*, 4(36), May 6, 1935, 3.

expeditionary force in the Soviet Union, to his current role in the proposed formation of a military police in California to "put Communists against the wall to be shot."<sup>25</sup> Also cited as giving speeches endorsing Hitler, Barrows is a figure who travels from the colonial periphery of the Philippines to the center of San Francisco, visiting the violence once used against a colonial population against an urban metropolis in California, in which his "shoot to kill" orders left two waterfront strikers dead.



**Figure 0.1 "Demand Bread--Not Battleships," *Western Worker* 2(31) July 31, 1933, 1. Where bread-and-butter and anti-imperialist politics meet.**

Given that the narrative of anti-fascism is often told through the lens of the growing threat of Nazi Germany as well as the Communist Party's shifting position

<sup>25</sup> R.A. Morton, "General Barrows Enters Into Heaven," *Western Worker*, 3(31) July 23, 1934, 6.

from anti-imperialism to supporting imperial "democracies" as against Axis powers, it should be remembered that the two major national anti-fascist organizations, the ALAWF and the National Negro Congress (NNC), had membership and leadership far beyond their Party beginnings.<sup>26</sup> The NNC's opposition to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the ALAWF's continued opposition to U.S. military spending carried with them an anti-imperialist sensibility that went beyond just anti-Nazism. The question of Ethiopia's independence and the continued critique of military spending – while part of a larger anti-fascist vision – were also very much questions of U.S. and European colonial dominance. Indeed, long after the "popular front" policy formally called for unity among liberals and leftists against fascism, implying a strategic "peace" with imperialist powers, the ALAWF continued to call for U.S. disarmament, an end to U.S. imperial domination in Latin America, and to equate Italy's invasion of Ethiopia with European colonialism. In a summer 1936 pamphlet published by ALAWF's journal *Fight* "Billions for Bullets," the League continues to call for an end to U.S. imperialism, and abolishment of ROTC and is a thorough-going critique of U.S. military spending.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, nearly all of the major anti-fascist campaigns in the 30s are not easily disentangled from campaigns that were more explicitly anti-

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<sup>26</sup> For a concise discussion of the CPUSA shift see Paul Buhle's entry "Antifascism" in *Encyclopedia of the American Left* ed. Paul Buhle, Mary Jo Buhle, and Dan Georgakis (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 46.

<sup>27</sup> "A Program Against War and Fascism," (New York: The American League Against War and Fascism, 1936), The Southern California Library Special Collections, 4-14. Elizabeth Noble, *Billions for Bullets* (New York: American League Against War and Fascism, 1937), Southern California Library Special Collections, 3-21.

imperialist, such as the "Hands off Cuba" or "Hands off Nicaragua" campaigns of the early 1930s. Campaigns, for a free Spain, free Ethiopia, anti-racism, and a redirection of military spending in the U.S., all had anti-imperialist valences depending on who was talking.

Many within the African-American left criticized the anti-fascist support for Western European imperial democracies, exemplified by a cartoon in the *Chicago Defender* that gives backhanded praise to the Nazi's for "picking on everyone equally," while England, France, and the U.S. "pick on the darker races only."<sup>28</sup> And yet many more on the left used popular opposition to Nazism to explore links between racism in the U.S. and the racial eugenics of the Nazi regime. Langston Hughes called the Spanish fascists "Jim Crow people," thereby explicitly linking the struggle in Spain with civil rights struggle in the south. Paul Robeson called on Congress to enact an anti-lynching campaign in the name of opposing fascism in the U.S. as well as abroad. In California, the Popular Front left often connected the fight against fascism with the Mexican and Filipino workers' movements, arguing that California was the state in the union "closest to a perfect fascist set-up" for its brutalization of farm-workers and immigrants.<sup>29</sup> As one black veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade related in the video documentary *The Good Fight*, he became

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<sup>28</sup> Penny von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 25.

<sup>29</sup> Gold, Michael. "Migratory Intellectuals" *The New Masses*, (December 15, 1936), 27-30. See also a pamphlet by Carey McWilliams, "It CAN Happen Here: Active Anti-Semitism in Los Angeles," (Los Angeles: 1935), 3-6.



involved by going to rallies “against war and fascism” that, more often than not, were rallies in support of the last free African nation. As Robin Kelley writes in *Race Rebels*, fighting the Italian and German fascists in Spain was not just a fight against racist powers for African-American activists but also a way to strike back at the German-backed Italian invasion of Ethiopia.<sup>30</sup> Langston Hughes makes the connection between fascism and empire in his poem “Dear Brother at Home,” in which he writes, “I looked across to Africa/and seen foundations shakin,” arguing that a socialist victory in Spain would mean liberation for African colonies.<sup>31</sup> To “see” Africa from Spain is more than just a literary conceit, it marks an entire way of seeing: that the anti-fascist struggle symbolized by Spain is crucially linked by race and by vision to the struggle to liberate people of color from Western imperialism.

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<sup>30</sup> Kelley, “This Ain’t Ethiopia, But It’ll Do: African-Americans and the Spanish Civil War,” *Race Rebels*, 123-58.

<sup>31</sup> Langston Hughes, “Letter from Spain,” *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*, Carey Nelson, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).



**Figure 0.2 "Civilization Enters Abyssinia," *Western Worker*, 4(95) November 28 1935, 6.** Notice the satire of the imperial discourse, as well as the column to the right of the cartoon, celebrating Ethiopia's resistance.

Nowhere is the "structure of feeling" of the anti-imperialist movement more ambiguous, but also more important, than in links between race and empire *within* the U.S. during the Depression. For intellectuals and activists within the circles of the Council on African Affairs, the Communist Party, sections of the black press, the National Negro Congress, and some of the more radical elements of the NAACP, linking race relations in the U.S. to imperialism abroad was common and indeed, animated nearly all struggles for equality and liberation during the period. News of Africa and news of Alabama were never far apart. "Race" was understood as a transnational term, linking slavery, colonialism, Jim Crow, and racial capitalism into

a single frame of analysis.<sup>32</sup> The Council on African Affairs and the Communist Party frequently sponsored meetings between civil rights leaders in the U.S. and independence figures from Africa and Latin America, raised money for and awareness of the colonized world within the U.S., and sponsored labor union and community members to travel abroad. Likewise, both organizations recruited and were comprised of members that participated in Garveyite movements and transnational Negritude movements that preceded the Popular Front, but also formed an important component of it. Equally, the Communist Party's rhetoric of "self-determination for minority peoples" implicitly connected nationalist claims in overseas colonies with African, Mexican, and Native-American struggles in the U.S.<sup>33</sup> In part, this was due to the Soviet Union's own policy on "minority peoples" within its borders, and efforts to gain influence in the third world, but as critics such as Mark Naison and Robin DG Kelley have argued, it was also a response to grassroots pressure within the Party to develop a coherent policy on race, capitalism,

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<sup>32</sup>Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, and Robin DG Kelley, *Freedom Dreams* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002)

<sup>33</sup> Robin Kelley is dismissive of the importance of Communist Party's slogan "self-determination in the Black Belt," citing the greater importance of the practical issues of racism, employment, and anti-lynching to Communist Party organizing strategy in the South in *Hammer and Hoe* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1990), 122, 225. However, Kelley argues in *Race Rebels* (New York: The Free Press, 1994) that black nationalism was a central part of the cultural literary production of black CP activists. Mark Naison agrees that the doctrine was never a practical campaign issue, yet he argues formulating an answer to black nationalism was theoretically crucial for focusing Communist Party leaders to take black issues more seriously, organizing solidarity movements against the invasion of Ethiopia, and in creating a revolutionary imaginary that could equal the Garveyites' visionary pull of militant nationalism. See Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1983).

and imperialism, and to respond to members' articulations of the centrality of race and empire to development of capitalism.

The connection between racism and imperialism implies that these scholars and activists understood black Americans as an “internally colonized” population, that there was more than a relation by analogy between the regime of South Africa and the Southern United States. Yet at the same time, many of the calls for action within the U.S. were for expressly integrationist goals, and the demands were placed on domestic – not international – institutions and practices. While there is nothing inherently contradictory about such stances, I draw attention to it because it complicates a discursive reading of the era. Given that many anti-colonialist figures were not calling for integration so much as liberation, the fact that activists on the ground fought for integration while simultaneously developing an imaginary of self-determination is central to the dialectics of struggle within the period, and must be seen as part of the same movement, even if the demands do not clearly match. Did the movement to integrate the armed forces in the 40s mean that civil rights activists ceased to believe the U.S. was empire? No, and such contradictions should not be smoothed out, nor should one give more weight to some images or struggles over others. Rather, I would suggest that images and rhetorics of liberation were, at the time, an articulated part of the struggle for integrationist equality within the U.S. Self-determination and greater civil rights often spoke the same language and uneasily if often shared the same discursive space.

Did this mean that Americans questioned their own expansionist history? Did this mean that opposing racism within the U.S. and colonialism abroad meant that left

culture challenged the “internal colonization” of minority peoples in the Americas, and U.S. intervention in Latin America? To the extent that it was a formal construction, such debate remained within the left. Yet it is a period that also witnessed a major shift in both the way white Americans constructed their relationships to people of color, and the way in which people of color constructed their relationship to whites as well as their own communities. To examine the increase in anti-colonialist thought and activity in isolation from the way Americans were re-thinking their relationship to race, the frontier, and foreign policy has been, unfortunately, the way in which the Popular Front has often been conceived. While there are obvious problems in making such claims (were all anti-racists anti-colonialists, and vice-versa?), there are greater dangers in disconnecting these issues historically and politically.

### **Transnational Modernism and the Popular Front**

In 1932, critic Edmund Wilson reached San Diego at the end of his year-long trip across the United States to “study the present crisis,” the roots and meanings of the Great Depression. Reaching his destination in California, he constructs his first image of the state from a singular and remarkable source: the turreted peaks of the John Spreckles’ Coronado Hotel. He comments that Spreckles made his fortune in “Hawaiian sugar” and, just so the reader knows what that means, adds “in 1887...he guaranteed to the Americans the exclusive use of Honolulu Harbor.”<sup>34</sup> He completes

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the thought by further noting that the same year saw the rise of the great “robber barons” as well as “the last attempt of the Indians to assert their independence” until they were “put down by the government and the Apaches penned up in a reservation.”<sup>35</sup> It is a compelling construction, and one made with the typical modernist understatement for which Wilson was well known, but one that nonetheless forces the connection among the overseas empire, the great industrial fortunes of the post-civil war era, Indian Removal, and I would add, the California shore. He completes the picture by noting that the hotel is “white as a wedding cake,” suggesting both “an ocean liner” and “a colonial mansion,” and “dominate(s) the last blue concave dent in the shoreline before the United States gives way to Mexico.”<sup>36</sup> This picture, one of whiteness, domination, colonial pretence, national boundaries, and tourism as well as a subtle reference to the “great white fleet of San Diego” that marked the U.S. expansion on the world stage as a global power, manages to locate the West as a mid-way point between a continuous imperial arc, rather than an end-point of the frontier. The overseas colonization of Hawaii and the internal colonization of the Native Americans are collapsed into a single image in which the hotel and the shoreline it dominates become the physical embodiment or objective correlative for imperial conquest.

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<sup>34</sup> Edmund Wilson, *American Jitters: A Year of the Slump* (New York: Books for the Libraries, Inc., 1937, 1968), 303, 253.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 254

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 254-5.

In Fredric Jameson's essay, "Modernism and Imperialism" he writes of the way imperialism creates a problem of perception, as "colonialism means that a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and existential experience of the homeland."<sup>37</sup> This "meaning-loss" is compensated within high modernism by an inward and aestheticized style – the impossibility of representing the totality of empire is itself represented by the "tenant-lieu" of an impregnable style.<sup>38</sup> While Jameson crucially points out how imperialism is constitutive not only of modernity but the modernist literary movement, his important theoretical essay leaves out another possible alternative: that many modernist writers responded to the crisis of representation created by modernity in a very different way. As one such modernist, Wilson was one of a large number of prominent intellectuals of the "red decade" to take a "turn to the left" in the 30s and his *American Jitters* was seen as his response to the social movements and epochal changes of the depression. He, like Malcolm Cowley, Granville Hicks, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Josephine Herbst represented a kind of literary patrician class formed in the movements of literary modernism in the previous decade. Wilson, Ivy-League educated and Anglophile in his literary tastes, wrote from the cultural center. Thus Wilson's modernist construction -- in which the shore-line is transformed into a perceptual vantage point from which to see into the "infinity" of empire both spatially

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<sup>37</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism," *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 50-1.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 58

and temporally -- presents another way to think about not only modernism but the way in which *anti-imperialist* work is another form through which modernism was expressed.

In addition, there has been a growing attention to the way in which modernism itself is constructed around a patrician, Anglo-American sensibility. Responding both to post-structuralist critics who label all modernism as totalizing, hierarchical, formal, and phallic as well as to New Critics who wish to re-assert the primacy of the aesthetic, intellectuals such as Paul Gilroy, Suzanne Clark, Michael Denning, and Laura Doyle suggest that we re-place modernism with working class/colonized/woman/and-or writers of color at the "center" of modernity.<sup>39</sup> Such a view puts into stark relief the way in which the high modernism of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, and others within the same circle represents less a universal truth than a particular subject position: the "globalized privacy" of the modern self, anxious to master the "global surround" and assert racial, classed, and gendered power over an increasingly transnational world.<sup>40</sup> Such a critique also aesthetically and politically recovers the cultural production of a whole generation of working class, left-wing, black, colonial, and woman writers within a comparative and historical context that suggests their own engagement with a modernist project while

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<sup>39</sup> To read a good account of the postmodern critique of modernism, see part 1 of David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Conditions of Cultural Change*, (London: Blackwell, 1990), 3-120.

<sup>40</sup> Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel, "Introduction: The Global Horizons of Modernism," *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 2.



not limiting their contribution to an identity formation. Laura Doyle's "emplacement" of modernity or "spatialization" of modernism thus not only forces the question of what lay on the other side of "infinity," it gives voice to those faceless members of the colonies described as the "hooded hordes/swarming over endless plains" in Eliot's *Wasteland*.<sup>41</sup> We can think of Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" as a refiguration of key modernist tropes, suggesting the "homelessness" of the modern subject be thought not so much as a spiritual condition, but rather as the culture produced in the multiple dislocations of the globalized world that began with slavery. Eliot's horror at the impurity of modern culture is precisely where Gilroy begins, in the "contact zones" between culturally rootless subjects, the violent articulations of an expanding capitalist horizon.<sup>42</sup> We can think then of C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins* or Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* as "modernist" within this frame, as both narrate the conflict/contact of race, nation, and empire through the transformative subjectivity of a hybrid voice.

It must also be recognized that claiming Popular Front literature as a form of modernism is an act of recovery. In literary history, the shift from modernism to postmodernism marked the Popular Front as a sort of interregnum, an unfortunate gap in the cultural order between avant-gardes. Dominated by "social realism," the Popular Front was regarded by several generations of critics as a return to the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," *Anthology of Modern American Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), lines 369-70.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity & Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

century verities of realism, including its middle-brow sensibility, its positivism, its reification of capitalist social relations – despite its ostensible social critique -- and its frequently linear, transparent narrative form. In this sense, 1930s "social realism" is read as a kind of anti-modernism. It is seen as a rejection of the aesthetic and its radical indeterminacy for the stable "truth" of social class and the determinism of an equally outdated philosophical materialism. As Barbara Foley points out, much of the 1960s post-modern literary criticism that came out of the legacy of the New Left – skeptical of theories of totalization, materialism, and binary oppositions – reproduced a narrative of Cold War anti-communism by discarding most proletarian fiction as "ideological" and thus retrograde.<sup>43</sup> Yet for Denning, the proletarian fiction of the 1930s forms a "third wave" of modernism that fused radical elements of surrealism, mass culture, and the grotesque to create a working class or "proletarian avant-garde."<sup>44</sup> Citing Kenneth Burke's 1935 address before the American Writers' Congress, Denning suggests we take Burke's call for a "revolutionary symbolism" as one of the clearest theoretical statements made at the time about the Popular Front modernist project.<sup>45</sup> As Denning notes, Burke's formulation of a modern "symbolism" with revolutionary politics marked both a rupture and a continuity with artistic forms of the previous decades. Framing Burke's address in more contemporary literary terms, Denning refers to Popular Front "social modernism" as a

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<sup>43</sup> Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction 1929-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 22-3.

<sup>44</sup> Denning, *Cultural Front*, 120-1.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

way to periodize and theorize the sensibility of writers as diverse as Richard Wright, Erskine Caldwell, Muriel Rukeyser, and James Agee.

Denning's formulation not only recovers the aesthetic value of Popular Front literature, as importantly, it recovers the revolutionary potential of the modernist project. Denning's category of "social modernism" suggests that perhaps the binary values encoded in David Harvey's table – opposing the mastery, hierarchy, logos, and phallocentrism of modernism with the exhaustion, anarchy, silence and androgyny of postmodernism – is an incomplete story.<sup>46</sup> While one could suggest that Denning's formulation of "social modernism" is another attempt to add an unlisted or uncounted group to the modernist canon, I would suggest that it has far more extensive implications for the way we both think of modernism and political movements "from below." If African-American, working-class, Mexican-American, Native American and other multi-ethnic artists and organizations found within the cultural logic of modernism a liberatory potential, then perhaps we can think of modernism as less the product of one particular subject-position than the attempt to construct a subjectivity within a discursive framework of the modern world. The "Waste Land" of the modern city onto which Eliot imposes his own formal order thus becomes a mobile trope – the abandoned buildings of Wright's *Native Son* or the asbestos mine of Rukeyser's *Book of the Dead* – a site for possible transformative visions of a new collectivity. By reclaiming the modernism of socially committed art, Denning shifts the debate about modernism from specific aesthetic characteristics to the question of

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<sup>46</sup> Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 42.

an avant-garde, a self-conscious artistic project of social transformation. As Joseph Entin and Paula Rabinowitz suggest, it was the self-conscious use of popular, pulp, grotesque and "sensational" material that marked Popular Front era literature as uniquely modern and modernist.<sup>47</sup>

Burke's address was, however, considered controversial at the 1935 Writers' Congress. In calling for a "revolutionary symbolism," Burke also suggests that radical writers adopt a "mythic" rather than a "scientific" approach to cultural struggle, dropping the language of "class" for a "national" myth of "the people."<sup>48</sup> Suggesting a "politics of inclusion," Burke encourages radical writers to borrow the language of "bourgeois nationalism" in order to re-appropriate it for a democratic project.<sup>49</sup> As Denning and others have noted, Burke's address was not well received at the Writers' Congress, and many within the audience criticized what they felt to be an open embrace of fascist rhetoric. Noting that "the people" was often the term deployed by right-wing populists, it was Burke's *nationalism* and not his modernism that upset the crowd.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, rather than find Burke's use of nationalist rhetoric more inclusive as Burke had hoped, it was his use of nationalism that the audience,

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<sup>47</sup> Joseph Entin, *Sensational Modernism: Experimental Fiction and Photography in Thirties America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 5-12; Paula Rabinowitz, *Black and White and Noir: America's Pulp Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>48</sup> Kenneth Burke, "Revolutionary Symbolism in America," *American Writers' Congress* (New York: International Publishers, 1935), 87-94, 88-90.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>50</sup> David C. Williams, "Thirty Years Later: Memories of the First American Writers' Congress: A Symposium," *American Scholar* 35 (1966) 495-516

including *New Masses* editor Mike Gold, found the most alienating. It is thus telling that Burke's address has been adopted by literary and cultural scholars as the theoretical blueprint of "social modernism," as it has shaped and in turn been shaped by the discourse around nationalism within the Popular Front. If one defines "social modernism" as a "national-popular" movement, key texts are thus remembered: John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, Woody Guthrie's *This Land is Your Land*, Dorothea Lange's FSA photography, and Paul Robeson's performance of *Ballad for Americans* – those texts that speak directly to the formation of a new national mythology.

The emphasis on "national mythology" unfortunately reproduces one of the more lasting narratives of modernism and the Popular Front. Part of what has obscured the transnational affiliations of the Popular Front however, is that Europe was largely displaced as a site of identification. With the bold and crucial exception of Spain, European governments were either fascist or soon to become fascist; intellectual exiles for a change were steaming to New York and Los Angeles rather than Berlin, Paris, or Rome. In this sense, the transnational character of the Popular Front was shaped in an identification and solidarity with what would come to be called the Third World.

As scholars such as Robin D.G. Kelley, Alan Wald, and Penny Von Eschen point out, within the African-American intellectual community racism was an inherently international phenomenon: news of Africa lay alongside news of Alabama, as racism in the U.S. was frequently understood in the context of global imperialism and European fascism. In addition, the Soviet Union's commitment to anti-discrimination measures as well as Lenin and Stalin's theoretical writings on minority

nationalism both created amongst some African-Americans the promise of a racially egalitarian future, and amongst many a counter-example to what seemed to be an intractable present within the United States. African-American modernists such as Richard Wright and Langston Hughes often questioned forms of both national and racial belonging that predominated in the 1920s Harlem Renaissance, resulting in a productive tension between black nationalism and a more multi-ethnic internationalism. For both writers, African-American modernism was always in view of a modernity denied to them but not Euro-Americans. Bigger Thomas' desire to fly airplanes and Hughes' respect for the Soviet project of modernity in Russia's former colonies were both suggestive of a black modernism that witnessed modernity from the outside looking in. In addition, Afro-Caribbean writers George Padmore and C.L.R. James both introduced a skepticism about whether any Western nation could bring about racial justice, and yet both also championed a multi-ethnic modernity based on mobility, transnational working class-affiliation, and bonds of revolutionary solidarity. Padmore's *International Negro Worker* and James' *The Black Jacobins* and *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways* advocated a modernism based on the fulfillment of the abstract rights and humanity gestured towards but never carried out by the Enlightenment. Langston Hughes' moment in which he "sees" Africa from Spain can be instructive: it is at the peak of the anti-fascist struggle that all of humanity, and not just Europe, is suddenly visible.

The transnational character of 1930s modernism included but also went well beyond the writings of the African-American intellectual and political community. Like Edmund Wilson's gaze into the "infinity" of the U.S. imperial arc, Clifford Odets

and Josephine Herbst traveled to Cuba to witness and document first-hand revolutionary and anti-imperialist movements as a way to call into question the limitations of a national framework for political writing. Like C.L.R. James' *Mariners* in which James celebrates the international proletariat aboard *Moby Dick's* Pequod, Herbst also celebrates the multi-racial "castaways" of Cuba's cooperative sugar plantation, Realingo 18, in a series of articles for the *New Masses* that later became her novel *Rope of Gold*. In fictional form, Odets creates a similar multi-racial and anti-imperialist army in his unperformed play "Ley de Fuga," based on revolutionary movements in Cuba. "Ley de Fuga" suggests that subjects on the colonial periphery may fulfill the promise of full democracy in a way the metropole cannot. "Ley de Fuga," also produces a radical estrangement for a U.S. reader, as Odets suggest that much of what "Americans" consider domestic is constructed beyond the national borders – including what we eat, but also the way in which U.S. citizens produce their national identity based on their presumed otherness from the countries U.S. financial capital directly or indirectly controls. Perhaps most importantly, their work recenters modernism from a European center to the colonial periphery and from a North Atlantic to a North-South spatial matrix. Rather than, as Laura Doyle suggests, a modernism constructed from an Anglo imperial panic, such transnational modernism is constructed out a need and desire for anti-imperial solidarity across racial lines.

**Arise, the Transnational Working Class?**

The idea of an international working class is, of course, not new. Recent studies of transnational culture often discount the importance of international socialist movements in shaping thinkers now considered central within a growing sub-canon of transnational U.S. literature, including Langston Hughes, C.L.R. James, Américo Paredes, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Carlos Bulosan. In the first half the 20th century, Communist Parties, left unions, socialist publications and organizations provided the structure as well as the capital necessary to facilitate publications and arrange for travels; they also provided an intellectual paradigm in which to locate oneself within a global world. As one former Communist Party activist in his late eighties explained, "you could be raised in the Bronx, show up in the Philippines, and without speaking a word of Tagalog or anything else, suddenly have hundreds of brothers in arms who would do anything for you."<sup>51</sup> And yet socialist internationalism, with its emphasis on working-class movements, relations among states, and seizing state power, cannot necessarily account for or adequately describe the multiple hybrid points of identity shaped by migrant flows, contact zones, borderlands, or the way in which the unequal relationship between colony and center is key to the production of identity. As Donald Pease writes of C.L.R. James' imprisonment on Ellis Island due to the Cold War's "state of emergency," James' detention was a "colonial encounter" within the borders of the United States, neither between states nor within one.<sup>52</sup> As a

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<sup>51</sup> Syd Resnik, oral interview (New Haven: August 2005).

<sup>52</sup> Donald Pease, "C.L.R. James, *Moby Dick*, and the Emergence of Transnational American Studies," *The Futures of American Studies*, ed. Pease and Wiegman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 149.



detrterritorialized subject, James neither belonged to class nor nation, but was rather with a "federation of diasporas," a delocalized exile that belonged neither to one place nor another.<sup>53</sup>

Intellectuals and activists such as D'Arcy McNickle and Emma Tenayuca both wrote of the way in which their racialized communities were neither able to constitute independent nations nor constitute abstract citizenship. For McNickle in particular, the Salish reservation was a site of racial violence, exile from which only meant another form of cultural death. In this sense, the reservation is constructed like James' INS facility as detrterritorialized space, neither within the nation nor independent from it, a site caught between a colonial history and a not-yet-becoming hybridity. As one of the tribal elders says in McNickle's *The Surrounded* "that's the way it goes now; the old law is not used and nobody cares about the new."<sup>54</sup>

On the West Coast, the brutal history of California's annexation became a crucial frame with which to narrate a violent wave of labor strikes in the agricultural fields of the San Joaquin Valley. Rather than interpret the conflict as solely a question of labor and capital, many including Carlos Bulosan, Emma Tenayuca and Carey McWilliams, as well as anonymous writers and photographers for labor and socialist newspapers such as *Lucha Obrera*, *The Agricultural Worker*, and *The Western Worker* saw the pattern of land-ownership and vigilantism as a continuation of histories established by the seizure of the Southwest from Mexico in the 1840s.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>54</sup> D'Arcy McNickle, *The Surrounded* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1936, 1978), 207.

California as a space is thus rendered as a contact zone, a site of power not resolvable through the national-democratic means of citizenship. Many of the photographers and writers for labor and socialist newspapers explicitly tied the violence of the strikes to the violence of lynching, the occupation of the Philippines by the U.S., and other imperial expressions of racial power. This narrative frame at once formed a counter-discourse to the conservative sentimental-nationalism of the New Deal, as well as reimagined labor in the U.S. West as inherently transnational, part of immigrant flows and colonial dislocations. This double-dislocation of the national subject was a key part of constructing a transnational modernist vision of stateless and multi-ethnic solidarity. Rather than the cosmopolitanism of the previous generation of modern writers, the images of grotesque and often violated bodies framed modern exile as one that emerges within conditions of imperial violence. Yet as Pease points out, such statelessness may also presage a utopian future, a "federation of diasporas" that challenge state power in the name of a new collective vision.

Emma Tenayuca's 1939 essay "The Mexican Question in the Southwest" also provides a site of productive tension between socialist internationalism and the transnational politics of the U.S./Mexico borderlands<sup>55</sup> While Tenayuca is primarily remembered as a Tejana labor activist, her writings reflect a dual consciousness as one organizing simultaneously as a Mexican-American as well as within movements that defined themselves as internationalist and working class. Published in *The Communist*, the Communist Party's theoretical journal, "The Mexican Question"

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<sup>55</sup> Emma Tenayuca and Homer Brooks, "The Mexican Question in The Southwest," *The Communist*, March 1939, 258-9.

positions the Mexican-American population as an internally colonized people and calls for cultural as well as political and economic recognition. As she outlines the dispossession of Mexican land, the marginalization of Mexican culture, the policing of Mexican citizens regardless of citizenship status, the deportation of labor organizers, and the lack of political representation and economic opportunity, she makes the deliberate argument that Mexican-Americans, like other colonized peoples, suffer repression as a whole people in both cultural and economic terms, outside of the safeguards of citizenship and nationhood at all levels of identity-formation. Yet the article stops short of calling for an independent nation for Mexican peoples in the Southwest, and argues that the fate of working-class people, regardless of race, is inexorably linked. Thus the essay both identifies her as a colonial subject, a subject-in-exile, at the same time that it calls for full democratic rights and an alliance across race and citizenship status. To claim to be a citizen and a colonial subject is not so much a contradiction, but rather a precise analysis of the liminal and transnational space of an empire within a nation. In this sense, transnationalism is not merely another name for internationalism, yet it does eclipse it either. As these works show, there was a deep correlation between socialist internationalists and post-national strains of thought.

### **Lost Texts, Rough Drafts, Unassembled Archives: The Transnational as Counter-Memory**

As historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot reminds us, what is remembered in an historical narrative is largely a function of power. Exercise of power not only dictates

what narratives will or will not remain within the public sphere, but what accumulates as "fact": archives, let alone histories, are produced at multiple points into which lasting and even permanent silences may be introduced.<sup>56</sup> The simple fact that one of the best single sources of information about the political, ethnic, and geographic depth and breadth of the Popular Front is the FBI's 1948 list of subversive organizations says much about how power has shaped the history of that particular movement. Perhaps because of this, much of the post Cold War recovery has naturalized the Popular Front's own narrative about itself, developed at the same time most of its foremost figures were silenced, jailed, exiled, or forced to recant: that it was an "American" movement celebrating the United States' most egalitarian traditions. As the narrative of C.L.R. James' exile from the U.S. emphasized by Donald Pease suggests, not all subversions were blacklisted equally.

Numerous scholars of African-American history including Mary Dudziak, Penny Von Eschen, Thomas Borstelmann and Carol Anderson have noted that it was precisely the internationalism of the previous decade that the FBI and state department found so threatening. While mainstream rights organizations like the NAACP were able to gain short term benefits from giving tacit support to U.S. foreign policy objectives, ultimately these historians argue, this policy effectively severed black American struggle for civil rights from issues of anti-colonialism and racism abroad. Indeed, as Penny Von Eschen points out, the entire notion of "race"

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<sup>56</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Power in the Story," *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 25-7.

and "racism" ceased to be, as it was earlier understood, a global term.<sup>57</sup> Labor underwent a similar revision of definition, as "international" unions and left political parties equally faced systematic repression, and international solidarity movements were shut down or reformulated to suite State Department and Pentagon needs, so much so that the AFL-CIO often became an active agent in CIA campaigns in Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe. Travel itself became suspect; to the Soviet Union naturally, but also travel to Spain, travel to the Caribbean, to Latin America, China. Perhaps the most telling fact about the Cold War Red Scare is that the McCarran Act of 1950 not only revoked the passport and citizenship of anyone belonging to "subversive organizations," but tightened the alien exclusion and deportation laws to include "subversives" as well.

Of course, silence is not merely a punitive or negative act. Early Cold War films repeatedly touched on Popular Front themes such as the dignity of labor, inter- and trans-national solidarity, democracy, anti-fascism, and racial pluralism through Westerns such as *Shane* and *The Magnificent Seven*; latent anti-communist films such as *Viva Zapata!* and *On the Waterfront*; epics such as *The Ten Commandments* and *Ben Hur* to reinscribe such themes within a nationalist and patriotic frame. Film noirs such as *They Clash by Night*, *Asphalt Jungle*, and *Out of the Past* often represented such values only to suggest that they belong to a lost and nostalgized past, reimagining the Popular Front era as a white, rural, laboring subject, projecting a repressed utopian desire for the Lincoln Republic for an age that now deems it out of reach.

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<sup>57</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*: 145-66.

Even left-wing filmmakers such as Orson Welles recast transnational bonds of solidarity in films such as *Touch of Evil* and *The Lady from Shanghai* as sites of danger and/or forbidden desire.

Perhaps most surprisingly if not most tellingly, blacklisted filmmakers Herbert Biberman and Paul Jarrico heavily revised their collaborative film *Salt of Earth*. A film that documents a miners' strike at the peak of the Cold War, it represents the resistance of a Mexican-American community to the racism, sexism, and class oppression intensified by the onset of the Cold War's emergent security state. In addition to the film's democratic message, the script was also democratically reviewed by a committee comprised of both mineworkers and filmmakers, who together edited scenes and suggested changes to the film. In addition to removing scenes that mineworkers felt either improperly portrayed their community or reinforced negative stereotypes (scenes of the lead mineworker drinking or having an affair for instance), the committee also removed references to the anti-communism of local officials and the mine executives, as well as to references to the Korean War and U.S. imperialism. While no record is left as to exactly why these changes were made, it is likely that the pressures felt by civil rights activists and labor unions to were also felt by the mineworkers' union, a union that had been recently thrown out of the CIO for refusing to make its officers sign Taft-Hartley anti-communist oaths. Examining the way in which even radical filmmakers and a left-wing union felt compelled to revise a film along less international lines powerfully suggests the way in which such international commitments of a previous generation were revised. Such a consistent and pervasive revision of the Popular Front not only reinforced state department and

FBI suppression of left-wing internationalism, it reframed a particular memory of one of the most constitutive features of the Popular Front imaginary. However, the silence entered into the historical record of the Popular Front was, in a Foucaultian fashion, also a proliferation, not merely a repression.<sup>58</sup> By "remembering" the Popular Front as a lost Lincoln Republic, it is in this way that a reactionary figure such as Ronald Reagan could invoke heartland populism in the name of a more aggressive security and military state. In this way, he came to be seen by many left intellectuals as both the inheritor of the Popular Front at the same time he set in motion the destruction of its remaining social legacy.<sup>59</sup>

In the context of Cold War repression, we can take Michael Denning's *Cultural Front*, Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations*, and Robin Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe* as not merely new theories on the long 1930s, but the construction of a new archive, the interruption of the process of historical narrative.

"Transnational modernism" is the attempt to produce a similar interruption in the historical sensibility of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Foley notes, written into much postmodern and New Left theory is a latent anti-communism. Yet also written into the assumptions of postmodern and post- New Left theory in the U.S. is the belief in social progress, that cultural and political movements in the U.S. have become *more*

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<sup>58</sup> Michel Foucault makes a similar point about sexuality, suggesting that the control revolves around the multiplication of discourse rather than repression, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978).

<sup>59</sup> Denning notes that many left-wing commentators felt Reagan's appeals to the "common man" and to a new "morning in America" smacked of the sentimental "schwärmerei" of the Popular Front, *Cultural Front*, 116-8.

egalitarian, *more* transnational, *more* open to questions of difference, *more* sophisticated in the way questions of whiteness, empire, power, sexuality are addressed. While there is no question that the U.S. is now more open to many questions of difference within the public sphere since the 1930s – especially along faultlines of race, sexuality, and domesticity – there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that contemporary social movements along questions of race, militarism, and empire have lost a focus on inter- and transnational solidarity, as well as institutional and material means to connect these issues to the daily lives of working people and the imaginary of artists and intellectuals.

"I See Foundations Shaking" is thus in part a collection of lost texts – newspapers with brief print runs, pamphlets, rough drafts, and books long out of print that I hope can do more than simply fill in gaps in history. They are rather attempts to restore an entire web of connections, an imaginary of a generation of social and intellectual activists. That Cuba was a major site of the cultural imaginary of the 1930s is simply not available within the currently circulating texts from the 1930s. And yet the "darling of the left" in the 1930s, Clifford Odets, visited Cuba as part of a delegation of activists, labor officials, and church groups; authored a pamphlet with well-known journalist Carleton Beals; and went on a speaking tour with ACLU president Roger Baldwin and poet Archibald MacLeish after his arrest by Cuban authorities, all of which became the basis for an unpublished play he worked on from 1936 to 1938. And Josephine Herbst's last novel in the Trexler Trilogy, *Rope of Gold*, ends in Cuba, with the final chapters largely based on a series of articles she wrote for the *New Masses* about a revolutionary sugar cooperative in the Sierra



Maestra. And the "Hands off Cuba" campaign staged rallies and passed local resolutions condemning U.S. intervention, after the election of Ramón St. Grau was met with U.S. warships and a velvet coup. Considering these facts also allows us to reconsider why the only novel Hemingway publicized as "political" was set in Cuba and the Florida Keys. Or more centrally to the multi-ethnic coalitions of the Popular Front, why Langston Hughes might credit his collaboration with Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén with changing his perspective on the global roots of African-American poetry; or for Clifford Odets, why going to Cuba seemed a necessary part of his political awakening after he had already established himself as the preeminent playwright of the U.S. left.

More than reconsider a few authors, the importance of a site like Cuba alters the entire narrative of the Popular Front. Locating a site of political desire, multi-ethnic solidarity, and national critique outside of U.S. national borders in an unofficial colony of the U.S. does more than simply construct transcultural connections. It radically questions the national frame proposed by theorists like Kenneth Burke, and radically alters the cultural memory of the decade that is based on themes of national belonging. To locate a movement in Cuba is not to align with another country so much as to suggest the U.S. was always already there, and the colonies must be recognized and included. Much like C.L.R. James re-centering the Enlightenment in the Haitian revolution, so re-centering an anti-fascist movement to the colonies suggests that "the fight for democracy" may indeed be the global fight against imperialism that begins not with European democracy but with European imperialism. For authors like Odets and Herbst as well, such works also crucially

interrogate their own racial identities. Odets' "Cuba Play" implicitly criticized the assimilation of Jewish-Americans by questioning whether ethnic-American dialect – so much a recognizable part of the "new American culture" of the 1930s -- may be part of the imperial project just as much as weapons or sugar. For Herbst, her last chapter of *Rope of Gold* is not just a statement of solidarity with Cuban socialists; it is also an excavation of her own family history intertwined with myths of manifest destiny. By going south to Cuba, she is forced to retrace her own family's footsteps from the West and confront her own implication in the U.S. imperial project.

"I See Foundations Shaking" thus rethinks the intersecting histories of cultural modernism and the Popular Front, and in doing so, asks how these histories also help us to rethink the legacy of transnational and anti-imperialist thought in the United States. Framing such historical and cultural connections can help in the formation of a comparative multi-ethnic approach to U.S. literature, providing conceptual bridges among African-American, Native-American, Asian-American, and Mexican-American literatures, especially along shared lineages of empire and transnational racial affinities. Looking at the way in which African-American writers and activists saw the Spanish Civil War in the context of European colonialism can help us to reconsider the ways in which people of color in the U.S. claimed the discourse of anti-fascism for their own critiques of Western empire: Mexican-American anti-fascists who saw the agribusiness vigilantes within the tradition of U.S. colonialism of Mexican land, or Filipino-American activists who saw the violence of the growers' associations in the light of the U.S. occupation of the Philippines. Tropes such as racial violence, migration, and militarism can also be seen as attempts to theorize the

ways in which multi-ethnic literature and transnational anti-imperialism can be linked. Again, considering how the violence in a novel like *Native Son* can be a way to theorize African-American nationalism has implications for how we read a Native-American text like D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded*.

For whatever faults and shortcomings the Popular Front period may have had, it should be remembered that it is to date the only U.S. social movement to raise an integrated socialist army to fight overseas—the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Yet the meaning of that event has still to be fully recovered. When the global justice movement exploded onto the streets of Seattle and into the public discourse over a decade ago, it was with optimism but also distress that the sudden focus on empire and the transnational flows of labor was perceived as "new." Or when activists traveled to Chiapas to work with the Zapatistas in the late 1990s, there was little if any memory of the decades of cross-border cultural and political exchange that had gone before. Considering transnational modernism as a possible site of past examples to learn from can guide current and future activists who wish to create bonds of solidarity across spatial and cultural borders. The absorption of postmodern organizing strategies, based on affinity groups, action networks, and social technologies, avoids many of the problems of hierarchy and statism for which Popular Front movements have been accused. Yet such strategies also construct the fiction of a permanent present, in which movements spring up as their own *causa sui*, without the need for a complex history or the difficulties of institutional presence. And yet the fiction of the political present is almost a necessity, considering the violence to history the Cold War security state has forced upon our cultural memory.

While the transnational movements of the late 1920s to the Cold War were far from perfect, the scope, ambition, and the transformational power of the long Popular Front can be appreciated in the current absence of such movements. For cultural producers, considering the way these intellectuals imagined transnational bonds of affinity can provide examples and solutions for the representational problems of empire and spatial fragmentation that face us now.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Traveling Against Empire: Cuba and the Construction of a (Trans)National-Popular Culture in the U.S.**

#### **A New Deal of Terror: Cuba in the Popular Front**

In 1935, Clifford Odets was imprisoned by the Cuban national police. As perhaps the most famous playwright in the U.S. at the time and often cited as the "darling of the left," Odets was elected as the chair of the American Commission to Investigate Social Conditions in Cuba in order to publicize the labor conditions on U.S.-financed sugar plantations.<sup>60</sup> The group included veterans of the Spanish-American War, representatives from churches, socialist parties, labor unions, and anti-war groups, and they departed with great fanfare from New York City for what was to be a week of publicity tours on the island. Held by armed guards, refused consular attention, communication, or food for over twenty-four hours while being watched by an entire company of soldiers, Odets later reported that it was the experience of seeing the U.S. consular representative collude with the Cuban authorities to detain the delegation that led him several years later to write "The Cuban Play," a feature-length production set in Havana. Finished in 1938 for Group Theater, it was never performed or published. While there is no one clear reason why the play disappeared – although the Group Theater's lack of funds, Odets' uneasiness

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<sup>60</sup> Clifford Odets, "What Happened to Us in Cuba" *New Masses*, 16(3) July 16, 1935, 9-11.

with its perceived faults, and Cuba's official status as an "ally" in World War II have been offered as answers – the play's first act gives insight into what it meant for the U.S.'s preeminent proletarian playwright to set a story in Cuba.

Titled after Cuba's *ley de fuga* in which the National Police or *porra* reserved the right to shoot anyone resisting arrest, the play centers on the life and death of Antonio Lorca, a Cuban revolutionary figure recently released from prison. "A Cuban Tom Mooney" as Odets writes in his treatment, Lorca struggles to form a Popular Front social movement against a corrupt U.S.-backed regime, until he is finally betrayed by an old college friend and shot by the National Police.<sup>61</sup> In the period between Lorca's release and his final execution, the play introduces us to the multiracial movement built by Lorca's organization, "Young Cuba," that attempts to enlist broad working-class and international support for their organization. The play also includes long monologues and scenes featuring otherwise peripheral figures who represent various levels within the power structure that governs life on the island: U.S. businessmen, criollo liberals, arms traders, informants, and fascist police officers.

Yet the play does not begin *mis-en-scene* in Havana. In a rare move by a cultural movement that prized the conceits of realism, "The Cuban Play" opens with a remarkable scene that draws into sharp relief the contours of literary production in the 1930s and its often complicated and contradictory engagement with the politics of U.S. anti-imperialism. Beginning in New York City, we are introduced to a left-

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<sup>61</sup> Clifford Odets, "Play Synopsis and Act I of Law of Flight," Clifford Odets Papers, 1926-1963, box 22, folder 5, Billy Rose Theater Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, 1.

wing writer who is listening to a "pitch" by two exiled Cuban revolutionaries who are staying with him. The Cubans want a play about their national hero, Lorca, and the writer –something of a stand-in for Odets himself - becomes increasingly impatient with their demands. He argues that he has no time, that he's under no obligation to write anything for anyone, that during the Depression there is no privileged site of suffering, until he finally erupts:

Author: Why not? I'll tell you why not....What do I know about Cubans? I'm a New York man: I walk down the street and I tell you everything. I look at a face and I know them all. I know how he speaks, the American male. I know what he reads, what he eats, how he works. I know his opinions, I know his language. He's got a wife – I know her. He doesn't like the boss – I'll tell you why. I'm up on that – I know that stuff. They go in the cafeterias – I know what they eat. What the hell does a Cuban eat – I don't know. I'm not a Cuban. Chekhov wrote about Russians. He was a Russian. Ibsen wrote about Swedes. He was a Swede. I'm an American - I write about that. I want you to go home. Go to your committee. Tell them what I said. Miss Upjohn is going to make out a check for a hundred dollars.<sup>62</sup>

The Author's speech suggests an interesting set of epistemological limitations around the nature and purpose of social realism in the 1930s. Given that Odets was considered, both in retrospect and at the time, the preeminent writer of realist drama of the Depression, his representational claims are more than just the idiosyncrasy of a particular writer.<sup>63</sup> Central to the Author's claim of authenticity as a writer is the sensual knowledge of the world about which he writes. To "know" about New

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<sup>62</sup> Clifford Odets, "Final Draft of the Play Law of Flight," Clifford Odets Papers, 1926-1963, box 23, folder 13, Billy Rose Theater Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Act 1, Scene 1, 5.

<sup>63</sup> William W. Demastes, "Preface: American Dramatic Realisms, Viable Frames of Thought," *Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition*, edited by William W. Demastes (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), xvi.

Yorkers, the Author goes for a "walk down the street" to "look at a face": both the interaction and the process of seeing are registered as necessary in order to understand the social and political world of his subject.

As Amy Kaplan writes in *The Social Construction of American Realism*, realism was imagined by its 19<sup>th</sup> century practitioners to be a genre that mediated between classes that were bound by spatial and national proximity. As a self-consciously democratic genre, realism represents an ocular world in which the members can and often do confront one another on the historical stage and, as importantly, on Main Street.<sup>64</sup> While the realism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is far less self-consciously middle class than in the era of William Dean Howells and Mark Twain and far more integrated within mass-culture industries, the set of shared assumptions and lineages are profoundly similar.<sup>65</sup> The attention to minute detail, the position of an omniscient narrator who can see into bedrooms and minds, as well as the emphasis on Howells' "phrase and carriage of everyday life" in the public spaces of "streets" and "cafeterias" suggest that Odets intends his Author to be very much self-consciously within the tradition laid out by a previous generation of socially progressive writers. A few moments later in the conversation, the Author compares

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<sup>64</sup> Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 12-13

<sup>65</sup> Chris Vials, *Realism for the Masses: Aesthetics, Popular Front Pluralism, and U.S. Culture, 1935-1947* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 6.



his work to "poetic plays" for which the writer only needs "to know a man's a hero, nothing else" - not, as he demands, what "a man eats for dinner."<sup>66</sup>

While the Author does eventually write his play for the Cuban revolutionaries, he tries to make clear that his objections are not political. He offers to give the activists money, says that he understands that "such a play is needed," and adds that "he likes" that the two men have been sleeping at the Author's house for the past three weeks, and also "likes" that he and the Cubans are "anti-fascists together."<sup>67</sup> In many ways, their political relationship embodies the many cross-race and internationalist relationships of the Popular Front, joined by a concern for labor and democracy, as well as a global imaginary that saw imperialism and fascism as intrinsically linked. The implication that the two Cuban revolutionaries would have an automatic home as well as the relationship of "smoking cigars and drinking rum while talking politics" that the Author wishes to maintain, suggest the common – if now often forgotten – bonds bridged across spatial, territorial, racial, and imperial boundaries that often connected movements.

What is thus significant is the extent to which realism is posed here as a genre of *national* belonging. The Author poses his intimate knowledge of New York working-class life – people who have bosses and eat in cafeterias – against "poetic plays" of worlds he doesn't know: the other nations of Sweden, Russia, and Cuba. Realism, argues the Author, is a national project, one based on the imaginary community of a coherent people who share a set of culturally specific values, habits,

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<sup>66</sup> Clifford Odets, "Law of Flight," Act 1, Scene 1, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., Act 1, Scene 1, 4.

and language that are not easily translatable without site-specific knowledge. The revolutionaries' answer suggests less that they disagree with the aesthetic prescriptions of realistic drama – they offer to tell the Author what their hero eats (rice and beans) – so much as with the political and cultural implications of the Author's art. The two Cubans point to a candy the Author unwraps, and tell him that the sugar produced for his candy was not only made in Cuba, but on a farm owned by U.S. financial interests. In this way, the two Cubans destabilize the presumption of knowledge articulated by the author: The Author does not "know" where his food comes from or how it is produced, or anything about the international connections and entanglements of the nation he proposes to represent that are part of sugar's production. The Cubans suggest the way in which the U.S. empire destabilizes regimes of knowledge necessary for the realist project that equates a coherent and unified "people" with the discursive boundaries of the nation.

In complicating the relationship among genre, literature, and U.S. empire, Odets joined several other artists who traveled to Cuba in the 1930s. Four of the most famous, and perhaps representative, writers of the 1930s spent time in Cuba between 1927 and 1939: Josephine Herbst, Clifford Odets, Ernest Hemingway, and Langston Hughes. While their collective accounts differ in important ways, Cuba became a way for all four to narrate their relationship to the United States and their identities as subjects of a sovereign empire. For Odets, Herbst, and Hughes, Cuba offers a problem of representation and forces them into a self-conscious relationship to their own work and their role as writers – creators, one could say -- of representative acts, acts that are to represent a particular political and literary constituency. This question

of the dual meaning of representation is drawn most forcefully in Odets' "Cuba Play" by the demand of the Cuban independence activists for a play about their leader. Yet the question of representation also forces Hughes and Herbst to consider the ways in which their work was based on racial and imperial notions of U.S. citizenship. For Ernest Hemingway, the novel *To Have and Have Not* was his one attempt, in his own words, to write a social protest fiction. At the same time, the novel is deeply implicated in reifying the racial, national, and gendered identities produced by the U.S. hegemonic domination of Latin America. In doing so however, Hemingway's text reveals the centrality of empire and race in the production of a white working-class subject. And all of these texts reveal the extent to which imperialism shapes the literary field in the 1930s, and the way its articulation in U.S. national discourse disrupted U.S. claims about itself as a democratically defined republic. All works, even those that tacitly embrace conceits of U.S. empire, reveal the generic considerations of the Popular Front as ones that both demand a national and a post-national imaginary. The question of realism, therefore, is also the question of who will be represented as "Americans:" "Americans" who are citizens, or as these authors suggest, all those within the range of U.S. imperial sovereignty.

For many of these writers, Cuba became an important site in an anti-racist, Popular Front social imaginary. Inspired by Cuba's long history of anti-racist, anti-imperialist nationalism, Odets and Herbst saw in the progressive movements an alternative to a racially bound U.S. nationalism as well as a model for multi-racial and transnational movements in the U.S. As historian Ada Ferrer writes in her history of the Cuban insurgency against Spanish colonial rule, "racial equality" was a

"foundation of the Cuban nation" against a slave-holding Spanish empire.<sup>68</sup> Not only did Cuban nationalism pose an alternative to a racial nationalism of the U.S., but the insurgency itself presented a model of a "multiracial fighting force that was integrated at all ranks."<sup>69</sup> At a time in which the U.S. military was still segregated and the AFL was only beginning to consider integrating its own locals, such an army provided an important historical model for movements in the United States, underscoring the urgency of breaking racial barriers for a resurgent labor movement within the left-wing of the CIO. Equally, the play can be read as an allegory and celebration of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, as the racially integrated and trans-American "Young Cuba" bears many striking resemblances to the International Brigades of Spain. Herbst writes of the racially integrated sugar-workers' commune of Realengo 18 that crucially dated its deed to the land they worked to the Ten Year's War settlement with the Spanish and thereby suggests another possible outcome for the South's ongoing problem of tenant farming and debt peonage.

Additionally for Odets, Cuba stands as a site of racial defamiliarization.

While Odets and other white-ethnic American writers like Louis Adamic, James Farrell, and Nelsen Algren actively wrote and campaigned against racism in the name of multi-ethnic working-class culture, many of these writers themselves were embodiments of class advancement for certain segments of the working class. Odets

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<sup>68</sup> Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

was hailed by a *Time Magazine* cover story as the new American voice in theater, the tellingly labeled "white hope."<sup>70</sup> Yet the "whiteness" of Jews and other 'white-ethnics' was provisional at best during the 1930s. As Michael Rogin points out, the "whiteness" of Jewish Americans was constructed in relation to African-Americans and often at their expense.<sup>71</sup> Odets was highly aware of the way ethnic outsiders were encouraged to participate in racialized structures of power in order to secure class advancements to end their own racial persecution. Odets' story, from outsider to ultimate insider, from a conception of Jewish-American culture that was seen as foreign to one increasingly interpreted as an example of the expanding middle class, is a kind of metonym for the process of inclusion itself. As Michael Denning writes, these "second generation immigrants" were the center of the Popular Front movement, and as Matthew Frye Jacobson reminds us, despite some of their best efforts, they became its most visible beneficiaries.<sup>72</sup> We can thus read Odets' decision to go to Cuba, and his subsequent difficulty writing a play based on his feelings of solidarity with the Cuban revolutionaries, as an attempt to further expand the fight against racism within his work and, as importantly, his life. Yet as his own work in Hollywood – which I will discuss in greater detail below – attests, such attempts also met with larger structures of racialization from which Odets would ultimately not be able to escape.

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<sup>70</sup> "Down with the General Fraud," *Time Magazine* 23(32) December 5, 1938.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 12-13.

<sup>72</sup> Denning, *The Cultural Front*, xv.

Langston Hughes' experiences in Cuba are more ambivalent. Hughes presents Cuba as a place in which African-American writers and intellectuals can receive recognition that is denied them in the U.S. He also represents Cuba as a site from which U.S. imperialism can be denaturalized. Rather than seeing U.S. race relations as inevitable, Hughes' engagement with Cuba's *mestizo* culture offers Hughes an implicit contrast to the more rigid racial lines in the U.S. Subverting the colonial trope of the "metropole" exporting "civilization," Hughes notes the way in which the most visible import from the United States is segregation: beaches and other vacation facilities segregated at the request of white tourists who use them. Yet Hughes is also skeptical of the claims made by largely *mestizo* and creole Cuban nationalists about the color-blindness of Cuba. While Hughes emphasizes the respect for Afro-Cuban and *mestizo* culture in Cuba, he also recognizes the limits of Cuba's "race blindness." He observes that most property is held by white creoles, and most government positions and even opposition parties are run by whites or light-skinned *mestizo*, while many ordinary Cubans find these implicit racial hierarchies to be "natural." Cuba for Hughes emerges both as a site of belonging and homelessness, and I would argue his ambivalence acts to undermine *both* U.S. and Cuban claims to equality. Yet, Cuba is also key for Hughes and it is not an accident that he begins his transnational journey there in *I Wonder as I Wander*. While he may feel disappointed by the *mulato* elite, he also breaks with the Harlem Renaissance formula of race/roots for a far more transnational vision of race and rootlessness.

As much as Cuba becomes a site of a Popular Front political imaginary, there was still a great deal of disagreement on the left about the best way to build an

international, multi-ethnic socialist movement. Odets' Author becomes a kind of stand-in for a range of Popular Front positions promoted by intellectuals within the Communist Party. The same year Odets began taking notes for the play, there emerged a heated debate within Popular Front literary circles about the roles of nationalism and genre for committed writers. Inspired by the Comintern's statement that the Communist Party should forge alliances with left-liberal groups to fight fascism, the Party responded to a deep desire in progressive circles to find a common front to fight growing threats in Europe. This turn had drastic implications for cultural production, both within and outside of Party circles. In Kenneth Burke's famous address to the American Writers' Congress, he argues that revolutionary writers should "borrow the advantages of nationalistic conditioning" and replace the international, Marxist language of "workers" with the "folk" expression of "the people."<sup>73</sup> This shift from internationalism to nationalism also coincided with U.S. Communist Party chairman Earl Browder's phrase, "Communism is 20<sup>th</sup> century Americanism," in which he argued that Marxism is the realization of a country's cultural heritage.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, the pages of the *Daily Worker* began running weekend inserts about the lives of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and Sitting Bull as examples of the progressive, even revolutionary heritage of a uniquely American

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<sup>73</sup> Kenneth Burke, "Revolutionary Symbolism in America," *American Writers Congress* (New York: International Publishers, 1935), 90.

<sup>74</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). See also, George Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

tradition, replacing the earlier internationalist Soviet iconography of Lenin, Marx, and Asian, Latin American, and Middle-Eastern Communist Parties around the world. As Burke argues in his address and as is clear from other CP publications, national cultural heritage was to be deployed strategically as a way to "appeal through inclusion" to a broader swath of the culture while at the same time challenging both the limits and assumptions of national identity.<sup>75</sup> Still, markers of national unity at socialist and labor gatherings were hard to miss: the "Star Spangled Banner" replaced the *Internationale* at Communist Party national conventions and leading left intellectuals like Granville Hicks, Louis Adamic and the Federal Writers Project published books entitled *I Like America*, *My America*, and *American Stuff*, all attempts in one way or another to render a multi-ethnic socialist U.S. within an American grain.

For those interested in questions of empire, the problem was as much one of patriotism as geography. As Michael Denning notes, there was a renewed desire to take up "American subjects and themes" working on the "chords of 'native' and 'ground' – including such titles as John Dos Passos' *The Ground We Stand On*, Alfred Kazin's *On Native Grounds*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Paul Strand's *Native Land*, Louis Adamic's journal *Common Ground* and his memoir, *The Native's Return*.<sup>76</sup> The focus on "land" and "ground" means, as Odets' Author points out, the imaginary of intimacy and physical geographical proximity is necessary for cultural production.

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<sup>75</sup> Burke, "Revolutionary Symbolism," 90-2.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* (London: Verso, 1997), 168-9.



The nation in many ways became one of the primary touchstones for imagining revolutionary struggle, and indeed, became part of a radical common sense as a way to find solidarity with common people. As Meridel Le Sueur writes of her decision to stay in the midwest, she contrasts herself to other writers who go to "Paris or Morocco or Venice," and vows to remain in the U.S. instead, "staying with you, bent upon understanding you, bringing you to life..."<sup>77</sup> This progressive evocation of the nation makes an aesthetic of working-class political commitment depend on remaining in the U.S. and attempting to salvage a progressive meaning from its inherited mythology.

Given that the Popular Front era is often remembered for its folk nationalism, Americana, and populism, the international concerns of central Popular Front figures like Odets, Hughes, and Herbst complicate dominant memories of 1930s culture. Woody Guthrie's famous ballad "This Land is Your Land" is, as Michael Denning notes, often taken as symbolic shorthand for the entire movement, and became a kind of alternative national anthem – one that emphasized a broad, working-class sensibility of national belonging. Key to the ballad's meaning is the ability for the narrator to see and move from one end of the country to the other. However, the centrality of sites like Cuba, which are not officially part of the United States and yet remain within U.S. circuits of capital and political control, troubles such evocations of a unitary and contiguous republic. Acts of transnational solidarity decenter the "nation" as the primary site of identification for these cultural workers.

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<sup>77</sup> Meridel Le Sueur, *Salute to Spring* (New York: International Publishers, 1940, 1989), 25.

For despite these signature "nationalist" works of the Popular Front, the movement was constitutively internationalist in outlook and action. The same year that Burke issued his address at the American Writers' Congress, Odets, as representative of the same organization, chaired a Provisional Committee for Cuba charged with investigating conditions under the Mendieta-Batista regime. The Provisional Committee ran its own weekly newspaper, *Cuban News Week*, and put out a 1935 pamphlet authored by Odets with the help of well-known Latin America journalist, Carleton Beals, entitled "Rifle Rule in Cuba," in which Odets called for an end to U.S. imperialism and detailed the ways in which his imprisonment was facilitated by U.S. attache Jefferson Caffrey. The commission sent by the Provisional Committee read like a cross-section of the Popular Front: it included representatives from the Food Workers Industrial Union, the American League Against War and Fascism, the National Students League, the American League of Ex-Servicemen, the Congregationalist Church of New York, the Commission on the Condition of Negroes in Cuba, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the All-Americas Anti-Imperialist League, the Unemployed Teachers' Association, the International Workers' Order, and the International Labor Defense.<sup>78</sup> After his return to the U.S., Odets immediately went on a speaking tour with members of the Communist Party as

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<sup>78</sup> Carleton Beals and Clifford Odets, *Rifle Rule in Cuba* (New York: Provisional Committee for Cuba, 1935), Southern California Library Special Collections. See also *Cuban News Week* (New York: Provisional Committee for Cuba, 1935-6), New York Public Library Humanities General Research Division, and Clifford Odets' testimony before HUAC on his journey to Cuba in Eric Bentley's anthology of HUAC testimony entitled *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities 1938-68* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), 506.

well as prominent liberals such as poet and Congressional Librarian Archibald MacLeish and Roger Baldwin, the chair of the ACLU.<sup>79</sup>

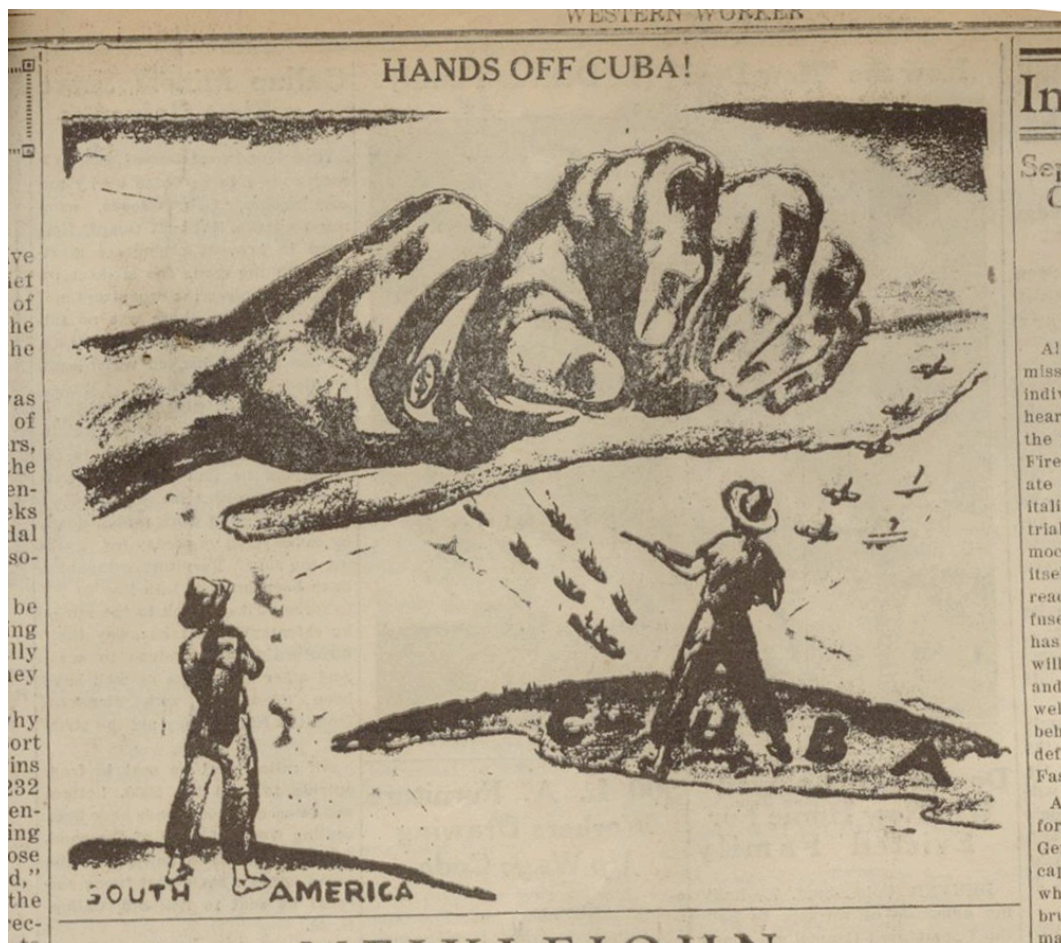
As part of a larger anti-imperialist movement in the U.S. that at its height saw millions of students strike against militarism and imperialism and counted over three million members of the anti-imperialist League Against War and Fascism, Cuba held a special place in the imaginary of writers and journalists. *Problems of a New Cuba* by the Foreign Policy Association, *The Crime of Cuba* by Carleton Beals and Walker Evans, *Our Cuban Colony* by Leland Jencks, and *The Cuban Crisis as Reflected in the New York Press* by Joseph Wisan were all published within a year of each other, while "Rifle Rule in Cuba" and the ILD booklet "Blood on the Sugar" came out within months of each other. An earlier pamphlet by the Anti-Imperialist League, "Who Fights for a Free Cuba," also circulated widely.<sup>80</sup> Ernest Hemingway, Josephine Herbst, Langston Hughes, and Clifford Odets were some of the major writers who based works on social movements on the island. *The New Masses* ran several front page special issues on Cuba, including one authored by Josephine Herbst, "The Soviet in Cuba," about her reportage in the mountains of the Sierra

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<sup>79</sup> A description of some of Odets' advocacy work on behalf of Cuban revolutionaries can be found in Margaret Brenman-Gibson's biography, *Clifford Odets: American Playwright* (New York: Antheneum, 1981), 365-8.

