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Preservation and the Production of Bare Life:
Cultural Expressions of US Genocide from 1864-1948

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

in

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

by

Ryan W. Heryford

Committee in charge:

Professor Rosaura Sánchez, Chair
Professor Gloria Elizabeth Chacon
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2013
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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2013
DEDICATION

in respect for those to whom the revolution will belong
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VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Preservation and the Production of Bare Life: Cultural Expressions of US Genocide from 1864-1948

by

Ryan W. Heryford

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

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Professor Rosaura Sánchez, Chair

Entitled "Preservation and the Production of Bare Life," my dissertation considers the role of late 19th and 20th century American literature as it negotiated and challenged contemporary discourses of preservation, which, I argue, were emerging in complicity with the silencing and cultural dismissal of multiethnic populations within the rapidly expanding United States and its imperial peripheries. From George Catlin’s vision of “a nation’s park, containing man and beast,” to William Faulkner’s depiction of Haiti as an ahistorical island “set aside by Heaven itself,” preservation was employed not only for the disinterested acquisition of knowledge, but also as an ideological tool used to encapsulate and redefine certain subjects as static and unchanging, barred from civil lives and political representation. My research goes on to explore the writings of Yankton Sioux essayist, Zitkala-SA, and African American labor organizer, Angelo Herndon, who envisioned and articulated new anti-colonial definitions of preservation, using their memoirs as a means to contest their presumed containment within these enclosed histories. In our own current moment, when conversations regarding preservation (ecological, historical and cultural) continue to dominate the popular
imaginary, my work traces the contested genealogy of this term as it was inspired, influenced, and subsequently transformed by the diverse and multivalent literatures of the late 19th and 20th century United States.
**Introduction:**

*Preservation and the Production of Bare Life*

In his seminal work on *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said begins to chart a spatially oriented dynamic of anti-imperial resistance, evoking the relationship between imagination and geography in interpreting and challenging colonial violence, stating:

> If there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism, it is the primacy of the geographical in it. Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss of locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored….Because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first only through imagination. (77)

As is to be expected, Said’s ‘geographic imagination’ has been explored almost exclusively through the frameworks set forth by postcolonialism, where the violent divisions and structural inequalities established by occupation are most vivid and distinct. But what happens if we attempt to transfer this statement to the US context, where the ongoing occupation and colonization of Native lands and resources, the post-emancipation, neaplantation sites of the rapidly expanding Prison Industrial Complex, and the continually re-figured imperial stakes in a ‘Hemispheric South,’ all come together to form new and complex geographical arrangements? How do the fixed spaces of containment and alienation that have come to dominate the disparate landscapes of the modern United States enact a geographical violence similar to the
one Said locates in his discussion of more traditional forms of imperialism? How might these occupied landscapes, what Édouard Glissant refers to as “fights without witnesses,” testify to new dimensions of neocolonial violence occurring apart from the dominant frameworks locatable in postcolonial studies?

The goal of this dissertation is to trace the emergent genealogies of these ‘environments’ of US neoslavery and neocolonialism, what I have termed, and will later explain, under the broader categorization of spaces of ‘genocide’, as well as to locate the means by which certain authors attempt to ‘write out’ from such spaces and imagine a reclaiming of the real or imagined landscapes. In doing so, I hope to reorganize fields of inquiry in postcolonial studies, critical ethnic studies, eco-critically theory, and 19th and 20th century American literature, as they interrogate each other through their own heretofore unconsidered intersections.

More specifically, this dissertation focuses on a variety of canonical literatures and subaltern texts, considering the role of late 19th and 20th century American literature as it negotiated and challenged contemporary discourses of preservation, which, I argue, were emerging in complicity with the silencing and cultural dismissal of multiethnic populations within the rapidly expanding United States and its imperial peripheries. From George Catlin’s vision of “a nation’s park, containing man and beast,” to William Faulkner’s depiction of Haiti as an ahistorical island “set aside by Heaven itself,” preservation was employed not only for the disinterested acquisition of knowledge, but also as an ideological tool used to encapsulate and redefine certain subjects as static and unchanging, barred from civil lives and political representation.
While genocide in the late 19th and 20th centuries has most commonly been associated with histories of Europe, I will argue that such inquiries cannot be fully considered apart from the massacres at Sand Creek and Wounded Knee, the concentrated killing and subsequent imprisonment of African Americans throughout the US South, and the execution of armed and unarmed resisters by US marines during the 1914-1940 military occupation of Haiti. This American era of genocide was emerging in parallel to conversations regarding the preservation of nonwhite peoples and the spaces they inhabited. A discourse espoused by naturalists, anthropologists, artists, writers, and cultural historians, preservation was seen as both a disinterested means for the acquisition of knowledge as well as a mediating factor in the tensions arising between the proclaimed noninterventionist policies of the US and its ongoing histories of colonization, exploitation, and racially coded acts of mass violence. My work views these cultural and political acts of preservation, not as unbiased alternatives to state authority, but as a means of exercising power, either in resistance to or in accordance with the nation.

My research goes on to explore the memoirs of Yankton Sioux writer, Zitkala-Sa, and of African American labor organizer, Angelo Herndon, who envisioned and articulated new anti-colonial definitions of preservation, using their narrative forms as a means to contest their presumed containment within an enclosed history. In our own current moment, when conversations regarding preservation (ecological, historical and cultural) continue to dominate the popular imaginary, my work traces the contested genealogy of this term as it was inspired, influenced, and subsequently transformed by the diverse and multivalent literatures of the late 19th and 20th century United States.
Intersections in Eco-criticism, Postcolonialism, and American Studies

I intentionally use this term ‘preservation’ in its most flexible and exploratory sense. As a form of discourse which, as this dissertation will illustrate, established its greatest stronghold on ecological and cultural conservation movements in the late 19th and 20th century United States, preservation, as a practice, was materialized through both temporal and spatial arrangements, creating a diversity of cultural forms and geographic landscapes, from the Smithsonian recordings of neoplantation work songs to the earliest conversations surrounding wilderness conservation, which are, as I hope to illustrate, in need of some uniting framework. This dissertation focuses on numerous diverse and distinct US environments where ‘preservation’ highlights itself as a managing discourse – from the National Park to the Reservation, the (Anglo)American Studies Canon to the Occupied Nation and the Prison. I call these spaces ‘environments,’ both to highlight the spatial arrangements central to them all, as well as to situate my analysis within a larger critical conversation aimed at investigating the biopolitical dimensions of environmentalism itself.

As Timothy Luke notes, in one of the earliest critical essays on the biopolitical outlines of environmental discourse, the very etymology of ‘environment’ conjures forth the dynamics of containment and alienation that my project will further explore:

To environ is to encircle, encompass, envelop, or enclose. It is the physical activity of surrounding, circumscribing, or ringing around something. Its uses even suggest stationing guards around, thronging with hostile intent, or standing watch over some person or place. To environ a site or a subject is to beset, beleaguer, or besiege that place or
person. (“On Environmentality: Geo-Power and Eco-Knowledge in the Discourses of Contemporary Environmentalism,” 64)

Using Foucault’s conceptualization of ‘Governmentality’ as “a triangle, sovereignty-discipline-government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security,” Luke expands upon the global implications of, what he refers to as, ‘Environmentality’ wherein the geopolitical resources of the globe are isolated, contained, and managed by a transnational authority (acting in the interests of the West) under the seemingly neutral rhetoric of environmental preservation and wise-use (Governmentality, 102):

An environmental act, in turn, is already a disciplining move, aimed at constructing some expanse of space – a locale, a biome, a planet as biospherical space, or, on the other hand, some city, any region, the global economy in technospherical territory – in a discursive envelope. (“On Environmentality,” 64)

Luke’s definition of environmentality speaks directly toward my own reading of preservationist discourse as a managing tool for the construction of contained and highly regulated spaces and their subsequent habiting (or trapped) communities. And yet, Luke’s argument quickly takes a limiting, prescriptive tone, wherein he almost seems to advocate for environmentality as the only option for continued engagement with our ecologies:

To save the planet, it becomes necessary to environmentalize it, enveloping its system of systems in new disciplinary discourses to regulate population growth, economic development, and resource exploitation on a global scale with continual managerial intervention. (ibid, 77)

Because Luke’s goals are prescriptive and speculative here, he fails to chart subaltern genealogies of ecological interaction that would allow for alternative environmental
futures. Instead, both Luke’s focus on the Euro-centric theories of Foucault as well as his engagement with an environmental historical context that only looks at international laws derived from the West, blind him to the larger histories surrounding ‘environmentality,’ and the voices that have continuously risen up in contestation.

My own project, rather than apply a speculative logic regarding the globalizing futures of preservationist discourse, will attempt to chart a historically and culturally contextualized genealogy of this discourse, considering both how it arose in response to social and environmental crisis, and how it was continuously challenged by alternative cultural players and resistance movements offering new means for social and cultural interaction.

In particular, I am most critical of Luke’s casual acceptance of the ‘environment’ as a given space that can be theorized and advocated for. My own project will more critically interrogate how particular environments - the built environments of the Prison and the Reservation, the interiorized environments of the Memoir and National Cultural Canons, the managed and occupied environments of Imperialism and the National Park – complicate and reconfigure their own presumed ‘nonhumanity’ through the dynamics of their representation in certain US literatures. Luke briefly considers this ontological question in his argument that:

Because the expanse of the organic and inorganic environment is so broad, it often is defined in terms delimiting what it ‘is’ by looking at what it is ‘not….with these maneuvers, environments are often transformed rhetorically into silences, backgrounds, or settings. (ibid, 63)
Luke himself is arguably guilty of naturalizing these silences and their ontological distinctions between ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ subjects and spaces. There is historical and political relevance to this naturalizing process, and much of my own project is aimed at considering the means by which an imperialist agenda rendered certain individuals and communities deemed by the racist hegemonies to be ‘less than human’ as silent and blank, inherently tied to their ‘environments’, all in the name of a broader ontological project of over-determination, what Jane Bennet refers to as the unacknowledged ‘political ecology of things’ wherein an unearthed tradition emerges of “the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feed[ing] human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption.” (Vibrant Matter, ix)

These ontological divides between the human and nonhuman are far too politically and historically charged to be taken for granted, and presumptuously naturalized. Particularly when these ontological divisions were reinterpreted to justify and evidence acts of extreme racist and imperialist violence throughout much of the history of United States. And yet, a dominant strand of academic inquiry has arisen that oftentimes seems to further the social and political histories of nonhuman environments from their inhabitants, that of eco-criticism. This particular brand of eco-criticism, predominant in the United States, has aimed to promote ecological awareness through the distancing of ecologies from their human proponents, leading to theoretical platforms that, as Charles E. Scott notes, “often draw us to an abstracting process rather than to the lives of things in their nondiscursive, dynamic interactions.” (“The Lives of Things,” 73)
In her book, *Ill Nature*, Joy Williams, perhaps best encapsulates the means by which words like ‘environment’ have been abstracted and alienated beyond recognition:

And the word *environment*. Such a bloodless word. A flat-footed word with a shrunken heart. A word increasingly disengaged from its association with the natural world. Urban planners, industrialists, economists, and developers use it. It’s a lost word, really. A cold word, mechanistic, suited strangely to the coldness generally felt toward nature. (*Ill Nature*, 23)

Williams’ critique of the dehumanized, and oftentimes industrialized, use of the term ‘environment’ has led to a new turn in eco-critical theory which seeks to remedy the ontological divides separating people from their environments by re-imagining alternative forms of humanism. Such new turns range from Teresa de Lauretis’ call that “now may be a time for the human sciences to reopen questions of subjectivity, materiality, discursivity, knowledge, to reflect on the post of posthumanity,” (*Technologies of Gender*, 368) to Stacy Alaimo’s critical question of how “conceptions of the human self are profoundly altered by the recognition that ‘the environment’ is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves.” (*Bodily Natures*, 4).

And yet, as Alaimo herself notes, such a quick embrace of eco-critical theories or posthumanist philosophies that seek to neatly do away with the ontological binaries between human/nonhuman, must not overshadow or attempt to erase the historical reality that these binaries were oftentimes placed within human communities to justify or explain racist and imperialist acts of extreme violence:

Nature has long been waged as a philosophical concept, a potent ideological node, and a cultural repository of norms and moralism
against women, people of color, indigenous peoples, queers, and the lower classes. (ibid, 4)

To look toward eco-criticism as a means for reconciling these ontological divides becomes quite suspect when we consider ‘the environment’ as an ideological tool that was historically used to enclose and encapsulate certain communities as inseparable from the spaces which they inhabited. As George B. Handley and Elizabeth DeLoughrey note in their introduction to Postcolonial Ecologies - perhaps the most thorough current interrogation of the intersections between eco-criticism, race and ethnicity studies, and postcolonial critique – the use of different ecologies to promote hierarchical ontologies within human communities expands as far back as the Enlightenment itself, and early gestures toward humanism. From Hegel to Kant, Handley and DeLoughrey note that:

…all articulated some form of climatic determinism, asserting that the peoples of the tropics were unable to attain the moral and cultural heights of northern Europe and to produce history. As such, the determinist discourse of colonial (tropical) place was often used to justify the practice of slavery and the denial of citizenship and subjectivity to non-Europeans. (Postcolonial Ecologies, 12)

In fact, much of the European imperial project was narrated through climatic and ecological distinctions, wherein the environment itself was meant to justify the violence enacted against its human occupants. Larry Lohman notes how certain climatically mapped coordinates, like the equatorial divide, “set up and enforced, in fine Orientalist style, a dichotomy between hungry, expectant, tradition-shackled Southern peoples and a modern, scientific, democratic North under whose progressive leadership they will gradually be freed for better things.” (“Green Orientalism,”” 202)

In Black on Earth, Kimberly N. Ruffin locates these same dichotomies in the
planted-era South and neoplantation United States, claiming that African American eco-literary traditions have always been born out of “a long history…of making nonhuman nature reflect racist exploitation and violence.” (Black on Earth, 4)

Perhaps the most thorough and contextualized account of the racist ontologies of ecological imperialism comes from Sylvia Wynter’s “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being.” In an excerpt, which I reference extensively throughout the dissertation, Wynter makes the argument that Western ontology, in and of itself, is inseparable from the practice of colonization:

...the West’s new master code of rational/irrational nature was now to be mapped onto a projected Chain of Being of organic forms of life, organized about a line drawn between, on the one hand, divinely created-to-be-rational humans, and on the other, no less divinely created-to-be-irrational animals; that is, on what was still adaptively known through the classical discipline of “natural history” as a still supernaturally determined and created “objective set of facts.” This “space of Otherness” line of nonhomogeneity had then functioned to validate the socio-ontological line now drawn between rational, political Man (Prospero, the settler of European descent) and its irrational Human Others (the categories of Caliban [i.e., the subordinated Indians and the enslaved Negroes]), in exactly the same way as, before Copernicus, the “space of Otherness” projection of a nonhomogeneity of substance between the perfection of the celestial realm and the degradation of the terrestrial had reciprocally bolstered and validated the Spirit/Flesh code as enacted in the ontological value difference between clergy and laity within the terms of Judeo-Christianity’s matrixformulation of a “general order of existence. (“Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,” 313)

These ontological lines between the human and the ‘nonhuman’, civil society and its antithesis, over-determined subjectivity and bare life, become the primary vehicles through which we must first understand the tensions existing between communities and their environments in the United States. And, if we are to understand the role that preservationist discourse held in establishing and mediating these divides, we must be
ready to understand the way in which, as DeLoughrey and Handley note, “the
domination of nature translates into the domination of other humans,” *as well as* the
way in which nature and preservationist discourse were ideological reconstituted to
become a form of domination themselves. (*Postcolonial Ecologies*, 16)

In addition to ‘nature’ serving as a primary ideological platform through which
racist violence and colonialist ontologies are generated, communities and individuals
who were previously ‘bound to’ and ‘conflated within’ the landscape, were oftentimes
subsequently alienated from those very same environments, made to feel as if they had
no stakes in the projects of ecological or cultural heritage or recovery. Kimberly N.
Ruffin refers to this practice as *environmental othering*, and Sylvia Washington best
elaborates on its complexities, when she discusses the way in which racist eco-
imperialist practices in the United States furthered “a paradigm of race and
concomitant rights to American enfranchisement that became the operative and core
episteme for determining the types of citizenry that would be entitled to salient ‘green
space’ into the twenty-first century.” (‘Packing Them In,’ 21)

A vivid example of this can be seen in the creation of the first US National
Park, in 1872. Originally intended by its planners to incorporate those whom Henry
David Thoreau referred to as “the hunter race,” so that they would not “be civilized off
the face of the earth,” the 3, 468 square mile tract of land that would actually become
Yellowstone National Park was set overtop of territory still occupied by Crow and
Blackfoot communities, who were later evicted and forced into reservation spaces in
South Dakota. (“Chesuncook,” 313)
This use of ‘nature’ and ecological preservation to both dehumanize and subsequently alienate nonwhite communities in the United States may account for the reasons that critical ethnic studies and eco-criticism have oftentimes developed in isolation from one another, a similar split to the one that DeLoughrey and Handley describe in their study of the divides between postcolonial and eco-critical thought:

Since hierarchical notions of nature were key to justifying colonial expansion and the repression of nonnormative others, postcolonialists have been understandably wary about calls to ‘return to nature,’ or attempts to collapse the concern with the human inequalities that resulted from colonialism into a universalizing focus on the future of the nonhuman environment. This has generated a debate between those who tend to prioritize the environment over all human needs, like many deep ecologists, and those in the social justice movement who insist that human equity must precede green conservation and preservation. *(Postcolonial Ecologies, 21)*

These intersections, existing between the ideological constructs of ‘nature’ and colonial violence, have been too long ignored by many eco-critics, rendering particular arguments coming from this field, at best, historically vacant, and, at worst, a re-enactment of the same forms of ecological imperialism responsible for a much of the neocolonial and neoplantation frameworks that are continually reenacted across the global terrain today.

And yet, we are nonetheless left to wonder, what is lost in postcolonial theory or critical ethnic studies if these fields abandon ecological perspectives altogether? David Kidner warns about how social constructionism can oftentimes replicate many of the same formal constraints and ethics as industrial capitalism, colluding “with commercialism in the long-term industrialist project of replacing the natural by the artifactual, defining a form of human existence which claims independence from
natural processes and rhythms. Social constructionism therefore provides a model of nature which fits seamlessly into the industrialist view of the world” (Environmental Ethics, 352)

By further replicating this constructionist ontological division between human and nonhuman worlds, certain cultural studies theories are also often slower to account for the ways in which new forms of racist and class-based genocide occur through different communities’ exposure to ecological hazards and toxic waste, what Rob Nixon refers to as “slow violence.” Stacy Alaimo further explores how this academic divide can sometimes overshadow the lived realities of ecological violence:

Whereas academic theories of race have worked to undermine its ontological status via theories of social construction, environmental justice movements employ scientific data that track the material agency of environmental hazards, placing a new sort of materiality at the forefront of racial struggles. At the same time, however, biomonitoring techniques, which yield categories of vulnerability other than those of recognized racial groups, reveal how the maelstrom of risk culture mixes peoples, places, substances, and forces, disclosing new distributions of harm. (Bodily Natures, 23)

While it does seem clear that both Kidner and Alaimo approach critical race theory from a perspective grounded in eco-critical theory, not fully accounting for the means by which the “ontological status” assigned certain groups continues to be reified within their own field, they do begin to suggest a productive opening for new solidarities between these different fields, charting a history of people and environments that recognizes, as Édouard Glissant notes, that “the individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process. Its deepest meanings need to be understood.” (Caribbean discourse, 105-106)
Specifically writing about the Caribbean context, but evoking an ethic that could likewise be translated in response to neoplanation cultures on the global scale, DeLoughrey and Handley consider the means by which colonialism as an institution relied on the “decoupling of nature and history…to mystify colonialism’s histories of forced migration, suffering, and human violence.” (Postcolonial Ecologies, 4) In an attempt to demystify and contest these lost solidarities, DeLoughrey and Handley go on to advocate for alternative histories of testimony, wherein the land becomes “a witness to the ongoing legacy of the plantocracy, a history that is vital to understanding modernity and yet seems without voice.” (ibid, 5) Not through a presumed association of certain communities with the landscape itself, but by giving our environments - Glissant’s ‘fights without witnesses’ - a historical voice, recognizing them as intertwined with the social histories and struggles of their inhabitants, we might now imagine more productive means for combating the ‘slow violence’ that has seemed to permeate our current geographies. Indeed as many scholars in eco-criticism have noted, our current ecological crises no longer allow for myths of these ontological divides to be tenably upheld:

…global climate science suggests that despite the claims of the Enlightenment, nature is not outside of modernity and that Western thought can no longer afford the freedom from accountability that a facile nature/culture dualism affords. (ibid, 26)

And so, in addition to charting and critically contesting the means by which ‘nature’ and ‘environments’ were employed as ideological tools to establish ontologies that tied certain individuals and communities to the spaces they inhabited, we must also begin to imagine new interconnected relationships between the human and
nonhuman worlds, ones rooted not in hierarchical forms of domination, but interconnected solidarity and mutual recognition. DeLoughrey and Handley attempt this process of reconciliation, stating that:

…the ecocritical interrogation of anthropocentrism offers the persistent reminder that human political and social inequities cannot be successfully and sustainably resolved without some engagement with the more-than-human world and with deep time. Although this challenge to anthropocentrism is often assumed to directly challenge the human social concerns of postcolonialism, both fields have made it clear that sustainability is a mutual enterprise that pertains as much to human social well-being as to the health of the physical world. If they are at odds, it is only because of our failure to consider their interdependencies. Although it is never clear how we know if we have escaped our anthropocentrism, ecocritical postcolonialism attempts to imagine something beyond the confines of our human story, an imagination that is essential to modes of sustainability. (ibid, 25)

DeLoughrey and Handley’s call for a postcolonial eco-criticism has come out of a broader emergent tradition of ecological re-imaginings by scholars and activists invested in the study of race, gender, class, and ethnicity, all of them attempting, as Donna Haraway notes, to “find another relationship to nature besides reification and possession.” (Promises of Monsters, 296) Haraway, in her own studies of intersections between gender, queerness, and Western ontological renderings of the human/nonhuman world, has lamented the double-bind that exists when scholar-activists attempt to reconcile ecological histories that have for so long been inextricably bound to narratives of domination, approaching ‘nature’ as “that which we cannot not desire. Excruciatingly conscious of nature’s discursive constitution as ‘other’ in the histories of colonialism, racism, sexism and class domination of many kinds, we nonetheless find…something we cannot do without but can never ‘have.’” (ibid, 296)
From these calls have come more complex understandings of social-ecological histories that do not take such intersections for granted, but attempt to navigate the double-bind through an understanding of the environment, not as a fixed or assumed space whose interactions with its habitants remain fluid, but rather through engaging a new conception of environments as bound within, what Glissant refers to, an “aesthetics of rupture and connection” that need be continuously accounted for.

*(Caribbean Discourse, 151)* An excellent example of these intricate connections and negotiations in narratives of social and environmental justice can be seen in Nancy Tuana’s essay, “Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Hurricane Katrina,” where Tuana attempts to navigate the interconnected injustices of Hurricane Katrina through the ruptures and connections of what she terms ‘viscous porosity.’

This does not mean that we cannot attempt to determine the extent to which human factors increased the intensity of a hurricane or some other weather related phenomena. Indeed issues of distributive justice may require that such a distinction be made in order to determine how to apportion responsibility across nations for harm from human-induced climate change as may be done if we adopt a ‘polluter-pay’ principle of responsibility. Again, distinctions can be made, which is why I employ the phrase ‘viscous porosity,’ rather than fluidity. (“Viscous Porosity,” 193)

Tuana’s note of the important distinctions in ecological injustice, both demonstrates how much of the neocolonial and neoplantation violence reeked on communities today is also a “slow violence,” deeply embedded in ecological hazard, and also how claiming redress to these conditions cannot be placed at the local level alone, New Orleans in this case, but occurs always on scales of global magnitude and responsibility. Just as Stacy Alaimo suggests that an “understanding of the substance of one’s self as interconnected with the wider environment marks a profound shift in
subjectivity,” Tuana is able to move this call beyond the interpersonal experience and locate the role of environmental interconnection in expanding the geographic dimensions of communal claims for justice. While Tuana’s work is a deeply impressive example of the negotiation of social and ecological concerns, it still remains somewhat prescriptive and bound to its own temporal context. Scholars like Tuana, Haraway, DeLoughrey and Handley have all begun to articulate narratives that can account for both communities and environments, but their work remains at the vanguard, locatable in the contexts of their subjects, and not framed within any one particular theoretical platform.

_The Discourse of Preservation_

Up until now, I have outlined a brief survey of the most current intersections in ecological and social justice movements, primarily as demonstrated in the emergent critical interventions in eco-critical theory and postcolonial studies. I have charted a genealogy of the oftentimes violent ideological tensions that have arisen between conceptualizations of the environment and forms of neocolonialism and neoslavery, and noted the danger in much eco-critical scholarship in repeating these same imperialist practices within academic scholarship. I have also advocated for a need to reconcile these fields of inquiry in responsible and productive ways, acknowledging some of the current socio-ecological theorists who attempt to negotiate between and embrace a stance attentive to both environmental and social concerns.
My own project in discourses of preservation does not attempt to engage with all of these varying and distinct intersections, nor do I even consider my work an ‘eco-critical’ project per say. In fact, certain chapters, such as Chapter 4 on Angelo Herndon and the post-emancipation US carceral state, deal with built landscapes and environments that are not particularly recognizable in the environmental humanities as such. Yet, by encountering the Prison as an environment set aside for preservation, like the National Park, I can not only chart the way in which the Prison Industrial Complex in the US arose as, what Ruth Wilson Gilmore has called, “a geographical solution to socio-economic problems” caused by capitalist crisis, but also as a contained space designated for racist violence, designed to preserve the dehumanizing conditions of the antebellum plantation. (*Golden Gulag*, 9) Thus, while my project is not privileging of traditional ecological concerns, it employs some of the dynamics outlined in eco-criticism to find new ways at exploring neocolonialism in the Native/Anglo American cultural canons, and neoslavery and racist violence in the post-bellum United States. Ultimately then, what this dissertation attempts to do is locate within this genealogy of productive and problematic intersections between eco-criticism and critical ethnic studies, the emergence of what I refer to as *the discourse of preservation*, in its ecological, social, and cultural forms - from the formation of National Parks, to the “tokenizing” of Native writings in an (Anglo)American Studies canon, to the Smithsonian recordings of neo-plantation songs in the Angola prison - arguing for the recognition of this discourse as a formative one in the racist and imperialist policies which have influenced US social, cultural, and political thought since the 19th century.
As may have by now been inferred, the majority of the scholarship which has informed the larger theoretical framework of this project is focused primarily in the postcolonial context, where the violent divisions of space and community are perhaps more vividly clear. Resituating this scholarship in the context of US cultural history presents a number of challenges as well as new openings for the field of American Studies. First, it further encourages us to think in terms of a post/neocolonial United States. My sites of study, from the Georgia prison to the South Dakota reservation to the 1914-1940 military occupation of Haiti, come together to form a new narrative of the late 19th and early 20th century United States that is inseparable from the occupation of land and the violent rearrangement of its spatial structures through diasporas, forced labor, and policed modes of enclosure and containment. Additionally, US environmental history, past and present, engages us both with the works of writers like Thoreau, Catlin, and Muir, each of whom (as I will later argue in Chapter 1) contributed to the racist ontological divides of eco-imperialism, and also confronts us with a current environmental materialist reality of, what Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffins have called, “a country that has actively and aggressively contributed to what many now acknowledge to be the chronic endangerment of the contemporary late-capitalist world.” (*Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, 17)

In addition to the national and transnational implications of a postcolonial eco-critical investigation into US cultural history, American discourses of preservation also force us to consider the way in which the United States’ environmental and cultural programs developed in the late 19th and early 20th century were essential in
modernizing certain racist ontologies, ontologies strikingly similar to those which would later materialize into genocides throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries. Thus, engaging the ontologies of human/nonhuman that are so pertinent to eco-critical and postcolonial theories, my dissertation is interested in the means by which American discourses of preservation accessed and exploited, what Mel Y. Chen, refers to as the power through which “language helps to coerce certain figures into nonbeing.” (Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect, 14) Specifically, I am most interested in the means by which discourses of preservation work to coerce certain individuals and communities into what I have referred to as ‘bare life.’

A Note on Genocide in the United States, 1864-1948

I invoke this term, ‘bare life,’ with some hesitation. A biopolitical concept first used by Giorgio Agamben, bare life has often been signaled in reference to human subjects whose biological life remains somewhat intact, but whose civil, social, political, and cultural livelihoods have been systematically deconstructed and dissolved. This term then serves as an important conceptual tool in reconsidering genocide, not simply as the systematic biological killing of mass numbers of individuals, but also as pertaining to the oftentimes preliminary cultural and legal means by which the more-than-biological identities of those individuals were deconstructed within civil society. Similar to Jasbir Puar’s conceptualization of the ‘bio-necro,’ bare life comes out of a diverse field of biopolitical thought and is capable
of synthesizing different conceptualizations of these exercises of power, being both
that which “conceptually acknowledges [Foucauldian] biopower’s direct activity in
death, while remaining bound to the optimization of life, and [Mbembe’s]
necropolitics’ nonchalance toward death even as it seeks out killing as a primary aim.”
(“Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times,” 6) Furthermore,
Agamben’s ‘bare life’ is equally concerned with the varying institutions responsible
for the production of this mechanized dehumanization, such as the institution of
language. This becomes particularly useful when thinking about the way in which the
civil, social, political, historical, and cultural subjectivities of certain individuals and
communities in the United States are stripped bare through the rhetoric of
preservation.