<sup>80</sup> See reviews of the following books in the *New Masses*, Lucile Perry, "Preserving Cuba for Imperialism," review of *Problems of the New Cuba*, *New Masses* April 9, 1935 (15) 2, 25; "The Big News," review of *The Cuban Crisis as Reflected in the New York Press*, *New Masses* April 2, 1935 15(1) , 35. See also Sam Dlugin, *Blood on the Sugar (Terror in Cuba)*, booklet (New York: International Labor Defense, 1935, Southern California Library Special Collections; Martin Kaye and Louise Perry, *Who Fights for a Free Cuba*, booklet, (New York: Workers' Library Publishers/Anti-Imperialist League of the United States, 1933), Southern California Library Special Collections.

Maestra with an interracial collective of former sugar workers. And the anti-fascist journal *Fight*, the publication of the League Against War and Fascism, also carried numerous articles and editorials denouncing U.S. intervention in Cuba. On the ground, the "Hands Off Cuba" campaign led local protests and won resolutions in town governments to oppose U.S. intervention, especially during the short-lived Ramón Grau San Martín government.<sup>81</sup>



**Figure 1.1 "Hands off Cuba!" Western Worker, September 25, 1933, 4**

<sup>81</sup> 'Hands off Cuba' is Demand at Long Beach Meeting," *Western Worker*, 2(39) September 25, 1933, 1.

While Haiti, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Nicaragua all had anti-imperialist and/or independence movements that attracted public support, Cuba remained pressing, in the popular imagination, as the U.S.'s largest unacknowledged colony. As historian Louis Perez writes, the history of Cuba has been very much shaped by how the U.S. chooses to represent itself as both a benevolent world power and a republican democracy. The narrative of the Spanish-American War, told as a "selfless struggle" to "liberate the Cubans from the 'yoke of Spanish tyranny' and set them on the road to 'mature self-governance,'" is central to ideas about U.S. nation-formation in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>82</sup> Not only is there a racial logic implicit in the assumption that the *mestizo* nation cannot govern itself, according to Perez, the U.S. narrative of benevolence is further constructed on the absence in U.S. historiography of Cubans' own role in the island's liberation from the Spanish. The absence includes exclusion of Cubans from key roles in the final battles of the War, the treaty ceding Cuba from Spanish to U.S. hands, and the real meaning of the Platt Amendment. All of these points contradicting the U.S. narrative were deliberately obscured or deleted from discussions of the island. As opposed to the long and bloody occupation of the Philippines, resistance movements in Haiti and Nicaragua, or continued colonization of Puerto Rico, Cuba was supposed to stand out as a counter-example of U.S. benevolence, moral and racial superiority, and democratic virtue.

Despite or perhaps because of this, U.S. finance capital controlled both the sugar and tobacco industries as well as the major sources of hard currency in the

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<sup>82</sup> Louis A. Perez, Jr. *The War of 1898: United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), x.

island other than tourism, either through financing or absentee landholdings.<sup>83</sup> As Marifeli Perez-Stable writes, U.S. finance capital owned half the sugar mills in Cuba and over half of the cultivated land.<sup>84</sup> Thus Cuba, more than any other country in Latin America, revealed that the Good Neighbor Policy had failed to change U.S. imperial and hegemonic relations in the region. In Mexico, Nicaragua, and Haiti, it was possible to show that the U.S. had either removed troops by 1934 or had resisted the exhortations of investment capital to intervene when the Cardenas government nationalized Mexican oil production. The election of Ramón Grau, a progressive reformer who promised to legalize labor unions and tax foreign exports, brought swift U.S. intervention and the threat to land U.S. marines; equally, it was broadly acknowledged that the hated Mendieta-Batista regime had U.S. support.<sup>85</sup> Economically, New Deal reforms in the U.S., such as agricultural subsidies and the stability of the banking sector were designed to keep Cuba in a state of dependency for both the maintenance of markets for U.S. goods and for flows of finance capital needing profitable investment.

According to Beals and Odets, what the Roosevelt government brought Cuba was in many ways simply a more sophisticated form of colonial control that relied on empty practices of sovereignty. Despite the overturning of the Platt Amendment,

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<sup>83</sup> Marifeli Perez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5. See also Ramon Eduardo Ruiz, *Cuba: the Making of a Revolution* (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1968), and Tulio Halperin Donghi, *The Contemporary History of Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>84</sup> Perez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution*, 15.

<sup>85</sup> Halperin-Donghi, *The Contemporary History of Latin America*, 240-1.

Batista, with the support of the United States, engineered puppet presidents throughout the 1930s, giving the necessary veneer of democracy.<sup>86</sup> As Beals reports in "Rifle Rule in Cuba," and as Odets includes in his play, the most galling for the U.S. solidarity movement was the fraudulent petition delivered to Roosevelt with 300,000 signatures in support of the Batista government, to which Roosevelt responded without irony that it was a "splendid demonstration" of what the Good Neighbor Policy could inspire.<sup>87</sup> The title of Odets' play is a reference to the new rule of law under Batista, the *Ley de Fuga*, in which political prisoners could only be shot if they were caught trying to escape – and of course, this was claimed any time a body showed up in the street with bullets in its back.<sup>88</sup> The *Ley de Fuga* or "law of flight" acted as a symbol for the way in which the new liberal foreign policy of the Roosevelt administration enabled and even intensified the colonial brutality of Cuba's comprador government. Thus the retort of the Cuban revolutionaries who ask the Author to write a play, that they live under a "New Deal of terror," is more than just a way of contrasting life in the U.S. with life in Cuba, for it calls attention to the way in which the New Deal itself was predicated on imperial alignments.<sup>89</sup> Cuba serves as a kind of short-hand for transformations in imperialism that work not only through changes in administration but through changes in U.S. foreign policy as well. In the

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<sup>86</sup> Perez, *The War of 1898*, 277

<sup>87</sup> Carleton Beals, *Rifle Rule in Cuba*, 7.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>89</sup> Odets, "The Law of Flight," Act 1, Scene 1, 2

same way that anti-lynching campaigns served to highlight how liberal progress during the New Deal era produced an ever-returning same for many African-Americans, so, too, the claims to the universality of democracy and self-determination were exposed as another conceit of modernity by these activists and writers.

The selection of Cuba as a site to represent U.S. citizens has implications not only for U.S. national identity but also for relationships to the Americas broadly conceived. In the collection *José Martí's "Our America: From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies*, the editors single out Cuba as a site of transnational cultural formations that privilege hybrid and diasporic views of culture over an Anglo-American view of monolithic national origins. They cite Cuba's nationalism from the Ten Years' War to post-Castro formations as a mestizo and mulato racial formation, a "borderlands" of cultural interaction among the Spanish, Native American, and English peoples of the Western hemisphere.<sup>90</sup> Likewise, in Janice Radway's 1998 Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, she argues for the centrality of José Martí's essay, "Nuestra America," for rethinking a "different America, the America of those who claimed South and Central America, the America of the Caribbean basin, as their home" including Haiti and Cuba as "sites of important

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<sup>90</sup> Jeffrey Belnap and Raúl Fernández, eds, *José Martí's "Our America": From National to Hemispheric American Studies*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 1998), 11. See also Monika Kaup's essay, "'Our America' That is Not One: Transnational Black Atlantic Discourses in Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes," *Discourse* 22(3) (Fall 2000), 87-113, in which she argues that the Black Atlantic also serves as a critique to hegemonic Cuban nationalism, despite its *mestizo* intellectual and political roots.



revolutionary movements opposing European *and* United States imperialism."<sup>91</sup> Thus it's clear that these writers' choice of Cuba as central to their political and cultural work does more than simply recenter a cultural movement that sought to gain legitimacy by embracing elements of U.S. national culture. In greater and lesser terms, these writers, with the exception of Hemingway, sought to privilege an alternate form of national definition that critiqued the U.S. as an empire. As importantly, they also made multi-ethnic Cuban nationalism a model for their own social movements. In other words, these writers were part of a movement that tried to make transnational cultural connections as part of a self-consciously revolutionary project of international liberation. As a consequence, they self-consciously raised questions about the meaning of national identity within transnational bonds of affinity. Cuba thus offers to U.S. Popular Front writers both a site of racialized, spatial dis-ease with the political frame of the nation as well as a site of new forms of solidarity. The only way to "see" the U.S. and understand its role in identity formation, their writings suggest, is to radically alienate oneself from the origins of the Lincoln Republic and the myth of U.S. populist democracy.

For the authors I will discuss in this chapter, Clifford Odets, Langston Hughes, Ernest Hemingway, and Josephine Herbst, Cuba emerges as a site that threatens to destabilize cultural modes of representation, the left project of what Michael Denning refers to as the "national-popular," a progressive, even revolutionary, politics that exists within and attempts to reform the national

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<sup>91</sup> Janice Radway "What's in a Name? Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November 1998," *American Quarterly* 51(1), (1999) 1-32.

definition.<sup>92</sup> Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* defines the U.S. working class both racially and nationally, foreclosing any bond of solidarity among workers outside the U.S., but in doing so, reveals many of the national boundaries around which visions of labor and struggle are defined: Cuba is that which must be contained in Hemingway's "social protest" novel of the working class in order for the fiction of their whiteness to be maintained. Odets, Herbst, and Hughes use the same basic structure of Popular Front narrative, opening from a point of view that recognizes the U.S. as the immediate frame of reference – and yet that does so to draw attention to the limitation and artificiality of such a frame.

Looking first at Odets' anti-fascist "yellow peril" film *The General Died at Dawn*, one can draw a contrast between the "internationalism" of the Hollywood Popular Front and the anti-imperialist Popular Front of Group Theater. Herbst's novel *Rope of Gold* features Victoria Chance, the daughter of pioneers turned revolutionary, to untangle the imperial lineages of her own family's journey West. As importantly, she articulates Cuba as a site of multi-ethnic or *mestizo* racial formation as against the racially bound United States. For Langston Hughes, Cuba marks the beginning of an exploration of the diasporic meanings of race in *I Wonder as I Wander*, and allows him to both examine the ways in which the U.S. shapes his experience in the West Indies as a raced subject, as well as how easy binaries between black and white break down in the complex racial formations of the island.

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<sup>92</sup> Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 134.

In this way, these four authors also suggest that Cuba destabilized the *literary* narrative as well. For Odets, his position as a social realist must be re-examined as Cuba reveals the national limits of his genre. For Hughes, the instability of the category of race also played an important role in his changing poetics of the 1930s and 1940s. Ultimately, the presence of Cuba in all of these Popular Front narratives, outside of the borders of the U.S. and yet cited within circuits of U.S. capital, ownership, trade, and tourism, explodes the republican ideal advocated and memorialized by Guthrie's song, as the "land" in Cuba neither "belongs to you and me" nor is it visible within the ocular sensibility that locates the migrant/viewer within the home-space of the nation.

### **Mr. Odets Goes to Hollywood: Anti-Fascism as Racial Masquerade**

At the same time Odets worked on drafts of "The Cuba Play," he wrote the Hollywood script for a film that also takes place outside U.S. borders and features an underground organization working to overthrow a tyrant: Lewis Milestone's *The General Died at Dawn*.<sup>93</sup> The film and play, both about underground revolutionaries and popular revolt and at great pains to construct their conflicts as against global fascism, act as doubles of each other, suggesting contrary and contradictory meanings of Popular Front internationalism and its relationship to U.S. imperialism. *The General Died at Dawn* celebrates the heroism of John O'Hara, an "American abroad,"

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<sup>93</sup>*The General Died at Dawn*, directed by Lewis Milestone, written by Clifford Odets, 98 min., Paramount, 1936, film

posing his U.S. ethnic-American working-class democratic values as against those of Western businessmen, Chinese warlords, and European fascists. Yet implicit in the democratic activism of O'Hara is the Orientalist assumption, backed by cues, traditional dress, and the Asiatic despotism of General Yang, that modernity can only be achieved by U.S. intervention. While the film was nominated for several Academy Awards, Odets' "Cuban Play" would be canceled by Group Theater. "The Cuba Play" poses an inverse relationship of the U.S. to the world – rather than "democracy activists" abroad, "The Cuba Play" suggests that U.S. interests keep Cuba in a state of dependency, indicting the cultural, economic, and political control the U.S. has over the island. The U.S. is presented as a promoter of pornography, racism, sexual tourism, political fraud and violence, and a plantation style economy that maintains its hold on the island through anti-labor violence: in short, "The Cuban Play" frames the U.S. as an imperial power and is a call-to-arms against a U.S. backed puppet regime. While *The General Died at Dawn* was a large-budget Paramount film and "The Cuban Play" a response to a grassroots movement that was scheduled for New York's radical Group Theater, the fact that both spoke a Popular Front lexicon of internationalism, global solidarity, and revolution suggests the range as well as the divisions within a movement that recognized both anti-imperialism and U.S. intervention under a shared signifier of anti-fascism. Likewise, the two works pose the question of representation: why, even though he regarded "The Cuba Play" as more important, did Odets feel comfortable writing *The General Died at Dawn* and not "Law of Flight?"

As Odets' "real work," in his own words, "The Cuban Play" functions as a kind of "ghost in the machine" in relation to *General*, and asks us to consider the multiple forms of international global solidarity - and sovereignty - that can exist not only within a single author's work but also across an entire field of cultural production.<sup>94</sup> While "The Cuban Play" made sense within a Popular Front framework of anti-imperial and anti-fascist global solidarity, it also fit very specifically within a social movement that sponsored speaking tours, trips, pamphlets, and protests as part of its cultural production. *General* makes no such claims for itself, and indeed, was labeled by film executives and critics as an "adventure romance" rather than an explicitly political "social problem" film. But as Michael Denning points out, the lines between popular cultural production and "movement literature" were often deliberately blurry, as many social movement artists not only sought larger audiences through Hollywood, but felt that they could exert influence over the kinds of films that could be made.<sup>95</sup> During the 1930s, cultural producers denounced the "unholy alliance" between "the Popular Front and image factories....as a betrayal of radical culture," yet it's also clear that many of the same activists and publications expressed optimism about what they could accomplish in Hollywood and Tin-Pan Alley.<sup>96</sup> One signal of the change in perspective came as *The New Masses* and the *Daily Worker*

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<sup>94</sup> Brenman-Gibson, *Clifford Odets*, 400.

<sup>95</sup> Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 83.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

began covering Hollywood films with increased seriousness and expectations in their film review section, though only seldom with unguarded approval.

The initial *New York Times* review of *The General Died at Dawn* gets at some of the complexity of the relationship between "grassroots" left-wing movements and Hollywood, as well as the establishment media in relation to both. In Frank Nugent's famous review, "Odets, Where is Thy Sting," he remarks that "Odets takes a holiday" and has abandoned stories of "strikes and unemployment" to join "The No Offense League" of Hollywood.<sup>97</sup> Yet the piece is more about the audience than the film, the 'left-wing clique' who came to hear "their prophet of social reform give his first sermon from a cinema pulpit." Nugent is correct to say there was a great deal of anticipation around the film, and the *New Masses* even ran excerpts from the script six months in advance of its showing. No enemy of Hollywood, Nugent seems skeptical less of the film than of what he perceives as the left's over-inflated sense of its own importance. Nugent heaps scorn on the audience for "being prepared to recognize social philosophy at long range, it broke out the bunting at Mr. Odets' hint of class struggle," suggesting that the audience was more in love with the idea of a radical film than what was actually delivered. Nugent is relieved when "the clique" finally realizes the picture "continued as...an interesting and compelling adventure tale" and not "the fires of the class war" the audience presumably arrived to see. Nugent predicts that "Odets will be made to pay" by this same audience once they realize their error, suggesting that the "clique" only comes to see films to hear the

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<sup>97</sup> Frank S. Nugent, "Odets, Where is Thy Sting," *The New York Times*, September 6, 1936, X3.

party line, rather than to see a film the reviewer admires for its craft and pacing. Nonetheless, it's worth considering why a "left-wing" audience might cheer at what Nugent dismissed ironically as the "vital public issue" of "Oriental robber barons and their victims."

Set in China, the story follows a working class Irish-American adventurer/revolutionary John O'Hara, who runs guns for Chinese peasants battling a corrupt and brutal dictator, General Yang. In many ways, it's a classic Popular Front tale, telling of an oppressed people who "pay taxes through the nose" and are killed "in the thousands" for the profit of Yang and "international commerce." Yang's tyranny as a "head-breaker, a heart-breaker, and a strike-breaker – a four star rat" in O'Hara's words, conveys precisely, in a phrase, the goal of the film: to connect the Popular Front concern with "strike-breaking" and fascist violence with the romance of "heart-breaking." The two are fused as Yang ensnares the attractive Judy Pierri to work for him as bait for O'Hara by promising Yang that he will help the heroine's ailing father. The story ends as O'Hara and Pierri fall for one another, and O'Hara convinces the general to free them as his dying wish. Done as an act of self-promotion – O'Hara offers to tell Yang's story - Yang's vanity is juxtaposed to O'Hara and Perrie's ultimate selfless willingness to sacrifice their lives for a cause, as a greedy American gun-seller and the General accidentally kill each other in a melee over a hoard of found cash. As an allegory, it's hard not to compare the story with the 1936 uprising of General Franco in Spain, another "four-star rat" who, like Yang, employed German "military advisors" supported by "international commerce," and

opposed adventurer/revolutionaries who traveled from the U.S. to help supply and fight for the Spanish "People's Republic."

Dismissed as a "lone wolf adventurer" by the *New Masses* critic Bob White, the film was recognized by Sidney Kaufman, also of the *New Masses*, and Robert Stebbins in *New Theater* as indicative of a new direction for film, the "use of the thriller to convey some unpalatable truths," and represented part of the turn in Popular Front criticism towards mass culture.<sup>98</sup> O'Hara clearly sees himself as more than just someone in it for money or adventure. When asked by Judy why he cares, he responds, "you ask me why I'm for oppressed people? Because I've got a background of oppression myself, and O'Hara's and elephants don't forget. What's better work for an American than helping to fight for democracy?" Clearly, O'Hara, who ran away from an orphan asylum, sold newspapers, and boxed ("I didn't like smackin' other kids around, so I quit"), is a proletarian hero turned to political activism abroad. Orphan, worker, and boxer, O'Hara's character, played by Western actor Gary Cooper, displays a sympathy for the oppressed based on his own experience with the hardships of capitalist competition. His decision to quit boxing and help the Chinese peasants can be read as a Hollywood rendition of many proletarian novels, in which the masculine, often white hero – Jack Conroy's Larry Donovan or John Steinbeck's Tom Joad – embraces revolutionary struggle at the end of the novel over an isolated life of competition.

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<sup>98</sup> Bob White, "The Screen," *New Masses* 20(11) September 8, 1936, 29. Kaufman and Stebbins quoted in Weales, 112.



Reading the anti-militarist struggle in *The General Died at Dawn* as a stand-in for other popular front concerns – especially the Spanish Civil War - is possible in part due to the fact that Odets proposed several films dramatizing the Civil War, all of which were rejected. In the years in which he was in Hollywood, Odets worked on and eventually dropped "Castles in Spain," "The River is Blue," and an adaptation of "The Love of Jeanne Ney," all of which were to be set in Spain as a way to address the conflict.<sup>99</sup> Odets strained the plot to suggest Yang had fascist ties, used Hitler's speeches for Yang's lines, and gave him a German adviser, a mechanized army, and a military insurgency in China.<sup>100</sup> What is more, Yang, according to O'Hara, is not only a murderer but a "strikebreaker," further dislocating the context from China to Europe, where German advisers, strikebreaking, and military coups were part of the newsworthy political landscape and would easily render him as a stand-in for Franco.

I would argue that Nugent was not altogether incorrect for chastising the "left-wing clique" for reasons I'll get to later, but he missed – perhaps deliberately – the larger context in which *General* exists. Stories about Americans abroad assisting peasants against military aggression were welcome to an audience that resisted Roosevelt's "neutrality" policy on Spain, especially coming from an anti-fascist writer who had written about Nazi oppression of political dissidents in Germany before coming to Hollywood. Given Hollywood's silence on the Spanish Civil War up to

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<sup>99</sup> Gerald Weals, *Clifford Odets the Playwright* (New York, Methuen, 1985), 113-4.

<sup>100</sup> Brennan-Gibson, *Clifford Odets*, 407. Odets admitted to Milestone that he adapted translations of Hitler's speeches to use the character of Yang.

that point and the difficulty of getting studio executives to "take sides" (*Blockade* was notoriously apolitical), the audience's initial enthusiasm for *General* is not surprising.

Contrary to the Hollywood "yellow peril" film, *General* does suggest the possibility of solidarity between Chinese peasants and Western progressives. Yet it's clear throughout the film that the Chinese peasants are incapable of action, and must rely on O'Hara not only to buy weapons, but for basic organizational tactics. Likewise, General Yang is portrayed as a fascist, complete with German advisers and mechanized troop transports, yet his final act – aboard a Japanese junk – is the cultish collective suicide of his entire band as he lies dying of a gunshot wound. Rather than suggest the modernity of fascism, Yang is portrayed as an Asiatic despot, ordering the death of his own soldiers and promising torture if he does not receive the information he desires. Stylistically, the film's "Asianness" is rendered authentic by the Chinese-style Roman alphabet with which the credits open as well as by traditionally dressed men sailing junks through Shanghai harbor. While the film is to be commended for casting Chinese and Japanese-Americans in many of the lead roles, Yang and many of his crew speak Charlie-Chan English, and the lead partner to O'Hara is played by a white actor who performs ethnic difference by speaking broken English. To resolve the tension of Hollywood's silence over the fascist uprising in Spain, Odets and Milestone deflected the conflict onto a mythologized China. Yet one must also ask – if Odets felt uncomfortable writing a play for Cuban revolutionaries on the premise that he was unfamiliar with their lives, why did he agree to write a film about China?

Odets and Milestone's acts of racial masquerade were made largely possible by the fact that few of the Chinese characters were more than one-dimensional stage

props for a love-story between O'Hara and Perrie. Mr. Wu, the friend of O'Hara, and General Yang are opposites, as examples of Chinese Confucian wisdom and Asiatic despotism. Wu, clothed in traditional Han robes, displays clever calculation but lacks courage and decisiveness. Yang and his army, the only "modern" Chinese characters in the film, are dressed in uniforms that appear curiously Japanese, suggesting that the cost of modernity in Asia is fascism and tyranny. Of course, this may also be a reference to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, but given the rendering of China as pre-modern, the contrast only serves to reinforce the ultimately imperial message: that O'Hara's presence is necessary to prevent the Chinese from slipping into barbarism.

Odets does work to puncture the conceit of an honest West posed as a binary opposite to a degraded Orient. He poses Brighton, the American weapons dealer, as a double to Yang, as both are willing to trade lives for money, and do so through the sale or acquisition of modern weaponry. True to their pairing, Brighton and Yang kill each other wrestling for a suitcase of money in the hold of Yang's junk. Many of the Asian characters were also played by Asian actors, which at the time was a rarity. Yet it's also clear that Perrie's father, who dies trying to make his fortune in the labyrinth of Asia, is destroyed by the barbarism of a country the danger of which he and Brighton are ill-equipped to face. O'Hara and Perrie may desire to help the Chinese peasants and rebels, but they are also clearly regarded as separate. Thus, *New Masses* critic Sidney Kaufman does have a point: *General* was a "new type of film," as it sought to smuggle an anti-fascist politics into a "yellow peril" melodrama.

Odets managed to tone down some of the worst elements of the genre, but at heart it is still a genre film that poses racial difference as the center of political meaning.

Perhaps more than any other single individual, Odets represented the complex racial and social politics around inclusion and belonging of the U.S. during the Great Depression. As a writer of the 1930s and 1940s, he was part of a generation of socially progressive intellectuals who saw an assault on white supremacy as important – or a necessary precondition for – a left-wing class-consciousness. As Lizabeth Cohen writes, labor organizers who formed the backbone of the CIO and the Communist-led Trade Union Unity League were acutely aware of the way in which racial and ethnic tensions contributed to the failure of the post-World War I union movement, and were determined to aggressively combat racism in new union drives.<sup>101</sup> And as Barbara Foley and Michael Denning write, civil liberties campaigns in the 1930s drew links between lynching and anti-labor-violence, drawing together violence against workers with violence against minorities as a way to create bonds of solidarity between white and black workers. As I suggest in my second chapter, left-wing labor unions would often use the rhetoric of "terror" and "vigilantism" to describe attacks against both, visually and metaphorically comparing campaigns against so-called "criminal syndicalist" laws with campaigns to pass anti-lynching legislation.<sup>102</sup> As a playwright, Odets makes very clear that he sees individualistic

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<sup>101</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) 13-15.

<sup>102</sup> I discuss the visual in rhetorical links between anti-labor violence and racial violence in my second and third chapters. Also, Michael Denning, Lizbeth Cohen,

class advancement for white-ethnic Americans as tied to racism. As critic Chris Vials points out, Joe Bonaparte's final fight in *Golden Boy* is framed both as the murder of Kid Chocolate, the black boxing champion, and as Bonaparte's greatest triumph.<sup>103</sup> As Bonaparte's rise is linked to his ultimate self-destruction, it's easy to see how Odets' morality play stands for the way white-supremacy leads to at best only short-term benefits.

As Mathew Frye Jacobson writes, Southern and Eastern Europeans occupied a liminal position within the dominant culture, not quite deemed Anglo-Saxon, yet not suffering the marginalization and violence often reserved for African, Native, Asian, and Mexican-American residents. For Popular Front writers from white-ethnic backgrounds, constructing a movement for class-consciousness was intimately bound up with acculturation within U.S. society. As labor unions have often been racially circumscribed by gaining benefits for white workers at the expense of workers of color, the racial character of the union movement ultimately begged the question of who won the desserts of class struggle.<sup>104</sup> While Odets and other white-ethnic

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Mark Naison, and Barbara Foley articulate the ways in which white-ethnic Americans in the social movements of the 1930s and 40s attempted to link race, ethnicity, and class. See Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham, University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983)

<sup>103</sup> Chris Vials writes extensively about Odets and his critique of whiteness, especially within the tradition of 1930s boxing narratives. Chris Vials, "Taking Down the Great White Hope: Clifford Odets, Nelson Algren and the Ethno-Racial Politics of Popular Front Boxing Narrative," *Realism for the Masses: Aesthetics, Popular Front Pluralism, and U.S. Culture, 1935-1947* (Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 2008).

American writers like Louis Adamic, James Farrell, and Nelsen Algren actively wrote and campaigned against racism in the name of multi-ethnic working-class culture, many of these writers themselves represented the very kind of class advancement often warned about in their work. As his own work in Hollywood would attest and his failure to produce *Ley de Fuga* suggest that the process of racialization may be stronger than his own individual efforts could address.

In a sense, then, *General* is everything the Cuba play is not, and says a great deal about not only the limits of Hollywood but also how the complex politics of identity are wrapped up inside representations of empire. Odets remarked to a friend that he changed the name of the gun-runner to John O'Hara because he was worried that the real life figure – the Jewish Morris Cohen – would sound too "un-American" for the part.<sup>105</sup> Clifford Odets, no less "un-American" by the same estimation, thus also sheds his difficult ethnic identification with other racialized groups as the price to paid to be heard by a Hollywood studio. As Rogin points out, an earlier generation of Jewish film-makers and actors facilitated their passing for white at the expense of enforcing the color line for Asians and blacks, most notably in films like *The Jazz Singer* and *Old San Francisco*. While *General* employs Asian actors and does not pose Yang's malevolence as a uniquely racial phenomenon, it does suggest O'Hara's implicit racialized superiority as part of his role as an American democracy activist.

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<sup>104</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). I am indebted to Chris Vials for raising my awareness of this quality of Odets' work. See also, George Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

<sup>105</sup> Benman-Gibson, *Clifford Odets*, 408.

The film contains the internationalism of its anti-fascism within a racial masquerade that ensures the film speaks to American superiority, not global solidarity. If the world is to be saved from fascism and imperialism, according to *General*, it is not the people in their own countries who will save them, rather it is up to the United States to help out. While this message may have had the short term benefit of supporting U.S. intervention in Spain, it would also be easily translatable into a Cold War struggle for hegemony in the third world.

### **The Cuba Play and the Politics of Realism**

Thus *The Cuban Play* poses a very different sort of international solidarity, one set not only on forging links between Americans and Cubans, but also one that questions what it means to be an American: as one of the Cuban revolutionaries points out, the playwright's cozy sense of familiarity with U.S. ethnic workers is estranged by the realization that those "American" meals the Author is so concerned about are produced through colonial plantations in another country. In "The Cuban Play" "a Cuban Tom Mooney" is sent to jail, and is released due to a combination of popular pressure and the hope on the side of the government that Lorca will lead them to the resistance so its members can be imprisoned or executed. He reorganizes "Young Cuba," a cross-class alliance dedicated to overthrowing the then-Machado government and freeing the island of U.S. domination, but he is ultimately betrayed by an informant, and his former college friend, now an officer in the secret police, watches as he is gunned down in a ravine. In one sense, *General* and "The Cuban

Play" follow similar narrative arcs. They are both adventure/espionage tales that take place abroad, focusing on a Popular Front hero who opposes a fascist tyranny in what is strongly suggested to be an allegory of – or at least a reference to – the Spanish Civil War. Indeed, it is also very similar to Odets' anti-fascist drama *Till the Day I Die*, in which informants, underground communist cells, and eventual death meet most of the socialist protagonists in Nazi Germany. Yet what separates "The Cuban Play" from *General* and even *Till the Day I Die* is more than "Cuba's" indictment of U.S. imperialism or the fact that it focuses on Cubans rather than American adventurers abroad. As the first act of the play suggests, it is marked by a self-consciousness about both its role as a drama and what it means for a writer from the U.S. to write such a play. As Amy Kaplan writes in *The Anarchy of Empire*, U.S. high culture is formulated by the presence and absence of empire in daily life in the U.S., both as a matter of style and content.<sup>106</sup> Not only does "The Cuban Play" expand the "ground" on which one can be "authentically" American, it also suggests that the "authentic" American voices for which Odets is well known are products of U.S. empire. Rather than Kenneth Burke's return to innocence with a usable past of progressive American values, Odets makes the point that American voices, authentic ethnic American voices, are also *imperial* voices.

The play opens as a debate about culture which continues into the first scene set in Cuba. In a dialogue between Rojas, the chief of police in Havana, and an

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<sup>106</sup> Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). Kaplan cites her indebtedness to the way Edward Said demonstrates "how the treasures of European high culture bear the traces of their foundation in the remote geographies of colonial violence and exploitation," 14.



American who wants to show pornographic films in the city, Rojas demands five hundred dollars as a license fee. The American is outraged, and protests that he can't be treated this way, until he sees the policeman is serious – it's not a bribe but rather an intentional attempt to shut him down. The scene demonstrates the complexity of Rojas, who has both fierce nationalist pride at the same time he implicitly works for the Americans, and suggests from the beginning that Cuba is culturally located by U.S. Americans as a site of excess, a place in which libidinous desires illegal or immoral can be fulfilled. It also functions to distinguish among imperial modes, suggesting that imperialism is more than simply a system of capital accumulation, markets, or mercantile extraction. It is also an imaginary, a way of relating and orienting questions of identity and desire. Rojas is comfortable with imperialism as a form of economic exploitation, yet he is disturbed by Cuba becoming an object within the U.S. libidinal economy.

There are two parallel narratives in "The Cuban Play." There is a diegetic story of the revolutionaries of Young Cuba who are eventually executed by the police and there is the exegetic story of U.S. culture shaped by and shaping Cuba in its gaze. In the diegetic story, there are many references to the way in which Cuba is dominated by the U.S. In addition to pornographic film distribution, there is also a petition to Roosevelt distributed on the behalf of U.S. sugar growers in Cuba and the presence of weapons from the U.S. that are used ultimately to execute Lorca. Thus the play points out that in terms of culture, politics, and military force, the U.S. controls the island, though it does so more often than not through a compradore class of Cubans who may or may not know the precise nature of the interests involved.

Puncturing this "story" of Cuban dependence and revolution, there are two scenes -- a tour guide advertising the exotic lures of the island, and businessmen discussing the island from a ship -- that break the narrative of the story.

The dialogue is what a reader would expect of an Odets play: full of slang, street-talk, and the casual hyperbole of advertising language. Especially since the play is unpublished, it is worth quoting at some length:

The tourist agent (very suggestive): And now, ladies and gentlemen, in a half an hour you are gonna be in Havana and you are gonna see some marvelous things. We have the little nigger boys there and they will sell you coconuts there for five cents as you never seen them in the cold cities in the north. Now don't you be impatient -- I'm getting to those night clubs and the girls. But first I'm gonna tell the ladies about the fine embroideries and those French perfumes which are imported without duty. You can get them in the shops for a song and a dance, and don't you forget it. Well, don't waste words, as the American men like to get to the point as soon as possible. Brass tacks! Yes sir, we know them words down here. When you get off this boat you are gonna have a time of your life! Havana! The playground of two continents! We have it here -- the flirtatious, color-loving Latin soul in all its manifestations and abandonment of revelry. the bright-eyed señoritas, they are wearing their most alluring smiles. You can bet your last dollar on that fact. Then we have the *La Playa* beach where it is sunshine all the time. Laugh and chat in sidewalk cafes. Do the rumba in native cabarets. You are gonna see those tropic flowers in the breeze. We are the originators of the many rum drinks as you don't have them nowhere. In the night time, when you wear them evening clothes, the casino and jockey club where the god of chance whispers in your ear -- roulette, baccarat, 21....you don't know what to do at first. It is one long carnival spirit in Cuba, as long as you are here, and it start the minute you get off the boat -- Cuban nights are not celebrations staged for tourists. They are part of the natural life, the continual and natural bubbling over waiting for you when you wash up at the hotel. It is all on the ticket. Have those tickets ready. Yes sir, you are gonna see the modernized señoritas -- she gives herself with the heart! An invitation to the cocktail, a bid to dance the night away -- ah, oh, she is willing to listen, and don't you forget it!....<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Clifford Odets, "Law of Flight," Act 1, Scene 4, 1.

Unlike Lorca, Hevia (Lorca's doctor and friend), Rojas, and the many guerrillas and informants who all speak in standard English with the occasional punctuation of a Spanish word or intonation. The Spanish-speaking voices often speak in nearly formal tones, without any slang or inflection. The above passage, on the other hand, is American slang rendered by one of best writers of ethnic-American dialect on stage. This dialogue punctures the text in several ways. It constructs an American imperial gaze that is racist and exploitative, seeing Cuba as merely as the production of exotic authenticity. Yet, like the dialogue between businessmen, it itself is the product of Odets' own performance of working-class, U.S. authenticity. Unlike the Spanish voices throughout the text that speak in ways that recall the flattening of a translation, this voice and the voices of the businessmen are rendered in, for lack of a better word, realist dialect.

The two registers in the play, like the two levels of action, between the "translation" of Spanish speech and the realist dialect of the tourist agent and businessmen suggest that, contrary to the claims of some of its practitioners, realism facilitates U.S. empire. That is, the exegetic action of the tourist agent and the businessmen reminds the reader that no "story" can happen in Cuba without the literal intervention of U.S. voices puncturing the action. More than this, the voices also remind the audience that this dialect, declared authentic by the author at the start of the play, is in the service of the act of looking at and interpellating a colonial possession. Given the importance of language to the construction of the national-popular imaginary within the world of the play – the emphasis on being able to name what a person eats, knowing how a person speaks – it is not an overstatement to

suggest that these authentic "American" voices are also voices of U.S. empire. That the act of interpellation by these figures does not disturb, but rather seems to elicit, a U.S. American vernacular poses a problem for the construction of the republic on "native ground" as the more conservative Popular Front writers would have it. As Kenneth Burke argues for the "suasive appeal" of the American vernacular, so this language of "the people" is deployed not in an act of socialist redemption but of overseas conquest. More than implicate national identity, the scene also suggests the way in which U.S. identity itself is predicated on colonial pleasure.

Indeed, in the monologue by one of the businessmen, we learn that his knowledge of blacks in the United States allows him to understand what his role is to be in Cuba:

Voice Two: (indignantly) Always coming at you, like the slide of a trombone. I don't like it, I told the hotel clerk – it goes against my sense of jurisprudence. He give me a look, the clerk. 'What're you looking at,' I says. He shut up like a clam. I know how to handle those fresh guys. I know – in my experience I met all walks of life. Old Home Week in a bed with a girl, that's all they know<sup>108</sup>

The metaphor, "always coming at you like the slide on a trombone," suggests of course, the trombone in a swing band, even as it implies that the blacks in Cuba are too familiar and too casual in their interaction with the unnamed merchant. It also suggests a familiarity with the same black culture from which his Americanness provides him a safe distance. Thus one of the "dangers" of Cuba for American tourists, the scene suggests, is precisely the relative racial integration that Odets and

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., Act 2, Scene 6, 5

Herbst celebrate. When we learn that he is a weapons dealer at the end of the scene, his entrance to the island does more than simply reflect back upon the United States. Shaping the island by his weapons sales, he also imposes U.S. Jim Crow culture from the United States. In an ethical inversion, Odets points out that the "native ground" in the United States is also one heavily divided by a global discourse of race, one that the U.S. shapes and from which it benefits. More importantly, it also suggests that the "native ground" of the U.S. is far from a space of redemption, rather it is an exporter of a harsh and relentless form of racial domination.

In John Dos Passos' final novel in the *USA Trilogy*, *The Big Money*, he opens by arguing that "USA is mainly the speech of the people," and closes with the figure of Vag, who travels the continent as the representative of the vernacular. Michael Denning argues that Dos Passos' *USA* is the "ur-text of the Popular Front," the "master-narrative" of the fall of American democracy and "the Lincoln Republic."<sup>109</sup> As a construct in Dos Passos' work, "The Lincoln Republic" offers a new version of a democratic, working-class America that he poses against "the great imperial steamroller of American finance" by reaching into the fictive past of an egalitarian nation. Thus the voices in Odets' play offer an ironic commentary on this use of language as the cornerstone of a progressive American counter-culture. In the *USA Trilogy*, the ideals of the foundational republic, as literally voiced by Dos Passos, serve as an antidote for the new U.S. based on commercial success and financial capital. Given the centrality of the *USA Trilogy* to the Popular Front, one can thus see how Odets' "Cuban Play" serves to unsettle many of the central assumptions of

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<sup>109</sup> Denning, *Cultural Front*, 166-7.

the work. Odets doesn't disagree with Dos Passos' argument about the role of finance capital but rather disputes the idea that there is something redemptive in a U.S. past rooted in the cultural memory of language. For Odets, the cultural past as it's evoked by working-class slang is as much a part of finance capital as the commercialized speech of Madison Avenue that Dos Passos critiques.

Against the speech of the United States, represented by the voices of tourist agents and businessmen, the Cuban revolutionaries create their own radio broadcast which they believe reaches the entire Caribbean and mainland of Mexico and the United States. Yet unknown to the broadcasters, their signal is disrupted by the Cuban national police and the radio itself is a plant by a police informant to track the revolutionaries' whereabouts and to give them a false sense of connection to the outside world. As a metaphor for the inability of the Cuban anti-imperialist discourse to silence or rebut the exegetic voices from the United States, the silent radio underscores the power of the United States to not only literally silence subaltern speech but to use that speech as a means of control. Thus Odets implies that "the speech of the USA" is not only dependent upon an imperial gaze, but also that it is by design only partial: it silences the other Americas for the inclusion of which the play argues. In this way, the play also fuses both forms of representation: the inability of Cubans to "represent" their interests in an imperial regime is fused with silencing of their representation within the genre of U.S. realism.

In this sense, the content of the radio broadcast is also key to Odets' message. Spoken by Delgado, a member of Young Cuba who fought against U.S. imperialism in Nicaragua "with Aponte," and "against Rivera in Mexico," he represents a

borderless, transnational figure of solidarity against the reactionary nationalism of Rojas and the American(ized) imperialism of the U.S.:

Delgado (seriously, into the mic in a low rapid monotone): Hello in the west, hello Mexico – Young Cuba is on the air! Hello Florida, hello Cuban exiles in Miami, Key West and Tampa – Young Cuba is on the air! Come home Cuban fighters, come home fighters against Yankee imperialism, come home! Help us make the united front. Learn lessons from the sad events in Germany. It is no longer enough to unmask the dictatorship – no longer enough to enlighten liberal North American opinions. Come home swiftly you Cuban exiles and fight with our side. Wherever you may be listening, Cuban homeless, join us in the united fight. Come home you homesick. Bring money – money is needed. bring guns – guns are needed. Bring hearts – hearts are needed. Key West hello, hello Miami, hello cigar workers of Tampa – Young Cuba is on the air. Remember Mella. Remember guiteras, Come home and fight for Cuba!<sup>110</sup>

At once transnational and bound within a struggle defined by the national boundaries of Cuba, Delgado articulates a far different sense of belonging than Dos Passos or the national-popular forms of the Popular Front. Addressing himself to a Cuban political and economic diaspora, he links the struggle for Cuba independence with a global struggle against fascism and imperialism.

It is also impossible to miss Lorca's connection to the Spanish Civil War. The name was deliberately chosen by Odets to make that connection, and Odets' "Author" mistakes Lorca at first for the Spanish poet assassinated by the Civil Guards. Likewise, it's very clear that Odets intended Lorca's "Young Cuba" to serve as a vehicle to discuss various factions within the Spanish left. Primo, one of the members of Young Cuba who presses for action, is degraded as a "sick romantic

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<sup>110</sup> Clifford Odets, "Law of Flight, Act 3, Scene 5, 7

infant....anarchistic and individual."<sup>111</sup> In Odets' archived papers, there was also a long description of anarchism by Waldo Frank, followed by a character sketch of Primo and a treatise on why Marxists are more capable revolutionaries:

[Primo] knows nothing...the anarchist is a tangential force from the social center, but in his naive egoism he conceives himself as the center....as anarchism evolved, however, it became an unrealistic fixation on the end, whereas the Marxists assumed the task of establishing the ideological and technical means that bring the end into existence.....<sup>112</sup>

This analysis is remarkably close to the Communist Party analysis of the anarchists in Spain: that they lacked a coherent and totalized program for Spain's liberation. Equally, the character of Hevia, Lorca's doctor and friend, is a thinly veiled critique of liberals who see the possibility of reform as the answer to fascism, and who don't believe that violence will solve any problems. And perhaps most telling is Lorca's insistence on a "united front" against the "fascist" Batista. Like the film *General*, "The Law of Flight" is also in some ways a racial masquerade, commenting on the politics of Europe through the cover of Latin America. Yet of course, unlike *General*, the U.S. is not the hero, and the revolution in Cuba was quite real.

While we may never know the exact reason Odets and Group Theater never performed "The Cuban Play," the very fact that he doesn't refer to his own work by name ("Law of Flight"), but rather by the problematic of location suggests that the issue derived from the way Cuba troubles not only white-ethnic identity formation as

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<sup>111</sup> Clifford Odets, "Law of Flight," Act 3, Scene 5, 9.

<sup>112</sup> Clifford Odets, "Character Notes for Law of Flight," Clifford Odets papers, 1926-1963, box 23, folder 4, Billy Rose Theater Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.



against an Orientalized other, but that its politics of transnational solidarity troubles the working-class Americanism that was the signature of the Popular Front. That "The Cuban Play" uses the very aesthetic touchstones of 1930s social art – realism and a celebration of U.S. folk culture – in order to trouble them and ultimately argue for their complicity with an imperial project suggests how difficult the play would have been for his central audience. Also, several biographers, who presumably read the manuscript, cite what they discuss as its doubtful quality as art.<sup>113</sup> While it is certainly not one of Odets' best plays, it is also no worse than his agitprop theater pieces such as *Till the Day I Die* and Hollywood films such as *The General Dies at Dawn*. Yet it is also plausible that "The Cuban Play's" meaning was not apparent to early biographers of Odets precisely because it questioned the premise on which other works are based, as well as the "working-class ethnic Americanism" upon which the Popular Front built the broadest consensus.<sup>114</sup> While the consensus around what definition of working class would be used was never as uncontested as some later critics asserted, especially along racial and national lines, it's very clear that *General* and "Cuba" formulate precise examples of both its most reactionary and radical forms. In *General*, a formerly Jewish character is "whitened" in order to act as a representative of working-class values abroad, while in Cuba, the same act of

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<sup>113</sup> Biographer Brenman-Gibson writes that Odets "could not breathe life into any of these brave Cubans," *Clifford Odets*, 494, and biographer Weals dismisses the play in a sentence, 104.

<sup>114</sup> George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 47. Lipsitz argues that it is precisely the working-class multi-ethnic "cultures of unity" that prevented the Popular Front period from creating a thorough critique of U.S. imperialism, whiteness, or the legacies of slavery and conquest.

racial working-class representation abroad is critiqued as complicit with U.S. empire. More than anything, the silencing of "The Cuban Play" may point to the inability of Odets to solve the problems of his critique of the same realism for which he was considered the prime emblem. As a figure who represents the contradictions as well as the most radical goals of the Popular Front, Odets would eventually solve them by renouncing both in his testimony before HUAC as a friendly witness some fifteen years later.

### **Cuba as an Indian War: Hemingway and Herbst**

Given the cultural memory of the working-class movements in the 1930s as white-ethnic, it's not surprising that the best known representation of Cuban revolutionaries in U.S. literature is Ernest Hemingway's racially charged 1937 novel *To Have and Have Not*. While critical writing about the novel doesn't explore the issue of empire, I would suggest that the meaning of Harry Morgan's death is inseparable from the U.S.-Cuban imperial relationship and the imaginary of conquest that precedes it. *To Have and Have Not* is also his most filmed novel, with five productions made from the early 1940s to the late fifties. However, not a single one of these films references Cuba or locates any portion of the plot on the island. The location of the film versions cannot be explained by the fact that Cuba is not cinematic; indeed, the location of the first adaptation, Howard Hawks' 1944 wartime action-drama, was changed from Cuba to Martinique for the explicit reason of

making the film seem "more patriotic."<sup>115</sup> While Hawks does not explain why setting a film in Cuba would seem less patriotic than a film set in Martinique, it seems that it may have to do with changing definitions of anti-fascism from 1937 to 1942. While anti-fascism frequently carried with it a critique of imperialism, by the middle of World War II, including the United States within that critique, however obliquely, was seen as undermining the war effort. Martinique was (and many would argue still is) a French colony, ruled at the time of the film by the Nazi controlled Vichy government. Despite the fact that Hemingway's novel reifies national and racial borders between the U.S. and Cuba and clearly criticizes the revolution for its willingness to use violence to achieve its ends, it was feared that the evocation of Cuba in any context might destabilize national definition and question the legitimacy of the U.S. government -- even though the island was officially counted as "an ally" during the war.

Given the troubled historical memory of Cuba in the Popular Front, that Hemingway's only attempt at the 1930s genre of social protest literature is also a novel set in Cuba must not be seen as merely incidental. It was likewise his one attempt to include not only working-class characters, but references to strikes, the WPA, proletarian fiction, unemployment, and in particular the 1930s phrase, "the economic situation," told through a story of maritime adventure and third world revolution. Rather than see this as peculiar to Hemingway, I would argue that

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<sup>115</sup> Ed Krzemienski, *There's Something About Harry: To have and Have Not: The Novel as Film*, <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/25/tohave2.html>, March 2007.

despite Hemingway's politics, these issues lay at the center of cultural production during the time period. Like Odets writing anti-fascist cinema through a B grade action story, so Hemingway reporting that this was "his most important work" at the time he wrote it does not necessarily contradict its status as an adventure novel, as much of the Popular Front's cultural production engaged with mass culture forms.<sup>116</sup>

The novel tells the story of Harry Morgan, who runs a charter service with his fishing boat until the Depression ruins his business and he turns to smuggling. It chronicles a successive number of trips that become increasingly dangerous and violent, until his boat is confiscated by the U.S. government, forcing Harry to earn money in a desperate act of smuggling Cuban revolutionaries from Florida to Havana after a bank heist. Unlike Hemingway's earlier work in which his heroes struggle against forces that are either psychological or eternalized within nature, nature is replaced by the economy. In addition to the financial ruin of his fishing tours, Morgan's poverty is set against a backdrop of the wealthy U.S. elite who vacation in Florida (including a proletarian novelist and his estranged wife) to whom he is invisible. Harry is an "ordinary man," and the construction of his "ordinariness" is posed against the morally isolating wealth of the elite and the savagery and moral expediency of the Cuban revolutionaries.

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<sup>116</sup> Norberto Fuentes, *Hemingway in Cuba* (Secaucus: Lyle Stuart, Inc, 1984), 144-5. While Hemingway later spoke poorly of the book, especially considering its weak critical reception relative to his early work, Hemingway's statements at the time of its authorship contradict later accounts. Also, in considering Hemingway's work in relation to film, Vials argues in *Realism for the Masses* that the development of realism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century cannot be understood outside of its adoption by Hollywood as its main aesthetic style.

Yet while the "ordinary man" in the U.S. may feel humiliated and taken advantage of, in Cuba he must defend himself against ideologically driven and often brutal revolutionaries against whom Harry can – and does – exercise a kind of imperial mastery. Thus the novel is at once the story of Depression-era "ordinary man" struggling against circumstance and an imperial adventure in which his racialized masculinity gives him the means to wrest a living from Cuba when he is not able to do so in the United States. The novel has been criticized for its construction of racial boundaries between Morgan and the Cubans with whom he comes into contact and in front of whom Morgan repeatedly proves his physical and intellectual mastery.<sup>117</sup> Yet this racial critique does not take into account the imperial relationship between the U.S. and Cuba, nor its location within a broader social movement in which the question of the U.S. as an empire was subject to great debate. That the novel takes place as a question of transnational flows of bodies, money, and violence is not an accident, and as I've argued, is a central feature of culture in that era.

The value of the work from the standpoint of anti-imperialist international movements lies less in what Hemingway wants to say with the character of Harry Morgan than in how the novel exposes the tensions within the Popular Front around whiteness and national belonging. The novel's location in Cuba is central, as the recurring motif of "crossing over" from the Keys to Havana structures Morgan's experiences: Cuba is a space of fluid identity and possibility for Morgan whereas the

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<sup>117</sup> Jeryl J. Prescott, "Liberty for Just(us): Gender and Race in Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*," *CLA Journal* 37(2) December 1993, 176-188.

U.S. is a site of immobile class stratification. In Morgan's wife Marie's epilogue, she remembers her and Harry's first trip to Cuba as a space in which her femininity is defined and developed in relation to displays of Morgan's white masculinity. When she is accosted by a black man, "Harry smacked him...and sent his hat sailing," which inspires Marie to get her hair done in an expensive salon.<sup>118</sup> Not only does Cuba offer a racialized valorization for her white sexuality, but also her own possibility for transformation: after she dyes her hair light blond in a beauty salon directly after Morgan assaults a black man in the street, Harry's "voice was thick and funny when he said "Jesus Marie, you're beautiful."<sup>119</sup> Thus Havana acts as a space of white identity construction in which Marie's blondness and Harry's racial act of violence form gendered parallels in the narrative and cement the bond between the two characters.

This imperial balance of stratification in the U.S. and possibility abroad is disrupted at the beginning of the novel when Morgan is recruited by a group of young Cuban revolutionaries who request passage to the U.S. Morgan refuses, but later is forced by economic circumstances to give in. This smuggling of bodies, what Morgan separates into "what can talk" as against "what can't talk," is possible only if Morgan is able to contain the migrants' travel away from the island. When he hires out to smuggle Chinese immigrants, he is careful not only to execute the Cuban contact but to return the Chinese immigrants to the Cuban shore. While his own body

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<sup>118</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937, 1996), 257.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 258-9

is highly mobile, and indeed, the ship serves as a kind of symbol for Morgan's white masculinity, the mobility of bodies of color is seen as an uncontrollable threat by which Morgan is eventually overtaken. Indeed, it is the revolution in Cuba against the Machado regime that renders Morgan's masculine prowess impossible. The revolutionaries are neither afraid of Morgan nor do they care about the possible financial consequences of breaking a deal. Thus the novel argues that the mobility of Morgan is predicated on – and indeed only possible – if bodies of color are rendered equally immobile.

In the U.S., Morgan occupies a liminal status, as both a man of means and mobility, and as a man who in his own words, "has no cash, no education, and only his *cojones* to peddle."<sup>120</sup> He is framed on either end of the class stratum by both Albert, his first mate in his final voyage, who works for seven dollars a week on the WPA and who recently went on strike against wages "I can't eat on," and against the idle rich who vacation in Key West, typified by the glib irony of the well-heeled writer of proletarian novels.<sup>121</sup> Albert, working class in a Marxian sense (with only his labor to sell), and looking only for a square deal, is also representative of the Popular Front "common man," not asking for charity nor a radical, as he says to Morgan over drinks, but also willing to unionize to get a fair wage. Gunned down immediately by the fleeing Cuban revolutionaries as they board Morgan's boat, his murder can be read as a symbolic sacrifice by the U.S. working class for the needs of

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 146

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 96

anti-colonial liberation. What is equally important is that Albert, unlike Harry, is an unknowing "victim," passively shot without offering resistance. Unlike Odets who identifies the Cuban struggle for freedom as part of the larger Popular Front struggle against fascism, it is clear that the threat of mobility posed by the Cuban revolutionaries is not against the wealthy, who are pictured sleeping as Morgan's bullet-riddled boat is tugged back into the harbor, but the heroic "common man" of "Waiting for Lefty."

Morgan's standard reception as, in literary critic John Cobbs' words, Hemingway's only "genuinely common man, a true proletarian," is complicated by his status as a frontier hero.<sup>122</sup> Critic Philip Durham points out Hemingway's characters' connections to U.S. Western heroes in the frontier tradition, especially because of their physical courage and their attitudes towards people of color.<sup>123</sup> The slipperiness of the definition points out the extent to which Popular Front discourses of class representation could move easily from proletarian to a frontier tradition of Republican virtue, in which "class" is defined less by relations of production than through cultural markers of labor, masculinity, and race. Thus *Hemingway's To Have and Have Not* functions in much the same way Wendy Kozol argues the FSA administration photographs did, in defining the "worthy subject" for federal aid racially and sexually as a white, heteronormative mother, who appears to be capable

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<sup>122</sup> John Cobb, "To Have and Have Not: A Casualty of Didactic Revision," *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 44(4), November 1979, 1-10

<sup>123</sup> Philip Durham, "Ernest Hemingway's Grace Under Pressure: The Western Code," *Pacific Historical Review* 45(3) August 1976, 425-32.



of self-reliance within a normative bourgeois framework.<sup>124</sup> The novel therefore functions to pathologize social issues by containing poverty and rebellion within a racial-gendered-national framework, in which the Cubans – unlike Morgan – are not worthy subjects and indeed, undermine efforts of those worthy subjects to become self-reliant. For both Morgan and Albert, the Cuban attack on their boat acts as a kind of "fall of the white republic" as the "common men" are defeated by a government relief program that emasculates the worker ("we had to go back to work anyway" says Albert after the strike fails, forcing him into crime like Morgan) and by a porous border between the U.S. and the third world in which such dangerous revolutionaries can operate.

While framed as a social protest novel, *To Have and Have Not* is ultimately about reinforcing the racial boundaries of the nation, in which the imperial gaze of Morgan is dangerously reflected back by the murderous rage of Roberto, the gunman of the revolutionary gang. It is not without meaning that after his arrangement to carry the Cubans to Havana, he notices a "picture of Custer's Last Stand on the wall" as "though he'd never seen it." While this bit of kitsch, along with the "nickle machines and quarter machines" in a bar, is merely local color, the significance of the painting as Morgan is gunned down by contemporary savages with "faces like Indians," would not be lost on a contemporary reader.<sup>125</sup> Framing Morgan as a pirate

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<sup>124</sup> Wendy Kozol, "Madonnas in the Fields: Photography, Gender, and 1930s Farm Relief," *Genders*, 2 (Summer 1988): 1-23. Kozol argues that the FSA photographs relied on heteronormative definitions of the family in order to make the victims of the Depression appealing to white, middle-class viewers.

and cowboy, the novel acts as what Richard Slotkin refers to as the "social drama Western," a sub-genre that came of age in the late 1930s as studios responded to the popularity of social themes and the celebration of bandits over the "law-men" of a previous generation.<sup>126</sup> As such, it is not the only Hemingway novel to deploy the metaphor of "the frontier," as the gypsies in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* reminds the "cowboy" narrator in several instances of "cigar-store Indians" and of "Indian customs."<sup>127</sup> When compared with Odets' framing of Lorca as not only an anti-colonial figure but as a Popular Front figure fighting fascism, the political implications of Hemingway's socially themed adventure stories become apparent. By constructing the fight against fascism and for the "common man" as an extension of the frontier myth, the racial and imperial lineages of that mythology are extended as well. Thus Odets' suspicion about the Popular Front as a strictly *national* cultural movement, ironized by his fictitious "Author," find its justifications in Morgan's appearance as a "common man" enduring the Depression.

There is a scene in Josephine Herbst's *Rope of Gold* that strangely recalls, and I would even say, informs a dialectical opposite of the barroom recognition of Custer by Morgan. The novel, about Victoria Chance's coming into political and gendered

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<sup>125</sup> Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 123, 103.

<sup>126</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 273-4.

<sup>127</sup> Durham, "Ernest Hemingway," 430.

awareness, not only situates her political transformation in Cuba, but does so by locating her own identity within the arc of U.S. imperial conquest. Seated at a bar in Havana, Victoria Chance, the estranged wife of a Communist Party farm organizer who travels to Cuba to write about the anti-Batista/Mendieta movement and general strike, gazes at a wood figurine of a Sidoney native. Unlike Morgan, whose gaze at the painting of Custer's Last Stand refers back to an epic race war in which he figures as a masculine white hero, Chance identifies with the figurine, musing that her own father was "no Cortez, skulking on the shores of Cuba," but rather, like the girl in the figurine, one of the losers of history, cut down "by the hunt for gold."<sup>128</sup>

Herbst traveled to Cuba in 1935 to write a series of articles for the *New Masses* about the growing resistance movement against Machado and his replacement, the Mendieta-Batista regime. The series, "Cuba on the Barricades" reports on the general strikes as well as the sugar workers' conditions in rural Cuba. The longest of these – detailed in *Rope of Gold* – describes an agricultural workers' collective in the Sierra Maestra mountains, "Realengo 18." The article is titled "The Soviet in the Interior of Cuba" but it is clear from her reporting, that formal Communist Party ideology and membership has little part in the stories or the lives of the agricultural workers. The claim to the land made by the workers stems rather from the Ten Years War for Independence from Spain, "in which the soldiers who had fought were supposed to be rewarded with land in Realengo 18," and yet the land

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<sup>128</sup> Josephine Herbst, *Rope of Gold* (Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1939, 1967), 362.

was never delivered to the workers, despite their ownership of Spanish deeds.<sup>129</sup>

Thus the commune Herbst discovers is as much "the first Soviet in the Americas" as the editor of *New Masses* described it, as a continuation of the independence struggle waged from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and delayed by the U.S. invasion in 1898. These two traditions, the international socialist movement and the Cuban independence movement, find articulation in the former sugar workers' invocation of Sandino and Pancho Villa, and in their articulation of a Pan Latin-Americanist vision of anti-imperial sovereignty, free from the U.S. and foreign capital.<sup>130</sup> Unlike Odets, who fits the struggle within a largely Western framework – his hero is the very Europeanized Antonio Lorca – Herbst locates the international dimension of Cuban socialism within Cuba's own long history of liberation.

The importance and emphasis on the possibilities for racial harmony within Realengo 18 can thus be read within Cuba's own *mulato* tradition. As historian Ada Ferrer writes, "all rebellions" against Spanish rule "were waged by an army unique in the history of the Atlantic world...a multiracial fighting force that was integrated at all ranks."<sup>131</sup> True to his history, Realengo 18 is led by a black Cuban who is married to a white farmworker. As Herbst says bluntly in the article, "there is no race problem here."<sup>132</sup> The last word in the sentence of course emphasizes that elsewhere in Cuba,

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<sup>129</sup> Josephine Herbst, "The Soviet in Cuba," *The New Masses* 14(11) March 19, 1935, 9.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>131</sup> Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 3.

and to the readership in the United States, this could not be said to be true. As José Martí writes in "Nuestra America," his vision of a free Cuba was of a "mestizo republic," a national-popular Cuban culture that was a mixture of European, African, and Native influences.<sup>133</sup> The presence of an interracial commune on land promised after the first war for independence from Spain is more than just an example of socialism in the Americas, it is also a fulfillment and beginning of the dream laid out by Martí in his manifesto. The fact that it's a farming commune, largely of the descendents of slaves, is also significant. As W.E.B. Du Bois points out in his magisterial social history of black life after the Civil War, *Black Reconstruction*, the utopian struggle for communal land rights by the newly freed slaves silently defined both the Civil War and its aftermath. Thus while the *New Masses* articulates the commune as the beginnings of socialism in the Americas, it is not incorrect to suggest Realengo 18's significance for liberation movements in the Americas. Not only does the site represent the working-class mestizo consciousness advocated by Martí and later Nicolás Guillén, it also represents to a U.S. audience the unfulfilled promise of emancipation.