And yet, I maintain a hesitancy with this term, insofar as its own etymology
remains entrapped by what Mel Y. Chen has called the “lingering Eurocentrism within
what is thought of as biopolitics – its implicit restriction to national bodies, for
instance, as well as its species-centric bias that privileges discussions about human
citizens.” (Animacies, 6-7) Most notably, Agamben’s contextual source for bare life
remains grounded in the European death camps of WWII and further solidifies their
primacy in studies of genocide, ignoring both the violence of colonization throughout
Africa and the Americas and the scholarship of people like Saidiya Hartman and Joy
James, who have worked to relocate histories of genocide and biopolitics in relation to
the holocaust of Africans and African Americans in the United States. In many ways
perhaps, Achille Mbembe’s necropolitical subject is the more appropriate term here,
because, unlike Agamben’s bare life, which emerges from extreme historical forms
within civil society (i.e. the European concentration camp), Mbembe’s subjects exist in a space that is always already coded by extreme historical forms (i.e. parts of the world where concentrated violence has become the banal, daily reality). The *necropolitical subject* becomes a more useful term when talking about writers who attempt to contest and reframe these discourses of preservation, such as Angelo Herndon and Zitkala-Sa, whose agency and voice, born as they are within the banality of everyday violent acts, must find alternate means and modalities for expression, outside and apart from the confines of social and civil death. Bare life, rather, becomes the term I employ when discussing the role of certain writers like Thoreau, Catlin, and Faulkner in framing the dehumanizing rhetoric of preservationist discourse. Regardless of the terminology, my engagement with biopolitics, as will be noted throughout the dissertation, occurs with awareness of its Eurocentrism and historical blindspots, and employs particular US histories of genocide as a means to reframe and complicate many of the key terms associated with this field of study.

Like postcolonial ecocriticism, the situation of biopolitics and histories of genocide within the US context, opens up new points of entry into American Studies. Unlike postcolonial ecocriticism, however, there are certain texts and historical documents that have paved the way for this re-situation. Two texts, which, while only referenced briefly in the dissertation itself, have provided a thoroughly helpful background on US genocide studies, include Ward Churchill’s *A Little Matter of Genocide*, which surveys the ethnic cleansing of multiple Native American tribal communities since 1492, and “We Charge Genocide: The Crime of Government Against the Negro People.” This second text, drafted by William Patterson and
members of the Civil Rights Congress, and presented at the United Nations in 1947, documents the lynchings of hundreds of African Americans (also referencing well over 10,000 undocumented cases) and charges the United States with genocide, both on the basis of the lynchings themselves, as well as the government’s systematic conspiracy to restrict African Americans from any forms of political presence or redress. Both of these documents help to reorient the genealogies of genocide out from the monopoly of modern European history and address the ongoing genocides that have occurred and continue to occur within the United States and elsewhere. The dates I have chosen for this cultural survey likewise attempt to reposition this history of genocide within the United States. Situated between the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 and the United Nations’ Convention on Genocide in 1948, this dissertation thus considers the actual histories of genocide in US empire alongside writings, recordings, and other various forms of cultural preservation articulated by both those acting on behalf of the nation and those speaking out in critical protest.

In this context, I have chosen to work with a definition of genocide that can respond to racial violence in the United States as well as the ‘slow violence’ of uneven ecological terrains in both the national and global arenas. The working definition which I offer is both a combination of Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s discussion of racism as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Golden Gulag, 247), and eco-feminist, Vandana Shiva’s re-labeling of genocide as “exclusion of the right to survival.” (“The Enclosure of the Commons”)

It is this definition of genocide - the systematic and
state-sanctioned exclusion of certain groups from historical, cultural, civil, political or biological survival – that I will continue to explore throughout the four chapters.

Introduction to the Four Chapters

As I hope to have made clear by this point, the coming four chapters attempt to build an argument around discourses of preservation through the examination of very different spaces, analyzing and critically observing their own testified existence as preserved environments. In doing so, this project will try to find responsible and productive intersections between two otherwise disengaged modes of critical thought - eco-criticism and critical ethnic studies. Furthermore, it will retain a critical distance from many of the dominant theoretical platforms in both eco-criticism and biopolitics, attempting to find new openings for bio-eco studies that effectively engage the struggles of multi-ethnic and working class communities in the United States. Such a project requires that I build many of my own theoretical and critical platforms from the primary sources I have chosen to work with, coming out from such distinct sites as the National Park, the Reservation, the Occupied Nation (as imagined by the occupier), and the Prison, the association of such sites being something that I will have to argue for throughout this dissertation. In an effort to try to visualize these connections and associations, let me present two very different examples of preservationist discourse, examples that I will repeat and further elaborate on in their own contexts in the chapters to come.
Consider for instance, in 1856, amidst the growing discussions surrounding national preservation and the creation of state protected parks, Henry David Thoreau’s statement that:

The kings of England formerly had their forests "to hold the king's game," for sport or food, sometimes destroying villages to create or extend them; and I think that they were impelled by a true instinct. Why should not we, who have renounced the king's authority, have our national preserves, where no villages need be destroyed, in which the bear and panther, and some even of the hunter race, may still exist, and not be "civilized off the face of the earth,"—our forests, not to hold the king's game merely, but to hold and preserve the king himself also, the lord of creation,—not for idle sport or food, but for inspiration and our own true re-creation? (“Chesuncook,” 313)

Thoreau’s conflation of preservation and consumption and his belief that national parks might contain all those produced apart from ‘civil’ society would come to represent many of the dominant ideologies regarding land conservation throughout the latter half of the 19th century.

Then, consider Thoreau’s advocation for violently contained spaces of preservation as it finds, perhaps, a more complete realization in the work of John and Alan Lomax, where traces of antebellum plantation culture were maintained and consumed in the form of various recordings at the Louisiana State Penitentiary and Parchman Prison Farm in Mississippi throughout the early part of the 20th century. In reference to his recordings of early 19th century antebellum songs still sung by the incarcerated peoples at a 1920’s prison camp, John Lomax wrote:

If one wishes to obtain anything like an accurate picture of the workaday Negro he will surely find his best setting in the chain gang, or prison...[where prisoners] thrown on their own resources, still sing, especially the long-term prisoners who have been confined for years
and who have not yet been influenced by jazz and the radio, the
distinctive old-time Negro melodies. (as cited in Work Songs, 205)

The early US penitentiary, as a means of reorienting slavery toward the more
‘progressive’ qualities of Northern industrial capitalism, had, by the time of Lomax,
also become a space for the preservation of antebellum plantation culture, where now
criminalized African Americans could be produced apart from the historical
movements and transformations of ‘civil’ society.

While such relationships between these sites - the late 19th century National
Park and the early 20th century Prison Industrial Complex - may seem purely
rhetorical, I hope to argue that there exists between them both an all too oftentimes
obscured narrative of US domestic and international policy wherein a spatial and
temporal freeze is applied to those landscapes and peoples whose use-value to the
market remains ambiguous and yet undetermined. I hope to illustrate three key points
of intersection between all of the spaces that I will be exploring: 1.) All of these sites
served in their own way as pre-Keynesian programs where the state stepped in to
resolve the perceived land crisis of the post-frontier West and/or the perceived labor
crisis of the post-convict lease system South; 2.) Each site was necessary in the
construction of a US civil society that could constantly identify and rearticulate itself
in juxtaposition to these contained spaces and peoples; and 3.) All can be interpreted
as attempting to mask or neutralize the violent divisions inherent to capitalist societies
at the same time as they reveal all those left absent from the presumably universal and
free market. My goal then is to illuminate the way in which concentrated spaces of
containment have always been a part of capitalist national economies and continue to
pervade this current global restructuring of power by fixing subjects within places that
deny them political voice or transformative agency.

In addition to their geopolitical functions, all of these spaces of ‘preservation’
attempt to fetishize some form of violence that was inherent to the institutions of US
settler-colonialism and slavery. Much like Homi Bhabha’s definition of the colonial
fetish, as that which “represents the simultaneous play between metaphor as
substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously
registers the perceived lack),” each of these sites attempted to mask and remedy their
perceived loss of domination in the “postcolonial” “postplantation” US, at the same
time that they vividly unveiled the repetition of this violence in new forms – the reality
of the neocolonial, neoplantation United States. (The Location of Culture, 74-75) The
goal of each of these chapters then, is to chart the means by which discourses of
preservation worked to mediate this transition from the colonial to the neocolonial
United States (through formal spaces like the Reservation and the National Park), and
from antebellum slavery in the US Southern plantation to the various forms of
neoslavery and neoplantations in the entire US and Global South (through formal
spaces like the US occupation of Haiti and the Prison Industrial Complex). This
project is both geopolitical (locating the functions these sites performed in the context
of capitalist crisis) as well as cultural (charting the specific remnants of colonial and
plantation violence as they were preserved in these sites). Finally, this dissertation
will also consider the means by which certain figures attempted to ‘write out’ from
these enclosures, evoking new strategies for the maintenance of historical realities
apart from the dominating discourses of preservation.
I open with an exploration of the speculative conversations surrounding the early US national park. Critically examining the writings of George Catlin, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir, who had each argued for the incorporation and containment of Native American communities within national parks, I argue that the early American environmental imagination had as much to do with the preservation of ‘wild’ landscapes as it did with the construction of ‘wild’ subjects intended to inhabit such landscapes. Early American environmentalist discourse, when read in this light, ultimately conflated Native Americans with the natural landscape, rendering these subjects as passive victims with no more political agency than the rocks and trees surrounding. Likewise, I argue that Emersonian transcendentalism, as manifested in the policies and rhetoric of many late 19th and 20th century naturalists, was steeped in a colonial ontology of over-determined European subjectivities and their contrasted Native American counterparts. I conclude this Chapter by outlining the way in which certain contemporary humanitarian and environmental discourses have drawn from this tradition, creating ahistorical and apolitical subjects as a precondition for their ‘protection’ and ‘preservation.’ More so than any of the other chapters, Chapter 1 serves as a continued introduction to the dissertation as a whole, highlighting intersections between eco-criticism and postcolonial criticism in the US context and further outlining the relationship between discourses of preservation and the production of bare life.

Chapter 2 focuses on the works of Yankton Sioux writer, Zitkala-Sa, considering both her serial memoir, *American Indian Stories*, and her later political
essays, as they emerged outside of the canons set forth by settler-colonial traditions, speaking directly to a Native American body of cultural productions that negotiated, challenged, and oftentimes obscured tribal differences in the face of mutual oppression and exploitation. Through a reading of Zitkala-Sa’s universalizing autobiographical subject and this subject’s reception among Native communities outside of South Dakota, this Chapter builds on the theoretical claims made by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing and others, arguing that dichotomies of the global and local, the universal and the particular, cannot be considered in strict and simplifying binaries, but are continuously engaged and navigated both by those seeking address to the conditions of their oppression and those imagining alternatives for new communities rooted in non-European models of political and ecological interaction. In doing so, this Chapter attempts to draw Zitkala-Sa’s writings away from their canonized status as “token” Native American literature in an otherwise anglicized American Studies project, and situate them among other Native writers to whom she would have been a contemporary, in particular, Native California writers at the turn of the 20th century. And yet, this Chapter will also look at the contained environment of the English language text itself, in particular Zitkala-Sa’s use the memoir as a space for expressing these universalizing rights, as constitutive of many of the same dynamics as preservationist discourse. While this Chapter maintains an ambiguous distance from Zitkala-Sa’s use of the ‘universal’ it does advocate for her collected essays as a cornerstone in an early 20th century (Native) American Studies project, capable of renegotiating national histories and offering new strategies for ‘writing out’ from the
reductive and enclosed canonical boundaries of set forth by Thoreau, Catlin, and other Anglo writers of the late 19th century.

Chapter 3 shifts toward transnational US ecologies and historical relationships, in particular the remapping of a geographically and historically unbound Global South. Reading William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* - a novel set at the close of the antebellum period and published in the midst of the 1914-1940 US military occupation of Haiti – this Chapter explores Faulkner’s use of 19th century US history and ecological depictions to comment on the global terrain of early 20th century US imperialism in the Caribbean and elsewhere. While Faulkner’s drawing of historical and ecological parallels between the US and Global South are useful critical tools in studying empire, this Chapter argues that in doing so Faulkner simultaneously sets new transnational boundaries for preservation, where the US South is aligned to a narrative of industry and progress, while formerly independent nations like Haiti are cast as apolitical spaces, lacking both history and agency. The chapter concludes with a broader consideration of the obscuration of the Haitian Revolution in 20th century American philosophies, historiographies, literary traditions, and other cultural narratives regarding the revolutionary Atlantic. This Chapter will engage with many of the postcolonial theorists discussed earlier on in the Introduction, and chart the way in which this domestic discourse of preservation was internationalized during the first half of the 20th century, exported to the Hemispheric South so as to serve a larger US imperial project.

The Fourth and final Chapter moves from the hemispheric to the regional US South, charting the early formations of the Prison Industrial Complex, from the
convict-lease system implemented shortly after Emancipation through the establishment of the ‘Parchman Farm,’ now known as the Mississippi State Penitentiary, in 1901. Beginning with the early prison recordings of John and Alan Lomax, this Chapter argues that the post-Emancipation penitentiary was an integral part in the state’s attempt to preserve and rearticulate antebellum slave society in the midst of a presumably liberated nation. The second half of this chapter focuses on a reading of Angelo Herndon’s *Let Me Live* (1937), one of the earlier US prison autobiographies, considering the strategies employed by incarcerated subjects to both assert their civil and political livelihoods, as well as contest the system as a whole. In particular, this Chapter looks at the way in which Herndon was able to deconstruct traditional forms of the memoir and the *bildungsroman* and re-imagine alternatives to ‘preservation’ as a mode of historical memory. This Chapter will conclude by celebrating Herndon’s use of, what Avery Gordon has referred to as, the practice of *haunting* as a means to keep historical realities intact, not so as to ‘preserve’ and solidify the violence, but rather to challenge and contest it, unveiling the ways in which it continues to permeate and inform the present.

In its entirety, this dissertation addresses the cultural contexts surrounding a US history of genocide that is often overshadowed by other historical events occurring at the start of the 20th century, locating the role of preservationist discourse as it presents itself throughout this history and, as I hope to show, within certain environmentalist and humanitarian projects today. Additionally, my research demands space in the American Studies curriculum for the anti-colonial writings emerging within and speaking beyond these restrictive confines. From early carceral memoirs in
the US South to Native American cultural canons, this dissertation opens a dialogue, not only in resistance to spatial and political enclosure, but also in hopes of new anti-colonial definitions of preservation and its relationship to culture, ecology, and shared histories in the United States and beyond.
Chapter 1:

“Containing Man and Beast!” A Postcolonial Reflection on U.S. National Parks and American Literary Environmentalism

Since the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the outcome of which produced the more formative policies adopted by UNESCO in 1972, the latter half of the 20th century has witnessed an emergent global conversation regarding the integration of human and ecological rights within a wide-reaching and seemingly all-encompassing dialogue of preservation. The genealogical origins of this dialogue can be traced to a conversation initiated by the United States in 1965, regarding the possibilities for a ‘World Heritage Trust’ which would preserve and maintain “the world’s most superb natural and scenic areas and historic sites for the present and the future of the entire world citizenry.” (Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Article 6) This official rhetoric of preservation places a certain responsibility or inherent authority within the hands of a global metropol, comprised of leading world powers, to define and determine certain peripheral ‘picturesque landscapes’ and cultural remnants of ‘historic value’ to be contained and maintained for a global ‘citizenry’ whose rights to these spaces of preservation are seemingly undefined.

The integration of social and natural communities under a combined ethics of preservation comes in the face of a Western Cartesian concept of naturalism that tends to see the human and nonhuman worlds as inherently incompatible. Indeed, as Alison Byerly notes in her work on “The Uses of Landscape,” the ideological construct of
‘environments’ as such rely on a dismissal of the human element at the same time that they are constructed by this same subjective experience:

The idea of wilderness refers to the absence of humanity, yet ‘wilderness’ has no meaning outside the context of the civilization that defines it. This paradox requires that we experience the wilderness without changing its status as wilderness. This can only be done by constructing an aesthetic image of the wilderness that allows us to avoid confronting its reality. (54)

This ‘aesthetic image of the wilderness’ that is both representative of pre-social histories, at the same time as it is constructed, maintained, and upheld by the climactic manifestation of Western civil-society – the nation-state - finds its clearest articulation in the form of national parks. A distinctly ‘American’ project, first conceived at the close of the 19th century, the national park was both a symbolic reaffirmation of the ideological divides between the ‘wilderness’ and civil society, as well as an actual space with violent colonial histories of land acquisition, re-appropriation, and defense. As Jane Caruthers notes:

National parks contain a basic contradiction in that they are saved for people and yet it is a state duty to protect national park land against people and against change. This fortress approach has had the consequence that parks are ‘islands under siege,’ especially in the post-colonial context, because the costs and benefits of these islands have been borne unequally by different segments of the national population. (“Nationhood and national parks: comparative examples from the post-imperial experience,” 126)

The coexistent dichotomies of a picturesque wilderness aesthetic and the violent security measures used to reinforce the exclusion of all human elements from this landscape have resulted in a national park service wherein the two most common areas of expertise in the educational backgrounds of park superintendents are landscape architecture and law enforcement. (Byerly, 54).
The ideological and physical divides between cultural and social identities, and the untainted wilderness experience, have reaffirmed themselves within the sphere of the university, whereby certain scholarly divides and circles have solidified what Cilano and DeLoughrey call the “unproblematized division between people (on the postcolonial side) and nature (on the ecocritical one)” (“Against Authenticity: Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism, 75) At least in literary theory, Ecocriticism, as it has emerged within the context of American Studies, has done so not only in neglect of, but in seeming opposition to the pre-established fields of Postcolonial Studies. In his seminal text, Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor, Rob Nixon outlines four major ideological loggerheads between the two fields of thought; according to Nixon, postcolonialists emphasize hybridity, while ecocritics emphasize purity; postcolonialists study displacement, while ecocritics focus on place; postcolonialists tend toward the cosmopolitan, ecocritics toward nationalism; postcolonialists work to recover history, ecocritics seek to sublimate or transcend history. (235) These divides have not only limited the critical canons of both schools, they have ignored the way in which ecological imperialism – broadly defined by Alfred Crosby as any change in the ecology of a territory as a result of the takeover and/or penetration of one group by another – has played a part in both the Anglo-invasion and violent re-appropriation of the globe, as well as the means by which the subsequent imperial metropols – the World Bank and International Monetary Funds – have used ecological technologies (the genetic modification of seeds, plants, and animals) to maintain an economic stronghold over the Third World.
And yet, just as geopolitical entities in the West have begun to intertwine
visions of people and ecologies, so to has the academic sphere incorporated what
Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have called a “postcolonial environmental ethic”
into its range of consideration and critique. Beyond a school of thought, or a set of
theoretical tools, the postcolonial environmental ethic, as Huggan and Tiffin assert, is
a point of advocacy and revolutionary transformation, residing on the premise that
“no social justice without environmental justice; and without social justice – for all
ecological beings – no justice at all.” (Interventions, 10)

Is it possible then, that both the radical politics of postcolonial environmental
ethics, and the state-based rhetoric concerning policies of preservation incorporative of
both human and non-human agents, might both be part and parcel of a more expansive
and progressive dialogue about sustainability, as well as a movement toward a deeper
ecological politics wherein traditionally ‘other-ed’ human and nonhuman communities
are protected apart from their relevance and ‘use-value’ to the colonizer? One need
only look to the most recent oil spill along the Louisiana Gulf coast to realize that this
is most certainly not the case. Indeed, as Renetta Lazarus reminds us, when any state-
initiated preservationist dialogues emerge out from the US context, we should always
be “skeptical about a country that has done far less than one might reasonably expect
to protect the global environment but far more than it could possibly have hoped to
‘reinvent the imperial tradition for the twenty-first century” (Lazarus, 20)

Rather, I would argue that World Heritage organizations like UNESCO cannot
be viewed only as apolitical sites of sustainable maintenance – an invention specific to
the 20th century– but must also be considered in a longer history by which nonhuman
‘wilderness’ spaces and certain human communities have been entwined and conflated in an imperial rhetoric of preservation and the production, containment, and confinement of ‘uncivil’ bare life. When considered in light of Michel Foucault’s theories on sex and sexuality, preservation as a construct, might be considered, not as the hidden reality and genealogical origin of preservationist discourse, but as an outcome of that discourse. Preservation, in this instance, is thus re-conceptualized in terms of a Foucaultian dispositif, whereby the word itself works to associatively link seemingly distinct fields of observation and categorization – humanitarians, environmentalists, oil companies, architects of genocide, activist protesters, the coercive hands of state law, etc – placing before us a multitude of meanings that are all independently recognized, and yet subsequently attached to the word and its projected use. No longer a neutral, passive term, preservation is the active means by which power is exercised and dissected along a range of varied and contradictory fields.

A genealogy of the term preservation, as it has emerged at various points throughout US history, reveals a narrative of power in which nonhuman and human communities have continually been conflated within the exercise of state (or hegemonic Anglo male) power. From Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia, where Native Americans appear in the chapter entitled ‘Productions’ as part and parcel of the wilderness landscape, to the writings of George Catlin and Henry David Thoreau, where both authors argued that the early national parks should contain Native communities - preservation, in particular its emergence in the formative conversations surrounding national parks and American literary environmentalism, has quite often been a means of containing, condensing, and confining human and
nonhuman communities and environments in fixed geographic terrains. The goal then
is to recognize the conflation of human and nonhuman communities, not only in terms
of the justice advocated by a postcolonial environmental ethic, but also within the
narratives of US imperial history, which environmental philosopher Deane Curtin cites
as “the connection, in theory and practice, of race and the environment so that the
oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the oppression of the other”
(Environmental Ethics for a Postcolonial World, 145).

The national park - along with the racially stereotyped books, records and
artifacts for sale in their gift shops purporting to represent ‘pre-social’ indigenous life
to tourists – might be more aptly considered in light of Homi Bhabha’s definition of
the fetish, being that which “represents the simultaneous play between metaphor as
substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously
registers the perceived lack).” (The Location of Culture, 74-75) A postcolonial history
of the national park is what is needed here to understand the way in which
preservationist discourse, while masking the absence of certain communities and
ecologies from the public sphere, can also be re-charted in such a way so as to reveal
the violent processes by which this absence emerged. The employment of cultural
studies and literary theory within a field of study that is more often than not relegated
to scientific discourse alone, might also, as Anthony Vital suggests, illustrate “the
complex interplay of social history with the natural world, and how language both
shapes and reveals such interactions” (“Toward an African Ecocriticism,” 90).

Postcolonial discourse, as a means for historical reflection on national parks
and American literary environmentalism, illuminates a terrain of both material
violence and the ideological constituents for certain ongoing discourses of
exploitation. As Graham Huggins notes, “postcolonial discourse is important to
indigenous Americans even as their situation remains one of ongoing colonization.
Native lands have uranium deposits that continue to be exploited, often with native
laborers, to the detriment of the environment and indigenous inhabitants” (1). The
realities and violences predicated by the sheer construction of parks as geographic
terrains of exclusion have histories that expand far beyond the preservationist
discourse of early American naturalists. As Jane Carruthers notes in her materialist
narrative of Transvaal park in South Africa, the ideological rhetoric surrounding the
formation of national parks overlays an economic reality, oftentimes far more
nefarious:

    Imperial antagonism for African hunting was based on the ideology that
to subsist on game (as Africans did) was ‘less civilized’ than to kill for
amusement. There was also a distaste for ‘cruel’ African methods of
hunting. But by the end of the nineteenth century the principal reason
had become quite clear: ‘the destruction of game by the
natives…enables a large number of natives to live by this means who
would otherwise have to maintain themselves by labour. Wildlife
conservation thus played a role in creating a proletariat in the
industrializing Transvaal. (Nationhood and national parks: comparative
examples from the post-imperial experience, 127)

A global understanding of national parks could bring us closer to an understanding of
21st century ecological imperialism, wherein the peripheries of empire hold
transnational dimensions and the metropols of evaluation, distribution, and coercion
are distinct and separate from any one nation. A more globally expansive postcolonial
survey would also save us from the risk of a study that privileged the US experience as
all-encompassing and singularly defining. Yet, I would also argue that the
environmental imaginary most formative of contemporary global discourses on preservation has its roots in the articulation and employment of, what Tiffin and Huggans call “hegemonic centrism’ [that] accounts not only for environmental racism, but also for those forms of institutionalized species-ism that continue to be used to rationalize the exploitation of nonhuman and dehumanized ‘others’ in the name of a “human- and reason-centered culture that is at least a couple of millennia old.” (Huggans, 8). The goal then of this Chapter is to trace both the racist ontologies of certain environmentalisms as they were established by both settler communities and imperial metropols, while simultaneously maintaining an awareness of an ecological narrative wherein at a certain point “the original accommodated relations between environment, humans and animals were fractured, sometimes beyond repair.” (Huggans and Tiffins, 1) This paper will thus argue that the late 19th and early 20th century national parks were formed not only through passive or arbitrary legislation but also by an American literary environmentalism rooted in the conflation of ecological landscapes and ‘uncivilized’ others along one side of an ontological divide that deemed both as bare life. Beginning with George Catlin’s earliest prophesies for a “nation’s park, containing both man and beast,” this chapter will chart a strand of the American environmental imagination as it was discursively articulated through a literary landscape, materialized in the form of national parks, and expanded into a violent exercising of preservationist policies which simultaneously cast Native Americans as ‘wild’ subjects, as bare life. My hope is that through an in-depth examination and postcolonial reflection on this rhetoric of preservation we might
extract new critical lenses through which to view certain humanitarian discourses and initiatives in our own contemporary moment.

“...a beautiful and thrilling specimen:” *Wilderness in the Early American Imagination – from the Mayflower to George Catlin*

In 1844, upon returning from a series of diplomatic missions up through the Mississippi River territory and into the American West, George Catlin wrote in his *Letters and Notes on the North American Indian Volume 1*:

This strip of [buffalo] country, which extends from the province of Mexico to lake Winnipeg on the North, is almost one entire plain of grass, which is, and ever must be, useless to cultivating man. It is here, and here chiefly, that the buffaloes dwell; and with, and hovering about them, live and flourish the tribes of Indians, whom God made for the enjoyment of that fair land and its luxuries.

It is a melancholy contemplation for one who has travelled as I have, through these realms, and seen this noble animal in all its pride and glory, to contemplate it so rapidly wasting from the world, drawing the irresistible conclusion too, which one must do, that its species is soon to be extinguished, and with it the peace and happiness (if not the actual existence) of the tribes of Indians who are joint tenants with them, in the occupancy of these vast and idle plains.

And what a splendid contemplation too, when one (who has travelled these realms, and can duly appreciate them) imagines them as they might in future be seen, (by some great protecting policy of government) preserved in their pristine beauty and wildness, in a magnificent park, where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, with sinewy bow, and shield and lance, amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes. What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world, in future ages. A nation's Park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty! (261-262)
Arguably a predecessor to the environmental movements of 21st century America, the blind spots inherent in George Catlin's privileged self-figuration as an active protector of a noble and passive 'otherness' are representative of the very same ideological dangers which continue to permeate humanitarian and environmental discourse today. While Catlin's conflation of difference with uncultured 'wildness' has been repeatedly considered and critiqued by scholars, activists, and revisionist writers and historians alike, the 19th century writer's conflation of preservation with consumption remains a shadowy, oftentimes unchallenged site of confusion, one that, now more so than ever, has begun to absorb radical, transformative politics into a liberal ethic of humanitarian and environmental reform. This violent fusion reaffirms itself for Catlin in a spatial politics aimed at absorbing both ecological and human rights within a particular physical environment and/or ideological site that aligns its contours along the dictates of a state-based socio-economic system acting as the sovereign policy-maker/policing agent. Out from this 'morality' has spawned a social and cultural portrait of the ecological landscape and the racially constructed 'wild' body of its marginalized inhabitants, which view both as either hostile, 'untamable' fuel for the greater engine of civilized/political life, or as passive, endangered subjects incapable of any transformative agency, in need of an 'educated' protectorate, a righteous crusade. Both viewpoints call into question the notion of rights discourse as it is intertwined with the landscapes and environments that such bodies inhabit, and both portraits work to elevate the subject position of the Catlin-figure, while severely diminishing the agency of the objectified other.
And yet before we can begin to interpret the over-determined subjectivity of
the Catlin-figure, as he has emerged from the violent conflation of human and
environmental rights, we must trace this genealogy of the adjective ‘wild’ as it has
been formed from the various competing notions of ‘wilderness’ in the early American
imagination. The wilderness as a passive landscape and active agent has continued to
shift, I will argue, in parallel to its perceived ‘use-value’ within the developing US
industrial economy. It is this crucial shift in the American environmental imagination
that paved the way for certain rights-granting figures like George Catlin, and the
employment of terms like preservation for means of containment and control.

Despite popular historical misconceptions that presuppose ‘wilderness’ to be a
fundamental part of the ‘American’ literary experience, the genealogy of the term is
far more diverse and ambivalent in its relationship to national identity. As Craig Allin
notes in his seminal work on The Politics of Wilderness Preservation, the pastoral
cultural codes that came from Europe were extremely different from the wilderness
into which early American settlers emerged:

Western civilization had traditionally glorified in the pastoral, not the
wild. Indeed, our word paradise in its original Persian meant ‘luxurious
garden’ the very antithesis of wilderness. The Greeks and the Romans
believed wild places to be inhabited by assorted monsters and demons,
and this belief was not limited to the Mediterranean civilizations.
Northern Europe had its fiends, and wild men always lurking in the
deepest corners of the darkest forest, and biblical tradition fostered the
notion that paradise and wilderness were antipodes. (Allin, 6)

These distinctions between the pastoral and the wild, carried with them innate
connotations about the use-value of natural resources and the role of human elements
in constructing the habiting environment. For settlers coming into a wilderness landscape which they perceived as being un-subdued by the human hand (an illusion ultimately cast forth by the reluctance of these European settlers to observe and take note of the alternative engagements with the land by pre-colonial Native American communities), these ‘unmanageable’ landscapes inspired only grief, frustration and feelings of antagonism. As Robert Nash has noted, “when William Bradford stepped off the Mayflower into a ‘hideous and desolate’ wilderness he started a tradition of repugnance.” (Wilderness and the American Mind, 103)

In addition to the feelings of vulnerability and overwhelming apprehension caused by the abundance of forest and densely foliaged landscapes, this ‘surplus of resources’ instilled in early American settlers a misrepresentation of the continental wilderness as endlessly expansive terrain. The belief in resource inexhaustibility, only reinforced European wilderness hostility, the forest becoming an insurmountable obstacle rather than a vital aspect of the new communal ecology. These ideological positions and misperceptions, combined with the economic incentives of a pre-industrial resource heavy settler society, produced local and national policies designed around subsidizing development rather than sustainable living and resource conservation. As early as 1795, Irish travel writer Isaac Weld had begun to consider the early American destruction and production of natural resources as being directly linked to a national ideology of ‘wilderness aversion:’

They have an unconquerable aversion to trees and whenever a settlement is made they cut away all before them without mercy; not one is spared; all share the same fate and are involved in the same general havoc…The man that can cut down the largest number, and have fields about his house most clear of them, is looked upon as the
most industrious citizen, and the one that is making the greatest improvements in the country. (Travels Through the States of North America, 172)

This relationship between the morally righteous, ‘industrious citizen’ and the devastation of local ecologies would continue throughout the early 19th century leading to a new American aesthetics rooted in Anglo settler achievement and the illusion of a contained natural environment. This anti-nature mentality would become emblematic of the American experience, as Alexis de Tocqueville noted in his 1831 survey of the ‘American wilderness experience:’

To break through almost impenetrable forests, to cross deep rivers, to brave pestilential marshes, to sleep out in the damp woods, those are exertions that the American readily contemplates, if it is a question of earning a guinea; for that is the point. But that one should do things from curiosity is more than his mind can take in. Besides, living in the wilds, he only prizes the works of man. He will gladly send you off to see a road, a bridge or a fine village. But that one should appreciate great trees and the beauties of solitude, that possibility completely passes him by. (Journey to America, 13)

What de Tocqueville ultimately articulated was not an American ignorance of the surrounding landscape, but a particular wilderness aesthetic that positioned a pre-industrial means of production and the nonhuman world against corresponding sides of a theological binary of good and evil, relying on the latter as sinister backdrop by which the former might be signified and morally illuminated. To understand the early American wilderness ethic and aesthetic then is not to harken toward the transcendental values so defining of a conservative American Studies project, but rather, to recognize the ecological colonialism of America as a genocidal war waged against a silent and defenseless enemy of ‘progress.’
This ethic of production would go on to inform and even dictate the early history of wilderness preservation, wherein, as Michael Williams notes, the recession in American environmental destruction was not a result of shifting ideologies and a more highly informed national conscience, but transformations in the dominant modes of production - most specifically the invention of the steel-tipped plough in 1837, which reduced the time necessary in clearing prairie land for cultivation:

Less than four days were now needed to break the sod and plough one hectare of prairie, compared to nearly eighty days to clear a hectare of forest. Henceforth, forest clearing as an element in the formation of the landscape diminished in importance compared with other processes, both actually and in popular imagination, as the glamour of the open range, cowboys – in fact, everything that made up the atmospheric concept of ‘the West’ – overshadowed the often harsh reality of forest pioneering. (“Ecology, imperialism, and deforestation,” 172)

As Williams illustrates and outlines, the ever-fluctuating American imagination was not determinative of the ecological history of the US, but was itself determined by the material realities of an emergent capitalist economy. Furthermore, within fifty years of these new industrial technologies providing, not only new means of resource production, but an ideological construct of the American West, the US Census Bureau would officially declare the close of the national frontier. It was at this moment - during a latter half of the 19th century that witnessed the almost total destruction of the country’s forests and alternate resource reserves - that images of wildernesses and frontiers ironically became solidified in the American consciousness as an inherent part of national identity.

Indeed this new appreciation for ‘the wilderness’ came at the end of an urbanizing Progressive era society entrenched in the anxieties produced by and
consequent of post-wilderness metropolises. By the 1870s and 1880s the
romanticizing of the natural world was already accompanying a popular protest
against the monopoly capitalism – in particular the railroad monopoly – that had
usurped the agrarian sector as the ultimate inheritor of the ‘pioneering spirit.’ An
animosity that had once been associated with the wilderness frontier, that which had
hindered the means to progress and development, was now applied to the results of
this progress: the consequences of industrialization and the urban metropolis. Indeed,
it was not by mischance that progressive-era novelist Upton Sinclair would entitled his
realist work on the devastating consequences of industrial work and life in urban
Chicago, *The Jungle*. The European settlers who had once prophesized and worked
toward a ‘Golden Age’ of industrial capitalism, would find themselves cynical, world
weary citizens of a nation who was passing through what many sarcastically referred
to as the ‘Gilded Age.’

It was during this era of dissolution with the production of the natural world,
that other European nations were beginning to look toward peripheral ecologies not
just as byproducts, but as relevant and essential tools in the ideological maintenance of
Empire. As Libby Robin notes in her examination of eighteenth and nineteenth
century Natural History museums in Europe:

‘Natural resource’ benefits were important to the economics of empire. In
addition, the British Empire in particular placed a high value on
natural history, on ‘curiosities.’ In Victorian England, the cabinet of
curiosities was a mark of class and civilization, a cultural rather than an
economic resource of empire. (“Ecology: a science of empire?,” 64)
Searching for a binding identity in light of a unified, colonial nation – and taking certain cues from other European powers - late-19th century US citizens began to turn toward the wilderness as a concept capable of articulating their ideologies of empire and nationhood. The unfortunate irony of this turn is that it appeared after forty percent of the forests in the United States had been sacrificed in the name of progress. As Craig Allin notes in his analysis of 19th century American timber production:

Wood dominated as a source of energy, domestically and industrially, until well after 1885, and a case could be made for asserting that America’s industrial growth in the latter part of the nineteenth century was based on cheap and abundant supplies of timber for fuel. Without the intensive use of its extensive forest, America could not have become such a major world power. (The Politics of Wilderness Preservation, 173)

And so, as we identify the material realities underlying the shifting wilderness ideologies in the US, we must simultaneously keep in mind the very real ecological devastation that preceded this shifting consciousness and the new popular embrace of a nationally-defining American wilderness.

Indeed, as one of the founders of early social conservatism and economic liberalism, Edmund Burke, had noted as early as 1790, “the laws of commerce are the laws of nature.” (A Philosophical Inquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, 31) The American transition from utilization to preservation exemplified Burke’s dialectic, case and point. Preservation, as an imperial rhetoric meant to chart, contain and apply certain environments for ‘use’ by the American citizenry, became a primary mediating force between nature and commerce by the close of the 19th century. Gifford Pinchot, a Republican Progressive who would serve
as the first chief of the newly created United States Forest Service in 1905, and whose debates with John Muir regarding deep unwavering policies of preservation vs. a ‘wise use’ conversation ethic would greatly influence Theodore Roosevelt’s preservation and production policies, best exemplifies the capitalist sentiment underlying late 19th and early 20th century environmental policy. Pinchot’s conception of a ‘working forest’ which would provide sustainable yields to a small selection of government sanctioned timber companies, outlines an attempt to regulate and reconsider early American environmental destruction, but continues to do so in a way that privileges capital accumulation over an awareness of eco-political rights. Consider Pinchot’s famous 1903 speech to President Roosevelt regarding the political and economic incentives embedded in the preservationist project:

…to preserve forests because they are beautiful, though that is good in itself; but the primary object…is the making of prosperous homes…Your attention must be directed not to the preservation of the forests as an end in itself, but as a means for preserving the increasing prosperity of the nation. ‘Forestry is preservation of the forests by wise use. (as cited in Allin, 49)

While this ethic of ‘wise use’ demonstrates a cognizance of the fragility of early 20th century American ecologies – an ideological shift from the hostile narratives of inexhaustibility presented by early settler-colonists – this new alliance between the imperial metropol (Roosevelt in the White House) and the ‘scientific’ periphery (Pinchot in the Forest Service) for the sake of industrial resource yield would set forth a US governmental policy of eco-political economics in which relationships between the forest service, lobbying timber companies, and presidents would always ultimately determine the criteria for ‘wise use’ – a recent example of which can perhaps be seen
in George W. Bush’s appointment of Mark Rey, a timber lobbyist and anti-national
forest partisan, as de facto head of the United States Forest Service for eight
consecutive years.

And yet, while Gifford Pinchot has already been isolated by dominant literary
naturalism as an ecological entrepreneur, the means by which he would influence and
instill this ethic of ‘useful preservation’ into the discourse of more admired American
environmentalists is all too often ignored and forgotten. Even John Muir, one of
Pinchot’s most antagonistic opponents, and the inheritor of a NGO tradition of
environmentalism, would advocate for the maintenance and protection of
‘undeveloped’ nature as a ‘useful producer:’

One is constantly reminded of the infinite lavishness and fertility of
Nature – inexhaustible abundance amid what seems like enormous
waste. And yet when we look into any of her operations that lie within
reach of our minds, we learn that no particle of her material is wasted or
worn out. It is eternally flowing from use to use, beauty to yet higher
beauty; and we soon cease to lament waste and death, and rather rejoice
and exult in the imperishable, unspendable wealth of the universe, and
faithfully watch and wait the reappearance of everything that melts and
fades and dies about us, feeling sure that its next appearance will be
better and more beautiful than the last. (My First Summer in the Sierra,
189)

Unlike Pinchot who would never see national ecology beyond its direct resource yield,
Muir was able to envision and articulate alternate uses of the American landscape
which would associate not just ‘production’ but consumption – the gaze of the citizen
– as part and parcel to the state project of environmental colonization. By 1895, Muir
would outline this vision in the form of a national park:

The Forests must be, and will be, not only preserved, but used…under
trained officers, the forests like perennial fountains, may be made to
yield a sure harvest of timber, while at the same time all their far-
reaching beneficent uses may be maintained unimpaired. (as cited in Allin, 36)

Like Pinchot and others, Muir conceived of and advocated for the creation of national parks in light of an economy of timber. Yet it is Muir’s foreshadowing of the more ‘far-reaching beneficent uses’ that would rise to prominence in the national consciousness long after the industrial movement toward coal and other mineral resources had replaced the need for wood in the developing American economy. The benefits of the American ecology would likewise shift from its use as a means of production to its use as a means of consumption. The proprietary gaze and repose brought to an American citizenry by the ‘environmental landscape’ would become the new means by which preservation was articulated and advocated for in the political arena. In attempts to realign the use-value of preservation with the picturesque aesthetic experience, wilderness advocates would work to present the necessity of ‘consuming nature’ as an integral part of the American experience. In his 1864 treatise, *Man and Nature*, George P. Marsh would locate aesthetic consumption in terms of historical identity, locating the national citizenry’s roots in a pre-social experience with their nonhuman environment, claiming that “it is desirable that some large and reasonably accessible region of American soil should remain, as far as possible, in its primitive condition.” (26)

This shifting sentiment in use-value, from production to consumption toward the latter half of the 19th century, would culminate in the McFarland-Olmsted draft, the first government initiative to:

…promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments and reservations hereinafter specified by such means
and measures as to conform to the fundamental purpose of said parks, monuments and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein, and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. (as cited in Allin, 49)

This draft, the first in a series of measures to lay the legislative foundations for US national parks, marked the movement of forests from hostile and overabundant enemies of progress to historical markers of a national identity that could be reaffirmed through visual consumption. And yet, to see this transition as fluid or exact would miss out on the tensions between preservation and production that continue to influence environmental policies today. As Don Wilson notes in *Preserving our National Heritage*, even today, “the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service, for example, control the disposition of their lands for ‘resource activities’ that include wilderness preservation, but also timber production, domestic livestock grazing, minerals development, and other commercial uses.” (as cited in Byerly, 89)

And so, as we go on to consider the formation of over-determined subjectivities and the biopolitical bare lives resulting from the eco-human creation of national parks, we must do so recognizing that in a liberal capitalist ethic which values life always and only as a potential resource, preservation and production will continue to remain two side of the same coin.

...no holier temple: Over-determined Subjectivities and the American Wilderness Cult
If the McFarland-Olmsted draft would legislatively reaffirm the now popular desire to frame American ecology in terms of contained recreational sites for a national public, we must likewise critically consider the criteria of what constitutes both the ‘public’ in this instance and the process of ‘recreation’ itself. And to understand the ideological constituents of a park-oriented national public, we also owe some attention to the American environmental literary imagination, as it functioned as a colonial mold, shaping a national identity around an exclusionary white, Anglo male, capitalist-class consciousness. While the environmental imaginary has been considered and reconsidered so often as to warrant it as an ideological hegemon in American Studies at large, its role in the same biopolitical colonial project that would materialize in the national park and continue to influence environmental and humanitarian discourse today, is all too often neglected. As David Mazel notes, while the establishment of national parks, for example – “clearly begins after conquest, much of what we recognize as literary environmentalism just as clearly begins earlier, as a quite interested style for knowing territory that at the time was not undisputed United States soil, a style generally predicated upon an imperial teleology that always took for granted the eventual domination of the region in question.” (“American Literary Environmentalism as Domestic Orientalism,” 144)

This assumption of certain nonhuman territories as distinctly ‘American’ came at the heels of an anti-urbanism rapidly spreading among those inhabiting the growing metropolises of Philadelphia, Boston and New York. Anti-urbanism, as Leo Marx notes in his seminal work The Machine in the Garden, was not just an outright dismissal of and dissatisfaction with the urban environment, but a desire to completely
re-conceive of the American landscape, not in terms of progress but primitivism. The re-conceptual process would not take one form alone, but set forth a growing dialectic of imperial culture and the human’s relation to the nonhuman world, what Marx refers to as “a far more inclusive, if indirect and unequivocal, attitude toward the transformation of society and of culture of which the emerging industrial city is but one manifestation.” (The Machine in the Garden, 13) By 1890, even Frederick Jackson Turner had begun to employ the wilderness experience as a means for allegorizing and theorizing national culture, claiming that “out of my wilderness experience, out of the freedom of my opportunities, I fashioned a formula for social regeneration – the freedom of the individual to seek his own.” (Turner, 43)

Wilderness as a ‘formula for social regeneration’ would find its own self regenerated by the national park through, what Robert Nash refers to as, the wilderness cult:

The cult had several facets. In the first place there was a growing tendency to associate wilderness with America’s frontier and pioneer past that was believed responsible for many unique and desirable national characteristics. Wilderness also acquired the importance as a source of virility, toughness and savagery – qualities that defined fitness in Darwinian terms. Finally, an increasing number of Americans invested wild places with aesthetic and ethical values, emphasizing the opportunity they afforded for contemplation and worship. (117)

The cult, of course, was not representative of the American public working in factories, indebted and indentured in the post-plantation South, or relocating to new territories cut, formed, and designated by the ongoing imperial project. Rather, the wilderness cult, and its subsequent over-determined subject, was the product of an American aristocracy whose unawareness of the uneven disparities and alienating
elements created by liberal capitalism would lead them to make such blindsided
comments as -“the millions are awake enough for physical labor, but only one in a
million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion.” (Thoreau, 152)

Thoreau’s admonishing of the working classes for their inability to transcend
the alienating environments of urban industry, bespeaks not only his own ignorance to
the all-consuming nature of working class labor, but signifies his role as a member of
the privileged American public, whose over-determined subjectivity is determined by
its contrast to those Others – the working class, enslaved peoples, indigenes, and, also
in this case, colonized nature - now devoid of agency and labeled as bare life. This
new ‘re-creational’ use of nature as that which emphasized Cartesian subjectivity by
juxtaposing it to a silenced wilderness, would find its clearest articulation in Ralph
Waldo Emerson’s transcendentalism, which advocated a complete dismissal of the
biological self at the behest of an ideologically subjugated nonhuman world:

Know then, that the world exists for you. For you is the phenomenon
perfect…As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind,
that will unfold its great proportions. A correspondent revolution in
things will attend to the influx of the spirit. So fast will disagreeable
appearances, swine, spiders, snakes, pests, mad-houses, prisons,
enemies, vanish; they are temporary and shall be no more seen…The
kingdom of man over nature, which commeth not with observation, - a
dominion such as now is beyond his dream of God, - he shall enter
without more wonder than the blind man feels who is gradually restored
to perfect sight. (Nature, 189)

Emersonian transcendentalism, with its premise that ‘the world exists for you’ would
set the stage for environmental movements surrounding the creation and maintenance
of national parks. National park advocates, acting on the presumption of an inherent
binary distinction between wilderness and civilization, would articulate their political
aims by either anthropomorphizing the natural world as a creation parallel to great human achievements, or by highlighting it as a silent, subdued, contemplative space for the realization of, what I will argue was primarily, the white, male Anglo self – the US citizen’s cerebral identification as the over-determined colonizer.

By the late-1990’s an American wildlife activist, advocating for the cultural gains achieved by reintroducing wolves into Yellowstone national park, was quoted as saying:

How do you say what it means to have lost the wolf in a place like Yellowstone? How do you say what a Mozart symphony is? How do you say what it’s like to lose the Mona Lisa?’ (as cited in Byerly, 58)

For this activist, the only way to express the value of a nonhuman other is by comparing it to various social and cultural achievements throughout human history. Preservation - or protection from the endangerment and extinction of a species as predicated by various means of habitat production and development – can only, in this instance, be articulated through reference to the victim’s perceived value to the hegemonic culture.

This anthropomorphizing of nature as a necessary cultural space, I would argue, is not a transformation away from, but a reaffirmation of the rhetoric presented by the early environmental advocates who claimed national parks as ‘America’s greatest artistic achievements.’ In 1906, when the city of San Francisco applied to the United States Department of the Interior to gain the water rights to the Hetch Hetchy Valley, John Muir responded in public outrage, citing the valley’s import as a
theological foundation for the realization of human values and transcendental possibility:

These temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and, instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the Mountains, lift them to the almighty dollar. Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people’s cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man. (“Hetch-Hetchy Valley, 2)

For Muir, the battle for Hetch Hetchy, like the battle for all national parks in the US, is fought by arguing for the land’s use-value not as receptacle for industrial resources like timber, coal, oil or water, but as a means of helping American culture further outline and define its own subjective underpinnings. This assumption that the natural world must exist through either cultural or economic import is born out from a Western ontology that defines the human being and social culture as predicated on environments that lie outside those spaces of interaction, progress and achievement.

As Val Plumwood argues, this Western ontological construct of the human relies on a fully materialized nonhuman Other by which it might be juxtaposed:

…the uncivilized, the animal and animalistic. European justification for invasion and colonization proceeded from this basis, understanding non-European lands and the people and animals that inhabited them as ‘spaces’, ‘unused, underused or empty’ (“Decolonizing Relationships with Nature,” 53)

This categorization of anthropological and biological knowledge, whose epistemological history can be traced back and beyond Aristotle, has become embedded in the very language by which we support, reinforce, contend or challenge these ontological categories. As Gary Snyder points out, even the word wild is defined in dictionaries as that “by what – from a human standpoint – it is not.” (9)
*Wilderness*, or nature – as it is defined apart from civil society – is entrenched in a battle with human communities for both its own definition as well as the identification of the Other.

Nature, as the defining opposite necessary for Western ontological identifications of the human, and, simultaneously, an ‘artistic creation’ parallel to humankind’s greatest cultural and theological achievements, thus finds its most realized articulation of its own dialectic in the *national park*, which Alison Byerly refers to as a piece of ‘fixed’ or found art:

The [national park] is able to obscure the boundary between nature and human art because the origin of its ‘artistry’ is unfixed. Although the actual implementation of picturesque aesthetic principles often involve ludicrous contrivance, in theory the picturesque is accidental. The viewer stumbles upon a scene or a prospect in which the elements are arranged ‘as if’ in a picture; he or she mentally frames the scene through a process that is part recognition, part creation. The apparently ‘accidental’ manifestation of the picturesque implies that the scene’s properties are inherent, ready to be discovered. The presence of the spectator, however, is no accident. It is the spectator who engages the machinery of the picturesque aesthetic, mentally manufacturing a work of art where before there had been a work of nature. The defining feature of the picturesque scene is not chance but its opposite, pure intentionality. (“The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System,” 55)

The intentionality embedded in the picturesque aesthetic brought forth through ‘wilderness’ – as best represented by the national park as a presumably nonhuman human creation - not only lengthens and accelerates the divide between human and nonhuman identities, but also obscures the way in which certain human communities are ultimately labeled *as* nonhuman within this mediating process. Indeed, as Henry David Thoreau, perhaps unwittingly, acknowledges, the preservation of *wilderness* has as much to do with the creation of a *wild* human, an uncivil subject, as it does with the
over-determined subjectivities of Western individualism. When he claims to not want “every part of man cultivated, any more than I would have every acre of earth,” Thoreau both sets forth a teleology of human development that moves away from the natural world, and signals to the possibility that in his own historical moment there might exist classifiable hierarchies of humans existing at different points along this teleological line. (“Walking”, 14)

Using Thoreau as a guide and exemplar, the following section will trace the means by which American literary environmentalism incorporated certain ‘wild’ human Others into its depiction of the picturesque aesthetic, a process that would ultimately result in George Catlin’s call for a nation’s park “containing man and beast.”

...a part and parcel of Nature: The Thoreauvian Imagination and its Wild Other

In his perhaps most notable and remembered work, *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau first began to articulate his philosophy of the binary human, made up of both the civil subject and its more ‘wild’ counterpart:

Once or twice, however, while I lived at the pond, I found myself ranging the woods like a half-starved hound, with a strange abandonment, seeking some kind of venison which I might devour, and no morsel could have been too savage for me…I found myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good…I like sometimes to take rank hold of life and spend my day as the animals do. (Thoreau, 161)
In clear contrast to his settler-colonist forefathers, Thoreau, the imperial citizen, would not only seek a life defined by the liberal ethos of civil society, developmental progress and capitalist ethics of production, but conceive of these traits as one part of the divided human whose other half was likened to the ‘primitive ranks’ of a ‘savage animal.’ While Thoreau acknowledges each end of this distinct binary opposition as integral components to his own self, he goes on to chart a genealogy of the spiritual and the savage as rooted in social histories of the European West and the more ‘primitive’ New World.

In his essay “Walking,” for instance, published in 1864, Thoreau would outline this history as one similar to those ontologies set forth by Byron, Wordsworth and other European Romantics, wherein civil society had forced its white, Anglo subjects away and apart from their more ‘natural’ ‘simpler’ roots in the wild:

Here is this vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature, lying all around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children, as the leopard; and yet we are so early weaned from her breast to society, to that culture which is exclusively an interaction of man on man, - a sort of breeding in and in, which produces at most a merely English nobility, civilization destined to have a speedy limit. (“Walking,” 164)

While Thoreau’s teleology recognizes the self-destructive potential embedded in Western civil society, it reaffirms this very same society as being that which is defined in opposition to the natural world and those other communities framed by its designated attributes. European society’s linear movement away from ‘Nature’ and the romanticized nostalgia for a ‘savage, howling mother’ thus only further distinguished the biopolitical criteria against which settler-colonial societies would come to define themselves.
The linear chronology distancing European civil society from primitive ecologies is further emphasized and expanded upon by Thoreau’s recognition of natural resources as fuel for social development:

The civilized nations – Greece, Rome, England – have been sustained by the primitive forests which anciently rotted where they stand. They survive as long as the soil is not exhausted. Alas for human culture! Little is to be expected of a nation, when the vegetable mould is exhausted, and it is compelled to make manure of the bones of its fathers. (“Walking,” 166)

Like Muir, Pinchot and others, Thoreau’s focus on the primitive forests as absolutely essential for any and all national growth, represents a progressive move toward bringing sustainable conservation practices into the state-based, or even national, political arenas. Identifying natural resources with cultural hegemonies – ‘Greece, Rome, England’ – as opposed to purely military or economic powers, emphasizes the means by which artistic, philosophical and socio-political achievements are equally reliant on the sustenance of organic ecologies.

And yet, Thoreau’s defense of the primitive forest is premised on an assumed parasitic relationship by which civil society, economies and cultures feed from the nonhuman world, and it is the modern world’s fracturing of this relationship alone that spawns the preservationist sentiment. This logic thus solidifies and naturalizes the false presumption that the nonhuman environment was created and exists for the human world.

In 1846, during a brief departure to make a trip to Mount Katahdin in Maine, Thoreau was confronted with harsher ecologies that could not be neatly inserted into
the use-value logics of his earlier preservationist discourse. Reflecting on this experience in the first part of *The Maine Woods*, Thoreau writes:

Here was no man’s garden, but the unhandled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor wasteland. It was the fresh and natural surface of the planet Earth, as it was made forever and ever, - to be the dwelling of man, we say, - so Nature made it, and many may use if he can. Man was not to be associated with it. It was Master, vast, terrific, - not his Mother Earth that we have heard of, not for him to tread on, or be buried in, - no, it were being too familiar even to let his bones lie there, - the home, this, of Necessity and Fate. There was clearly felt the presence of a force not bound to be kind to man. It was a place for heathenism and superstitious rites, - to be inhabited by men nearer the kin to the rocks and wild animals than we…I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one – that my body might, - but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them…Think of our life in nature, - daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, - rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! The solid earth! The actual world! The common sense! Contact! Contact! Who are we? Where are we? *(The Maine Woods*, 149)

The existential crisis presented here – arguably Thoreau’s first contact with the ‘actual wilderness’ – that which forces him to reconsider not only his preconceived notions of environment and ecology, but his own conditioned human identity, has often been cited as the writer’s first move away from a strict and unwavering Emersonian transcendentalism. The ‘common sense’ acquired during his journey through the desolate, unwavering landscape of Katahdin, drives like a spike through the traditional environmentalist logic that nature’s precondition arises from its use-value to human civil society. An anti-theological rhetoric wherein the Judeo-Christian God is not the creator, and environments might exist as ‘no man’s gardens,’ Thoreau’s visit to the mountain of Katahdin could be read as the writer’s first attempt to outline a politics of preservation wherein the nonhuman is maintained, conserved and left-alone for no
other reason than its own fundamental right to survival and livelihood – what some contemporary eco-critics might refer to as ‘deep ecology.’

And yet, Thoreau does identify a habiting body to this supposedly uninhabitable landscape – those he refers to as “men nearer the kin to the rocks and wild animals than we.” Additionally, in this ‘no man’s garden’ Thoreau ascribes a culture – albeit one antithetical to the Judeo-Christian traditions – dictated by “heathenism and superstitious rites.” While many might argue that the image of the animalistic man here stands in as a literary mechanism employed in the process of Thoreau’s own self-deconstruction, I would argue, by looking more specifically at Thoreau’s later writings on the relationship between indigenous culture and the nonhuman world, that Thoreau’s Katahdin experience cannot be praised alone as a move toward deeper ecological understanding, but an associative gesture, tying both nonhuman landscapes and human cultures along one side of the axis of European civil society and New World bare life.

The transition from nature as a necessary commodity for European settler culture to its existence separate and apart from civil society is expanded upon in his 1881 text, *Natural History of Massachusetts*. Here, Thoreau reiterates his teleological model of the nonhuman world and European urban society, re-envisioning it within a binary relationship comprised of two distinct modes of knowledge – the one which has its roots in the Enlightenment, and the other which is intimately tied to the natural laws of nonhuman ecologies:

We do not learn inference and deduction and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy. It is with science as with ethics – we cannot know truth by contrivance
and method; the Baconian is as false as any other, and with all the helps of machinery and the arts, the most scientific will still be healthiest and friendliest man, and possess a more perfect Indian wisdom. (Natural History of Massachusetts, 13)

These distinctions between theory and application, abstract reason and experiential observation, carry with them associative categorizations of the human societies from which the praxes have developed. The arts, machinery, the application of mathematics and philosophy – are all tied to a Baconian logic, which Thoreau both sees as alienating and unproductive in understanding the natural world. Yet, Thoreau simultaneously, by acknowledging Francis Bacon as a progenitor of distinctly European Enlightenment values, juxtaposes this theoretical position to “a more perfect Indian wisdom.” Thoreau’s advocating for and romanticizing of indigenous relationships to nonhuman ecologies does as much to critique Baconian practice as it does to dehumanize indigenous communities serving as Euro-scientific counterparts. As David Lowenthal notes, the indigene as environmental representative, even when exploited for purposes of sustainability and deep ecological conservation, sacrifices the subject’s agency, labeling Native Americans as being inseparable from their inhabited landscapes:

Native influence is still seen as light, but lightness has become a virtue instead of a vice. Indigenes whose impact on nature was once dismissed as derisory are now stewards blessed with inherent environmental wisdom. The same mindset that replaces confidence in technology with malaise about its fearsome effects exalts tribal peoples as ecological gurus. Aboriginal and Native American reverence of nature is held necessary to repair the ravages of technocratic greed…Just as indigenes changed their environments more radically than settlers realized, so too they not infrequently wrought environmental havoc. No culture has a monopoly on ecological sanctity…To view indigenes as incapable of harm is as dehumanizing as earlier notions that they could do no good. Romantic primitivism jeopardizes realistic rapport with the
Unfortunately, David Lowenthal’s essay, in reaction to the dehumanizing exploitation of Native symbols by many mainstream environmental advocates, dismisses any gestures toward the alternative environmentalisms of communities like the Cherokee and Sioux, making the very limited claim that ecological destruction is an inherent part of ‘humanness.’ Nevertheless, this passage locates the rhetorical violence through which popular environmentalism has entrapped indigenous ecological engagement. And as a predecessor to these more contemporary movements exploiting ‘romantic primitivism’ as a symbol for environmental conservation, Thoreau’s ‘deep ecology’ then, must not be naively embraced as advocating or upholding indigenous environmental values. Rather, Thoreau is outlining a particular Wild in which both man and beast might be contained within one conflated ethic of the natural world. For Thoreau, both indigenous ecological and cultural heritage are signifiers of Native conflation with an anti-civilization, an observation best articulated in his claim - “if we could listen but for an instant to the chant of the Indian muse, we should understand why he will not exchange his savageness for civilization.” (“Walking,” 143)

Thus, when Thoreau writes in his experience at Katahdin that he will “fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one – that my body might, - but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them,” I would argue that he is not only referring to the deconstructed civil subject, released from its binding, over-determined Cartesian subjectivity – but to bodies apart from his own, bodies that are only bodies, capable of inhabiting landscapes and environments hostile to the European settler. These bodies, indigenous
and deemed inseparable to their inhabited environments, are part of Thoreau’s understanding of the *wild* as ‘that which the Anglo-subject is not’ and it is to these bodies, I would argue, that he is also referring when he writes, “the West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the World.” (“Walking,” 165)

Thoreau’s ethic of preservation in which not only landscapes, but their habiting bodies constitute the American wilderness and its role in the environmental imagination, finds its materialization in the prospects of the early national park. Like Catlin, Thoreau envisions a space wherein both ecological and human agency might be contained and placed on display for an Anglo-settler citizenry. By 1858, Thoreau had outlined this plan in an essay entitled "Chesuncook," first published in the *Atlantic Monthly*:

The kings of England formerly had their forests "to hold the king's game," for sport or food, sometimes destroying villages to create or extend them; and I think that they were impelled by a true instinct. Why should not we, who have renounced the king's authority, have our national preserves, where no villages need be destroyed, in which the bear and panther, and some even of the hunter race, may still exist, and not be "civilized off the face of the earth,"—our forests, not to hold the king's game merely, but to hold and preserve the king himself also, the lord of creation,—not for idle sport or food, but for inspiration and our own true re-creation? or shall we, like villains, grub them all up, poaching on our own national domains? (317)

Here one sees the over-determined subject in its most perverse and extreme form. The body of the king (or the state), rises from a preserved arena in which panther, bear and the 'ethnic' body of the Native American are obscured into the universal 'other' against which settler society reinvents its economic expansionist policies as a moral initiative and an environmental mission.
The conclusions drawn by Thoreau, his predecessors, and the environmental literary traditions which would follow were all formative in creating and affirming a discourse of preservation, where - not unlike Homi Bhabha’s definition of the fetish - the human element was both obscured and naturalized as part and parcel of the process. The concluding part of this chapter will thus consider this ‘human element’ as it was transformed from early racist sentiments toward indigenous communities inhabiting New World ecologies, to a refined humanitarian discourse wherein certain peoples were ‘preserved’ at the sacrifice of their political agencies and recognition as being part of a historically changing, civil society.