In this context, it's not surprising that for Herbst/Chance, her trip to Cuba serves as an excavation of her own past and her own implication within U.S. westward expansion. Structurally in her novel *Rope of Gold*, as she journeys farther into the rural fields of Cuba – and further away from the racial codes of the U.S. and

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>133</sup> While *mulato* is the preferred Cuban term for people of mixed-race ancestry, Martí uses "mestizo" in his essay, perhaps to connect the Cuban struggle for independence with indigenous activists and intellectuals in Mexico and Central America.

Havana - the further back within her own memory she travels. She remembers how her own family's journey West over the Mississippi ended badly, her grandfather returning bankrupt and penniless for his refusal to submit to the ruthlessness of capital accumulation and land theft. "He had been led back," she remembers, "without a cent, staring out at the river as the train rumbled across...his mind a lost and broken toy."<sup>134</sup> Like FSA photographs, *Rope of Gold* relies on the logic of sentimental identification with the other – for Chance is granted access as a reporter only after she is seen crying over the photo of an imprisoned Communist the local revolutionaries know. Yet the identification exists within a complex dialectic in which Chance does not identify with Cuba so much as she unlocks the meaning of her own imperial legacy, finding structural connections between the loss of land by her own family and the dispossession of Cubans by U.S. agricultural interests.

It is not an accident that Chance's final destination as a reporter also coincides with her excavation of personal memory, the failed journey West by her grandfather. Forming a parallel, Chance is granted full political awareness of her own past at the same time the farmers she interviews expose the trans-American reach of U.S. capital. Comparing themselves to Sandino and Villa, revolutionaries and nationalists who struggled against the U.S., the farmers display an historical awareness of their own position fighting U.S. empire, while at the same time fighting for their own essential connection to the land. "Lino was no politician...He knew his people owned

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<sup>134</sup> Herbst, *Rope of Gold*, 371.

the land, and they meant to keep it...they wanted guns."<sup>135</sup> The farmer is very aware that "Sandino was shot in the back" and if they resisted, "there would be no guarantees."<sup>136</sup> This awareness of a trans-Caribbean anti-imperialist resistance as well as an essential rootedness in the land complicates an easy attempt at sentimental identification. Chance is welcomed as a supporter, but also acknowledged to be an outsider. This tough dialectical stance does not allow for Chance to claim to represent the Cuban revolutionaries and forces her to acknowledge her own position of relative privilege. Her task at the end of the novel is not to stay in Cuba, but to return to the U.S. and work against U.S. empire there. The promise of racial harmony in Realengo 18 does not function as an escape for Chance, but rather as a reminder of what political tasks have yet to be accomplished.

*Rope of Gold* is not only significant because it suggests possibilities for transnational solidarity but because it is also a meta-narrative about the Popular Front. Chance is contrasted with her husband, who works as a Communist Party organizer among small farmers, and her editor and friend, who works in the WPA administration, promoting public works with publicity campaigns. Both men are seen as dissolute and unfulfilled in their political work, and more than anything, harbor a feeling of emptiness for no reason they can discern. "Of all things he had wanted not to be, it was a "Front"...in his fine clothes, with his good looks and charm, he was an

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 386.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

ace of a "Front."<sup>137</sup> The question of being a "front," as opposed to having an organic connection to the real, applies at least in part to Victoria Chance's travel to Cuba, in which she not only finds an occupation for herself as a radical journalist, but is able to piece together her own history with the imperial history of the U.S. and form anti-imperial, transnational connections of solidarity. As Fredric Jameson writes, empire creates by its very nature a problem of representation, that the individual cannot "see" and cannot spatially locate herself within the totality of the system of exploitation.<sup>138</sup> Their political acts of representation are empty, for the absent signifier of the U.S. empire renders their actions devoid of meaning. Given the importance of direct, first-hand experience for the politics of the Popular Front – Guthrie's emphasis on "seeing" the system he wishes to transform – Victoria Chance's dream of fulfilling political action is made possible only by her physical presence in Cuba.

The two works, *To Have and Have Not* and *Rope of Gold*, retell the story of Cuban revolutionary movements through the lens of Westward expansion. As Richard Slotkin writes in his trilogy of the cultural and political impact of the U.S. frontier, imperial conflicts throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century were understood as continuations of "Indian Wars," the battle between European settlers and the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas.<sup>139</sup> Hemingway articulates the frustrations of

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>138</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism," *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 50-1.

<sup>139</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 3-4.



white working-class inheritors of this mythology, many of whom were the targets of Native American resistance and whose land holdings were later taken over by large financial interests. As a tale, we can understand Harry Morgan as perhaps a pirate version of Tom Joad, recreating the myth of Westward expansion through a racialized working-class sensibility. Thus the importance of Herbst's novel is not only that it refuses this racially bound metaphor, but does so from a site of late 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S. colonial expansion. Her work suggests that it is not enough to simply "walk away" from what Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz refers to as the "grid of history," but that she is able to forge bonds of solidarity through her understanding of her own ideological and material complicity. Cuba is a necessary site, therefore, to undo the legacy of colonial conquest, but also to expose its conceits and its absences.

### **Langston Hughes and the Politics of (Dis)location**

Clifford Odets was not the only writer to find his entrance to Cuba blocked during the 1930s. Langston Hughes was initially refused passage on the Ward Steamship Line to Havana in 1930, and it wasn't until the NAACP intervened that Hughes was able to arrange passage on another ship.<sup>140</sup> Hughes explains his treatment in a story entitled "Little Old Spy," in which the narrator suddenly finds himself followed by a government operative on his second day in Havana. Unlike Odets and Herbst, neither Hughes nor his fictionalized writer-narrator in the story

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<sup>140</sup>For newspaper accounts of the steamship's refusal to grant Hughes passage, see "Ward Line Color Bar Punctured," *New York Amsterdam News* March 5, 1930, 11; "Steamship Co., Not Cuban Govt., Banned Hughes," *Afro-American* March 8, 1930, A3.

were in Cuba to join a revolutionary struggle. Putting the refusal of the Ward steamship line to grant him a ticket and the presence of the spy together, he muses on the fact that "at home in Harlem, I was a nobody" and yet in Havana, "I was suddenly of governmental importance"

....And I knew pretty well why. The government of Cuba had grown suddenly terribly afraid of its Negro population, its black shine boys and cane field hands, its colored soldiers and sailors who make up most of the armed forces, its taxi drivers and street vendors....the Negroes had begun to rise with the students and the others to drive the dictator from Cuba.

For a strange New York Negro to come to Havana might mean – *quién sabe?* – that he has come to help stir them up....Had not Marcus Garvey come out of Harlem to arouse the whole black world to a consciousness of its own strength?

"They," the Cuban dictatorship, were afraid of Negroes from Harlem. The American steamship lines at that time would not sell colored persons tickets to Cuba....<sup>141</sup>

In a perverse way, the Cuban government recognized the politics of the black transnational tradition as articulated by Hughes and other radical black writers of the 1920s and 1930s. For Hughes, travel to Cuba was more than just a visit to a foreign country; in Cuba, Hughes was hailed by the artistic community as one of the U.S.'s most important writers. Langston Hughes had "a profound impact" in shaping the literary work of many Afro-Caribbean writers, probably none more so than Cuba's nationalist poet, Nicolás Guillén.<sup>142</sup> Hughes published a translation of Guillén's

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<sup>141</sup> Langston Hughes, "Little Old Spy," *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes: The Short Stories*, ed. R.Baxter Miller (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 257.

<sup>142</sup> Edward Mullen, "Langston Hughes and the Development of Afro-Hispanic Literature: Diasporic Connections," *The Black Scholar* 26(2) 2001, 10-16

poems and is often credited with influencing the young Guillén to include Afro-Cuban rhythms, content, and language into his work, as something of a parallel to Hughes' own commitment to using black speech and jazz in his own poetic voice. It would thus seem that there was a certain truth to Hughes' statement that in the U.S. a "Negro writer was nobody" and that in Cuba he was "suddenly of importance." Not only for Afro-Caribbean culture was Hughes considered an important poet, but for Cuban national culture as well. As Hughes critic Antillano Scott writes, "for Guillén – as with other Cubans – blackness was not a "social problem," rather being of mixed heritage was part of social/cultural pride."<sup>143</sup> As Gullén went on to be widely read, so Hughes would be credited with being a crucial influence and shaper of Afro-Cuban poetry.

In this sense, the very presence of Cuba in Hughes' work, and Hughes' presence in Cuba as a writer, destabilizes the United States as the center of the literary world and the arbiter of American culture. Hughes' relative marginalization in the U.S. and his profound importance in Latin America suggests a rethinking of the U.S. literary landscape, in literal and figurative terms, as part of his project in contrasting his reception in the U.S. and abroad. To include, for instance, Langston Hughes' poem "Let America be America Again" as part of 1930s national culture begs the question of *which* America Hughes addressed: the national boundaries of the U.S. or the "Americas" in which Cuba would emerge as an important site of U.S. literary production. In that sense, it is telling that Hughes' memoir of the 1930s, *I Wonder as I*

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<sup>143</sup> Antilliano Jonathan Scott, "Home to Exile: Langston Hughes," *The Langston Hughes Review*, 20(3) Fall 2006, 8.

*Wander*, is a memoir of travel rather than the national belonging called for within mainstream Popular Front texts. And yet, unlike nationalist figures like Marcus Garvey, Hughes does not privilege the Caribbean as a site of racial belonging, a "home" as an equal opposite to the "homelessness" in the U.S. Like Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, *I Wonder* argues against the construction of a stable or "rooted" identity, holding out instead for the notion of a hybrid, rhizomorphic identity based on the memory of exile and displacement, a double-consciousness born of a diaspora that sees modernity through a distinctive black perspective.<sup>144</sup> The memoir and travel-log trace his travels from the Caribbean, the U.S. South, Soviet Central Asia, Mexico, China, Japan, and finally to the International Brigades in Spain, offering his perspective as both a deracinated viewer on socialist uprisings and resistance, and yet one who sees as Hughes writes, "with *Negro* eyes." As the memoir ends on a note of racial solidarity and exile, as he and another socialist writer drink in Paris on New Year's eve, the work would seem to reject the foundationalism of land and nation as guideposts of identity or social movements. The "return" of the book is both an image of political kinship and political exile, both solidarity and rootlessness. Whatever home Hughes has is almost lamented: the fact that he can go back to the U.S. "even when I don't want to."<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3-6.

<sup>145</sup> Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1956, 1993), 404-5.

This may explain the strange sense of irony around much of Hughes' writing about Cuba. While he deploys his travel in Cuba to highlight U.S. racism and imperialism – and to show the ways in which black writing and writers are accepted elsewhere in world – his writing consistently undermines any possibility of having a permanent home there. That *I Wonder as I Wander* begins in Cuba suggests a special role for the imaginary of the Island to Hughes' conception of a black transnational consciousness: it is the site in which he both realizes the possibilities and impossibilities of black transnational consciousness. As pointed out by critics such as Michelle Ann Stephens, Penny von Eschen, and Robin D.G. Kelley, writers and intellectuals including W.E.B. Du Bois, Claude McKay, C.L.R. James, and Marcus Garvey imagined an international black community linked by concerns of racial identity, anti-colonialism, and national self-determination. And yet imperialism creates a dialectic that at once gives rise to "the material conditions for black solidarity" as Stephens writes, as well as creates the primary source of black exploitation and alienation.<sup>146</sup>

As a visitor to Cuba, Hughes contrasts two scenes: one in which he is invited to the Club Atenas, the "leading club of color" in Havana, and another in which he is refused access to the beach by Cuban authorities working for the United States. The first scene suggests an attitude of cultural belonging: Hughes is impressed with the "taste and luxury" of the club, commenting that it had no equal in the U.S.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 5.

Equally, his description of Cuban music is laden, as one critic puts it, with "organicist and romanticist" views about black culture, the "hip-shaking...roll of drums" that "speak of...life bursting warm from the earth...in steady rhythms of procreation and joy" that suggest some of the culturalist positions of the Negritude movement.<sup>148</sup> And as Hughes comments towards the end of the night, the songs translated for Broadway consumption in the U.S. are cleansed of their references to black women, "plainly described as such in racial terms," seeming to celebrate the frank appreciation of women of color.<sup>149</sup>

Yet Hughes' feelings of racial ease are quickly broken in Cuba. He points out in the following section, "Cuban Color Lines," that the shop clerks in the "bigger shops are white or near white" and the political establishment, for the most part, is run by whites.<sup>150</sup> He also chronicles his experience with overt racism as he and his traveling companion, Zell Ingram, are refused entrance to a U.S.-run beach in Havana. Explaining that the beach had been leased to a U.S. company, it now enforced Jim Crow policy on all of its patrons, at the request of U.S. tourists. Hughes asks the bouncer – a U.S. former boxer, "white of course" – if "you mean to tell me that you're drawing the color line on a *Cuban* beach against *American* citizens..."<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 8.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 8; Sheila Lloyd, "Transnationalism in its African-American Travels: The Politics of Location in Langston Hughes' *I Wonder as I Wander*," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, 19(2), July 31 1995, 29.

<sup>149</sup> Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 10.

<sup>150</sup> Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 11.

The bouncer's refusal to answer the question suggests the answer is quite clear: that Cuba cannot enforce its own laws, and its tradition of *mulato* nationalism, and "flexible" view on race, as Hughes calls it, are not outside of or immune to U.S. racism. In one sense, this story serves to bitterly ironize the central conceit of imperialism, that civilization is the "export" of the colonial mother country. Rather, the most visible export of the United States is segregation and a retrograde form of racial antagonism. Ingram and Hughes are arrested, and it is the fact that the police and judge both apologize, but are powerless – or unwilling - to stop the practice of segregation which suggests that even Cuba is not a place isolated from the racial and imperial practices Hughes found in the U.S.

As mentioned, the story "Little Old Spy" also frames the question of imperial domination of Cuba by the U.S. in racial terms. Paid to track Hughes for political considerations – anyone from the U.S. who was not obviously a tourist was considered suspicious – it's also clear that the government enforces racial codes at the request of U.S. interests. Given that most of the cane workers are black, Hughes' friend argues, "foreign dividends" determine whom the Cuban government decides might be dangerous.<sup>152</sup> And yet the story suggests a kind of pathos for the "little old spy," an over-dressed drunkard who once trafficked in women until his age rendered him unable to compete. Hughes decides to invite him for a drink to get his story – and to get him drunk enough so Hughes can slip out unnoticed – during which time

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>152</sup> Hughes, *The Short Stories*, 256-7.

the spy discoursed a great deal on Cuban women. "Sweetest are the mulattoes of Camgüey," the spy said,

because they are a mixture of two worlds, two extremes, two bloods. You see, señorito, the passion of blacks and the passion of the whites combine in the smoldering heat that is *la mulata*. The rose of Venus blooms in her body...<sup>153</sup>

This racialized portrait of the women the old man once trafficked, is however, in ontology, not all together different from the racially sexualized portrait of the rhumba given in Hughes' description of Club Atenas. Rendered as a grotesque, it serves as a subtle critique of the Cuban myth of racial transcendence in Cuban national culture. This trafficker in women "appreciates" the racial beauty of Cuban mixed ancestry, while it is Hughes' blackness that paradoxically blocks his free movement to Cuba, and then assigns him this spy once in the capital. Mestizo, the "old spy" points out, creates a commodity value for sale to tourists and sailors, while it is Hughes' own color that marks him as dangerous to the authorities. As a statement of racial value, this scene suggests the way in which color and racialized assumptions of identity can work as floating signifiers of value in ways that Hughes cannot necessarily control.

Hughes' two poems about Cuba also suggest a certain kind of irony with respect to his relation to the land. As in Langston Hughes' poem "To the Little Fort in San Lázaro," written shortly after his first visit with Nicolás Guillen, the fort – while once able to stop pirates – can no longer defend against U.S. finance capital that knows neither borders nor defenses. Against the pirates of a previous moment of capital accumulation – "DRAKE/DE PLAN/EL GRILLO" the watchtower "served

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 260



quite well --/When times and ships were slow" but in an era of neo-colonialism in which the "ship" no longer has material existence, the poem calls for the watchtower's destruction.<sup>154</sup> Equally disembodied is a poem written in 1931, "Havana Dreams," which chronicles the uncertainty of imagination:

The dream is a cocktail at Sloppy Joe's –  
(Maybe—nobody knows.)

The dream is the road to Batabano.  
(But nobody knows if that is so.)

Perhaps the dream is only her face –  
Perhaps it's a fan of silver lace –  
Or maybe the dream's a Vedado rose—  
(*Quien sabe?* Who really knows?)<sup>155</sup>

Calling it a poem of "despair," Hughes biographer and critic Arnold Rampersad also notes that it was written shortly after Hughes' experience with the "little old spy" of his "most verbatim" story.<sup>156</sup> The suggestion that Hughes' treatment by the Cuban *porra* as well as the sight of "American tourists" ignoring the poverty and agitation in Havana could lead Hughes to a mood of uncertainty implies that imperialism is in some ways a uniquely disembodying experience. As opposed to the "rooted" metaphors of Woody Guthrie's "This Land" or the bounded space of what Stephens refers to as "black sovereignty," imperialism for Hughes suggests a crisis of identity that emerges either in spatial-temporal dislocation – asking the fort to "tumble down"

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<sup>154</sup> Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems*, ed. Arnold Rampersad, (New York, Knopf, 2004), 136.

<sup>155</sup> Hughes, *The Collected Poems*, 148.

<sup>156</sup> Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes v.1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 204.

– or dreams that do not come to fruition.<sup>157</sup> As Hughes critic Edward Mullen writes, Hughes' trip to Cuba made him conscious "that the black experience with its attendant feelings of alienation and subjugation is an international phenomenon."<sup>158</sup>

As critic Sheila Lloyd suggests, Hughes was beginning to feel alienated from the easy binary inherited from the Harlem Renaissance, that "all things black were more desirable than all things associated with whiteness."<sup>159</sup> While Hughes' politics had always been more complicated than this easy binary, one cannot help but notice that much of his writing in Cuba and Haiti is also directed towards a U.S. audience that may harbor oversimplified ideas about racial harmony outside of the U.S. in predominantly black American nations. In *I Wonder*, Hughes writes of the "colored visitors who are looking anxiously for a country where there is *no color line*" and of the "wonder" in the black imaginary for the Citadel, the fortress begun by Haitian head of state Dessalines.<sup>160</sup> Citing the obvious color codes in Cuba and the way the black elite in Haiti "scorn those below them," Hughes writes of the way "class lines may cut across color lines in a race" and of the way the Haitian elite even resembles the *gens de couleur* of St. Domingue, living off the labor of their fellow black workers.<sup>161</sup> Thus Cuba functions as a kind of double displacement. At once, it

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<sup>157</sup> Stephens, *Black Empire*, 5.

<sup>158</sup> Mullen, "Langston Hughes and the Development of Afro-Hispanic Literature," 15.

<sup>159</sup> Lloyd, "Transnationalism in Its African-American Travels," 29.

<sup>160</sup> Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 11, 16.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

complicates a black transatlantic vision based on a single definition of blackness or a question of a priori solidarity. And it complicates the role of the United States as well. Not only is imperialism defined by the extent to which the U.S. can impose its own racial codes on the Americas, but it also renders the black experience disembodied, subject to the alienation of dreams or unreality.

In this sense, it seems telling that *I Wonder* is a book about *looking*, a particular sensibility based on his own mobile and racially conscious perspective: Hughes writes "I observed changes in Soviet Asia with *Negro* eyes" to contrast his enthusiasm for previously colonized peoples' advancement over Arthur Koestler's criticism of the Soviet Union.<sup>162</sup> Traveling is thus a metaphor for a particular kind of gaze that is mobile and yet based on a political and cultural ontology of anti-imperialism. It is no accident that the memoir is structured to end during the Spanish Civil War, in which he interviews a number of black soldiers serving in the International Brigades. In a conversation with a Guinean volunteer in the International Brigades, the volunteer makes it clear that he is fighting for a new colonial policy and against the Italians who invaded Ethiopia.<sup>163</sup> Equally, many of the African-Americans Hughes interviews discuss the connections among fascism, racism, and the invasion of Ethiopia. One of the black soldiers refers to a captured Falangist as a "Spanish Klansman" he wishes he could execute.<sup>164</sup> In all of his

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 116, 172. Italics in original.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 357

interviews, Hughes privileges a particular way of seeing that the black troops have. In Hughes' poem, quoted in full in his memoir, "Letter from Spain," a black Abraham Lincoln volunteer offers a dying Moroccan conscript solidarity, on the basis that if a "free Spain" wins the war, "the colonies, too are free."<sup>165</sup> The fact that from the narrator's vantage point in the Spanish Civil War he "looked across to Africa" is intended as more than just a suggestion of geographical proximity, but is rather a reference to pan-Africanist de-colonization: a socialist victory in Spain would liberate African colonies and set "foundations shaking" of the entire world.<sup>166</sup> While it is hardly to be taken literally that the narrator in the poem could "see" Africa from Spain, it is precisely the intervention the poem and poet hope to make. By focusing on an African-American gaze, Hughes argues that supporters of the Spanish Republic should "see" Africa in the conflict.

Yet it must also be remembered that while Hughes began writing many of the sketches in *I Wonder* in the 1930s, it is a Cold War text, published in 1956, three years after Hughes' testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Hughes' testimony before the House was considered to be compromised, even supine. While he didn't "name names" he also appeared to grant the committee legitimacy and at least partially apologize for his former radical stances. As Arnold Rampersad writes, "Hughes' dignity had largely been passive," especially when compared to other leading black voices such as Paul Robeson and Doxey Wilkerson, who engaged

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 354-5.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 353-4. Hughes includes the poem in its entirety in the volume.

in "spirited acts of resistance" to the committees' questions.<sup>167</sup> In this sense, *I Wonder*, as well as the publication of "Little Old Spy" in the 1952 edition of *Laughing to Keep From Crying*, function both as provocation and cover. Entitling the journey to Cuba and Haiti "In the Search of the Sun," it disguises as a tourists' journal, complete with exotic parties and long stretches on the beach, an expose of U.S. imperialism,. Such subversion is winked at in "Little Old Spy," when the narrator leaves the drunk former-pimp to deliver "all the messages that exiles in the Latin-American Quarter of Harlem had sent by me to their revolutionary co-workers in Havana."<sup>168</sup> While the narrator insists he's not in Cuba to do political work, he allows his own relative mobility – partial though it may be – to speak for exiled bodies of color in Harlem who do not even have such permission to travel. Thus the story is at once a parody of a certain kind of nationalism based on the transcendence of race as well as a story about how solidarity between the U.S. and Cuba can only be represented through acts of subversion.

The subtext of both *I Wonder* and "Little Old Spy" is as much transnational bonds of affinity as it is governments' attempts to prevent black bodies from moving freely. In *I Wonder* Hughes is not only prevented from using a white-leased beach in Havana, but he and Ingram are also detained as Haitian migrants on their return to Havana from Haiti some months later. Given they had almost no money and were traveling on a freighter, the Cuban authorities assumed that they were black sugar

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<sup>167</sup> Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes Volume 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 218-9.

<sup>168</sup> Hughes, *The Short Stories*, 260.

workers and detained them for days on Cuba's "Ellis Island" until the U.S. consulate – three days later – rescued them.<sup>169</sup> In this sense, there is a bitter irony to Hughes' "spy" story. The spy is, as Hughes points out, a trafficker in women of color. While Hughes' was dogged by government spies, restricted by Jim Crow practices on U.S. steamships, prevented from entering public spaces, and finally detained as undocumented migrant labor, the movement of women's bodies continued unimpeded, in so far as they were moved by their employers for the sex trade. As a Cold War text, the fears about the restriction of movement for intellectuals of color were very much on the minds of writers who had ties to the left in the decades before, as the fates of Robeson, Patterson, and Du Bois suggest, all of whom had their passports revoked by the U.S. government.

In a 1943 poem "Broadcast to the West Indies," Harlem is imagined as an "Island within an island" in a Caribbean archipelago hailed in the beginning of the "broadcast":

Hello, Jamaica!  
Hello, Haiti!  
Hello, Cuba!  
Hello, Panama!  
Hello, St. Kitts!  
Hello, Bahamas!<sup>170</sup>

The poem is at the most salient level, an argument with a transnational American black culture about whether or not blacks should side with the Axis rather than the United States in the war. Yet the poem is strangely silent about the question, only to

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<sup>169</sup> Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 34.

<sup>170</sup> Hughes, *Collected Poems*, 273

say that both the Axis, as well as U.S. racists, "will end," and that racists do not represent the entire United States. Most of the poem is a celebration that "we care for each other" and "share so much in common." Yet what is shared in common is precisely their identity as imperial subjects, the "certain things we know in common:/Suffering/Domination/Segregation-". In a sense, the poem is a rejection of both the Axis and the United States, and rather a statement that Harlem is simply one more island in a transnational archipelago marked by its imagining of solidarity and its conditions of imprisonment.

Thus to begin a story of the black experience in Cuba is to claim allegiance to the United States, yet as a subject of its empire, rather than as a full citizen. The poem "Broadcast" is a statement of the inevitable way in which Hughes is a U.S. subject, but a subject in the same way one from the Bahamas is a subject. Cuba and the greater Caribbean thus stand, unlike Africa or Asia, in a state of inbetweenness for Hughes, both part of a greater Americas at the same time they are states of separation, "domination" and "segregation," both from white America and from each other.

The poem "Broadcast" ends as it begins, with a long list of Caribbean nations the speaker greets, only with the difference that it is "FREEDOM" for which "WE PREPARE." This circular ending suggests the kind of paradox Stephens articulates in *Black Empire*, that U.S. imperialism both creates the material conditions for a transnational imaginary, yet is also the force preventing its realization as a political project. That is, one must be greeted first as imperial subject, then again as a subject of liberation. Cuba presents both, and thus challenges the narrative of the U.S. republic at the same time it reinforces its centrality. Hughes thus articulates himself

as an unwilling subject, someone who belongs "home" in the U.S., "even if I don't want to."

### **Recentring Cuba/Decentering the U.S.**

For the work of the Popular Front, the decision to place Cuba as central to not only the activism but to the representation of U.S. citizens abroad has profound implications. Not only does it decenter the nation as the primary site of political and cultural identification, it also questions U.S. national narratives as a democratic republic and a benevolent power abroad. As Louis Perez points out, Cuba was not only central to U.S. financial interests, it was central to the U.S. image of itself as a benign power, going overseas only to liberate another nation from tyranny. As opposed to the long and bloody occupation of the Philippines, resistance movements in Haiti and Nicaragua, or continued colonization of Puerto Rico, Cuba was supposed to stand out as a counter-example of benevolent power and republican virtue. To the extent that Popular Front works may have participated in the reification of U.S. national identity, the centrality of Cuba as a site of political and cultural interest and exchange suggests a strong counter-tendency within the cultural movement. Indeed, American Studies scholar Michael Denning's formulation of the "national-popular" may need to be revised for another view of working-class multi-ethnic international solidarity. Perhaps considering the way in which work on Cuba creates a "transnational-popular" imagery, based on the recognition of the importance of anti-



colonial movements and the centrality of empire in domestic structures of power, more clearly describes Popular Front production.

Cuba stands as both problem and a point of departure for reconstructing the memory of the Popular Front. As with Hemingway's novel *To Have and Have Not*, drawing borders around revolutionary politics can be thought as also defining the limits of racial identity. Hemingway's novel defines the U.S. working class in racial terms: Harry and Albert are both white, and it is their whiteness, rather than their class status, that is under threat by the finish of the novel. Or rather, it is their status as working-class white men that leaves them vulnerable to attack by Cuban "savages" while the well-to-do sleep safely, not compelled as are Albert and Harry to engage in such dangerous forms of labor. In this sense, Hemingway's novel reframes Cuban colonialism as what Richard Slotkin might refer to as another "Indian War," in which Harry Morgan takes on the role of Indian fighter.

This collapse of racial and national identity in Hemingway's novel underscores the importance of Odets', Herbst's, and Hughes' gestures of solidarity with the Cuban struggle for independence. As Herbst makes clear in her novel *Rope of Gold*, understanding her own whiteness was only possible if she understood and witnessed U.S. imperialism first-hand. And for Odets, "The Cuban Play" marked a stark point of departure from the politics of racial masquerade of his film, *The General Died at Dawn*. Rather than "Americanize" his own identity by casting it relation to an Orientalized East, "The Cuba Play" intentionally troubles the ability of white, U.S. writers to represent racially and nationally distinct peoples, and agrees to do so only in so far as it remains self-reflexive.

One has to ask what it means that Odets' affiliation with Cuban radicals and his desire to write a play about Cuba later became a key point in his testimony as a friendly witness before HUAC. The Committee spent nearly half of their time questioning him about his trip and subsequent arrest, despite Odets' frequent statements that he was no longer a member of the Communist Party and considered himself a "friendly witness," willing to "name names."<sup>171</sup> His film *The General Died at Dawn* did not draw so much as an utterance from HUAC, nor did much of his other work in New York or Hollywood, and yet his one-week trip to Cuba was an object of near obsession. While issues of race and ethnicity were not brought up during the Odets' testimony, it is interesting that his one attempt at constructing a transnational politics of solidarity was also considered his most "subversive" act by HUAC. For a white-ethnic writer like Odets, the politics of global solidarity and his own "Americanness" are implicitly questioned by this single-minded focus. It was no secret that many Jewish-Americans felt during the HUAC hearings that their loyalty to the United States and their whiteness was in question. There is thus a strong suggestion that the suppression of this element of the Popular Front's culture of solidarity also has deep implications for post-WWII racial formations.

For Langston Hughes to refuse an essentialized black culture as well as the binary between diaspora and anti-colonial nationalism further suggests that Cuba played an important role in the development of his work. As U.S. imperialism complicates Hughes' relationship to a Cuban black diaspora by refusing a feeling of

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<sup>171</sup> Eric Bently, *Thirty Years of Treason*, 504-14..

national belonging in Cuba and Haiti, he also shows the ways in which U.S. imperialism acts to further make blackness a mark of identity. Cuba thus acts to destabilize racial as well as national forms of identity. This is not to suggest that Hughes champions a post-racial politics, far from it, but rather to suggest that belonging for Hughes is not grounded in the politics of place or the "rootedness" of a national narrative of origins. As Stephens suggests, Hughes articulates how empire both creates a sense of placelessness at the same time it provides the material foundations for a black transnational imaginary. That Hughes ends a memoir that begins in the black artistic community with a transnational multi-ethnic army fighting for socialism and de-colonization suggests that this "placelessness" has a transformative quality and may articulate itself within multiple forms of struggle. Hughes thus apprehends the Popular Front with double vision, at once as a committed anti-fascist, but also as a figure who sees as he writes with "negro eyes," apprehending each anti-fascist struggle as part of an archipelago of empire for which Cuba is the first stop.

## CHAPTER TWO

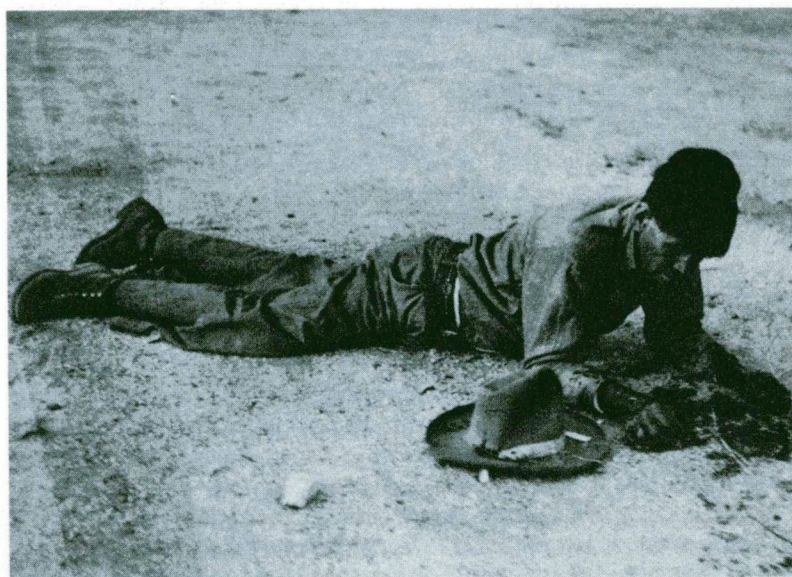
### **Let Terror Unite Us: The Transnational Critique of the New Deal in the California Popular Front**

The same year Dorothea Lange's iconic photograph, "Migrant Mother, Nipomo, CA, 1936" first appeared in a special edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, another photograph – also of a farmworker – circulated in the California Communist Party newspaper, *The Western Worker*. It is an image of a striking worker lying on the ground in a pool of his own blood, his hat on the earth beside him, shot in the face by anti-union vigilantes during one of the greatest labor upheavals of the 1930s, the Corcoran cotton strike of 1933. The image was republished repeatedly both in the Communist and labor press, as well as in Paul Taylor's field work of the San Joaquin Valley he gathered with Lange, published as a collection in *On the Ground in the 1930s*. If Lange's photograph is the dominant cultural icon of the Great Depression, appearing in major newspapers and magazines in the 1930s, and since reissued in school books, museum displays, ready-made art-syllabi, postage stamps, government web pages on the New Deal, and other media for organizing a national narrative for a popular audience, then I would argue that the wounded, perhaps dying worker from the largely forgotten cotton strike forms an important counter-memory of the 1930s. Mexican-American, male, wounded, part of a militant strike led by the Communist Party and involving mostly workers of Mexican and Filipino descent, this representation of labor violates nearly all the precepts that made the Lange image central to the ideological work of representing

the Depression around notions of whiteness, paternalism, national identity, gender, and the deserving poor.



**Figure 2.3 Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother of seven children. Age thirty-two. Nipomo, California, Dorothea Lange, 1936**



**Figure 2.2 "Striker at Pixley," photograph, in Paul Taylor On the Ground in the Thirties, 1933. This photo also appears in at least three editions of the Western Worker, as well.**

Various commentators and critics have offered explanations for the "Migrant Mother's" iconic status, pointing out the importance of racialized representations of poverty, her link to the *Grapes of Wrath* narrative, the religious metaphors employed by the photo's framing, the appeal to middle-class and sentimental ideals of the family, and the photo's participation in a New Deal program that fused cultural production with a federal relief program. Together, I would argue these various critiques of the photograph create a composite of public memory around the Great Depression. The photo is both a symbol of the Depression as well as a metonym for a collective narrative of the era, defined as a crisis in which workers temporarily suffered hardship as individuals and families, ameliorated by a new relationship to a benevolent state that has the popular legitimacy to interpellate and represent them. The appeals to the racially defined nuclear family though the theme of the lost father are further suggestive of a socially conservative and racially bounded narrative of the U.S. working class. In this sense, the Lange photo and the narrative it helps to produce also create a uniquely *national* image of labor and poverty, in which the absent father and the paternalistic state form structural homologies.

As the image of the wounded striker would suggest, the Lange photo existed within a much larger imaginary field of labor representation in the 1930s. Competing with the popularized imagery of the Farm Security Administration that had access to large run newspapers and magazines, socialist and labor organizations in California developed a visual and rhetorical language to narrate their struggle within self-published Communist and labor newspapers. Contrary to what I will argue was the sentimental nationalism of the FSA, socialist and labor advocacy organizations

developed a global and deterritorialized lexicon of violence that was at once rooted in the specific historical struggles in California, at the same time it also formed important discursive links with transnational struggles against racial violence and colonialism. Creating a visual and rhetorical language of "terror," left groups in California displayed images of wounded, dying, and lynched bodies, often on the front pages of newspapers and newsletters, and combined the images with sensational stories of strikes, anti-colonial uprisings, and anti-fascist resistance. This language at once formed a counter-discourse to the conservative sentimental-nationalism of the New Deal, as well as reimagined labor in the U.S. as inherently transnational, part of immigrant flows and colonial dislocations. This double-dislocation of the national subject was a key and often misunderstood feature of the Popular Front era, and yet also had an urgent specificity to the situation in California.

As part of what Michael Denning refers to as the "long Popular Front," California's left social movements were somewhat unique.<sup>172</sup> As the site of the one of the most militant and multi-ethnic labor movements of the 1930s - the longshoreman's union in San Francisco and the growing militancy within incipient farm-worker unions in the Salinas and Central Valleys - California was also the site

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<sup>172</sup> The Popular Front is traditionally defined as the 1935-9 coalition of Communists and liberals against the threat of fascism. While I don't wish to downplay the importance of the change in Communist Party policy or the election of Popular Front governments in Latin America and Europe, I prefer Michael Denning's broader historical definition, outlined in *The Cultural Front*, of a "social democratic electoral politics; a politics of anti-fascist and anti-imperialist solidarity; and a civil liberties campaign against lynching and labor repression" that held cultural and occasional political hegemony in Europe and Latin America from the late 1920s to the beginning of the Cold War. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997), 9.

of one of the more repressive racial and anti-union regimes in the nation. For the California left, the violence of vigilante movement and the "red squads" of Los Angeles, the mass deportations of Mexican-Americans, and the conditions of poverty in the Central Valley could not be fully explained or contained within the discourse of U.S. liberal democracy or the New Deal. To activists within the same circles, like civil rights lawyer and historian Carey McWilliams, California was "that state of the union which has advanced furthest toward an integrated fascist set-up," something echoed by other left intellectuals at the time, including Mike Gold's casual reference to "lynch towns" in the Central Valley and "Nazi Germany" east of Los Angeles.<sup>173</sup> It must be remembered that "fascism" to groups such as the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League (HANL), the Communist Party, the ILWU, and the American League Against War and Fascism (ALAWF) included Nazis and blackshirts, but also U.S. backed dictators in Cuba and Brazil, agri-business owners in the San Joaquin Valley, and anti-labor laws that all but outlawed union meetings in California's farm labor camps. This suggests that fascism was a flexible term that expanded to include not only U.S. racism in the South along with European dictators as well as an entire field of capitalist social relations, including racism, anti-labor violence and global imperialism. California itself was read as an imperial space, as something both foreign and domestic, as Amy Kaplan articulates in *Anarchy of Empire*, a space that is

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<sup>173</sup> Carey McWilliams quoted in "Carey McWilliams Warns of Danger of Fascism," *Hollywood Now*, July 28, 1939, 3-4. Mike Gold, "Migratory Intellectuals," *New Masses*, December 15, 1936 (21), 27. McWilliams makes a similar statement in *Factories in the Fields: History of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, "In California....the mechanism of fascist control has been carried out to further lengths than elsewhere in America..." (1939, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 9.



neither able to be incorporated within a U.S. narrative and yet cannot be read outside of it.<sup>174</sup> As Denise da Silva describes the site of the colony as a place of "total violence," the focus on violence as a way to narrate an anti-colonial aesthetic is not random, as it gave a common term to connect what would otherwise seem like disparate events.<sup>175</sup> Thus violence became a way not only to draw attention to the abuse of civil liberties in California, but to mark it as outside democratic space altogether – linking power in the state with fascism and colonialism.

The concept of "terror" became the primary visual and rhetorical method for representing labor in California. Far from being a new term within the U.S. political lexicon, "terror" springs from the seemingly unlikely source of internationalist anti-imperialist movements during the 1930s and 1940s. In one of the more radical transformations (or one could co-optations) of terminology, the idea of "terror" as opposed to grassroots "democracy" has a history that traces not back to Enlightenment thinkers or Pentagon planners, but to socialist and labor newspapers in circulation in the United States. Contrary to today's meaning, nearly every use of "terror" in the 1930s and 1940s implied state or state-sponsored violence against civilians, often by reactionary forces.<sup>176</sup> The word came into mainstream usage in the

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<sup>174</sup> Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 2-7.

<sup>175</sup> Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 267.

<sup>176</sup> Leon Trotsky published a number of short essays prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, arguing that the revolutionary value of "terror" is limited, as individuals and even organized civil groups lack the "bureaucratic hierarchy" necessary for terror campaigns to be effective: terror is a program for states, carried out against workers.

U.S. use after the German "terror bombing" of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, and the term nearly always carried with it the valences of the unique and particular violence of fascism. Leon Trotsky published a number of short essays prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, arguing that the revolutionary value of "terror" is limited, as individuals and even organized civil groups lack the "bureaucratic hierarchy" necessary for terror campaigns to be effective.<sup>177</sup> Terror by this definition, is a program for states, carried out against workers. As one historian writes, "terror bombing...by the late 1930s" was associated in the minds of Americans "with images of...the Italians in Ethiopia...Germans against Spanish Republican strongholds, and the Japanese against Chinese cities...bombing from the air was viewed as terrorism against civilians, carried out by fascist dictators."<sup>178</sup> Perhaps two of the best-known artistic images of fascism from the 1930s, Pablo Picasso's painting of the fire-bombing in *Guernica* and Ben Shahn's hooded prisoner in *This is Nazi Brutality*, were also images of terror, the spectacular and gratuitous violence that intentionally violates conventions of political discourse and armed conflict.<sup>179</sup>

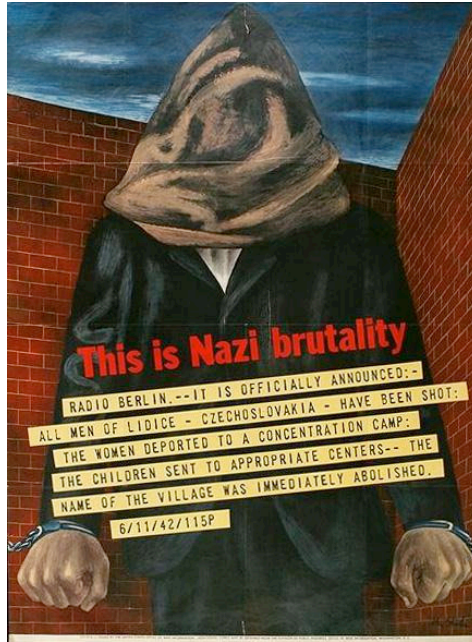
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Leon Trotsky, "On Terrorism," and "The Collapse of Terror and its Party," from *Marxism and Terrorism* (Reykjavik: Pathfinder Press, 2005), 14-15.

<sup>177</sup> Leon Trotsky, "On Terrorism," and "The Collapse of Terror and its Party," from *Marxism and Terrorism*, 14-15.

<sup>178</sup> Edward Spannaus, "'Shock and Awe': Terror Bombing from Wells and Russell to Cheney," *Executive Intelligence Review*, 30(42) October 31, 2003, 22.

<sup>179</sup> Stephen Eisenman comments extensively on both of these images in *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2007).



**Figure 2.3 "This is Nazi Brutality," Ben Shahn, Office of War Information, 1942**

Before entering U.S. popular lexicon, the word appears in the U.S. much earlier, often in the context of violence by vigilantes against striking workers, and lynch mobs both in California and the South. Due to the violence directed at the California labor movement, California socialist and labor journals used the term more than anywhere else. California based anti-fascist publications like *Hollywood Now*, the Communist *Western Worker* and *People's Daily World*, the Spanish-language *Lucha Obrera*, and union newsletters like *UCAPAWA News*, and *The Agricultural Worker* frequently combined coverage of international events with coverage of local issues in such a way as to suggest connections between events. For the 1930s left, internationalism consisted of more than a concern with the rise of fascism in Europe, but rather a global perspective on labor, race, and imperialism that saw a common arena of struggle between working and subaltern classes in both the first world and third. To draw out these links, left journalists developed a global and deterritorialized

lexicon for violence outside of legal, statutory, or citizenship rights through the visual and rhetorical culture of "terror." Images of wounded, dying, and lynched bodies were often displayed on the front pages of newspapers and newsletters, and were combined with stories of strikes, anti-colonial uprisings, and anti-fascist resistance. Given the need of activists and intellectuals to connect what seemed like disparate sites of violence, from Ethiopia to the California San Joaquin Valley, certain forms of violence became key expressions of global imperialism. These images not only served to critique the violence of fascism and imperialism, but also constructed a counter-discourse to the national-popular images of California and the West produced by photographers and writers like Dorothea Lange, John Steinbeck, Jack Delano, and Ben Shahn who framed their critiques of poverty within sentimental discourse of benevolent paternalism and social welfare.

As Michael Denning writes, Steinbeck's novel and John Ford's film *The Grapes of Wrath* became the dominant narrative of the Depression, as well as the most lasting cultural memory struggle and dispossession.<sup>180</sup> While Denning clearly notes that *The Grapes of Wrath* story was not representative of the Popular Front as a whole, the narrative "achieved the greatest success in the state apparatus and the culture industry" as it "reinforced...sentimental and conservative... interpretations of New Deal populism."<sup>181</sup> The *Grapes* narrative lay within the an entire field of cultural field of production, including the Farm Security Administration photographs by Dorothea Lange and Jack Delano and films like *The Plow that Broke the Plains*

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<sup>180</sup> Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 263.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 267-8.

that offer a redemptive vision of U.S. democracy based on the morality of white, rural, patriarchal values around the family, as well as individualist ideas about the dignity of the passive poor, self-reliance, and uplift. While scholars like Denning, Barbara Foley, Robin D.G. Kelley, Bill Mullen and James Smethurst draw attention to the diversity of grassroots political movements in the 1930s, little if anything has been said about the ways in which Popular Front journalism and visual culture formed a counter-discourse to the *Grapes* narrative. I would like to suggest that within both English and Spanish-language left and labor newspapers in California, a sensational and often visual rhetoric of "terror" constructed a transnational language of violence and resistance that challenged national-popular notions of cross-class and global unity based on an erasure of difference. Rather than base a New Deal populism on a sentimental coalition of white middle and working classes within a national frame, by constructing both a language and visual culture of transnational structures of violence as well as resistance, "terror" served to link the colonies and imperial core to create multi-ethnic networks of solidarity outside of the limits of a racialized nationalism. Further, these newspapers, including farm-labor newspapers like *UCAPAWA News* and Spanish-language Communist Party newspapers like *Lucha Obrera* also suggest greater connections between English-language, white-ethnic anti-fascist organizations and Spanish-language, Latino/a organizations in California than have been documented. Rather than a New Deal coalition consisting of unity between white workers and white middle classes as imagined by FSA photography, these newspapers imagined a cross-race, bi-lingual, and international unity based on working-class solidarity and anti-imperialist, anti-racist activism.

To understand the meaning of "terror" in the anti-fascist lexicon, it's necessary to underscore its pervasiveness. West Coast English and Spanish language journals such as *Western Worker*, *People's Daily World*, *Lucha Obrera* and *UCAPAWA News* headlines weekly and daily used the word "terror" to describe anti-labor, racial, imperial, and vigilante violence. To give a sense of the usage -- and sheer number of uses -- of the term, it's worth listing a sample of the headlines: "Lynch terror in Vacaville," "terror against workers," "Deportation terror against Mexican and Filipino Workers," *Ola de Terror Anti-Obrerista*, "El Terror en La America Latina," "Demonstration Against War on August 1, Despite Police Terror," "Reign of Police Terror in Seattle," "boss terror to crush sugar workers' strike in Hawaii," "Lynch Terror in California," "SF Workers Defy Terror," "Two Shot as Salinas Lettuce Strike Grows; Terror Sweeps Entire State," "Mexican Workers Hunted Down as Authorities Launch New Terror," "Vigilante Rule through Fascist Terror," "Vigilantes...Burn Fiery Crosses in Terrorism," "Terrorism – Weapon Against the Working Class," "Terror Grows in Imperial Valley," "Terror Against Workers," "Vacaville Vigilantes Attempt to Rule Town Through Fascist Terror," and of course, the first lines of Tillie Olsen's electrifying strike reportage of the 1934 general strike in San Francisco, "do not ask me to write of the strike and the terror."<sup>182</sup> These uses of the word "terror"

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<sup>182</sup> "Lynch Terror in Vacaville," *Western Worker*, 1(28) December 12, 1932, 1. "Anti-Alien Legislation Threatens All Progressive Organizations," *UCAPAWA News*, 1(2) August 1939, 2. "Deportation Terror Against Mexican and Filipino Workers," *Western Worker* 1(11), June 1, 1932, 1; Coresponsal Obrero (Worker Correspondent), "Ola de Terror Anti-Obrerista," *Lucha Obrera*, Translated by author and Jaime Posford, 1(13) October 1934, 1; "El Terror en La America Latina," *Lucha Obrera*, trans. by author and Jaime Posford. 1(9) February 1934, 4; "Demonstration Against War on August 1, Despite Police Terror," *Western Worker* 1(16), August 15, 1932, 1.

links the specificity of racialized violence against blacks, deportation of Mexican-Americans, and the brutalization of workers by invoking a common term that underlines less their subjectivity than the nature of the violence directed against them by a racial, capitalist state. For a movement that represented a spatially, geographically, racially, and politically diverse body of workers, finding common terms to link their repression also constructs a set of shared interests and a common language of struggle.

This language not only joined workers of various racial and ethnic backgrounds under a common term, but was also often deployed to connect forms of violence in a global context. On the front page of the California Communist Party's *Western Worker*, the imminent invasion of Ethiopia dominated the news in October of 1937: San Francisco's International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) placed a "ban" on Italian cargo in protest, the Labor Council of LA passed resolutions condemning the invasion, and anti-war and anti-imperialist organizations planned protests from Seattle to Los Angeles.<sup>183</sup> The same newspaper that breathlessly

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"Reign of Police Terror in Seattle," *Western Worker* 2(10), March 6, 1933, 1. "Sugar Workers Strike in Hawaii," *Western Worker* 2(27) July 3, 1933, 1. "Lynch Terror in California," *Western Worker* 2(34) August 21, 1933, 1. "SF Workers Defy Terror," *Western Worker* 3(33) August 8, 2008, 1. "Two Shot as Salinas Lettuce Strike Grows; Terror Sweeps Entire State," *Western Worker* 3(40) September 3, 1934, 1. "Mexican Workers Hunted Down as Authorities Launch New Terror" *Western Worker* 4(36) May 5, 1935, 1. "Vacaville Vigilantes Attempt to Rule Town Through Fascist Terror," *Western Worker* 4(39) May 16, 1935, 2. "San Jose Vigilantes Threaten Farm Labor; Burn Fiery Crosses in Terrorism," *Western Worker* 5(48) June 15, 1936 1. "Terrorism – Weapon Against the Working Class" *Western Worker* 5(81) October 8, 1936 4. "Terror Grows in Imperial Valley" *Western Worker* 5(38) November 2, 1936 1, "Vacaville Vigilantes Attempt to Rule Town Through Fascist Terror," *Western Worker* 4(39) May 16, 1935, 2, Tillie Olsen, "The Strike," *Partisan Review* 1(4) September-October, 1934, 3-9.

carried this news also carried a longer analysis of the invasion's causes: the way "three-power imperialists" of England, Germany, and the United States will benefit from the further colonization of Africa, and how the "democracies" and "fascist powers" of Europe collude on issues of empire.<sup>184</sup> The final page of the newspaper carries no news of Italy, but rather, a stark and haunting woodcut of a lynching, the agonized black body on display above a crowd of three jeering white vigilantes, flames filling the contours of the frame (Figure 2.9).<sup>185</sup> While the strike by a militant labor union to protest an imperialist invasion, the collusion of "democracies" with "fascist dictatorships" in an imperial project, and racist violence in the U.S. appear in the newspaper without editorial comment, their combination says much about the way in which U.S. and global struggles around questions of labor, race and imperialism were imagined by a broad multi-ethnic left in the California. Given the frequent connection between the "fascist gangs of the KKK and White Legion" and European fascist powers in the 1930s left press, the implication that the "three-power imperialists" were engaged in a global lynching of the last free African state would not be lost on contemporary readers.<sup>186</sup> As Penny von Eschen writes in *Race Against*

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<sup>183</sup> "I.L.A. Blocks War Shipment," *Western Worker*, 4(86) October 28, 1935, 1. "Labor Council at Los Angeles Raps Italy Aggression," *Western Worker*, 4(86) October 28, 1935, 1. "Sailors Union Backs Unity of Action Program," *Western Worker*, 4(86) October 28, 1935, 1. "American League to Hold Anti-War Rally," *Western Worker*, 4(86) October 28, 1935, 1.

<sup>184</sup> "Three-Power Imperialists in Move to Carve Ethiopia," *Western Worker*, 4(86) October 28, 1935, 2.

<sup>185</sup> Beau Vincent, "Lynching...." Woodcut. *Western Worker*, 4(86) October 28, 1935, 4.



*Empire* for the 1930s civil rights community – and I would add for the anti-fascist one as well – news of an imperial invasion was considered the part of the same world-structure of power as a lynching in the Deep South.<sup>187</sup>

This structural view of racism that compares the legacy of slavery in the South with the racism of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia was carried over into the labor battles in California. The violence against workers by the Grower's Association in the Imperial Valley is cited alongside an article about the violence deployed by Italy to "civilize" Ethiopia (quotes in original).<sup>188</sup> In another edition of the *Western Worker*, a funeral cortege for a murdered striker in the Imperial Valley is placed alongside a funeral cortege for murdered independence activists in the Philippines.<sup>189</sup> The *Agricultural Worker* makes the comparison more explicit, citing the way that Filipino workers are exploited in the U.S. by the same "American finance capital...invested from coast to coast of the Filippine (*sic*) Islands....enslaving the Filipino masses there."<sup>190</sup> And more generally, news coverage of the violence of the

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<sup>186</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 120.

<sup>187</sup> Penny von Eschen *Race Against Empire* (New York: Cornell U Press, 1997). See also Thomas Borstelmann, *Cold War and the Color Line*, (Cambridge: Harvard U Press, 2001); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 2003); Paul Robeson, *Paul Robeson Speaks: Writing, Speeches, and Interviews 1918-1974*, Philip Foner, ed. (New York: Citadel Press, 1978)

<sup>188</sup> "How Italy acts to "Civilize" Ethiopia," *Western Worker*, 5(88) November 2, 1936, 3.

<sup>189</sup> "Murdered Picket is Buried with Honors on May Day," *Western Worker*, 4(36) May 5, 1935, 1. "Terror Launched as Sakdal Coup Fails in the Philippines," *Western Worker*, 4(36) May 5, 1935, 1.

Grower's Association and American Legion against striking workers resembled news coverage of the U.S. putting down demonstrations in the Philippines, or the Batista regime's soldiers firing into crowds of strikers in Cuba. In addition, left newspapers were eager to connect the militarization of Pinkertons, the U.S. national guard, and vigilante squads with repressive techniques and attitudes acquired by officers who saw service in the Philippines or Cuba; they also suggested that the militarization of CCC camps and state militias was part of a larger imperial-military project of expanding U.S. power. Beside an article reporting the mass arrest of strikers in Shafer, CA, an article reports on a conference exploring cooperation between U.S. and Mexican unions: they have "common enemies" the piece argues, reminding us that both faced the conditions one experiences "in a colonial country."<sup>191</sup>

To give a context, scholars such as Michael Denning, James Smethurst, Robin D.G. Kelley, Barbara Foley, Alan Wald, George Lipsitz and others have written extensively about the rise of anti-systemic movements in the 1930s. Dubbed the "Popular Front" after the 1935-9 alliance among communists, socialists, and liberals against fascism, Denning and others have pointed to the far longer lineages and after-effects of the movement, narrating a political arc from the late 1920s to the late 1940s. While a social democratic politics, a concern for labor, and an attack on racism and fascism have been long documented cornerstones of 1930s social movements, I would also add that anti-imperialism and third-world solidarity were

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<sup>190</sup> Rufino Deogracias, "Filipino Agricultural Workers Must Fight Against the Contract System, *The Agricultural Worker*, 1(1) December 20, 1933, 6.

<sup>191</sup> "Labor Front Between U.S. and Mexico Urged," *Western Worker*, 5(44) June 8, 1936, 1-2.

central to the "long Popular Front" as well. Penny von Eschen and Robin D.G. Kelley have both written about the powerful anti-imperialist movements within African-American communities, and Josephine Fowler has written about anti-imperialism within the Chinese and Japanese-American communities in California during the same time.<sup>192</sup> For multi-ethnic organizations like the 3,000,000 member American League Against War and Fascism, the National Negro Congress, or the All-Americas Anti-Imperialist League, campaigns against U.S. involvement in Latin America, against military spending and anti-militarism, as well as against figures who represented a kind of imperial masculinity -- the "imperial" William Randolph Hearst or the "red squad captain," LA Police Chief Hynes -- were a way to internationalize otherwise local Popular Front concerns. Likewise, issues like military spending and U.S. foreign policy filtered up through larger organizations like the CIO that occasionally took anti-imperialist stances on issues such the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, U.S. military spending, and U.S. military involvement abroad.

In California as in other big cities throughout the U.S., demonstrators held rallies protesting war and imperialism throughout the 1930s. These protests drew crowds in San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, Seattle, Denver, Fresno, and

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<sup>192</sup> Penny von Eschen *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anti-Colonialism: 1937-57* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). Josephine Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists: Organizing in American & International Communist Movements, 1919-1933* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007). Both works point to sizable communities of anti-imperialist activists in the U.S. from the 20s up through the cold war. Robin D.G. Kelley's work on the African-American Communist Party paper *The Liberator* also suggests that black nationalism and Pan-Africanism were key elements of the 1930s African-American Communist imaginary, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 103-122.

Portland in the thousands and tens of thousands.<sup>193</sup> The demonstrations represented organizations as diverse as the American League Against War and Fascism, the Methodist Church, the Socialist Party and Communist Party, relief and unemployed organizations, the All-Americas Anti-Imperialist League, the Chinese Anti-Imperialist League, and unions belonging both to the Communist affiliated Trade Union Unity League as well as the conservative American Federal of Labor.<sup>194</sup> This anti-imperialist activism culminated in a wave of student strikes in the late 1930s, in which millions of students demanded, among other things, an end for U.S. support of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and U.S. intervention in Latin America. The upsurge in anti-imperialist activism corresponded with a militancy within Mexican-American and Filipino labor unions that increasingly understood not only their class status, but also their conflict, in imperial terms. Carlos Bulosan, Carey McWilliams, Karl Yoneda, Ernesto Galarza, James Rorty, Dorothy Healey and countless other key leaders in the California Popular Front saw themselves as part of a larger internationalist anti-imperialist and anti-fascist movement that also interpreted local conditions of vigilante violence, racism, militarism, and the consolidation of power in the hands of Western agri-business as a legacy of U.S. imperial expansion. California was an "outpost of empire" as McWilliams framed it, based on "racial hatred" and undemocratic forms of power.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> "Aug. 1 Meetings Show Growing Opposition to Bosses' Wars," *Western Worker*, 2(33) August 14, 1933, 1.

<sup>194</sup> "'Hands off Cuba' is Demand at Long Beach Meeting," *Western Worker*, 2(39) September 25, 1933, 1.

Neither bound by sovereignty or national definition, left and labor newspapers used the language of terror to link their struggles abroad, creating out of the global archipelago of colonialism an imaginary of a new form of solidarity. The images produced a deterritorialized and decentered space of empire that focused on the violence done to bodies as a way to shape a movement otherwise segmented by labor stratification, spatial apartheid, cultural and language barriers. The "Terror-Ridden Philippines" and the "brutal terrorization...of Philippine masses...by American imperialism" links the status of migrant field labor to the status of a colonial subject.<sup>196</sup> In the Spanish-language Communist Party newspaper *Lucha Obrera*, "Terror in Latin America" by the U.S. backed regime in El Salvador is discussed alongside a "terror wave of deportations" in Arizona.<sup>197</sup> And likewise, in the *Daily Worker*, the headline "Sheriff Asks Troops in Akron Strike" detailing the way the military is used to "slaughter" workers on the picket line, is placed parallel to the headline "Marines Rushed to Puerto Rico to Back Up Terror," in which the "imperialist governor is held responsible for massacres."<sup>198</sup> The language of "terror" thereby forces analogies among fragmentary and often competing discourses of

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<sup>195</sup> Carey McWilliams, "Introduction" in *America is in the Heart* by Carlos Bulosan (1939; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), ix.

<sup>196</sup> "Independence no Break for Filipinos," *Western Worker*, 5(72) September 7, 1936, 5. "US Imperialism Tries to Crush Philippine Revolutionary Movement," *Western Worker* 2(11) October 9, 1933, 4.

<sup>197</sup> "El Terror en La America Latina," *Lucha Obrera*. Trans. by author and Jaime Posford. 1(9) February 1934, 4. "Ola De Terror Anti Obrero En Ariz.," *Lucha Obrera*. Trans by author and Jaime Posford, 1(13) October 1934, 1.

<sup>198</sup> "Sheriff Asks Troops in Akron Strike," *Daily Worker* 8(49) February 26, 1936, 1. "Marines Rushed to Puerto Rico to Back up Terror," *Daily Worker* 8(49) February 26, 1936, 1.

power within U.S. imperial control. It suggests that the deployment of violence in the imperial periphery is not separate from the treatment of minorities and workers in the U.S., but part of a larger system of coercive state power. The Popular Front was an international movement of both social democratic electoral politics and anti-imperialist solidarity, creating a rhetoric that could connect a worker's struggle in the San Joaquin Valley with a strike on the San Francisco waterfront, and both to anti-colonial struggles in the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. To do so required a language of struggle, and a way to connect with people across racial, national, and linguistic lines, for which terror was a primary, if unacknowledged, method.

### **Migrant Mothers, Dying Men: Terror as a Counter Discourse to New Deal Populism**

Critic Paula Rabinowitz argues in *Labor and Desire* that the laboring body of the Popular Front era was not only frequently imagined as masculine, but was also rendered in an exaggerated language of health and virile power.<sup>199</sup> Images of healthy, powerful working class men were common in the pages of Communist and Socialist Party newspapers, and on the covers of proletarian novels. The figure of working class revolutionary strength was meant to serve as an antidote to the very real bodies of defeated, hungry, and unemployed men in breadlines, as well as a caricature of a feminized bourgeoisie: lawyers who have "plump fingers" and intellectuals with

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<sup>199</sup> Paula Rabinowitz, *Labor and Desire: women's revolutionary fiction in depression America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 37.

"delicate" bodies.<sup>200</sup> To the extent that newspaper photos of terrorized bodies produce a representation of a laboring subject, it must be argued that they run counter to the narrative Rabinowitz and others suggest.

In the context of Depression era social movements in California, one can also think of "terror" as a counter-discourse to images such as Dorothea Lange's Farm Security Administration (FSA) photograph, "Migrant Mother." Lange's photograph, as well as others from the federal project, are part of the official memory of the Great Depression, and are some of the most reproduced works of the decade, images that are often synonymous with the Depression itself. The FSA photographs produced by prominent Popular Front photographers like Dorothy Lange, Ben Shahn, and Arthur Rothstein were part of the federal program to promote government backed loans to small farmers and resettlement facilities for farmers forced off their land.<sup>201</sup> Faced with hostility from the large growers in California who feared the resettlement camps would provide labor organizers unrestricted access to farm workers, as well as Southern Democrats who were against any relief of any kind for the middle and lower classes, the FSA hired filmmaker Roy Stryker to direct a propaganda effort that would promote not only the FSA but many of the relief efforts undertaken by the federal government. While it was a government effort to support particular controversial programs, the images nonetheless circulated widely within newspapers

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<sup>200</sup> Jack Conroy, "Uncle Ollie's Spite Fence," *Progressive Weekly*, January 22, 1939, 4; Meridel Le Sueur, "A Hungry Intellectual," *Salute to Spring* (New York: International Publishers, 1940, 1989), 52, 57.

<sup>201</sup> Wendy Kozol, "Madonnas in the Fields: Photography, Gender, and 1930s Farm Relief," *Genders*, 2 (Summer 1988): 1-23.

and the emergent visual print culture of magazines like *Life* and *Time* that relied on documentary photography.

The images of the rural farm workers selected by Stryker suggest patriarchal family values as well as conservative ideas about the dignity of the passive poor, self-reliance, and moral uplift. As critic Wendy Kozol notes in her essay "Madonnas of the Fields," many of the images focus on mothers who are framed as secular "Madonnas" who promote the values of virtue, charity, and humility.<sup>202</sup> The images rarely present farmers or farm-laborers in collective settings or engaged in waged labor. Rather, the images largely present women either as isolated figures within rural landscapes or as the head of families with an absent or subdued father. The women are often engaged in the work of childcare or positioned in feminine occupations recognizable to a middle-class audience such as mending or food preparation. And while it was common for women to work alongside men and children as sharecroppers and pickers, there were few if any close-ups of women working in agricultural fields. In addition, the portraits often present a deracinated vision of poverty, in which government programs, capitalization of farmland, and crop monoculture are nowhere in evidence. Rather than suggest that the AAA and other federal agrarian programs actually hastened the intensive capitalization of farming in the U.S., the images suggest a return to the yeoman ideal, facilitated by liberal relief policies designed to give temporary assistance to people who are self-reliant and deserving because they embody moral and civic virtue. The images not only reinforced the idea of the U.S. poor as rural, white, and associated with the

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<sup>202</sup>Ibid, 11.



yeoman tradition, but more importantly rekindled the myth of the yeoman farmer as the moral backbone of the nation.

Lange's "Migrant Mother" is the best known of these photographs, precisely because it encapsulates the values and myths the FSA championed. Simultaneously heroic and defeated, Lange's "Mother" gazes out at an unknown horizon that both suggests the stability of a moral character – she dominates the frame solidly with two small children flanking her – as well as a dislocation we can assume is temporary. The children face away from the camera, offering us a portrait of devoted motherhood. As the portrait suggests both self-reliance as well as destitution, it is a study in many of the contradictions around discourses of poverty and the New Deal – constructed to reveal extreme poverty at the same time they are suppose to suggest uplift and self-determination. Even the woman's hand close to her mouth suggests a delicacy and refinement that contrasts with the dirt of her nails and clothes, a contrast that implies she is a bearer of presumed middle-class values that she may at one time, with help, return to. The function of the portrait, and I would argue its success, has much to do with the placement and function of the viewer above the mother, in the figurative role of the state. As the FSA photography project was designed to justify relief, the Mother's position forces the viewer in a role of domination, as though she makes an appeal to the viewer for help. Likewise, the role of the state is further legitimated as necessary, to fulfill the role of the photos' missing father, restoring the family to the middle-class norm for whom the image was created.

Like Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, the photo proposes a new collectivity based on the sentimental metaphor of the maternal family. Just as Rose of Sharon

breastfeeds the starving migrant in a barn, so we are to understand the privatized family must break down and reconfigure new forms of mutuality. Yet, as with the pamphlet *Their Blood is Strong*, the metaphor of the family also suggests a strong racial-national form of identification. In Steinbeck's pamphlet, the dust bowl migrants are "of the best American stock" and are differentiated from the "foreign peon labor," who may be pitied, but will not inherit the future of "white and American" farms that will eventually restore the nation.<sup>203</sup> In imaging a nationally redemptive motherhood, Lange's image of the "Migrant Mother" places the FSA project squarely within the sentimental protest tradition of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Helen Hunt Jackson's "culture of maternity." As Tompkins argues in *Sentimental Power*, Stowe creates a moral society of mothers, who uphold civic virtue and the bonds of solidarity based on their power to feel. Roy Stryker, the director of the FSA photo project, articulated this language of feeling clearly when he stated "You're not going to move anybody with this eroded soil – but the effect this eroded soil has on a kid who looks starved, this is going to move people."<sup>204</sup> While Stowe bases her moral vision on cross-race, and even cross-gender formations of motherhood, Steinbeck and Lange based their appeals to feeling on images of working-class mothers within the bounds of a national-popular, racially bound project.

That both Lange and Steinbeck would articulate the language of sentimental belonging within California is interesting, especially considering that California was considered one of the primary sites of labor and racial violence in the 1930s. While

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<sup>203</sup> Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 267.

<sup>204</sup> Kozol, "Madonnas in the Fields," 6.

to my knowledge, no single image of a lynched or otherwise violated body circulated in the same way the image of the "Migrant Mother" ran through popular picture magazines and federal agency publications, anti-lynching images and images of "terror" nonetheless circulated widely within Communist, anti-fascist, and labor journals. Images of lynched bodies were shown nationally in progressive journals, such as the NAACP's *Crisis*, which frequently ran an ad in support of the federal Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill with a photo of a hanging black body, or in the International Labor Defense campaign to commute the death sentence of African-American lumber worker Ted Jordon accompanied by an image of a noose superimposed above his body.<sup>205</sup> Yet within California, the images of racial and anti-labor violence traveled beyond anti-lynching campaigns, and were a regular staple of labor reportage. Two images -- the image of a bleeding worker of Mexican descent shot during the Corcoran cotton strike of 1934 and the image of two workers shot by the police during the San Francisco general strike the same year -- not only dominated coverage of the events, but were reproduced as images multiple times in the publications as images to represent labor struggle in California (see figures 2.2 and 2.4 respectively).<sup>206</sup> If Lange's "Migrant Mother" is a body designed to evoke not

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<sup>205</sup> "Mobs Act, While --." Photograph. *The Crisis*, June 1936, 172. "Ted Jordon Must Not Hang!" Illustration, *Voice of Action*, September 11, 1933, 5.

<sup>206</sup> "Worker shot in the face after Pixley Massacre." Photograph. *Western Worker* 2(43) October 23, 1933, 2; "The Great Cotton Strike of 1933," Photograph, *Western Worker* 4(53) July 4, 1935, 3; "Shot Down by Vigilantes," Photograph, *Western Worker* 5(15) February 20, 1936, 3; "Sperry and Olsen Fell," Photograph, *Western Worker* 4(53) July 4, 1935, 1; Otto Hagel, "Tear Gas, Guns -- And Death," Photo-montage, *Men and Ships: a Pictorial of the Maritime Industry*, E.T. Jeffress, ed. (

only a nostalgia for a mythic yeoman past, but also a benevolent state imagined through tropes of motherhood, one must ask what imaginary these photos of violated bodies construct by contrast.

### **Bodies of Terror: Towards a Visual Critique of U.S. Empire**

In the photo of the wounded, perhaps dying worker from the Corcoran cotton strike, also known as the Pixley massacre, the worker does not address the camera, and appears to be staring at the pool of his own blood gathering beneath him. While the impact of the photo is sentimental to the extent that it relies on the power of the feeling it may provoke in the viewer, the viewer is not interpellated into the role of a distant, and benevolent caregiver, but is rather invited to imagine a community constructed by acts of violence. In this sense, the community is not bounded by national or racial lines, but rather by a relationship to capital and the state. More than any other, two images circulated throughout the left and labor press in California in the 1930s – one of a worker of Mexican descent shot in the Pixley massacre and another of two white workers murdered by police in the 1934 general strike. The most repeated images of the two strikes, occurring months from each other, suggest that cross-racial and cross-spatial relations may be imagined by appealing a common status as victim. The victim of the Pixley massacre dominates the frame with nothing but arid earth underneath; there is no suggestion that he is assisted or cared for, his hat lies beside him undisturbed. The workers shot dead in San Francisco likewise lie face-down, with no family members or loved ones in the frame. Rather than images

of solidarity based on bonds of family, these are men cut off not only from community, but from any sentimental or pre-capitalist social network.

Unlike the FSA photographs that were designed to convey the plight of a deserving poor to a primarily middle-class audience, the photographs in these newspapers assumed a collective gaze based on the mutuality of the viewers. Both in methods of production and circulation, these movement newspapers actively sought to break down the binary between journalist and reader. Many of the articles and images were sent in by readers under the by-line "worker correspondent." This was in part a pragmatic response to a lack of funds and the inherent difficulties of getting news during strikes in which workers would be wary of speaking to any newspaper, and the highway patrol would run check-points, arresting anyone who seemed sympathetic on sight. But it also suggests a paper constructed as a community project, defined less by "objective" standards of professional journalism than by membership within a given political collective.

Movement newspapers are by their nature, hybrid genres, part newspaper and part party or union organ. While it may seem remarkable today, the Communist Party newspaper in California, the *Daily People's World* (formerly the *Western Worker*) was, as the title suggests, a daily paper with a circulation at its height in the tens of thousands. Yet their methods of circulation were quite different from other large run newspapers. One of the typical activities for Party members would be to sell copies and subscriptions of the *People's Daily World/Western Worker* to other members, as well as on the street, and the sale of the newspaper was seen as itself contributing to the movement. Likewise, organizing campaigns in the Central Valleys brought

copies of the *Western Worker*, *Lucha Obrera Agricultural Worker*, and *People's Daily World* with them, and they were seen as crucial components of the educational function of unions and political parties.<sup>207</sup> As one writer reports, copies of the *Western Worker*, *Lucha Obrera*, *Agricultural Worker*, and *Daily Worker*, circulated in labor camps widely, though surreptitiously, along with journals like *Detective Stories*, *Screen Romances*, and *Mcfadden's*.<sup>208</sup>

In content as well as consumption, these images form a marked contrast to not only FSA photographs, but also to the structure of the "documentary aesthetic" that privileged a lone recorder of the "other" in ways that are often highly aestheticized.<sup>209</sup> In function, the images act to bring attention to the violence committed to workers and colonial subjects, and they also act to form bridges of solidarity and reassurance to subjects facing the violence of fascism and colonialism. More importantly, the images then serve to construct a collectivity in which the victim of violence and the recorder of it are not distinct. Elaine Scarry writes about the way victims of torture seek gestures of solidarity and recognition both within prison and once released.<sup>210</sup> Often risking jail for making such gestures, the supporters of the tortured declare their vulnerability at the same time they demand justice. This shared sense of vulnerability

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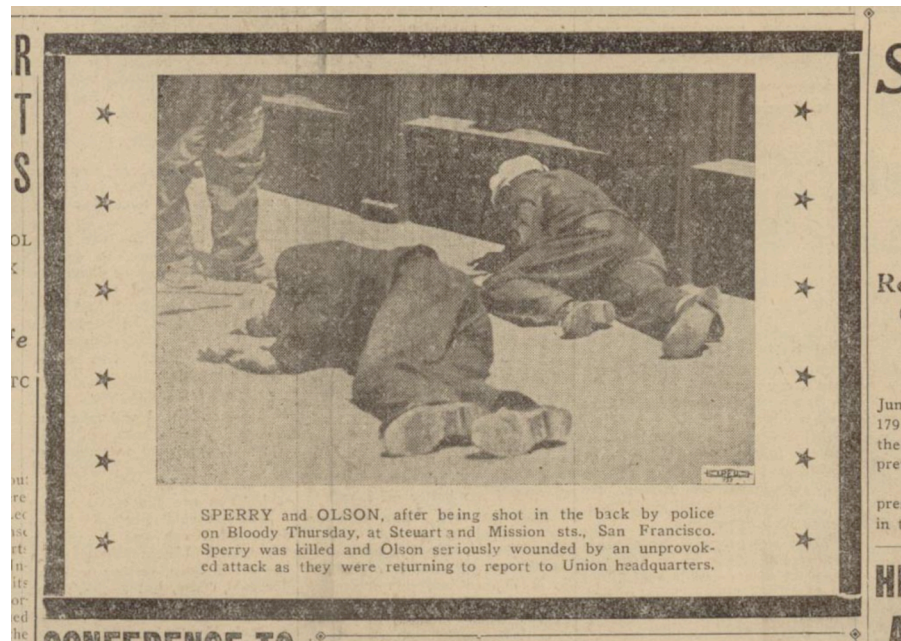
<sup>207</sup> Dorothy Healey and Maurice Isserman, *California Red: a Life in the American Communist Party* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 45-6.

<sup>208</sup> R.A. Emberg, "Fascismo Californianus," *Western Worker*, 5(35) April 30, 1936, 4.

<sup>209</sup> Mieke Bal, "The Pain of Images," *Beautiful Suffering: Photography and the Traffic in Pain*, Mark Reinhardt and Holly Edwards, eds (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 95.

<sup>210</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 49-51.

by the photographers and the victims prevents the distance implied by the documentarian, and also creates the image as a material part of the struggle.



**Figure 2.4 "Sperry and Olson," photograph, *Western Worker*, 4(53) July 4, 1935, 1. Front page photo. Like the image of the fallen Pixley striker, this image was reproduced multiple times.**

Terror in the Popular Front was largely a discourse about bodies. By focusing on bodies, anti-fascist, anti-imperialist and labor union activists could articulate the way strategies of control share common points of articulation. Frequently the *Western Worker* and *People's World* ran front-page photographs of workers and labor organizers wounded by vigilantes and police. Often, the same image would run through multiple stories. During the 1933 Corcoran cotton strike, the same image of a Mexican-American worker shot in the face by vigilantes ran at least three times between 1933 and 1935, each time with a caption drawing attention to the blood

pooling below him (see figure 2.12).<sup>211</sup> Two consecutive issues show the same front page photo of two labor organizers just released from the hospital after beatings by police, displaying their bandages and bruised faces; and yet another gives us close-ups on the jaws of protesters broken by LA's notorious "red squad"; and yet another asks us to "note the bruises" on the "ribs and arms" of a relief worker beaten by deputies "and particularly the pin holes...made by detectives pushing pins on their badges into him" – all of which were front-page photos.<sup>212</sup> These images are often coupled – within the same journal and sometimes on the same page – with photos of dead waterfront workers in the San Francisco general strike, and the bodies of executed guerrillas in Ethiopia, Korea, and China, as well as the bodies of independence activists in Puerto Rico.<sup>213</sup> Given the ocular nature of racial and imperial discourse, the importance of images drawing connections among forms of violence cannot be overstated. To mark bodies in the imperial center as well as the periphery as vulnerable – and on display – draws a parallel between the violence against "visible" bodies of white workers and the power of the state to write violently

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<sup>211</sup> "Worker shot in the face after Pixley Massacre," Photograph, *Western Worker* 2(43) October 23, 1933, 2; "The Great Cotton Strike of 1933," Photograph, *Western Worker* 4(53) July 4, 1935, 3; "Shot Down by Vigilantes," Photograph, *Western Worker* 5(15) February 20, 1936, 3.

<sup>212</sup> "They Asked for Food, and Got This!" Photograph, *Western Worker* 2(5) January 30, 1933, 1; "Strike Leaders Beaten, Jailed," Photograph, *Western Worker* 2(2) July 3, 1933, 1; "Tortured by Military Police," Photograph, *Western Worker* 3(65) November 29, 1934, 1.

<sup>213</sup> "Puerto Ricans Want Freedom," Photograph, *Western Worker* 6(29) April 12, 1937, 3; "Sperry and Olsen Fell," Photograph, *Western Worker* 4(53) July 4, 1935, 1; "Ethiopia --History's Most Savage Bloodbath," Photograph, *Western Worker* 6(81) October 11, 1937, 1,5.



on bodies on the colonial margins. To see the naked – and tortured – torso of a white relief worker beside the mutilated torso of a black guerrilla asks that we imagine empire as a language of what total violence written upon flesh.



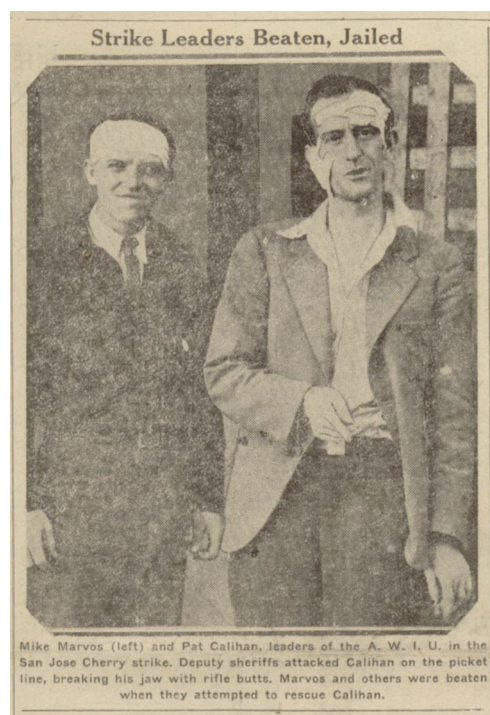
**Figure 2.5 "They Asked for Food and Got This," photograph, *Western Worker* 2(5) January 30, 1933, 3**



**Figure 2.6 "Puerto Ricans Want Freedom,"** photo, *People's Daily World*, 6(29) April 12, 1937, 3. This photo accompanied a story about a strike in the U.S. on the same page



**Figure 2.7 "Tortured by Military Police,"** Photograph, 3(65) November 29, 1934, 1. Front page of the *Western Worker*

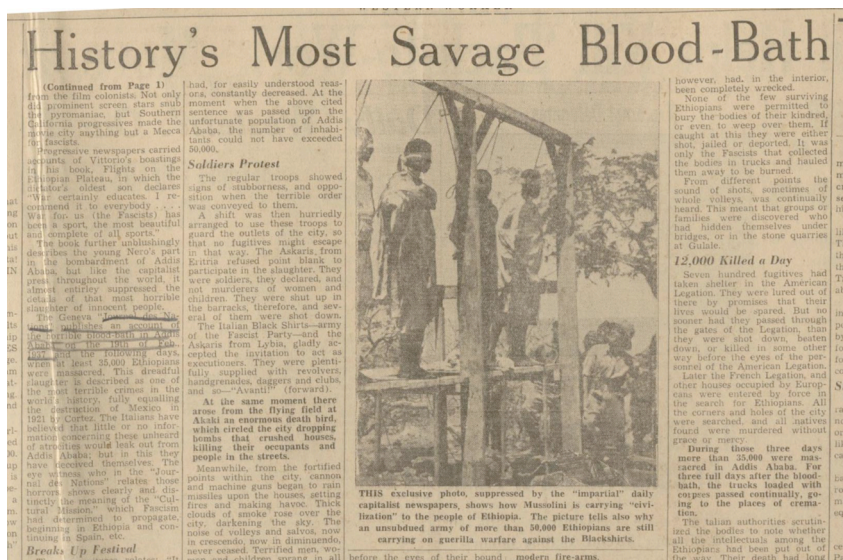


**Figure 2.8 "Strike Leaders Beaten, Jailed," photograph, *Western Worker* 2(27) 7 2, 1933, 1. Front page photo**





**Figure 2.9 Woodcut accompanying reportage about Ethiopia. "Lynching," woodcut, *Western Worker* 4(86) October, 28 1935, 4.**



**Figure 2.10 Ethiopian partisans about to be executed by Italian colonial police. Notice the inversion of the word "savage." "History's Most Savage Bloodblath," photograph, *Western Worker* 6(81) October 11, 1937, 5.**





Figure 2.12 "En Terror en el Salvador," photograph, *Lucha Obrera*, 1(9) February 1934, 4

## The Twin Circulations of Violence: Disrupting the Pathological Public Sphere

As many of the headlines and images suggest, the lynching of African-Americans and the violent suppression of the often non-white labor in California were thought of as part of the same racialized structure of power.<sup>214</sup> California was frequently compared to the South in terms of the level of violence directed at minorities and labor organizers, with Mike Gold referring to "lynch towns" east of Los Angeles and the Communist Party frequently associating anti-labor violence with the Klan, as in a dramatic cartoon of muscular workers knocking out a Klansman with

<sup>214</sup> Jacqueline Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 24

their fists.<sup>215</sup> As an editorial in *Lucha Obrera* argues, "lynching happens not only in Southern US where the tradition is unleashed against the working masses of black peasants, but also in California...." posing the practice of lynching as less a regional phenomenon than something that occurs in the West as well.<sup>216</sup> Of course, although "lynching" as a discrete practice, that is, hanging by a rope, rarely occurred in California after the turn of the century, the practice of organized violence for ideological, racial, and political ends continued and the term likewise continued to signify contemporary forms of violence. The meaning of "fiery crosses burning on hilltops" described by Carey McWilliams in *Factories in the Fields* and its Southern associations were intentional, both on the part of the perpetrators and in McWilliams' reporting of them.<sup>217</sup>

Racial violence and its representation in California circulated in ways that were remarkably similar to the ways images of lynching circulated in the South. As Jacqueline Goldsby notes in *Spectacular Secret*, the lynching of African-Americans is both "spectacular" and "secretive," relying on formal sources of institutionalized power to strike fear and trauma into the community of its victims, as well as informal networks of circulation to ensure both the deniability of its actors as well as the

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<sup>215</sup> Mike Gold, "Migratory Intellectuals," *New Masses*, December 15, 1936 (21), 27; "Onward Men, All Hell Can't Stop Us," Cartoon, *Western Worker* 1(26) July 28, 1932, 4.

<sup>216</sup> "Nuestro Deber y Los Linchamientos," *Lucha Obrera*, trans. by author and Jaime Posford, 1(8), January 1934, 4.

<sup>217</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields: History of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, (1939, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 6

claims to justice of its victims.<sup>218</sup> The "normalized invisibility" of lynching in which lynching practices and photographs circulated widely within broad but circumscribed communities, allowed for lynching to both be pervasive as well as absent in public life.<sup>219</sup> In the San Joaquin Valley, editorials advocating concentration camps and firing squads circulated widely, yet did not make it the newspapers in the urban centers.<sup>220</sup> On a purely practical level, this doubling discourse of public spectacle and public silence allowed vigilante squads employed by the California Growers' Association to operate freely and openly without risk of censure. As Carey McWilliams notes, the urban middle class could both be aware "fiery crosses burning on hilltops" in the San Joaquin Valley and simultaneously ignore them as aberrations of the "heat counties."<sup>221</sup>

The Communist Party and left unions' decision to publicize the images was precisely designed to disrupt the normalized way in which such images circulated. Coinciding with the NAACP's decision to publicize – rather than suppress lynching photographs – this practice forces the images of violence to appear where they are not expected.<sup>222</sup> Images of violence appearing on the front page of large-run circulation

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>220</sup> <sup>220</sup> "Facing the Bullpen" *Corcoran News* October 20, 1933, quoted in Paul Taylor, *On the Ground in the Thirties* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith Inc., 1983), 53.

<sup>221</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields*, 6

<sup>222</sup> Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, 250. Walter White, the chair of the NAACP, decided for the first time to use the NAACP's resources to publish lynching photographs in 1931.



newspapers in urban areas, the images thus draw attention to the public's denial of their existence. The images of terror appearing unexpectedly emphasize two planes of knowledge, one "official" discourse of the rational and universalist state and another semi-public sphere in which acts of racial violence circulate. This double discourse of violence relies on two separate planes of knowledge and visibility, one for the citizen-subject in which criminality is officially impersonal, and another in which bodies are marked for discipline outside of the public eye. In this sense, the photographs circulated by anti-lynching and labor activists served to not only interrupt the orderly circulation of knowledge as it supports a practice of violence, but to also draw attention to the way the penal system's invisibility is structured on a hypervisibility that could not be acknowledged. Calls for violence regularly circulated in local newspapers of towns such as Corcoran and Delano, yet did not manage to make it into national and urban newspapers like the *San Francisco Chronicle* or the *New York Times*. The very fact that Paul Taylor and Carey McWilliams would often do little more than republish statements and editorials from local papers in their works suggests that the publication of this information for a national audience implicitly violated dominant circuits of communication.<sup>223</sup>

Much the way lynching photos that circulate both in private and public spheres, these images were viewed in what I suggest was a twin circulation, both within Communist Party and labor newspapers and the publications of well known

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<sup>223</sup> Paul Taylor especially extensively quoted local newspapers and editorials in his reportage, and McWilliams often quoted local officials in *Factories in the Fields*. Paul Taylor, *On the Ground in the Thirties* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith Inc., 1983).

authors and artists like Paul Taylor and Walker Evans. The NAACP as well as writers like McWilliams and Taylor used editorials and statements from local officials in their publications to create an alternative sphere of meaning, publicizing statements meant only for the agricultural communities in which they were written. And while Goldsby writes of the "pathological public sphere" constructed by the circulation of "private" lynching photographs in semi-public venues, images of terror taken by labor activists relied on multiple forms of circulation precisely because the public sphere did not grant sufficient space for this form of critique.<sup>224</sup> Indeed, a 1933 book *The Crime of Cuba* by well-known journalist Carleton Beals featured photographs by California photographer Walter Evans, in which Evans included two images by anonymous Cuban activists of murdered labor organizers (see figures 2.13 and 2.14). Evans and Beals, with access to a public sphere and audience that the anonymous activists -- like their U.S. counterparts -- lacked, relied on the publication of the book to release the images. Also, in Paul Taylor's *On the Ground in the 1930s* includes an image that circulated at least three times in the *Western Worker* before being used by Taylor, of a wounded, and possibly dying striker in the Pixley massacre (see figure 2.2). This combination of marginal and mainstream modes of communication is a common feature of Popular Front culture, and it also suggests that these images -- unlike the production of the *Grapes* narrative -- circulated from mass movements to the center.

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<sup>224</sup> Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, 241.



**Figure 2.13 "Document of the Terror" by an anonymous photographer, from Walker Evans and Carleton Beals' *The Crime of Cuba* (Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott, 1933), plate 26**



**Figure 2.14 "Gonzalez Rubiera" by an anonymous photographer, *The Crime of Cuba*, Plate 28**

Critic Elaine Scarry also writes of the way torture's power resides precisely in the construction of a semi-public sphere based on unacknowledged structures of "pathological" feeling. On the one hand, torture is a spectacle, and she cites the way in which torture facilities in South Vietnam, Pinochet's Chile, and U.S. occupied Philippines were referred to in "torturer's idiom" the "cinema room," the "blue lit stage," or the "production room."<sup>225</sup> While Scarry uses the facilities' names to highlight the "dramatic structure" of torture, these names also suggest the way in which images and rhetorics of torture circulate as spectacle. As Paul Taylor cites

<sup>225</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 28.

during the 1933 Pixley cotton strike in California, editorials from small town papers like *The Corcoran News* threatened "concentration camps," forced medical procedures including delousing and vaccinations, and deportation; other newspapers threatened "dead Mexicans in the streets" if the strike continued.<sup>226</sup> While the *LA Times* editorialized shortly after the Pixley strike that due to the havoc of the cotton strike, "the time for the scotching" of the "Communistic menace...among the olive pickers" was "now," such specific threats as murder or concentration camps were absent.<sup>227</sup> Thus the power of both the rhetorical violence of such editorials and the real violence they inspire in armed vigilante organizations is precisely dependent upon the power to control the circulation of violence and to speak for those to whom it is directed. And like McWilliams' "fiery crosses on hilltops" they are meant to be both seen by one constituency (the farmworker) and ignored by another (the urban liberal). The mastery of these separate planes of knowledge within the same public sphere is necessary to "convert the prisoner's pain into the torturer's power."<sup>228</sup>

As Goldsby notes, images of lynching "helped shape the experience and meaning of American "seeing" at the start of the twentieth century," with images and films of sensational racialized violence used to narrate early motion pictures with *Birth of a Nation* and *Avenging a Crime; Or Burned at the Stake*.<sup>229</sup> In many ways,

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<sup>226</sup> Taylor quoting the *Corcoran News* and the *Tulare Advance Register* in *On the Ground in the 1930s*, 52, 58.

<sup>227</sup> "Temporizing with Disorder," editorial, *Los Angeles Times*, Oct 28, 1933, A4.

<sup>228</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 58.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

one could say these images participate in this culture as a means to construct a language of critique. Yet rather than naturalize violence as legitimate or unavoidable, these images create a language of critique by their presence in unexpected contexts and without such legitimization. They often draw attention to the vulnerability and pain of the body, and they appear within a public sphere that does not officially acknowledge them. As scholar Denise da Silva points out, imperialism is a global language of "total violence" on bodies of color that renames itself as governments and regimes of knowledge shift.<sup>230</sup> Thus terror became a portable and reproducible visual short-hand to refer to the intrinsic nature of imperial domination, and to construct a moral cultural outrage at its more desperate acts. While fascism, anti-labor violence, imperialism, anti-communism, and counter-insurgency may seem spatially, politically, and discursively separate, the very sameness of terror's discourse renders them as part of the same system.

### **Ola de Terror Anti-Obrerista: The Communist Spanish-Language Press in California and the Popular Front**

Given the racially charged context of labor relations in California, it's not surprising that the journal in California most dedicated to making the spectacle of terror public is the Spanish-language Communist Party paper, *Lucha Obrera*. During the two years of *Lucha Obrera's* run, it offered weekly updates about deportations, national organizations opposing deportations and violations of the rights of the foreign born, correspondence to and from Mexico between members who had been or

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<sup>230</sup> Denise Ferreira Da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 267.

were facing deportation, regular news about labor in Mexico and Central America, frequent analysis and reports about U.S. imperial involvement in Latin America, and translated into Spanish key headlines from English-language Communist dailies. Repeatedly, the news-journal suggested connections among immigration raids and vigilante violence, deportations and lynching, U.S. imperialism, and European fascism. In an October, 1934 article entitled "Ola de Terror Anti-Obrerista" the article explains that the "anti-worker terror" included the use of "immigration officers to intimidate Mexican workers."<sup>231</sup> Several months earlier, the paper ran an editorial exhorting readers to protest against mass deportations to Mexico, framing the injustice in the language of anti-fascist civil liberties, protesting the "breaking down of doors," the use of "stool pigeons," and the frequent questioning of political beliefs and the deportation of anyone – citizen or not – who belonged to Communist Party and was of Mexican descent.<sup>232</sup> In framing the immigration raids as violations of racial, political, and First Amendment rights, the article suggests that we consider immigration officers as comparable to the Guardia Civil, Gestapo, and other secret police agencies. The paper particularly called on Mexican-American activists to join with prominent anti-fascist organizations like the Committee for the Protection of Foreign Workers and the International Labor Defense, and also sought to tie the growing concern about fascist governments in South America to their use of border

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<sup>231</sup> Coresponsal Obrero (Worker Correspondent), "Ola de Terror Anti-Obrerista," *Lucha Obrera*, Translated by author and Jaime Posford, 1(13) October 1934, 1.

<sup>232</sup> "Por La Lucha Unida Contra Deportaciones," *Lucha Obrera*, trans. by author and Jaime Posford, 2(6) June 1934, 4.

patrol agents and national ID cards.<sup>233</sup> Together, such articles suggested a *hemispheric* concept of "fascism" that was concerned as much with governments in Italy and Germany, as with racist policies in the U.S. and anti-communist governments in Latin America. In doing so, "fascism" becomes a way to link violence against workers of Mexican descent in the U.S. and U.S. imperialism in the Global South.

In addition to creating a transnational voice for workers of Mexican descent, *Lucha Obrera* also created an internationalist representation of lynching and racial violence. In an article titled "El Terror en La America Latina," the author describes how U.S. backed regimes have also created popular, fascist parties, the Milicia Nacional in Chile and the Gold Shirts in Mexico, which do the bidding of U.S. multinational corporations.<sup>234</sup> While the connection of fascism and imperialism bears mention, the article is accompanied by two lynching photographs of executed communists in El Salvador (figure 2.10). As the article connects fascism with the reach of the U.S. in the Latin South, so also, the article visually connects the public spectacle of lynching to the U.S. backed fascist regimes. In connecting the practice of lynching with the political practice of fascism and imperialism, the article forces the reader to consider an implicit historical connections between slave practices in the south and the construction of U.S. imperialism abroad. As mentioned earlier, an editorial in *Lucha Obrera* argues, "lynching happens not only in Southern US...but

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<sup>233</sup> "¡Luchese Contra Las Deportaciones!" *Lucha Obrera*, 1(9) February 1934, 4.

<sup>234</sup> "El Terror en La America Latina," *Lucha Obrera*, trans. by author and Jaime Posford. 1(9) February 1934, 4

also in California...." challenges the not only the presumption that lynching is a uniquely Southern practice, but also the idea that it is merely a question of civil liberties and law enforcement.<sup>235</sup> As Ken Gonzales-Day argues, the function of public lynching in California was not merely "law and order." He points to the way the spectacle of lynching existed side-by-side with a modern, bureaucratic form of law in which the functions of the state occur away from public view.<sup>236</sup> The function was less a form of criminal punishment or an official aspect of the penal code than the "legal and social privilege" of Anglo-Americans over residents of Mexican and Indian descent.<sup>237</sup>

Thus the language of "terror" not only creates an international visual and rhetorical lexicon to connect the disparate practices of racial and imperial violence, but such representations also crucially interrogate assumptions about the artificial boundaries separating deportation, lynching, anti-labor violence, and the violence of imperial domination. *Lucha Obrera*, rather than forcing a Mexican-American readership to conform to mainstream anti-fascism, implicitly challenges the anti-fascist movement to see issues central to the Mexican-American community as central to their concerns. In a cartoon in *Lucha Obrera* above an editorial "Que es Fascismo?," a multi-racial crowd of workers with clubs emblazoned with the names

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<sup>235</sup> "Nuestro Deber y Los Linchamientos," *Lucha Obrera*, trans. by author and Jaime Posford, 1(8), January 1934, 4.

<sup>236</sup> Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West: 1850-1935*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 34.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.



of Communist organizations rally together, promising they will fight back.<sup>238</sup> While images of multi-racial marches were common in Communist and other left newspapers, it was not uncommon for the white worker to dominate the frame, as in a 1933 cartoon in which a white farm worker in a cowboy hat is flanked by a Mexican-American and African-American farm workers during a Kings County cotton strike.<sup>239</sup> In an image of worker solidarity that ran in *Lucha Obrera*, the faces of the workers have been darkened slightly by the artist, suggesting a movement that is both multi-racial at the same time it is exclusively for workers of color. This image creates both a universal language of anti-fascism as well as one based on the celebration of a racialized subjectivity.

Yet in doing so, *Lucha Obrera* also encouraged the Mexican-American community in the U.S. to see commonalities among struggles in the U.S. and struggles in Mexico. The paper featured letters by deported workers about conditions in Mexico that connect struggles on both sides of the for greater government assistance. In a letter quoted beside an article about the transnational maritime strike in 1934, the writer wishes to make clear that Mexican workers are in solidarity with their northern comrades.<sup>240</sup> Likewise, *Lucha Obrera* continually highlighted cross-

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<sup>238</sup> "¡Con Estas Armas Atacaremos!" Cartoon, *Lucha Obrera*, trans. by author, 2(3) March, 1934, 4.

<sup>239</sup> "Boss Tricks Cannot Break Workers Ranks," cartoon, *Western Worker*, 2(43) October 23, 1933, 1.

<sup>240</sup> Luis Gonzales, "Carta De México," *Lucha Obrera*, trans. by author and Jaime Posford, 1(9) February 1934, 2; Executive Committee of the Independent Union of Marine Workers, "Como La Clase Obrera Mexicana Apoyo La Huelga Del Pacifico," *Lucha Obrera*, trans. by author and Jaime Posford, 1(12) September 1934, 2.

border labor solidarity against deportations, reporting on joint TUUL-CSUM actions in Washington D.C. and simultaneous support rallies both in the U.S. and Mexico.<sup>241</sup>

While *Lucha Obrera* is singular in the attention it gives to transnational acts of violence and cross-border acts of solidarity, it is not fundamentally different from other left publications in California at the time that were making similar connections. Many of the leading activists in Mexican American community such as Emma Tenayuca and the editor of *Lucha Obrera* Pete Garcia saw themselves as part of a larger anti-fascist movement, at the same time they also understood themselves as organic leaders of their own communities. Tenayuca, the leader of one of the largest strikes in Texan history, was also active in the League Against War and Fascism, the largest anti-fascist group in the U.S., and Mensalves was president of UCAPAWA, one of the more integrated unions on the West Coast. And while less biographical information is known about Garcia, he frequently appeared as a speaker at labor rallies up and down California. Despite its short life, *Lucha Obrera* stands as an important document of kinds of multi-ethnic and transnational movements that existed in California before the Cold War.

## Conclusion

Through the West Coast Communist, anti-fascist, and labor newspapers, one can see that the terms "anti-fascist" and "farm-labor" came to be laden with an anti-imperial valences not understood in other times of U.S. history. In part, this has to do

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<sup>241</sup> "Llamado de la CSUM a la TUUL Para la Acción Conjunta," *Lucha Obrera*, trans. by author and Jaime Posford, 2(6) June 1934, 4.

with the way anti-imperialism has been marginalized within historical and popular accounts of anti-fascism, as well as for individual groups like the American League Against War and Fascism, and its supporters in the CIO, communist, and socialist parties. And, as the images of terror suggest, there is a specificity to fascism in California that goes beyond even the concern for civil liberties one sees in the LaFollette Committee or the ACLU. By connecting racial practices of the U.S. in the fields of the San Joaquin Valley to the Philippines, it exposes the myth of the U.S. as an "accidental empire" at the same time it suggests that internal expansion and racialization within the bounds of the nation are part of the same colonial process. Likewise, one can see the ways that these news journals circulated competing discourses within the field of Popular Front, challenging much of the often conservative New Deal imagery that dominates the cultural memory of the Depression. More than simply offer critique, one can also see through labor newspapers like *UCAPAWA News* and socialist newspapers like *Lucha Obrera*, cross-race and cross-language anti-fascist alliances took place within the California Popular Front, making the need as well as the institutional basis for such imagery a reality. Not only can these journals suggest an alternate map to read social movements within the Depression, they also suggest that the construction of the Popular Front as a national-popular movement was contested at the time. This forces us to consider the way in which even progressive scholarship has remembered a 20-year social movement, as well as some of the major tropes by which the movement is remembered. As Amy Kaplan writes of Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*, it is not only an anti-fascist spectacle, but a precise critique of the way in which imperial conquest

abroad is reflected and refracted within both the domestic as well as the political space of the U.S. nation.<sup>242</sup> Yet one can also place the film based loosely on the life of Hearst within a spectrum of anti-imperialist discourse, in which it emerges as only the most well known, if perhaps one of the less radical. In this sense, the journals can act to recenter a social movement closely associated with national belonging and suggest a new way to read it, with the periphery as it were, at the center. This is not to say that we should think of the Popular Front as an anti-imperialist movement, so much as to say that anti-imperialism was a constitutive part of way in which labor was imagined.

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<sup>242</sup> Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 167-70.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **An Inland Empire: Fascism, Farm Labor and the Memory of 1848**

*If the strike continues...every last one of you will be gathered into one huge bull pen and given the opportunity of proving your right to be in this country. What will a bull pen mean to you? Many of you don't know how the United States government can run a concentration camp....*

Corcoran News, October 20, 1933.<sup>243</sup>

*Driving into the Valley, you had the feeling of leaving the United States behind you*  
Dorothy Healey, labor organizer for the CAWIU.<sup>244</sup>

The contradiction articulated by these two quotes crystallizes a central tension within representation of farm labor in the 1930s. The idea that there is nothing "more American" than a concentration camp and yet that to witness such conditions one "leaves America behind" expresses neatly the seemingly contradictory discourse of U.S. empire: both the exception to American life and its fullest expression. The decade of the 1930s witnessed the first major, sustained challenge to the concentrated power of the agri-business elite that dominated California social and economic life since the late 1880s. The challenge in the thirties came in the form of a massive, region-wide effort at farm-worker unionization, with major strikes by Mexican-American, black, Filipina/o, and white migrant workers occurring every year from hands of government and non-government forces sponsored by the growers, including deportations, killings, and temporary concentration camps. Many of the workers

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<sup>243</sup> "Facing the Bullpen" *Corcoran News* October 20, 1933, quoted in Paul Taylor, *On the Ground in the Thirties* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith Inc., 1983), 53.

<sup>244</sup> Dorothy Healey and Maurice Isserman, *California Red: A Life in the American Communist Party*, (1990, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 44-5.

carried with them memories of the Mexican Revolution and the U.S. occupation of the Philippines, and many of the organizers and cultural producers engaged in the struggle shared an anti-imperialist sensibility that understood the power of the agribusiness elite to be a form of colonial domination. While many excellent histories have already been written regarding both the farm labor movement in the 1930s, as well as the formation of new Mexican-American and Filipino identities in the same period, I would like to discuss the way three writers and activists, Carlos Bulosan, Emma Tenayuca, and Carey McWilliams, conceived of the struggle in colonial terms -- the way in which the invasion of Mexico by the U.S. reemerged in the 1930s as a kind of collective reference point to articulate the contours of a new social movement.<sup>245</sup> More than this, I would argue that the three figures themselves represent concise distillations of the Popular Front in California: a multi-ethnic, multi-dimensional movement caught in the often contradictory language of democratic belonging and anti-imperialist critique.

The U.S. conquest of Mexico is a kind of "spectral presence" in the histories, fiction, and popular culture of the thirties California left, often mobilizing the

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<sup>245</sup> For the formation of Mexican-American and Filipino-American identities, the following three titles give good overviews of the 1930s: David G. Gutiérrez, *Halls and Mirrors: Mexican-Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, third ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); and Dorothy Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). For contemporary labor histories of the multiracial agricultural work force in the 30s and 40s, these two titles give good overviews: Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers: 1870-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

memory of 1848 as a means to narrate the violence and social dislocation of the period.<sup>246</sup> Whether it's an attempt to understand the colonial patterns of land-ownership, contract labor, mass deportations, the terrible violence visited upon laboring bodies by state-sponsored actors, or the racialized nature of state and federal aid, 1848 re-emerges as a crucial site of return from which the lineage of the varying discourses of power can be traced. Like other theories of haunting that focus on the role of the uncanny for an imperial history the U.S. would like to forget, left intellectuals and popular culture myths like the California bandit Joaquín Murrieta used the "absent presence" of the U.S.-Mexico War to create bonds of solidarity among racialized victims of violence and to link the white business elite with an imperial venture. In this sense, the tale of Joaquín Murrieta became the perfect vehicle to express the many contradictions of Popular Front discourse around the U.S. West and its imperial legacy. At once part of the romantic myth of California – the various legends feature a landscape of abundance and an adventurous departure from Murrieta's humble beginnings – Murrieta's story is also one of dispossession, ethnic cleansing, and spectacular violence. In this sense, the "haunting" of 1848 is at once a Benjaminian project, using a silenced historical memory to narrate a present moment of crisis, as well as a mass cultural trope addressing the many contradictions of the social modernism of the 1930s and the U.S. West.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> For the term "spectral presence" see Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

As an historical analytic for these writers, it's important to note that other attempts by Popular Front authors to construct a usable past involves stories of successful liberation: the Haitian Revolution as with C.L.R James, Orson Welles, and Guy Endore, or the story of slave emancipation for W.E.B. Du Bois and William Aptheker. The project of historical memory in California is often not the story of successful revolt, but of failed rebellion, conquest, displacement, and violence. In the second section of this chapter, I look at the many stagings of the story of Joaquín Murrieta, the Sonoran outlaw who took revenge on the U.S. invaders for the murder of his family and eventually was gunned down and decapitated by U.S. state militiamen. The figure of Joaquín Murrieta dominated both discourses of the anti-colonial revolution and containment, as the promise of Mexican-American unionization held for many both the dream and the fear of Murrieta's social banditry. For some, like Mexican-American folk singers and radical organizers, Murrieta appears as a national hero; for liberal New Dealers in Hollywood, his story becomes a sympathetic if cautionary tale of what can happen if racist vigilantism goes unchecked. Either way, explaining U.S. imperial conquest is central to articulations of power; indeed, one might say that it is the central fact of an emerging labor consciousness in California.

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<sup>247</sup> "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger." Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations* (1955; New York: Schocken Books, Harcourt, Brace, & Jovanovich, 1968), 255.



Even for those writers whose political imaginary may be as much engaged in imperial nostalgia as critique, the discursive return to 1848 seems to be a cultural flashpoint of articulation that unites many authors together within a shared field of reference. That the referent is unstable in its meaning also suggests that the narratives of labor and anti-fascism were contested, even among members of the same movement. As a movement that simultaneously critiqued U.S. empire and embraced U.S. democracy, the U.S. conquest of Mexico became a perfect articulation for that contradiction. If part of John Steinbeck's lament lay in fact that "white and American" yeoman who can trace their lineage to the democratic beginnings of the American Revolution cannot settle and become farmers in California, he, like many others, lay the blame at "imperial greed" of the state's original Anglo invaders.<sup>248</sup>

Yet in one sense, for many of these writers, the U.S. invasion of Mexico was not merely a metaphor. As Mike Davis writes in his history of vigilantism on the West Coast, the 1846-47 war of conquest in California was "but a prelude to the protracted, incomparably more violent predations of Anglo gangs, filibusters, and vigilantes" that stole native and Californio land in the 1850s.<sup>249</sup> While the rapid land theft, or "accumulation by dispossession," had reached its limit by the end of the

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<sup>248</sup> Michael Denning quotes extensively from John Steinbeck's pamphlet, *Their Blood is Strong*, in which Steinbeck openly declares California's future lay in the hands of "white and American" farmers, *The Cultural Front* (London: Verso, 1998) 267. See also John Steinbeck's description of the conquest of California in *The Grapes of Wrath* where he discusses the "laziness" of the Mexicans and the "American greed for land," (New York: Penguin Books, 1967) 297.

<sup>249</sup> Mike Davis, "'What Is a Vigilante Man?' White Violence in California History," *No One is Illegal: Fighting Racism and State Violence on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), 21.

decade as most of the arable land was under Anglo title by that time, the mode of social organization that secured the native genocide and land theft – the vigilance committee – had become a firm fixture of the California political structure. While the image of the vigilante in popular cultural memory is of a citizen who claims the right to act because the state is either absent or corrupt, Davis is clear that the roots of vigilantism lay in the imperial quest for land and gold, and that participants were often members of a hegemonic elite.<sup>250</sup> Indeed, Davis' long essay primarily concerns the 100-year continuity of institutionalized private violence that can trace its roots to the annexation of California, condoned if not participated in by elites to maintain a racialized structure of power. Citing the first vigilantes as death squads with the singular aim to dispossess natives of their land, Davis creates a continuity from Indian genocide, to anti-Chinese riots, to anti-labor and anti-IWW violence, to the Associated Farmers' "fascist" control of the Central Valley. In doing so, we can consider imperial violence and power as an ongoing project. The invasion of Mexico and "1848" is not a memory, then, but rather a lived present. As a starting point, there is a literalness to Bulosan, McWilliams and Tenayuca's use of empire to narrate their current struggle. And likewise, one can't help but read the explosion of Murrieta myths during the decade as an acknowledgement, even by Hollywood, that the U.S.-Mexico War is still being fought.

To represent lynching, vigilantes, and racism as central to conceptions of California, these writers radically displace narratives of U.S. westward expansion in

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 18, 20-6.

which mythologies of California are central. As Tomás Almaguer writes in *Racial Fault Lines*, the foundation of California along republican ideals was also based on racial exclusion. U.S.-European immigrants to California often imagined themselves as inheritors of the “free labor” tradition, emphasizing self-sufficiency, the small-landholder, and individualism as defining traits – often explicitly against the landed estates of the Californio elite, slave-holders of the U.S. South, and those defined as lacking the racial stock needed for self-reliance: blacks, native Americans, and Asians were regarded as threats on the assumption that slavery, pre-industrial ways of life, and peonage were racially encoded.<sup>251</sup> To place racial and anti-labor violence at the center of an imaginary of California thus complicates any claim that California would be free of the kinds of racial antagonism over labor that characterized the U.S. South and the race riots of the Northeast. It likewise challenges the specific racial binary that was produced by this discourse as well – as inherent parts of their competing civilizations, it was often assumed by purveyors of this ideology that the free-labor ideal was necessarily “Anglo-Saxon,” and yet it is very clear that labor – white and non-white in much of California – is far from “free”.<sup>252</sup> Indeed, while McWilliams demonstrates that the Spanish colonists employed “slave labor,” US entrepreneurs perfected the hacienda system, institutionalizing and industrializing

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<sup>251</sup> Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Faultlines: The Historical Roots of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 33.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 32-3; Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 298.

it.<sup>253</sup> This perspective not only refutes the Western conceit of progress, it also denies an easy othering of California's racialized past, and as importantly, a separation of California from the "original sin" of slavery. Californio civilization is not safely contained in a picturesque past, but haunts the present in its most reactionary form, and racial violence is not contained to the South, but is the foundation for the West's most utopian state. For these writers, it is clear that the Anglo "colonial empire of California" and the entire U.S. West is firmly a product of the U.S. conquest of Mexico, and is more like the U.S. South than an escape from it.

It is thus significant that the first poem to appear in Carlos Bulosan's journal *The New Tide* is a chronicle of the invasion and occupation of Mexico City in 1847 by General Winfield Scott's forces in the U.S.-Mexico War. In 1934, Chris Mensalvas, who went on to be elected president of Local 7 of United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), and Carlos Bulosan who was perhaps the best-known Filipino writer at mid-century, co-edited *The New Tide*, in which their poems and stories appeared with those of other working class Filipino, Mexican-American, and Euro-American writers. In the two issues that appeared in 1934 before the demise of the journal, *The New Tide* included a poem by William Carlos Williams, as well as a story by a prominent U.S. Filipino writer living in the U.S., José Garcia Villa. This attention to both the left-literary mainstream represented by Williams and a national and anti-imperialist consciousness suggested by the inclusion of Villa is not accidental, as much as it may productively complicate

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<sup>253</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields: History of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, (1939, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 47.

the historical record of proletarian literary journals. Indeed, on at least two historical websites devoted to Bulosan and Filipino history, *The New Tide* was referred to as a "Filipino journal," while another wrote that it was an "ILWU organ."<sup>254</sup> While these sorts of misunderstandings are not ubiquitous, they do nonetheless suggest a certain ambivalence around the generic expectations of both proletarian literature and the editorial intent of racially-conscious activist-intellectuals like Mesalves and Bulosan. Neither a "race journal" (in the 30s lexicon) nor devoted solely to labor issues, *The New Tide* expressed a literary sensibility that was neither and both.

The poem at once celebrates the resistance of the Mexican army to the U.S. invasion, as well as lists atrocities committed by U.S. Marines upon breaching the walls of the city. The poem forces an identification with the residents of Mexico City as it shifts from accounts of atrocities committed by a "Marauding, hungry foreign band/With gringo guns on every hand," to heroic acts of resistance "against the hateful stripe and star" that are both victorious in setting "the Yank in flight." As the Mexicans are overtaken, so the narrative of the poem itself comes to an end, finishing on their drumbeat of "cursed dismal doom."<sup>255</sup> It is clear that the writer identifies with Mexico, and refers to the "snake and eagle" as "our flag" and the U.S. as an

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<sup>254</sup> Historylink.org: The Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History. "Carlos Bulosan," [http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file\\_id=5202](http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=5202) (accessed June 28, 2008). Ricardo Ramos, "Review of 'On Becoming Filipino,'" *epinion.com*, [http://www.epinions.com/review/On\\_Becoming\\_Filipino\\_Selected\\_Writings\\_of\\_Carlos\\_Bulosan\\_by\\_Carlos\\_Bulosan/content\\_137548959364](http://www.epinions.com/review/On_Becoming_Filipino_Selected_Writings_of_Carlos_Bulosan_by_Carlos_Bulosan/content_137548959364) (accessed June 28, 2008).

<sup>255</sup> H.E. Curtis, "Drums of Doom," *The New Tide* 1(1) October-November, 1934, 7. Special Collections, Poetry Periodicals Collection, State University of New York, Buffalo.

"alien...North Empire." The U.S. military is presented as both vampiric and inhuman, U.S. soldiers are "columns, columns, columns, columns...cannons, rumbling drums...bayonettes...gun" whose only human act, eating, is framed as a kind of imperial cannibalism, as "each well-drilled man is daily fed/By pouncing on our motherland."

With these images, the Mexican resistance against the U.S. is reimagined as a Popular Front struggle against racism and fascism. In the final stanza, the U.S. reveals itself as a slave empire. The Confederate "Stars and Bars," replace the "Stripe and Star" from an earlier stanza, as the flag is raised over Mexico City. As the "Stars and Bars" replaces "the Eagle and Snake," it's clear that the defeat is not only for Mexico, but for a mestizo republic that outlawed slavery with independence. The violence of the invasion suffered by Native Americans, African-American slaves, and Mexicans recalls cross-racial alliances against Southern landowners and California agribusiness. Posing the "Indian's right" against the Confederate flag suggests a linking of discourses of slavery with discourses of Westward expansion and colonial conquest. And perhaps what is most interesting in the poem is its focus on the disembodied nature of the U.S. military. Rendered as fusions of machine and insect, "steel centipedes of sword and fire," and as mechanically "well-drilled" pairs of "glittering bayonettes," the poem recalls a powerful language of anti-fascism that centered on the mechanical, modernized capacity of the fascist state to commit acts of violence. Suggesting Hemingway's "mechanized doom" and Orson Welles' "doom machines" from "War of the Worlds" the poem implicitly links an anti-fascist imaginary with the invasion of Mexico. In the same way Welles' futuristic radioplays

raised the question of the contemporary context, so this poem connects the language of international anti-fascism with the local racial politics of California.

It should also be noted that this poem appeared in a journal that was both one of several prominent proletarian literary journals on the West Coast, and also, in Bulosan's words, "the first of its kind to be published by Filipinos in the United States."<sup>256</sup> In this sense, *The New Tide*, which appeared twice in 1934, was more like than unlike other radical journals of the period in California, covering topics that ranged from lynching to colonial alienation for a multi-racial working class audience. The first edition included two stories about lynching, a long prose-poem by Mensalvas that mediates colonial displacement through the trope of sexual encounters, a poem by Bulosan on the psychological toil of migration, and numerous stories and poems about unemployment and the strain of joblessness and its effects on family and the domestic sphere, in addition to the poem I quote above, on the U.S. conquest of Mexico.

The two lynching stories, "Only a Damned Nigger," and "A Necktie Party," both focus on the absence of legal status or claims to identity for African-Americans in the South: neither lynching involves a criminal act, nor is the absence of criminality a concern on the part of the lynch-mob. The first story concludes when a young girl admits to an indifferent sheriff that she wasn't attacked; the second story concludes when the overseer presumed to be murdered by his African-American

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<sup>256</sup> Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart* (1939; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), 193-4.

share-cropper mysteriously reappears without even a wound.<sup>257</sup> As a method to display the regularity of the practice as well as its symbolic nature, the lynchings themselves are highly ritualized: the police give a formal and scripted pretense of resistance; a lynching is moved from a landowner's property to a "neutral" site by a creek; at one point a lyncher is prevented from cutting off the victim's testes as "this ain't no rape case."<sup>258</sup> While the "point" of lynching in both seems to be not only the racial exercise of power, but a kind of social excess – references to "frenzy," "sport," and even sexual sadism – both focus more on the legal state of non-being of African-Americans and the repeated insistence that no crime even need to take place for lynching/auto-da-fe to take place.<sup>259</sup>

This is significant, as the two poems by Bulosan in the journal, "Cry Against Chaos" and "The Foreigner," also focus on a similar state of non-being, repeatedly chanting "we are dead" in "Cry," and in a more pointed reference to a lynching, the "fear" of the foreigner who eventually "burn themselves/with their own fire."<sup>260</sup> Both

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<sup>257</sup> Forrest T. Frazier, "Only a Damned Nigger," *The New Tide* 1(1) October-November, 1934, 19-20, Special Collections, Poetry Periodicals Collection, State University of New York, Buffalo; H.L. Dickerson, "A Necktie Party," *The New Tide* 1(1) October-November, 1934, 24-8.

<sup>258</sup> Dickerson, 27.

<sup>259</sup> Frazier, 19-20; Dickerson, 26-8.

<sup>260</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). Agamben describes the *homo sacer* as a human being reduced to 'bare life,' legally excluded from rights and citizenship, paradoxically, as a function of law. Agamben gives the example of Jews stripped of citizenship before being sent to extermination camps, and others have interpreted the legal distinction of "enemy combatant" by the Bush administration as a legally defined *homo sacer*.



the anti-lynching stories as well as Bulosan's poetry about the status of the migrant worker suggest that *homo sacer* – the legal non-person – is socially dead in the eyes of the law. Stripped of rights, and living in a state in which the power structure can act with impunity, Bulosan uses metaphors of a self-imposed ritual burning and the darkness of a spiritual coma to express the emotional world of this form of statelessness. In a sense, Bulosan is playing on the double meaning of "stateless," both one without legal citizenship as well as an existential state of non-being. Thus thematically, the position of a colonial subject and a victim of lynching in South are linked by their racialized legal status as well as their subjective negative state enforced by a racist social structure.

Stories in *The New Tide* that concern lynching, the loss of a domestic sphere due to overwork or unemployment, and the policing of sexuality and prostitution by medical and civil authorities construct a continual thread throughout the journal, expressing concerns for spaces of social reproduction. As later world-system theorists like Immanuel Wallerstein point out, workers in colonial and neo-colonial countries operate both within and outside of the formal "labor sector," meaning their experience of exploitation falls outside of the standard representation of the first world working class.<sup>261</sup> In the Mensalves poem "Fifteen Farewells," the successive loss of each new girlfriend is cast in implicit racial terms: he writes that he "knew he lost them forever" when he remembers that his one "American" girlfriend "Marjorie"

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<sup>261</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, "Production of Capital," *Historical Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2003), 36-9.

wouldn't kiss him.<sup>262</sup> Structurally, the dis-placement from the Philippines is complete only when the colonial desire for an "American" girl is rendered impossible. At that point, the Mensalves poem leaves the chronicle of progress he charts with each new girlfriend, and recognizes that he is "lost to them forever," losing with his dream of sexual conquest his hopes for assimilation within U.S. culture.

While there are several poems and stories that are explicitly anti-imperialist, I argue that the undercurrent of racial, classed, and gendered borders over which the characters in the journal are consistently displaced echoes Bulosan's own concerns as a colonial subject, mapped in the continual violence, peripatetic wandering, and despair in *America is in the Heart*. While *The New Tide* shares the generic concerns of "proletarian literature," I suggest that many of the concerns also speak to Bulosan's and Mensalves' positions as colonial subjects traveling to the metropole of the U.S. Or perhaps a better way to put it, looking at *The New Tide* as one of the central proletarian literary journals in California refocuses a discussion of proletarian literature to necessarily include these concerns.

It's also important to note that the journal circulated within the progressive literary coterie in California, reaching and in several cases publishing original work from well-known figures like Edmund Wilson and William Carlos Williams, while at the same time, as Bulosan recalls in *America is in the Heart*, he first distributed it among farm-workers

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<sup>262</sup> "Chris Mensalves, "Fifteen Farewells," *The New Tide*, 1(1) October-November, 1934, 21. Special Collections, Poetry Periodicals Collection, State University of New York, Buffalo.

When [The New Tide] came out, José and I took a hundred copies and distributed them to some of the more literate farm workers. It did not create a sensation, but we did not expect anything spectacular... it was fumbling and immature, but it promised to grow into something important in the history of Filipino social awakening.<sup>263</sup>

Like the stories and poems themselves that cover spaces from New York city coffee-pots to colonial armies to immigrants' quarters to the houses of prostitutes, so too does the journal materially attempt to bridge the divide between urban literary left and workers in the fields. It's also important to note that the journal was so self-consciously multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan that Bulosan would attribute a "Filipino social awakening" to its development. This kind of paradox for Bulosan, both racially determined and overdetermined at same time, marks a distinct sensibility one witnesses among many of the writers of color in the Popular Front period.

In this sense, it is not a contradiction that Bulosan was both a committed anti-fascist writer, allowing his work to be used as wartime propaganda, and a committed anti-imperialist, editing *The New Tide* and writing one of the few full-length works of fiction by a U.S. author on the anti-imperial resistance movement in the Philippines, *The Cry and the Dedication*. Bulosan's 1943 essay in *The Saturday Evening Post*, "Freedom from Want" was one of four essays published by the *Post* to, as one critic put it, "help articulate Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "'Four Freedoms'."<sup>264</sup> Bulosan's

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<sup>263</sup> Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, 193.

<sup>264</sup> Chris Vials, *Realism for the Masses: Aesthetics, Popular Front Pluralism, and U.S. Culture, 1935-1947* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2008), 14. Vials makes the argument that the placement of Bulosan at the center of Roosevelt's war policy reconfigures the domestic meaning of World War II and the popular front as the promise of an expansion of racial and economic democracy.

article is often seen as the literary companion to the propaganda film, "Why We Fight" and a summation of the possibilities and limits of the war-time political idealism of the New Dealers.<sup>265</sup> While historian Eric Foner importantly comments that Bulosan's "Freedom" exceeds the usual liberal notion of civil liberties to include the needs of workers and the unemployed for basic economic security, it is also crucial to note that Bulosan published this essay the same year as *America is in the Heart*. In one sense, "Freedom" is a political summation of *America is in the Heart*, as it persuasively argues that the U.S.'s most marginalized subjects should be celebrated as inheritors of the U.S.'s most democratic ideals. But as many critics, including Lisa Lowe and Michael Denning, have noted, *America* is an uneven text: they cite the narrator's constant oscillation between feelings of belonging in the U.S. and feelings of alienation, between celebrations of U.S. democracy, and documenting racist brutality that seems endemic to the U.S. national project. And likewise, the journey that Allos/Carlos takes is not only along the West Coast but from Mangusmana to Seattle, from colony to center.