...and not be ‘civilized off the face of the earth: The Confinement of Human Communities in Preservationist Discourse

Henry David Thoreau’s conflation of indigenous communities and the landscapes they had come to inhabit was not born out from innovations in the environmental literary imagination alone. Rather, the tendency to neutralize and dehumanize indigenous subjectivities came from the dominant colonialist dismissal of distinctions between indigenous rights to the land, and the indigene as being indigenously bound within (or inseparable from) the land. Land, in the settler imaginary was not an active agent capable of its own modes of organization and communion, but was viewed as either a land-scape - a back drop upon which the independent (Anglo) subject was to act upon - or a space for improvement, development and the production of its resources. While Native American
communities, as Shepard Krech and others would note, were impacting and engaging with the nonhuman environment through an array of practices unfamiliar to Western culture, the longstanding imperial tradition that laid claim to lands along the continent’s east coast had already formed a conception of indigenes as ‘incapable of improvement.’ As David Lowenthal notes:

At the outset, imperial settlers were hardly aware of indigenous impacts, blind to sights of non-European occupation. They assumed that they saw virtually untouched virgin lands, ‘almost fresh from the Maker’s hands.’ That indigenes without permanent farms or advanced tools had, over millennia, profoundly altered New World landscapes, and were still doing so, long went unrecognized. To be sure, it suited colonial incomers to overlook signs of native alteration; the apparent absence of indigenous ‘improvements’ helped to justify the removal of indigenes from tribal lands. (“Empires and Ecologies,” 234)

The dismissal of native alteration that allowed settler colonists to justify their own appropriation was part and parcel of a larger process of racial and ethnic distinctions that considered human communities as either tied to the land or capable of its transformation. As Huggans and Tiffins note, for settler colonists, the imaginary relationships presumed to exist between Native communities and the land was formed, not by comparisons to their own cultures, but through specific racial distinction:

Had colonists perceived a parallel between native hunters and lower-ranking Englishmen who trapped game in order to put meat on the table, they might have acquired some understanding of a vital part of Indian culture. By likening Indian men to gentlemen of leisure, however, colonists indulged moral judgements that had little to do with social and economic conditions in native villages. (Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment, 20)

While Huggan and Tiffins’ speculation about settler-native relations is still quite reductive, their argument that Native American society could be arranged and molded so flexibly in the colonialist mindset, suggests a fetishization of culture that allows
relations of power to replace communication and understanding in setting forth the
dimensions and dictates of the settler’s acquisition of knowledge about indigenous life
and lifestyle. Excluded from conversations surrounding civil society and democratic
inclusion, Native communities were fully transformed by Western imperialist
epistemological categorizations that, through dialogues of exploitation and
preservation, neutralized, contained, and confined their subjective agencies in a
museum culture of exhibition and consumable entertainments. As Renata Wasserman
notes in her detailed accounts of indigenous communities in the US and Mexico –
much like the landscapes they inhabited, native culture was placed on display as a
‘curiosity’ by which over-determined subjects might continually re-invoke and re-
imagine the dominance of Western civil society:

    Indians paraded before royal courts; like turkeys and parrots in cages
were the innocent signifiers of an otherness that was [...] exotic, that is,
non-systematic, carrying no meaning other than that imposed by the
culture to which they were exhibited. (“Re-inventing the New World,”
132)

This association of the Native American body as a non-systematic exhibition would
ultimately conflate these groups within the same categories of preservationist dialogue
formerly reserved for the nonhuman environment. The flattening of subjectivities
upon what settlers perceived to be an unchanging, inactive, two-dimensional
landscape, would grow into a discourse employed by Thoreau, Catlin, and others that
would justify the need to preserve Native culture as premised on its status as passive
life.

The creation of passive life as rooted in the environmental imaginary is not
entirely distinct to early-American culture. As Raymond Williams notes in his seminal
work, *The Country and the City*, the very nature of pastoral writing is premised upon the over-determined subjectivity of ‘close observers’ of the English countryside, misperceiving or ‘overlooking’ the working classes as being embedded within the landscape itself. “The labourer,” Williams writes, is “merged with his landscape, a figure within the general figure of nature.” (62)

This difference between the English pastoral observer and the American colonial environmentalist, I would argue, is that while the former merely dismisses the working class subject as buried within the landscape, the latter actively argues for the indigenous subject as an essential element in rendering the nonhuman world ‘wild.’ In the vein of his aforementioned writings, Thoreau provides a telling portrait of the indigenous fisherman, claiming that he “does not make the scenery less wild, more than the jays or the muskrats, but stands there as a part of it…He belongs to the natural family of man, and is planted deeper in nature and has ore root than the inhabitants of towns. (“A Winter Walk,” 141)

Thoreau’s ‘natural family of man’ not only attributes certain human communities to the natural world, but prefaces the presumed ‘naturalness’ of the nonhuman world on its association with certain ‘wild’ and ‘passive subjects.’ The conflation of human and nonhuman communities into a depoliticizing discourse of preservation became in the US context, not just a side effect of absent-minded literary environmentalists, but an active strategy employed to justify the conservationist message to an otherwise disinterested Anglo-American public.

These dialogues on the preservation of all-inclusive ‘passive’ life did not end with the conclusion of the 19th century, but would continue to develop and expand
throughout the course of US environmental history. As Shepard Krech points out, the rise of environmentalism as a grassroots agenda in the 1960's and 70's relied heavily on stereotyped cultural representations of what he refers to as the *Ecological Indian*:

Ecological Indians constituted fertile soil for those seeking alternative 'countercultural' lives. In the back-to-nature movement, many sought communal life shot through with American Indian tribal metaphors and material culture, as well as native religion - or any religious tradition, in fact, perceived as more in tune with ecology and in harmony with nature. Greenpeace marked the convergence of ecology, environmentalism, critique of the social order, and images of Native Americans as ecological prophets. More widely, environmentalists joined American Indians in their vision quests and struggles, and thought of themselves as 'tribalists.' (*The Ecological Indian*, 20)

Highly critical of such associations, Krech makes starkly clear how these 'countercultural' reproductions of Native American subjectivities deny the agency of indigenous culture and the ecological change that is inherently tied to organized political society:

...while this image may occasionally serve or have served useful polemical or political ends, images of noble and ignoble indigenousness, including the Ecological Indian, are ultimately dehumanizing. They deny both the variation within human groups and commonalities between them. As the historian Richard White remarked, the idea that Indians left no traces of themselves on the land 'demeans Indians. It makes them seem simply like an animal species, and thus deprives them of culture.' (*ibid*, 26)

Perhaps most importantly, the failure to consider Native ‘impact’ or engagement with nonhuman ecologies leaves environmental movements in the postcolonial US devoid of alternative models for articulating and implementing new practices of environmental justice. And yet, I also argue that this process of ‘dehumanization’ is not merely the consequence or side effect of a ‘well-intentioned’ environmentalist political strategy, but rather, as I hope to have illustrated, it is the means by which the
over-determine subject comes to define ‘himself’ against the landscape and people over which ‘he’ traverses.

As Jurij M. Lotman notes in his extensive work on the semiotics of culture, the Western narrative tradition itself is premised on the subject’s ability to move through a world of confine and contained Others, a narrative process which Lotman describes as resulting in only two types of characters:

…those who are mobile, who enjoy freedom with respect to plot-space, who can change their place in the structure of the artistic world and cross the frontier, the basic topological feature of this space, and those who are immobile, who represent, in fact, a function of this space…[which] is divided by a single boundary into an external and an internal sphere…[where only] a single character has the opportunity to cross that boundary (“The Origins of Plot in the Light of Typology,” 169)

Whereas Lotman fails to distinguish the means by which these character distinctions are inflected through exercises of power and the formation of subjugated others, Donna Haraway situates these plot distinctions within a predetermined set of gender dynamics where the mobile being is always already labeled through the pronoun he, and the feminine becomes the space upon which his movement is enacted. For Haraway, if Western narrative is orchestrated around “the hero and the limit of his action or the space through which he moves,” female agency is thus “fixed in the position of icon, spectacle, the one looked at, in which the subject sees the objectification of his action and subjectivity.” (Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science, 141)

I would take this reading of the ‘fixed’ and immobile position one step further, highlighting the means by which landscapes, or ‘spaces of Otherness’ can be formed
around a variety of subjugated communities whose agency has been sacrificed in the name of white, male over-determined subjectivities - what Sylvia Wynter refers to as “the Coloniality of Being:”

…the West’s new master code of rational/irrational nature was now to be mapped onto a projected Chain of Being of organic forms of life, organized about a line drawn between, on the one hand, divinely created-to-be-rational humans, and on the other, no less divinely created-to-be-irrational animals; that is, on what was still adaptively known through the classical discipline of “natural history” as a still supernaturally determined and created “objective set of facts.” This “space of Otherness” line of nonhomogeneity had then functioned to validate the socio-ontological line now drawn between rational, political Man (Prospero, the settler of European descent) and its irrational Human Others (the categories of Caliban [i.e., the subordinated Indians and the enslaved Negroses]), in exactly the same way as, before Copernicus, the “space of Otherness” projection of a nonhomogeneity of substance between the perfection of the celestial realm and the degradation of the terrestrial had reciprocally bolstered and validated the Spirit/Flesh code as enacted in the ontological value difference between clergy and laity within the terms of Judeo-Christianity’s matrixformulation of a “general order of existence. (“Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,” 313)

Wynter’s charted genealogy, (an important passage in understanding discourses of preservation at large, which was quoted in the Introduction and will be reiterated throughout this dissertation), with its extensive historical range, provides a broad theoretical lens for colonial subject formations. When juxtaposed to semiotic considerations of space, narrative, and power, we can see the means by which animality and landscape are conflated in what can be referred to as environmental colonialism, wherein, as Lawrence Buell notes, “nature has been doubly otherized in modern thought. The natural environment as empirical reality has been made to subserve human interests, and one of these interests has been to make it serve as a
symbolic reinforcement of the subservience of disempowered groups: nonwhites, women, and children.” *(The Environmental Imagination, 21)*

How these disempowered groups resist, act, or merely speak through their hybrid existences as both human communities and conflated parcels of the environmental landscape will be a concern of the following Chapter, which looks specifically at the indigenous American literary tradition as it has developed in response to this condition of confinement. The remainder of this Chapter will conclude with a more expansive consideration of preservationist discourse as it has developed, grown and transformed into a direct humanitarian dialogue which both furthers the 21st century imperial project at the same time that it purports to save certain communities and ecologies from the consequences of its own destructive excess.

*...in all the wild and freshness of their nature’s beauty! The Future of Environmental Preservation as Human Rights Discourse*

Even at its root juncture, the etymological break which divides the term *environ* - an active process of habiting - from its more commonly used derivation, *environment* - a passive, fixed, silenced space, void of its own transformative agency - draws forth a genealogy incorporative of Aristotle's distancing of nature through qualitative categorizations based on 'rationality,' Francis Bacon's torture of the natural world through analytic experimentation, and the 21st century Edenic rhetoric of an objective beauty larded over by a racist, patriarchal Adam who preserves, defends, and
exploits at the will of God or the free market. Within such a genealogy, environmental preservation in both the literary and political arenas, as David Mazel suggests, is not "a conceptually 'pure' and unproblematic resistance to power, a resistance based upon objective and disinterested organization of knowledge...[but] just one of many potential modes for exercising power, as a particular style, both political and epistemological, for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the real territories and lives that the environment displaces and for which it is invoked as a representation." (144) Like Foucault's definition of knowledge, environmentalism in its seeming neutrality allows for a series of biopolitical structures where both state and non-state actors can make crucial decisions as to what will be defined as 'nature' and what can be deemed industrial refuse, the undeveloped resources which fuel 'civilized' life. Raymond Williams makes this connection most clear and vivid in his assertion that the establishment of state-funded parks and the 18th century enclosure movements were "related parts of the same process...in the one case the land is being organized for production...while in the other it is being organized for consumption - the view, the ordered proprietary repose, the prospect." (124)

This particular breed of environmentalism - that which contains 'preservation' (commodification) and 'production' (industrialized exploitation) on either end of a scale held by a cultural imaginary dictating the contours of a 'natural world' in terms of the picturesque aesthetic - obscures a more radical environmental politics which would incorporate dialogues of preservation and production into a larger conversation of class struggle, anti-colonialism (both within the US and abroad), and the uneven geographic development of the globalized economy. Indeed, as John Belamy Foster
notes, the real issue at stake exists first and foremost in the recognition that no
environmental movement can ultimately achieve its intended affect without
simultaneously working to dismantle a global ethic of capitalism that lies at the heart
of our current ecological crisis:

    Logically, in order to be physically sustainable, an ecohistorical
    formation has to meet three conditions: (1) the rate of utilization of
    renewable resources has to be kept down to the rate of their
    regeneration; (2) the rate of utilization of nonrenewable resources
    cannot exceed the rate at which alternative sustainable resources are
    developed; and (3) pollution and habitat destruction cannot exceed the
    'assimilative capacity of the environment.' Yet, to achieve these ends,
    according to current ecological knowledge, we must not simply slow
    down present economic growth trends but reverse them. Nothing in the
    history of capitalism suggests that this will happen. (The Vulnerable
    Planet, 71)

    The figuration of environmentalism as a vehicle for exercising state power and
    the selective construction of a picturesque aesthetic is, as I hope to have shown
    throughout this Chapter, not too far distant from a political rhetoric which would
    additionally seek to incorporate the human along an axis of preservation and the
    production of dispensable, bare life.

    In his book, Appealing Subjects, Randall Jay Williams discusses the construct
    of the picturesque human in our own contemporary moment. Born from a supposedly
    apolitical rights project that would nonetheless set the sovereignly defining limits of
    what constitutes a victim of state violence, human rights, according to Williams, like
    19th century preservationist dialogue, is not an objective system of justice outside the
    socio-political influences of state economies, but a loose guise through which
    repressive force and state monopolized violence can be exercised with limited moral
    objection. Consider, for instance, this US State Department Report on Human Rights,
which could arguably be synonymous with a hypothetically corresponding report on

US environmental ethics:

Today, all talk is of globalization. But far too often, both its advocates and its critics have portrayed globalization as an exclusively economic and technological phenomenon. In fact, in the new millennium, there are at least three universal 'languages': money, the Internet, and democracy and human rights. An overlooked 'third globalization' - the rise of transnational human rights networks of both public and private actors - has helped develop what may over time become an international civil society capable of working with governments, international institutions, and multinational corporations to promote both democracy and the standards embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (as cited in Williams' Appealing Subjects, 17)

Here we see human rights not simply as a platform through which power acts, but as an active process in and of itself, a 'civilizing' mission - not in terms of religious ideology, but the globalization of neoliberal 'humanness' which positions the construct as inherently tied to the free market of transnational capitalism. This active rhetoric of human rights as a colonial tool can be further seen in Eqbal Ahmed's claim that:

Great imperial powers, especially democratic ones, cannot justify themselves on the basis of power or greed alone. No one will buy it...Modern imperialism needed a legitimizing instrument to socialize people into its ethos. To do that it needed two things: a ghost and a mission[...] After the Cold War, Western power was deprived both of a mission and the ghost. So the mission has appeared as human rights. It's a very strange mission for a country which for nearly a hundred years has been supporting dictatorships in Latin America and throughout the world. (30)

This manifestation of the human rights mission, like the US environmentalist mission, becomes a most horrid perversion of non-state internal resistance projects in its ability to conflate activism with imperialism, resistance with subjection, and neutrality with
neoliberal totalitarianism. And yet, my purpose here is not to compose an extensive comparison of various neoliberal 'missions,' but rather to see environmentalism and transnational human rights - in so much as they remain dialogues of preservation and the production of untapped 'resources' - as part and parcel of a state-building rhetoric which has continued to expand the ideological divides between human and non-human worlds, between use and value, between the over-determined subject and 'bare life.'

And so, as we look toward the efforts of UNESCO and other organizations in our own contemporary moment claiming new and innovative means for preserving both the human and nonhuman worlds, it is my hope that we might likewise trace the genealogy of this rhetoric back along its emergent points throughout US history, all the while maintaining a cautious critical awareness of the divides brought forth by this discourse – between humans and nonhumans, settler-colonists and indigenes, First World ‘protectorates’ and Third World ‘victims.’ Because it is indeed such divides as these, which have grown out from the history of the liberal nation state, reaching as far back as the first American settler’s hostile reactions to the seemingly endless expanse of wilderness, Thoreau’s belief that the ‘wildness’ of the world is premised on the containment of its uncivilized subjects, and finally, the imaginings of George Catlin and others, who all believed that one day this American environmental imagination would find itself fully realized in a "nation's park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty!"
Chapter 2:

Zitkala-Sa and the California (American) Indians: A Comparative Study of Early-20th Century Native Resistance Literature

As detailed in the previous Chapter, American environmentalism emerged from an erratic and unstable narrative of perceived land-value and colonialist ontologies, shifting perhaps most dramatically in 1890, when the US Census Bureau officially declared the close of the ‘American Frontier,’ and a progressive-era settler society that had once viewed the country and its perceived borders as inexhaustible space for endless resource accumulation now began to face the consequences of its own urban metropolises and cultivated farmlands. A longstanding US government policy of expansion and Manifest Destiny began transitioning toward new policies of containment and the concentration of people, property, and resources. Additionally, the ‘wilderness,’ that which had once been seen as the inhibitor of progress and development, was now invoked as a spiritual antidote of over-industrialized urban life. Indeed, it was not more than three years following the close of this frontier that Frederick Jackson Turner would advance a thesis arguing for such lost space as essential to the nation’s symbolic identification.

With these new identifications came a political discourse of preservation that espoused not only the containment of land for purposes of production, but also the establishment of spaces for the ideological reiteration of an American wilderness identity, what Raymond Williams locates as “related parts of the same process...in the one case the land is being organized for production...while in the other it is being organized for consumption - the view, the ordered proprietary repose, the prospect."
(The Country and the City, 62) On March 1st, 1872, this organized prospect was fully realized in the establishment of Yellowstone National Park, a 3,468 square mile tract of land that, by the close of the 19th century, was still inhabited by Crow and Blackfoot communities. That these tribes initially lived within and were later expelled from the nation’s first park is, of course, no coincidence. The earliest speculative discourse surrounding preserved spaces in the US had already figured in the Native subject as part and parcel of the contained landscape. By 1844 early preservationist, George Catlin, had begun signaling toward a place:

…where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, with sinewy bow, and shield and lance, amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes. What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world, in future ages. A nation’s Park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature’s beauty! (Letters and Notes on the North American Indian, Volume 1, 261-262)

Catlin’s statement (which is extensively elaborated on in Chapter 1) exemplifies the manner in which discourses of preservation, as embodied by the national park, came to represent ‘wild’ America - an ideological construct entailing the possibility of not just ‘wild’ landscapes, but ‘wild’ peoples as well. This ‘wild’ Native Other became necessary both to the over-determined identifications of white civil society and the reduction of indigenous subjects to bare life.

That this discourse not only failed to provide alternatives to, but actually facilitated a late 19th and early 20th century policy of extermination can most clearly be seen in the writings of popular newspaper columnists and politicians of the same period, who, albeit with different intentions, employed the same paternalistic,
dehumanizing rhetoric to forward and promote their claims. In December of 1890, only nine days before the massacre at Wounded Knee, well-known children’s book author and acting editor of South Dakota’s *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, Frank Baum, wrote:

> The whites, by law of conquest, by justice of civilization, are masters of the American continent and the best safety of the frontier settlers will be secured by the annihilation of the few remaining Indians…the PIONEER has before declared that our safety depends upon the total extermination of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries, we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow it up by one more wrong and wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth. (as cited in Chiarello, 9)

While Baum’s brazen racism may seem at odds with Catlin’s earlier, romanticized lament, both writers recognize, albeit perhaps unconsciously, that the ideological foundations of a white, Euro-colonial United States relied on the debasement and objectification of Native Americans. This overlap between paternalism and annihilation is perhaps best witnessed in President Theodore Roosevelt’s depiction of teleological US imperialism, what was otherwise articulated as Manifest Destiny:

> All men of sane and wholesome thought must dismiss with impatient contempt the plea that these continents should be reserved for the use of scattered savage tribes, whose life was but a few degrees less meaningless, squalid, and ferocious than that of the wild beasts with whom they held joint ownership…The most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages, though it is apt to be also the most terrible and inhuman. The rude, fierce settler who drives the savage from the land lays all civilized mankind under a debt to him. American and Indian, Boer and Zulu…in each case the victor has laid deep the foundations for the future greatness of a mighty people. (as cited in Jacobson, 218)

Roosevelt’s rhetoric, while differing from Catlin, and to a lesser degree Baum, in its aims and intents, brings together a picture of the colonizer that is inextricably bound to
the dehumanization of the colonized. ‘Civilization’ as employed by Roosevelt, exists only in its degree relation to the “scattered, savage tribes” that he seeks to dispossess of and evacuate from their land and country. His argument becomes circular here, as the pillars of this civilization rely on the obliteration of the social and political histories of Native communities residing within the colonized landscape, a process that Ngugi wa Thiong’o refers to as “the cultural bomb:”

…the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against…collective defiance…[Its] effect…is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves…It…plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death wish. (Decolonizing the Mind, 3)

This ‘cultural bomb,’ as employed by the rhetoric of both preservationists (Catlin) and the architects and advocates of genocide (Roosevelt and Baum) also took the form of various state operations and bureaucratic projects such as the re-allotment of tribal lands, the invention of a mismanaged Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the creation of militarized, assimilationist boarding-schools like the Carlisle Industrial School in Pennsylvania. Like the ideological language surrounding them, each of these institutions served to sever Native people from their cultural ties and community connections.

And yet, this severing project was not relegated to antiquated institutions alone. In fact, many of its most ardent proponents – Baum, Roosevelt, and Catlin
among them – continue to serve as the foundational ideologues for our current
American Studies guilds, where, as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn notes:

…contemporary American Indian Fiction is sustained as such by non-
Indian publishers and editors, critics and scholars for Euro-Anglo
canonical reasons (some might even suggest imperialistic reasons)
rather than for either the continuation of indigenous literary traditions
and development of nationalistic critical apparatuses or for the sake of
simple intellectual curiosity. (“How Scholarship Defames the Native
Voice…and Why,” 85)

Cook-Lynn’s comment here aligns directly to a contemporary (Anglo)American
Studies canon that incorporates Native writers only as ‘token’ subjects complementing
a neocolonial Western historiography, that which attempts to re-label US imperialism
as multiculturalism. Alternatively, such structures would likewise cast Native writers
as ‘victims’ within the Catlin\Baum binaries of preservation and the production of
bare life.¹

That Native communities were passive or indifferent to these re-constructions
as apolitical and ahistorical peoples is ultimately as dehumanizing as the discourses of
preservation themselves. From the Dakota Sioux Uprising (1862) through the
occupations at Alcatraz (1969-1971) and the Siege at Pine Ridge (1973) Native
resistance has continued throughout the 20th century as a means of constructing
politically transformative subjectivities capable of contesting the ongoing genocide.
The late 19th and early 20th centuries, in particular, witnessed a rise in Native literary

¹ It is with these imperialist structures of canonization and theorization in mind, that I
too, as a non-Native critic and reader, must carefully negotiate my readings of Zitkla-
Sa, Alfred C. Gillis, Samuel J. Rice, and Wa Wa Chaw. My goal being not to propose
any clear representation of particular Native cultures as such, but rather, to consider
the questions which arise when the American Studies canon and US cultural theories
are reinterpreted from Native critical centers.
production, a canon not just devoted to the preservation or maintenance of tribal pasts in a Euro-American dominated socio-cultural landscape, but, as Craig Womack argues, a new form of writing that worked “from within the nations, rather than looking toward the outside…emphasizing Native resistance movements against colonialism, confronting racism, discussing sovereignty and Native nationalism, seeking connections between literature and liberation struggles, and…rooting literature in land and culture.” (Red on Red: Native Literary Separatism, 6) Such a body of work would likewise require a new type of reader, capable of treating these texts, as Elaine Jahner notes, “not always as the object of critical inquiry…[but] as generating critical positions in and of themselves” (“Metalanguages,” 178).

Perhaps the most notable and critically represented writer of this period was Zitkala-Sa, a Yankton Sioux essayist, poet, playwright, folklorist and political activist. Born in South Dakota as Gertrude Simmons in 1876, Zitkala-Sa spent her childhood both on the Sioux Reservation and, later, in boarding schools throughout the East Coast. Her most famous works would come from the autobiographical pieces regarding her time as both a student and a teacher in these schools - these writings initially published in both Harpers and Atlantic magazines and later collected in a volume entitled American Indian Stories. Zitkala-Sa would expand beyond her literary career in the late 1910s and early 1920s, spending her last few decades as a Native activist, mediating intersections between white public policies and Native claims for justice, as well as serving as an ambassador between inter-tribal communities and the US government.
Zitkala-Sa’s fluency in English and her literary publications in the country’s most mainstream Anglo journals and magazines, placed her in a subject position that was never entirely accepted or accounted for by either society’s myths of cultural purity. Indeed, as Ron Carpenter notes, Zitkala-Sa’s written persona emerges as a ‘bicultural subject,’ “sign[ing] in a context that is inseparably Anglo and Yankton; a context in which she is irreducible to either culture and alienated from each.” (“Zitkala-Sa and Bicultural Subjectivity,” 1) Such a position allowed her access to a cultural canon and political vocabulary unavailable to many Yankton Sioux in South Dakota, and yet, it also separated her from many socio-political collaborations and networks of friends and family, as well as alienating her from the Anglo communities dominating the cities of the East Coast. As she would recall on her first journey home from the Carlisle Industrial School – “Even nature seemed to have no place for me. I was neither a wee girl nor a tall one; neither a wild Indian nor a tame one.” (American Indian Stories, 98) Here Zitkala-Sa emerges as a marginalized voice who, speaking out from the confines of late 19th century racist ideologies, testifies beyond the myths of both Catlin’s ‘wild hunter race’ and Roosevelt’s ‘scattered savages,’ shattering the fictions of both the moment she declares her own existence as that which is unidentifiable to either.

Just as Zitkala-Sa navigated and negotiated, contested, and oftentimes attempted to bridge the uneven gaps between Euro-American and Yankton societies, so too did she attempt to illuminate, challenge, and reconcile the tribal divides between the various and distinct Native communities still surviving and resisting in the United States. While maintaining her Yankton heritage, she engaged in a number
of different political alliances and cultural conventions that incorporated aspects of many non-Yankton tribal societies. This multi-tribal engagement would, at times, prove to be equally alienating. In a February 1918 edition of the *Washington Times*, white American ethnologist, James Mooney evoked Zitkala-Sa’s intertribal apparel in an attempt to discredit her as an ‘authentic’ Native writer and activist on the grounds of ‘racial impurity.’ He describes her dress: “She wore a fringed dress whose style identified its provenance as a southern Plains tribe; her belt was that of a Navajo man; and the fan she carried was, itself, a type used by men in the peyote ceremony.” (as cited in Cathy N. Davidson’s “Introduction” to *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*, xxiii)

While racial purity, as it outlines Mooney’s own claims, was a popular means for neutralizing the political message of Zitkala-Sa’s collaborative efforts, more recent scholarship has moved beyond these unsettling, deterministic myths and reevaluated the significance of Zitkala-Sa’s diverse, multi-representational subjectivity. Doreen Rappaport has noted the way in which Zitkala-Sa retooled early European allegorical tropes to highlight a trans-regional, transnational indigenous subject, explaining that “[she] knew her life story mirrored what had happened to thousands of other Indians forced to renounce their culture.” (*The Flight of Red-Bird: The Life of Zitkala-Sa*, 84) Ron Carpenter suggests that contemporary discomfort with the ambiguity of Zitkala-Sa’s autobiographical persona has more to do with our inability to listen than it does with an error in representation:

For her, the tradition of telling the self was embedded in letting others speak about the self: a person, or witness, was required to testify about what had happened to others, or what others had done. By explicating
the general experiences of Indian children, the narrator helps expand conceptions of autobiography beyond the egocentric. She thus uses personal omissions to iterate her similarities with other Indians, while suggesting a different type of self-representation dialogue. (“Zitkala-Sa and Bicultural Subjectivity,” 13)

In addition to alternate modes of self-representation, Zitkala-Sa also calls for a different type of listener. Her own autobiographical subject position, which is generated by both Anglo and Native representational modes and structures, requires a bicultural listener who can negotiate between and beyond the stereotyped Anglo/Indian binaries set forth and promoted by late 19th century preservationist discourse. This request for a new type of reader is alluded to throughout Zitkala-Sa’s autobiography, where she laments the silencing of her own voice by those who are, perhaps not unwilling, but as of yet, unable to listen:

The melancholy of those black days has left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have gone by…Perhaps my Indian nature is the moaning wind which stirs them now for their present record. But, however, tempestuous this is within me, it comes out as the low moan of a curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears that are bent with compassion to hear it. (American Indian Stories, 67-68)

As Zitkala-Sa’s autobiography not only testifies to the interpersonal experiences of one individual, but is also designed to illuminate the subaltern histories and cultural narratives of an occupied community, this new act of listening takes on certain historical distinctions and political stakes. As Elaine Jahner notes, “in a minority context where history has been kidnapped by conquerors and its voices muffled in an effort to induce an emptiness that could be filled by the dominant people’s past […] the act of listening to the past is approached with extraordinary care.” (“Metalanguages,” 95) This act of careful listening expands beyond the dimensions of
individual texts when we consider the ramifications of subaltern histories on canonical
culture. Consider, for instance, the dynamic influence Zitkala-Sa’s ‘curiously colored
seashell’ might have on Richard Brodhead’s innovative manifesto for American
Studies, where he states:

American literary history should be rethought as the history of the
relation between literary writing and the changing meanings and places
made for such work in American social history – a history not of texts
or contexts alone but of the multiform transactions that have taken
place between them. (Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and
Writing in Nineteenth-Century America, 8)

By urging, not simply the inclusion of texts like Zitkala-Sa’s *American Indian Stories*
in an Anglo-American literature survey, but the centering of Native texts within a
neocolonial American Studies canon, a multitude of heretofore silenced political
stakes and historical contexts now arise within the study of US literatures and culture.