As Dorothy Fujita-Rony argues, Filipino texts and narratives destabilize the territorial boundaries of the continental U.S., making the Philippines the "most western part of the American Empire" with Seattle, not the most Western city in a

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Also see Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1998), 223.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

contiguous republic, but the “colonial metropole” of a Pacific periphery.<sup>266</sup> In this sense, the very presence of the colony in the text destabilizes the foundation myth of the country, that one travels to America as a refugee towards the beacon of freedom, to escape the limits of class or history imposed upon a subject: America is always already there, deeply implicated in the poverty and colonial history. In this context – and the war-time context in which Bulosan was writing – it seems crucial to point out that the first scene is that of Allos watching his brother approach his farm, unsure of who he is. He is informed by his father that “Leon maybe dead” given the length of time since anyone had heard from him.<sup>267</sup> It is a moment of estrangement, both in the sense that “the war in Europe” has little meaning in the village, and that the most important family relations are governed by the national interest of the United States – given the ability of the US to draft non-citizen soldiers from a foreign country for its own military interests. What Carlos/Allos repeatedly identifies as “Filipino” – family and land – are rendered momentarily unrecognizable, outside of his immediate surroundings: the text opens less with an invocation of home than with ruminations on the essential homelessness of the colonized subject.

The first gaze of the novel is borderless, trained on the far horizon that reaches, rather than Manila, the battlefields of the West. Equally, the eventual dispossession of the family home can only be read in similar terms: the father sells the family farm “that had fed our family for generations” in order to afford Macario a

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<sup>266</sup> Dorothy Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941*, 15

<sup>267</sup> Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, 3-4.

Western education.<sup>268</sup> The “free education” that the U.S. occupation bestowed on the people of the Philippines, allowing “poor people” their first opportunity at education that formerly “belonged exclusively to the rulers,” not only bankrupts the family, but is the causal factor in their emigration to the U.S. and final breakdown as a cohesive unit.<sup>269</sup> That Macario cannot find anything but manual employment within the United States is only half of the story – the Filipino (and Westernized/comprador) elite constructed by the US occupation benefit from the ‘accumulation by dispossession,’ as the family plot is finally sold “to a rich man in Manila.”<sup>270</sup> Thus the “education” that Bulosan receives later in the novel, with which he transforms his identity into a writer and socialist, is already mirrored by the complicity of education with the colonial project in the Philippines.

For an anti-colonial writer like Bulosan, we can thus ask what it means that he and Mensalves open their journal with a poem about the U.S.-Mexico War. Given that the journal is split between work that specifically refers to the editors' subjectivities as Filipino workers, as well as stories and poems that are more typically representative of mainstream popular front concerns, like lynching and unemployment, one could say that the invasion of Mexico by the U.S. acts as a metaphorical bridge or place-holder for Bulosan's own sense of cultural displacement. Using the medium of the invasion and occupation of Mexico City, the journal draws

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 27

together its range of concerns – lynching and racial violence, colonial alienation and displacement, labor and national identity – within a trope that places them under a single analytic. While Bulosan is not the author of the poem, one could argue that his publication of it performs a kind of national masquerade, an adoption of a national symbol to subvert its meaning. Like the scene in *America is in the Heart* when Allos/Carlos is sold into slavery as soon as he arrives in Seattle, his deadly "middle passage" across the Pacific acts as a kind of manifest destiny in reverse, from freedom and land-ownership and into a form of literal wage-slavery.<sup>271</sup> In the same way, Bulosan announces which historical narrative of the United States he adopts. Rather than the triumph of the West as a form of progress, manifest destiny is presented as an inhuman cannibalism, and a victory for the most reactionary forces over a mixed-race Mexican republic. More than anything else, the presence of the poem as an opening to the journal declares a fundamental gesture of solidarity with other colonized peoples, and suggests that the experiences of Filipinos and Mexican-Americans share an historical lineage of oppression.

This also forces one to read the often-quoted popular front slogan "We are America" from *America is in the Heart* in a different context. The "we" in this construction does not only include immigrants who have come to live in the U.S., but all points of contact with the U.S. empire. Thus one could argue that Bulosan's politics of inclusion are radically destabilizing, as the "Americans" that Bulosan includes are the very colonial subjects that have been rendered *homo sacer*, the

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 69-70

"foreigner" or lynched victim of the journal. Using a popular front lexicon, in much the same way that *The New Tide* is a "proletarian" journal which expands greatly on the imagination of what that term should mean, the language of multi-ethnic inclusion is expanded to grant those parts of the U.S. empire rendered invisible an unsettling visibility. The "fight for democracy" that so defines the popular front thus has a very different meaning, as this universalist term is used to include those subjects not included within the notion of a democratic citizenry. In the same way *Hollywood Now* defends "American democracy" by pointing out that the U.S. is an empire, so Bulosan joins the U.S. military's fight against fascism by pointing out that Mexico was invaded by a fascist army. Bulosan is thus one of the more striking examples of the ways in which anti-fascist writers in California spoke a dual lexicon of belonging and estrangement. As Fujita-Rony chronicles, organizations like the Filipino Anti-Imperialist League in New York City and the West Coast Communist Party supported the war and also engaged in transnational protests for the release of political prisoners held in U.S. colonial jails.<sup>272</sup>

Bulosan's and Mensalves' journal is not the only multi-ethnic working-class publication that reaches back to the history of the U.S. conquest of Mexico or maps the politics of colonial space to narrate the terms of a present crisis. In 1939, Mexican-American labor organizer and Communist Party leader Emma Tenayuca wrote "The Mexican Question in the Southwest," for the Marxist theoretical journal, *The Communist*. Like Bulosan, Tenayuca was involved with left-CIO and Trade

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<sup>272</sup> Dorothy Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941*, 164-7.



Union Unity League (TUUL) unions, was an "organic intellectual," in so far as she emerged from within working-class organizations, and at the time of her historical and theoretical writings, she lacked formal higher education (though like many popular front intellectuals, she attended Party seminars and night classes, and after WW II earned an MA at San Francisco State College).<sup>273</sup> And also like Bulosan, she was one of the first to theorize the position of the "subaltern subject" in the U.S., writing the first historical analysis of Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals in what we might call now a post-colonial context. Perhaps most importantly, Tenayuca shared with Bulosan an anti-imperialist sensibility that emerged from a multi-ethnic, working-class formation, and that was centered around popular front organizations such as the Workers' Alliance, the Unemployed Council, and the TUUL.

This is not to suggest that Tenayuca lacked support in the Mexican and Tejano community. Tenayuca organized for the extension of WPA employment to Mexican-American workers, for an end to discrimination in relief, and led marches against the mass deportations of undocumented workers in Texas. In a state that exercised de facto and de jure segregation against the Mexican-American population, such outspoken, open, organized resistance against white authority was nearly unheard of at the time. As historian Zaragosa Vargas writes, Tenayuca left a "lasting impression on Mexican workers – men and women who were not accustomed to either a Mexican

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<sup>273</sup> Zaragosa Vargas, "Tejana Radical: Emma Tenayuca and the San Antonio Labor Movement during the Great Depression," *The Pacific Historical Review* 66(4), (November 1997), 553-580.

or a woman confronting the police."<sup>274</sup> As Vargas suggests, Tenayuca quickly became a well-known figure even before the famous pecan sheller strike, in which 10,000 workers, mostly women, struck for months while facing violence, deportation, jail, and even starvation. Like the Central Valley strikes years earlier, the pecan sheller strike took on the dimension of a "popular uprising," uniting members of the community to challenge not only the local employer but other racist institutions such as the police and the city council.<sup>275</sup> Tenayuca reported that as she walked the streets of San Antonio, she would hear people comment on the street "there goes the little woman who confronts men." <sup>276</sup>

Yet she was also ostracized for the very politics – as well as cross-racial alliances - that made her an effective leader. Red-baited repeatedly by the local police and white political establishment, the middle-class, religious, and political leadership of the Mexican-American community quickly fell in line. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) officially called for her dismissal as strike leader and condemned the strike as communist-led. Likewise, representatives of the Catholic Church attacked Tenayuca for her marriage to white Party leader Homer Brooks, for organizing undocumented workers, for her open assaults against racism as an organizer in the Alliance, and more than anything for her membership in the Communist Party. Church members even went so far as to declare her "not a

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 562.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 574.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 560.

Mexican," and to brand her as a race-traitor in the church's Spanish-language newspaper *Voz*.<sup>277</sup> Thus racial identification for LULAC and the Church meant keeping within boundaries defined by the Mexican-American middle class. A few years after the strike, ostracized by the community she supported so vigorously, Tenayuca left Texas for San Francisco, where she enrolled in school.

Tenayuca's story gets at the complexity of Popular Front anti-imperialist politics, in that it often existed in the nexus between racially conscious and racially mixed social and cultural institutions. While Tenayuca is primarily remembered as a Tejana activist, and while she organized almost exclusively within the Mexican and Mexican-American community, she did so within organizations that were outside of the *mutualistas*, fraternal orders, and racially defined labor unions that served as an alternative public sphere for the Mexican-Americans in the Southwest. Rather her fights were for inclusion inside organizations that were dedicated to expanding the New Deal to cover racial minorities and cross-racial union organizing within TUUL. While she is credited with a sizable role in shaping a new, militant consciousness within the Tejano community, her writings reflect a dual consciousness as one organizing simultaneously as a Mexican-American as well as within movements that defined themselves as internationalist and working class. Her writings reflect this dialectical approach, as they suggest a fusion of Mexican-American history and Marxist thought on minority and third-world nationalism.

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 574.

Her essay "The Mexican Question in the Southwest" is significant most notably for its positioning of the U.S. as an internal empire, the construction of the Mexican-American population as an internally colonized people, and the call for cultural as well as political and economic recognition. As historian David Gutiérrez puts it, the article "stood the traditional ideology of assimilation on its head, demanding Americans recognize the contributions of the Mexican people...rather than expect them to assimilate into the mainstream."<sup>278</sup> As the lead organizer for the 1938 San Antonio pecan sheller's strike, Tenayuca and her husband, co-author Homer Brooks, applied their experiences as field organizers in the development of a theoretical position. Tenayuca notes in the essay that without organizing the undocumented and without recognizing the legitimacy of the Spanish language, as other mainstream Mexican-American organizations like LULAC refused to do, no organizing drive among workers of Mexican descent would be possible. And likewise, the essay implicitly calls upon the Communist Party to grant the same level of resources to organizing Mexican-American workers as to black workers in Chicago, Harlem, and the South.

Beginning the article with the U.S. invasion of Mexican territory in 1846, Tenayuca frames Mexican-American identity as a product of a colonial conquest. She argues that "the treatment meted out to the Mexicans as a whole has from the earliest days of sovereignty of the United States been that of a conquered people," citing the economic and cultural "penetration of Anglo-Americans" in Mexican

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<sup>278</sup> David G. Gutiérrez. *Halls and Mirrors: Mexican-Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 109.

territory that "has practically segregated into colonies" the original Mexican inhabitants.<sup>279</sup> She describes the process of colonial alienation provoked by separating communities from their land, enclosing public spaces, repressing the Mexican and mestizo language and culture, denying political representation, enforcing second class wages, and targeting whole communities with state repression. The outlining of forms of oppression has a culminating logic, as she makes the deliberate argument that Mexican-Americans, like other colonized peoples, suffer repression as a whole people in both cultural and economic terms, outside of the safeguards of citizenship and nationhood at all levels of identity-formation.

As Almaguer writes, the attitude of the U.S. Protestant and largely Anglo conquerors of the Southwest took on a distinctly colonial attitude towards the people they conquered, defining them as culturally and racially inferior and incapable of progress, at the same they cultivated a small "compradore" class of elites with at least formal rights of citizenship and some small exercise of political power.<sup>280</sup> This structure of power closely resembles the "continuity of preoccupations...initiated by European imperial aggression" including language, hegemony, place and displacement, land, power, and capital described by the broad swath of colonial and post-colonial writers.<sup>281</sup> Thus Tenayuca argues, one cannot look at the massive

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<sup>279</sup> Emma Tenayuca and Homer Brooks, "The Mexican Question in The Southwest," *The Communist*, March 1939, 258-9.

<sup>280</sup> Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Faultlines*, 12-13, 59.

<sup>281</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2.

organizing drives of the 1930s as just "the labor aspect," but rather they must be viewed as part of a cultural, political, and economic drive for liberation from an historic and imperial conquest. Her demands for "the study of the Spanish language and *the use of Spanish in the public schools and universities* in communities where Mexicans are the majority" as well as literacy campaigns directed by the WPA to be conducted in Spanish (a demand she notes the Workers' Alliance won) are combined with a demand for an end to deportations and an opening of the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>282</sup> Tenayuca frames her demands on the grounds of "the due recognition of the historic rights of the Mexican people in this territory."<sup>283</sup> It is crucial to note that Tenayuca does not articulate her demands on the grounds of social utility, in other words that an open border would facilitate commerce or that Mexican immigration is good for the U.S. economy, but rather as the historical birthright of a people who have legal and moral claims to the lands of California, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and Texas.

These positions articulate the Mexican origin population in the Southwest as a "whole people," and Tenayuca notes cross-class alliances in the "scores of small Mexican merchants" who "signed petitions demanding of Mayor Quin the right of the

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While using European post-colonial theory to comment on the experience of internally colonized peoples in the United States should be done cautiously at best, it is important to point out the continuity of points between Tenayuca's work and the work of later anti-imperial theorists. One could also point to the work of Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, or Aimee Césaire for parallels.

<sup>282</sup> Emma Tenayuca and Homer Brooks, "The Mexican Question in the Southwest," 264, 263, italics in original.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 266.

strikers peacefully to picket the factories without interference from the police" despite the fact that the merchant class and labor were often seen as hostile.<sup>284</sup> Or how a Texas local of UCAPAWA adopted a demand for schools taught in English and Spanish in towns "where Mexicans were a majority."<sup>285</sup> In emphasizing cross-class and regional alliances, this is not merely a Spanish-language version of the New Deal with its populist celebration of working- and middle- "producing" classes. As other black and native-American U.S. intellectuals would do in the same period, she takes contemporary Marxist writings on imperialism to argue that in many respects, the Mexican origin population forms a separate "nation-state," in terms of culture and history, comprising a "population...whose customs, language, traditions, and culture were essentially different from those of the rest of the country."<sup>286</sup> Such a claim is not merely descriptive, for the Soviet definition establishes cultural and linguistic differentiation as key claims for nationhood. Rather than reading Tenayuca's invocation of the USSR as Party orthodoxy, I see it is as a tactic used by many activists of color in the U.S., who strategically claimed the prestige of the Soviet Union in their demands for independence.

Beginning her article with the U.S. imperial conquest of Mexican land, she draws the conclusion that the labor struggles in the Southwest are a continuation of

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 262, 257.

the logic of this conquest. Like other thirties writers, she links racism in the U.S. with imperialism abroad.

Internationally, the Mexican and Spanish-American people's movement in the United States has an important bearing on the relationship between the United States and Latin-America, especially in Mexico. Unless the "Good-Neighbor" policy begins at home, with respect to the treatment of the Mexican people, it will be difficult to convince Latin-Americans of the sincerity of this policy<sup>287</sup>

Comparing the treatment of workers of Mexican descent with the armed intervention by the U.S. in Latin America draws attention not only to the racism of U.S. foreign policy, but to the imperial implications of U.S. labor policy domestically. And the paragraph contains more than just a little bit of a veiled threat. The U.S. was within a few short years of the Sandino uprising and frequent and often violent protests near the Canal Zone in Panama. While she does not say it directly, one can also glean from the "unwillingness to accept" the Good-Neighbor Policy a refusal to accept U.S. hegemony in the region. Drawing on the extensive comparison between fascism and imperialism as other anti-fascist actors did, she notes that a right-wing publication in Mexico City compares the fate of Mexicans in the U.S. to the Jews in Germany.<sup>288</sup>

Thus Tenayuca links the anti-fascist struggle to the struggle against U.S. conquest of Mexican land. This connection was not merely discursive. As Vargas reports, Tenayuca was a member of the National Executive Committee of the Workers' Alliance, and attended the Workers' Alliance convention in Milwaukee months before the pecan strike. As a member of the Alliance's executive committee,

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 267.



Tenayuca served with Frances Duty, the leader of the Harlem Alliance and a figure within the internationalist African-American left circles. At the convention, Tenayuca was noted for pushing a legislative program of extending relief and for sponsoring a resolution "against war and fascism."<sup>289</sup> Perhaps more importantly, Tenayuca connected with members of the delegations from Colorado and California and heard of conditions suffered by Mexican-Americans there. As Vargas relates from an oral interview with Tenayuca, "her thinking was shifting" as a result of the meeting, and "she aimed to connect the plight of San Antonio's Mexicans to...other workers and to international events."<sup>290</sup> Thus such forums were crucial not only because they connected local activists to international issues, but they also became means by which activists of color from across the U.S. could share experiences and influences. As in the case of Bulosan, her articulation of a Mexican-American nationalism was a direct result of the internationalist and cross-racial activism of Popular Front institutions.

Despite, or perhaps because of this, the text is uneven in regard to its attitude towards the internal colonization of Mexican-Americans. While she clearly argues that Mexican-Americans have historic claims to the land, the right for cultural self-determination, and likewise, for free movement across the border, she invokes a somewhat technical reason for backing down from a full claim for independence --

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<sup>289</sup> Zaragosa Vargas, "Tejana Radical: Emma Tenayuca and the San Antonio Labor Movement during the Great Depression," 563.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 563.

Mexican Americans do not form a "territorial and economic community."<sup>291</sup> Yet simultaneous claims for national belonging *and* separatism make sense if one considers the threats of deportation faced by Mexican-Americans in the Southwest. To claim to be a citizen and a colonial subject is not so much a contradiction, then, but rather a precise analysis of what it means to be a U.S. subject within an imperial context.

As the two quotes that begin this chapter suggest, to belong to the U.S. as a citizen and thus not face deportation one must, at the discursive level, embrace the nation as a republican project. Tenayuca writes that the "economic (and hence political) interests" of the Mexican origin population in the Southwest "are welded to those of the Anglo-American people of the Southwest."<sup>292</sup> While this is not the near mystical connection of an imagined national community, such a statement does suggest a certain ambivalence about what the legacy of U.S. imperial conquest means, as well as an integrated life within a multi-ethnic state. If the fight Tenayuca outlines is simultaneously a global struggle for liberation that begins with 1848 and if the solution will be in the acquisition of full citizenship rights within a pluralist democracy, then there is an implicit tension in her definition of the U.S. as national space. Similarly, Bulosan records supporting the Marcantonio bill for Filipino citizenship rights in the U.S., as the same time he openly supported an end to colonial

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<sup>291</sup> Emma Tenayuca and Homer Brooks, "The Mexican Question in the Southwest," 262.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

control over the islands.<sup>293</sup> In a sense, one could say that these two activists and intellectuals organized within the republican limits of a multi-ethnic democratic movement, yet did so with the full knowledge of their position as colonial subjects. And like Bulosan, Tenayuca uses an historic moment of imperial conquest to begin her narrative of the U.S.. Just as Bulosan enters the U.S. as a slave, so does Tenayuca use the U.S. invasion of Mexico to chart an alternate to full citizenship rights in the U.S., supplanting the U.S. revolution as the metaphysical origin of the nation.

Yet in so far as Tenayuca constructs the U.S. national space as both imperial *and* democratic, her work is a clear departure from middle-class organizations like LULAC, that tended to not only embrace assimilation and promote deportation, but to frame themes of "Americanization, citizenship, and integration" within metaphors of social belonging: the U.S. was their "home." While LULAC eventually dropped calls for the deportation of undocumented immigrants, the fact that this was a key part of their strategy suggests they claimed a position within the U.S. nation as a racially defined state, and sought to win concessions within that framework. Tenayuca's claims for belonging are far more complex and multi-layered within her writings and statements. At once calling the Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals in the U.S. a "whole people" based on historical conditions, she also articulates a space of solidarity with working class whites and African-Americans based on a future, if often contradictory, process of organizing. Likewise, the "nation" is bisected by claims of international borders, and the domestic space is impacted by what the U.S. and other imperial powers do abroad. It is a formulation of political identity and

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<sup>293</sup> Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, 147.

practice that is situational and articulated through multiple sites of power at the same time. In this sense, Tenayuca's essay is not only the first attempt to locate Mexican-Americans within the U.S. as a historically defined people with a specific relationship to U.S. imperialism, it is also a kind of metacommentary on the U.S. Popular Front, that simultaneously articulates a demand on the U.S. state and nation, at the same time it theorizes an international sense of identity and politics. Within the literature of the Southwest, it also refuses to grant California (or Texas) exceptional status: all lands once occupied by Mexico form Tenayuca's imagined community of Mexican-Americans.

Among the three figures I will discuss, Carey McWilliams is perhaps best remembered as a figure on the California left in the 1930s and 1940s. Lawyer, historian, journalist, and activist Carey McWilliams is often best known for his book on farm labor in California, *Factories in the Fields*, a history of the rise of agribusiness and migratory labor in California. Often compared to John Steinbeck for his concern about migrant farm-workers (and also the near simultaneity of the books' publications), their comparison has as much to do with the way the California Popular Front gets remembered as it does with the content of their work. Steinbeck's concern was primarily for white migrants, reconstructing a kind of yeoman mythology out of the farm-worker struggle. McWilliams, on the other hand, was a central figure in the California Popular Front precisely because his writings and tireless advocacy work stitched together, often personally, the many seemingly disparate geographic, racial, organizational and political differences in the movement. Personal friends with Edmund Wilson, Carlos Bulosan, and Los Angeles city councilor Eduardo Roybal,

McWilliams was a lawyer for the racially charged Sleepy Lagoon Defense committee and special counsel for the Korematsu case, a reporter and historian of farm labor struggles in California, and a prominent anti-fascist in Southern California. He spoke at UCAPAWA rallies, Filipino independence events, rallies to raise funds for Spanish loyalists, and protests against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and was a regular columnist for *Hollywood Now* (and I should also add, was eager to distance himself from Steinbeck in his memoir).<sup>294</sup> Together, these seemingly disparate sites of struggle create a kind total of map of social resistance in California, and a greater insight into the multi-racial and multi-dimensional character of the movement. Indeed, one could say McWilliams was one of the few to theorize the connections among for instance, the internment of the Japanese and the dispossession of the Mexican landowners, the struggle of farm-workers in the central valley and the fight against fascism. In this sense, McWilliams was a sort of theorist of the West Coast Popular Front, in so far as he distilled the common history and significance of the disparate movements under a single analytic term.

McWilliams begins his history of California with the metaphor of the concentration camp. In *Southern California Country*, McWilliams' contribution to the American Folkways Series edited by Erskine Caldwell, he sees the process of Western colonization of California as a planned genocide, and describes it in compellingly contemporary terms. He writes that "the Franciscan padres eliminated the Indians with the effectiveness of Nazis operating concentration camps," and notes

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<sup>294</sup> Carey McWilliams, *The Education of Carey McWilliams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 78.

that the only Native Americans to survive the U.S. invasion in large numbers were those who also resisted the mission system.<sup>295</sup> McWilliams' concept of the "concentration camp" is much like Benítez-Rojo's "traveling plantation," in the sense that it combines a racial logic with a mode of production that expands through place and time. The U.S. policy, while more violent and genocidal than Spanish or Mexican practices "to extirpate Indian culture...to be liquidated as rapidly as possible," continued with the project of the racialized and modernized hacienda system started under the Spanish.<sup>296</sup> That is, for whatever the differences within U.S., Spanish, and Mexican policies, McWilliams sees the beginning of the California system of agriculture in the enslavement of the California tribes. Citing one of the early historians on California tribal history, McWilliams suggests that "it would be possible to show how the cheap labor market passed from the Indian to the Chinese and how the same rationale of peonage and compulsion was applied to the latter...."<sup>297</sup> Like Mike Davis' work cited earlier on the continuity of vigilantism, so McWilliams connects the long history of native genocide to contemporary patterns of racialized labor exploitation. And more significantly for the West Coast anti-fascist movement, he makes a compelling case that fascism not only exists within the U.S., but is a result of the West's imperial lineage. Thus the final culmination of the colonization of

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<sup>295</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (New York: Stratford Press, 1946) 29.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 42

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 47

Americas is the fascist control of politics and labor in California and the construction of concentration camps in the San Joaquin Valley.

While McWilliams is not a theorist, I would argue that his presentation of California “farm-fascism” not only remakes the fight against fascism into the fight against imperialism, as many intellectuals like CLR James and Du Bois were doing abroad, but also places the Western farm labor movement and the anti-fascist movement in a much broader context of transnational de-colonization. At the center of McWilliams' critique was the term “farm-fascism” he coined to convey the multi-layered links among anti-labor violence, state collusion with finance capital, racism, and imperialism. In doing so, he challenges the contemporary view that fascism, as one historian put it, “did not extend a significant threat within the United States.”<sup>298</sup> While self-identifying fascist organizations were rare in California, the Silver Shirts, Black Legion, and the American Nazi Party having no more than a few hundred members in LA at their height, McWilliams challenged the common-sense attitude that fascism was a European, even particularly ideological formation. Rather “farm-fascism” was a formation of power that combined land monopoly, finance capital, undemocratic forms of political control, and organized campaigns of violence against migrant workers, journalists, and even government officials attempting to benefit from the struggles of farm-workers for basic rights. Likewise, “farm fascism” was supported by an entire superstructure of ideas and publications that promoted agriculture in California and hid not only its violence but its industrial-plantation

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<sup>298</sup> Larry Ceplair, *Under the Shadow of War: Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and Marxists*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 196.

nature. The phrase "Farm fascism" thereby draws attention to the particular *modernity* of the agriculture industry in California.

In the thirties, and especially in West Coast and Southern circles in which state violence was commonplace for organizers, it was equally commonplace to talk about fascism in the United States. "The drive towards fascist control has probably been carried further in California than in any other state in the union," McWilliams states.<sup>299</sup> In Alabama, the *Southern Worker* carried an open letter to the Socialist party to unite against the "fascist gangs" of the Klan and White Legion, and Langston Hughes named the Spanish fascists as "Jim Crow people" in his "Love Letter from Spain."<sup>300</sup> In California, the 1936 State Conference Against War and Fascism, as part of the ALAWF, resolved during its yearly meeting in Fresno:

Fascism is a very real threat...In California, the Chamber of Commerce, Associated Farmers Inc., Hearst interests, vigilante organizations, etc, we see the formation of very ominous patterns...the vigilante outbreaks in this state are not merely sporadic...but definitely planned and directed assaults upon the fundamental rights of the people"<sup>301</sup>

As noted earlier in this chapter, anti-fascist organizing sought to connect local struggles against Jim Crow and anti-labor violence to international struggles against

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<sup>299</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields*, 273.

<sup>300</sup> "Open Letter to the Socialist Party," *Southern Worker*, October 1934, quoted in Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 120; Langston Hughes, "Love Letter from Spain," *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*, Carey Nelson Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 387.

<sup>301</sup> "Minutes from California State Conference Against War and Fascism," *American League Against War and Fascism*, December 12-13, 1936, The Southern California Library Special Collections, Box A.



Nazism and imperialism. It also sought to create broad coalitions, like the church, labor, civil rights, and socialist organizations listed as attending the California conference. The *Western Worker* ran a seven-part series entitled "California's Sun Kissed Hoodlums," featuring "home-grown fascists," vigilantes, racist police, and growers living in armed camps, and the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee openly declared the acts of the LAPD as "fascist" and LA County officials as belonging to the "Hitlerian Master Race."<sup>302</sup> The Chamber of Commerce, the LAPD, the Associated Farmers, and Hearst were far more a threat than the Silver Shirts. Fascism, for the California left, became a way to tie together anti-racism, anti-war activism, anti-imperialism, civil liberties campaigns, and labor unionism into a single framework.

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<sup>302</sup> Ronald R. Cooley, "California's Sun Kissed Hoodlums," *Western Worker* 5(23) March 19, 1936, 6. Ronald R. Cooley, "California's Sun Kissed Hoodlums," *Western Worker* 5(23) March 23, 1936, 6. Ronald R. Cooley, "California's Sun Kissed Hoodlums," *Western Worker* 5(24) March 26, 1936, 6. Ronald R. Cooley, "California's Sun Kissed Hoodlums," *Western Worker* 5(26) March 30, 1936, 4. Ronald R. Cooley, "California's Sun Kissed Hoodlums," *Western Worker* 5(27) April 2, 1936, 5. Ronald R. Cooley, "California's Sun Kissed Hoodlums," *Western Worker* 5(28) April 6, 1936, 5. Ronald R. Cooley, "California's Sun Kissed Hoodlums," *Western Worker* 5(29) April 9, 1936, 5. Guy Endore, *Sleepy Lagoon Mystery* (Los Angeles: Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, 1944), 22-3. Southern California Library, Special Collections, Box S.



**Figure 3.1** One of the many representations of California as a fascist state. Bill West, "California Here We Come," cartoon, *Daily Worker*, February 16, 1936, 6.

There is no mythic beginning or lost democracy for McWilliams to return to – California was an empire from its inception. Not only does this refuse the pastoral narratives of FSA imagery, it also demands that organizers and intellectuals confront the legacies of imperial power as central to any liberatory project. "The colonial character of landownership" was something that did not arise with the modern state for McWilliams, but rather dates back to the earliest foundation of Western rule in the

territory.<sup>303</sup> What is unique about this characterization of post-annexation land-monopoly is that it refuses a binary between the Spanish hacienda system and the free-labor history that is often so much a part of the official ideology and historiography of the California past. As Almaguer suggests, U.S.-European immigrants to California often imagined themselves as inheritors of the “free labor” tradition, emphasizing self-sufficiency, the small-landholder, and individualism as defining traits – often explicitly against the landed estates of the Californio elite.<sup>304</sup> This challenge to the dominant cultural memory of California complicates any claim, as was made by the U.S. invaders, that civilization or modernity would be the result of the conquest. It likewise challenges the specific racial binary that was produced by this discourse as well – as inherent parts of their competing civilizations, it was often assumed by purveyors of this ideology that the free-labor ideal was necessarily “Anglo-Saxon.”<sup>305</sup> Indeed, while McWilliams demonstrates that the Spanish colonists employed “slave labor,” it was US entrepreneurs who perfected the hacienda system, institutionalizing and industrializing it.<sup>306</sup> This perspective not only refutes the Western conceit of progress, it also denies the defenders of the status quo an easy othering of California’s racialized past: the Californio civilization is not

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>304</sup> Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 33.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 32-3. Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981, 298.

<sup>306</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields: History of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, 47.

safely contained in a picturesque past, but haunts the present in its most reactionary form.<sup>307</sup>

Like Tenayuca, McWilliam's critique of fascism goes beyond the liberal paradigm of civil liberties to investigate the historical lineages of power in the U.S. west. While McWilliams supported and helped organize testimony for the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee, his analysis of lynching and extra-judicial violence is not one that ultimately rests on a claim of abstract citizenship. "California is the home of vigilantism," he writes, and he notes that the current "vigilante armies" and "militias" have names that refer back to the original vigilantes of the post-annexation era.<sup>308</sup> Likewise, McWilliams writes that the organizing principle of vigilantism in 1848 and in present times is the same: "race hatred" and the need to keep a racially coded system of ownership and privilege intact.<sup>309</sup> In *Factories*, vigilantism is not an aberration or an unusual form of excess. Rather, it is constitutive of the structures of ownership and labor in the state, and McWilliams chronicles repeated waves of vigilantism directed at first the Mexicans, the Chinese, and later at the Wobblies and most recently at the explosion of union organizing in the Central Valley. Connecting violence against Mexican miners in the 1850s to the anti-Chinese riots, the Alien Land Laws, anti-Filipino violence, and anti-Communist agitation at the turn of the century, McWilliams draws a straight line from the violence of imperial domination

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 22-3.

<sup>308</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field History of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, 135.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 135-6.

to racialized labor repression in the 1930s.<sup>310</sup> This places the violence reported on by the LaFollette Committee not within the field of an abstract citizen or a claim of individual rights, but rather within the colonial ethnic cleansing preceding and just following annexation, leading up to the deportation of thousands of Mexican-Americans in the early thirties.

McWilliams, like Bulosan and Tenayuca, also emphasized the building of democratic institutions as a way to fight fascism, arguing that unions and other grassroots forms of working-class mobilization are the answer to the power of agribusiness in the Central Valley. In this sense, it's fair to say that his work is also caught within the contradiction of democracy and empire as a framework to understand, and organize against, the structures of capital and power in the West. Yet despite what may seem like limited proposals for organizing, it's clear that all three writers saw their struggle within larger global struggles against fascism and imperialism. And in this sense, this is what is so radical about their work. Framing the fight against racism and labor exploitation within the framework of global anti-fascism and the U.S. invasion of Mexico, they allow anti-war groups in Los Angeles and San Francisco to make common cause with labor organizers in the inland valley. More significantly, the links between unionization in the fields and fascism connect decolonization struggles in Africa and Asia with the fight to unionize cotton workers in the San Joaquin Valley. While anti-imperialist scholars like C.L.R. James, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Cedric Robinson have critiqued the Popular Front as

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 132-9.

legitimizing the English, French and U.S. empires by posing global struggles within first-world frameworks of "freedom" against "fascism," the Popular Front writings of McWilliams, Tenayuca, and Bulosan suggest that the discourse of anti-fascism could be used to expand the critique of imperialism. Including racial domination within the national borders of the U.S. and manifest destiny, far from excusing the U.S., a discourse of anti-fascism became a way to narrate the roots of the U.S.'s imperial history.

### **A Prize for the Writers on Joaquín Murieta: Anti-Imperial Romance and the California Popular Front**

In 1934, the Communist Party's California newsweekly, *The Western Worker*, issued the following call to its readers, "A Prize for Writers on Joaquin Murrieta":

How many know of Joaquin Murieta? Joaquin was one of the most interesting characters in California history. We are certain that if story writers are looking for material to write fiction based on historical truth, they will find no more dynamic personality than Joaquin Murieta.<sup>311</sup>

The 1930s witnessed an explosion of cultural representations of Joaquín Murrieta, the mythic California bandit who turns to armed resistance and/or crime after his wife and brother are killed by invading Americans. Two films produced were loosely based the myth, *The Avenger* (1931) and *The Lone Rider and the Bandit* (1942), and four novels and a film that all more or less follow John Rollins Ridge/Yellow Bird's 1854 text: Ernest Klette's *The Crimson Trail of Joaquin Murieta* (1928), Walter Noble Burns' *The Robin Hood of El Dorado* on which the 1936 film by the same

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<sup>311</sup> "A Prize for the Writers on Joaquin Murrieta," *Western Worker* 3(7) February 12 1934, 4.

name was based (1934/36), Dane Coolidge's *Gringo Gold* (1939), Samuel Peeples' *The Dream Ends in Fury* (1948), as well as a history cited by Carey McWilliams, Stanley Coblentz's *Villains and Vigilantes* (1936), and one recorded song by Los Madrugadores, "Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta" (1934). According to the *LA Times*, the circulation of the Murrieta myth was so widespread that there began a spontaneous phenomenon of Joaquín Murrieta treasure hunts, in which independent prospectors searched for the buried gold of Murrieta's band, so much so that oil companies repeatedly called the police under the mistaken assumption that the treasure-hunters were attempting to make illegal claims on their land.<sup>312</sup> Indeed, the language in the *LA Times* story is compelling: "the forbidding specter of Joaquin Murrieta's "death curse" hangs like a cloud over the rugged country between the Rincon and the Casitas Pass," suggesting not only something sinister in the "treasure hunt" but that the gothic weight of memory hangs over the otherwise innocent pursuit of this December 25<sup>th</sup> 'Christmas Day' newspaper story. Of course, this gets at the ambiguity of the meaning of the legend. As many of the stories begin with the question of land claims and property rights, that a popular myth could inspire a treasure-hunt for illusive gold and reestablish the myth of open Californian land, gold in the earth, and the imperial specter of a Mexican bandit suggests the extent to which Murrieta is inextricably tied the California mythology.

Yet which mythology is open to question. As Shelley Streeby writes in "Joaquín Murrieta and the American 1848," the Spanish language *corridos* of

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<sup>312</sup> "Treasure Hunters Defy Murrieta's Death Curse," *Los Angeles Times*, December 25, 1939, 8.

Murrieta competed with English language novels and films, often circulating within widely different constituencies and with very different meanings during the 1930s. The Murrieta stories speak to themes of popular Mexican resistance against U.S. power, class resistance to displacement and enclosure, and romantic ballads of the West, as well as racial anxieties by dominant groups about national boundaries, racial miscegenation, and Mexican immigration.<sup>313</sup> Since the publication of Ridge's text in 1854, Murrieta has remained a liminal figure, both claimed by Mexican-Americans protesting U.S. invasion, as well as marked as a criminal figure calling for greater law enforcement by the *Police Gazette* and other mass consumption serials for a predominantly white 19<sup>th</sup> century audience. And collectively, what they refer back to is, of course, the unsettled legacy of 1848, the U.S. conquest of Mexico and annexation of the Southwest, told through the medium of Western romance.

That the most circulated bandit story of the 1930s – and perhaps the most cited Western in an era that witnessed the decline of the genre - is also a story of imperial conquest is worth noting. Slotkin argues that the "western" was eclipsed by the urban gangster in the 1930s, as "social problem films" and dirty realism took the place of big-sky myths of the open frontier.<sup>314</sup> While Slotkin is correct to the extent

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<sup>313</sup> Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 274-87. See also, Shelley Streeby, "Joaquín Murrieta and the American 1848," *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, John Carlos Rowe, ed. (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000). My argument about the centrality of Joaquín Murrieta to imperial memory in California is of course deeply indebted to Shelley Streeby's work, in which she argues the reproduction of the Murrieta tale both signals the remembering and forgetting of the annexation of California by the U.S. in 1848.



that "A" westerns were rare compared with the era before and after the depression, the extent of the Joaquín Murrieta myth would seem to challenge his thesis, as Murrieta corresponds with many of the concerns of the genre. Perhaps Murrieta was a western made for a public that was suddenly skeptical of the West: hearing stories of violence, strikes, and discord instead of the promise of open horizons and individual wealth, the white frontier hero is suddenly replaced by a Mexican bandit opposing the Anglo advance into his country.

In this light, it's important to note that the *New York Times* reviewer of the William A. Wellman film *Robin Hood of El Dorado* seemed vexed by the fact that Hollywood would even make such a film at all – especially one that he finds to be so critical of the United States. He marvels that the film's "frank indictment of American injustice, greed and cowardice in the years of the California gold rush" could be a feature while at the same time the studios were "unable to make films of 'It Can't Happen Here,' 'Paths of Glory,' or the 'Forty Days of Musa Dagh'," all novels published within a year or two of *El Dorado*, and rejected for one reason or another by the studios as too controversial.<sup>315</sup> While I argue that Murrieta's status as a romance of the West has much to do with its space for critical comment, the un-made films the reviewer lists also reveal much about how Murrieta was seen in the 1930s. All three titles would, very generally, be considered anti-fascist novels: Sinclair Lewis' targeting of state power, Humphrey Cobb's critique of militarism and war, and

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<sup>314</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992, 255.

<sup>315</sup> Frank S. Nugent, "Concerning, Among Others, 'Robin Hood of El Dorado, at the Capitol, and 'Love Before Breakfast,' *New York Times* March 14, 1936, 10.

the Austrian-Jewish Franz Werf's novel about state-sponsored genocide in the Ottoman Empire. That the reviewer would implicitly connect *Robin Hood of El Dorado* to these three well-known novels is interesting, given that the Murrieta story is not usually considered part of – and precedes – the anti-fascist and anti-war movements.

Yet given the Communist Party's interest in the story – naming Murrieta a "hero fit for filming" in the *Daily Worker's* nonetheless scathing review of the film -- it bears consideration why they would have selected the Murrieta tale in the mid-thirties for their prize.<sup>316</sup> As Streeby argues, the Murrieta legend is at once a story of resistance as well as a call for law-and-order. While these two tendencies in Murrieta would seem to be irreconcilable, they make sense if one considers that anti-racist and anti-lynching campaigns were perhaps the single largest concern of anti-fascist activists within the U.S. And indeed, the film version of *The Robin Hood of El Dorado* was the first Hollywood film to critically depict the lynching of a racial minority as an unacceptable form of non-state violence, and certainly the first film to place racist lynching in the context of the West.<sup>317</sup> As such, it is important to consider the film as embedded not only within the genealogy of Murrieta legend, but within the cultural context of Popular Front, and to consider the ways the film exemplifies the extent to which a Popular Front sensibility informed the cultural industries, as well as the contradictions and limitations of this project. While the film

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<sup>316</sup> Joseph Gollomb, "The New Movie," *Daily Worker* 1(11) March 22, 1936, 6.

<sup>317</sup> *Within Our Gates*, an independent film directed by Oscar Micheaux, critically depicts lynching in a 1920 response to *Birth of a Nation* and the Chicago riots.

transforms Murrieta into a Popular Front figure, changing him from a proto-capitalist gold miner to a yeoman farmer, he is also transformed from a bandit dedicated to clearing Anglos from California, to one deeply ambivalent about the U.S. In doing so, the film also transforms the California rural landscape from a site of racial and labor violence to an epic pastoral for a consumer eye.

In many ways, the concern for civil liberties expressed by the film is fully integrated within the consumer logic of the culture industries. Murrieta changes from Mexican hero to white matinee idol, and his epic of resistance to Anglo authority is also an epic of California's stunning natural beauty. In this sense, the film fits Murrieta within the "romance" of California, placing it within the lineage of works like Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* that promoted the aesthetically cleansed vision of the California it ostensibly critiqued. In doing so, the film fits within an ongoing critical debate about the representation of California within the Popular Front, with critical realists like Edmund Wilson and Carey McWilliams as well as a critical realist tradition McWilliams, Wilson, and others deliberately placed themselves against.

As Michael Denning writes, "the most effective part of Popular Front public culture was...the mobilization around civil liberties and the struggle against lynching and labor repression."<sup>318</sup> Anti-lynching campaigns were particularly effective and emblematic of the Popular Front precisely because they combined the radical and marginal elements with those at the very center, Spanish-language Communist Party

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<sup>318</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 13.

organizers with the ACLU, black sharecroppers' unions with organizations with the NAACP and the International Labor Defense. The campaigns spoke to both the severe racial discrimination and terror in the U.S., while they also made calls on both civil society and the state for law and order. They engaged the history of imperial conquest while also making appeals to U.S. democracy. Groups like the National Negro Congress and the International Labor Defense gained national and even international attention for their defense of the Scottsboro Boys, with protests not only occurring in New York and California, but at U.S. embassies in Cuba, South Africa, and Europe. On the West Coast, the case of Ted Jordon, an African-American sentenced to death on dubious charges in Portland, Oregon, also gained significant support. Likewise, labor organizations like the Communist Party's TUUL and the CIO UCAPAWA led fights against the anti-labor "criminal syndicalism" law that prosecuted unions as organized crime. The anti "CI" campaigns were central in linking the concerns of labor with broader concerns for civil liberties throughout California. And indeed, many of the farm-labor unions like CAWIU and UCAPAWA that fought the "CI" laws also fought against organized racial violence against their members by the growers' associations and the police.

While the ILD ceased to exist after the mid-thirties, perhaps the most important "anti-lynching" campaign on the West Coast occurred in the 1940s, when dozens of Mexican-American youths were picked up and sentenced for murder in a wave of anti-Mexican-American sentiment, shortly after the so-called "zoot suit" riots the year before. The Sleepy Lagoon Case sparked significant public outcry, and the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee formed into a multiracial, grass roots coalition

that included Mexican-Americans, whites and blacks, Hollywood celebrities, and labor officials and was chaired by Carey McWilliams. Likewise, the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee drew significant attention to the abusive actions of the Growers' Association and other vigilantes taken to crush labor organizing drives in the fields. Indeed, California was frequently compared to the South in terms of the level of violence directed at minorities and labor organizers, with Mike Gold referring to "lynch towns" east of Los Angeles and the Communist Party frequently associating anti-labor violence with the Klan, as in a dramatic cartoon of muscular workers knocking out a klansman with their fists.<sup>319</sup> Of course, although "lynching" as a discrete practice, that is, hanging by a rope, rarely occurred in California after the turn of the century, the practice of organized violence for ideological, racial, and political ends continued and the term likewise continued to signify contemporary forms of violence. The meaning of "fiery crosses burning on hilltops...and vigilante terror" described by McWilliams in *Factories* and its Southern associations would not be lost on the reader, and would be considered part of "lynch culture" by readers.<sup>320</sup>

What unifies the Murrieta stories is their focus on lynching as a racialized practice of terror in California's state formation. In *The Dream Ends in Fury*, Murrieta laments after his brother is hanged, "what have I done but be born a

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<sup>319</sup> Mike Gold, "Migratory Intellectuals," *New Masses*, December 15, 1936 (21), 27. "Onward Men, All Hell Can't Stop Us," Cartoon, *Western Worker* 1(26) July 28, 1932, 4.

<sup>320</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields: History of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, (1939, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 6

Mexican?"<sup>321</sup> In a clear reference to the racial politics of the Depression, the miners who hang Murrieta's brother José in the film version of *El Dorado*, as well as the miners who rape and kill Rosita, complain openly of their troubles with unemployment, "everyone's gettin' rich 'cept for us," one miner says, while another complains that "the land don't belong to us."<sup>322</sup> Not only does this gesture to the logic of the massive "repatriations" of the thirties that cited unemployment as the primary cause for deporting tens if not hundreds of thousands of Mexicans from California, it also resonates with other Popular Front critiques of racism as a form of displaced class anger. From Archie Mayo's *Black Legion* in which a northern Klan-like organization feeds on the resentment of factory workers, to Nathaniel West's "mob of resentment" at the climax of "Day of the Locust," this reading of lynching places Wellman's *El Dorado* clearly within the lexicon of a Popular Front common sense. Likewise, the notion that the vigilante killing of Murrieta's brother was a localized act of terror is repeatedly punctured in *Gringo Gold* by the reference to a state-wide race war and the racial epithets used by the sheriff's men throughout the text.<sup>323</sup>

The Coolidge text repeatedly emphasizes the social and collective nature of the Anglo dispossession of Mexican property and persons. It is clear that Murrieta

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<sup>321</sup> Samuel A. Peeples, *The Dream Ends in Fury* (New York: Harper and Row's, 1949), 14.

<sup>322</sup> *The Robin Hood of El Dorado*. directed by William A. Wellman, written by William A. Wellman, Joseph Calleia, and Melvin Levy, 85 min., MGM, 1936, film.

<sup>323</sup> Dane Coolidge, *Gringo Gold; a story of Joaquin Murrieta, the bandit* (New York: E. P. Dutton & co., inc., 1939.), 93, 176.

loses his miner's claim as part of a systematic purging of non-whites from the gold fields, and in a scene that is reminiscent of current debates around immigration, Coolidge wryly notes "the morning after the hanging of Carlos, there was no one to sweep up the saloons, or take out the garbage," making clear both the class position of Mexican-Americans and Anglos' dependence on non-white labor.<sup>324</sup> Murrieta is consistently linked with the entire Mexican population of the state who "began to realize what it meant to their people to be deprived of their homes and property...tricked by land-hungry sharpers, or money-grabbers charging their ten-percent."<sup>325</sup> In a gesture that seems linked to the massive "repatriation" of Mexican-Americans in the 1930s as well as historically based in the ethnic cleansing of towns like Sutter and Rancheria shortly after annexation, a mob burns down the entire Mexican quarter in San Andreas "and drove them from the town."<sup>326</sup>

Many of the calls for law and order within the thirties texts can thus be read in the context of the call for anti-lynching legislation. As the search for federal legislation suggests, many anti-lynching organizers felt that the forces of "law and order" would protect them from private militias and local law enforcement. For many, it was government responses such as the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee that cemented in the public imagination the idea that the federal government would be the protector of civil liberties. As historian Jerold Auerbach suggests, the Roosevelt

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 41

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 223

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 93; Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West: 1850-1935*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 36. Gonzales-Day chronicles the ethnic cleansing of whole Californio towns immediately after annexation.

administration's efforts to protect civil liberties led civil libertarians to abandon their anti-statist perspective and recognize the role of the federal government.<sup>327</sup> Likewise, many of the anti-lynching campaigns themselves were quests for impartial law enforcement. The NAACP's *The Crisis* reported on its Monterey chapter's successful fight for a jury trial of a local black citizen rather than a judicial assignment to an asylum. In addition to running the names of congressional sponsors of anti-lynching legislation, in *The Crisis'* special issue on lynching, the opening editorial begins with an evocation of the "mob" that "sets itself up in a place of the state."<sup>328</sup> While there are contrary discourses around the question of lynching, it is clear that at least within certain liberal sectors, the hope for an impartial system of justice regulated by the state vied for hegemony among others.

In this sense, it's interesting to note that the figure of Harry Love, the deputy who eventually tracks down Murrieta, is presented in nearly all of the texts as something of a liberal. In the film version of *El Dorado*, the Love figure (Bill Warren) defends Murrieta as "a man done wrong to" and appeals to liberal universalism when he argues that "none of you would done any different." Warren is also instrumental in initially preventing a "citizen's militia" from tracking Murrieta down. And indeed, Warren's first instinct, after he hears that Murrieta has been threatened on his farm, is to find a lawyer and attempt to enlist the help of the federal

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<sup>327</sup> Jerold S. Auerbach, *Labor and Liberty: The LaFollette Committee and the New Deal* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1966), 190.

<sup>328</sup> "Along the N.A.A.C.P. Battlefront," *The Crisis*, January 1935, 28; "Public Enemy Number One!" *The Crisis*, January 1935, 7.



government. It is only when the federal government is unable to act that Murrieta is driven into his acts of violence. In the words of the lawyer Warren consults, "Washington D.C. don't seem to know nothing about what's going on out here," positioning the federal government as against the local, racist, authorities. The meaning of this clear: that if Washington, DC were able to enforce the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and protect Mexican lands from encroachment, then Murrieta would have never been driven to crime. This positions Washington, D.C. as the arbiter of order, and more importantly, suggests that proper law-enforcement would protect minorities from mob violence. This is similar to the language of the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill advanced by most left organizations in the 1930s, meant to curtail "states rights" and prevent lynching.

The rhetoric of "disorder" used to critique lynching was widespread among left-liberal groups in the 1930s. While contemporary scholarship on the collusion between the law and lynching contradicts this view, the progressive and impartial administration of the law was an important strand of anti-lynching activism and thought. In an article in *The Crisis*' special issue on lynching, a psychologist argues that the practice is "primitive" and "savage," as "the administration of justice is ruthlessly wrested from the arms of the Law and meted out by private citizens."<sup>329</sup> Tellingly for the subject of Joaquín Murrieta films, Roosevelt was quoted in the *The Crisis* as calling lynching "banditry."<sup>330</sup> This rhetoric of lawlessness opens the door

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<sup>329</sup> Dr. A.A. Brill and Dr. Fritz Wittels, "Psychologists Analyze Neal Lynching," *The Crisis*, January 1935, 18.

for federal intervention against lynching, yet it also deracinates lynching from its specific racialized nature and also from questions of structural power. For films like *Robin Hood of El Dorado*, the violence done to Murrieta, and Murrieta's slide into increasing violence against "innocents" are equated as both examples of lawless behavior, with the government forces ultimately providing for stability.

Yet the 1930s versions of Murrieta also present the government in a far more positive – and progressive – light. Like Warren in *The Dream Ends in Fury*, Love is described as "a man out of step with his time...the fact that a man was a Mexican carried no more weight with him than if that man were English or German."<sup>331</sup> And in *Gringo Gold*, the figure of Captain Bynes, who finally tracks and kills Murrieta, is also depicted as without racial prejudice, derided as a "regular Greaser lover" by locals in a bar for refusing the reward money.<sup>332</sup> This representation of an impartial state carrying out justice regardless of race and ethnic origin, as well as the figure of Captain Love/Bynes/Bill Warren, who is depicted as a bearer of progressive values while at the same time the only one who can track down Murrieta, evokes the paradox of liberal discourse around lynching. So long as Murrieta remains a passive victim of racist miners, the figure of the benevolent federal government, through the character of Love, acts both paternalistically and generously. It is only when Murrieta crosses the line between revenge and social banditry that the Love figure decides to hunt Murrieta down. This aspect of the thirties "Popular Front" era Murrieta tale is

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<sup>330</sup> "President Roosevelt Says," *The Crisis*, January 1937, 7.

<sup>331</sup> Samuel A. Peeples, *The Dream Ends in Fury*, 23.

<sup>332</sup> Dane Coolidge, *Gringo Gold*, 246.

decidedly different from the original John Rollins Ridge version. While Love may figure as the harbinger of law and order for Ridge, and thus be "necessary," Love himself does not exhibit the element of sympathy and liberal concern in Ridge's text as he does in the more contemporary versions. In the thirties vision of Murrieta, it is no longer an oppressive hand of government suppressing by force, but rather a reluctant state that finally must take action despite its acknowledgement of the legitimacy of Murrieta's claims of injustice.

Murrieta's racial liminality is key to understanding his role as a figure in Western anti-lynching stories. Even those that appear in relatively radical journals, such as Forest Frazier's "Only a Damned Nigger" in *The New Tide*, or Bulosan's self-representation during acts of violence in *America is in the Heart*, present the racial body of a lynching victim as passive and defenseless. As mentioned in chapter one, many of the photographs of "terror victims" display their bodies as targets, rather than as voices of resistance. While this interestingly complicates the usual memory of strong, masculine bodies as the primary representation of labor in the 1930s, it does also present problems for the representation of Murrieta, who is at once, in the English-language versions, a criminal and a victim of racial terror. While William's *Robin Hood of El Dorado* is remembered as starring the matinee idol Warner Baxter as Murrieta, a sizable portion of the cast have Spanish surnames, a rarity in Jim Crow Hollywood, in which Mexican-Americans were seldom allowed on screen – except in the most stereotypical or minor roles. Yet this is not to say the division of the roles according to race was random. José, Murrieta's brother who is lynched, Rosita, Murrieta's wife who is raped and killed, and Murrieta's mother who is beaten by a

mob, are the only leads with Spanish surnames, and they do not, or cannot, resist when they are assaulted. The active "Mexican" roles, as bandits, killers, and *hacendados*, are played by Anglo actors, including Murrieta, Three-Fingered Jack, and Juanita. The division of roles between Anglo/Mexican descent actors also mirrors the split within discourse on anti-lynching. For the film to succeed in drawing sympathy for Mexican victims, Murrieta's exceptional status as a marginal white seems to suggest the converse: "good" Mexicans – and therefore those who deserve pity – must also remain passive.

It's possible that the choice in casting had to do with perceived racial sensitivity among the white producers, who did not want to portray actors of Mexican descent in more violent roles. While critic Paul Buhle calls the film version of *El Dorado* "among the most positive...to this time...in its admiration of Chicano culture," and although it was co-written by well known left-wing playwright, Melvin Levy, the decision to cast an Anglo matinee star as the lead role may have also been a calculated attempt to make the story more palatable to white, mainstream audiences.<sup>333</sup> Levy, who was known as a key writer for the Boston Group Theater, and was one of the many "gray listed" artists during the Cold War, likely had much to do with some of the important changes from the novel to the script. Several of the key plot points are altered to fit within a liberal, Popular Front discourse, most central of which is the change of Murrieta from a gold miner to a yeoman farmer. In nearly all the versions of Murrieta, including the *corrido* and the 1854 Ridge/Yellow Bird

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<sup>333</sup> Paul Buhle and David Wagner, *Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story of America's Favorite Films* (New York: New Press, 2002), 136.

text, Murrieta is a gold miner whose claim is challenged and then stolen by white miners. In *El Dorado*, Murrieta never mines and is even contemptuous of mining as "lazy and greedy;" rather he is pictured multiple times as a hardworking farmer, first living with his wife and mother, and then with his brother. The white miners, by contrast, are portrayed as bearers of capitalistic greed. They are presented as animalistic, often digging through the mud with their bare hands, the "bones of their pack animals" driven to overwork "whiten in the sun," and they are shown as degrading the natural landscape to mine. This image of an emergent capitalist order destroying land and degrading human beings is immediately juxtaposed to Murrieta, standing upright, digging potatoes with a pitchfork, very visibly clean and using appropriate tools for his work. The miners are all single men, but Murrieta is constantly presented as a man with family, represented by his wife Rosita in the conservative domestic role of cooking and cleaning, and his extended family nearby. This presentation of Murrieta as a yeoman farmer dispossessed of his land by greed is one of the central tropes of great depression cultural production – from FSA photographs to Steinbeck's *Grapes* – and placing him within this lineage does much to include Murrieta within the cultural center of "worthy victims" and inheritors of the mythic U.S. democratic tradition.

This yeoman Murrieta is remade to fit within an allegorical New Deal coalition of liberal businessmen, minorities, and the working class in Williams' *El Dorado* as well. Continuing the film's disposition to see racism as the product of resentment and anarchy, his response to Three Finger Jack's sadistic delight in killing Chinese workers is to declare that the band needs "leadership," and that he would

volunteer, giving the band a political direction, repositioning Murrieta as something of a modern political leader. Like the New Deal federal government protecting Mexican-Americans, so Murrieta would curb the racialized chaos of Three Finger Jack and his band. More important, Murrieta eventually comes to understand that the wealthy *hacendados* he earlier scorned and robbed are "now as poor as I am," and he joins forces with the daughter of a prominent Mexican family. Like Frank Capra's "big family" of the New Deal, so the joining of the daughter of a wealthy businessman with a social bandit creates cross-class alliances.

The final scene of the film, in which Murrieta falls dead on Rosita's grave, echoes the theme of family and a Popular Front critique of capitalism. Rosita's marker places her death in 1848, mapping the U.S. invasion of California with the breaking of the domestic unit. Obviously committed for effect (since the film places her death after the Gold Rush, then the marker would have to be inaccurate), this scene troubles the 19<sup>th</sup> century trope of annexation as a wholesome marriage between two people. As Streeby argues in *American Sensations*, Mexican elites were imagined as welcomed "in the U.S-American family circle," completing the trope of annexation as "union" of marriage between the U.S. and Mexico.<sup>334</sup> And likewise, Sam Houston's statement that the annexation of Texas into the United States would be "as a bride adorned for her espousals" is critiqued: annexation in *Robin Hood of El*

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<sup>334</sup> Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations*, 114, 121.

*Dorado* destroys marriages, and sets loose rapacious, lone men upon honest, hard-working farmers.<sup>335</sup>

As much as *El Dorado*, along with other English language versions of the Murrieta legend, may fit the contours of Popular Front culture, I nonetheless have to question Paul Buhle's assessment that *El Dorado*, or any of the other English-language versions of the Murrieta legend, are "admiration" of "Chicano culture." I don't believe that the makers of *El Dorado* were racist per se, rather the film has little to do with Mexican-American or Chicano/a culture one way or the other. Unlike the Los Madrugadores' *corrido* that circulated on Spanish-language radio stations and was specifically geared towards a working-class audience of Mexican descent, the English-language versions of the legend's meta-text did not circulate among channels of Spanish-language viewers or readers. Even the Communist Party's "prize for the writers on Joaquín Murieta" made the call within the English-language edition of their newspaper, not the Spanish-language *Lucha Obrera*. What this suggests is, that no matter what the political content and meaning of the English-language Murrieta meta-text, it is a text about, rather than by or for, Mexican-Americans in California, and the dominant culture's relationship to the memory of 1848. Given that Murrieta is a meta-text by and about the dominant culture, and funded by major U.S. culture industries, it also poses the unanswered question from *The New York Times* reviewer: how did such a text critical of U.S. racism and imperialism get made, when other, arguably milder anti-fascist texts could not? While one answer could lie in Streeby's

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<sup>335</sup> Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 27.

analysis of the text as a criminalization of Mexican-Americans, given Murrieta's heroic stature in many of the texts, I would also argue that Murrieta fits within the context of the California romance.

That it is protest fiction is not a contradiction with its status as romance, a work of fiction that acts as a fanciful realm onto which the viewer can project desires not only of consumer, even imperial desire, but also desires for a pre-modern, chivalric past.<sup>336</sup> Arguably the most important California romance, Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*, was also written as protest fiction, attacking the native genocide in California that directly came after annexation. As Chon Noriega argues, what defines *Ramona* as a romance of the West was the extent to which her character could create a consumer fantasy of California and stand in for, while also eliding, the actual native Americans in California. The novel's success, according to Noriega, depends on Ramona's racial claims to whiteness, in which "the mostly White, presumably female readers" are invited "to occupy the space of the Indian in a moment of 'sentimental identification'."<sup>337</sup> The discourse of sentimentalism enacts an erasure of just the subjectivity it is supposed to represent precisely because it is predicated on the assumption of sameness. As Amy Kaplan argues in "Manifest Domesticity," sentimental discourses of the home were employed as part of the U.S. imperial project, both to differentiate racially unfit subjects as lacking the order and refinement

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<sup>336</sup> I am borrowing the definition of a popular culture romance from Amy Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 94-102.

<sup>337</sup> Chon Noriega, "Birth of the Southwest: Social Protest, Tourism, and D.W. Griffith's *Ramona*" *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 209.



of the domestic sphere, as well as to define the role of empire as bringing these subjects within imperial discipline to "civilize" and train within a stern maternal organization.<sup>338</sup> Yet even sentimental works published as protest fiction like Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, emphasize the ability of Tom and Ramona to adopt values that allow them to be produced as subjects within a white middle-class culture of feeling. Ramona's racial liminality, as well as her education, beauty, and fidelity, fashion her, like Tom, into images of sentimental concern, "the same" as the reader, and yet as essentially differentiated from the actual subjects of color they are constructed to represent.

Yet as Michael Denning suggests in *The Cultural Front*, the Popular Front's engagement with the sentimental is part of its cultural legacy, even if this is far more ambivalent and partial than later critics might assert.<sup>339</sup> Many of the values derided by the high moderns, writes Suzanne Clark in *Sentimental Modernism*, such as love, commitment, domesticity, and the affect of consumer culture, were also values to a large extent embraced by left-wing cultural producers in the 1930s.<sup>340</sup> In Kenneth Burke's famous essay delivered at the 1935 American Writers Congress, "Revolutionary Symbolism in America," Burke speaks of adopting the affective, suasive appeals of advertising in their work as revolutionaries, and that socialists should assume "positive symbols" that would evoke sentimental bonds and create

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<sup>338</sup> Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *Anarchy of Empire*, 23-50.

<sup>339</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* (London: Verso, 1997), 115-7.

<sup>340</sup> Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1-8.

"sympathy" and "kindred values" among a democratic vision of "the people."<sup>341</sup>

Indeed, it is just this sensibility that Denning refers to when he defines the Popular Front with Raymond Williams' phrase, as a "structure of feeling," noting that the cultural of "commitment" as a personal and felt choice became something of a catchphrase for left intellectuals in the period.<sup>342</sup> In this sense, one could say *Robin Hood* embodies many of the contradictions of Popular Front cultural production. If the culture industry's version of the Popular Front is marked by a sensibility of national belonging, then a legendary bandit who defines himself in the 1930s Spanish-language *corrido* as one who "makes Anglos/tremble" and who to whom "no one gave...a bit of affection" is necessarily fraught with tension.<sup>343</sup>

The aesthetic and political demands of representing California as an "outpost of empire" to use McWilliams' phrase, also problematizes an aesthetic based on "sympathy" and "kindred feeling" -- or as Noriega frames it -- "sentimental identification." This is not to suggest that left and anti-imperialist activists denied bonds of solidarity; rather, the bonds were articulated precisely by the quality of "negativity" Burke wanted to avoid, their status as victims of racial and class oppression. As Don Mitchell writes in the *Lie of the Land*, the question of landscape

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<sup>341</sup> Kenneth Burke, "Revolutionary Symbolism in America," *American Writers Congress* (New York: International Publishers, 1935), 89, 91.

<sup>342</sup> Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 26.

<sup>343</sup> "A cualquier americano/lo hago temblar a mis pies" and "Nadie me hizo ni un cariño," from "Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta," in *Los Madrugadores*, performed and arranged by *Los Madrugadores*, published by Arhoolie Folklyric, 2000, audio recording.

in California was of central importance to the agricultural giants as it was to the real estate boosters, who wanted to present California as "a playground of beauty" and a "pastoral Eden" to cover up the real facts of exploitation and labor strife.<sup>344</sup> Like Noriega's critique of the 1920s film version of *Ramona*, what the novels and films of the Murrieta legend reproduce is the colonial gaze as a tourist, orienting the viewer to enjoy a pastoral, mythic landscape of the Spanish Californio and the open abundance of land, while paradoxically feeling a sentimental identification with the victims of colonial expansion. The romance of California is precisely about constructing a fantasy of natural beauty and wonder, and yet often this beauty is dependent upon covering up California's colonial legacy.

Murrieta thus functions as a kind of double text, critical of 1848 and its consequences, at the same time celebrating the romantic myth of California. Indeed, I would argue that the Murrieta legend supplanted the *Ramona* legend as a kind of thirties production of the "foundational myth" of California. In this sense, the racial liminality of Murrieta in the English-language texts fulfills a similar logic to the half-Scottish/half-native *Ramona* in Jackson's novel. Unlike the *corrido* by Los Madrugadores in which Murrieta's identity is posed though a sense of national, rather than racial, belonging--"*yo no soy Americano...yo soy...Mexicano*,"--Murrieta is frequently distinguished in the English-language texts through ocular descriptions of his race: marked apart from the character of Three-Finger Jack as both lighter-skinned and more civilized, Murrieta is described in turns as a "Spaniard" and as having a

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<sup>344</sup> Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 22, 33.

"complexion...neither dark nor light, but clear and brilliant," and as discussed earlier, played by a well-known white matinee idol, Warner Baxter, known for playing racially liminal roles.<sup>345</sup> While *Gringo Gold* and *The Dream Ends in Fury* avoid the racial epithets of the Ridge text, Burn's *El Dorado* further triangulates Murrieta between "poor Indians" who are "cowardly" and "miserable," and the "Oriental patience" of passive Chinese miners, creating as Omi and Winant describe, a whiteness by proxy.<sup>346</sup> And unlike other Hollywood representations of characters of Mexican descent played by Anglos, such as Marlon Brando's Zapata or Charleton Heston's Miguel Vargas, Baxter is not in brownface, further suggesting the director's intention to present a visually deracinated Murrieta. In this way, Murrieta speaks more to a residual Spanish colonialism, in which the Californios were legally considered "white" and often distinguished economically as well as racially from the later working-class migrants from northern Mexico.<sup>347</sup> And much like Noriega's argument about Ramona, it allows the viewer to see Murrieta as neither "Mexican" nor "white," but in an inbetween position that allows the viewer a site of identification. Thus Murrieta's tragic death allows the viewer to close off the event in the past, safely sealed within a violent narrative of progress.

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<sup>345</sup> "Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta," in *Los Madrugadores*, performed and arranged by *Los Madrugadores*, published by Arhoolie Folklyric, 2000, audio recording. Walter Noble Burns, *Robin Hood of El Dorado* (New York: Coward-McCann, inc, 1932), 5. John Rollin Ridge (Yellow Bird), *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murrieta, the Celebrated California Bandit* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 8.

<sup>346</sup> John Rollins Ridge, *Joaquín Murieta*, 36-8, 83-5.

<sup>347</sup> Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 69.

One of the more curious facts about the Murrieta legend is that, while proposing a critique of the Gold Rush years, the resurgence of the tale could provoke precisely the promise of the Gold Rush for dozens of "prospectors" searching for Murrieta's buried gold. Rather than understand the Murrieta story in relation to a binary between "critique" and "containment," one could suggest rather that it reproduces the romance of California at a moment in which dominant institutions were under assault. Perhaps the most important aspect of the Murrieta legend is its place within the pastoral tradition, the representation of a pre-industrial California. In the same way *Ramona* led to a Mission revival, so Murrieta celebrates the wildness of California's landscape for a WPA generation celebrating a return to nature. In the opening and closing shots of *Robin Hood*, we're presented with a vast pictorial landscape, long-shots of the rugged Sierra mountains, and close-ups of Murrieta within the natural world. Murrieta is nearly always associated with the natural landscape, opposed to Warren and other Anglos, who are always framed either within the rational pursuits of economic gain – mining or in their offices - or within the semi-urban space of the town. Equally, the scenes of the mountain hideaway suggest a pastoral romance, with guitars, singing, and drinking around campfires, and in the presence of giant redwoods often pictured in tourist brochures. And nearly all of the Murrieta tales feature his travel from the high mountains of northern California to the still-Spanish towns of Los Angeles and San Diego, reproducing a tourist's regionalism much like the Federal Writer's Project State Guides. While the "tourism" promoted by Murrieta is not the same as the Spanish pastoral promoted by Jackson's

novel, the film produces a California landscape that is nearly identical to the Edenic dreams of large agri-business landowners.

In Mitchell's *The Lie of the Land*, he discusses the way in which large landowners in California worked hard to promote – and produce – California as a model pastoral landscape. Citing a wave of regional and travel writers at the birth of the large agricultural estates, Mitchell argues that there was a sustained effort to produce California as a "purely aesthetic environment" modeled on Italian villages and orchards.<sup>348</sup> While the literature of the California landscape may seem merely idealist, this idea was constructed through forced relocations of vagrants, migrant workers, and immigrants.<sup>349</sup> Mitchell writes of the landscape as a form of "spatial power" produced through the visual and discursive representation of beauty, in which the reproduction of beauty and the reproduction of capital in this instance have a direct one-to-one correlation.<sup>350</sup> It's not merely a question of how labor will be represented, then, but if within the discourse of the California ideal the representation of labor is even possible. In this sense, the production of a "beautiful California" is never disturbed in the Murrieta legend; rather, through Murrieta's heroic romance, the California landscape is reproduced as the source of Edenic redemption. Murrieta's refuge in the pastoral mountains away from the troubles of racial violence mirrors the California booster's hope to retreat from the troubles of labor strife in the pastoral

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<sup>348</sup> Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 22.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

images of the state, and his travels up and down the state are highly suggestive of the mode of conveyance from which the tourist's gaze is best fixed, the automobile. The fact that the Murrieta films and texts pose landscape as the answer to social turmoil does not erase their status as Popular Front protest literature, and indeed it suggests the many ways in which more successful, and more centrist, Popular Front campaigns relied on a bourgeois sensibility. The Murrieta tales fuse a popular front concern for civil liberties with a mass culture sensibility of sentimental identification and consumer tourism. While I argue there are important continuities between *Ramona* and the English-language Murrieta, one could also say that the Murrieta legend was an attempt to supplant the "foundational myth" of California with a more active and militant figure, albeit within a stable lexicon of consumer and sentimental desire. This is not to condemn the film as without political merit, but rather to suggest that, like many other Popular Front texts that had the good fortune to make it within the mass market, its success also came with the consequence of its integration within the lexicon of the culture industries.

In this context, it's interesting to note that many of the authors engaged in anti-imperial politics in California also vigorously positioned themselves as anti-romantics. McWilliams, Edmund Wilson, and proletarian novelists James Rorty and Arnold B. Anderson took on as part of their excavation of the West the romantic mythology of California. It should be noted that critics like Suzanne Clark question the binary between "sentiment" and "realism," suggesting that not only do realist writers engage in moments of sentiment, but that much politically engaged literature,

especially by women, is ignored by adherence to this construct.<sup>351</sup> Yet I would argue that writers in California used the extensive critical lexicon against the sentimental as a way to engage in an anti-imperialist discourse, without necessarily always calling it by name. While as Clark mentions, the modern critique of the sentimental embraces "the objective" and the "difficult" as opposed to the emotive appeal of sentiment and ocular sensibility of beauty, these writers adapted and transformed the modernist sensibility to discover a quite different "resistance to the obvious" than would have been intended by Eliot or Pound. The "obvious" for these writers, is California as a space of natural beauty; the "obscure" is California's imperial history, workers who have been hidden away from sight by large agricultural and business interests, the degradation of the land by monoculture. This is not to suggest that realism is inherently anti-imperial, rather that the anti-sentimental discourse was used by these writers in the service of an anti-imperial critique. In some ways, one could suggest that these writers developed a radical modernism based on the extremes of the California landscape, and the chasm between official discourse and working class experience.

James Rorty's 1936 *Where Life is Better: An Unsentimental American Journey* takes for its object of parody the title of a pamphlet the author wrote in the 1920s as a copy writer for a booster campaign in San Francisco, "Where Life is Better," by Californians, Inc. He ends his narrative in an Imperial Valley jail during a lettuce strike, as a stark reversal of the "lies" he earlier spun about the freedom and beauty of

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<sup>351</sup> Clark, *Sentimental Modernism*, 1-16.



the Golden State. For Rorty, as for the other writers of the U.S. West just mentioned, "the pioneer concept" of individualism and expansionism relies on "the sentimentality of the pioneer" that is given to "saccharine frosting of neo-Hellenic day-dreaming" to cover up the "hysterical brutality" of conquest.<sup>352</sup> As a copy-writer in the 1920s, Rorty had penned booster literature for a living, describing the "enchanted scenes" and the "possession of paradise" for an advertising company, and comes to the conclusion while sitting in jail in El Centro that the booster literature merely "covers over the stockades of fascism."<sup>353</sup>

Other California de-bunkers like Edmund Wilson also end their private westward journeys in California. Wilson ends his trip in San Diego, a town he reminds us with a melancholic delight, that has the highest suicide rate in the entire nation, the "last blind feeble effervescence of the great burst of the American adventure."<sup>354</sup> The rejection of California romance and its status as an empire is thrown together in one spectacular image:

they throw themselves into the placid blue bay, where the gray battleships and cruisers of the government guard the limits of their enormous nation – already reaching out in the eighties for the sugar plantations of Honolulu<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> James Rorty, *Where Life is Better: An Unsentimental American Journey* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1936), 272-3.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, 271, 12.

<sup>354</sup> Edmund Wilson, *American Jitters: A Year of the Slump* (1937, New York: Books for the Libraries, Inc., 1968), 257.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

In this remarkable metaphor, the dream of California as it ends in San Diego by a kind of symbolic suicide that, in death, has already reinvented itself in the overseas empire in Hawaii.

The obsession with the gap between California as an aesthetic landscape and its reality is probably best captured in the Woody Guthrie song, "Do Re Mi," from *Dust Bowl Ballads*.<sup>356</sup> The presentation of California as a "Garden of Eden" that one experiences by "taking your vacation by the mountains or sea" is punctured by the narrator's "look through the want ads every day" and the need for money, the ironically aesthetic "do re mi." "The paradise to see," California's status as an aesthetic landscape, hides the reality of unemployment. Indeed, the function of the song is to replace one form of looking with another, the consumer gaze of the tourist with the active search of the unemployed. The move from the ocular to the body is also the move from the spatial aesthetic to the actual conditions of production. And other writers and artists, such as Nathaniel West, Robert Cantwell, Chester Himes, and John Steinbeck, also joined the chorus of deconstruction of the California mythology in one way or another. The function of the California romance for these writers is to cover over the brutality of exploitation, racial violence, and fascism. Cantwell's factory in darkness, Himes' prison-house of racism in "free" California, Steinbeck's labor-camps burned by the police, and West's mob of the insulted and injured all point to a culture of political and repressive violence under cover of a sentimental landscape built on dreams of escape and plenty.

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<sup>356</sup> "Do Re Mi," in *Dust Bowl Ballads* performed and written by Woody Guthrie, Buddha records, BMG Distribution, 2000.

Perhaps one writer, more than any other, engaged with the appropriation and commoditization of the Spanish past in California. Proletarian novelist Arnold B. Armstrong published *Parched Earth* in 1934 along with a wave of novels and reportage about the CAWIU led strike wave near Corcoran, including Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*, Daniel Mainwaring's *The Doctor Died at Dusk*, and Paul Taylor's essays later collected in *On the Ground in the 1930s*. While little is known about Armstrong (and indeed, the name is a pseudonym), the book was reviewed favorably by the Communist Party's prestigious West Coast John Reed Club's publication, *The Partisan*, which noted it was "revolutionary" and reviewed it with several other well-known strike novels, William Rollins Jr's *The Shadow Before* and Lauren Gilfillan's *I Went to Pitt College*.<sup>357</sup>

*Earth* is in many ways, a Southern gothic novel staged in the San Joaquin Valley. It tells the story of a mentally disabled "idiot child" who is the illegitimate offspring of the Anglo cannery owner Everett Caldwell and the grand-daughter of a Spanish Don who has not only lost the family land to Caldwell and other speculators, but who lives as a prostitute and social outcast at the edge of town. Caldwell's refusal to recognize the child as well as the child's lewd appearances exposing himself in public and his voracious appetites speaks to a psychoanalytic understanding of imperial memory. Not only does the "idiot-child" speak to the refusal of Californians to recognize the U.S. invasion of 1846, but also that the repressed returns to haunt the presence as an uncanny eruption through our most basic systems of desire.

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<sup>357</sup> Betty Bruce and Justin Melvin, "Fruit, Cotton, and Coal," *The Partisan*, 1(5) April 4, 1934, 7.

The connection between the South and the San Joaquin Valley is not incidental, as many commentators at the time saw California's inland valleys as a second slave economy, and the lynching of Mexican-Americans and labor activists as yet another sign of their structural similarity. And likewise, it was not lost on some commentators such as Carey McWilliams and WEB Du Bois that the same men who built the slave economy in the South and the labor camps in the West also had imperial designs on the Caribbean and the Pacific respectively. Yet unlike the South, the West's imperial history – and the nature of its economy – lay under rhetorical shadow as a "free labor state," and as a "dream country" in which the individual could still escape the wage relationship and achieve the status of independent entrepreneur. This absent presence of its racial empire gets at the heart of the anti-sentimental tradition of Wilson, McWilliams, and Rorty. In this sense, the intentional construction of *Earth* as a gothic narrative is an important, implicit reference to this tradition. The gothic, with its formal concerns of mystery, haunting, horror, and masculine tyranny lends itself to investigations of suppressed knowledge and residual meanings that cannot be affirmed in public discourse. As Avery Gordon notes, ghosts and hauntings are also a way of framing social knowledge, a particular way of knowing of that which is kept silent.<sup>358</sup>

The novel is singular in so far as it begins its story with the Spanish conquest of Alta California – evoking from the first page the Spanish enslavement of the

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<sup>358</sup> Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

Native Americans, and eventual annexation of California to the U.S.<sup>359</sup> This broad scope of history is crystalized into three representative figures: the Vasquez family who lose their land, the Caldwell family which becomes the figure of Anglo capitalism, and the Rathbone family who represent the fading small landholding pioneers. All three families are linked through a legacy of conquest, present in the figure of a disabled child, the illegitimate offspring of a Spanish grandee's daughter, Belle Vasquez, and the son of the Anglo lawyer Ev Caldwell, who owns the town's canneries as well as politically controls its population. This figure of the disabled boy – the real identity of whom is unacknowledged by the town – literally and figuratively haunts the streets: he goes out late at night to break into stores and feed himself as his mother lies dying of syphilis, a disease she contracts from Ev Caldwell and spreads as a prostitute, a second unacknowledged "haunting" that lurks in narrative darkness. This figure of monstrosity, as well as the poisonous sexual economy pursued by Ev through Belle, suggests that the unresolved and uncanny presence of empire leaves the town of Caldwell not only unsafe, but itself slowly dying from a disease that literally is formed by its conception. While Belle's son Wally acts as a "narrative prosthesis," standing in for an unnamable horror of genocide and social theft, this memory acts as an uncontrollable force, neither progressive nor reactionary, attacking both labor organizers and the Chamber of Commerce with equal venom.

Yet the political solution lies in contradiction. One of the main working class figures in the text, train engineer Hop Collins, tells Rathbone that what will save

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<sup>359</sup> Arnold B. Armstrong, *Parched Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1934).

Caldwell is a "new pioneer spirit" that the communist organizers show, a real "fighting spirit" and respect for "the Golden Rule." This nostalgia for the "real pioneer," as opposed to the monopoly capitalist, is shown in the sympathetic portrait of the Rathbones as the central figures in the text, who attempt to make it by "honest work" while the aliens – foreign contract laborers and large landowners – destroy the remnants of the producer's republic. Unlike Steinbeck, however, the novel does not allow for even a promise of such a utopian fantasy. Wally, the disabled boy, destroys the city dam and floods the town in what is both a return of the repressed as well as an image of revolution. As the barber exclaims while a wave of water crashes through the town hall, "I didn't even have to go to Mexico to have my revolution."<sup>360</sup> This seems to suggest that "revolution" is less within the "American grain" than a return to the Spanish, even pre-Spanish past, to a racialized other that is foreign to the entire structure of California social life. The river suddenly unleashed, we are to understand, was originally allowed, in the days of Native Americans, to flow unimpeded through the Valley. Used for irrigation by the Spanish, and then dammed by the Caldwells, its release is a metaphoric return to the moment before conquest. It is telling that in the final confrontation between cannery workers and the National Guard – interrupted by the flood of water – the Guard troops receive "don't shoot to kill" orders as the labor power will be needed in the military when "we go to fight

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 422.

Japan."<sup>361</sup> Thus the seeds of overseas empire are intimately tied to the management of laboring bodies within an internal empire in California.

It's also telling that the central event in the novel is the yearly "Fiesta" created by Ev Caldwell to attract settlers to the region. The Fiesta, like the Fiestas in Santa Barbara and Los Angeles, included "Spanish costumes, Indian regalia, pioneer garb" in addition to guitar players, dancers, and a parade.<sup>362</sup> Likewise, Caldwell "remembered the old mission across from the railroad tracks and was tempted to restore it," which associates him with the Mission revivalism of the 1920s.<sup>363</sup> Ironically, the actual "Mexican laborers" who worked on the restoration left for promises of better pay in the south, highlighting the discrepancy between the image of Mexican history and the actual citizens and workers of Mexican descent in the Valley.<sup>364</sup> As William Deverell writes in *Whitewashed Adobe*, the construction of Spanish-style architecture and inauguration of Spanish fiestas in Southern California, including parades, Spanish dances, caballeros, music, and outdoor "Mexican" food marked the beginning of Southern California's regional identity in the eyes of real-estate and agricultural boosters. As Deverell writes

La Fiesta offered elite Anglos in Los Angeles the ideal vehicle by which to forget – whitewash – both the unpleasantness of recent decades as well as the entire bloody history of the Southwest throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. La Fiesta suggested...that indeed a kind of

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 69.

*rapprochement* had been worked out between the white city builders of Los Angeles and the Mexican past and people....but the peace was a contrived peace...it was a past cloaked as nostalgia.<sup>365</sup>

McWilliams devotes an entire chapter of *Southern California Country* to *Ramona* and the Mission revival. For McWilliams, the answer lay in the need to find a sacred and mythological past that can give an aura of history and presence to a region most marked by boom-and-bust cycles of capital accumulation and real-estate speculation. And likewise, the glorification of the Mission past by the state, Chamber of Commerce, and various popular historians, with its attendant rise in value as a tourist destination, had little to do with the actual conditions of Mexican Americans or Native Americans in California. Deverell notes that "the region accepted charming *Ramona*, as a folk figure, but completely rejected the Indians living in the area."<sup>366</sup> As McWilliams describes it in more savagely ironic terms, "paunchy realtors...in gaudy sashes" and "outland females...in Native American costumes" were viewed "by the 3,279 Mexicans who live in Santa Barbara...doubtlessly bewildered...."<sup>367</sup> Beyond mere commodification, the Los Angeles Fiesta was also a celebration of Manifest Destiny, the floats presenting a chronological narrative of progress through "primitive" natives replaced by increasingly complex representations of industry and the arts.<sup>368</sup> Tellingly, the military would occupy a large part of the parade,

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<sup>365</sup> William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 59.

<sup>366</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country*, 76.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-2.



celebrating the armed conquest of the West.<sup>369</sup> While some attempts were made to suggest "diversity," such as a Chinese dragon and a "real" tribe of Pueblo Indians, the Fiesta was designed to celebrate the colonial incorporation and domination of alien and "exotic" cultures.

Narratively speaking, the Fiesta frames the entire novel. The Fiesta has an almost lunar pull on Wally, who slobbers its pronunciation "Festa" in much the same way Deverell writes the pronunciation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century varied from "fyesty" to "fi-eeestor" by tourists thoroughly unfamiliar with even the rudiments of Spanish.<sup>370</sup> It is during the Fiesta that Wally first exposes himself in public. Wally's public nudity sets in motion the town council to condemn Belle Vasquez's property, which leads to his night-time foraging for food, and his eventual destruction of the dam, during the preparations for the next Fiesta. The irony of the unclaimed progeny of conquest appearing naked during a spectacle of appropriation is that of a silent history demanding to be recognized. It's clear that the history that has been suppressed by the town will reemerge, as a grotesque if not allowed as a figure for justice.

Yet it's also more complicated. Wally's own desire for the Fiesta suggests that even ersatz representations of history can invite libidinal desires that cannot be contained. Even the commodified representations of Murrieta carry within them critiques of empire, at least picked up on by cranky *New York Times* reviewers. In the way the Murrieta legend's "meaning" is variable and contingent, so the construction

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<sup>368</sup> William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 52.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

of the Fiesta in *Earth* works to show the way the history of empire is buried at the same time it is evoked. The translation of Spanish culture into the very industry that exploits Spanish-speaking workers can also allow for critical messages to emerge within its own system. Thus for many writers on the left in California, engaging with history as well as the commodification of history were necessary as simultaneous pursuits.

Yet as I mentioned, even *Earth*, despite its excavation of the absence and presence of 1848, does not do justice to the actual conditions for workers of Mexican descent in California. Given that the novel was released the year after the great Corcoran cotton strike, during which tens of thousands of mostly Mexican-American strikers armed themselves inside camps for months, *Parched Earth* both announces the centrality of 1848 at the same time that it ignores the contemporary reality of its now striking descendants. While "fruit tramps" and "cannery workers" remain a presence throughout the novel, they remain racially ambiguous. With the exception of Hop Collins, a white skilled laborer, and a brief oration by a communist organizer, workers also remain voiceless. Yet, the novel's reason for existence – as articulated by the *Partisan* reviewer – is to chronicle the labor violence always hovering on the border of the text – and town – like a barely articulated memory.

Like other mainstream texts of the thirties in the West, in Murrieta tales and popular anti-Hearst tracts, the acknowledgement of empire is an ever present modality through which to simultaneously express and contain what was the greatest labor insurrection in California history up to that point. While writers like McWilliams and Tenayuca, and organizations like the All-Americas Anti-Imperialist

League and the ALAWF were clear about the connections between empire and anti-labor violence, the connections in many of the mass culture texts remain ambivalent.

The circulation of the Murrieta legend may be, in some ways, a useful metonym for the way in which anti-imperial discourse operates within the Popular Front.

Simultaneously an anti-imperialist *corrido* celebrating armed resistance against the U.S. within a working-class Chicano/a subculture, and a major Hollywood film that both celebrates the myth of expansion at the same time it critiques it, the circulation and representation of the Murrieta myth not only suggests the presentness of anti-colonial discourse, but also the multiple ways it can move within and outside of the dominant culture of the thirties. It also suggests as well the way in which Popular Front culture both elides and calls forth marginalized subjectivities. The *corrido* attuned itself to working class radio stations – and even the English translation of the band's name, The Early Risers, suggests a culture of labor – the song marks itself as part of a larger "laboring of U.S. culture" as Michael Denning frames it. Yet the same anti-imperialist movement also witnessed the elision of working class production with Hollywood films and slick paperbacks. My intention is not to focus on one over the other, but rather to suggest that within a larger field of anti-fascist and anti-imperialist production, "1848" acts as kind of metatext, linking numerous different cultural productions together: *The New Tide*, proletarian novels, popular labor histories, the Communist Party, Hollywood films, and even treasure-hunts in the Sierra Nevada.

What this suggests is that the Popular Front as a moment of cultural and political history needs to be revisited. Often remembered as a moment of sentimental

nationalism, featuring a "redemptive" vision of America to quote George Lipsitz, this view by necessity re-writes much of the Popular Front's central literature.<sup>371</sup> Given the anti-imperialist consensus in which a "redemptive" view of the U.S. was seriously challenged, Lipsitz's narrative of the Popular Front unfortunately aligns itself with the Cold War production of social movement history. While much of the work tying farm-labor activism to anti-imperialism and connecting anti-fascism with movements abroad remains to be done, by focusing on California, one can at least begin to see the broad web of connections among organizations as well as an intertextuality among writers, intellectuals, and Hollywood cultural producers. The lack of visibility for the anti-imperialist movement is often a result, however, of these organizations' desires to provide for the daily needs and immediate concerns of their constituents. The various anti-imperialisms that circulated in the 1930s, from the ALAWF to Bulosan's *The New Tide*, often had to frame arguments in relation to immediately reachable goals, such as redistribution of military spending, citizenship rights for Filipino migrants, or the banning of ROTC contingents from college campuses. This tension between immediate and global goals was often framed as a tension between narratives of

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<sup>371</sup> George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 44.

citizenship and belonging and narratives of anti-colonial resistance. As Emma Tenayuca and Carlos Bulosan suggest, their practical needs as socialist organizers and U.S. residents/citizens meant that claims of belonging were a necessity when repatriation and racial violence against "aliens" competed for attention with critiques of U.S. power. Rather than see all Popular Front activism as fraught with contradiction on this issue, it's also important to cite the unambiguous ways in which a reading of U.S. imperial history was central to their often effective activism on key Popular Front causes. To conclude, one needs to look back at the Popular Front in California with a view of possibility – that simultaneous campaigns aimed at labor, anti-war, electoral victory, anti-imperialism, and civil liberties shared a common lexicon and common agenda. Rather than looking at the Popular Front for seeds of its own failure, activists and intellectuals today can learn much from the multiple entry points this movement has left available to us.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **More American Than You Ever Thought of Being: Self Determination and National Belonging in the Writing of D'Arcy McNickle and Richard Wright**

In a 1933 edition of the California Communist Party newspaper *The Western Worker*, a letter appeared from a self-proclaimed Native American entitled "Indian Tells Upton Sinclair One, and Why He Joined C.P.," framed as a response to then gubernatorial candidate Sinclair's accusations that Communism is "un-American" and "from Russia"

...Now Mr. Sinclair, in regard to Americanism. It so happens that I am an American Indian, which is more American than you ever thought of being. We American Indians can truthfully say we are 100% Americans, which you can not.

You are original products of Europe and so is your mode of production and distribution, and since Columbus discovered this Great Nation we have been exploited.

We American Indians are lovers of all humanity, especially the Negroes, who are the most exploited race in this country. As Chief White Calf of the Blackfoot Indian Reservation in Montana, whose face appears on the Buffalo Head nickel has often said to me, "The flags of the white men are emblems of intolerance."

Before the white man came, our mode of production and distribution were on a cooperative basis, without any exploitation. This is Communism, which is true Americanism. And this is why I joined the Communist Party.

---Vincent Spotted Eagle.<sup>372</sup>

As a rhetorical strategy, Native Americans – both real and fictionalized – were frequently deployed by U.S. socialists as a way to combat their perceived "foreignness," especially during a time in which foreign-born Communists and

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<sup>372</sup> Vincent Spotted Eagle, "Indian Tells Upton Sinclair One, and Why He Joined C.P.," letter to the editor, *Western Worker* 3(12) (March 14) 1934, pg 6.

Socialists faced deportation, often whether they were in the country legally or not. This theme was picked up in numerous cartoons in socialist newspapers, including the *People's Daily World's* "Barnacle and the Fink," in which Finkie, a right-wing anti-communist, is punched out when he tells a Communist co-worker and "full-blooded Sioux Indian" that he "should go back to India" if "he doesn't like this country."<sup>373</sup> By locating socialism with "Native" Americans, the cartoon hopes to root socialism in an identity, if not a tradition, that is bound both physically and mythically within the American grain.

And yet if it is a use of nativism, it is one that dramatically alters the ideological terrain of national belonging. The author of the letter to the *Western Worker* both claims a distinctly *American* national identity at the same time he positions the most salient image of national identity, the flag, as an "emblem of intolerance." This move turns nativist discourse about assimilation and national origins on its head, as it suggests that white Europeans who claim Americanness are alien to U.S. traditions of tolerance, all spoken by – yet again ironically -- the mythic American icon of the Buffalo Head nickel. Spotted Eagler's letter articulates both a language of native belonging to a nation-state as well as a rejection of the whiteness and European origins of such a project. By turning racial claims of sovereignty around, Spotted Eagle suggests that capitalism is a foreign import to the Americas, and that Native Americans have a democratic affinity with the most exploited members of society. The nation in this letter,

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<sup>373</sup> Mac Duff, "Barnacle and the Fink," cartoon, 1(91), (April 16) 1938, *Sunday Magazine*, 12.

becomes a site of Native American sovereignty as well as the harbinger of an inclusive vision of a new pluralism.

While Spotted Eagle may have vanished into history, his letter is nonetheless a concise summary of many of the aspirations and contractions of Popular Front notions of democratic pluralism and claims of sovereignty by communities of color. As Michael Denning, George Lipsitz, Alan Wald and others suggest, the Popular Front era of the 1930s witnessed a politics and a culture of democratic ethnic inclusion.<sup>374</sup> Broad anti-fascist and working-class social movements targeted racism as a key element of fascist and reactionary political forces and a threat to union drives, while the celebration of "ethnicity" became a marker of left-democratic politics in the 1930s.<sup>375</sup> The rise of the multi-racial CIO as well as the interethnic electoral coalitions in Chicago and New York coincided with ethnic festivals that presented immigrants as central to U.S. identity, a rise in progressive publications like *Negro Quarterly*, *Challenge* and *The Clipper* that featured a range of writers of color, and left political parties from the American Labor Party to the Communist Party integrated their ranks and promoted black and Latino activists into prominent positions of power. Perhaps most importantly, the Federal Theater Project and the Federal Writers Project

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<sup>374</sup> Michael Denning describes the twin cultures of ethnic pride, particularly of marginalized cultures and groups, and a sense of newfound national belonging as "ethnic Americanism" that had both radical and conservative constellations within working class union culture, *Cultural Front* (London: Verso, 1998), 9; George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, (Minneapolis: University of MN Press, 2001), 38-42; Alan Wald, *Trinity of Passion: The Literary Left & the Antifascist Crusade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1-16.

<sup>375</sup> Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, 38-9.



were among the first government-sponsored cultural programs to reject a racial/assimilationist definition of U.S. culture; they did so by creating theater pieces, oral history projects, and state guidebooks that explicitly intended to demonstrate the diversity of the United States as well as by receiving advice from Harlem Renaissance poet Sterling Brown and Columbia anthropologist Franz Boas that helped them to articulate approaches to the subjects of race and culture.<sup>376</sup> This new politics of radical democracy – what Denning refers to as the "cultures of unity" within the CIO -- coincided with the emergence of a new civil rights activism among black and Latino/a communities in the U.S., sponsoring movements to enact a federal ban on lynching, de-segregate schools in Los Angeles, integrate labor unions in the midwest, and challenge English-only education in Texas and New Mexico. Spotted Eagles' letter, it should be noted, is also a statement of fundamental solidarity with African-Americans and offers a vision of exploitation in which race forms a central part.

Considered the first "modern" Native American novelist, D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* can offer a way to read the contradictions between Popular Front modalities of self-determination and democratic pluralism. In some ways, the novel is optimistic about the possibility of cultural and political redemption between the Salish and the white settlers on the reservation. Serving as a kind metonym, the protagonist's Salish mother and Spanish father are at "warfare" with one another, a "warfare" that is ultimately resolved by his father's

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<sup>376</sup> Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project* (Chapel Hill: University of NC Press, 2003), 5.

recognition of the wrongs done to the Salish people and his mother's renunciation of Christianity for the "old ways." That these are concurrent suggests that cultural pluralism is not so much compatible with reconciliation, it is rather a precondition of it. This view sits squarely with the progressive vision of the original Native American New Deal authored by John Collier and several Indian rights organizations that formed out of the fight to save Pueblo lands in New Mexico in the early 1920s (a point I'll address more thoroughly in the next section): they believed that the way to "save" U.S. democracy was to recognize past inequalities and respect the cultural rights of national minorities. And yet structurally as well as thematically, *The Surrounded* forecloses this possibility, as the protagonist is caught further within the violence of the racial system of U.S. justice. This paradox, between reconciliation and structural violence is not resolved, and seems to suggest that it may not be resolvable, at least not within the limited possibilities of the reservation system.

In addition to considering *The Surrounded* as a call to cultural, political, and *spatial* self-determination – restoring all of the original Salish lands – one might also consider the novel as in dialogue with other 1930s writers invested in questions of radical nationalism. As one of the most important novels of the Popular Front as well as a text that situated among traditions of African-American literature, Popular Front protest novels, and the modernist canon, reading *The Surrounded* alongside *Native Son* may suggest ways in which *The Surrounded* can be read in a comparative context. In particular, I would like to explore the texts' engagement with questions of self-determination and Popular Front politics.

As Anthony Dawahare notes, Richard Wright's *Native Son* is a novel deeply invested in the question of 20<sup>th</sup> century black nationalism and its political meaning in the black radical tradition.<sup>377</sup> While Dawahare suggests that Bigger Thomas' embrace of black nationalism be read at an ironic distance, I would also suggest that Wright makes it clear other pluralistic and democratic alternatives are not viable for Thomas. Rather, *Native Son* articulates a key problematic that confronted Popular Front activists and writers: that the very pluralism demanded by the Popular Front and the left-liberal wing of the New Deal calls forth constituencies for whom democracy has been an empty promise or worse, the name under which their oppression functions. More specifically to both novels, their bildungsroman form is undercut by the racial violence that structures both narratives. As Frantz Fanon suggests in seminal work on colonial liberation *The Wretched of the Earth*, racialized violence is what demarcates the colony from the metropole; it is the origin of colonial relations between settler and native and the means by which the colony will be liberated.<sup>378</sup> I would suggest that we read the contradiction in both novels between their adherence to the bildungsroman form and their violent ends as a metonym for the contradiction between the narrators' need for self-determination and pluralistic democracy. That the novels are at once nationalistic and integrationist is thus less a fault than the exploration of a

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<sup>377</sup> Anthony Dawahare, "Richard Wright's Critique of Nationalist Desire," *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature*, (Jackson: University Press of MS, 2003), 111-33.

<sup>378</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, Grove Press, 1963), 63-4.

problematic -- the lived contradiction of a politics that at once engaged with democratic social movement and yet worked and imagined beyond its limits.

As these novels suggest, the pluralist cultural and political movements of the 1930s were also intersected by anti-colonialist and black nationalist movements that shared space in the same publications, and often within the same organizations. In the last decade a growing body of literature has been devoted to the role of black nationalism and the support for colonial self-determination from the late 1920s to the Cold War. With the decline of the Garvey movement in the late 1920s, historians Mark Naison and Anthony Dawahare write of the way the Communist Party not only recruited former Garveyites, but in many ways, took up the torch of the black nationalist cause within the U.S. and much of the colonized world in the 1930s. Beginning with the 6th Communist International (Comintern) Congress in 1928, the Communist Party declared a set of policies that would dramatically shape intellectual and political currents in the U.S. for the next decade. Abandoning a pure class critique, the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress built upon the writings of Lenin and Stalin to declare anti-colonial nationalist struggles to be a legitimate part of global revolution, and to state that the Comintern should support national liberation struggles for both "national minorities" within states and as subjects of colonial powers. This policy not only dramatized the Soviet Union's own policy of self-determination within the former Russian empire, it opened the door for U.S. Party leaders to develop a "self-determination" thesis for the "black belt" within the U.S., declaring African-Americans to be "internally colonized" and in need of their own state. While this policy has been criticized as

an example of Communist orthodoxy, both Dawahare and Robin R.G. Kelley have suggested that it was a concession to black radicals from within the Party and the Comintern.<sup>379</sup>

Many on the left also supported the self-determination of colonial subjects, and anti-war and anti-fascist groups carried explicit messages condemning both European and U.S. imperialism. While groups such as the 3,000,000 member American League Against War and Fascism didn't question manifest destiny, they did frequently cite connections between U.S. military spending and U.S. imperialism in Latin America, including U.S. support for right-wing Brazilian dictator Getúlio Vargas and the destabilization of the democratically elected Popular Front government of Ramón St. Grau in Cuba. Likewise, African-Americans were not the only racial minority in the U.S. to consider Lenin's and Stalin's writings on nationalism in relation to their own claims for justice. Labor organizer and Communist Party member Emma Tenayuca co-authored an article titled "The Mexican Question in the Southwest" for *The Communist* shortly after a victorious pecan-sheller strike in San Antonio that involved tens of thousands of workers, mostly of Mexican descent. Beginning the article with the U.S. invasion of Mexican territory in 1846, Tenayuca frames Mexican-American identity as a product of a colonial conquest. She argues that "the treatment meted out to the Mexicans as a whole has from the

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<sup>379</sup> Dawahare, *Nationalism, Marxism, and African-American Literature*, 73-6; Robin D.G. Kelley, "'Afric Sons With Banner Red': African American Communists and the Politics of Culture, 1919-1934," *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, (New York City: The Free Press, 1994), 103-22.

earliest days of sovereignty of the United States been that of a conquered people," citing the economic and cultural "penetration of Anglo-Americans" in Mexican territory that "has practically segregated into colonies" the original Mexican inhabitants.<sup>380</sup> She describes the process of colonial alienation provoked by separating communities from their land, enclosing public spaces, repressing the Mexican and mestizo language and culture, denying political representation, enforcing second class wages, and targeting whole communities with state repression. The outlining of forms of oppression has a culminating logic, as she makes the deliberate argument that Mexican-Americans, like other colonized peoples, suffer repression as "a whole people" in both cultural and economic terms, outside of the safeguards of citizenship and nationhood at all levels of identity-formation.

As C.L.R. James writes in the "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the U.S.A." many of the pluralistic attempts to include African-Americans within a more democratic U.S. national narrative merely incorporate them within a larger narrative that privileges whiteness. Critiquing a series of new histories of the Civil War, James writes that "in the...Marxist writings of the 1930's, the Negro is present, but only as a soldier, an officer, as deserving of 'recognition' for their bravery, service, etc."<sup>381</sup> He argues that instead,

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<sup>380</sup> Emma Tenayuca and Homer Brooks, "The Mexican Question in The Southwest," *The Communist*, March 1939, 258-9.

<sup>381</sup> C.L.R. James, *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C.L.R. James*, edited by Scott McLemee & Paul Le Blanc (Amherst: New York, Prometheus Books, 2000), 188-9.

revolutionary movements in the U.S. need to recognize the particular subjectivity of black struggle that is at once outside of the national, class-based frame of the Popular Front and likewise, has an important if neglected role within it. He makes four points: that the black struggle has its own deep, historical roots; that it has an organic political perspective and is not in need of outside or vanguard leadership; that it can intervene as a powerful force in shaping the character of the nation; and that it has a great contribution to make to the international proletarian struggle.<sup>382</sup> One can thus read James' portrait of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution as also re-centering the history of the Enlightenment with new world Africans at the center, who took the French revolution and "constructed it in their own image."<sup>383</sup> James suggests that the slaves' appropriation of the hypocritical universalism of the Enlightenment did not undermine it, so much as fulfill it – or rather that, to fulfill the Enlightenment, one must first focus on the margins rather than the center. This realignment of modernity in relation to a new world, black subject has profound implications for the Popular Front, as James was well aware, informing the reader that “this book is of the age.”<sup>384</sup> Locating revolution in the colonies rather than the urban metropole, understanding the dialectical way those denied their Enlightenment subjectivity are precisely the ones who must fulfill its meaning, and bringing out the way in which the black subject fuses folk tradition with modernity, suggests

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<sup>382</sup>Ibid., 182-3

<sup>383</sup> C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Random House, 1963,) 81.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., xi.

that the colonies are not merely backwaters awaiting the revolution to bring them modernity. Rather a revolutionary modernism locates liberation, the forward motion of history, in the very colonies seen by Europe to be backwards, outside of history.

James' revisioning of New World history and black subjectivity is furthered in W.E.B. Du Bois' epic history of slavery and emancipation, *Black Reconstruction*.<sup>385</sup> The conclusive action of the Civil War, Du Bois argues, was not Lee's surrender at Appomattox, but rather the "general strike" of four million slaves that brought the Southern economy to a halt. Du Bois' insistence that the civil war was a labor question asks the reader to consider more than the issue of wage labor and unwaged slavery, including the ways in which labor is recognized through the modality of race. It wasn't that labor unions and free-soilers could not recognize the injustice of slavery, but rather that they could not recognize the black slaves as workers, whose fate was intrinsically tied to their own. Indeed, one of the reasons the New Deal gained wide support while the Freedman's Bureau failed was tied up in just this question: the 'dictatorship of the government of labor of capital' seemed an acceptable truism when applied to white workers, since blacks were not labor – and planters, therefore, not capital. "Racism" in this liberal model is merely a question of inclusion and exclusion, rather than one about the very way in which labor came to be defined, and then fought over, as a raced concept from the start.

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<sup>385</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1935, 1962).



In this sense, it is key for Du Bois to place black labor in the south as less a 'question' than a bloc, with its own historic capacity and agency. It is one thing to suggest that blacks played an important role in the Civil War, but it is quite another to suggest that the meaning of the war, and hence the nation-state, rested on the actions of a black general strike. This suggests that black labor and activism are not a perspective to be incorporated, but have a unique and particular subjectivity that has a determining effect on the whole. The implications for the Popular Front are global. Not only did the labor movement not fully comprehend the importance of black – and especially southern black labor – but Du Bois' comparison of colonialism with southern plantocracy was not incidental. The marriage of convenience among abolitionists, progressive unions, and industry that led to universal suffrage (and no more) was echoed by the coalition of unions, anti-fascists and capitalist-democracies to destroy fascism, and no more - at the expense of preserving colonialism as part of the 'democratic' West. While many anti-fascists were anti-imperialists, many more read imperialism outside of the discursive field of labor and capital: the colonial subject may an 'other' deserving sympathy, but not necessarily the bond of solidarity. Opposing fascism for colonial democracy became – to Du Bois and others like CLR James and Paul Robeson – like opposing slavery for Jim Crow freedom. Inclusion in a new multi-racial CIO or within an FWP guidebook was not enough. But the very presence of Native Americans who identified as members of the Communist Party raises the question that up to now has not been fully addressed: what, if any, connections can be made between the social formation of the "long Popular

Front" and Native American activists, cultural production, and federal policy?

These concerns open up a broader question that also has yet to be examined, specifically how questions of race, transnational anti-colonialism, and nationalism in the long Popular Front engaged questions of U.S. indigeneity.

### **Native American New Deal or Native American Popular Front?**

While this discursive and political battle over multiculturalism, nationalism and colonialism raged on, it seems strange that few if any contemporary accounts of the Popular Front mention another battle over the question of race and sovereignty that occupied a significant part of the New Deal agenda: the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) or Native American New Deal. Indeed, the absence of Native Americans from accounts of the Popular Front period is striking, especially considering that the IRA was not only a major component of the New Deal agenda, but was considered one of the few successes of the New Deal's left-wing.<sup>386</sup> And while the IRA fell short of Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) secretary John Collier's goals and remains controversial for reasons I'll discuss below, its passage was accompanied with both federally and state funded cultural productions focusing on American Indian lives as well as a small explosion of Indian and non-Indian writers broadly sympathetic to Native claims

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<sup>386</sup> Kenneth Philp, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-54*, (Tucson: University of AZ Press, 1977), 245. For more sources on the IRA, New Deal programs and Native Americans, and John Collier's tenure in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, see Lawrence Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform* (Albuquerque: University of NM Press, 1983); Graham Taylor, *The Indian New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: The Administration of the IRA, 1934-45* (Lincoln: University of NB Press, 1980); Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (New York: Random House, 1984)

of sovereignty. Perhaps most importantly, tensions within the New Deal Indian reforms were also a concise expression of many of the contradictions around questions of race and nationalism within the Popular Front. In one sense, the IRA and the FWP represented a break with government assimilationist policy and promoted a "pluralistic" view of U.S. history, yet a pluralistic version of U.S. history that as often denied direct expression and cultural power to those same communities it was said to represent. Like the Popular Front itself, these tensions were not resolved, and often more dominant cultural strains that privileged whiteness and liberal democracy prevailed in public policy as well as recorded history. However, such contradictions of public policy and cultural production also opened spaces for more radical voices to be expressed and, one could argue, created valuable precursors for later liberation movements

The decade of Indian reform under John Collier, Roosevelt's appointee to lead the BIA from 1933 to 1945, was the single largest change in federal Indian policy since the Dawes Act of 1887. The IRA was promoted by Collier, Indian activist organizations, and the BIA administration as a form of self-government that would restore the Native land-base and empower the reservation as a site of cultural and economic independence.<sup>387</sup> It had several major accomplishments: it ended the policy of allotment by which Indian land was slowly broken up and finally sold to non-Indians; it legalized Native customs and religions, many of which were still banned at the time of the IRA's passage; it created an arts and crafts board to verify "authentic" Native American art (and thus it was hoped raise

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 135

prices for Native artists); it created the policy of self-government under which tribes would be encouraged to incorporate for the purposes of economic self-development; and it ended "assimilation" as the end goal of federal Indian policy.<sup>388</sup> Despite the fact that the bill was seen at the time as radical and even "communistic" by conservative politicians, missionaries, and the more assimilated tribes, the act has been criticized by recent Native American scholars as both insufficient and misdirected. As part of the New Deal's emphasis on national belonging and pluralism, the IRA can be read in light of other federal programs and documents like the Four Freedoms, the Federal Writers' Project, and Fair Employment Practices Committee that attempted to increase the role, economic opportunity, and visibility of minorities within the national body. As Ronald Takaki suggests in *A Different Mirror*, the IRA's attempt to see Native Americans as another U.S. minority group tended to flatten differences among tribes and installed a uniform tribal model on all federally recognized tribes.<sup>389</sup> And as several essays on the Federal Writers' Project of inclusion of Native American history have suggested, such inclusion did not fundamentally alter the power relationship between Native and white perspectives, in the same way the IRA's emphasis on self-government did not fundamentally alter the relationship between the government and tribes.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid.; Deloria, *The Nations Within*; Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation*

<sup>389</sup> Ronald Takaki, "The Indian New Deal: The Remaking of Native America," *A Different Mirror: A History of Multi-Cultural America* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 238-45.

Collier's concept of "self-government" was a complicated and often contradictory project. As an activist in New Mexico and a founder of the American Indian Defense Association in the 1920s, Collier wrote a series of articles for *Sunset* and *Survey* magazines about the threats to Pueblo land grants by new Congressional legislation – the Bursum bill -- and white encroachment by squatters. Collier's article "The Red Atlantis" has often been cited as the intellectual blueprint for later reforms. A mix of picturesque and romantic descriptions of the Pueblo Indians ("At twilight when the men come riding through the fields, they are singing...one may meet them garlanded with wild flowers.....in dramas of dance which engulf the whole tribe in ecstasy...."), it is also a call upon the federal government to prevent white predations as well as to assist the tribe in "conserving tribal relationships" and to encourage them "to make their own adaptations" to modern life.<sup>391</sup> As a treatise on the communal life of the Pueblos – "they have no concept of private property" and "each individual has a communal function" – Collier advances his own prescriptions for broader social engineering. Collier asks rhetorically what a "socially undernourished" white society could learn from the Pueblos, a thought Collier elaborates on in a 1933 newsletter as secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs some ten years later: although "the nation...was brought to the verge of wreckage by planless

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<sup>390</sup> Cory Pillen, "See America: WPA Posters and the Mapping of a New Deal Democracy," *Journal of American Culture*, 31(1), (March 2008), 49-65; Mindy Morgan, "Constructions and Contestations of the Authoritative Voice: Native American Communities and the Federal Writers' Project," *American Indian Quarterly*, (29) 1&2, (Winter and Spring 2005), 56-83.

<sup>391</sup> John Collier, "The Red Atlantis," *Survey* 49, (October 1, 1922), 17

individualism...." through "planned community living and community development....Indians and their lands can become laboratories and pioneers in this supreme new American adventure."<sup>392</sup> Luther Standing Bear had framed a similar premise in his 1933 *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, suggesting that "Indians can save America" from the "destructive order" manifest in the Great Depression.<sup>393</sup> Yet Collier's romantic view, mixed with scientific management, imagined an integrated Indian population based on economic partnership and mutual reciprocity. While some critics have gone so far as to say this marks Collier's administration as "assimilationist" (Schwartz 524-5), I would argue that his program accepted and even celebrated racial and cultural difference, so long as it was administered by the federal government.<sup>394</sup>

And yet as Vine Deloria Jr. writes in *The Nations Within*, "modern tribal sovereignty" begins with the IRA.<sup>395</sup> Legally speaking, Deloria refers to a brief written by the BIA under Collier, stating that tribal incorporation implies the

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<sup>392</sup> John Collier, "Editorial: At The Close Of Ten Weeks," *Indians at Work*, 1(3) (September 15, 1933), 3.

<sup>393</sup> Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, (Lincoln: University of NB Press, 1933, 1978), 255. "But it is now time for a destructive order to be reversed, and it is well to inform other races that the aboriginal culture of America was not devoid of beauty. Furthermore, in denying the Indian his ancestral rights and heritages the white race is but robbing itself. But America can be revived, rejuvenated, by recognizing a native school of thought. The Indian can save America."

<sup>394</sup> E.A. Schwartz, "Red Atlantis Revisited: Community and Culture in the Writings of John Collier," *American Indian Quarterly* 18(4) (Autumn, 1994), 507-31. \

<sup>395</sup> Deloria and Lytle, *The Nations Within*, 160.

ability to purchase land, administer justice, draw up tribal constitutions, and operate businesses, all of which are powers "inherent" within the tribes, not "delegated" by Congress.<sup>396</sup> The distinction implies that tribes are sovereign powers and not wards of the government. Yet beyond the legal distinctions, the contradictions between a policy that is at once a part of liberal pluralism as well as the modern foundation of American Indian nationalism owe much to Collier's own dynamic contradictions on Native sovereignty. While the Collier article "The Red Atlantis" has often been taken as a kind of shorthand for his vision of the IRA, another essay written a year later in *The Survey* magazine, "The American Congo," suggests that we see the Pueblos as less romantic "lost civilizations" than as internal colonies, a "Belgian or French Congo" in which the "denial of land rights" and "decimation of victims" is "here in the United States."<sup>397</sup> While some scholars like Philip? and Schwartz have made much of Collier's statements that "self-government" would be modeled on British "indirect administration" in Africa to suggest that the IRA was merely a more subtle form of federal control, Collier was also a firm advocate for "self-determination" of colonized peoples and even approached the Socialist Party-USA to build an "American Anti-Imperialist Center" in New York City.<sup>398</sup> Rather, I would suggest, Collier was an anti-imperialist who recognized Native Americans as an

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 155-62.

<sup>397</sup> John Collier, "The American Congo," *Survey*, 1(9) (August 1923), 476.

<sup>398</sup> Harry Fleischman, National Secretary of the Socialist Party, Letter to John Collier, February 27, 1946, John Collier Papers.

internally colonized people that he believed, through anthropological science and a benevolent federal government, could be assisted to live in a form close to that "Irish Home Rule" from the British. Of course, Collier's statements that reservations could be "laboratories for social planning" are full of colonial pretense, yet it was Collier's recognition of the colonial relationship between tribal nations and the federal government that produced such far-reaching reforms.

Indeed, one missing model from the historical record of Collier's IRA is the Soviet Union's policy on "national minorities." As Anthony Dawahare writes, Stalin's popular book *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question* became highly influential among black intellectuals in the 1930s who were looking for answers to what seemed to be the intractability of racial progress in U.S. as well as a way to square separatism with integration in a global revolutionary analysis. Particularly attractive was Stalin's proclamation that colonized peoples have the right to "national self-determination," as well as the legitimization of national liberation struggles and the cultural independence of colonized peoples.<sup>399</sup> These policies were also popularly understood to be underway in the former colonies of imperial Russia. For instance, Langston Hughes wrote numerous articles for *The Daily Worker* and the *New Masses* about life in the former Russian empire during his trip to the Central Asiatic Republics in the mid 1930s, which he later published in memoir form in *I Wonder as I Wander*. Rather than see the Soviet

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<sup>399</sup> Dawahare, *Nationalism, Marxism, and African-American American Literature*, 75.



model as measured in terms of formal democracy or universal human rights, Hughes assessed the Soviet Union in relation to the question of how it addressed the issues faced by people of color when in contact with the Western world. Explaining the significance of the opening of film schools, arts programs, and economic development, he distinguishes himself from his European companion's distaste for the "primitive" conditions of Soviet Asia by remarking that "Turkmenistan" was not "a primitive land moving into the twentieth century" so much as a "*colored* land moving into the orbits hitherto reserved for whites."<sup>400</sup>

Hughes also remarked on the speed with which the Soviet Union dismantled Jim Crow policies of the Russian empire, noting that restrictions on Turkmen and Jews had been lifted since the Soviets came to power and that "I could not help but remember Atlanta, Birmingham and Houston...I had to sit in the COLORED section" while in Turkmenistan "Russians...Europeans, and natives...all went to the same schools, sat on the same benches, ate in the same co-operatives, worked in the same shops and factories, ...gains and defeats were shared alike."<sup>401</sup> This mix of economic development, federal control, and cultural independence – the promotion of Turkic languages and cultures – was attractive for anthropologists who wanted to see what effect the policies would have on indigenous peoples living in Siberia. One can see obvious parallels between the IRA's emphasis on cultural freedom with the economic benefits of tribal

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<sup>400</sup> Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1956, 1993), 116.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 172

incorporation. Indeed, Franz Boas and Collier openly praised the Soviet policy, and at least one anthropologist, Nez Perce Archie Phinney, was hired by Collier on the basis of his study of Soviet policy while in Leningrad.<sup>402</sup>

To the extent that Collier supported federal intervention, anti-imperialism, and transnational – even communist – answers to Native policy, I would argue that he and the IRA should be considered a part of Popular Front culture and policy, and not just an element of the New Deal – indeed, Collier often referred to his opponents as "fascists" and "Nazis," suggesting that he understood his struggle within the frame of contemporary international politics.<sup>403</sup> More than Collier and the IRA, however, the 1930s witnessed a cultural resurgence of Native American themes within literature and popular culture. The sheer amount and variety of literature by – and more often about – Native Americans suggests that (re)imagining Native Americans and their relationship to the United States was central to the formation of left-wing culture in the 1930s. From the Federal Writers' Project travel guides, to oral histories, to journalism by figures like Carey McWilliams and Edmund Wilson, to novels by well-known left writers like Howard Fast and emergent Native American voices like D'Arcy McNickle, "rediscovering" Native culture resonated powerfully with Popular Front attempts to redefine national belonging along democratic and multi-ethnic lines. For writers like Fast and for journalists in socialist publications like the *People's Daily*

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<sup>402</sup> William Willard, "Nez Perce Anthropologist," *Journal of Northwest Anthropology*, 38 (1) (Spring 2004), 5-19; Philp, *John Collier's Crusade*, 221.

<sup>403</sup> Philp, *John Collier's Crusade*, 176.

*World*, the image of the Native produced an "authentic" site of resistance. Fast's novel, 1941 Readers' Club selection *The Last Frontier*, narrates the story of one Sioux band's attempt to escape their reservation and make it back to the Black Hills.<sup>404</sup> In the *People's Daily World*, the West Coast publication of the Communist Party, articles ran in their weekend magazine pointing out that Mount Rushmore was on land claimed by Sioux treaty and that "Sitting Bull should be held in just as much reverence" as the presidents carved into the side of the mountain.<sup>405</sup> Indeed, just to clarify whose side Sitting Bull would be on, the author noted Sitting Bull pursued a "united front policy" against the Indian's common enemy, the U.S. military.<sup>406</sup> A month earlier, an account of the Battle of Little Bighorn appeared, written by the last surviving member of the "the only living Indian who knew and fought with Sitting Bull at the Battle of Little Bighorn."<sup>407</sup> On the next page, an article entitled "This Land is Ours" told the story of Mexican-American farmers who face the threat of "colonization" by "Anglo-Americans and the Chamber of Commerce" who "conspire to take their land."<sup>408</sup> While stock images of Natives on horseback speak to the racial

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<sup>404</sup> Howard Fast, *The Last Frontier* (New York: The Press of the Readers' Club, 1941, 1942).

<sup>405</sup> Howard Rushmore, "Singing Warrior," *Peoples' Daily World*, 1(31) (May 1938), Magazine, 5.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>407</sup> Chief Benito Altaha, "Custer's Last Stand: An Indian chief who fought with Sitting Bull tells the true story of that mighty battle on the banks of the Little Big Horn," *Peoples' Daily World*, 1(103) (April 1938), Magazine, 7-8.

romanticism of the author, it's clear that the editor wishes to point out the ways in which manifest destiny continues to the present, with the enclosure and theft of land held by non-whites at the center.

In addition to an increased visibility, there seem to have been a small number of Native American members of the Communist Party who had, at least in regional chapters, a relatively high profile. On the West Coast, in the early 1930s, a person by the name of Joe Manzanares, self-identified as an American Indian, was featured in several headline stories; he also placed an advertisement asking for those "interested in Indian issues" to call a number at the San Francisco CPUSA office.<sup>409</sup> There were also calls by Native Americans to join the Communist Party in the editorial section, framed much like the letter by Vincent Spotted Eagle as a combination of calls for self-determination, Communist class rhetoric, and anti-colonial questionings of the savage-civilized binary. One letter, for instance, argues that "white bosses stole all the land from us Indians" and "they call us "natives," or "Indians," or "wild,"....the Indians are not wild....Indians are always friendly to workers who must slave for a living....".<sup>410</sup> In addition, there were at least five stories about Communist Party members organizing relief drives and unemployed councils on reservations in California,

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<sup>408</sup> Aron Kirch, "This Land is Ours," *Peoples' Daily World* 1(103) (April 1938), Magazine, 8-9.

<sup>409</sup> "Interested in Indian Issues?", advertisement, *Western Worker* 1(14) (July 15, 1932), 4.

<sup>410</sup> "Calls Upon Indians to Join Communists," letter to the editor, *Western Worker*, 1(12) (June 15, 1932), 4.

which suggests that on the West Coast at the very least, party activists and Native Americans organized together on reservations.<sup>411</sup> And in *Western Worker/People's Daily World* articles, numerous articles ran on the subjects, including illegal land claims by whites on Indian land, broken treaties, deportations of Native Americans to Mexico, and the "genocidal" policy of Indian Removal in California, suggesting that the Party did merely see Native Americans through the lens of class, but rather understood the specificity of Indian claims to injustice.<sup>412</sup> While nowhere near the attention paid to the African-American community, such articles and editorials suggest far greater participation and involvement between Native communities and the far left than is usually granted. Indeed, in Montana, the CP ran a Native senatorial candidate by the name of Raymond Gray in 1934, and perhaps the best known and most influential Native anthropologist working for the Collier administration, Archie Phinney, spent four years in the Soviet Union to study its policy on native peoples.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> "Corcina, Rumba Indians Come to Jobless Council for Help," *Western Worker*, 1(23) (November 7, 1932), 2; "Forced to Give Indians Relief After Struggle," *Western Worker*, 2(11) (March 16, 1933), 2; "Indians Organize Relief Fight," *Western Worker*, 2(34) (August 21, 1933), 3; "Indians Robbed by GOP-Democrats; Turning to CP," 1(14) (July 15, 1932), 4; "Indians Fight Removal to Poor Location," *Peoples' Daily World*, 6(39) (May 20, 1937), 5.

<sup>412</sup> "California Indians Betrayed and Bled of their Money," *Western Worker* 6(39) (May 20, 1937), 5; Ned Dahl, "Working Class History of California," Editorial, *Peoples' Daily World*, 6(19) (March 3, 37), 2; Harrison George, "Chamber of Commerce Inheritors of Earlier Genocide: Column Left," Editorial, *Peoples' Daily World* 1(9) (January 11, 1938), 4; "Deported Indians Starve in Mexico," *Western Worker* 3 (27) (July 24, 1934), 1/5; "Indians Ask Collective Bargaining Rights," *Peoples' Daily World* 6(60) (July 29, 1937), 2.

<sup>413</sup> "American Indians in the Communist Party, U.S.A.," *Western Worker* 3(60) (November 12, 1934), 3; Willard, "Archie Phinney," 5-19.