To come to such a critical position, however, requires a reading of works like
Zitkala-Sa’s autobiography apart from and beyond writers like Thoreau, Catlin, Baum,
and Roosevelt. Indeed, while many critics and analysts of Zitkala-Sa’s writings
thoroughly and sensitively evoke and examine the dynamics at play between Zitkala-
Sa and her Anglo-American readership, they do little to evaluate what this creation of
a ‘universal Native subjectivity’ meant for other tribal communities at the start of the
20th century. Indeed, Zitkala-Sa’s later political activism and influence, from her work
with the Society of American Indians (1915-1919) and The National Council of
American Indians (1919-1938), to her creation of the *American Indian Magazine*
(1916), were all primarily devoted, not to an Anglo/Native American dialogue, but a
greater interconnectivity and collaborative dialogue among tribal cultures and socio-
political Native communities within the United States.

In California, in particular, Native organizations such as the Indian Board of
Co-Operation in 1912 and the Mission Indian Federation magazines, *The Indian* and
the *California Indian Herald*, grew and expanded through their cultural, political and
economic ties to the SAI, the NCAI and the *American Indian Magazine*. It was in
California that Zitkala-Sa wrote some of her last political essays, three short pieces
originally published in the *San Francisco Bulletin* in 1922 and then later reprinted in
the *California Indian Herald* that same year.

While the Native Californian response to Zitkala-Sa as a literary figure is, as of
yet, unknown, I am inclined to read her writings, political testimonies, and her
attempts to initiate conversations regarding a universal indigenous subjectivity, not
only through the Euro-American publications which gained her canonical fame, but
also as contextualized by her contemporaries’ publications in Native journals such as
the *California Indian Herald* and *The Indian*. To consider Zitkala-Sa’s persona - as a
Yankton Sioux publishing in a journal of Wintun, Dieguana, Luiseno, and other
California Native authors - as a trans-regional one, engages her in a dialogue apart
from, what Gary Totten calls, the “criticism which designates her as a token American
Indian regionalist relegating Zitkala-Sa to the status of a racial Other against whom to
posit ideas of U.S. nationhood, rather than the anamnesis of Indigenous genocide and
colonization, which constitute the repressed side of national history.” (“Zitkala-Sa and
the Problem of Regionalism,” 99) Indeed, to see Zitkala-Sa not as a token regionalist
in an (Anglo)American Studies canon, but as a cornerstone in early 20th century
Native American socio-political literature, both drastically reshapes our notion of 20th century US cultural production and opens a space for dialogue regarding a markedly silent piece of America’s ongoing neocolonial history.

Additionally, critiquing Zitkala-Sa’s creation of a ‘universal’ Native subject within the context of Native literature allows for a critical discussion of the ‘universal’ as both a form of preservationist discourse, and also a strategic attempt to resist this containment and articulate a voice outside conversations that privilege Europe and would see all Native claims only in relation to the colonizer. As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing notes, the ‘universal,’ while epistemologically emergent in Europe, continued to hold global significance even after the initial moments of colonial violence, setting forth similar ontological dichotomies to those produced by the late 19th century national parks:

In the matrix of colonialism, universal reason became the mark of temporally dynamic and spatially expansive forms of knowledge and power. Universal reason, of course, was best articulated by the colonizers. In contrast, the colonized were characterized by particularistic cultures; ere, the particular is that which cannot grow. The universal, however, opens the way to constantly improving truths, and even, in its utilitarian forms, to a better life for all humanity. These contrasts continue to structure global asymmetries. (*Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, 9)

By reflecting on Zitkala-Sa’s ambiguous Native identifications - not as a token ‘Indian’ in Euro-American culture, but as engaging claims to a new universal, emergent from within a praxis of Native resistance - opens up new avenues for philosophical dialogue about the nature of the universal as both a form of preservationist discourse, *particularizing* certain subjects as inherently tied to their
historical and environmental contexts, and also as a means for seeking, articulating,
and addressing anti-colonial desires and claims for justice.

Additionally, we can witness the shaping and transformation of this ‘subaltern universal’ as it is formed by Zitkala-Sa’s all-incorporative Native persona, and contested, accessed, reified, and reshaped by the Native Californian writers publishing in the *California Indian Herald* and *The Indian*. As Tsing notes, such universals must be charted not as fully formed realities, but as knowledge, or also in Zitkala-Sa’s case, subjectivity, that transgresses but also morphs through its interactions with certain particularities:

Universals are indeed local knowledge in the sense that they cannot be understood without the benefit of historically specific cultural assumptions. But to stop here makes dialogue impossible. Furthermore, it misses the point. To turn to universals is to identify knowledge that moves – mobile and mobilizing – across localities and cultures. Whether it is seen as underlying or transcending cultural difference, the mission of the universal is to form bridges, roads, and channels of circulation. Knowledge gained from particular experience percolates into these channels, widening rather than interrupting them. We must step outside the boundaries of locality to ask what’s meant by the universal. (*Friction*, 7)

Tsing’s attempt to reclaim a conception of the ‘universal’ as mobilizing knowledge that can engage local contexts in broader, transcending solidarities – best demonstrated by her use of the term *friction* – is useful as a strategy for ‘writing out’ from the ontological binaries of particularized/universal, preserved/transformative so integral to the US colonial and neocolonial projects. And yet, like Shepard Krech’s and David Lowenthal’s reactionary focus on the ecological destructiveness of pre-colonial Native histories, such a strategy risks reinforcing and normalizing these very same binaries in the first place. It is with this in mind that I begin to chart a
comparative critique of Zitkala-Sa’s work as it was both contested and reaffirmed by the writings of Native Californian authors publishing in the *California Indian Herald* and *The Indian* at the beginning of the 20th century.

I do not uncritically celebrate or accept Zitkala-Sa’s embrace of subaltern ‘universals.’ More often than not, I read her employment of this strategy as limiting and neutralizing the otherwise radical nature of many of her writings. Additionally, while many of the writings that I will be observing were published in journals addressing a trans-tribal Native American public, all of them were published in the language of the colonizer, which presents its own multitude of problems. Thus, like the National Park, the Occupied Nation, and the Prison, I locate within the English-language Memoir many of the same *preservationist* dynamics that enclose and alienate their subjects, rendering them a-historical and silenced at the very moment they begin testifying to and contest the violent injustices acted upon them.

The goal of this Chapter, rather, is to begin a dialogue regarding early 20th century. Native writing in the US, not in relation to an (Anglo)American canon, but via the emergence of indigenous universal claims to basic rights and political justices in South Dakota, California, and beyond, looking at the way which these universal claims both elicit solidarities among a diverse group of Native writers and, at times, conversely serve to doubly imprison these writers within the violent ontologies of the neocolonial US.

Specifically, this Chapter will read Zitkala-Sa’s development as a Yankton Sioux, English-language memoirist alongside the writings of three of her contemporaries in California. Through these trans-tribal literary relationships, I will
look at the way in which early 20th century Native literary canons critically reframed certain Euro-American political and narrative forms – like historical memoirs and regionalist writings – to construct a new type of anti-colonial American literature. By charting both the successes, the failures, and the transformation of this engagement with the ‘subaltern universal’ as it is employed by all of these writers attempting to testify to the genocide and ongoing occupation of their communities, this Chapter ultimately hopes to begin generating new critical positions within American Studies, emerging from Native centers, offering alternative strategies for ‘writing out’ from the colonial binaries of preservation and the production of bare life.

*Zitkala-Sa and Alfred C. Gillis: A Comparative Reading of the ‘Universal’*

While Zitkala-Sa’s time in California and her subsequent essays can be contextualized within the works of numerous Native Californian authors and essayists, this Chapter will focus on three writers in particular, whose essays, poems, collected tales and stories all seem to directly engage, embrace, and also debate Zitkala-Sa’s literary persona and its implication for certain tribes in California.

The first of these three writers, Alfred C. Gillis, was a member of the Wintun tribe from Heroult in Shasta County. He belonged to the Indian Board of Co-operation and worked as an editor and organizer through its Advisory Board, also hosting many events aimed at initiating dialogue between the Board’s local auxiliaries. It was during these events that Gillis would travel through the state of California with Edward Wharton James, who was the editor of the *California Indian Herald*. The purpose of
these statewide tours was to both promote Native culture and advocate for indigenous rights. Gillis was known both for his political essays, his poems and stories, as well as his spoken word performances and singing.

While it would be irresponsible to assume the specific responses Gillis might have had to the activism and writings of Zitkala-Sa, it is clear that he would have been somewhat familiar with her work. Gillis would have been among the members of the IBC committee that invited Zitkala-Sa to visit in the summer of 1922, and Edward Wharton James would have been on the editorial board when her essays were subsequently reprinted from the San Francisco Bulletin. Additionally, Gillis’s own poems, essays and short fiction were printed in the following January, April, and June editions of the 1923 and 1924 *California Indian Heralds*. This work in particular - in its nature and scope, from political essays addressing contemporary injustices, to lyric poetry, autobiographical writing, and collected folklore - closely parallels Zitkala-Sa’s stylistic range and diversity of interests and political investments.

Both writers, for instance, published abstract autobiographical essays that incorporated regional folktales into their Native *bildungromans*. Additionally, both writers began their tales with the Judeo-Christian tropes of Edenic landscapes and untainted happiness. Consider here Zitkala-Sa’s opening to *American Indian Stories*:

A wigwam of weather-stained canvas stood at the base of some irregularly ascending hills. A footpath wound its way gently down the sloping land till it reached the broad river bottom; creeping through the long swamp grasses that bent over it on either side, it came out on the edge of the Missouri…I was a wild little girl of seven. Loosely clad in a slip of brown buckskin, and light-footed with a pair of soft moccasins on my feet, I was as free as the wind that blew my hair, and no less spirited than a bounding deer. (68)
Zitkala-Sa’s depiction here of a vast and bountiful landscape that provides not only the material necessities for survival and sustenance, but reflects the unfettered freedom of the individual subject, is matched by Alfred C. Gillis’ opening lines to “The Story of SID-DI-POU-I-WI-TA,” where he states:

The Wintun tribe of Indians was, for long centuries, the most powerful tribe of the northern part of California. The men were stalwart warriors, made so by their training and the fact that they were ever at war defending the generous and fruitful land that the gods had bestowed upon them...It was a wonderful land, the rivers teeming with fish, and their banks the populous homes of beaver, mink, otter and other fur-bearing animals. On the hills were elk, deer, antelope and bear in abundance, as well as the smaller squirrel, rabbit and raccoon. The digger pine and the pinyon gave an abundance of delicious nuts, the white and black oaks yielded their rich harvests of acorns, the buckeyes gave their rich chestnuts, the meadows gave abundantly of nutritious grass seeds and fruits and berries abounded on the hillsides. In the swamps and marshes great bulbous roots were found which added to the food supply. It was a country of the yew, rarely found in California, and no wood was so suitable for making the bow of the warrior and hunter as this, and, as on the eastern slopes of Mt. Shasta vast ledges of native volcanic glass -- obsidian -- were found, it was comparatively easy to equip the Wintun warriors with bows and arrows that had no superiors and few equals in the land. (as told to Edward Wharton James; in California Indian Herald, April, 1923)

At first glance, both writers appear to enclose themselves in the same preservationist frameworks set forth by Thoreau and Catlin in the latter half of the 19th century. And yet, I would argue that Gillis and Zitkala-Sa’s positioning of their tales as emerging out from pure and wholly realized Edenic landscapes, allows both writers to play with and comment upon the Judeo-Christian fable and its interpretative role in the Anglo myths of America as an unspoiled land, pre-designed by a Manifest hand for the colonizer alone. Their narratives, in this context, revert the myth and highlight the communities evacuated from and exterminated within the American Eden.
And yet there are crucial distinctions between these two opening scenes. In Zitkala-Sa’s depiction of the South Dakota landscape, the reservation, albeit unspoken of, provides the essential foundations of her experience. Though this time on the reservation might seem outlined by specifically Yankton attributes, it is Anglo-American culture that dictates much of the material realities embodied in her and her family’s daily life. In lieu of a buffalo hide, for instance, Zitkala-Sa’s wigwam comes from ‘weather-stained canvas.’ Later on, she goes and makes coffee in a coffeepot (American Indian Stories, 27). Her mother, as the scene continues, decides to move into a log cabin and furnishes this cabin with curtained windows and checkered tablecloths (ibid, 40, 89). Even the landscape itself is determined by its English referents; rather than use the Yankton word Mni’so’se, Zitkala-Sa labels the river as the Missouri. A close reading of these opening moments in American Indian Stories makes it quite clear, as Gary Totten notes, that Zitkala-Sa “is writing neither a fixed ethnicity nor a stable and timeless region, for the culture and place that she writes about are, during the very moment she writes about them, undergoing dramatic changes.” (“Zitkala-Sa and the Problem of Regionalism,” 88)

For Alfred C. Gillis’ Wintun California, however, the ambiguities are much less fluid, and change is negated in light of a more stable and fixed rendering of the past. While Gillis does use Anglo-English place designations, his portrayal of these spaces seems vacant of any other Euro-American cultural or economic influences. The land and its resources are inseparable from a specifically Wintun identity and lifestyle. Similarly this tribal identity is not, like Zitkala-Sa’s Yankton persona, fractured and complicated by cross-cultural ties, but appears whole and unchallenged,
fixed within by the space that it inhabits, testifying not to the ongoing genocide of Euro-American colonization, but furthering the myth upheld by Catlin and others of a preserved Native imaginary.

There are several possible explanations for the discrepancies in these two depictions. For one, Alfred C. Gillis had composed “The Story of SID-DI-POU-I-WI-TA” as a spoken word piece, which he would perform aloud for audiences throughout California. This may have pressured him into constructing a pre-colonial narrative that white audiences would have found more ‘authentic,’ and less disturbing than Zitkala-Sa’s cross-culturally imprisoned narrator.

Additionally, due to her recognition among Anglo audiences, Zitkala-Sa may have been compelled to address Native\European interactions from a more complicated and complex place. Rather than frame her narrative within the strict Judeo-Christian binaries of ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ American Indian Stories, begins, as Ron Carpenter notes, with:

Zitkala-Sa’s veiled implication…that all Americans are already fallen since neither Indians nor Anglos can claim a ‘chosen’ or innocent status due to perceptions of the other. Each culture loses a central tenant of its respective self-identification in the expansion west. Yanktons lose more than just land; they lose their symbiotic connection to the land as well as the perception that they are privileged inhabitants. Euroamericans lose their ‘innocent’ status as they become imperialists who commit genocide in order to occupy the land. (“Zitkala-Sa and Bicultural Subjectivity,” 8)

Ron Carpenter’s claim - while irresponsibly ignorant of the Yanktons’ position, not necessarily as ‘privileged inhabitants,’ but as survivors of an ongoing occupation – does illustrate the way in which Zitkala-Sa is able to mobilize and de-stabilize her fixed connection to the landscape. By displacing the dominant narratives of US settler-
colonialism from their Judeo-Christian binaries – these same binaries that promoted and excused ‘Manifest Destiny’ – Zitkala-Sa is able, as Carpenter notes, to remind “[her] white readers that their recent expansion west, which provides for her the opportunities to record her mother’s and her own story, is predicated on the displacement, confinement, and genocide of Native Americans.” (ibid, 10)

And yet it is this, albeit sparse and occasional, Anglo readership that, perhaps, compelled Zitkala-Sa to take these opportunities for complex colonial depictions, opportunities that may have been more compromising for Gillis as a Native Californian writer. Indeed, it is possible that Gillis felt a need to illustrate and highlight a specifically Wintun locale - a pressure to represent regional particularities that for Zitkala-Sa, would have seemed irrelevant. While the Dakota Sioux, from the Battle of Greasy Grass (aka Little Bighorn) to the Massacre at Wounded Knee, were quite visible in Euro-American popular culture, the Native tribes of California were often either forgotten or dismissed as being ‘unauthentic’ Native Americans. Gillis signals toward this dismissal and degradation in his essay entitled “The California Indians:”

…writers were wont to speak of these people as being of low order. They were spoken of as "Digger Indians" who were content to feed upon jack rabbits and grasshoppers, too timid to attack larger game as were the Indians of the plains and the Atlantic seaboard, and various other misleading statements. However, the truth of the matter is quite to the contrary. The mountain tribes of California were the equals as hunters and warriors to any of the Indians of the continent. They were considered inferior to the eastern Indian because in their conflict with the white man, they lacked the modern rifle which the Indians of the East used so effectively in their war with the white man. The Sioux, Blackfeet and Apaches were in possession of firearms and were able to make a stubborn resistance against both the soldiers and the settlers in defense of their home and land. This, however, was not the case in
California owning to the fact that very early a law was placed on the
Statute Book of California forbidding the sale of guns or ammunition to
an Indian. (in California Indian Herald, January, 1923)

While Gillis may seek collaboration with Zitkala-Sa and the Dakota Sioux in
resistance to their joint oppression by Anglo-American colonial society, he likewise
recognizes that these collaborations are oftentimes uneven and unequal. As Anna
Tsing notes, “collaboration is not a simple sharing of information. There is no reason
to assume that collaborators share common goals. In…collaborations, overlapping but
discrepant forms…may inform contributors, allowing them to converse – but across
difference.” (Friction, 13) While the goals of Zitkala-Sa and Alfred C. Gillis may have
far more in common than those of other collaborating parties, they are still structured
with an unevenness that is oftentimes overshadowed and obscured in their
categorization as ‘universal’ Native Americans.

And yet, just as Gillis acknowledges the unevenness of certain collaborations,
at times he engages in even more destructive collaborations and assimilationist
dialogue as a means for furthering the political goals of the California Indian Herald.

In his essay, “Through the Inyo County District” Gillis concedes to white
Californians, calling them allies in the struggle for Native rights and recognition:

The white people of Big Pine are large-hearted and interested in the
work of helping the Indian. Publicity is one of our watchwords and one
of the key-notes of our success. The Indians and their friends have long
felt the need of awakening the public conscience to the just and
reasonable demands of the Indians of our country at large and
California in particular. (in California Indian Herald, June, 1923)

While reluctant to submit one’s political claims to the absorbing and oftentimes
neutralizing power of dominant Euro-American culture, Gillis, whose ‘universalizing’
audience is incorporative of both Native and white Californians, becomes entrapped in a similar myth of ‘assimilationist-resistance’ to the one that Barbara Chiarello praises in her examination of Zitkala-Sa’s own agenda, stating that “resistance that hopes to be more than a momentary flash may require this strategy, at least as part of its arsenal, since the mainstream is supported by a web of intricately interconnected institutions that marginalized voices may have to enter into in order to transform.” (“Deflective Missives: Zitkala-Sa’s Resistance and Its (Un)Containment,” 8) This notion of ‘subverting the system from inside’ is one that has entrapped numerous activists, in spite of a vast multitude of historical examples throughout the 20th century – from the Black Panther Party for Self Defense to the American Indian Movement – who have taught us that “marginalized voices” do not necessarily have to enter such institutions in order to transform them. Nevertheless, this Chapter is concerned with Gillis’ concession to the “whites of Big Pine” as one example of how employment of the ‘universal’ as a means to ‘write out’ from the enclosures of preservationist discourse can oftentimes lead to unproductive assimilation with the occupying force.

This is not to suggest that either Alfred C. Gillis or Zitkala-Sa entirely submit themselves to the institutions of colonial rule, but rather, both writers do end up consenting to certain elements of the occupation despite their hopes of reframing these elements as mobilizing agents in exporting their claims beyond their own particular sites of protests. Exemplary of Anna Tsing’s claim that “the knowledge that makes a difference in changing the world is knowledge that travels and mobilizes, shifting and creating new forces and agents of history in its path,” Gillis tries to “awaken” the public consciousness and move his testimonies through engagement with the
hegemonic forces of US colonialism. And yet it is this very claim to the ‘universal’ as a means to ‘write out’ from his particularized space in California, that only further depoliticizes Gillis’ message. Zitkala-Sa, further demonstrates the problems that arise when employing the universal as a means to move indigenous knowledge into a larger national arena, in her essay, “California Indian Trails and Prayer Trees,” published in the *San Francisco Bulletin* and the *California Indian Herald* in 1922:

> It is an Indian belief that bad thoughts and deeds of man bring disastrous storms and earthquakes. Before we pass upon this as a superstition of untutored minds, let us recall the learned Thoreau’s statement that the greatest of all arts is to affect the quality of the day by our own acts. These ideas are akin, like peas in a pod. Truths are universal. Our discernments grow with keener vision. Truths are ever present for us to see, if we will, whether our eyes are blue, gray, or black. (*American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*, 251)

By subscribing to a “universal wisdom,” Zitkala-Sa tries to register her claims in a space incorporative of Dakota Sioux, California Wintuns, Euro-Americans and others in the occupied United States. And yet, we must also ask, what is lost, what violence is re-enacted when an associative link is cemented between Sioux knowledge and the writings of Thoreau, whose writings, (as Chapter 1 tried to make clear), were directly responsible for the attempted re-definition of Native American communities as ahistorical and apolitical subjects, imprisoned in contained spaces of preservation? And so, while the universal is employed by both Gillis and Zitkala-Sa as a means to move Native claims for rights and recognition - the testimonies of past and current injustices - out from the shadows of history and into the present moment, the collaborative connections between these groups are uneven and unequal, their goals often quite separate. While the ‘universal’ seems to be an appealing strategy for these
writers’ to speak out from their enclosed and particularized locales, it likewise situates them in complicity with the coercive violence of an ever-expanding neocolonial United States.

Zitkala-Sa and Samuel J. Rice – Renegotiating the ‘Master’s Tools’

If Alfred C. Gillis and Zitkala-Sa form unlikely, and also perhaps uneven, collaborations when read through their claims for a Native-Anglo universal, Zitkala-Sa’s later work in public policy would project an articulation of this uneven collaborative universal even further into the context of neocolonial US liberalism. Beginning in 1926 with her marriage to Bureau of Indian Affairs representative, Raymond Bonnin, and their subsequent founding of the National Council of American Indians, Zitkala-Sa’s writings would further reflect specific concerns with administrative policies and the relationship between reservation communities and US government representatives in Washington. Her preceding autobiography, with its focus on Anglicizing educational models and the cultural genocide of tribal communities at the turn of the century, takes on new light when read alongside these later policy-concerned essays and speeches. Consider, for instance, the essay, “Americanize the First American: A Plan of Regeneration,” where Zitkala-Sa makes a seemingly assimilationist argument regarding the importance of an English-education to Native youth in occupied America:

Give [the American Indian]…those educational advantages pressed with so much enthusiasm upon the foreigner…freedom to do their own thinking; to exercise their judgment; to hold open forums for the expression of their thought and…to manage their own personal
business. (as cited in American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings, 4-6)

Zitkala-Sa’s focus on the ‘educational-advantages’ of colonial academic institutions in America was not too far dissimilar from the sentiment of many of her published Native Californian contemporaries. One writer, in particular, Samuel J. Rice, would closely share in Zitkala-Sa’s commitment to reframing and renegotiating educational policies from Native communities throughout the early 20th century United States.

Though far less visible than Zitkala-Sa and lacking the publications and popular appraise of writers like Alfred C. Gillis, Samuel J. Rice, a member of the Dieguana tribe in Riverside, California, nonetheless made significant impacts through his editorial work on The Indian, an official magazine of the Mission Indian Federation. While it is unclear if Rice had any direct contact or remote conversation with Zitkala-Sa, it is certain that all administrative and editorial workers in the Mission Indian Federation, which was set-up in the state of California to serve as an alternative service provider and policy advocate to the Indian Board of Cooperation - which worked at the Federal level and often served to do the bidding of the US government rather than serving as a voice for Native peoples - would have been familiar with both Zitkala-Sa and Raymond Bonnin.

Additionally, Rice’s policy-driven political positions seem to directly reflect and echo many of the comments and claims being made by Zitkala-Sa at the start of the 20th century. In his editorial article, “Educate and Seek Your Worth,” Rice outlines a seemingly more conservative and assimilationist message regarding Anglicizing education models than Zitkala-Sa’s previous ‘Plan of Regeneration:’
The promise of the Indian race lies in the education of its children, morally, mentally and industrially. To be of permanent value the schools must be provided to equip the children to assume as adults the responsibilities in equalizing themselves with the standard competent requirements of Americanism, thus leading them to become useful citizens. These environments have become the milestones marking Indian progress....It must be understood, I am not commenting to intimate that Indians of recent gener-gratuity from charitable resources and must be dependable. But, truly, a majority of them today, are fifty per cent better qualified for citizenship than the foreigners, some who are subject to calls of their native country in time of war. (Rice, 157)

Rice’s argument here aligns closely on a number of levels with the writings and political speeches of Zitkala-Sa during this same historical moment. Both writers feel a need to juxtapose the allegiance of indigenous Americans to the influx of European immigrants during the interwar period in the early-20th century; both writers apply positive connotations to colonial definitions of ‘progress,’ and both writers seem to warmly invite the assimilating effects of a neocolonial US education.

And yet, if we consider these two like passages in the context of each writer’s larger body of work, a far more complicated theme emerges regarding the role of Western educational models in Native tribal society. In Samuel J. Rice’s prose piece, “The Indian Wakes Up,” Anglicizing educational institutions are reconceived - not as harbingers of progress and an assimilated civil society - but as, what Louis Althusser has famously named Ideological State Apparatuses, where seemingly neutral institutions work to forcibly readjust individuals into subservient citizens of the nation:

On the reservation I followed the rules. See, I have changed my garments, I have cut my hair, and what is there for me? I am as a child - helpless! As a blind-man, I grope and know not whither I go! I thought this land belonging to the Great Spirit? Are the white people Great Spirits? I am afraid there is something wrong in me; and if you
can see - lead me. Maybe my child, here, can push the curtain aside and make a way out from the plight I am in. Take him, teach him as you would your own child. Then when I am gone he will like you, for he will be with you. (“The Indian Wakes Up,” 156)

Rice’s plea to educate Native youth takes on a highly ominous and disturbing tone here as he reflects on his own alienation from both his tribal community and the racist civil society that would forcibly assimilate him only to then reject him from its socio-economic culture.

Zitkala-Sa illustrates a similar hypocrisy of Anglo-American educational systems as she discusses her own experiences with cultural genocide – what she refers to as the ‘civilizing machine’ – in *American Indian Stories:*

> It was next to impossible to leave the iron routine after the civilizing machine had once begun its day’s buzzing; and as it was inbred in me to suffer in silence rather than to appeal to the ears of one whose open eyes could not see my pains, I have many times trudged in the day’s harness heavy-footed, like a dumb sick brute. (*American Indian Stories*, 66)

Zitkala-Sa continues to address, lament, and highlight the alienation and terror born of her time spent at the Carlisle Indian School throughout her literary career. At the conclusion of *American Indian Stories,* upon attaining fluency in English and being made a teacher at the school, Zitkala-Sa nonetheless notes that she “made no friends among the race of people I loathed.” (*American Indian Stories*, 386) Later on, in her poem “The Indian’s Awakening,” she discusses the alienation she feels in her own

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2 That both Samuel J. Rice’s “The Indian Wakes Up” and Zitkala-Sa’s “The Indian’s Awakening” share such similar titles could set the impetus for an essay separate and distinct from this chapter, these shared titles seen perhaps as yet another signifier of the two authors’ literary connections/dialogue. A tangential argument might be constructed here regarding the symbolism of dream and waking states to the cultural genocide of Native communities throughout the late-19th and early-20th centuries.
tribal community after being submitted to the ‘civilizing machine’ of an Anglo-American education, stating “from you my own people, I’ve gone astray./ A wanderer now, with no where to stay.” (“The Indian’s Awakening,” as cited in American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings) As Gary Totten has pointed out, Zitkala-Sa’s autobiographical writings always conclude with a sense of isolation, alienation, and abandonment:

…she ends her autobiography with the disturbing realization that the docility and industriousness of the Indian students is comforting for the white visitors to Indian schools because it confirms their project of cultural preservation. (“Zitkala-Sa and the Problem of Regionalism: Nations, Narratives, and Traditions,” 104)

Here we see the specter of George Catlin emerge once more, and the ‘project of cultural preservation’ becomes further revealed as a means for reconstructing Native subjects as ahistorical and apolitical, what Totten refers to as an ethic of ‘docility and industriousness.’