This does not mean, of course, that the relationship between elements of the Popular Front and Native communities was at all even, or that cultural representations of Native communities by the left were devoid of racialized stereotypes. Often depictions of Native Americans were overly idealized, or were composed, however well-intentioned, within a narrative of the "vanishing Indian." The FWP travel guides are an often-cited example. Designed to celebrate American regionalism while forming a cohesive national image, the project was conceived from the beginning as including "full information on existing Indian tribes" and "extinct tribes" in every state.<sup>414</sup> In part this was an attempt to include Native Americans in what was conceived of as a broadly pluralistic national project, and yet it was, as one critic writes, also motivated by the desire to present Native communities in such a way as to develop tourism. This schism was represented by the fact that the guide series cautioned its writers to avoid "sentimental" and "dishonest" stereotypes of Native Americans, and the directors made it a priority to hire Native community members whenever possible, and to ensure that all material was vetted by their chief anthropologist – D'Arcy McNickle.<sup>415</sup> Yet, as has been mentioned by many critics, the guides do not present contemporary material about Native communities, nor do they present any of the massive changes enacted by the IRA. This alone generated the perception that Native communities were "non-historical facts," little different from the vast

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<sup>414</sup> Morgan, "Constructions and Contestations of the Authoritative Voice," 59-60.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 61.

descriptions of geological formations or other flora and fauna.<sup>416</sup> As with Fast's novel, the Natives remain symbols of, rather than subjects of, an emergent pluralistic nation.

As critics like Michael Staub, Deloria, and Morgan have pointed out, however, 1930s documentary and literary culture did more than just include Native Americans in more "accurate" ways. There was a great emphasis on documenting the lives of Native Americans – collecting oral histories and writing down Native storytelling. While much of this has been dismissed as "salvage anthropology," American studies scholar Michael Staub suggests that much of the 1930s documentary writing had little to do with furthering academic anthropology and was a continuation of 1930s documentary realism.<sup>417</sup> As part of what Paula Rabinowitz labeled the "documentary aesthetic," Native American voices were recorded and transcribed as ethnographers, writers, journalists, and filmmakers traveled into the field to document what they saw as vanishing oral cultures. Migrant farm workers, former slaves, immigrants, and artisans, along with Native Americans, were recorded to bring social action to bear on injustice, but also out of an impulse that, as Dos Passos writes, "the speech of the people" was an important artistic and democratic political form in itself. Outside of the FWP

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<sup>416</sup> Hartwig Isernhagen, "Identity and Exchange: The Representation of 'The Indian' in the Federal Writers' Project and in Contemporary Native American Literature," *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations*, ed. Gretchen Bataille (Lincoln: University of NB Press, 2001).

<sup>417</sup> Michael Staub, "(Re) Collecting the Past: Writing Native American Speech," *American Quarterly*, 43.3 (September 1991), 425-56.

travel guide series, the FWP also included numerous oral history projects that did grant Native speakers a voice, as speakers and as often as the documentarians themselves. As Staub writes, ethnographies such *Black Elk Speaks*, *The Autobiography of a Papago Woman*, and the "Stone and Kelsey 'Massacre'" were surprisingly self-reflexive texts that gave voice to marginalized perspectives and often silenced histories in ways that neither sentimentalized their subjects nor privileged the recorders. In addition, other FWP projects such as *Land of Nakoda: The Story of the Assinboine Indians* and *'I Will be Meat for my Salish.'* *The Montana Writers Project and the Buffalo of the Flathead Indian Reservation* were projects undertaken by educated members of their respective tribal communities to correct the "failings" of previous ethnographic works as well as to preserve oral traditions within the contemporary context of changing reservation life.<sup>418</sup> Unlike the FWP guides, tribal communities had total control over the representation of oral history and contemporary tribal life in these projects. And equally, other FWP projects, like "Henry Mitchell, Indian Canoe Maker" create an oral history account of a Penobscot who claims tribal identity while both criticizing the commodification of Native identity and living a "modern" life as a factory worker and urban city dweller.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> Morgan, "Constructions and Contestations of the Authoritative Voice," 69.

<sup>419</sup> Siobhan Senier, "Henry Mitchell, Indian Canoe Maker: A Penobscot Modern in the WPA," *European Contributions to American Studies* 54, 2005, 120.



These "narrative acts of self-determination," as one critic framed them, were also part of a renaissance of Native literature.<sup>420</sup> Non-fiction tracts such as Luther Standing Bear's memoir *Land of the Spotted Eagle* and the avant-garde *America Needs Indians!* by Iktomi Hicala suggested a further boldness in both style and claim during the Depression. Yet memoirs and political tracts remain related more to genres of 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century Native writing, like Zitkala-Sa's *Impressions of an Indian Girlhood* or William Apess' *Eulogy on King Phillip*. In a major break with earlier forms of Native writing, John Joseph Mathew's *Sundown* and D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* have been called the first modern Native novels.<sup>421</sup> And while critics have credited McNickle's *The Surrounded* as being the progenitor of modern Native fiction, it's also useful to consider the way in which the novel engages with major currents of 1930s literature, especially Popular Front literature by writers of color.

*The Surrounded* tells the story of Archilde Leon, the son of a Salish mother and a Spanish father, who returns to the Flathead reservation after spending a year in Portland making a living playing fiddle and working in restaurants as a dishwasher.<sup>422</sup> The novel follows a narrative arc of reconciliation

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<sup>420</sup> Morgan, "Constructions and Contestations of the Authoritative Voice," 76.

<sup>421</sup> Christopher Schedler, "Formulating a Native American Modernism in John Joseph Mathews' *Sundown*," *American Indian Quarterly*, 55.1 (Spring 1999), 127-149; Gaetano Prampolini, "American Indian Novels of the 1930s: John Joseph Mathew's *Sundown* and D'Arcy McNickle's *Surrounded*," *Transatlantic Voices: Interpretations of Native North American Literatures*, ed. Elvira Pulitano (Lincoln: University of NB Press, 2007), 65-88.

<sup>422</sup> D'Arcy McNickle, *The Surrounded* (Albuquerque: University of NM Press, 1936, 1978).

and growth, as his mother returns to her forgotten "pagan" roots and Archile reconciles with his well-intentioned but culturally limited father, who eventually agrees to send Archilde to Europe to play violin. Yet this arc is undercut by a second narrative in which the reservation – and its violence – eventually entrap Archilde, as he faces arrest and possible execution for the death of a sheriff and game warden. Like realist novels such as Richard Wright's *Native Son* or Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*, *The Surrounded* ironically signifies on the Popular Front's "cultures of unity," or Denning's formation of the "national-popular." Rather than a culture of belonging based on an inclusive democratic nation, McNickle suggests the land itself is a carceral trap, in which bonds of national belonging and solidarity racially mark the subject as "other" at the same time that "assimilation" is regarded as a kind of cultural suicide. As *Native Son* ironically invokes the folk nationalism of the Popular Front to undercut it – the "native son" of the United States is put to death for an accidental murder (and the murder he did intentionally commit is largely ignored) – so too *The Surrounded* invokes Collier's romantic description of reservations as "islands removed from time" and "red Atlantis" to undermine it. Indeed, the title of *The Surrounded* suggests more the "psychological island" of race Wright describes in *12 Million Black Voices* than the "islands removed from time" of Collier's essays.<sup>423</sup> Such tropes of belonging are further belied by the narrative structure. *The Surrounded*, like *America* and *Native Son*, employs the bildungsroman form only to suggest

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<sup>423</sup> Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1995), 35.

how the protagonist's reintegration with his family and with Salish culture exposes him as vulnerable to the law. As in *Native Son*, Bigger's progressive vision of community comes only as he's about to be executed by the state.

So too, claims that *The Surrounded* be read as a "high modernist" text suggest we consider the sources not only of the novel's experimentation but also of the narrator's alienation.<sup>424</sup> The protagonist of *The Surrounded* is "culturally adrift" at the outset of the text, yet his alienation is more a product of his exclusion from his white father's "big house" than any form of radical individualism. Modernism and modernity in *The Surrounded* are racialized – the protagonist is not nostalgic for a lost pastoral as in *The Wasteland* so much as trapped between a modernity he's excluded from and a way of life that has been violently exterminated. And likewise, *The Surrounded's* modernist forms of textuality – the incorporation of mass culture texts, the dime Western and detective story. Yet while these devices suggest the Popular Front's embrace of mass culture, their function in the narrative also suggests a greater skepticism about the liberatory potential of "pulp" forms like the Western and the detective plot.

Like *Native Son*, violence structures the narratives as well as articulates the individual protagonists' basic relationship with legal authority. Violence also separates the novels from what might otherwise be their basic formal allegiance to Popular Front era social realism, to the extent that the protagonist's realization of

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<sup>424</sup> Shedler, "Formulating a Native American Modernism in John Joseph Mathews' *Sundown*," 132; Prampolini, "American Indian Novels of the 1930s: John Joseph Mathew's *Sundown* and D'Arcy McNickle's *Surrounded*," 66-8.

self is also linked to their failure and ultimately, their death. While both novels do end with a kind of social integration and a broader conception of political and historical forces that shape their lives, this understanding cannot prevent their demise. Indeed, for both novels, the death of the protagonist becomes inevitable once their encounter with white authority becomes inevitable; the struggle in the novel is as much to escape as to understand the forces that undermine them. For Archilde, the entrance of the Game Warden? and Sheriff Quigley into his life, like Bigger's job at the Dalton's in *Native Son*, functions as a loss of agency. In certain ways, it seems to matter very little that Bigger Thomas is "guilty" of a murder and Archilde Leon is not, for as Bigger himself surmises, he "knew that when they killed him it would be for Mary's death and not Bessie's" and "the death chair...seems like just something that had to be."<sup>425</sup> While certainly these novels chronicle the actual violence regularly inflicted on communities of color, violence also serves as a political demarcation between the becoming-democratic telos of the Popular Front bildungsroman and the more skeptical novels by writers of color. As Agamben suggests, the line between citizen and *homo sacer*, the person who is outside of the law, is precisely the person to whom violence can be done. As Denise da Silva writes, the body of color "always-already signifies violence," and it is through violence that the state manages and organizes a racial system of power.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1940, 1991), 304, 358.

Within the discourse of colonialism, violence has a unique meaning. For Frantz Fanon, violence is what marks the colony from the metropole; it is the settlers' regime of violence that "must be broken" to restore dignity to the colonial subject.<sup>427</sup> As Immanuel Wallerstein remarks in a retrospective on Fanon's works, violence is the origin and contact point of colonial settlement; it is thus the source of psychological and political transformation in the struggle for liberation for the colonial native.<sup>428</sup> And as Ward Churchill and Aime Cesaire suggest, violence is perhaps to broad a term for the Americas: it is the question of genocide that marks contact between the first nations of the Americas and Europeans.<sup>429</sup> Thus ending *The Surrounded* with the arrest and implied future execution of Archile Leon has particular resonance. Considering that McNickle was a public supporter of Collier's Native American New Deal and specifically sought out employment in the BIA under Collier, *The Surrounded* may suggest a greater sense of ambivalence about what could be accomplished. The novel in many ways supports key elements of Collier's vision: restoration of Native culture, an end to missionary education, boarding schools, allotment, and the restoration of the

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<sup>426</sup> Describing the often fatal police brutality in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* "...such killings do not unleash an ethical crisis because these persons' bodies and the territories they inhabit always-already signify violence Denise Ferreira da Silva, "No-Bodies: Law, Raciality, and Violence," *Griffith Law Review* 18.2 (2009), 213.

<sup>427</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 63-4.

<sup>428</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, "Reading Fanon in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *New Left Review*, 57-2 (May-June 2009), 118-9..

<sup>429</sup> Aimé Cesaire, "Discourse on Colonialism," *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 177.

reservation as a site of communal renewal. But this narrative is overshadowed by the force of the "Old West" as Archilde calls it, which has far older roots than either modern reforms or his reconciliation with his father.<sup>430</sup> This is not to suggest that Archilde's only experience is one of violence, or that violence formulates his subjectivity in the way it does the desires and fears of Bigger Thomas. Yet, the racial violence of Sheriff Quigley and its power to steal the future from the past, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, suggests that as a competing narrative force, it is granted the power of closure. These structural similarities between *Native Son* and *The Surrounded* suggest powerful links between the discourses of Native colonialism and black nationalism in the period and open larger questions about the political and theoretical connections between the two in the "long Popular Front."

### **Returning to the Present: Undermining the Native American Bildungsroman**

*The Surrounded* opens with a stark binary divided between a "Western" and Christian world-view and a "Native" and pagan world-view. When Max Leon, Archilde's Spanish father, asks the missionary priest why he cannot get along with any of his half-Salish sons, Father Grepilloux doesn't answer directly - rather, he responds by telling the story of the Salish conversion to Christianity. As a figure who commanded loyalty and devotion from many of the Salish, including Archilde's mother, Grepilloux took it upon himself to write his memoirs as a way to tell the Salish's story. Grepilloux introduces his memoir by relating

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<sup>430</sup> McNickle, *The Surrounded*, 117.

the Salish conversion to Christianity, offering that "they wanted to know the right faith, their hearts were inclined" and that they believed they had been "worshipping False Gods."<sup>431</sup> Whatever problems the Salish may have had with Church teachings or insistence on retaining pagan customs, he suggests they had the "hearts of children" and cites their enthusiasm for confession and conversion as proof of their deep faith.<sup>432</sup> As Father Grepilloux speaks, Max Leon reflects that he had never heard the story of the Salish's willing conversion, and realizes – as part of his answer – that, despite living in Sniél-emen for forty years and marrying a Salish woman, "he was ignorant of these people."<sup>433</sup> While the story establishes Max's failing – his inability to see the Salish from their own perspective – it also establishes Father Grepilloux as a "man who knows Indians," in Slotkin's turn of phrase, and as someone whose authority to speak for and about them goes unquestioned.

On the same day, however, Archilde's uncle Modeste offers another narrative of the Salish conversion. Modeste explains that after their tribe had been decimated with the introduction of modern weaponry among their ancient rivals, the Crows and Blackfeet, the "wise men" began looking desperately for answers as to "why the people had lost their power."<sup>434</sup> At the advice of Iroquois who came to Sniél-emen, the Salish sent men looking for "black robed priests" who

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 49, 47.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 73.

had a "Somesh, a power" that "if they brought it to us we would be strong again." While Modeste acknowledges that their strategy failed, "we thought they would bring back the power we lost – but today we have less," the story reveals a far different motivation for conversion than what Grepilloux maintains.<sup>435</sup> Rather than a tale of "False Gods" and "true faith," this story suggests a political calculation based on a people desperate for answers that would save their tribe. Rather than a tribe with "the hearts of children" Modeste's story suggests agency as well as sophistication in the way they approached the priests so they would not suspect their motivations. At the heart of Grepilloux's misunderstanding is the colonial conceit that he was, in his own words, "teaching" the Salish the meaning of God, and that the relationship was based on subject-object relationship of unequal power.<sup>436</sup>

This division between conversion narratives is further framed by the two houses Archilde faces upon his return, his father's house and his mother's cabin. In many ways, they can be read as ontological spaces, "the big house, where his [white] father would most likely be sitting" and "the dirt-roofed log cabin" where his Salish mother lived and "which occupied the lower ground."<sup>437</sup> The separation of the two spaces speaks to the "warfare" in his own house, and course, stands in as a metonym for the continuing and unresolved "warfare" that exists

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 74

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 1.



between the two peoples.<sup>438</sup> As a figure, Archilde Leon, the son of a Salish mother and white father, would seem to stand, as Grepilloux himself articulates, as the "place where the road divides": he is someone who has the chance to make a new path, and act as a mediator between the two cultures.<sup>439</sup>

In one sense, the novel suggests an affinity with what Barbara Foley refers to as "the radical bildungsroman," perhaps the most popular form for the radical novel of the 1930s.<sup>440</sup> The "radical" bildungsroman rejected many of the individualistic assumptions usually associated with the genre and often promoted oppositional forms of culture, often featuring a hero who embraced the class struggle and an affirmative vision of the world. While *The Surrounded* does not feature stories of collective action or class conflict, the novel does present an affirmative vision of reconciliation as the three central figures of the Leon family, Max, Catherine, and Archilde are reunited. Indeed, Archilde Leon is described by Father Grepilloux as "the 'sign of a new day,' a hybrid figure, someone who can cross cultural and racial boundaries, and may lead the tribe to a better future. And as at least one critic has suggested, we can read Archilde's hybridity as an embrace of a post-colonial critique of binary modes of thought."<sup>441</sup> Neither fully "native" or "colonist" in perspective, Archilde seems positioned to be able to

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>440</sup> Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 19939), 322-3.

<sup>441</sup> McNickle, *The Surrounded*, 97, 108.

transcend the carceral trap of the reservation, as well as the world view established in the opening frame of the novel. Archilde suggests early in the novel that Louis, a horse-thief and a brawler who lives as an outlaw in the mountains, has embraced a counter-mythology as dangerous as Quigley's, and taunts Louis for his bluff to "wait for [Quigley] in the mountains with my gun."<sup>442</sup> Unlike his white father and Salish mother, who live in "separate houses," Archilde is ultimately welcome in both and seems poised to overcome the final binary: to "stay" on the reservation or to "leave" it. By accepting to study music on recommendation of the church, he remains tied to the history of Sniél-emen while also pursuing opportunities abroad.

In part, this view is reinforced by the fact that the narrative is largely told through Archilde's perspective. In contrast to the Father whose story of the Salish is compromised and to Max who anguishes at his inability to understand his Salish family, Archilde listens to Modeste and his mother tell stories of the Salish past. In addition, compared to Modeste and Catherine, who both have poor eyesight, Archilde is associated with birds and flight, often scrutinizing, ironizing, and weighing the value and wisdom of those with whom he comes into contact.<sup>443</sup> His older brother is a "bag of wind" for boasting; his nephews he corrects when they repeat anti-Native stereotypes; his father talks of useless matters of business that reveal his own emotional poverty; the priests he indulges but knows can't

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 103, 192.

teach him anything, and so on.<sup>444</sup> Even many of the omniscient evaluations are delivered through Archilde's eyes, including discrepancies between dress and action among the Fathers or how much his mother had aged since he last saw her.<sup>445</sup> Archilde's aloof gaze throughout the novel not only affords the reader the assurance that he has mastery over his own life, it also privileges his hybrid and frequently sophisticated view of the world. The fact the narrative centers on Archilde gives his voice priority and suggests that we should view Catherine, Modeste, Sniél-emen, Max, and Louis through his eyes. Such a narrative construction, of course, also reinforces the bildungsroman expectations, as Archilde seems to be character most capable of growth and development.

Several scenes however, call into question Archilde's point of view. Riding alone in the mountains, Archilde stumbles upon and attempts to save a mare and her kid that are obviously starving in the badlands by forcing the mare to go to water. The mare, weakened but with strength enough to resist, struggles against the rope until exhausted to the point of death, when Archilde is forced to shoot her. "He had to show her kindness in spite of herself," the narrator tells us, and Archilde spends the night "guarding her worthless carcass" from coyotes.<sup>446</sup> Of the many parables throughout the novel, this one speaks most to Archilde's assumptions of superiority over his brother, mother, and two nephews, whom he

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 18, 12, 87.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., 99, 3.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 240, 242.

frequently judges as "superstitious" or "crazy."<sup>447</sup> The mare's "ungratefulness" at Archilde's attempts to bring her food and water can be compared to his nephews' ungrateful response to Archilde's attempt to bring them back to Catholic school, or to Louis' anger at his threats that he will be arrested. It also suggests, in many ways, the attitude of the Missionary fathers towards the Salish, and forces one to question whether Archilde's plans – made by Father Grepilloux to study abroad – are merely another version of the benevolent paternalism that marks the Father's behavior. In this sense, one wonders how much Archilde actually sees of his own behavior, of the extent to which his own life is shaped by circumstances beyond his control.

In a critique of cultural hybridity, Kenyan author and critic Ngugi wa Thiong'o suggests we consider such forms of cultural synthesis as a kind of "colonial alienation." Defining alienation as an act of identification with the views, perspectives, and life of the colonizer at the expense of the life, views, and perspectives of the colonized, Ngugi wa Thiong'o suggests that we cannot consider issues of language, custom, or culture as neutral.<sup>448</sup> Throughout the novel, Archilde expresses ambivalence with Salish customs, at times approving and at other times wanting to express his distance. This ambivalence is revealed as Archilde watches his nephew perform the "midsummer dance" at the July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration in St. Xavier. As one of the "attractions," along with "bucking

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid., 130, 18.

<sup>448</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind* (London: James Currey, 1986), 8-33.

contests," "horse races," "baseball game," and "ragtime music" Archilde was painfully self-conscious, noting "nothing was real in the scene he came upon...the idea was a spectacle, a kind of low-class circus."<sup>449</sup> Yet for Modeste and Mike, Archilde's nephew, the dance was transformative. Mike, afflicted with bed-wetting and nightmares since he was locked in a closet by the nuns at Catholic school, did not respond to any cures or punishments inflicted by school officials. Invited by Modeste to participate in the "midsummer dance" as a form of therapy, he and the other tribe members take it seriously, and seem to be unaware of the context. As Modeste calls out "let it be as it was in old times," Archilde feels the dancers are "unknowing" and act like "and old grandmother" too blind to see "the chair had been pulled away just before she was to sit down."<sup>450</sup> And yet, as Archilde watches

for a moment he felt everything....they made him think of a wild stallion running free—no one could approach him, no one would ever be able to break his spirit....but it was only for a moment. Then he heard the spectators laughing<sup>451</sup>

This moment suggests Archilde's identification – and more profoundly, his distance – from the Salish. Unlike the Salish dancers, Archilde cannot remove himself from his experiences of double-consciousness, his acute awareness of what the white audience perceives.

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<sup>449</sup> McNickle, *The Surrounded*, 216.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-3.

Despite Archilde's acute social analysis, not long after the dance, Mike ceases to wet his bed, and also ceases to go to Catholic school, hiding in the mountains with his brother Narcisse. For Modeste, the question is one of self-determination. As Modeste articulates to Catherine as she drops her Catholicism, "we know our own affairs."<sup>452</sup> Yet Modeste's gestures of "self-determination" are acutely limited; he is aware that his dance has only been permitted as an "attraction" – it was previously banned, and he is aware that whites will not understand or appreciate its meaning. Yet the dance retains its power, and there is a suggestion that perhaps within the dance there are moments of defiance that cannot be so easily contained: "they echoed the war cry from time to time and made threatening gestures with a feathered carpenter's hatchet, which was fierce enough to cause a white woman to grow pale and draw back – but what a small matter that was!"<sup>453</sup> While the narrator jokes about both the "white woman" and the "fierce gestures," it should be remembered that it was also a carpenter's hatchet that dispatched the warden only some days before.

This radical uncertainty is often reflected in the contradictory descriptions of many of the characters and situations. While the narrative of the Salish conversion clearly reveals the ways in which Father Grepilloux's world-view is circumscribed, we also learn that, as one of the first priests to found the mission in the valley of Sniél-emen (Mountains of the Surrounded), Grepelloux was regarded by the Salish as "the only one who did not speak 'with a forked tongue'"

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 206-7.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 217.

and as someone who felt "tribal laws and customs must be restored and respected."<sup>454</sup> Father Grepilloux is at once a "saint," and, as Max recounts with regret, one of the white men like himself who "brought it on" in the Valley, who colonized Sniél-emen.<sup>455</sup> The actions of the Salish display a greater knowledge "of our own affairs" as Modeste puts it, but also an equal uncertainty as to the correct way to perceive what has happened to the tribe, where to go, and who or what should lead them. This division, among language, land, household, family, narrative and religion divides not only the trajectory of the novel, but severely restricts the reader from finding a single point of view from which to see the events. As Lisa Lowe points out, such refusals of narrative "seizure" can be framed as acts of resistance, refusing the linear teleology of progress, as well as the unitary forms of identity and synthesis that mirror capitalist models of progress.<sup>456</sup>

The novel's affirmative arc is further unraveled by a second sequence of events: the murder of Archilde's brother by a game warden; the (counter) murder moments later of the warden by Archilde's mother; the eventual flight of Archilde and Elise, Archilde's companion and romantic interest; the capture of Archilde by the Sheriff Quigley and murder of Sheriff Quigley by Elise; and the capture of Archilde and Elise by the Indian Agent and Agency police. In the same way the

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 40, 137.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>456</sup> Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 44.

radical bildungsroman informs the initial structure of the text, the murder of Louis, the warden, and the introduction of Sheriff Quigley articulates a second narrative strand. As *The Surrounded* employs and modifies the popular genre of the "radical bildungsroman" in order to mark Archilde as both within and without dominant cultural norms, so too the introduction of the "Western" is not simply a question of another character, but rather the introduction of a separate discursive device. Sheriff Quigley appears only four brief times throughout the text and yet his presence and what he represents shape the entire contour and outcome of the narrative.

In this sense, I suggest that we refer to the narrative of Archilde's eventual flight and capture as the imposition of one *genre* over another genre. Sheriff Quigley belongs wholly to the Wild West dime novel, and the narrator suggests that Quigley is self-referentially aware of this fact: Quigley was "...a sheriff out of the Old West...he had read of those hard-riding, quick-shooting dispensers of peace...he had made the part his own."<sup>457</sup> In this sense, *The Surrounded* exemplifies what critic Christopher Vials calls the "mass-mediation" of 1930s texts, the mutual incorporation of popular and "pulp" genres within radical protest fiction and vice-versa.<sup>458</sup> Yet McNickle significantly alters this format insofar as he arranges the genres hierarchically. The arrival of Quigley in the narrative both foreshadows and forecloses any possibility of Archilde's transformation and

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<sup>457</sup> McNickle, *The Surrounded*, 117.

<sup>458</sup> Christopher Vials, *Realism for the Masses: Aesthetics, Popular Front Pluralism, and U.S. Culture: 1935-47* (Jackson: University of MS Press, 2009), xvii.



further growth. The "sudden" appearance of "horse and rider on the trail" and Quigley's "scrutiny" of Archilde for a "whole list of crimes" halts the bildungsroman as forcefully in its tracks as Archilde is frozen in terror by his chance meeting with Quigley in the mountains.

This secondary narrative also serves a colonial "ordering" function. When Archilde confronts the warden, his instincts are to speak English and do everything the warden asks, yet this instinct merely makes the warden more suspicious, as Louis will not speak English. More significantly however, that Archilde responds to the Louis' murder with confusion suggests the limits of his ontological hybridity.<sup>459</sup> Archilde is not only confused and shocked by Louis' murder, but Catherine kills the warden so quickly that Archilde does not even see it happen. The final phrase, that Archilde could not see what "led up to" his mother's counter-murder of the game warden, is highly suggestive of a broader history than merely his mother's silent approach. Catherine has no trouble understanding what took place, and acts immediately. The scene ends with Archilde continuing to ponder how "inexplicable" his mother's movements and acts were to him, suggesting that he is still quite removed from the Salish history of conquest.<sup>460</sup> In this way, Quigley becomes a figure who "racially orders" the text, aligning all Salish characters within the category, as Da Silva writes, of

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<sup>459</sup> Jeri Zulli, "Perception in D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded*: A Postcolonial Reading," *Telling the Stories: Essays on American Indian Literature and Culture*, ed. E.H. Helson & M.A. Nelson, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001), 76.

<sup>460</sup> McNickle, *The Surrounded*, 128.

bodies to whom violence can be done. Catherine, unlike Archilde, recognizes the fact and can act; Archilde is frozen in paralysis and confusion.

In the same way the presence of *The Law* serves to "order" complex characters into racial types, the function of violence in the narrative also serves an ordering function, as it puts an end to the radical uncertainty to the novel. Max's long series of unanswered, and perhaps unanswerable questions after Father Grepilloux's death--"what good came of...building a new world here?"--are not so much answered as foreclosed. Equally, the constant shifting among characters and view points comes to a sudden end as the relations between whites and Salish are for once firmly established: the Indian agent stands above Archilde, who "extended his hands to be shackled" in a final act of submission.<sup>461</sup> As Lowe notes, the bildungsroman form contains within it a binary between youth and maturity that critically reproduces the binary between savage and civilized, colony and metropole.<sup>462</sup> That the novel undermines the bildungsroman, even in its radical form, suggests that we refuse the distinction between a "sighted" Archilde and "blind" elder or "crazy" Salish brother, and rather realize the strengths and limitations of an indeterminate and particular (non universal) point of view. Yet the ending reminds us that the power to fix meaning does not belong to all narrators equally. While Modeste may remind the reader of Grepilloux's inaccuracy, Grepilloux's story is in writing. While the novel celebrates the primacy of the oral text and storyteller, it also is not mistaken about the power

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<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 146, 297.

<sup>462</sup> Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 44.

differentials between them within Western civilization. And for Archilde's hybrid perspective, violence ultimately marks him on one side of the binary without the agency to refuse.

When the Indian agent finally captures Archilde, the agent's line "it's too damn bad you people never learn you can't run away..." is an echo of what Archilde has been saying about the reservation since the beginning of the novel: that one can no longer live in the mountains in the "old way."<sup>463</sup> The irony is less that Archilde was right all along, so much as that Archilde must realize the extent to which he has embraced the colonizer's logic. In the end, Archilde is transformed from the great hope of the reservation to just another Indian; yet as a question of narrative there is nothing deterministic about it. McNickle's narrative structure, in effect, allows Archilde's potential to become fully affirmed at the same time it both suggests his limitations and imposes a secondary narrative structure upon it. One could say the "Wild West" narrative of the game warden performs the role of an occupation; its coercion is in one sense as totally incapacitating as it is external to lives of the characters. This is not to suggest all the Salish need to do is overthrow the local sheriff; rather it affirms that the Salish "know their own affairs" as Modeste says, even if they have submitted to a greater military and colonial power.

From the point of view of social movements of the 1930s, one could say that the novel performs many of the contradictions of the Popular Front. The novel is in some ways redemptive – that Max and Catherine reconcile and

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<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 297.

Catherine moves back into the "big house" after Max acknowledges his wrong suggests its parallel as a national story: that integration of a kind is possible, and a form of it that does not require Catherine to give up her rights, dignity, or culture. Yet the novel is also bitterly militant in its depiction of the racial violence that the law inflicts upon the Salish with impunity. As da Silva writes, it is precisely this racial violence that marks the body other; that Archilde is victim of it as is Louis merely suggests that race is a determining field and that cultural freedom is not enough. That the novel is at once nationalistic and integrationist should not be understood as a problem – it is rather the lived contradiction of a movement and a politics that at once engaged with federal policy and yet worked and imagined beyond its limits.

### **Finding Fanon's Native in *Native Son***

In Richard Wright's travel narrative of Africa's first independent nation, he describes a group of women dancing at a liberation rally for Kwame Nkrumah's nationalist party, suddenly realizing that the dances were uncannily familiar:

I'd seen these same snakelike, veering dances before....Where? Oh, God, yes; in America, in storefront churches, in Holy Roller Tabernacles, in God's Temples, in unpainted wooden prayer-meeting houses on the plantations in the Deep South...<sup>464</sup>

It is a familiar trope within black nationalist and Pan-Africanist writing, to affirm cultural, political and spiritual links with Africa. W.E.B. Du Bois' essay on the African links to the "sorrow songs" and C.L.R. James' invocation of African

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<sup>464</sup> Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1953, 1995), 56-7.

drumming during the Haitian revolution are two notable examples. As much as *Black Power* is often seen as Wright's entrance point into the global politics of anti-imperialism and Pan-Africanism, I would suggest that this reading has much to do with the way Wright constructed his narrative personae in the book: as a "Western" observer, one who "rarely thought about Africa."<sup>465</sup> *Native Son*, however, seems to suggest otherwise. References to representations of Africa permeate the novel, and indeed, while Wright does not link Bigger Thomas culturally to Africa, the novel suggests that we understand white racism through an imperial lens. As a question of political commitments, it locates the novel outside of pluralistic and democratic projects based on a shared or recovered U.S. national history. Such a lens also crucially refocuses the question of Bigger Thomas' violence. If Africa and colonialism function as a "return of the repressed," then we may read Bigger's murder within the tradition of Fanon's psychological study of the role of violence in liberation movements. While it's clear that Wright saw the potential for revolutionary action in someone like Bigger, Fanon's theories of violence and colonialism provide us a way to consider how violence, as in *The Surrounded*, suggests an "ordering function" in the novel, establishing and/or resisting racially marked bodies within a colonial project of racial taxonomy. Equally, as Fanon recognizes that violence is what marks a colony apart from other forms of rule, such a reading suggests ways that the violence in *Native Son* is precisely what marks it as a transnational novel.<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 4.

As critic Joseph Entin suggests, *Native Son* is invested not only in reproducing the texture of cinema, but many of the characters themselves are drawn from Hollywood and pulp sources.<sup>467</sup> As Vials suggests, we can consider *Native Son* very much within the tradition of left-wing "mass-mediated fiction," in which protagonists, plots, and narrative structure may be drawn heavily and intentionally from Hollywood and other popular sources. We can thus consider that Bigger Thomas' predecessors as not so much drawn from the "real" Biggers Wright discusses in "How Bigger was Born," but from cinematic and pulp figures such as hard-boiled detective fiction and even more, the 1933 film *King Kong*. As Entin suggests, it is the film's ambivalent portrayal of Kong, as at once a racialized monstrosity as well as a sympathetic victim, that drew Wright to the figure.<sup>468</sup> Bigger's flight onto the water tower, the false accusation of Mary Dalton's rape, the constant reference to Bigger by police and lynch mobs as a "black ape," and of course, Bigger's name -- implying the larger-than-life quality he assumes among the white power structure after his presumed rape and accidental murder of a young white woman -- suggest that Wright's invocation of the film was not accidental.

Yet Entin does not consider the ways in which *Kong's* allegory does not just construct a racialized image of monstrosity, but in particular, a colonial

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<sup>466</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 241.

<sup>467</sup> Joseph B. Entin, *Sensational Modernism: Experimental Fiction and Photography in Thirties America* (Chapel Hill: University of NC Press, 2007), 216.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

subject overtaking the urban metropole in a rampage of violence and revenge. As *Kong* is clear about the "imperial" ambitions of the filmmaker, the film fits within a long trajectory of anti-imperial critics who feared that extending the flag overseas would ultimately contaminate the nation with racially undesirable and anti-democratic subjects.<sup>469</sup> *Kong*, in essence, is the colony come home to roost.

Interestingly enough, the only film actually cited diagetically within *Native Son* is the 1931 MGM action-adventure picture *Trader Horn*. Choked with colonial tropes, from murderous savages to panoramic spectacles of flora and fauna, the film chronicles a white adventurer who journeys deep into the African jungle to rescue a missing white daughter of U.S. missionaries. Assuming the sexual and racial power of white womanhood, the missionary's daughter emerges as a tribal queen and orders the execution of the entire party, until the moment an overtly racial appeal is made, when she is reminded of her "proper place" among "her own people." The film's tag-line, "white goddess of the pagan tribes, the cruelest woman in all Africa," suggests strongly that Wright chose the film with clear intentions of satirizing Mary Dalton, who envisions herself running off "to join the pagan" Communists and wants desperately to live among black people. While in the film, the white adventurer is successful in convincing the woman to return from Africa, Bigger not only murders Mary Dalton but very nearly gets away with it. Bigger's assertion of counter-phallic power in the theater (masturbating with his "nightstick") is replicated by the assumption and reversal

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<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 217

of this filmic narrative.<sup>470</sup> As Bigger embodies the colonial rebellion of *Kong*, so too can we read Bigger's ransom plot as the attempt to overturn yet another colonial trope. Bigger tells Bessie they can hide in the South Side's abandoned buildings because "it'll be like hiding in a jungle;" later the prosecuting attorney argues that executing Bigger is a "fight of civilization."<sup>471</sup> Bigger even seems latently aware of the colonial implications of the act, as he warns his friend Jack that an attempt to join Mary Dalton (sexually) in the tropics as they watch the newsreel would end in his "hanging from a tree like a bunch of bananas."<sup>472</sup> This fusion of U.S. lynching with the tropical plantation economy forcefully suggests the connection between white racism in North America and the production of commodities in the colonial South.

In addition to Bigger's attempts at narrative mastery after the film, while watching *Trader Horn's* "pictures of naked black men and women whirling in wild dances," Bigger dreams of what it will be like to work for the Daltons: "gradually the African scene changed and was replaced by images in his own mind of white men and women dressed in black and white clothes....they were smart people....maybe he would get some of it," their "millions."<sup>473</sup> This scene functions with a kind of double-displacement. Not only is his desire to "get the dope" while working for the Daltons out of reach, but it displaces precisely those

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<sup>470</sup> Wright, *Native Son*, 32

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 228, 374

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., 33.



images constructed around his social oppression, "natives dancing and whirling" on stage. Given that Bigger is described in the press as a "jungle beast" and a "black ape," that Bigger imagines his "millions" while watching the film is doubly ironic.<sup>474</sup> In placing himself both inside and outside of the very imperial imagery by which Bigger will be eventually executed, I'm reminded of the metaphor Bigger uses to describe his first interaction with Jan: the No Man's Land between "the white and black world."<sup>475</sup> Wright specifically refers to this space in "How Bigger was Born" as a "hovering unwanted between two worlds," a space which "lacks physical existence....[a] shadowy region" that left Bigger feeling "naked and transparent."<sup>476</sup> Entin, Dawahare, and Wright discuss this space as the feeling of disempowerment, of being held up for scrutiny by an imperial gaze. Outside of stable racial realms, Bigger is ungrounded, no longer capable of assuming his prescribed role within a racial part nor able to end it. Yet Bigger's projection of self onto an imperial action-adventure story suggests a similar kind of space "between white and black," mediated by mass-culture industries. In many ways, the film constructs an inverted map of the novel: Bigger kills "the girl" rather than rescue her, and the adventurers' escape is not hampered by tribesmen with spears, but rather a white racist mob. And yet in Bigger's imagination in the

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., 67; Richard Wright, "How Bigger Was Born," *Native Son* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1940, 1991), 451.

movie theater, the film is experienced as a merged identity, even as his attempts at mastery over the imperial tropes of the film are doomed.

That the image of the tropics in *Trader Horn* brings up the question of violence suggests that we may see the violence in the novel as part of its imperial unconscious. While *Native Son* comments on the latent connections among race, imperialism, and identity in numerous ways, at the core of the novel is racial violence: the death of Mary and the "white blur" before Bigger's eyes before he murders Bessie; his fight with Gus in the pool hall to remove the shame of his fear at robbing Blum's deli; the near riot as news of Bigger's crime reaches the papers and black businesses are smashed; the near-lynching of Bigger outside of the court and the legal lynching of Bigger inside the court; even the opening in which Bigger kills a rat with a frying pan mirrors the inter-racial violence with inter-species violence. And yet, prefiguring this violence is the murder of Bigger's own father "in a riot in the South" when Bigger was a child.<sup>477</sup> The riot is unspecified and may more likely refer to a lynching, as Bigger groped for "neutral words" while talking to Jan and Mary as their chauffeur.<sup>478</sup> Bigger is thus literally, you could say, born of racial violence.

As Fanon notes, it is the specific nature of its violence that marks the colony as separate from other forms of domination and oppression. Unlike feudalism in which the hegemony of "divine right" legitimates the serf's relation to the monarch, the "settler brought the native into existence...by violence" by

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<sup>477</sup> Wright, *Native Son*, 74.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

"means of guns and machines."<sup>479</sup> Thus for Fanon, "symbolic violence" against the settler in the form of armed struggle is not only necessary as a "cleansing force" but the violence itself "invests [the native's] characters with positive and creative energies" and is a necessary part of "freeing the native from his inferiority complex and despair."<sup>480</sup> Violence for Fanon is transformative both psychologically and politically: it creates a collective history and unites the "fragmentation" that colonialism forces upon the native into a "national front;" it also heals the divided and ultimately ruptured subjectivity of the native, torn between "desire" for what the settler has and the self-loathing the native feels as a result of their domination.

Fanon is also clear that the violence of the native against the settler is first and foremost, of a psychologically symbolic nature. In this sense, Bigger Thomas refers to his murder of Mary and ultimately Bessie in startling similar terms. He writes that his murder "created a new world for himself"; that for once he "had his destiny in his grasp. He was more alive than he could ever remember having been; his mind and attention were....focused toward a goal."<sup>481</sup> Even Boris Max, Bigger's Communist Party lawyer refers to Bigger's murder as an "act of creation."<sup>482</sup> If the initial violence against his father forms a psychological

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<sup>479</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 36, 40.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-4.

<sup>481</sup> Wright, *Native Son*, 241, 149.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

castration, Bigger's attempts at phallic ordering (which I'll discuss below) can only be achieved through a counter-violence:

The shame and fear and hate which Mary and Jan and Mr. Dalton and that huge rich house had made rise so hard and hot in him had now cooled and softened. Had he not done what they never thought he could? His being black and at the bottom of the world was something which he could take with new-born strength...No matter how they laughed at him for being black and clownlike, he could look them in the eyes and not feel angry....<sup>483</sup>

While Bigger has not yet subscribed to a fixed political ideology in the novel, the novel prefigures much of Fanon's claims that violence is not only an act which "brings the native and settler" to points of equality, but rather that the act itself is necessary for the native's own mental health and alignment. It seems less than incidental that Bigger's apartment is owned by his employer, who charges exorbitant rents on the basis that blacks cannot live elsewhere in the city – a relationship enforced by the violence of white mobs and the police authority.

While critic Anthony Dawahare suggests we see *Native Son* as a critique of black nationalism, it is also clear that nationalism is only – albeit rare "longing for solidarity with other black people" Bigger expresses through the novel. Bigger is caught within a global web of imperial white racism, a "white force" against which Bigger dreams "of making a stand."<sup>484</sup> "Dimly," Bigger felt,

there should be one direction in which he and all other black people could go whole-heartedly; that there should be a manner of acting that caught the mind and the body in certainty and faith...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

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<sup>483</sup> Ibid., 150

<sup>484</sup> Dawahare, *Nationalism...*, 127, 114.

and shame that sapped at the base of his life. 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. He 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...<sup>485</sup>

Bigger's fusion of black nationalism, global events, militarism, anti-Semitism, and paternal authority are clearly meant to recall the Garvey movement of the 1920s.

As Marcus Garvey often mixed anti-colonial rhetoric, black uplift, with an admiration for the masculine and racial nationalism of Mussolini and ultimately Hitler, Bigger's own naive admiration for nationalism and militarism is something of a parody. While for Garvey to admire Mussolini in the late 1920s was more an attempt to legitimate his own brand of nationalism than an embrace of fascism per se, Bigger's embrace in the early 1940s cannot be read in the same innocent terms. Clearly, Wright wishes to suggest that Bigger's nationalism is less about liberation than a psychological drive for his own (denied) phallic power.

While Wright was critical of the Garvey movement, he also had a far more ambivalent and sympathetic perspective on it than would be apparent from some of his public statements. As Wright states in *American Hunger*:

The Garveyites had embraced a totally racialistic outlook which endowed them with a dignity that I had never seen before in Negroes. On the walls of their dingy flats were maps of Africa and India and Japan, pictures of Japanese generals and admirals, portraits of Marcus Garvey in gaudy regalia, the faces of colored men and women from all parts of the world... I pitied them too much to tell them that they could never achieve their goal, that Africa was owned by the imperial powers of Europe...It was

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<sup>485</sup> Wright, 115.

when the Garveyites spoke fervently of building their own country....I caught glimpse of the potential strength of the American Negro...<sup>486</sup>

The similarities of these passages are striking, particularly in the emotional recognition Wright grants black nationalism, as well as the understanding of the symbolic resonance that Japanese militarism – and by extension, other forms of right-wing nationalism – held for African-Americans. While Dawahare and others cite Bigger's attraction to fascism as a sign of his authoritarianism and patriarchy, Garvey's own embrace in the late 1920s and early 1930s of European nationalism needs to be read through a colonial lens. As George Lipsitz notes, "the Japanese were not just any outsiders to African-Americans in the 1940s: they were people of color with their own independent nation, a force capable of challenging Euro-American imperialism on its own terms."<sup>487</sup> Rather than merely understanding right-wing nationalism as an expression of the global Ku Klux Klan, as many within the Popular Front did, there is a way in which Garvey used the legitimacy of Japan, Mussolini and even Hitler's brand of nationalism to legitimate black calls for an independent state. While many see the Communist Party's call for an independent black nation in the U.S. – the so called "black belt thesis" -- as a naive attempt to apply Marxian theory to the United States, it was in many ways,

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<sup>486</sup> Richard Wright, *Black Boy/American Hunger* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1944, 1995), 286-7

<sup>487</sup> George Lipsitz, "Frantic to Join...the Japanese Army:: Black Soldiers and Civilians Confront the Asia Pacific War," *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* ed. T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, Lisa Yoneyama (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 350.

an attempt to attract former Garveyites to the Communist Party.<sup>488</sup> African-American nationalism, unlike German or Italian nationalism, is inherently global, and its inclusion in *Native Son* seems yet another way in which Bigger speaks to the nascent politics of colonialism within the novel.

The No Man's Land is, of course, also a military metaphor. I would suggest that Bigger's references to the South Side as a "jungle" and Buckley's calls for a war to protect "civilization" also invoke not only the scorched earth of WWI trenches, but the imagery of guerilla war. Indeed, images of war abound in *Native Son* from the very beginning. While complaining about how he'd been racially barred from aviation school, Bigger surmises that "I'd take a couple of bombs and drop 'em" on the "white folks" who prevented him from flying.<sup>489</sup> The bombs Bigger would drop on "white folks" appear again as the "bombs thrown by whites... when "Negroes first moved into the South Side" as he and Bessie search for abandoned houses to escape into.<sup>490</sup> As Gus and Bigger "play white," Bigger imagines the President calling on the Secretary of Defense to stop "sending a note to Germany" and "do something with these black folks" who are "raising sand."<sup>491</sup> As a novel published only a year before U.S. entrance in WWII, the assertion that the President finds blacks "raising sand" in the U.S. more of a *military* concern

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<sup>488</sup> Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Urbana: University of IL Press, 1983, 2005), 40.

<sup>489</sup> Wright, *Native Son*, 17.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

than Germany "raising sand" in Europe suggests blacks are equivalent if not greater as a *national* threat than fascism. As was echoed by many within the anti-imperialist African-American communities, many felt that the U.S. government critiques of Nazi race policies were ironic as best. As Penny Von Eschen points out, many within the African-American community felt, as one *Chicago Defender* cartoon expressed, that Germany would "pick on anybody" while the "democracies pick on the darker races only."<sup>492</sup> That the fictionalized president would call the Secretary of Defense to "do something" suggests also that African-Americans are an external threat, one for whom military power typically reserved for other nations would be necessary.

Reading Bigger as young Garveyite may be in some ways Wright's dig at the Garvey movement, but it is also suggestive of Wright's political dialectic between nationalism and Communism that he lays out in *Blueprint for Negro Writing*. While Wright saw the reality of a "Negro way of life" rooted in black social institutions such as the black church, black businesses, black schools, and a black press, he also sees such a way of life as a forced product of slavery and segregation.<sup>493</sup> Wright feels that writers should acknowledge the cultural force of black nationalism as a lived reality for black people, yet he casts it in historical terms, as the residual remnant of what is a dying slave-plantation order.

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<sup>492</sup> Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-57* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 25.

<sup>493</sup> Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing," *Within a Circle: An Anthology of African-American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed Angelyn Mitchell (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 100.



Articulating socialism as a way to "overcome" racial identity and cultural nationalism, Wright praised the modernity of the black urban proletariat and felt Marxism would bring the black masses into the modern age.<sup>494</sup> On a schematic level, one can see *Native Son* within this trajectory. Bigger's cultural and political isolation is ultimately engaged by Boris Max's broad, inclusive socialist vision. Bigger's near-final words in the novel, "tell Jan hello" suggest Bigger's growth and acceptance of their linked fate. Much the same way the two narratives in *The Surrounded* compete for primacy in the novel, so too the two political narratives – between nationalism and a socialist pluralism – also compete in *Native Son*.

Like *The Surrounded*, *Native Son* deploys a radical bildungsroman form to criticize the social and political foundations on which such a form relies. While in *The Surrounded*, the form is deployed to show Archilde's exclusion from the modes of radical belonging, *Native Son* deploys the form for a slight different effect. Rather than suggest Bigger's exclusion through violence, Wright implies that it is precisely Bigger's violence that, for a made him "feel equal" and as though he were "truly living."<sup>495</sup> The suggestion that murder, accidental or not, achieves the same effect as collective action authorizes a dramatically different historical arc. While Max's narrative that "all people who work are inferior" to "the men who own the buildings" attempts to place Bigger within a narrative of radical and transformative progress, Bigger's counter-narrative suggests that his origins, marked by racial violence, may trace a different path to national and/or

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<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Wright, *Native Son*, 164, 239.

social belonging.<sup>496</sup> As Denise da Silva and Fanon point out, the question of racial violence is not a matter of degree, but signals a categorical difference among forms of Western hierarchy. It is interesting that Wright uses a metaphor of birth to explain Bigger's development as a character ("How Bigger was Born), as it is precisely through the murder of Bigger's father that Bigger comes into a social being. Fanon discusses the act of violence in similar terms, suggesting that a "new man is born" through violence, substituting a biological metaphor for the change in historical narrative the armed struggle begins.

In this sense, one could say that *Native Son* performs much the same tension between nationalism and belonging as other Popular Front texts do, and yet the emotional force of the first half of the text, as well as Bigger's reluctance to accept Max's vision, trouble this dialectic. In Max's last visit to see Bigger, Bigger tries to explain to Max that he and his executioners are in many ways the same: they both see violence as a way "to get something" even if the "something" exists only on the symbolic level.<sup>497</sup> Max refuses the statement, and attempts to steer the conversation back to class interest, or one could say, U.S. democracy, yet Bigger's challenge remains unanswered.

In this sense, Bigger's acts of violence, intentional or not, bring forth the colonial character of racial relations in the U.S. originated, and maintained as Fanon writes, with "cannon and bayonet."<sup>498</sup> The play on "native" in the title

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 426-8.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 425.

suggests that Wright was well aware of the discourse of national belonging in the Popular Front; Bigger's inability to be fully incorporated within the universal history of democracy suggests more the "native" of Fanon's text than the organic community usually suggested by the phrase. This distinction is important for the context of Wright's own work. While *Blueprint* would suggest that a radical or "alternative" modernity eventually answers for and replaces the false universalism of the Enlightenment, Bigger's resistance suggests that modernity may not, in the end, rescue all whom it has left behind. While Wright remained ambivalent about these categories throughout his work, the "imperial dreams" of the slaveholders, as Max calls them, are very much still present within the text.<sup>499</sup>

By stating some of the thematic similarities between *The Surrounded* and *Native Son*, I do not wish to flatten obvious differences between the two texts nor suggest that "Native American self-determination" and "black nationalism" share identical roots and contexts. Yet despite these differences, both novels display similar tensions around questions of belonging and nationalism that articulate themselves through Popular Front literary and cultural modes. Both texts fuse a social realist aesthetic with popular culture tropes, genres, and narratives. And, like many Popular Front texts, such as Clifford Odets' "Waiting for Lefty" and Nelson Algren's *Never Come Morning*, these novels suggest ways in which popular culture narratives are constitutive of characters' identity formations. Bigger not only projects himself into the text of a Hollywood film, but his actions

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<sup>498</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 36.

<sup>499</sup> Wright, *Native Son*, 389

and definitions of happiness are defined by them. After Mary's death and his plot to secure ransom money, Bigger "felt a sense of fullness he had so often but inadequately felt in magazines and movies."<sup>500</sup> For Archilde and Bigger, mastery over the racial and colonial implications of such narratives forms the core part of their struggles for self-hood. And perhaps more radically, these texts often register how popular genres such as the dime Western or the detective novel contain racially freighted narratives and themes that are not "neutral" vehicles for their plots. Both suggest that race is a mediated discourse through mass culture that the characters have limited access to or ability to change.

I also would hope by pointing out crucial commonalities between texts by writers of color, I can begin to suggest ways in which Native American literature was in dialogue with the Popular Front. I would not go so far as to say there was a "Native American Popular Front" as Bill Mullen and Robin D.G. Kelley have suggested there was "African-American Popular Front," but I would say that Native American issues and Native American intellectuals played a crucial part in the dialectics between and among race, class and nation that formed the movement's most intense political currents. While Collier's progressive reforms were enacted as part of an attempt to renew U.S. national identity – which he accurately saw as reliant on incorporating Native Americans for its cultural reproduction – such a view was challenged by both Native American intellectuals as well as by the space opened up by New Deal programs. Writers within the FWP and intellectuals within the Collier administration, such as McNickle and

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 150.

Phinney, saw the space opened by his reforms to pursue their own more radical vision of tribal life. In addition, we can see that Native American policy was shaped by transnational currents in social modernism, including Soviet policy, Marxist theories of self-determination, and global decolonization that link efforts at reform to other activists and intellectuals of color who rethought U.S. racial issues along similar lines. By approaching Native American policy and literature in the 1930s through the lens of the Popular Front, we can see the breadth and depth of the movement, as well as understand how radical modernisms were embraced and challenged. At the center of *The Surrounded's* political structure is the conflict between a telos of radical and alterior modernity represented by Archilde and the history of racial violence represented by sheriff Quigley. While these two narrative strands would seem to be unbridgeable, it is precisely this gap between a new universalism and the history of exclusion from such universalisms that embodies the horizons and contradictions of the Popular Front.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Cold War Re-Visions: Representation and Resistance in the Unseen Salt of the Earth**

*Salt of the Earth* is often remembered as the primary counternarrative of the Cold War. A film made by blacklisted artists, it presents a miners' strike in which a largely Mexican American and Native American union overcomes a Taft-Hartley injunction after the ladies' auxiliary takes over the picket line.<sup>501</sup> Against this backdrop, mine worker Ramón Quintero and his wife, Esperanza, negotiate their new roles, as Esperanza struggles for equality as strike captain and Ramón chafes against the perceived threat to his masculinity. These two narratives in *Salt of the Earth*, of a strike by a minority union with a long history of racial consciousness and the story of the miners' wives' empowerment as they take over the picket line, challenge central cultural and institutional doctrines of the postwar order: maintenance of the color line, the Cold War cult of domesticity, and more than anything, the notion of labor-management "peace" as key to the prosperity of working-class Americans.

When producer Paul Jarrico related the strike he witnessed in New Mexico, director Herbert Biberman understood immediately that they had found their "story."<sup>502</sup> It was a story that, unlike other critical films made during the height of the

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<sup>501</sup> Herbert Biberman, *Salt of the Earth: The Story of a Film* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 65. Herbert Biberman remarks in his memoir that several members of the union, including the leadership, were Native American and identified as such.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

Cold War, not only challenged the multiple intersections of class, race, and gender suppression that formed the postwar political project, but also imagined possibilities for radical transformation: rather than finding their union shattered after the injunction, the miners transformed it into a more inclusive institution, more powerful for its inclusion. Even the story of the film's production becomes a part of this counternarrative. Rather than promote official values of technocracy, the nuclear suburban family, and national unity, the filmmakers' artistic collaboration with the miners and ultimately their reliance on networks of solidarity to resist government suppression suggest an alternative model of social organization based on mutuality and working-class self-activity. In this way, *Salt* stands not only as a challenge to the Cold War, but also as the last and perhaps finest product of the multi-ethnic, working class, internationalist popular front.

Yet it's difficult to know exactly what "story" Biberman and Jarrico intended to tell. Between the treatment, pre-production draft, and final film version, the screenplay went through a number of changes and edits that significantly changed the meaning of the film. Some are explained by Biberman and others as resulting from the unusual, democratic method of review. Michael Wilson, Jarrico's brother-in-law and the blacklisted screenwriter of *Salt*, insisted that the mine workers themselves would have veto power over scenes and content, and he helped form a committee of union members and the ladies' auxiliary who could suggest and implement changes. Among critics and followers of the film, the story of those changes is a success. It is a narrative of worker-artist collaboration, a case of intellectuals bridging the many meanings of racial and class difference. Looking at the published record, the story

would seem to be true: racist scenes were removed, unflattering gender stereotypes were omitted, and Mexican American mine workers replaced professional Anglo actors as leads.<sup>503</sup> As George Lipsitz frames it in his definitive work on postwar culture, the film becomes a parable of collective art in which Biberman and Wilson's "contact with concrete struggles of a working-class community" in the end "produced a work of art and politics far superior" to the original draft of the film, or to any of the mainstream work either had done as highly paid studio artists.<sup>504</sup>

There is a great deal of truth to this claim, especially to the notion that a film's meaning is embedded in the practices of its production. Yet critics' many accounts of the changes uniformly ignore larger and more sweeping omissions made by Wilson and the union committee. Such changes are not included in any of the published, firsthand accounts of the film, nor are they referred to in any of the later scholarship on the film that rely on such accounts. In fact, it seems entirely probable that few if any of the critics who make these claims have actually seen the archived, pre-production draft and treatment of the film (especially as its circulation is limited to a single copy in the Wilson archive at UCLA). Indeed, the claim that the final script was "far superior" to the original draft seems based more on the powerful cultural narrative surrounding the film than an account of Wilson's original script. The

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid., 38–41. George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 292–94; James Lorence, *The Suppression of Salt of the Earth* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 65–90; Tom Miller, "Salt of the Earth Revisited," *Cineaste* 13.3 (1984): 31–6; Deborah Rosenfelt, *Salt of the Earth: Commentary* (New York: Feminist Press, 1978). This narrative of the film's production can be found in print in most, if not all, of the authoritative sources on the film.

<sup>504</sup> Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, 292.



changes that took place in the film present a far more complex and contradictory process than a simple narrative of the reeducation of Hollywood elites or of essential working-class spirit.

For what the changes reveal is less the dropping of stereotypes for a broader conception of working-class life than a wholly new film. Rather than contain merely a few objectionable scenes cut out by the union committee, the original, pre-production draft presents us with a very different vision of the film's meaning, one that in many respects is far more expansive, far more critical of the international Cold War, a film that finds its location as much in Silver City, New Mexico, as in the intersections of the Korean War, white racism, anticommunism, domesticity, and the legacy of U.S. imperialism. While Salt is undeniably a monument to worker-artist collaboration any way you cut it, it is impossible to see the original script as merely the efforts of naive cultural producers, or the final version as solely the product of radical working-class and racial consciousness. Rather, the tension between the original script and the final product is a tension between different worldviews, between a script that uses the specific location of Silver City, New Mexico, to offer a critique of the international Cold War, and a version that leaves much of the direct critique of the U.S. Cold War implied or even unsaid. Instead of seeing one version as better than the other, I propose that the two are a negotiation between the needs and experiences of two disempowered groups—the old (and blacklisted) Hollywood left, and a civil rights consciousness inside a minority-run labor union facing not only the Cold War blacklist, but a longer cultural history of struggle against racism and cultural dispossession. While Wilson, Biberman, and Jarrico wanted to fit the Local 890 strike

against the appropriately named “Empire Zinc” into a global discourse of race, imperialism, labor, and the rising threat of U.S. fascism, the meaning of this representation for miners who lived in Silver City may have had consequences beyond the Hollywood filmmakers’ conception.

Beyond a concern over derogatory stereotypes, I would argue that the miners were concerned about the repercussions of such a radical film. As historians such as Mary Dudziak, Penny Von Eschen, and Thomas Borstelmann point out, the civil rights movement that saw its greatest achievements at the height of the Cold War did so at the expense of its earlier commitment to anti-imperialist politics. The worker-artist collaboration, rather than simply broadening the scope of the film, may have paradoxically limited what the cultural producers felt they could say. Local 890 of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers (IUMMSW or Mine-Mill) was deeply affected by Cold War politics, as its leadership was red-baited and its charter revoked by the CIO for refusing to sign noncommunist affidavits. For the mine workers, caught in a struggle to end a two-tiered wage system in the Southwest mines, a film that further suggested they were “soft” on communism, skeptical of the church, and antiwar may have been more of a risk than they wished to take. Likewise, the history of Mexican American labor activism in the Southwest suggests that vigilante and state repression, including violence, red-baiting, and deportation, were not new, nor were they confined to the state/corporate apparatus of the Cold War. The reification of a racialized national identity, the policing of bodies, borders, and the climate of corporate and government terror associated with the red scare of the late 1940s and 1950s goes back half a century for southwestern miners to the first mass

union drives in the early 1900s, in which Mexican American mine workers were subjected to assassination, deportation, and mass terror. To use Gramsci's military metaphor for social movements, the colonized subject requires a different mode of struggle, the "war of position" as much as the more open "war of maneuver."<sup>505</sup> For a community under the double-edged threat of race and class persecution that had recently survived "Operation Wetback" and the "repatriations" of the 1930s, it is easy to see why both the antiracist militancy of a union like Mine-Mill and the political caution regarding its national presentation on film would not be so much a contradiction as a kind of dialectical common sense.

Still, even a glance at the original script reveals that the changes made to it are significant. There are omitted scenes that suggest collusion among the Catholic church, the D.A., the sheriff, local businesses, and the zinc mine to break the strike. There are omissions in which members of the white business and political establishment resort to vigilante violence and overt racism to defeat the workers and their union. There is a scene in which the sheriff admits to taking bribes from the mine, and another in which the sheriff complains that his bribes are not large enough, given the community pressure he will face if it becomes known that his deputies beat women, even radical, picketing women. There are scenes of overt racism by shopkeepers who deny strikers credit. There are scenes depicting open tension between Anglo and Mexican American mine workers. There are implicit critiques of union bureaucracy and subtle and not-so-subtle attempts by the union to discipline its

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<sup>505</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 229–30

own more militant members, suggesting tensions between pragmatic and more revolutionary goals. There are repeated references to the culture of anticommunism in the United States—speeches by union officials warning members about how they will be red-baited by newspapers and politicians, editorials and headlines denouncing the union as “communist,” references by mine executives and managers to “bolshevist” union leaders and strike captains, and explicit links between the culture of anticommunism and racism, sexism, and imperialism. And perhaps most important, there are references to the Korean War and the U.S.-Mexico War that implicitly connect U.S. foreign policy to the ideology of domestic control of labor, women, and nonwhite populations as well as to the U.S. history of imperialism.

What is startling about these omissions is not their wide-ranging nature, but rather their consistency. They connect the particular and local struggle of the Mexican American mine workers of Local 890 to the larger state, civic, and corporate apparatus of the international Cold War; and they link the Cold War to a longer U.S. history of imperial conquest, racism, and industrial violence. Together these omissions construct a broad map of Cold War social relations, as well as posit an alternative history of the Cold War as both a continuation of recent popular front struggles and of older historical struggles that have their genesis with the foundation of the nation, including the theft of Native and Mexican lands by European colonists. The final film remains a subtle critique of the U.S. conquest of the Southwest, yet the connection between the then-current global war against communism and manifest destiny is subdued. It is not an understatement to suggest that the removal of nearly all references to the Korean War and anticommunism alone produce a film that, while

challenging the Cold War consensus, severs crucial links between internal U.S. politics and third world revolution.

To give an example, one of the more striking missing subplots concerns a woman referred to merely as “the widow,” a mine worker’s wife who lost her husband a year earlier in the Korean War. Engaged in an affair with a mineworker, “the widow” breaks off the adulterous relationship when she learns that the ladies’ auxiliary is now picketing the mine. The scene introduces the complex way in which colonized people are conscripted to fight wars of colonization for an imperial power, and also the way their narratives of resistance to conscription are suppressed. Equally, the choice made by the widow to resist advances from a sexist male mine worker and join her union sisters on the picket line is framed as recovery of the loss of her late husband. Such a narrative move suggests that the ideology of domesticity—the pressure the widow feels to remain away from the public arena of the picket line and submit to masculine sexual desires—intersects with the corporate and imperial project of the Cold War. This is not a political point contrived by naive or insensitive filmmakers, and its removal—and the removal of scenes like it—deserves a fuller treatment than it has thus far received.<sup>506</sup>

This is not to say that *Salt of the Earth* in its final form did not challenge the Cold War consensus, especially as it concerned gender and the color line, or that it

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<sup>506</sup> Rosenfelt, *Commentary*, 127. In her commentary, Rosenfelt very briefly mentions that the subplot was removed because of the suggestion of infidelity, but doesn’t mention why several other references to the Korean War were removed, that the widow’s husband died in Korea and that he was openly critical of the war, or why the scene could not be rewritten.

did not present the optimistic, intimate portrayal of workers engaged in struggle. And likewise, the film connects the racist policies of both Grant County and Empire Zinc to the colonial occupation of northern Mexico, the dispossession of Mexicans from their land, and the intersections among class, race, and gender that inform any working-class struggle for equality and liberation. Yet there is a grain of truth in what the *New York Times* reviewer wrote after seeing the premier in 1953—that for all of *Salt*’s “agitated history,” it is “in substance, simply a strong pro-labor film with a . . . sympathetic interest in the Mexican-Americans with whom it deals.”<sup>507</sup> While this subtlety was certainly lost on the government, Hollywood unions, and local vigilantes, all of whom conspired to shut down the film and deport the lead actress, Rosaura Reveultas, the film *Salt* became is obviously different from the kind of film Michael Wilson, Herbert Biberman, and Paul Jarrico initially imagined they would make. What the changes mean, and what kind of film *Salt* finally became may have much to do with Biberman’s changing sense of not only what the film was about, but who he filmed and why. That these changes aren’t discussed in any sources relating to the film, and indeed, that the original script remains unpublished, does not suggest that they were’ unimportant.

I would argue the filmmakers’ silence reveals a deep and unacknowledged contradiction faced by progressive writers and artists attempting to narrate collective struggle during the Cold War, the absence of commentary merely underscoring its insolubility. The fact that *Salt* was the “one unfettered creation of Hollywood’s victims,” as Paul Buhle refers to it, suggests that the tensions felt by the *Salt*

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<sup>507</sup> Crowther quoted in Biberman, *Salt of the Earth*, 172.

filmmakers are not only, as one would suspect, between capital and labor, studio and employee, but also between the different aims and goals of radical cultural production at this time in history.<sup>508</sup> For the filmmakers, one of whom served time in jail under the Smith Act, the immediacy of the Cold War in its international dimensions would understandably seem like the crisis of the moment; for the workers of Mine-Mill Local 890, securing an end to decades if not over a century of racial discrimination may have been more of a priority.<sup>509</sup> In this sense, the changes to the film are a powerful reminder that resistance is always culturally and materially located, not only within the realm of the possible, but within the immediate needs of disempowered groups.

Examining the revisions to the *Salt of the Earth* script can also tell us much about similar tensions within film production during the early years of the Cold War. It was a time of remarkable repression within the film industry, and during which time many directors and writers associated with the Popular Front were either expelled from Hollywood, or attempted address the changing political landscape with equal parts subversion and collusion with emerging structures of power. If the creators of *Salt* felt it necessary to heavily edit their film to make it less critical of U.S. imperialism and in line with mythologies of U.S. democracy, it may be helpful

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<sup>508</sup> Paul Buhle and David Wagoner, *Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America's Favorite Movies* (New York: New Press, 2002), xv.

<sup>509</sup> Passed in 1940, the Smith Act bans any individual or group from "advocating the overthrow" of the U.S. government by "force or violence." It was used first against the Socialist Workers Party during World War II, and later during the cold war to arrest over a hundred members of the Communist Party. While the convictions were thrown out years later, the law is still technically on the books. Biberman, as one of the Hollywood Ten, served six months in jail under a Smith Act indictment.

to also place these changes in the context of the work of several other Popular Front filmmakers who continued to labor in Hollywood. Darryl Zanuck and Elia Kazan's production of John Steinbeck's script, *Viva Zapata!*, and Orson Welles' *The Lady from Shanghai* both work within similar terrain, placing Popular Front political figures, a peasant revolutionary who's lost his land and "water-front agitator," within a new Cold War logic of international expansionism and working class entrapment. While both films offer greater intellectual and political complexity than conservative epic blockbusters like Cecil DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*, the collusion of *Zapata* and the fatalism of *Lady* both exemplify the way *Salt* is exceptional and yet subject to the same forces that shaped both films, albeit in surprising ways.

### **Frank Barnes Meets Ramón Quintero: Anti-Imperialism and the Popular Front**

To place this discussion in context, one needs to consider why Biberman, Jarrico, and Wilson were interested in the New Mexico strike to begin with. Biberman and Jarrico wrote after the film was released that they wanted “stories that would reflect the true stature of union men and women” and more specifically “material dealing with minority peoples.”<sup>510</sup> The link between the “true” character of union men and women and their status as “minorities” is not something, in the heart of the Cold War, that anyone would have taken for granted. Yet for Biberman and Jarrico, their desire to present a pro-labor film had everything to do with its location in New Mexico and the ethnic and racial identity of the union’s leadership. If one thinks about other possible script ideas they considered—one regarding a divorcee

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<sup>510</sup> Rosenfelt, *Commentary*, 107



who loses her children after accusations that she is a communist, and another about the Scottsboro Boys—it's clear that the Mine-Mill 890 strike was the “story” precisely because it was not only a “pro-labor” or “pro-minority” or “pro-woman” narrative—as it is often portrayed in discussions today—but also because all of these elements bring together so many intersections of the Cold War: the way in which anticommunism so frequently spoke the language of domesticity, race, and individualism to the extent that they became inseparable from the ideological struggle. From the outset, the film's scope was internationalist in vision and political in the broadest sense.

But one aspect of Biberman's interest in the strike very seldom is discussed—Biberman did not think of the Mexican American mine workers as minorities so much as he considered them partial foreigners. Biberman writes in his memoir that it is only as he cast several professional Mexican actors for the lead that it occurred to him that Mexican Americans were “not Mexicans” but a separate and distinctly U.S. American culture.<sup>511</sup> While Biberman's confusion over whether the miners were “Mexicans” or “Americans” is naive, even implicitly racist, it also reveals certain tensions within artistic production at the time; one cannot discuss the meaning of the Cold War in the United States without discussing what happens outside of U.S. borders, and the two are dialectically linked. In essence, Biberman and Wilson wanted to create a film around a militant union struggle that would be both representative of what unions could and should be and that would engage with the political dimensions of the Cold War within the United States—and yet looked for a

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<sup>511</sup> Biberman, *Salt of the Earth*, 55.

population and strike that they understood to be on the margins. This fact alone reveals what to any labor historian is obvious: the Cold War compromised the union as an oppositional force within U.S. culture by, as Antonio Negri suggests, incorporating unionism as a dynamic part of the new Keynesian-military state apparatus.<sup>512</sup> But more than this, it reveals the extent to which Biberman and Wilson hit on what many historians of the Cold War have only recently brought forth—the connection between struggles to fight racism at home and U.S. imperialism abroad, between the international Cold War and the struggle for freedom within the United States.

In Mary Dudziak's *Cold War Civil Rights*, she writes of the “narrowed discourse” of cold war–era civil rights struggle. Of course, it must be asked what was “narrow” about a movement to end centuries of white terror in the United States. Penny von Eschen writes of the many black institutions, activists, and newspapers that continually linked segregation in the United States to fascism in Europe, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia to the larger context of European and U.S. imperialism, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria to the English and French occupation of Southeast Asia, and perhaps most embarrassing for the United States during the war, the segregation of the armed forces to German segregation of Jews and other “undesirables.” As von Eschen writes, “at the dawn of the civil rights movement,

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<sup>512</sup> Antonio Negri. “Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State post 1929.” *Revolution Retrieved: Selected Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects 1967-1983*, trans. Ed Emery and John Merrington. (London: Red Notes, 1988), 5-38.

international issues went hand-in-hand with domestic concerns.”<sup>513</sup> Institutionally, organizations such as the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers’ Party, the Filipino Anti-Imperialist League, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, and the Council on African Affairs sponsored articles and newspapers and organized conferences and trips that brought together a wide range of constituencies—labor unions, civic organizations, intellectuals—from across the world to link the two issues. The Communist Party sponsored trips to Cuba, the Soviet Union, Europe, and Africa; the CAA frequently hosted leaders of anticolonial struggles in Africa, creating meetings between black intellectuals such as Alphaeus Hunton and Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrume; and figures such as Carlos Bulosan and Emma Tenayuca linked the struggle to unionize the fields with the nationalist struggles in the Philippines or in the U.S. Southwest.

More important for figures such as Herbert Biberman, Paul Jarrico, and Michael Wilson were organizations like the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League (HANL), later renamed the Hollywood League for Democratic Action and the American Peace Mobilization. This group, headed by Biberman and Sam Ornitz, tied the racism of Nazi Germany to racism at home, and worked hard not only to end racist stereotypes in Hollywood films, but also to organize support for the Sleepy Lagoon case and raise money for striking farm workers in the Central Valley.<sup>514</sup> In one sense, these are

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<sup>513</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anti-Colonialism: 1937–57* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 77.

<sup>514</sup> See Paul Jarrico, *Hollywood Blacklist, 1988–1990: Oral History Project* (Transcript, Oral History Collection, dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCLA, 1991), 120. Also see David E James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History*

simply positions that one might expect from a progressive organization in California, but there is a specificity to the HANL's understanding of "fascism" as both international and local that many in the L.A. community shared. Cary McWilliams, a figure well known within Hollywood leftist circles and a columnist for HANL's publication *Hollywood Now*, wrote extensively about the connections among fascism, imperialism, vigilante violence, the U.S. conquest of California, and the collusion between business and government to suppress labor rights and deport labor militants. To McWilliams, California was "that state of the union which has advanced furthest toward an integrated fascist set-up," something echoed by other leftist intellectuals at the time, including Mike Gold in his reference to "lynch towns" in the Central Valley, and "Nazi Germany" east of Los Angeles.<sup>515</sup> Similarly, Biberman, Wilson, and Jarrico intuitively connected the relationships among race, U.S. objectives abroad, and labor conditions at home, inviting speakers and writers to discuss subjects such as the British empire and the rise of fascism, or slavery and U.S. empire. Indeed, in its file on Biberman and HANL, the FBI was troubled not only by the fact that the League exposed connections between the U.S. business establishment and the rise of Nazi Germany, but also by the League's critique of the "imperialism" of the "Allied War Effort," England's continual colonization of Africa and Asia, and racist practices

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*and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>515</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: the Story of Migratory Labor in California* (1935; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 224; Carey McWilliams. "News of the World," *Hollywood Now*, April 11, 1937 (issue 1.12), 11; Michael Gold, "Migratory Intellectuals," *New Masses*, December 15, 1936, 27.

within the United States.<sup>516</sup> HANL, like many other organizations at the time, made the connection among racism, fascism, and imperialism in both word and deed—often including the United States and U.S. policy within that critique.

As Borstelmann, Dudziak, and von Eschen argue, such commitments collapsed or were held increasingly suspect as the Cold War wore on. Paul Robeson, Alphaeus Hunton, W. E. B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, C. L. R. James, and even Josephine Baker found themselves without passports, hunted by the FBI, called before the House Un-American Activities Committee and forced to testify—their careers destroyed and their message discredited. Figures who were central to the anti-imperialist sensibility in the California Left such as Bulosan and Biberman found themselves blacklisted, implicitly or explicitly. By and large, the civil rights establishment did its best to distance itself from such figures, looking to Truman’s “multiethnic anticommunism” to replace the *New Masses*’ multiethnic socialism as the paradigm for leftist intellectuals in the Cold War. The civil rights establishment abandoned such internationalist critiques, opting to support U.S. foreign policy in exchange for legal victory at home.<sup>517</sup> This is not to say that some civil rights advocates didn’t continue to make such comparisons, but by and large the felt loyalty

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<sup>516</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, Freedom of Information/Privacy Acts Section, “Hollywood Anti-Nazi League,” parts 1 and 2, File 100-6633 (1), February 1, 1941, 10, 64, online at [http://foia.fbi.gov/hollywood\\_anti\\_naz\\_league/hollywood\\_anti\\_nazi\\_part01.pdf](http://foia.fbi.gov/hollywood_anti_naz_league/hollywood_anti_nazi_part01.pdf), and [http://foia.fbi.gov/hollywood\\_anti\\_naz\\_league/hollywood\\_anti\\_nazi\\_part02.pdf](http://foia.fbi.gov/hollywood_anti_naz_league/hollywood_anti_nazi_part02.pdf) (June 14, 2006).

<sup>517</sup> Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 67.

of mainstream figures such as Thurgood Marshall and Walter White to the Democratic Party and to anticommunism would guarantee progressive action on the homefront.

In this context, Biberman and Wilson's interest in the strike is not just a portrait of civil rights struggle. Rather, it is an attempt to bring together the internationalist scope of popular front-era antiracism with a concern for militant unionism. What is compelling about Biberman's "mistake" about the cultural identity of Mexican Americans is the impulse to connect the populist concern with "true union" struggle and the internationalist, anti-imperialist efforts of organizations such as the CAA. While many critics argue that *Salt of the Earth* was ahead of its time, in another sense, it was ten years too late. The organizations and institutions that fostered such internationalist and laborist thinking—often in separate spheres—were bankrupt and discredited by the early fifties, largely owing to a concerted effort by the government to destroy them. What the original script of *Salt* attempts is no less than a rare bringing together of these two separate spheres. The film incorporates the fictional figures of Frank Barnes and Ramón Quintero into a single work, the white labor organizer and the Mexican American who claims the United States stole his land. That is, *Salt* fuses the antiracist, anti-imperialist sensibility that is so much a part of the work of C. L. R. James, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Carlos Bulosan with the central popular front icon and narrative form—the strike tale. In this sense *Salt* is not simply an expansion of a 1930s political aesthetic; it is the fulfillment of it.

### **Viva Zapata? Remaking a Cold War Popular Front**

To further contextualize Biberman's interest in Local 890's strike, it might be useful to consider a film that was released the same year by three equally well known popular front-era figures, Elia Kazan, Darryl Zanuck, and John Steinbeck—the Oscar winning *Viva Zapata!*<sup>518</sup> In many ways, *Zapata* is a classic popular front film: it tells the story of a revolutionary people's hero; it focuses on the plight of landless peasants and small farmers as they fight wealthy landlords growing cash crops for export; it represents the organic knowledge of “the people” as morally and intellectually superior to the weakness and corruption of the ruling classes and their representatives. The film can be read as a kind of sequel to what many regard as the definitive depression novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, in which uprooted tenant farmers are pitted against California's landed elite and their gangs of vigilantes. Likewise, the film suggests an aesthetic of the popular, celebrating the romance between the merchant's daughter Josefina and the peasant Zapata, fusing both the cult-of-feeling romance with the masculine contours of a proletarian hero. The film focuses on Zapata's physicality, immediacy, and compassion as they compare both to Josefina's cold and calculating father and the frail intellectualism of President Francisco Madero.

Yet, the film has one major difference from U.S. popular front narratives—*Zapata* takes place in Mexico. Rather than depict the United States as the supporter of the landed elite in the figures of Porfirio Díaz and General Victoriano Huerta, the United States is depicted as a benevolent world power and leader in world

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<sup>518</sup> *Viva Zapata!* a film directed by Elia Kazan, written by John Steinbeck, and produced by Darryl Zanuk (20th Century Fox Productions, 1952, 113 minutes).

democracy.<sup>519</sup> Responding to Zapata's skepticism that the Mexican hero Madero lives in Texas, Rudolfo counters with a speech about the benevolence of the United States. In the United States, Rudolfo tells a rapt Zapata, "they protect political refugees," an observation that prompts Rudolfo into a further lesson on civics: "up there, they're a democracy; up there they govern with the consent of the people." Never mind that the United States arrested Mexican opponents of Díaz who sought refuge in the United States, or that U.S. ambassador Henry Lane Wilson conspired with deposed elements of the Díaz regime to assassinate Madero; the film's point is clear: in the United States, freedom is achieved. All that is left is to export this freedom to the rest of the world, by aiding "democracy activists" abroad. Thus Steinbeck and Kazan succeed in transforming a classic popular front imaginary into one that aids the internationalist dimensions of the Cold War, suggesting ways in which the struggle for social and material equality can be relived not as a strike in the nearby factory or office, but as a struggle against communism abroad.

True to form, Zapata's fatal flaw is not that he ignored the long reach of *El Norte*, but, in a thinly veiled attack on the Bolshevik revolution, that he attempted to redistribute land and thereby produced a new tyranny. Yet for all its anticommunism, *Zapata* locates what is essentially a national-popular 1930s icon, the "people's hero," outside of the United States. Played in brownface, Marlon Brando's Zapata deploys a popular front aesthetic and sensibility in the cause and interest of U.S. world power. Thus *Viva Zapata* suggests a kind of sublimated desire for the now-forbidden arena of

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<sup>519</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Century of the Wind* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 25, 32–33. Likewise, Galeano writes that Madero was executed as a direct response to his attempt to impose a slight tax on U.S. oil corporations.



the political, available only in the imagined body of the Mexican, a sort of revolutionary minstrel costume. While the film could be merely interpreted as a rote fulfillment of U.S. foreign policy needs—as “benevolent supremacy” requires U.S. audiences to learn about foreign countries, sympathize with the plight of their inhabitants, and find ways to connect their struggles at home with those abroad—it also makes a second and equally important point that resonates with American audiences: within the United States, the struggle is over. Whether one listens to Rudolfo’s speech to Zapata about the democracy achieved in America or one considers that it is Steinbeck’s last work about displaced agricultural workers, the film functions to divert repressed political energy to concerns in the third world. While such revolutionary images may be forbidden both on the silver screen and in literature, audiences could be allowed a kind of vicarious thrill seeing Tom Joad move through the body of Zapata. While neither Mexicans nor Mexican Americans would be allowed to play such a heroic lead role in Jim Crow Hollywood at the time, the brownface Brando allows the viewer the joy of self-projection as well as the safety of otherness. The film thus acts as both a perverse elegy for the popular front imaginary and as a projection of sublimated revolutionary desire.

In this sense, the film exposes a larger truth about Cold War politics—that the kind of open struggle imagined and led in the 1930s was no longer possible within the United States. Whether it was the climate of repression instigated by HUAC, the purging of communists and other radicals from the AFL-CIO, the Taft-Hartley act, or more generally, union acceptance of the “labor peace” in exchange for productivity gains, films like Steinbeck/Kazan’s *Viva Zapata!* and (the equally Popular Front

styled) *On the Waterfront* could act as a kind of return of the repressed, so long as they generally endorsed the United States' stated goals during the Cold War.

One could say Biberman and Steinbeck agreed on a single point: films could not represent struggle within the United States. For Steinbeck, radical struggle within the United States would be subversive; for Biberman it would not be subversive enough. As Christina Klein writes in *Cold War Orientalism*, popular front ideals of unity, mass culture, internationalism, and liberal inclusiveness were reincorporated into sentimental narratives of Americans abroad, person-to-person exchanges, and an interest in the history and cultures of other nations—all in the name of securing “democracy” as against “communism.” In this sense, we can read the original *Salt* as a kind of progressive palimpsest, a ghost still in the machine of films such as *Zapata*. Instead of finding a site outside of the U.S mainstream from which to project a benevolent American supremacy as Steinbeck and Zanuck do, Wilson's original script of *Salt* attempts to locate a site on the margins from which to analyze the contradictions of the United States and internationalist Cold War state apparatus. In this sense, the color line and even national boundaries become articulations of the changing political landscape of struggle Biberman and Wilson are trying to rearticulate while remaining within a popular front conceptual framework. We can think of Biberman's interest in the New Mexico strike as more than just a popular front concern with antiracism or a laborist's interest in a militant strike. Rather, Wilson's fictional site in New Mexico is one from which the entire scope of political and cultural changes of the Cold War can be rethought and analyzed—complicating clear notions of national borders, outside a dominant civil rights left and trade union

consensus, exploding the third-world-first-world divide -- as earlier popular front anti-imperialist texts had attempted to do. As *Salt*'s mine-worker families are at once internally colonized—working at a mine that was once the property of the Mexican and Native American families and denied equal treatment within the United States—they are victims of the Cold War logic they simultaneously challenge. Unlike mainstream civil rights discourse that attempts to “fill out the contours of U.S. democracy” within the confines of U.S. anticommunism and imperialism,<sup>520</sup> the original script for *Salt* situates the strike outside of discourses of U.S. labor prosperity and peace, criticizes manifest destiny and the Korean War, and demands equal rights for a Mexican and Native American communist union. In this way the script suggests a radical premise: multi-ethnic democracy is not possible while the U.S. remains an empire.

### **The Prison of Empire: Orson Welles' *The Lady from Shanghai***

*Salt of the Earth* and *Viva Zapata!* were not the only post-war films to feature iconic Popular Front figures struggling against – or colluding with – new structures of U.S. empire. Orson Welles' 1947 adaptation of the pot-boiler *If I Die Before I Wake* into *The Lady from Shanghai* transformed an "utterly conventional" murder mystery into a surreal Cold War allegory.<sup>521</sup> Originally titled *Black Irish*, the film centers on the fate of an Irish merchant mariner who is seduced aboard a luxury yacht by the

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<sup>520</sup> Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11.

<sup>521</sup> Clinton Heylin, *Despite the System: Orson Welles Versus the Hollywood Studios* (Edinburgh, Canongate Books Ltd, 2005), 200

kept wife of a wealthy criminal lawyer.<sup>522</sup> Much has been made about the film's albelist and masculine contours, opposing the macho, working class O'Hara to the disabled, possibly homoerotic figures of Arthur Bannister and George Grisby.<sup>523</sup> Of equal critical concern has been the cruise through the Caribbean, in which the "racial otherness" of the Caribbean is used to suggest in a Conradian way, the presence of evil and corruption, posing the "blackness" of film noir as a critical unconscious regarding the dangers of racial mixing and the loss of white prestige.<sup>524</sup> Yet these provocative reading nonetheless limit the significance not only of O'Hara's roots in 1930s anti-fascist struggles, but of the way the film takes a critical eye of its own conventions. In part, these readings are possible if one doesn't consider the ways the film was locked in a debate over its own meaning, radically shifting registers from Hollywood convention to critical irony. And likewise, it doesn't take into the account the many layers of signification in O'Hara's "blackness," both as the "Black Irish" and the veteran of the first fully integrated U.S. army, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

As a left-wing anti-fascist, Orson Welles was highly aware of the dangers of a post-war world in which the U.S. appeared poised to lift the imperial mantle from

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<sup>522</sup> *The Lady from Shanghai*, a film directed by Orson Welles, written by Orson Welles (Columbia Pictures, 1948, 87 minutes).

<sup>523</sup> Michael Davidson, "Phantom Limbs: Film Noir's Volatile Bodies," *Concerto for the Left Hand* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); James Naremore, *The Magic World of Orson Welles* (Dallas: Southern University Press, 1989).

<sup>524</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, "The 'Dark continent' of film noir: race, displacement and metaphor in Tourneur's 'Cat People' (1942) and Welles' 'The Lady from Shanghai' (1948)," *Women in Film Noir*, E. Ann Kaplan, ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 183-201.

Europe as Africa and Asia de-colonized. In 1945, Welles attended the Pan American War and Peace Conference, that was to set transnational relations among nations in the Americas after World War II. While he was sympathetic with the stated objective of the meeting to secure Latin American opposition to European fascism, he felt the Latin American leaders were "pseudo-revolutionaries" who could not succeed "without the help of a couple of North American companies you could name."<sup>525</sup> And more worrisome for Welles was the way in which the U.S. seemed set to dominate Latin America after the war. Welles wrote in the *New York Post* shortly after attending:

Internationalism can't be preached in a new government level and practiced on an old states' rights basis. The inconsistencies are just too glaring....Thus an Atlantic Charter is perused by foreigners with one eye on a lynching in Arkansas. A Crimea communique is studied in reference to a Detroit race riot. A declaration at Mexico City stirs memories of a place called Sleepy Lagoon....no moral position taken by us against Col. Perón has any meaning for Spanish-speaking America until we break with Gen. Franco.....Our attitude towards the policy of the Good Neighbor matches the rest of our foreign policy....<sup>526</sup>

Linking racial violence in the United States with U.S. imperial objectives abroad, Welles suggests that U.S. opposition to fascism was opportunistic, focused on its own economic and political needs (opposing Perón) while maintaining ties with Franco. And more importantly, Welles suggests that lineages of imperial power and fascist authoritarianism are present in the U.S. under the code of "states rights" and urban "riots." Soon after his return from the Pan American conference, Welles went to work on an anti-fascist thriller, *The Stranger*, focusing on a fugitive Nazi hiding as a

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<sup>525</sup> Welles quoted in Naremore, 114.

<sup>526</sup> Welles quoted in Naremore 115.

college professor in a small Connecticut town. While the Nazi is captured, implying a post-war world in which fascists can't hide from justice, more unsettling is the suggestion that without international monitors, fascism could have gotten along just fine with the small town manners and economism. Far from being an alien to Harper, Connecticut, the fugitive Nazi is celebrated for repairing the ancient clock tower, thus setting the town back in tune with its colonial past. As Welles wrote for the *Post*, "we've been on the move for quite a time now...from North Africa to Yalta. The next objective is San Francisco [and the U.N. conference] – and we better continue...Otherwise we'll find...we didn't take the ride at all. We were taken for it."<sup>527</sup>

The image of a new fascism "taking [the left] for a ride" even as it's said to have won seems a fair place to begin with *Lady* as Welles' first major film production since *The Stranger*. The figure of "water-front agitator" seduced in an alliance with wealthy conservatives only to be framed and hanged after his usefulness is over seems a loaded allegory for the position of the anti-fascist left after World War II, met at home with conservative revanchism and the Cold War abroad. And yet contrary to most film noir, World War II is barely mentioned, and O'Hara does not claim to be a veteran of that conflict. Rather the memory and war-time trauma all point back to a conflict that severely disrupts the narrative of war-time unity. The Spanish Civil War is not only a troubling memory because of the fact that major sectors of U.S. capital profiting from World War II defense contracts supported Franco (represented by in the film by George Grisby). In addition, the structure and purpose of the Abraham

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<sup>527</sup> Welles quoted in Naremore 113.

Lincoln Brigade suggested an anti-fascist radicalism that undermined U.S. claims for moral superiority after the war. The Abraham Lincoln Brigade was not only the first fully integrated armed force in U.S. history, but many of the nearly hundred African-American soldiers and officers within the unit carried with them a very different understanding of fascism and freedom than U.S. war-time propaganda would allow. As Langston Hughes noted in his memoir *I Wonder as I Wander*, many African-Americans traveled to Spain to fight the kind of racism they experienced in the U.S. South.<sup>528</sup> And as Robin D.G. Kelley writes in *Race Rebels*, African-American volunteers in Spain were motivated by socialist black nationalism that found expression in Communist Party militancy and saw the Lincoln Brigade as a way to avenge the 1936 Italian invasion of Ethiopia.<sup>529</sup> As the title of Kelley's chapter suggests, "it ain't Ethiopia but it will do" became a kind of commonsense for the black left of the 1930s to explain the Spanish Civil War. Thus O'Hara's nickname (and the proposed title of Welles' film) "Black Irish" can be thought of as a stand-in for the missing figure of Africa during World War II, as well as for the broken promise of black prosperity after the War.

As Michael Denning suggests, Welles invites us to view his work as complex allegory, in so far as figures and backdrops are laden with political signification. As Denning reads Welles' 1936 "Voodoo Macbeth" as a fusion of anti-colonial imaginary with an "allegory of an African-American uprising" in the wake of the

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<sup>528</sup> Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1956, 1993), 354.

<sup>529</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, "'This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do,'" African-Americans and the Spanish Civil War," *Freedom Dreams* (New York: The Free Press, 1994, 1996), 124.

1935 Harlem riots, so too can we read the ominous Caribbean setting in *Lady* with similar colonial implications.<sup>530</sup> In one sense, the cruise speaks to the position of labor after World War, increasingly employed and implicated in U.S. defense spending and foreign policy, both through eradication of radicals from CIO unions, as well as through the participation in neo-colonial programs like USAID. The sense of seduction as well as confinement as a fascist and a wealthy Jew are literally in bed together (the homoerotic relationship between Grisby and Arthur Bannister has been extensively commented upon), as well as the constant appearance of befuddlement would not exactly be unrecognizable on the faces of once-radical labor activists in the post-Lewis era. The fact that O'Hara can be read as an innocent "fall guy" needs to be countered with O'Hara's desire to "know what the rich are like" and to ultimately enter into a deal with fascism in order to secure his own right to domestic happiness. If the Harry Bridges trial is, as Denning said, one part of the political unconscious of *Lady*, the sinister bargain labor struck with big-business post HUAC is the other. Michael's murder of a fascist spy in Spain as a sign of his militant "blackness" is mirrored by the spy-glass wielding Grisby's invitation to "murder" him for money. What was once an anti-systemic movement is brought within the logic of personal gain.

Grisby's scopic gaze – surveying the bathing Elsa with his spy-glass and the panoramic heights of Acapulco – suggests a self-consciousness about the act of looking in the film. Hollywood's tourist gaze as represented in films like *Out of the Past* and *South Pacific* is rendered as an act of surveillance and colonial mastery,

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<sup>530</sup> Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 396.



connected to the possession of women and servants, as well as a reference to the act of spying that belongs to images of Nazi spies from the previous war. This gaze is frequently countered by O'Hara's visual association with darkness and depths. Before O'Hara gives his speech likening Grisby and the Bannisters to self-cannibalizing sharks, Grisby and the Bannisters must call for O'Hara and send someone to find him. Grisby and the Bannisters are cut off from the scene of the "picnic," secluded on their own private stretch of beach while the swirling of torches and conga pulse behind them. O'Hara is found mixing with the porters and islanders who have been hired by Bannister for the day. Likewise, O'Hara is only major character in the film who goes, significantly, to the lower deck of the yacht and talks to the black maid. This constant split in the film, literally between the "lower" decks and the "upper" decks, between the "darker" worlds and "brighter" worlds informs the colonial subtext of the film. As Welles inverts the imperial binary of savage/civilized in his performance of *Macbeth*, so *Lady* suggests that the "bright, guilty world" of power is the one that is truly filled with head-hunters and cannibals. O'Hara's trip away from darkness – into the upper decks of the Bannister yacht – is thus also his descent. This "falling upwards" expresses itself repeatedly throughout the film, in the "madhouse" when O'Hara spins down the slide – but towards the center of the screen – as well as the vertiginous cliffs of Acapulco O'Hara appears to fall beneath with Grisby as they are climbing.

The scene in Acapulco in which Grisby first attempts to lure O'Hara into his fake murder is perhaps the most complicated expression of this motif in the film. As film critic James Naremore writes, it was a scene heavily edited by the studio in the final cut, in which Grisby's remarks are "systematically played off against American

tourists in the background, whose conversations about money become obsessive and nightmarish."<sup>531</sup> Rising from the slums of Acapulco, it is almost as though Grisby and O'Hara pass through geological strata of social life on their ascent, from poor shacks lived in by locals, to tourists arrayed in various classes, from the declassé rubbing zinc oxide on his nose and complaining to his wife that "pesos are real money" to the well-heeled worrying about expense accounts on his honeymoon, to the final heights at which Grisby announces his plan with the offer to O'Hara to "make five thousand dollars." This descent into chaos, rendered by fast shot-reverse-shots of Grisby and O'Hara, and wide-angle lens close-ups with deep focus, suggests the ascent away from the "darkness" of the city is also fall into madness and corruption, with the final scene displaying the vertigo of the cliffs and black water beneath O'Hara's head. Thus the typical reading of the film, of O'Hara's "fall into darkness" is constantly reversed in the visual language of film, as O'Hara falls away from darkness, and into the light. The imperial relationship to the world, represented by Grisby's association with tourism and the "easy money" of colonial theft, is covered over by Grisby's manufactured paranoia about "nuclear war." Rather than read the Cold War as deferred nuclear conflict as popular history often does, *Lady* exposes the imperial project underneath it. It's telling that Bannister refers to O'Hara's attempt to quit as a lack of a "sense of adventure," considering that adventure films are one of the ways in which colonial desire is constructed on Hollywood screens. Rather than read *Lady* as imperial noir, I would argue that it is an anti-imperial adventure film, constructed and subverting the formula of the genre.

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<sup>531</sup> Naremore, 274.

Thus the film's cruise through the Caribbean is not so much a journey to the heart of darkness as Kaplan suggests, but a debate between twin registers of looking. The "moral darkness" of Elsa and Grisby is not conflated, but rather contrasted to the "racial darkness" of O'Hara. As the "black Irish" is also a reference to the Moorish presence in Ireland, so it suggests yet another subtext to the Spanish Civil War, in which many on the left felt that the Republic would support a more liberal policy in the colonies than the fascists. As Langston Hughes wrote while a correspondent for the *Baltimore Afro-American*, a "free Spain" would also mean "freedom" for "Moorish brothers" who are as "dark" as the narrator in Hughes' poem.<sup>532</sup> Thus the "blackness" that O'Hara receives "for what he did to those finks in '39" renders him racially dark at the same time he morally pure. O'Hara's conflation of light with guilt, his "bright, guilty world" of exploitation in Acapulco is the most lucid verbal declaration of this principle in the film. The reversal of tropes of light and dark suggests a kind of negative exposure, as the role of the Caribbean in the film is to do roughly what Biberman and Jarrico intended to do with the original script of *Salt of the Earth*, to expose the post-war political and economic order by traveling to the zone of its hardest impact.

This is not to suggest that we should read *Lady* as wholly separate from the imperialist gaze of its character, Grisby. At heart its basic conceit, that the Lady from Shanghai trapped the innocent merchant marine, suggests that the Popular Front aesthetics of anti-imperial solidarity sits somewhat uncomfortably with yellow peril fantasy of Hollywood convention. Welles' attempt to redeem its Asian Orientalism

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<sup>532</sup> Hughes, Langston. "Letter from Spain." *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. Nelson, Cary, ed. (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 2000).

by presenting a brief scene of two Chinese girls code-switching from Cantonese to a hip idiom in the mass spectacle of O'Hara's trial deracializes the "Asian threat" by suggesting that these girls are as "Americanized" as the other spectators. Yet the film merely moves the location of the threat within culture, as O'Hara realizes the "truth" about Elsa once inside the traditional Chinese theater, in which only Chinese is spoken. That the final scene of the film takes place in San Francisco further recalls the Asian Exclusion Acts of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in which the Workingman's Party in San Francisco played a central part. While the film may resist the optimism of post-war empire building that *Viva Zapata!* engages in, it renders at least part of its terror in the last century's language of imperial panic.

In this sense, empire is a prison for the left-wing O'Hara, a "crazy house" in which the radical worker is (en)trapped by both the imperial schemes of the ruling elite and the fear of alien threats lurking in the dark theaters of the city. O'Hara "leaving the madhouse" in the final scene cannot be separated from Welles' own desire to quit the United States, as the Popular Front coalition splintered – or one could say in the Wellesian language - cannibalized itself in the late 1940s. As much as *Salt of the Earth* radically departs from films like *Viva* and *Lady*, together the three become part of a lengthy discourse on the role of the Popular Front and its position within the new expanding "American century." *Viva* and *Lady* suggest a nostalgized gaze into the past, either with "democracy achieved" in the United States, or with a veteran of the Spanish Civil War who now travels as a prisoner aboard a luxury cruise. While *Viva* recalls active resistance and *Lady* a sharp, anti-imperialist critique, collusion or panic seem the only modes available in the new era of U.S.

dominance. Thus the changes to the original script of *Salt* also seem to suggest that staying within the borders of the United States is ultimately safer. While one could argue that the fact that the presence of Mexican-Americans challenging U.S. ownership of their land makes the final cut of *Salt* implicitly transnational, the original script very clearly states the relationship between domestic expansionism and the further expansion beyond U.S. shores.

### **The Original Script**

For all *Salt of the Earth's* embattled history at the hands of local and state anticommunist repression, the most striking omission from the draft to the final cut of the film is just this pervasive texture of anticommunism. Remaining as a single wisecrack by Ramón in the final version of the film, the repeated presence of anticommunist remarks and references in the original draft creates an ominous cultural atmosphere mine workers and union officials must negotiate. The presence of anticommunism infects the language of the business elites and allied law enforcement and is present as a continual concern of union leaders as they consider strategies of resistance and solidarity. Consider Charley Vidal's speech on the night of the initial strike vote, cut in its entirety:

Mine owners will stop at nothing to keep us from getting equality. They'll distort the issues. They'll print lies about our union in their kept press. They'll red-bait your leaders. They'll charge that this strike was cooked up in the Kremlin. They'll remind the public that zinc is needed for the war. They say that any miner who walks off the job now is a traitor to his country.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>533</sup> Michael Wilson, *Salt of the Earth: Pre-Production Draft* (Michael Wilson Papers, UCLA Film Archive, 1942–1977), Box 36, Folder 6, 48

It is a remarkable speech. It suggests that anticommunism is not a question of subversion, espionage, or external threats, but rather explicitly links anticommunist ideology with control of labor, revealing how questions of foreign policy are the means by which union militancy within the United States can be contained. As a critique, it gets to the heart of the way labor unions were conscripted willingly and unwillingly to cooperate with the corporate elite's assault on radicals by claiming to back seemingly labor-neutral foreign-policy goals. Vidal's speech suggests it is just those "foreign policy goals" that are used as justification for persecuting workers who strike for fair wages and working conditions. Rather than accept the AFL-CIO's conceit, the speech underscores their inseparability.

Given that the history of Mine-Mill Local 890 is intimately tied both to the anticommunism of the postwar years and to the longer history of anticommunist raids against Mexican citizens of the United States, beginning in the years after World War, it's nothing short of stunning that the entire context of anticommunism is removed from the script. Likewise omitted from Vidal's speech, the press does print such libel, in newspaper headlines quoted by Esperanza: "Red Terror in Zinc Town, Says Mine Spokesman. Civic Leaders Demand Union Probe. Commies Sabotage Zinc Production."<sup>534</sup>

Anticommunist rhetoric is so pervasive in the original script and treatment that even a casual conversation between company executives reveals that they consider strike leader Ramón "a Bolshevik," and frequently refer to union leaders as

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid., 95

“reds.”<sup>535</sup> Likewise, given the decimation of the Left-led unions after the Taft-Hartley Act, it is impossible to understand the ultimate demise of Mine-Mill in the late 1960s without understanding the anticommunist attacks against the union.<sup>536</sup>

More important, however, are the connections among anticommunism, gender, and imperialism. Sheriff Dade, for example, refers to “red leaders” and “Bolsheviks” who mislead “good Mexican girls” to “desert their homes.”<sup>537</sup> Sheriff Dade’s quote is central, as it expands the question of gender beyond the personal drama of Ramón’s unwillingness to accept his wife’s new role as strike leader, to suggest the way in which gender roles are articulated as part of an international political project. Not only is there the question of how the mine workers will react to their wives and daughters taking over the picket line—and men taking over domestic tasks—but the entire question of the Cold War as a specifically domestic project is raised. When Sheriff Dade refers to “red leaders” who are leading “good Mexican girls” to “desert their homes,” he draws on a strong web of images that connects

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<sup>535</sup> Ibid., 65; Michael Wilson, *Salt of the Earth*: Film Treatment (annotated by Wilson) (Michael Wilson Papers, UCLA Film Archive Papers, 1942–1977), Box 36, Folder 2, 57.

<sup>536</sup> The Taft-Hartley Act, passed in 1947, is widely interpreted as at least a partial repeal of the Wagner Act of 1935. The Taft-Hartley Act declared the closed shop illegal and inaugurated the bureaucratic and often dangerous NLRB procedure for union elections. It also banned “sympathy strikes” and secondary boycotts, severely limiting the ability of labor to express cross-union solidarity. The act also introduced loyalty oaths for union leaders that required they affirm they were not members of the Communist Party. And as the central event in *Salt of the Earth*, the act gave the federal government the power to obtain a court injunction banning any strike s/he believes “imperils the national health or safety.” In nearly every aspect, the Taft-Hartley Act continues to govern labor relations, weaken the power of unions, and force a centralized labor bureaucracy into the role of policing its own membership.

<sup>537</sup> Wilson, Pre-Production Draft, 57.

communism with threats to domestic security. As Elaine Tyler May points out in *Homeward Bound*, gender becomes one of the key sites of discursive struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. U.S. journalists, for instance, repeatedly suggest that Soviet women have “desexualized themselves” by leaving the home to work in industry, while gender transgression itself becomes a sign of communist influence.<sup>538</sup> Likewise, as Nicholas Berg points out, Mexican and Mexican American women have always been read as outside heteronormative relationships, their sexuality and presumed fertility both a domestic as well as a eugenic threat.<sup>539</sup> In this way the script suggests that gender equality, class equality, and racial equality are intrinsically related and that such categories are mobilized to suppress other forms of resistance as well.

In the original script, not only do women and men find that their struggles for equality are inseparable, but Ramón is obsessed with the idea that Esperanza’s new role with the union poses a sexual threat to him, that Esperanza is “sneaking off somewhere” with the union president, Charley Vidal.<sup>540</sup> This intimate connection, in which Ramón understands his wife’s political activism as a transgression against marriage, suggests the ways in which the Cold War domestic policy affected the lives of even union militants. It also suggests that gender discourse can stifle political movements for social change. And one can hear in Ramón’s charge of infidelity

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<sup>538</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 19.

<sup>539</sup> Charles Ramírez Berg, *Latino Images in Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 70–82.

<sup>540</sup> Wilson, Pre-Production Draft, 141.



against Esperanza a distant parallel to the reasoning of mine superintendent Alexander that Sheriff Dade should use force to remove women from the picket line. As Sheriff Dade refuses to do so, Alexander hotly accuses Dade of being soft on Communism: “But don’t you see what they’re doing? It’s an old Commie trick. Don’t you read the papers? How the reds in Korea put women up in front of their troops so our boys won’t fire? They’re doing the same thing here.”<sup>541</sup> Of course, this is a statement Ramón would never make. But nonetheless, gender transgression and political subversion nonetheless share a common discursive thread for both figures, regardless of their political, racial, and class position. For a corporate executive like Alexander, asserting communist subversion is a way of containing the new threat posed by the union. For Ramón, asserting sexual transgression is a way of containing the threat against his traditional role as patriarch within the home.

Yet Alexander’s comment—also omitted in the final version—goes a step further. It makes a direct connection between newspaper reports from the Korean War and a strike in rural New Mexico. The executive’s remark hence links gender transgression to communism and the Mine-Mill Local 890 to the international Cold War. This gets at the heart of the pre-production draft—that the actions of these miners in New Mexico exist within a national, even international framework that shapes how their lives are understood by the public—and even by themselves. That Mexican American strikers are no different from “reds in Korea,” and indeed, the fact that a corporate executive collapses a picket line and battle line makes the connection between U.S. labor and Cold War imperialism clear. In the same way that radical

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid., 52.

black activists in the 1930s understood Jim Crow practices in the United States as discursive and material corollaries to European colonialism in Africa, the original script understands that wars fought against people of color abroad are mapped onto bodies of color in Silver City.

The original script also highlights the connections among racism, anticommunism, and the ideology of domesticity and class within the institutions that construct life in “Zinc Town.” The script draws compelling structural parallels among Esperanza’s confessions at church, her son Luis’s experiences at school, and Ramón’s experience with the mine and even with his union. In an opening scene of the original script depicting Esperanza’s confession, she explains how she slapped Luis after he failed his English test and then quickly goes on to relate the way school officials punish him for speaking English at school, how the “Anglo kids” tease him, and how he is “always fighting.”<sup>542</sup> The scene conveys the school’s efforts to forcibly assimilate the Mexican American children, but also suggests ways in which the local elite view complaints of any kind: the priest criticizes Esperanza for instilling in Luis a “rebellious spirit.” At the same time, the priest enforces distinct gender roles in the home. For example, when Esperanza compares Luis’s behavior at school to that of her husband “so full of pride, so quick to take offense, brooding, walling himself off from me,” the priest rhetorically asks if Esperanza is confessing her sins or “discussing your husband’s.”

Her confession likewise forms a structural parallel with the opening shot of Ramón, sitting in the mine locker room, smoking a cigarette. He’s been disciplined by

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<sup>542</sup> Ibid., 7–8.

the mine for speaking out against dangerous blasting practices, even chided by union officials for mounting a “one-man work stoppage,” as concerned with keeping Ramón in line as they are with ensuring that challenges to the mine’s unsafe practices are made through the negotiating committee.<sup>543</sup> There is a special poignancy to Ramón’s charge that he is forced to “work alone”—or blast without his usual assistant—since it is in isolation that both Esperanza and Ramón must face their challenges to the social order. This parallel is explicitly drawn in the treatment, comparing the darkness of the mine with the “dark” of the “confession booth,” suggesting ways in which their lives are both materially and ideologically circumscribed. Yet there is another parallel Esperanza’s confession serves: the confession is structured much like the questioning of HUAC testimony. Not only does the priest warn Esperanza to stay away from “radical ideas,” but it is implicitly understood that if she abandons her radical and thus “sinful” attitude, that if she “names names” and discusses the union’s strike plans, she will receive absolution. While Esperanza can break with the oppressive structure of confession to join the ladies’ auxiliary, Ramón’s stubborn individuality plays a far more complex role in determining his response to change. For although Ramón’s individuality makes him an organic leader, willing to take on the mine and cautious union officials, it is the same masculine individuality that won’t allow him to accept his wife’s new role. It is telling that in Ramón’s return to the union after deserting it with other male chauvinists, the union officials make as much of his individualism as they do his sexism, comparing him to the rugged frontier

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 3–4.

individualist Daniel Boone.<sup>544</sup> And given the context of imperialism and racism that is the important texture of the original draft, naming Ramón after a white frontier hero when he abandons his union is hardly incidental.

Yet one of the more striking omissions from the original script is the woman Wilson names simply “the widow.” Biberman and Wilson claim that they cut Ramón’s extramarital affair for the reasons mentioned above—to suggest that Ramón is having an affair would be to promote negative stereotypes of Mexican Americans. Yet they don’t mention that she is effectively a war widow because her husband is listed as “missing in action” in Korea.

Missing in action, she muses, missing in action. The torn flesh of his body scattered over a paddy field somewhere in Korea . . . swallowed up by a war he hated, losing a life he never got to live, leaving an empty marriage from which love was always missing.<sup>545</sup>

This short monologue not only exposes the empty domesticity of the Cold War project, but suggests that men and women of color are proxies in an imperialist war they also suffer as victims. Unlike *Zapata*’s depiction of the United States as liberator of Spanish-speaking peoples abroad, the original script presents U.S. foreign policy as a murderer of Spanish-speaking people at home. This scene, like Alexander connecting the picketing women with myths about Korean battle tactics and Charley Vidal’s speech in which the war effort is used to crush union demands, internationalizes the struggle and questions the goals of U.S. foreign policy. The fact that this unseen victim “hated” the Korean War—not “reluctantly fought” or simply “misunderstood” it—also forces the viewer to question why this “battle for freedom”

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<sup>544</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 61.

might engender such an attitude. The posing of the Korean War as a major plot point in the story also implicitly critiques liberal advocates who insisted that one must accept U.S. foreign policy goals in exchange for civil rights. As the fate of the mine worker suggests, foreign policy and civil rights are inseparable: the conscription of minorities for the most dangerous aspects of military service is very much part of the logic of a racialized state.

It's telling that the widow also considers herself "missing in action," trying unsuccessfully to "find herself with Ramón." It suggests that the Cold War battlefield on which one can go "missing" is broader than military action on the Korean Peninsula—that gender identity has been "conscripted" into the project, like the male members of the community. And like the military itself, Ramón demands her "submission." As she tells Ramón that she will join the picket line, she not only challenges the Cold War domestic order, but the demands the Cold War places on labor. She says she will not be "missing" any longer. In this sense, the questions the script raises about anticommunism, the international Cold War, race, and domesticity are answered by the widow's decision to no longer "go missing." The military metaphor of "going missing in action"—an unhappy marriage and a lost husband—is ultimately realized when she joins the new battle line/picket line of women. She is not only winning a strike, but striking a blow against an entire militarized, patriarchal order based on racialized codes of power.

Indeed, from the very beginning of *Salt*, Wilson frames the strike as a question of U.S. imperialism. Esperanza narrates the opening as she passes by an "ancient graveyard," remarking that her history, the history of "her people," is

“recorded only on these worn stones.”<sup>546</sup> In the original script, the graveyard functions as a recurring symbol of the miners’ history and sense of pride as a distinct people, making the point repeatedly that the only land that the company doesn’t own is the graveyard by the church. While this is clearly problematic from the point of view of civil rights advocacy and Mexican American self-identity, suggesting by way of metaphor that Mexican Americans are a “dead people” who have no living cultural traditions, the graveyard also functions as an alternate history, a way to connect the racial discrimination faced by the Mexican American workers to the history of U.S. conquest of Mexico. In this sense, the treatment of the miners in Local 890 is presented as merely the latest manifestation of a long tradition of conquest and institutionalized persecution. The graveyard, a recurring symbol throughout the work, punctures not only the view of American exceptionalism projected abroad, but also the frequent insistence that the United States, unlike Europe, is not an imperial power. The image of a cultural remnant preserved in the face of conquest is one that would likely resonate strongly with members of anticolonial movements and, indeed, suggests a tough dialectical stance that colonialism enforces “tradition” while at the same time such “traditions” remain a source of resistance.

The original script poses a totalized world in which institutions such as the mining company, the government, the press, the church, the law, and the family are unified by anticommunist ideology for the purpose of domestic control, most specifically the labor power of industrial workers. And it is against this backdrop that the Quinteros and their entire company town are placed figuratively outside of the

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<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 6.

national frame, literally people who are connected to a dead past with greater strength than to a current Americanized culture. It is one of the more profound ironies of the Cold War that the “American” identity of Mexican Americans that Biberman comes to understand also comes at the implicit price of locating the mine workers within the national frame. It emphasizes the paradox of the Cold War era, that to enter the “mainstream” and become “American” one also risks entering an exceptionalist discourse, no matter how radical one’s politics. Since all that is communist is indeed “un-American,” to remove the film’s critique of anticommunism is also to limit its critique of U.S. imperialism, the Korean War, and the parallel institutional structures that maintain them.

### **Negotiating History, Negotiating Histories: Two Views of the Cold War**

Of course, one could argue that the final edition of *Salt* says implicitly what the original draft says explicitly—that at the height of the Cold War, a picket line of miners’ wives from a blacklisted Mexican American and Native American union challenges the consensus so dramatically as to not need editorial comment. And what is more, from the opening shot, we hear a sustained and compact meditation on the meaning of colonial memory, tracing the many layers of history through the dispossession of the Quintero’s land to their lives in a company town. And of course, any strenuous debate on the content ended up mattering very little to its critics and enemies—it, like the crew, was blacklisted within the United States, the film limited to two theaters on short runs, and Biberman’s “Independent Productions Corporation” spent the remainder of its capital on lawsuits. Yet I would argue that the persistence

of the original script in drawing the readers' attention to the international dimensions of the conflict operates almost with a kind of Brechtian effect—one cannot naturalize the experience of the film, nor can one place the events of Silver City outside of an international narrative of imperialism. The progression of events is constantly interrupted by multiple and competing discourses that literally do violence to the narrative of community struggle. One cannot read the original script without understanding the way in which daily life, or Gramscian “common sense,” is a product of U.S. imperialism, the Korean War, and the Cold War social order. While the final published script and film remain transnational in their critique of U.S. expansion into the Mexican north and its celebration of Mexican American culture—one cannot help but notice that the film is also brought more closely within the bounds of the nation. With the conclusion spoken by Esperanza that “we had won the strike,” it becomes possible to read *Salt* as a film emphasizing a civil rights concept of expanding U.S. democracy.<sup>547</sup>

Despite these changes made to the film, one needs to be careful to avoid a neat binary between radical artists and more cautious union leaders, bold challenges against the Cold War order and calculated submission. It's clear that the workers of Mine-Mill 890 chose a militant, communist-led union over the United Mineworkers and the Steelworkers, both of which engaged in red-baiting campaigns against the union, first in the 1930s and later in the 1950s. As labor historian Robert Zieger writes, Mine-Mill was known nationally along with a handful of other unions, such as the International Ladies Garment Workers and the Fur and Leather Workers' Union,

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<sup>547</sup> Michael Wilson, *Salt of the Earth* (New York: Feminist Press, 1978), 90.



as among the more radical and democratic unions to emerge from the social upheavals of the 1930s.<sup>548</sup> In the Southwest, Mine-Mill was more than just a more militant alternative to other, more bureaucratic CIO unions. In part because of a long tradition of mine worker radicalism going back decades, and in part because of a growing political and ethnic solidarity among Mexican Americans, members of Mine-Mill tended to look at the union as a whole social movement, embodying not only a desire to desegregate the mines, but a larger fight for racial, gender, and class equality within the entire community.<sup>549</sup> According to another union activist, for Mine-Mill 890 president Juan Chacón the union was as much a source of securing higher wages as it was a source of ethnic identity, and a means for combating the colonial character of capital in the Southwest. Chacón's "attitude toward management," the union official recounts, "was 'I'm Chicano and you're a gringo and you're fucking the Mexican.'"<sup>550</sup> This quote dramatically suggests that the union was a central expression of racial pride and ethnic nationalism, articulated through the modality of a class-based organization. As one labor historian noted in a report prepared for the U.S. Bureau of Labor, labor activism among Mexican Americans of the Southwest often "took the form of organized racial conflict."<sup>551</sup> That Chacón was also cast as the lead in *Salt* as Ramón is not an accident: the film committee was clear

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<sup>548</sup> Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935–1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 254–75

<sup>549</sup> Lorence, *The Suppression of Salt of the Earth*, 22–30.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

<sup>551</sup> Stuart Jamieson as quoted by David G. Gutiérrez, *Halls and Mirrors: Mexican-Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 100.

about wanting actors to also be individuals who expressed the collective desires of the community.

And like other central organizations of the popular front, Mine-Mill was deeply invested in a politics of international solidarity, condemning the Truman Doctrine, opposing the Marshall Plan, officially endorsing the Wallace “peace” campaign, as what some refer to as the last gasp of the popular front against the Cold War.<sup>552</sup> And like other central organizations of the Popular Front, the union suffered tremendously for its internationalism. Not only was Mine-Mill thrown out of the CIO and raided by the Steelworkers on the orders of the national CIO leadership, but also Local 890’s international representative Clint Jencks (who played Frank Barnes in *Salt*) was imprisoned for refusing to sign a noncommunist affidavit. While these actions did not end Mine-Mill’s stance on racial equality, it would be an understatement to suggest that it may have dampened its enthusiasm for openly embracing an anticommunist platform at the height of the red scare. As legal council for Mine-Mill Nathan Witt argued, “ideology took a backseat to racial equality with Mexican American unionists,” who were “more concerned with fighting discrimination than in whether or not organizers were members of the Communist Party.”<sup>553</sup> While this kind of political and cultural pragmatism may have made communist organizers feel they could work without fear of hostility in Mine-Mill, it also meant that at the height of the Cold War, presenting an antiracist message in *Salt* may have been more important than critiquing international anticommunism. As

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<sup>552</sup> Lorence, *The Suppression of Salt of the Earth*, 24-5

<sup>553</sup> Ibid., 23.

California Communist Party leader and Los Angeles area Mine-Mill organizer Dorothy Healey remembers, she was allowed to work in the union as long as her affiliation with the Communist Party remained at the level of an open secret. When she decided to attend a high-profile conference, Mine-Mill “felt that having one of their organizers seen at a national convention of the Communist Party was not going to do them any good, and so they gave [her] an ultimatum: don’t go, or don’t come back.”<sup>554</sup>

For all of the Mine-Mill rank-and-file militancy, it must also be remembered that for many both in the Anglo community and in the small middle-class Mexican American community, Mexican American unionism was tainted with the brush of subversion to begin with, and the question of Mexican American identity at the time was sharply cut by contradictory discourses both embracing and rejecting national belonging and citizenship. A film that emphasizes the explicit rejection of U.S. wartime patriotism and suggests the possible communist affiliation of the mine workers may run closer to the truth, but it nonetheless unfortunately risks reproducing a white-nationalist discourse on the political, social, and cultural “otherness” of Mexican Americans. For the community of Grant County, questions of political, economic, and social persecution were nothing new, and the crisis of the Cold War was a continuation of patterns of exploitation that had existed since the U.S. invasion and occupation of Mexico. In addition, the history of the mine-workers’ struggle in the Southwest is one punctuated with vigilante violence, deportation of union activists whether or not they held legal residency or citizenship, and red-baiting by the white

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<sup>554</sup> Dorothy Ray Healey and Maurice Isserman, *California Red: A Life in the American Communist Party* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 94.

community, influential members of the middle-class Mexican American community, other unions, as well as official state forces.<sup>555</sup> As Curtis Marez points out, to be Mexican American in the Southwest was already to be marked as “other” and potentially communist—opening up the possibility for state-sponsored violence.<sup>556</sup>

Therefore, one need not look further than the union filmmaker committee to understand how the alterations were made. By one estimation, the film had been reviewed by nearly four hundred people in the community by the time it was actually shot.<sup>557</sup> Thus the immediate needs for representation and for political change likely dominated the selection process—as Biberman later wrote, the film was the “expression of a community,” not the vision of a particular group of artists.<sup>558</sup> Rather than understand the changes of the film as indicating that a once-radical union gave in to anticommunism in a quid-pro-quo exchange for civil rights gains, the changes instead suggest that Mine-Mill attempted to manage a delicate balance between its vulnerability as a minority union and its commitment to profound social change. This delicate negotiation of militant commitment to the local and to international politics of anti-imperialism, along with the workers of Mine-Mill’s unique vulnerability as

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<sup>555</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 202–5; Richard A. Garcia, “The Mexican-American Mind: A Product of the 1930s,” *History, Culture, and Society: Chicano Studies in the 1980s*, National Association for Chicano Studies (Ypsilanti: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingue, Eastern Michigan University Press, 1983), 73. Both Acuña and Garcia cite LULAC as being anticommunist and essentially middle class in its outlook.

<sup>556</sup> Curtis Marez, *Drug Wars: The Political Economy of Narcotics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 126.

<sup>557</sup> Lorence, *The Suppression of Salt of the Earth*, 59.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

subjects with only limited access to full citizenship rights, meant that any act of resistance was necessarily circumscribed

The final film version, while perhaps less radical in some ways than the pre-production script, manages this delicate balance between narratives of resistance and narratives of belonging. The exchange between Ramón and Barnes is telling: recalling how Barnes couldn't recognize a portrait of Benito Juarez, Ramón challenges him that if he didn't recognize a portrait of George Washington, "you would say I was an awful dumb Mexican."<sup>559</sup> This dialogue performs a double function: not only does it reaffirm the cultural heritage of the Mexican American Southwest, but it also displays the way Ramón is required to perform his citizenship as cultural knowledge to prevent himself from being labeled "a dumb Mexican," while Barnes has no such reciprocal burden. This scene articulates Ramón as both a national subject and a subject in resistance, without compromising either. In the context of the mass deportations of the 1930s, and the impending deportations of "Operation Wetback," protecting claims to citizenship were not idle concerns.

' As I have suggested,, the changes in the script did not simply make for a "more accurate" or "more progressive" film. Likewise, the question of artistic democracy and cross-race/cross-class collaboration does not automatically produce a result that is more critical of the oppression that produced these terms to begin with. This is not to take away any of the film's power. It remains a moving story of labor militancy, of the transformative power of collective action, of resistance to the ways in which domestic and racial discourse can be mobilized to divide workers from their

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<sup>559</sup> Wilson, *Salt of the Earth*, Rosenfelt edition, 43

struggle for dignity, rights, and control over their own labor. It is also a powerful critique of Cold War hegemony, articulating the ways in which the family, mass culture, consumerism, and liberalism function as weapons to demobilize a once militant labor movement. And certainly, compared to other films made in the 1950s that featured Mexican Americans, the assertion that Mexican American cultural heritage is something to celebrate and that it plays an active role in their strike victory was unheard of at the time. If the changes to the film mean anything, they are a reminder that resistance is always culturally and materially located not only within the realm of the possible, but within the immediate needs of disempowered groups. For members of the Hollywood Ten, exposing the scope of the international Cold War and finding a cultural front from which to critique its multiple sites of exploitation must have seemed like the current crisis in need of address. For members of Mine-Mill Local 890, I can only imagine that the Cold War, pared down to a mention of the Taft-Hartley Act, would be less a crisis than a return of the same. While the Cold War stalled the militant Mexican American union efforts for more than a decade, the repression of the 1950s was hardly new to the Grant County community. For this reason, if for no other, the original script deserves to be restored as a work in its own right, as not only a powerful critique of the Cold War, but as a living template of how two subject positions, both partly within the discursive field of the “old left,” responded to their historical moment. This is not to suggest that the original script should be imposed over or used instead of the final version of the film. Indeed, the original script and the final version of the film should not be understood as opposites. While I argue the original script contains valuable scenes, one can’t

deny that Wilson and Biberman's objective—to make a movie as a collaborative project with the miners of Local 890—transforms the picture's meaning into something else, a medium that is far more powerful than whatever words the original script may contain. That is to say, the meaning of *Salt of the Earth* is the fact that the union made, rewrote, starred in, and defended the film, and had the courage to both trust and challenge Biberman, Jarrico, and Wilson and to stand up to the Cold War consensus at both the local and national level. And yet the different needs and messages of these two groups lay at the heart of the film's paradox.

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