Once she begins her role as a teacher at the Carlisle Industrial School, the genocidal nature of this educational project becomes more clear and distinct. Entrusting the education of young Indians – “the smallest of Indian timber” – to ‘the palefaces,’ she writes, is merely a “semblance of civilization” that results in “long-lasting death.” (American Indian Stories, 98-99) As Martha Cutter points out, Zitkala-Sa’s autobiography “does not put forth a model of triumph and integration, nor does it emphasize the importance of language in the overall process of self-authentication” and while it maintains a complex and non-binary relationship with the structures influencing her circumstance, we cannot “expect her writing to legitimate the very institutions (the English language, writing, culture, and ‘civilization’) which have
suppressed her.” (“Zitkala-Sa’s Autobiographical Writings: The Problems of a Canonical Search for Language and Identity,” 84)

Zitkala-Sa leaves her autobiography, and subsequently enters into the sphere of public policy, as a hybrid voice. Homi Bhabha describes such a voice as being in constant movement, born in negotiation between two binaries to which it serves to subvert, undermine, and ultimately deconstruct, stating that “it is in [such a] hybrid gap, which produces no relief, that the colonial subject takes place’ (The Location of Culture, 58). Yet, while the ‘colonial subject’ emerges from a space which would negate the cultural products and symbols of oppositional binaries, we can likewise not ignore such cultural products and symbols - (English-language education being one example) – as they are reframed apart from their colonial contexts. As hybrid subjects then, Zitkala-Sa and Samuel J. Rice’s employment of the English language occurs in a much more ambiguous and ambivalent arena. As Rice makes clear in a later essay, entitled “What Value is Education to the Indian of Today,” educational systems in the early 20th century United States, when reframed and re-contextualized by Native subjects, can also become spaces wherein rights are contested and alternative notions of justice are articulated and demanded:

Schools and colleges do not increase human capacity, but they do make mental exercise more general, and hence help to develop the capacity already possessed by individuals. As knowledge become more general and studies more common the generations possessing these have a decided advantage over previous generations; not only in that there are now a thousand thinkers to one formerly to sharpen, and stimulate each other with suggestions, but also in that each of the later generations has through books the combined experience of the past (erratic life) in addition to his own has visions. (Rice, 159)
Rice’s re-conceptualization of Western education can also be read, not only as implicating him in the colonial project at large, but also and alternatively as re-conceiving of these structures and institutions outside and apart from the colonial West. Education then, as a universal right, fits closely to the subaltern historical narrative espoused by Anna Tsing, where “the West can make no exclusive claim to doctrines of the universal. Radical thinkers in Europe’s colonies long ago expanded Enlightenment universals to argue that the colonized should be free, thus establishing doctrines of universal freedom at the base of Third World nationalisms.” As Tsing aptly notes, “universalism is implicated in both imperial schemes to control the world and liberatory mobilizations for justice and empowerment.” (Friction, 9)

And yet, this does not mean that Zitkala-Sa or Samuel J. Rice’s advocating for certain educational models born out of imperialist institutions and missionary structures should in any way be seen as radical or even revolutionary. Rather than praise or castigate these writers for their political initiatives, however, I am more interested in seeing what questions these claims - demanded by Native thinkers for universal rights and responsibilities conceived of and born in the colonial West – might raise for early 20th century US liberalism and its discourses of preservation when reframed in the neocolonial context. Tsing asks a similar question regarding not just colonized peoples, but occupied ecologies as well:

Might not other species – and perhaps even landscapes and ecosystems – have rights with a status above and prior to human social conventions? The jurisdiction of modernity is turned inside out: Indigenous cultures deserve Enlightenment rights and liberties precisely because they have managed so far to do without them. It is within these jumbled and utopian causes that concepts of freedom are invigorated and made worthwhile for our times. (ibid, 10)
‘Freedom,’ as conceived of by early 20th century US liberalism, is not simply ‘invigorated,’ but critically re-imagined by Native scholars advocating for Western universals as tools for resistance and alternative modes of postcolonial justice.

Zitkala-Sa makes this most vivid when we consider her demand for educational rights in light of her own subversive rearrangement of the English language. As Gary Totten notes, Zitkala-Sa’s use of English as the primary language for her autobiography is not indiscriminant or meant to be accommodating to Anglo-audiences, but rather, “Zitkala-Sa uses English, a tool of the dominant culture to…make it visible as [one of the] tools used to oppress Indigenous peoples and then turn it into a tool of resistance.” (“Zitkala-Sa and the Problem of Regionalism,” 107)

Zitkala-Sa’s decision to publish her works in English, what she describes in the introduction to American Indian Stories as an effort “to transplant the native spirit of these tales…into the English language, since America in the last few centuries as acquired a second tongue,” displays a use of English as a language that can be retooled so as to highlight and protest the colonialisit policies affecting a wide range of tribal communities, all of whom would have been previously isolated from each other. (American Indian Stories, vi)

This reconsideration and reemployment of colonial language to articulate and make visible the injustices wrought by US settler society encapsulates what Malea Powell refers to as “the language of survivance (survival + resistance)...to reimagine and literally, refigure ‘the Indian’...their object-status within colonial discourse [is transformed] into a subject status, a presence instead of an absence.” (“Rhetorics of
Survivance: How American Indians Use Writing,” 400) Advocating for English-language education, not as a means for assimilation, but as a tool for both survival and resistance, provides Zitkala-Sa with a presence and visibility not just to Anglo readers, but, more importantly, to a far-reaching web of intertribal communities. Additionally, Zitkala-Sa uses certain aspects of the English-language memoir to both play with the narrative form itself, and also to highlight her complex position outside of and apart from the confining dichotomies of preservation and the production of bare life, what Powell would call her transformation “into a subject status.” As Ron Carpenter notes, Zitkala-Sa’s investment in written English has less to do with a desire to assimilate her texts to the colonial norm, than with an attempt to teach Anglo readers new ways of reading the Native person as a bicultural subject, rather than a preserved object:

...for readers to be able to acknowledge her biculturalism or comprehend how she alters the Indian type, Zitkala-Sa’s autobiographical narrator, or her persona, must teach her Euroamerican audiences to recognize the bicultural Indian, a ‘civil’ woman, who does not fit crude stereotypes. (“Zitkala-Sa and Bicultural Subjectivity,” 3)

And yet, as Zitkala-Sa’s recent canonization in the American Studies curriculum has already shown - as a ‘token’ English-speaking Native American - sheer visibility alone is not enough to resist the socio-cultural dynamics of colonization, and, just as she can rework the English language to incorporate a subversive dynamic, so too can an Anglo readership neutralize her message, admiring her work in such as way where, as Barbara Chiarello notes, Anglo American readers are simultaneously “celebrating Zitkala-Sa’s presence while silencing her voice.” (“Deflective Missives,” 19) The refraction of an articulated protest into a hollowed-out - albeit ‘celebrated’ - presence, simply reestablishes the hierarchical binaries of colonialism and furthers this
ethic of ahistorical and apolitical preservation. Franz Fanon vividly illustrates the implications of this dynamic, asserting that “registering in various forms a kind of surprise [to a native’s linguistic achievement is] a mode of condescending praise, that a native has achieved this mastery.” (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 20)

Thus, when read from the perspective of the colonizer, the retooling of colonial discourse and Western universals loses its subversive potential and becomes, not a means for resistance, but another form of confinement and depoliticization. In order to see the empowered potential embedded in these negotiations and critical reimaginings, we must read Zitkala-Sa’s use of the English-language apart from an (Anglo)American Studies readership, refracted instead through a Native critical lens.

Consider, for instance, Zitkala-Sa’s earliest decision to employ English as a means for resistance at the beginning of her autobiography, where, upon learning some basic phrases, she feels ‘possessed’ by a ‘mischievous spirit of revenge’ (*American Indian Stories*, 188). This “spirit of revenge” is ultimately embodied, not as a direct reaction against colonial policy or an open chastisement of Anglo readers, but through an ethic of community organizing and intertribal connectivity. In her later essay, “Letter to the Chiefs and Headmen of the Tribes,” Zitkala-Sa appends a footnote, asking readers who understand English to “do a kind act by reading and explaining to an Indian who cannot read or speak English,” and asking for a reciprocating conversation, telling the different Chiefs, many of whom could not yet speak or read in English, “I could profit by your advice in many things, and you would know you were not forgot.” (“Letters to the Chiefs and Headmen of the Tribes,” 196-7)
It should be noted here that much of the content of Zitkala-Sa’s letter dealt with land acquisition rights and the retaining of tribal properties. As Gary Totten notes:

That [Zitkala-Sa] considers English-speaking and the retaining of Indian lands the two most important issues she could discuss with her people also alludes to the ways in which white America used the inability of some American Indians to communicate in English as a way to gain possession of Indian lands. (“Zitkala-Sa and the Problem of Regionalism,” 107)

Zitkala-Sa’s “spirit of revenge” becomes entangled with and matures through an ethic of community organization and struggle. By reading her use and reframing of the English language, not as a means of making oneself visible to an Anglo readership, but as a tool for revealing the injustices and tactics of domination committed by a settler-colonial society, Zitkala-Sa is able to effectively ‘rewrite’ the language as reflected through and in the interests of disenfranchised Native communities.

Samuel J. Rice, in his later editorials and essays for The Indian, will continue to build on this effective ‘rewriting’ of colonial discourse to combat hierarchical structures that would otherwise depoliticize and dehistoricize Native communities. In his essay about and entitled “Inspiration of the Mission Indian Federation,” Rice elaborates on the use of colonial discourse to rob Native communities of land and livelihoods, articulating a demand for Native universal rights:

The free man of us, whose rights had been rooted in the soil of their native land, becomes a tenant, a serf of the usurpers of our rights and seems to be completely at the mercy of masters and ever active landlords, who gratefully join together in the policy of robbing and exploiting the Indian people of their scant property. (“Inspiration for the Mission Indian Federation, 158)
Rice’s signaling toward a set of ‘rights,’ which have “been rooted in the soil of their native land,” invokes a reclaiming and rearrangement of universals and liberal conceptualizations of freedom and justice from the critical perspective of early 20th century Native communities.

In the same essay, he continues to elaborate on the relationship between this disenfranchisement and the colonial project of preservation, arguing for certain educational models as a means for invoking subaltern narratives of resistance and reclamation:

America preserves history, if there be history. Representatives of history tell us this in the volume of history on any principle or human probability. Politicians, how long did the shadow of a destitute race on which your conventions and treaties had not smiled languish on the plains of this country? As inquirers, we have no methods open to us whereby we can come to an understanding with our Government representatives. (ibid, 158)

Rice’s demand for “methods” to articulate and advocate for claims and truths within a neocolonial US government stands as a possible antidote to the imperialist political project of (Anglo)American historical preservation.

Yet, once again, this is not to suggest that speaking or publishing in English is a liberating practice for Samuel J. Rice or Zitkala-Sa. Nor I am trying to ignore the implications embedded in resistance movements which rely on colonial modes and methods, what Audre Lorde would deem an inherently futile effort to ‘use the master’s tools’ to ‘dismantle the master’s house.’ Rather, by reading Zitkala-Sa and Samuel J. Rice as bicultural subjects - emerging from a hybrid gap which negates the hierarchical binaries between, but does not entirely vacate the cultural resources of either Anglo or Native cultures - we might see the way in which early 20th century
‘biculural’ Native communities could rewrite and subsequently reclaim both an English language and universal rights discourse so as to articulate alternative histories and critically re-imagine the meanings of ‘freedom’ and ‘justice’ in the occupied United States. These attempts to reclaim a subaltern universal, as I have already argued, are not without their problems and failures. Nevertheless, it is imperative, if we are to understand how artists like Zitkala-Sa attempted to ‘write out’ from the contained dictates of a preservationist American literary canon, that we continue to explore and critically analyze this universal-bicultural Native subject within an emergent (Native)American Studies canon.

Zitkala-Sa and Wa Wa Chaw: Bicultural Regionalisms, a Challenge to the Nation

Zitkala-Sa and Samuel J. Rice, in their attempts to survive and testify as bicultural subjects, must navigate, negotiate, and, at times, re-imagine a system of signs and representational symbols constructed and established by the colonizer. Michael Riffraterre refers to this struggle as the battle within ‘colonial intertextuality,’ where mimesis is no longer based on “reference…from words to things…[but] that intertextuality is the agent both of the mimesis and of the hermeneutic constructions on that mimesis” (Fictional Truth (Parallax: Re-visions of Culture and Society, 142). Thus, as Riffraterre notes, it become destructive for writers like Zitkala-Sa and Samuel J. Rice to confront dehumanizing stereotypes and models of ahistorical preservation by signaling toward an “objective exteriority” when the mediation of such signs and symbols are based upon the dialogue existing between representations of a presumably
‘neutral’ reality - “a system of signs” - and not on the actual language employed to reference that “reality.” (ibid, 159)

In this case, a fight for intertextual representation is also a fight to re-conceptualize and ultimately rebuild the cultural mediums defining of and expressed by the early 20th century United States. As Ron Carpenter has noted, Zitkala-Sa’s bicultural narrative not only combats the stereotyping dichotomies placed upon Native subjects at the turn of the century; it also attempts to rearrange the very structures by which the dominant US culture hoped to solidify certain socio-political, regional American identities:

When Zitkala-Sa’s persona sketches common events to demonstrate how popular representations of Native Americans are insufficient for categorizing the emerging generations of indigenous people, she also disturbs the inherent egotism of most self-representational texts. (“Zitkala-Sa and Bicultural Subjectivity,” 12)

The ‘inherent egotism of self-representational texts,’ at this moment in US cultural history, was a label applicable to many of the regionalist writings dominating the socio-political public sphere. Such texts would come not only to define a particular period in US cultural history, but would also represent a larger ideological project aimed at invoking and cementing a unifying – yet violently exclusionary – American identity. As Gary Totten has noted, this form of early 20th century regionalist writing “seems to work against nationalism and hearken back to an earlier sectionalism; however, in glorifying prototypical American regions, manners, and characteristics, regionalism celebrates the stability and timelessness of local American values as a projection of national values.” (“Zitkala-Sa and the Problem of Regionalism,” 96) By composing a ‘regionalist’ text that concludes with the emergence of a bicultural
narrator, Zitkala-Sa not only breaks the bounds of regionalism as a literary form; she also put into question the very foundations of ‘national values’ and ‘American identity.’ As Totten argues:

Because Zitkala-Sa is writing about a way of life that has survived rapid change, she interprets identity, geography, and everyday reality in response to such change, a form of textual, cultural, and psychological work which explicitly works against the universalizing tendencies of dominant ideologies and which white regionalists do not undertake in their texts. (ibid, 88)

Rearranging the formal rules of regionalism becomes the method and means by which Zitkala-Sa’s ‘colonial intertextuality’ emerges. Her struggle then is not simply a fight for self-representation. Rather, Zitkala-Sa’s investment lies in re-conceiving and re-designing the very cultural and historical mediums of representation at large. For, as Barbara Chiarello writes regarding the role of colonized people in shaping national cultures and narratives, “it is on this site of exchange that statements are ranked, not according to their veracity, but according to the power of those who made them. This place, where the marginalized struggle to gain influence, becomes contested territory.” (“Deflected Missives,” 3)

Zitkala-Sa’s narrative history in American Indian Stories, which, as Ron Carpenter notes, takes form as “an autobiography that chronicles not just her fall into assimilation, but her resiliency in a bicultural world,” sets forth a new mode of American regionalist writing, accounting for the change, negotiations, and losses faced by Native communities in an occupied United States. (“Zitkala-Sa and Bicultural Subjectivity,” 10) This subversive use of regionalist and autobiographical tropes would not be afforded to writers like Alfred C. Gillis and Samuel J. Rice, whose
essays, editorials, prose, and poems never strayed far from, nor appeared to question the formal constraints and traditions of their craft. One of the few Native California authors who would attempt this critical play with cultural form was the poet and painter Wa Wa Chaw.

Born in the Luiseno reservation in Valley Center, California in 1883, but later adopted and raised by an Anglo family in New York City, Wa Wa Chaw would grow to become one of the more prominent Native American feminist activists of the early-20th century. While her poems appeared only sporadically in *The California Indian Herald* and *The Indian*, a collected edition of her works, edited by Stan Steiner and entitled, *Spirit Woman: The Diaries and Paintings of Benita Wa Wa Calachaw Nunez*, would be published by Harper and Row shortly after her death, signaling a level of recognition in the popular Anglo readership afforded to few early-20th century Native writers besides Zitkala-Sa.

Like Zitkala-Sa, Wa Wa Chaw played with certain Anglo cultural forms and recognized stereotypes to make visible the injustices and violences committed against Native American communities in the early 20th century neocolonial United States. Consider, for instance, Wa Wa Chaw’s poem “Indian Games” which plays with the hierarchical, stereotyped dichotomies between ‘progressive’ Anglos and ‘traditionalist’ American Indians:

Big Heap-heart has Pale-face chief,
The Indian game is without grief.
Heap-chiefs share the Pale-face leaf,
Friendship is the guiding game.
Indian love spirit likes are the same,
The only difference is the Indian name.
Buffaloes have left the pastures. (“Indian Games,” 32)
This passage, when read alone, seems to suggest both an uncritical willingness to assimilate within Anglo-American society, and even a submission to condescending and racist depictions of Native subjects in the United States. The use of a static and broken form of English language, the reference to common symbols and signs often employed to stereotype Native communities at the turn of the century, and the seemingly-unbridled offer of friendship, all appear to play into common American cultural fantasies about early Anglo-Native relationships.

Yet, if we acknowledge the subtleties of loss as they appear in this small fragment – from the forced acceptance of a ‘Pale-face Chief’ to the loss of buffaloes from their pastures – a specter of injustice seems to arise. If Wa Wa Chaw has indeed constructed a ‘fantasy’ for her white American readership, perhaps the dimensions of this fantasy are not as stable as they might at first appear. Consider the ‘fantasy’ of this poem in light of Slavoj Zizek’s definition of the term:

On the one hand, fantasy has a beatific side, a stabilizing dimension, which is governed by the dream of a state without disturbances, out of reach of human depravity. On the other hand, fantasy has a destabilizing dimension…[that] encompasses all that ‘irritates’ me about the Other, images that haunt me about what he or she is doing when out of my sight, about how he or she deceives me and plots against me, about how he or she ignores me and indulges in an enjoyment that is intensive beyond my capacity of representation. (“Fantasy,” 192)

“Fantasy,” not unlike Zitkala-Sa’s subversive play with regionalism, not only appeases colonial sentiment, but can also turn that sentiment, and its readership, on their heads, making vividly aware the violent contradictions inherent in such a ‘fantastical’ caricature of history. While Wa Wa Chaw’s “Indian Games” remains somewhat
ambiguous in its representations of Anglo-Native fantasies, her following poem, “The Indian’s Spirit” - which can perhaps be read as a postscript to the former – is more direct in its critical retooling of the haunting dimensions embedded within fantasy:

Down in the deep my spirit will creep,
Fearless of sorrow and fearless of time,
Indians will seek a spirit to help his creed.
Out of the window into the air
No one knows where.
Indian spirit shall share
Deathless and lifeless, sleepless of fear
The noise of my spirit shall speak very clear. (“The Indian’s Spirit,” 40)

Like Zitkala-Sa’s narrator in *American Indian Stories*, the clarity of testimony becomes a central concern within Wa Wa Chaw’s poetic fragment. Yet, whereas Zitkala-Sa chooses to articulate her bicultural testimonies through regionalist and autobiographical forms, Wa Wa Chaw employs elements of fantasy and the ghost story to evoke a haunting, spirit-like narrative presence.

In her book, *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon locates this use of haunting as a means for realizing the contradictions embedded within dominant, colonial narratives of both personal and collective histories:

Haunting is a frightening experience. It always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present. But haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing something-to-be-done. Indeed, it seems to me that haunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, the moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks of rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done. It is this sociopolitical-psychological state to which haunting refers. (*Ghostly Matters*, xvi)
Gordon’s use of haunting (which will be explored in greater detail throughout Chapter 4) represents the transcending movement the awareness of trauma to the forecasting of revolutionary struggle and political change. It realigns the individual's injury within a collective body of resistance. Most importantly, haunting is made active when the invisible - those who cannot participate in the ritual of a ‘unified nation’ - shed their voice on the destructive policies and institutions that would seek their exclusion - their cultural, social, and physical genocide as the nomos of a singular body politic.

The ‘noise’ of Wa Wa Chaw’s ‘spirit,’ both ‘deathless,’ ‘lifeless,’ and ‘fearless,’ becomes an empowered political and historical force as her ‘fantasy’ continues to reveal the contradictions left unresolved within the occupied United States. In a later poem, entitled “Haunted Brains,” Wa Wa Chaw expands upon this movement from trauma to resistance by signaling toward a collective body of ghostly Native voices who will continue to call out subaltern historical narratives, challenging and re-imagining early 20th century Anglo-American culture:

Dead no rest
Haunted Brains make earthly test
Tears of sheer mingle with fear
Justice will lead in a few years.
Death has no fear
Indian no sleep (“Haunted Brains,” 122)

Wa Wa Chaw is thus able to flip her fantasy of friendship over and onto it’s underbelly, revealing the destabilizing symbols of loss, fear, and injustice so central to, and yet unacknowledged by, the neocolonial Anglo-Native relationship at the start of the 20th century. The ‘haunting brain,’ or the ‘deathless and lifeless spirit’ become the means by which Wa Wa Chaw articulates and evokes a bicultural voice of socio-
political testimony and collective resistance in spite of an Anglo readership that would wish to see her works ‘preserved’ as artifacts of their imagined ‘traditional Indian.’

The ghost story, the horror tale, the gothic romance – tropes that can also be found in the works of Hawthorne, Melville, and other Anglo-American predecessors – were all fundamental parts of early 20th century American regionalist writing, and have even been read into the works of Zitkala-Sa by recent critics. As Gary Totten has pointed out:

Zitkala-Sa’s self-representation appeals to American readers as a horror story, complete with detectives, witnesses, deferral, and indirect reported speech. In this sense, her autobiographical memoirs constitute a gothic narrative that requires fear to be remembered. (“Zitkala-Sa and the Problem of Regionalism,” 22)

That both Zitkala-Sa and Wa Wa Chaw chose to access these tropes and formal mediums of expression is, I would argue, no coincidence. Rather, both writers employed such literary forms, not as a means for conditioning their narratives to an Anglo readership, but as a strategy in reshaping the American literary landscape itself. Both Zitkala-Sa and Wa Wa Chaw don’t simply use Anglo cultural mediums; they refashion and reform them, creating a new American Studies that positions bicultural Native American voices within its foundations. It is in this way that, like Alfred C. Gillis and Samuel J. Rice, both Zitkala-Sa and Wa Wa Chaw lay claim to a new Native literary canon, providing them a political voice and historicity beyond the confining binaries of preservation and the production of bare life.

Conclusion: Particularizing the Universal
The universal, as a conceptual system, is molded and shaped by the particulars to which it appeals and by those specific voices evoking it as a means to articulate and mobilize local claims. Likewise both the political frameworks of liberalism and the ideological confines of the nation are adjusted, expanded, and reframed so as to account for and encompass these particularities. As Anna Tsing notes:

Through these [universals], they make their case to the world; through these, too, they are shaped by liberal logics. Yet they must make these rhetorics work within the compromise and collaborations of their particular situations. In the process, new meanings and genealogies are added to liberalism. This does not mean people can do anything they want; however, it changes our view of liberal sovereignty – with its universals to imagine it in concrete purchase on the world. (Friction, 5)

The universal Native subject, as it is formed and contested in the dynamics of an early-20th century liberal nation-state, is both ultimately shaped by and formative of appeals from Zitkala-Sa, Alfred C. Gillis, Samuel J. Rice, Wa Wa Chaw, and other Native writers re-envisioning US culture and history at the turn of the 20th century.

For Zitkala-Sa, the appeal to a universal Native subject places her in conversation with sets of particularities and specificities that alter and transform her broader political position. Earlier on in her autobiography, specific historical injustices, such as the Massacre at Wounded Knee - an event which would have occurred during her second summer home in South Dakota from the Carlisle Industrial School - are obscured in light of a more ambiguous and allegorical subject position. Yet, by the time she writes her 1923 article, “The California Indians of Today,” Zitkala-Sa moves toward the particulars, citing the specific genocide of the California Indian population, a reduction from “210,00 to 20,000 during the siege of seventy
cruel winters, repeated evictions and the spread of the white man’s diseases among them.” (American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings, 101)

Alternatively, writers like Alfred C. Gillis begin to align particular claims with other collaborators and non-Californian allies, broadening their subject positions into a more universal arena. In his essay, “The California Indians” Gillis describes what he calls, “the soul of the Indian:”

There is an unquenchable fire born in the breast of the Indian, a love of race and splendid heroism that all the fiends of hell cannot drown. There are no true, no nobler people than the Indian. I have seen them live and die and starve in the silent canyons of California rather than leave the shade of their ancestors. The mixed Indians are proud of their white blood, but too true and noble to forget the Indian mother that brought them into the world and nursed them in their childhood. The versatile character of the American Indian is such that he has stamped himself indelibly and forever upon this continent. The Indian was a hunter, a warrior, an inventor, a runner, an athlete of world-wide recognition. (in California Indian Herald, January, 1923)

While Gillis’ claims about ‘the Indian’ are somewhat essentializing, his alternate genealogy of American Indian cultural histories is an all-encompassing one, where his subjects are temporally fluid and socially malleable. Most importantly, by invoking this subaltern universal as a means to broaden his narrative of Native America, Gillis is able to, as Cheryl Walker notes of many other indigenous resistance writers, “contest the notion that the past had to take shape as it did,” and subsequently “imagine a nation (or multiple nations) committed to a policy of mutual accommodation.” (Indian Nation: Native American Literature and Indian Nationalisms, 40)

My goal here is not to romanticize this universal employed by Gillis, Zitkala-Sa, or others, nor is it to distract from the flawed and faulty promises of engaging
universal claims. Rather, I am interested in exploring, through both their strategic successes and failures, why engagement with a subaltern universal might have been appealing to these writers as they attempted to reify their subjective voices in an American literary space that would otherwise render them as token, ahistorical ‘cultural objects.’ Through reading through such strategic narratives, I hope only to show how universal claims themselves are neither stable nor fixed, nor do they, as Anna Tsing notes, “actually make everything everywhere the same.” Rather, it is through these particular connections that various political claims “give grip to universal aspirations,” and shape them as such. (Friction, 1)

Through understanding the ways in which certain marginalized communities like the Wintun, Diegano, and Luiseno communities of California, and the Yankton Sioux of South Dakota, negotiate the universal as an attempt to assert claims of citizenry, and rights to land and self-determination, one comes to a new engagement with the complexities surrounding both Western European philosophies and early 20th century United States’ histories. By reading Zitkala-Sa alone, as a token Native American in an otherwise (Anglo)American Studies canon, we would fail to see these complex interactions. It is only through recovering the works of other Native authors, in particular those on the extreme margins of an otherwise already marginalized group, like the California Indians, that we see these complexities arise and take shape, revealing a new and imperative part of our early 20th century US history.

When forefronting Native writers in an American Studies canon, it is likewise this grip - as Tsing refers to it - that is challenged and shaped anew. As Tsing notes, universals are certainly not neutral or disinterested claims for rights or recognition, but
are shaped through the friction that comes from encounters with particulars, as well as
the pathways of history and political empowerment upon which they travel:

Speaking of friction is a reminder of the importance of interaction in
defining movement, cultural form, and agency. Friction is not just about
slowing things down. Friction is required to keep global power in
motion. It shows as (as one advertising jingle put it) where the rubber
meets the road. Roads are a good image for conceptualizing how
friction works: Roads create pathways that make motion easier and
more efficient, but in doing so they limit where we go. The ease of
travel they facilitate is also a structure of confinement. Friction infects
historical trajectories, enabling, excluding, and particularizing.
(Friction, 6)

If the ‘American identity,’ as shaped and solidified in an (Anglo)American Studies
canon, is premised on the myth of ‘continual progress,’ this forward movement occurs
within pathways established by a neocolonial historiography which relies on the
exclusion of Native voices. As Barbara Chiarello notes, “the dominant society is
defined by an ability to enforce its version of the truth, but this task becomes difficult
when the marginalized are allowed to speak.” (“Deflective Missives,” 23) By
rearranging the particulars by which universal friction takes place, we begin to see
new roads emerge, new histories and national cultural identities take shape.

The goal of this chapter has not been to chart or project these new roads
entirely. A far more modest project, this chapter advocates for a re-conceptualization
of US cultural history, the formation of a (Native)American Studies canon that raises
the questions: what desires, anxieties, concerns or questions emerge when those
produced or preserved as ‘bare life’ become the primary cultural producers in a canon?
What new universal claims and critical landscapes take shape when, as Craig Womack
writes, Native Americans “are not merely victims but active agents in history,
innovators of new ways, of Indian ways, or thinking and being and speaking and authoring in this world created by colonial contact[?]” (Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism, 6) By charting a late 19th and early 20th century landscape that moves apart from and beyond figures like Thoreau, Baum, Roosevelt, and Catlin, we might come to new understandings of history, cultural preservation, ecology, identity, and other questions and themes so central to American Studies. As Arnold Krupat points out, “to urge the inclusion of Indian literature in the canon of American literature…is not only to propose an addition but a reevaluation of what ‘American literature’ means.” (The Voice in the Margins: Native American Literature and the Canon, 85)

In addition to re-evaluations of the canon, Zitkala-Sa and her American Indian contemporaries inspire new avenues for theoretical and cultural discourse that move beyond previously established academic boundaries and national borders. As Gary Totten notes:

Zitkala-Sa constructs a complex and challenging cultural and national landscape and her texts demand a critical discourse that seeks not to fulfill the needs of dominant U.S. culture and criticism, but responds appropriately to aesthetic, cultural and national difference. (“Zitkala-Sa and the Problem of Regionalism,” 113)

To build a critical paradigm rooted in ‘aesthetic, cultural and national difference’ requires new conceptualizations of national literatures not as all-encompassing, absorbing or assimilative, but as spawning from multiple points of origin, a variety of particulars and subaltern narratives not yet considered by dominant cultural histories. It is my hope that this chapter, as well as those to follow, in tracing the discourses of preservation and the production of bare life emerging at the turn of the 20th century,
will also begin to suggest new avenues and intersections between American Studies and cultural criticism where the voices confined, restrained, and cast apart from ‘American civil society’ might offer up new positions from which to engage a trans-regional, trans-national, trans-disciplinary, and trans-cultural American Studies.

This ethic of ‘American’ literary studies will need not only take on the anti-colonial cultural texts bespeaking an ongoing occupation within the 20th and 21st century United States, but requires an attention to the transnational dimensions of the early 20th century national imaginary, considering the means by which preservationist discourse and its subsequent technologies of violence, developed within the domestic US, were transported abroad in the larger project of American Empire. The following Chapter will be specifically concerned with the way in which the genocidal dimensions of preservationist discourse were further accented in the understudied US military occupation of Haiti from 1914-1940, exploring the friction of US biopolitical rhetoric as it is transported from the post/neoplantation US South and into the post/neocolonial Caribbean.
Chapter 3:

*Thomas Sutpen’s Geography Lesson:*

*Historical Obscurities and the Racial Remapping in William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!*

The design that will later become Sutpen’s Hundred begins with a geography lesson, or lack thereof. In a “one-room country school in a nest of Tidewater plantations” Thomas Sutpen’s teacher reads to the class from a book on Haiti and other points in the Caribbean:

That was how I learned of the West Indies. Not where they were, though if I had known at the time that that knowledge would someday serve me, I would have learned that too. What I learned was that there was a place called the West Indies to which poor men went in ships and became rich, it didn’t matter how, so long as that man was clever and courageous…. *(Absalom, Absalom! 195)*

Geography, or the ‘where they were’ of points outside one’s own frame of reference, is obscured within the semiotic systems by which the Caribbean islands were represented to those inhabiting the industrialized metropolises and tidewater plantations of the United States. Cleverness, courage, and other traits associable to the *Bildungsroman* hero, outlined the primary system of knowledge used to locate and assign symbolic attributes to points throughout the globe. Haiti, as translated through these geographically impoverished narratives of Thomas Sutpen, was thus mapped not by latitudinal coordinates but a colonialist cartography, symbolically charting the country as a “spot of earth which might have been created and set aside by Heaven itself…as a theater for violence and injustice and bloodshed and all the satanic lusts of
human greed and cruelty, for the last despairing fury of all the pariah-interdict and all the doomed.” (ibid, 202)

Ironically, the theological, anti-humanist rhetoric used to define and coordinate Sutpen’s Haiti was not all too dissimilar from popular ecological depictions of the US South throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. By 1867, a malaria-ridden John Muir had already begun to cast “the border which sweeps from Maryland to Texas” within a diseased topography of fevers and plagues:

The mainland of Florida is less salubrious than the islands, but no portion of the coast, nor of the flat border which sweeps from Maryland to Texas, is quite free from malaria. All the inhabitants of this region, whether black or white, are liable to be prostrated by the ever-present fever and ague, to say nothing of the plagues of cholera and yellow fever that come and go suddenly like storms, prostrating the population and cutting gaps in it like hurricanes in the woods… The world, we are told, was made especially for man – a presumption not supported by all the facts…[W]hen man betakes himself to sickly parts of the tropics and perishes, he cannot see that he was ever intended for such deadly climates. No, he will rather accuse the first mother of the cause of the difficulty, though she may never have seen a fever district; or will consider it a providential chastisement for some self-invented form of sin. (A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf, 824-26)

Muir’s depiction of the climate and ecology of the US South is far more compatible with US visions of the Caribbean than with ecological renderings of the US North. A space of both ‘plagues’ and ‘chastisement’, the US South, for Muir, was “a spot of earth” set aside if only to render the body impotent and complicate the relationship between celestial providence and organic communion. If the world as “we are told, was made especially for man,” the US South, like Sutpen’s Haiti, stood antithetical to such a world or the representation of its making. Of course, John Muir’s world was prefaced on 19th century conceptions of the inexhaustible American wilderness, that
which offered itself as an implicit challenge for white, male organization, and could be juxtaposed both to the effeminacy of the European dandy and the noble savagery present in 19th century representations of indigenous cultures. The heat, swamps, hurricanes and disease of the South, what Jon Smith refers to as the “roiling, deadly, engulfing agency,” while geo-politically tied to the nation, appeared incompatible with a landscape born of ‘American’ identity. (“Hot Bodies and ‘Barbaric Tropics’: The U.S. South and New World Natures,” 117)

If ecological climates are to be charted along ideological axes of national-identity and the limits of civil organization and subjectivities, the Southern ‘American’ landscape seems to have less in common with an American ideology of the ‘tameable’ sublime, sharing many more attributes with the transnational, pan-American thinking of José Martí and Alejo Carpentier, the latter who described the relationship between literature and environment most succinctly in his essay on the foundations of the *marvelous real*:

> How could America be anything other than marvelously real?...Our world is baroque because of its architecture – this goes without saying – the unruly complexities of its nature and its vegetation, the many colors that surround us, the telluric pulse of the phenomena we still feel. There is a famous letter written to a friend by Goethe in his old age in which he describes the place near Weimar where he plans to build a house, saying, ‘Such a joy to live where nature has already been tamed forever.’ He couldn’t have written that in America, where our nature is untamed, as is our history, a history of both the marvelous real and the strange in America… (*The Baroque and the Marvelous Real*, 104-105)

Carpentier’s American wilderness, like the depictions of such naturalists and geopolitical writers as Muir, Thoreau, and Frederick Jackson Turner, is colorful and varied, multivalent and wild, and, perhaps most importantly, it stands juxtaposed to
the tamed spaces inhabited by the European colonizer. Yet, whereas the Thoreauvian wilderness - that which grounded the early ideologies of Manifest Destiny, Turner’s frontier thesis, and Perry Miller’s founding ideas for American Studies in *Errand into the Wilderness* - is rooted in the preconditions of capitalist investment and industrial possibility – i.e. that which is never yet, but always soon to be tamed – Carpentier’s nature with its “unruly complexities” connotes a continuous shift between states of being - the marvelous real and the strange - in which nature untamed *is* the precondition for social organization and cultural representation.

Additionally, Carpentier parallels the underlying spontaneity and abstract violence of the natural process to human histories of social organization, which he likewise signals as part of the “marvelous real and strange.” The untamable and unruly, as defining characteristics of both the natural world and civil society, dismantles and challenges pervading ‘American’ notions of wilderness as that sublime experience which realizes its Cartesian climax when juxtaposed to an outside world that is always already its Other. The very climate of Carpentier’s Caribbean-centric ‘America,’ sharing many of the same swamplands, torrential rains, and unbearable humidity of the US South, disallows such preconceived binaries of the subjective-mind/bodied-wilderness, in which the former might master or manipulate the latter. In addition to the predominating symbolisms outlining our ideological constructs of wilderneses, climate and ecologies, writers like Carpentier encourage us, as Jon Smith notes, to:

…go beyond such a metaphorical use to examine the ways in which the sheer heat experienced by much of the Caribbean and the U.S. South (indeed, the global South), with its attendant disease, vegetative
profusion, biodiversity, and long growing season (eventuating in plantation culture) render the autochthonous body and, indeed, materiality or ‘things’ in general much more visible than a European discourse that at least since Descartes has sought to repress them.” (107)

Smith’s argument, which lingers dangerously close to environmental-determinism, interprets not only the nationalist narratives set forth by John Muir and others, but the fundamental components of the actual ecologies themselves to frame the contours of an expansive, incorporative Global South.

If climates, ecologies and theological renderings alone could usurp and re-envision the boundaries of the nation-state - and the Southern US does share many more eco-geographic traits with the Caribbean islands than its Northern neighbors - both Haiti and Yoknapatawpha County might potentially be re-mapped together on one side of what Amy Kaplan refers to as “the racially inflected distinction between images of the ‘jungle’ and ‘wilderness,’” their ecologies and climates contained within a more expansive, Global South. (Cultures of U.S. Imperialism, 9) The jungle, as a symbolic, geographic point of reference for cultures outside from the ‘American wilderness’ sets itself up in a binary equation of landscape and culture, wherein one community might define itself in contrast to the other. As Jon Smith notes:

Historically, people who like wilderness, who even invest their (usually ‘American’) identity in the idea of it – a roster of whom would included Muir, Miller, Frederick Jackson Turner, and a host of their intellectual disciples – have tended to marginalize the idea of jungle, even to define ‘America’ in opposition to it. (Hot Bodies and ‘Barbaric Tropics,’ 117)

The marginalization of the jungle not only as a ‘racially-inflected’ geography, but a cultural contrast to national ideology, requires us to not only locate it on a stable,
horizontal plane, but to map it historically as well, considering both the genealogy of the term and the narratives of those places signaled by its use.

The jungle then, as an incorporative concept of place, speaks not only to the shared ecological and geographic attributes of the Global South, but to the common histories of exploitation, slavery, reconstruction and military occupation which worked in part to define Haiti and Mississippi throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Both the historical narrative within *Absalom, Absalom!* and the contemporary events surrounding its publication were embedded in a myriad of historical specificities particular to and incorporative of each locale. The story of Sutpen’s Hundred, built and sustained by the labor acquired through a Caribbean voyage, and collapsing not long after the official conclusion to the reconstruction of the Southern United States, was simultaneously interpreted by an American readership immersed in news surrounding the 1914-1934 US occupation of Haiti, in which certain technologies of antebellum plantation violence and Northern military paternalism were exported from the US South and into the presumably independent nations throughout the Caribbean. Symbolic imagery and fragmentary phrasings figure throughout *Absalom, Absalom!* interchanging the literary languages of Haiti and the US South, both being represented within a larger, trans-historical hemispheric jungle of exploitation and forced labor.

Consider, for instance, Quentin Compson’s narration of Sutpen’s time in Haiti and the colonial oppression by which his task was sustained:

…the planting of nature and men too watered not only by the wasted blood but breathed over by the winds in which doomed ships had fled in vain, out of which the last tatter of sail had sunk into the blue sea, along which the last vain despairing cry of woman or child had blown away; - the planting of men too: the yet intact bones and brains in
which the old unsleeping blood that had vanished into the earth they
trod still cried out for vengeance. And he overseeing it, riding
peacefully about on his horse while he learned the
language…(Absalom, Absalom!, 202)

The ‘planting of men’ contains within its phrasing a Haitian cultural referent—travay
te pou zo (‘the farming of bones’) – which symbolizes both the grueling task of
harvesting sugar cane and the act of remembering a past wrought with historical
violence. Quentin, who would have had no prior knowledge of the expression itself, is
able to access pan-Caribbean culture (or it’s violent dismissal) through a genealogy of
slavery and colonialism inclusive of the US South, the “doomed ships” of the trans-
Atlantic trade, and Sutpen as the overseer who “peacefully” engages this new
language. Additionally, the figurative genealogy of travay te pou zo became
increasingly relevant just shortly after the publication of Faulkner’s text, when the
phrase was used to represent the Dominican President Rafael Trujillo’s ordered
execution of 30,000 Haitian sugar cane workers in 1937. The remnants and emergent
ghostly voices move throughout both Faulkner’s Haiti and Yoknapatawpha with
historical and geographic ease, the Global South figuring into the novel as a
multilayered palimpsest in which pre-revolutionary Haitian sugarcane plantations, the
antebellum South, military-based reconstruction, and the 20th century occupation of
Haiti, are all condensed and conflated in a Judeo-Christian fable of the hemispheric
jungle, its exploitation and collapse.

Yet, to situate Yoknapatawpha County and Haiti within a homogenizing
geography ignores the racially coded divides separating the wilderness and the jungle.
Indeed, if such distinctions are to exist, they are determined by ideology and not
ecology. The wilderness, as a signifying frontier of white masculinity, is premised upon its contrasting binary, what Kaplan more specifically calls “the enervated ‘barbaric tropic’ marked by its unspoken connotations of blackness.” (ibid, 9) Race and its ideological constructs, as Thomas Sutpen learns on his voyages throughout both the Caribbean and the Southern US, are far more determining of Western cartography than any shared ecologies, histories or geographic proximities.

Racial mapping, as a practice that supplants other modes of geographic organization, pertains not only to divides at the hemispheric level, but codes and contextualizes the more intimate geographies of nations, states, cities, towns and even families. From genealogical geographies of racial miscegenation and antebellum lineage, to the de jure segregation of post-Reconstruction Jim Crow cities, to what Mary Renda refers to as “Woodrow Wilson’s wholly racialized vision of liberal internationalism” (Taking Haiti, 420) wherein diplomatic racism structures a nation’s, and individual’s, potential for self-determination, race becomes the imperial mapmakers’ primary tool in exercising sovereignty.

Thomas Sutpen’s geography lesson, I will argue, comes not from the abstract and obscured passages read in his one-room Tidewater schoolhouse, but through his own narrative recapitulation of the conflated and condensed routes by which he traveled. Geographic knowledge - to the slave-holder, the occupying marine, the imperial entrepreneur - is an active process of constant disassembly and remapping, wherein the Global South, its jungles and its wildernesses, are determined not by latitudinal degrees, but through the racist technologies of violence and the production of both sovereign subjects and bare life.
“...maybe nothing ever happens once....” Historical Absence and Negotiation in William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*

Sutpen’s Hundred, the late antebellum plantation driving the plot of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the climatic result of young Thomas Sutpen’s geography lessons, rests on a palimpsest of various spaces throughout both the US South and the Global South at large. It is “the halfway point between what we call the jungle and what we call civilization, halfway between the dark inscrutable continent from which the black blood, the black bodies and flesh and thinking and remembering and hopes and desires, was ravished by violence, and the cold known land to which it was doomed, the civilized land and people.” (Faulkner, 202)

Indeed, the transnational history and repeated significance of Sutpen’s Hundred might, at first glance, appear to reaffirm and situate Yoknapatawpha County on one side of the colonial binary of inscrutable jungle and temperate wilderness. Such an affirmation could lead to a reductive reading of the ecologies present as essentialist, primordial or without a historical context rooted in the slave system and its export among the Caribbean colonies. Consider, for instance, Anne Fisher-Wirth’s reading of the landscapes present in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!:

Faulkner reminds us that beneath or beyond the ‘eggshell shibboleth’ of class and race – the human abstraction that admit some, ban others, and wreak such havoc – there is the living physical universe of stars and cedar trees, hound dogs and horses, wisteria and mud and of ourselves as biological organisms, as ‘mammalian meat.’ (“William Faulkner, Peter Matthiessen, and the Environmental Imagination,” 55)
Fisher-Wirth, relying on French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concept of ‘flesh,’ makes the existential argument that “…Faulkner’s awareness is not simply that the natural world lies underneath the human drama, but that something else lies underneath, of which the natural world is an embodying.” (ibid, 55) Ironically, Fisher-Wirth’s use of presumed biological certainties in making her phenomenological argument about the something else present in Faulkner, ignores the very real violence of slavery, colonialism and genocide that have established the landscape upon which Faulkner’s characters act. This irresponsible ignorance of historical violence and reoccurring injustices, that which is relegated to the ‘eggshell shibboleth’ of class and race, leads Fisher-Wirth to the reductive concluding claim that:

Just so Sutpen’s house, which he wants to stand for his dynasty, is simply a physical object; there is no ulterior meaning in its gradual collapse. This natural process carries all human bodies with it as well; what the patriarch aspires to – the nonrelationality, the incorporeality, of complete dominance and dominion, is swept up in, negated by, the organic process of flesh. (ibid, 59)

While the organic process of flesh could supercede and endure beyond mementos of civil society and its immortal aspirations, we must recognize that both flesh and organic process hold cultural value and epistemological histories as well. To presuppose the autochthonous body and its ecological roots as a trump card to certain social histories misses out on the way in which the environment serves as an ideological constituent in the colonial imaginary, existing within the constructs of civil society and its maintenance. While incorporeality may be negated by organic processes of flesh, it is the sovereign power of privileged subjects to deem Others as only flesh and nothing more that creates such incorporeal subjectivities in the first
place. If Sutpen’s Hundred is to be carried away by natural processes back into the jungle of meaninglessness, we must also recognize that the ephemeral dynasty itself was built from the labor of those symbolically tied to this so-called meaningless ecology. In order to determine the geographical coordinates and ecological attributes and agency of Sutpen’s Hundred, we must first consider the cartographic representations of its genealogy – i.e. understanding Sutpen’s Hundred requires us first and foremost to understand and locate the places of its conception and creation.

The story of Thomas Sutpen’s journey to acquire the slave labor necessary for his dynastic design, as told by Sutpen himself, is premised on the disavow and abstraction of temporal movement through and between actual geographic coordinates within the Global South. As Quentin Compson’s grandfather remarks, there was:

…no more detail and information about that than about how he got from the field, his overseeing, into the besieged house when the niggers rushed at him with their machetes, than how he got from the rotting cabin in Virginia to the fields he oversaw. (201)

The strategic refusal to contextualize these distinct and specific places within a sequential travel narrative, allows Sutpen’s listeners to imagine the “rotting cabin in Virginia” and the Caribbean “fields he oversaw” as both one and the same, adding a mythic tone to the tale, which could arguably explain many of its’ inconsistencies and seeming impossibilities. The absence overlaying the geographic particularities in Sutpen’s journey is matched, for instance, by a historical ambiguity that exposes certain contradicting discrepancies between Sutpen’s conveyed dates and the actual history of Haiti as an independent nation.
According to the timeline of the novel, Sutpen’s single-handed suppression of the plantation revolt occurred in or around 1824. This event, however, would have happened twenty years after the Revolution and subsequent declaration of Haiti as an independent nation. By 1824, the year of Sutpen’s profiteering in the West Indies, Haiti was under the leadership of President Jean Pierre Boyer who had unified and asserted complete authority over the previously divided island. It was during this time that Boyer freed all remaining slaves in Santo Domingo. By the early 1820s, white ownership of any land in Haiti was both legally disallowed and culturally stigmatized. While Boyer’s presidency did institute the Code Rural, a law designed to tie formerly enslaved peasant laborers to plantation land denying them certain rights of mobility, Sutpen’s account, which explicitly implies slave revolts and the transnational dealing of peoples as commodities is, if not entirely inaccurate, at least suggestive of the possibility that these particular historical discrepancies might beg for a reading of Sutpen’s time in Haiti as an impossible journey.

This obscurcation and misrepresentation of geographic place and historical dates is most often interpreted through Faulkner’s interest in linear vs. cyclical models of time, narrative, and history. The possibilities that cyclical history might disassemble and replace dominant Western teleology is embraced by many of Faulkner’s narrators who employ tactics of repetition as a means for unearthing deeper historical truths. Drawn most vivid in a passage spoken by Quentin Compson, it becomes clear that the history of Absalom, Absalom! cannot be contained within a chronological trajectory of specific dates and locales, but is transient and repetitive, a specter that continues to haunt contradictions left unresolved:
...Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different
tone the unchanging sky, it doesn’t matter. (Absalom, Absalom!, 261)

Repetition, in its ability to register the haunting politics of that which never once
happens but continues to ripple throughout history, can perhaps provide us with more
detailed parallels and palimpsests embedded in the socio-political relationships
between Haiti and the US. When observed as a ripple within a series of unresolved
historical contradictions, one could argue that the same racist technologies of empire
that would have allowed the slaveholding Thomas Sutpen to profit from the West
Indies in the 18th century were also creating accessible avenues for a US marine
Thomas Sutpen to profit in Haiti between 1914 and 1940. In her essay, “Almost
Feminine, Almost Brother, Almost Southern: The Transnational Queer Figure of
Charles Bon in Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!” Elizabeth Steeby discusses the
inconsistent historical timelines in terms of a symbolic imperialism that is
continuously replicating and dismantling itself. Drawing from Mary Renda’s assertion
that “U.S. Americans who presided over, visited, or read about Haiti [from 1915-
1940] found opportunities to reimagine their own nation and their own lives as they
appeared to be reflected by and refracted through Haitian culture,” Steeby argues that
the twenty-year delay in Sutpen’s visit to Haiti can be read in terms of the ambiguity
of imperial desire and its ability to reflect and refract itself across real historical time.
Centering an argument on the figure of Charles Bon, Sutpen’s illegitimate son with his
Haitian-born first wife Eulalia Bon Sutpen, Steeby claims that the ambiguities present
in the identity of Bon himself are both a product and producer of a colonial violence that cannot be located in specific dates or categories. (Steeby, 152)

While such parallel ‘recollections’ of a hemispheric South are useful in signaling to certain pervasive injustices left unaccounted for, I would also argue that this evasion of historical specificity and distinction might simultaneously act as a means for dismissing or exorcising colonial guilt.

I read Quentin’s tone, which shifts from an intricate allegorical articulation of historical understanding to abstract nihilism, as both opening up theoretical conversations concerning narrative time at the same moment that it forecloses possibilities for historical distinction and revolutionary possibility. As detailed in Chapter 2, repetition, like geographic obscurcation or ‘universal’ wisdom, when treated as uninterruptible and unchanging, neglects the power of particularities to reveal historical injustice and political agency. Quentin’s unchanging sky, while aiding in a cross-historic, hemispheric critique of certain universalizing histories, ignores the fracturing power of events like the Haitian Revolution, as well as the diasporic movement of imperial investments and forced passages wherein both “poor men went in ships and became rich” and human beings from Africa were violently reshaped into transatlantic commodities.

This fluid state of retelling, that which presumes at its very center some unchanged primordial truth, is subsequently bound to the contemporary perspectives of both its narrators and audiences. Constantly interpreted via the outward ripple in the pond, Thomas Sutpen’s voyage depends on both the storyteller’s and the story-listener’s capacity for narrative reconstruction:
He went to the West Indies. That’s how he said it: not how he managed
to find where the West Indies were nor where the ships departed from
to go there, nor how he got to where the ships were and got in one nor
how he liked the sea nor about the hardships of a sailor’s life and it
must have been a hardship indeed for him, a boy of fourteen or fifteen
who had never seen the ocean before, going to sea in 1823. *Absalom,
Absalom!*, 193)

Faulkner’s history of the Global South, and its relative geographies, are part of a
reconstruction project reliant on the historical and geographic imaginations of
Sutpen’s subsequent white Southern narrators, as well as the dominant readership base
for the text itself, who, like Faulkner, were immersed in their own contemporary
narratives regarding Haiti and the United States. Indeed, if the imaginative processes
required to fully engage Sutpen’s journey requires active listening on both the part of
Quentin Compson, Shrevlin McCannon, and, most importantly, Faulkner’s
contemporary audiences, critical assessment of the narrative itself must be interpreted
first and foremost through the frames of comprehension and recapitulation by which it
was received.

“...a spot of earth which might have been created and set aside...”: US interpolations
of Haiti from 1804-1936

Published in 1936, *Absalom, Absalom!* was first read by a US audience at the
close of a full-scale military occupation which saw, by official US estimates more than
3,000 Haitians, and, by a more thorough historical accounting, 11,500 Haitians killed.
Haiti, as a space for the exercising of paternalist discourse and US imperial
sensibilities, served, in one sense, as a stepping stone in what Barbara Ladd refers to
as “new nationalism,” or the shift from a “a reunion of North and South after
Reconstruction to the ideological rhetoric of Empire building.” (“William Faulkner
and the Discourse of Race and Nation,” 148) On a temporal, historical plane, the
occupation existed within a crucial space between the fragmentation and unification of
a nation-state at the close of the Civil War, and the solidification of that nation as an
imperial hegemony by the close of WWII. With the projection of empire just shortly
after the emergence of a newly united nation, the US South found itself with a more
refined critical perspective in assessing 20th century liberal internationalism and the
United States interests and investments in the Caribbean:

…when a nation envisions itself in ahistorical and millenialist terms,
as new and as redemptive, it denies its relationships to the past, even to
the history of its making. For a white southerner who had been, prior to
his defeat by the United States, at the very center of a southern
nationalism that envisioned itself in terms remarkably similar to those
of the United States (i.e. as redemptive), the consequence is that, by
logic of his own rhetoric, he has become through his defeat the inheritor
of history and the bearer of prior displacements in his own. (“William
Faulkner and the Discourse of Race and Nation,” 153)

The US Southerner as a symbolic predecessor, historical victim, and contemporary
coonspirator with American Empire, was able to situate Haiti along a national
narrative of both redeemable possibility and historical doubt. The Southerner was thus
granted a unique critical perspective when witnessing and participating in the 1915-
1940 US occupation of Haiti.

And yet, Haiti was also situated within the not-so-critical perspective of a
romanticized backdrop by which the new ‘united’ citizens could picture themselves
along a modern, cognitive map of global circulations and imperial designs. As Mary
Renda has documented in her detailed work on the culture of military imperialism in Haiti:

Popular narratives that sensationalized Haiti and positioned readers as voyeurs in an exotic land made that move all the more appealing. In this sense, sensational narratives reinforced official discourses and strengthened their ability to conscript ordinary citizens into the logic of empire. Together, popular and official discourses invited U.S. Americans to adopt an imperial perspective and fueled public fascination with Haiti as one means to that end. (ibid, 21)

Haiti, by the 1930s had become not only a sight of military occupation, but an exoticized travel destination that formed a crucial part of white Americans’ sense of the global exterior to their home empire. Best-selling texts like William Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* (1929), John Vandercook’s *Black Majesty* (1928), Blair Nile’s *Black Haiti: A Biography of Africa’s Eldest Daughter* (1926) and Edna Taft’s *A Puritan in Voodoo-Land* (1938) provided pulp accounts of the authors’ voyages through a country contextualized by scenes of fetishized abjection, and possibilities for new and contrasting definitions of white Northern subjectivity. The agency that came with this new geographic imagination mapped Haiti not only as a ‘colony’ of wide-reaching US military presence, but a locatable point in the white American middle-class’ formation of a modern, internationalist geography. Haiti, as portrayed by these journalists and bourgeois travelers, was a space of both primordial perversity and capitalist possibility, where white American men and women could depict and embellish representations of the black Other as both a sexual grotesque and irrational child in their paternalistic, imperial, hetero-normative, global family structure. As editorial board member Carl Van Doren wrote of Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* in 1929:
Now and then the people of the United States should be reminded that they are no longer merely citizens of a republic but also citizens of an empire which reaches out from its native continent to include various isthmuses and islands far away from New York or Chicago or San Francisco, from Iowa or Oregon. And at the same time they should be reminded that ancient human moods and ideas have by no means been subdued throughout the American empire to the modern, rational, scientific temper which is supposed to administer the government and influence the customs of people. (as cited in Taking Haiti, 3)

Haiti, as contextualized here by Van Doren, both inscribed for individuals the cognitive maps necessary for imagining US Empire while simultaneously signaling toward an Enlightenment ontology of the racist cartography dictating these maps, their lines of longitude and latitude cast by racially-coded conversations regarding “modern, rational, scientific temper.”

This ‘modern’ temper exercised and articulated its distinctions from ‘uncivilized’ nations like Haiti through a series of pulp Hollywood films like White Zombie (1932) and I Walked with a Zombie (1943), as well as the inclusion of Haitian characters and settings in the popular Orson Welles’ radio show, The Shadow, wherein Haitian peoples and cultures were inscribed with subhuman, zombie-like presences and juxtaposed to the white scientists and crime-fighting superheroes acting as the narratives’ protagonists. Haiti thus became a racialized and geographically marked parallel to the US sense of self being formed out from developing technologies at the start of the 20th century.

In addition to the distant accounts and interpretations of Haiti from journalists and filmmakers, Marine Corp sergeants also capitalized from more interpersonal, sensationalized accounts of their military exploits provided to an American literary public eager for more tools in their quest to imagine American empire. Faustin
Wirkus’ *The White King of Gonave* (1931) and John Houston Craig’s *Black Bagdad: The Arabian Nights Adventures of a Marine Captain in Haiti* (1933) and *Cannibal Cousins* (1934) registered Haiti as a space where supremacist desire could be revealed and materialized in ways no longer tenable by the domestic US:

In the context of increasingly visible African American and feminist challenges to the social, economic, political, and cultural predominance of white men in the teens and twenties, the call to take up the paternalist mantle in Haiti seems to have had a particularly compelling resonance for some white U.S. men. (*ibid*, 302)

These narratives, in addition to charting a racially inscribed First/Third World cartography of empire, fashioned the already exoticized Haiti as a space for regaining the privileges of white men to exercise the perverse desires of supremacy and subjugation being contested and challenged in both social and legal sphere throughout the United States.

The accounts of returning marines combined the 1930s’ focus on ‘modern, rational, scientific temper’ with the late 19th century belief that, as young Thomas Sutpen noted, “courage and cleverness” might serve as adequate tool for the imperial cartographer in locating and inscribing points throughout the globe. The combination of over-determined white subjectivities and a racist cartographic ontology that mapped Haiti as a space void of reason and historical import, forged a biopolitical project in which acts that would be otherwise inconsistent with the ideologies of liberalism and democracy could be committed in this place that was simultaneously cast as no-place at all. As Faustus Wirkus notes in his introduction to *The White King of Gonave*:

‘Join the Marines and See the World’ screamed the enlistment posters in Wilkes-Barre. Within the space of ten days one young man from the collieries of Pennsylvania was ‘seeing the world,’ not as a mere soldier,
a bayonet in a force of a thousand or one-hundred thousand bayonets by which fighting forces are numbered – but as an arbiter of life and death. (The White King of Gonave, 3)

‘Seeing the world’ as Wirkus notes and Sutpen proves throughout his own Caribbean voyage, is as much about the movement between actual spaces as it is about the exercise of violence in both intimate and global territories, a biopolitical project that deems all non-white places and peoples as no-places, no-peoples.

This self-fashioning of white US identity via the ideological mapping of Haiti as “a theater for violence,” held historical roots in antebellum slaveholding society’s interpretation of liberal, humanistic black societies. Indeed, one could interpret the contemporary anxieties concerning the protection of privileged white subjectivities in the Jim Crow South and radically segregated US North as a historical palimpsest of racism and sovereignty, overlaid by the fears of early 19th century plantation owners hoping to obscure or reinterpret news from the Haitian Revolution. For slaves working on plantations in the US South and other points in the Caribbean, news of the war waged against French planters and Toussaint’s revolutionary government sounded a call to rebellion and revolt against the backwardness of a proclaimed post-enlightenment revolutionary nation that still sought to sustain and exploit civil divides between races. Indeed, Jefferson’s refusal to acknowledge Haitian independence was both a signal toward his own personal profits from Southern slavery, as well as a proclamation of the fear of a revolt within the US itself. Alternatively, slave-owners and Confederacy politicians re-interpreted the post-revolutionary Haitian state as exemplary of the disastrous consequences of enlightenment ideologies in plantation
societies. As Alfred N. Hunt notes, the varying means by which white plantation
society distorted and manipulated Haiti to reaffirm the paternalistic discourse
surrounding biological distinctions between the races and subsequent societal
structures, falsified and mythologized an entire century’s worth of national history and
geopolitical understanding:

Unfortunately, Haiti in the nineteenth century suffered civil wars, massacres, and assassinations. That history only served to reinforce white slave owners’ fundamental skepticism of the capabilities of blacks living in freedom. Southerners looked to Haiti more than to the northern states to evaluate what freedom meant to blacks. Given their orientations, slaveholders found further evidence to bolster their tendencies toward racist views. (Hunt, 132)

Independent Haiti was not simply a peripheral aberrance in the racist narratives of antebellum slave society, but a crucial focal point, hotly contested and debated for symbolic value. Haiti as a symbol of white Southern anxiety as well as an affirmation of their arguments for the maintenance and survival of antebellum slave society, required not only a rewriting and reinterpretation of the Haitian state itself, but a willful ignorance of certain socio-political histories essential to understanding Haiti’s narrative as an emergent, independent state. As Hunt notes:

The destruction of the economy during the struggle for St. Domingue, the bitter rivalries between mulatto and black that caused unending internal instability, and Haiti’s complete isolation by the republics that shared the Caribbean were not part of southerner’s evaluation of the black experiment with freedom. (Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean: Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America, 132-3)

Much like the socio-economic impetus underlying Woodrow Wilson’s decision to invade Haiti in 1914, the politics surrounding the fight between German nationals and US capitalist firms to maintain economic sovereignty in the Caribbean throughout the
early 20th century, and its effects on Haitian governance, economies and cultures, were ignored and dismissed from 20th century US imaginings of the country; so too did antebellum Southerners sacrifice an accurate historical depiction of the Caribbean nation for nightmarish embellishments that did more to justify antebellum claims to ideological righteousness than encourage possibilities for an awake and aware American public. Like the many 20th century interpretations of Haiti used to justify the twenty-five year occupation, these antebellum processes of dismissive revision were so significant, Hunt claims, that “the southern interpretation of the Haitian Revolution and the way it was used strongly suggest one of the reasons why it took a civil war to emancipate the slaves.” (ibid, 146)

This white American interpretation of Haiti as a failed experiment in black liberation persisted throughout the US South and North well into the 20th century, arguably forming both the ideological roots of the 1914-1940 occupation as well as, for African American’s seeking the rights and privileges granted to middle class whites in both the supremacist domestic state and transnational empire, a point of protest and revelation regarding the violent colonialist roots of Woodrow Wilson’s so-called ‘noninterventionist state.’ By the 1920’s both US and internationalist newspapers like The Nation and L’Union Patriotique, as well as major African American organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) called out actively in opposition to the United State’s racialized imperial war, even going so far as to build ties with the resisting Cacos peasant insurgency within Haiti itself. In 1920, famed Harlem Renaissance writer James Weldon Johnson traveled to Haiti with funds from the NAACP and published his
article, “Self-Determining Haiti” in The Nation. In addition to blasphemying the American government for the atrocities committed by US marines, Johnson illuminated and attempted to make vivid and whole the life of both the peasantry and the black upper class in modern Haiti. He additionally signaled to Haiti as a rallying point for African diasporic communities everywhere, citing its revolutionary history as the first black republic. Johnson’s travels were part of much larger historical moment in which well-known African American authors, poets and playwrights journeyed to Haiti both in political protest against US occupation and in search of deeper ethnographic roots and cultural connections. Zora Neale Hurston’s Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica (1938) and Langston Hughes’ “A People Without Shoes: The Haitian Masses” (1934) each voiced, albeit through varying degrees and tactics, a desire to locate political concerns of the present in dialogue with a 19th century history highlighting the Haitian Revolution as a nexus in post-slavery diasporic struggles. Yet, while the Harlem Renaissance did much to excavate Haiti from the racist dredges of white American interpolation, many of these writers still continued to invest in Haiti as a primordial site of certain pre-historical truths – as a place wherein culture remained stagnant, history stable, and social relations and organizational complexities unchanged.

Ultimately, what connects each and all of these interpretations - from the Haitian Revolution to the end of the US occupation - is the refusal of the interpreters to acknowledge a Haiti outside and apart from its rendering by distinct US subjectivities. The historical paralleling central to Southern and Northern racist technologies of violence and the subversions and protests against such imperial
rhetoric, situates Haiti not as an independently locatable nation-state, nor an
indistinguishable point in the incorporative Southern hemisphere, but an ideologically
mapped zone of interpolation, whose contours are drawn not by the Haitians
themselves, but the socio-cultural renderings of white and black Americans. Thomas
Sutpen’s geography lesson is not excused from this US cultural project of remapping
and rewriting the historical contexts for Haiti, nor is its reassessment and evaluation
by the novel’s subsequent narrators. Even the final telling of Faulkner’s Absalom,
Absalom!, which occurs in a conversation where Shrevlin McCannon, a Harvard
student from Canada who has never been to the South, acts as a fact checker and
historical reference to the tale as re-imagined by Quentin, seems to both embrace a
historical specificity in regards to the US narrative while simultaneously rejecting any
accurate representations of Haitian history or geography. Consider, for instance, the
interjection of Shrevlin into Quentin’s initial narration of Sutpen’s childhood:

“Because he was born in West Virginia, in the mountains where –’
(‘Not in West Virginia,’ Shreive said. ‘Because if he was twenty-five
years old in Mississippi in 1833, he was born in 1808. And there wasn’t
any West Virginia in 1808 because –’ ‘All right Quentin. ‘- West
Virginia wasn’t admitted –’ ‘All right all right,’ Quentin said. ‘ – into
the United States until –’ ‘All right all right all right,’ Quentin said.)”
(ibid, 179)

That Shrevlin McCanon, a Canadian student, can tie such an abstract narrative to exact
dates and specific references to US history, and yet, entirely ignores the twenty-year
gap in Sutpen’s journey to the West Indies, suggests that while US history must be
subjected to and aligned with a certain ‘scientific, modern, and rational’ mode of
knowledge production, Haiti, alternatively, might act as a free-for-all space of tall tales
and myth, in which the nation is not mapped in terms of actual geographic
coordinates, but via the taleteller’s psyche and its underpinnings of imperial desire and
disgust.

Thomas Sutpen’s geography lesson, in this sense, is not an isolated or passive
one, implanted upon the innocence of one young man through schoolteachers and
transatlantic journeys, but a trans-generational praxis that Sutpen passes on to
Faulkner’s readers via the racially inscribed re-mappings of an emergent American
empire.

Through a close reading Gerald Langford’s collation of the manuscript and
book for *Absalom, Absalom!*, one could argue that these racial remappings of Haiti are
not only drawn from the internalized and perverted projections of US socio-political
communities, but through a simultaneous dismembering and dehumanizing of the
Haitian people themselves, what Jeff Karem refers to as Faulkner’s “carefully
orchestrated obscurity.” (“Fear of a Black Atlantic? African Passages in *Absalom,
Absalom!* and *The Last Slaver*”, 163) Consider the slight but extremely important
distinctions between the original manuscript and published text in Faulkner’s
description of the rebelling Haitian plantation workers. In the original manuscript
Faulkner writes:

…the land, earth, which would require 10,000 years of equatorial
heritage to bear it – a little island which was not even the halfway point
between the jungle they came from and the civilization they were
doomed for, which the black blood, the black arms, and hands and
bones and thinking and remembering and hopes and desires. (OM 202,
as cited in Karem, 164)
This text is then crossed out by Faulkner and replaced in the published version almost identically, with two major exceptions – the “black arms, and hands and bones” have been rewritten as “the black blood, black bones and flesh,” and the island of Haiti is now “the halfway point” between jungle and civilization. (as cited in Karem, 164)

While Faulkner had never granted the Haitian characters full bodies to begin with, the reduction of the physical being from “arms and hands” to “blood and flesh” marks a symbolic genocide in which communities are first deconstructed via law, culture, and political agency and then reduced in terms of biological import. Thus, the cartographic project surrounding the Western geographic coordination and ecological depictions of Haiti is not only aimed at conditioning the landscape into an abstract and historically undecipherable no-place, but conditioning the indigenous body as well, transforming subaltern subjectivities into de-socialized, bare life. As Karem notes through detailed and defined observations of Faulkner’s own revisions, this process, if not arguably intentional, is an intricately arranged one, in which the narrative works to makes Haiti anew at the same time that it obscures and actively misrepresents Sutpen’s journey and his position held there:

Faulkner’s process of revision surrounding these Caribbean passages confirms a desire to use the region as a kind of New World unconscious, a place that is resonant but unvoiced. His revisions of the West Indies section form a set of precise subtractions that make the region and Sutpen’s time there more shadowy and underrepresented. (Karem, 163)

The symbolic richness found in the abstraction of real geographic space, comes with the sacrifice of historical accountability and responsibility that can only be revealed through the accuracy of documentation. Thus, while the “little island” is connected to
a more expansive hemispheric dialogue through Faulkner’s symbolic abstractions,
Haiti is simultaneously obscured and negated in the attempted exorcism of Southern
guilt over the post-slavery technologies exported to points throughout the Caribbean
during the course of the early 20th century. As Karem points out, Absalom, Absalom!
is not “concerned with the Haitians or Africans as persons, or even as bodies, but as
the raw material of sin and guilt in the New World.” (ibid, 172)

...no enemy but the Haitian night itself: Representation and Abstraction in William
Faulkner’s Post-Slavery Empire

Absalom, Absalom!’s observational depictions of the Haitian landscape and
the abstract and disorienting violence leading up to the plantation revolts themselves,
that which leaves young Thomas Sutpen in a state of confused ambiguity and
obscuration, firing his rifle “at no enemy but at the Haitian night itself,” (204) allows
its readers to de-map and reconstruct Haiti as an undefined Conradian space of
seemingly timeless American exploitation and Haitian denegation. This chaotic
abstraction is premised on the presumed ‘innocence’ of its educationally impoverished
protagonist. An innocence that is ironically characterized by a lack of knowledge, a
blunt and clumsy conflation of landscapes and historical dates, as well as ethics and
morals:

… - a bright glare that vanished and left nothing, no ashes or refuse:
just a limitless flat plain with the severe shape of his intact innocence
rising from it like a monument; that innocence instructing him as calm
as the others had ever spoken, using his own rifle analogy to do it with,
and when it said them in place of he or him, it meant more than all the
human puny mortals under the sun that might lie in hammocks all afternoon with their shoe off: ‘If you were fixing to combat them that had the fine rifles, the first you would do would be to get yourself the nearest thing to a fine rifle you could borrow or steal or make, wouldn’t it?’ and he said Yes.’ ‘But this ain’t a question of rifles. So to combat them you got to have what they have that made them do what he did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with. You see?’ and he said Yes again. (Absalom, Absalom! 192)

Rather than employ an Enlightenment rhetoric that would justify the committed violence against ‘irrational, unmodern, unscientific’ cultures via liberalism’s rhetoric of paternalism, the violence committed by Thomas Sutpen is excused or even exorcised on the premise of his presumed ‘backwardness.’ And yet Thomas Sutpen’s ‘innocence,’ that which instructs and plants itself historic and phallic, ‘rising like a monument,’ conflating both the lands and the bodies who work it, is perhaps the most violent colonialist technology born in the US South and transported to the West Indies throughout the course of the novel. This innocence, the comfort and power of not-knowing, seems to be the recourse of both white plantation owners and the occupying marines and travel writers who seek refuge and absolution from their own colonial violence by harkening toward their ignorance of the broader historical context. It is additionally this knowledge that would obscure and conflate Haiti geographically, marking it as indistinguishable and un-locatable from all other points in the Southern hemisphere.

I would argue, however, that the process of geographic abstraction is a carefully crafted one in which coordinates of both Haiti and the US South are aligned and simultaneously distinguished along socio-ontological degrees of racial Othering.
Indeed, even the means by which Sutpen unwittingly acknowledges his inability to accurately represent his socio-political landscape beyond the most base observations, a pun on Sutpen-the-overseer’s inability to truly and accurately ‘see,’ he is figuratively charting it as a space ecologically and geo-politically distinct from Jefferson, Mississippi:

…not knowing that what he rode upon was a volcano, hearing the air tremble and throb at night with the drums and chanting and not knowing that it was the heart of the earth itself he heard, who believed…that earth was kind and gentle and that darkness was merely something you saw, or could not see in; overseeing what he oversaw and not knowing that he was overseeing it, making his daily expeditions from an armed citadel until the day itself came. (ibid, 202-203)

Sutpen’s absolution in “not knowing” presupposes that his observations, free from any knowledge or understanding that would otherwise infect them, come pure and unbiased. And yet the metaphorical language he uses – there is no evidence of any volcanoes or volcanic activity in Haiti or the Dominican Republic – deliberately situates the island within a particular ecological geography incorporative of Latin America and the Pacific Islands, mapped by ethnically-coded coordinates apart from the civil societies of the US South. Expressed through certain cultural traits – “drums and chanting” – associated with non-Anglo societies, percussive music in Haiti is disengaged from its historical inheritance and circumscribed within “the heart of the earth itself.” Yet, for the white subject, seeing is not about accurate representation or understanding of the space and culture that it inhabits. Rather, seeing like overseeing is a matter of controlling the situation and the people themselves. It is of no import for Thomas Sutpen to acknowledge that there are no volcanoes on the island of
Hispaniola, that there is a cultural code and historical context rooted in the percussive chants, that slavery was abolished twenty years prior to his arrival on the island.

Sutpen’s responsibility lies not in understanding the communities inhabiting the space he exploits – rather, he is responsible only for a violent maintenance of control over those conflated communities/spaces when the inherent conflicts make themselves most vividly present.

The simultaneous interplay of historical de-mapping and figurative remapping opens further possibilities for a mythologized portrait of Haiti, subject to white interpolation and the paternalist rhetoric of presumed US achievement. Just as the chronology and ecological traits of Sutpen’s Haiti are irreconcilable to the actual nation-state, so too do Sutpen’s ‘super-human’ feats inherently contradict the historical narrative of independence. In an almost biblical portrayal of white biological divinity, Thomas Sutpen’s suppression of the plantation uprising in the West Indies is a racially-inscribed re-writing of the Haitian Revolution itself:

…and how on the eighth night the water gave out and something had to be done so he put the musket down and went out and subdued them…he just put the musket down and had someone unbar the door and then bar it behind him, and walked out into the darkness and subdued them, maybe by yelling louder, maybe by standing, bearing more than they believed any bones and flesh could or should (should, yes: that would be a terrible thing: to find flesh stand more than flesh should be asked to stand); maybe at last they themselves turning in horror and fleeing from the white arms and legs shaped like theirs and from which blood could be made to spurt and flow as it could from theirs and containing an indomitable spirit which should have come from the same primary fire which theirs came from but which could not have, could not possibly have…(ibid, 205-206)

Thomas Sutpen’s suppression of the plantation revolt comes not from military technologies, economic privilege or accessibility to the necessary resources – but from
an “indomitable spirit” that is materialized and historicized through the narrative re-telling of otherwise unbelievable events. The notion that “on the eight night the water gave out and something had to be done” sets up the premise for a retelling of the biblical Genesis in which Thomas Sutpen, acting as the Israelite god, makes the Haitian world anew. The paternalist discourse driving the narrative, that which Mary Renda suggests “should not be seen in opposition to violence, but rather as one among several cultural vehicles for it,” situates Haiti in a primordial history where white inheritance and black disability constitute the making of not only the social world, but a biological one in which white subjectivity suppresses blackness for the sustenance and survival of its own excessiveness. *(Taking Haiti, 15)* Thomas Sutpen’s struggle then is not a historical one fought against Haitian nationals seeking to drive out foreign plantation owners, but a violent forging of the Judeo-Christian narrative in the occupied Caribbean.

These intimate biopolitical cartographies wherein the excessiveness of civil society is premised upon the mapping and remapping of various ‘hearts of darkness,’ calls forth to an Enlightenment rhetoric of subjectivities and their predetermined limits, what Sylvia Wynter refers to as the ‘coloniality of being.’ Wynter’s thorough and calculated deconstruction of Western ontological racism (which has been repeatedly considered throughout this Dissertation, and serves as a foundational link in understanding these different discourses of preservation) could likewise be read as a critical deconstruction of Sutpen’s *impossible* voyage from the US South to the Global South:
...the West’s new master code of rational/irrational nature was now to be mapped onto a projected Chain of Being of organic forms of life, organized about a line drawn between, on the one hand, divinely created-to-be-rational humans, and on the other, no less divinely created-to-be-irrational animals; that is, on what was still adaptively known through the classical discipline of “natural history” as a still supernaturally determined and created “objective set of facts.” This “space of Otherness” line of nonhomogeneity had then functioned to validate the socio-ontological line now drawn between rational, political Man (Prospero, the settler of European descent) and its irrational Human Others (the categories of Caliban [i.e., the subordinated Indians and the enslaved Negroes]), in exactly the same way as, before Copernicus, the “space of Otherness” projection of a nonhomogeneity of substance between the perfection of the celestial realm and the degradation of the terrestrial had reciprocally bolstered and validated the Spirit/Flesh code as enacted in the ontological value difference between clergy and laity within the terms of Judeo-Christianity’s matrix formulation of a “general order of existence.” (“Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,” 313)

When these ‘spaces of Otherness’ are epistemologically aligned to the jungle/wilderness binaries of colonial cartography, a new map is created in which particular parts of the globe are deemed inhabitable only by bodies, void of reason and agency. These no-places of imperial exploitation are not merely determined by the sovereign subjectivities of ‘civil society,’ but are the very foundations upon which they rest. They provide not only the material conditions necessary for the function of countries like the United States, but stand as a counterpoint to the over-determined subjectivities present there. They are thus cognitively mapped by white Americans onto all points resting outside and apart from the perceived spaces of socio-political community.

Yet, as Thomas Sutpen learns even prior to the inspirations for his journey and design, these technologies of racial violence and biopolitical coding are not born from the colonial project alone, but have roots in the intimate geographies of ‘civil society’
itself. For it was not his journey to Haiti, but his childhood movement from the mountains of West Virginia to the rural communities of the slave-holding South where young Thomas Sutpen learned:

…there was a country all divided and fixed and neat with a people living on it all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be and what they happened to own, and where a certain few men not only had the power of life and death and barter and sale over others, they had living human men to perform the endless repetitive personal offices such a pouring the very whiskey from the jug and putting the glass into his hand or pulling off his boots for him to go to be that all men have had to do for themselves since times began and would have to do until they died and which no man ever has or ever will like to do but which no man that he knew had ever anymore thought of evading than he had thought of evading the effort of chewing and swallowing and breathing. (ibid, 180)

A Global South, one that initiates conversations about hemispheric or national divides, neglects the intimate geographies that run throughout both the regional tropics and the rivers and streams of Yoknapatawpha County, casting forth a topography that requires more complex and critical conversations about race prior to charting and outlining the presumed geographic contours. In fact, it is these more intimate geographies, materializing most vividly in the figure of Sutpen’s illegitimate son, Charles Bon, that both seemingly collapses the import and ideological weight of colonialist cartographies while simultaneously using these constructed environments to contain and mythically resolve the contradictions present by the miscegenation of spaces and peoples.

...sprung from the loins: The Miscegenation of Southern Ecology(ies) in the Figure of Charles Bon
Miscegenation as a materialization of cultural, racial, and even spatial integration becomes an inherent part of the colonial process. Indeed, even from the start of his overseeing career on the Haitian plantation in 1824, Thomas Sutpen realizes that there is more than ecological similarities and historical abstraction necessary to bridge the transnational gap before him, and that some level of interaction, integration, and the possibilities of miscegenation may be necessary for the enactment of his tasks:

…he had believed that courage and shrewdness would be enough but found that he was wrong and how sorry he was that he had not taken the schooling along with the West Indian lore when he discovered that all people did not speak the same tongue and realized that he would not only need courage and skill, he would have to learn to speak a new language. (Absalom, Absalom!, 200)

Knowledge, as a deeper understanding of the occupied inhabitants’ culture, becomes more relevant than white American myths about Haiti as a space of pure exploit. Such knowledge requires a certain amount of interaction with subjugated communities – i.e. language learning as best acquired through direct close conversation with native speakers. For Sutpen then, it is not possible for the socio-ontological divides between master/slave, colonizer/colonized to exist and be sustained without a certain level of recognition and miscegenation between the distinguished subjects. As he soon realizes, the “courage and shrewdness” of his over-determined subjectivity will only carry him so far in the colonial project. There is a level of cultural acknowledgment and understanding, the learning of a new language, that ties him to the Haitian
worker/slave at the same time that he attempts to subjugate that biopolitical Other to the realm of bare life.

The contradictions inherent in Sutpen’s need to learn the language of the slaves/workers that he oversees, foreshadows the difficulties embedded in the paternalistic discourse of US marines occupying, defending, and destroying various Haitian communities throughout the early 20th century. As Mary Renda notes:

The white U.S. marines who arrived in Haiti in and after 1915 were armed – if inadequately – with a nationalism that posited the inherent stability and racial basis of U.S. American identity. Yet, these marines were probably the first to experience the challenge to American identity that the occupation, and its paternalistic rhetoric, would pose. Thrust into a foreign context to carry out an intervention justified by, and organized according to, a notion of benevolent paternalism, marines – particularly those stationed in the Haitian countryside – were encouraged to take up the role of father to what was considered a child nation….On the one hand, [this paternalist injunction] degraded Haitians and justified violence committed under the guise of necessary discipline; on the other hand, it suggested the efficacy of learning Creole and inserting oneself into ‘native’ society. (Taking Haiti, 304)

The simultaneous disarmament and violent reaffirmation of national identity in the colonial process ultimately situates the colonized subject in a shifting position of embrace and annihilation. The colonized subject is both preserved by the colonizer’s desire for cultural consumption, and also produced as bare life via the colonizer’s interpretation of the colonized as enemy combatant. The contradictory balance here between embrace and dismissal signals also to the conflation of a geography that is both defined in its contours and illusionary in the submission of these boundaries to cultural interaction and national miscegenation. Indeed, the children of white marines and antebellum overseers in Haiti are born of two nationalities and come to represent the fragility of these national identities as their own existence seems to supercede and
deny any notions of environmentally and geographically determinative maps of segregation and exclusion.

For Thomas Sutpen, the final product of his geography lessons, the climax of these conflicting juxtapositions between the integration and fragmentation of race, culture and geographic locales, appears in the novel through the character of Charles Bon –Sutpen’s illegitimate child with Eulalia Bon, the only daughter of the Haitian sugar planter for whom Sutpen worked as an overseer. Originally believed to be of Spanish Creole decent, it is later speculated by Quentin Compson that the Bon lineage may perhaps be of African Haitian origin. This contrast between Spanish and Haitian blood is not only representative of the anxieties surrounding racial miscegenation in the US, but of the antihaitianismo on the island of Hispaniola and many of the ethnocultural segregations between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Traceable back to the segregationist policies instituted by the Creole Spaniards in the colony of Captaincy General of Santo Domingo, antihaitianismo sentiments would climatically materialize in Rafael Trujillo’s execution of 17,000 to 35,000 Haitian workers in the Parsley Massacre of October, 1937, one year following the publication of Absalom, Absalom!. The necropolitical racisms similar to both the African American holocaust of Faulkner’s 1930’s Mississippi and the genocidal policies of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, would not have been unnoticed by a global public awakened to the actualized horrors of ethnic cleansing. Thus the colonizers’ anxieties surrounding miscegenation – whether the colonizers are white Southerners or Dominican Creoles – take on a transnational dimension, encompassing the segregationist policies and
genocidal consequences that would erupt, like Sutpen’s volcano, across the globe throughout the 1930s and 40s.

   The colonizer does attempt to alleviate these anxieties through certain ecologically and environmentally contained environments refusing conflation and heterogeneous integration. But contained environments, like myths of racial purity and anxieties regarding racial integration and miscegenation, are ultimately dispelled, often by the remainders of their own symbolic equations. Charles Bon does ‘exist’ within Jefferson, Mississippi – albeit if only for a short while – and his presence, as Elizabeth Steeby points out, “becomes the symbolic product of imperial desire whose ambiguous identity works toward the dissolution of the very building blocks of empire itself” (“Almost Feminine, Almost Brother, Almost Southern,” 152). As a living dispeller of white Southern myths surrounding racial and sexual distinction, Charles Bon is able to seduce both of his half-siblings, Henry and Judith Sutpen, and become the true biblical Absalom, contesting and ultimately dissolving the dynasty of his father.

   Charles Bon’s power lies in his ability to transcend boundaries both racially and sexually – to become both the heroic seducer and abject monster. This translation and deconstruction of social norms into subversive forms of agency is best contextualized by Judith Butler’s reading in “Passing, Queering: Nella Larsen’s Psychoanalytic Challenge”:

   …[T]he symbolic domain, the domain of socially instituted norms, is composed of racializing norms, and… they exist not merely alongside gender norms, but are articulated through one another. Hence it is no longer possible to make sexual difference prior to racial difference or,
for that matter, to make them into fully separable axes of social
regulation and power. (Butler, 176)

The articulation of both racial and gendered norms, as well as alternative racial and
gendered identities, not alongside, but through one another, requires a complex, fully
formed character capable of mediating the variances, and not an obscured or
objectified one relegated to the landscape of the narrative. Is it possible then, that the
figure of Charles Bon might represent an inherent challenge to the containment of
colonial Environment? Might we regard his voice and agency as capable of
constructing and enabling new and alternative ecologies, connective of both the US
and Global South(s)?

While I agree that the symbolic dissolution of empire does gain voice through
the product of its imperial desire (i.e. Charles Bon), it must be noted that Bon’s agency
is rooted always and only in the processes of dissolution themselves. His character is
born of the precondition that it cannot exist in any constructed environment. Rather
than dissolve these environments and build anew, Bon’s dissolution signals the
conclusion and containment of the narrative itself – what Jeff Kareem refers to as the
“exorcism” of a particular history:

Faulkner’s hemispheric vision shows a deep awareness of the origins of
the Black Atlantic, but also a fear of it, as evidenced in his tendency to
repress black agency or to treat it as a source of contamination. In this
respect, Faulkner may evoke an image of the Black Atlantic not to
recognize a specific history so much as to exorcise it. (“Fear of a Black
Atlantic?”, 172)

Charles Bon as an inheritor and symbolic product of Faulkner’s “deep awareness” of
the Black Atlantic, is also its exorcist. Recalled by various white narrators throughout
the novel, Charles Bon represents to each of them both the desire to acknowledge and
fear to accept certain contradictions in the history of the US South. For Faulkner,
Charles Bon is both the product of interconnected New World ecologies and the
symbolic Absalom, a warning that all attempts to exist between the carefully contained
socio-ontological environments of Absalom, Absalom! are futile. In so much as
Charles Bon alludes to the possibility of a trans-dimensional Global South, he
acknowledges its impossibility through his own impossibility to survive the whole of
Faulkner’s narrative.

“...as if the house were of one dimension:” Fragments and Divides in Ecologies of the
South(s)

The final scenes of William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!, when Sutpen’s
Hundred burns to the ground and the various contradictions surrounding its history are
momentarily resolved, a lingering historical uncertainty remains, a narrative about
flesh and environment that continues to “reek in slow and protracted violence:”

They reached it at last. It loomed, bulked, square and enormous, with
jagged half-toppled chimneys, its roofline sagging a little; for an instant
as they moved, hurried, toward it Quentin saw completely through it a
ragged segment of sky with three hot stars in it as if the house were of
one dimension, painted on a canvas curtain in which there was a tear;
now, almost beneath it, the dead furnace-breath of air in which they
moved seemed to reek in slow and protracted violence with a smell of
desolation and decay as if the wood of which it was build were flesh.
(Absalom, Absalom!, 366)

A conservative eco-critical reading of this scene might hail the ever-present
Environment as that universalizing norm capable of subsuming and ultimately
resolving, or destroying, all social aspirations. The Environment, as Anne Fischer-
Wirth and others have suggested, thus becomes that primordial space revelatory of the means by which societies stratify and segregate. If such an environment truly does exist, I would argue, it is not to be found in William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom! The ecologies present in this text are not indifferent to socio-ontological organization, but have been built upon such presumptions, closely navigating the geopolitical lines between the US North, South and Caribbean, and the geo-biological lines between civil subjects and bare life.

Further recalling Homi Bhaba’s definition of the fetish, as that which “represents the simultaneous play between metaphor as substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously registers the perceived lack),” we can clearly see the means by which the fetish of geographic knowledge, the ability to dictate, define and locate the coordinates of certain places, both veils the cartographic process as an unbiased means of observation, and simultaneously reveals the hemispheric and intimate technologies of violence and racism inherent to its science. For William Faulkner, the “umbilical water-cord” which universally connects histories and hemispheres through its cyclical narrative depictions, is both a mask of historical rupture and an acknowledgement of the way in which Western science has used history and cartography to contain this rupture. Quentin Compson and Shrevlin McCannon, two Harvard roommates born in entirely separate parts of the continent distinguished by geographic contours, climates, and cultural attributes, are nonetheless:

… joined, connected after a fashion in a sort of geographical transubstantiation by that Continental Trough, that River which runs not only through the physical land of which it is the geologic umbilical,
not only runs through the spiritual lives of the beings within its scope, but is very Environment itself which laughs at degrees of latitude and temperature. (ibid, 208)

Here the River, Faulkner’s constantly appearing “umbilical water-chord” sets the contours for an Environment which is capable of surpassing specific geographical trademarks and deterministic theories of climate and culture, evoking the possibility of a new cartographic science, wherein primordial degrees of spiritual connectivity surpass and supplant the varying degrees of latitude and longitude.

Yet, when the universalizing geography of the boys’ all-encompassing Eden is confronted with the specter of racial miscegenation, Environment quickly becomes the means by which these anxieties are contained, reassuring the Anglo world that space is always produced by the sovereign subject:

I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the Western hemisphere. Of course it won’t quite be in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do, so they won’t show up so sharp against the snow. (369-370)

Responding to Southern fears of a miscegenation-apocalypse, what Barbara Ladd refers to as “the gradual usurpation of political, familial, and economic purity – that is, legitimacy, recognition by the national body, or father – by a mulatto brother or brother-in-law, a usurpation almost always associated with the degeneration of a proud civilization into a ‘mongrel’ future,” the Environment, that “geological umbilical” which “laughs at degrees of latitude and temperature,” is simultaneously a source of containment for racial rupture and indeterminism wherein the colder climates can “bleach out” certain races “like the rabbits and the birds do.” Like Foucaultian understandings of knowledge as the production and exercise of power, seemingly
banal and disinterested sciences of geographic and ecological distinction are continuously employed in the maintenance of racial hegemonies, revealing the contradictions in the biopolitical project at the same time that they attempt to obscure and dismiss its violence.

What then can we learn from Thomas Sutpen’s geography lesson? Certainly not a subaltern coordination of Haiti and the communities present there. Indeed, not even a geographic or ecological representation that is accurately aligned with the nation’s actual geological and historical attributes. Rather what we witness are the contours of a map defined by technologies of racially specified violence, developed in the antebellum US South and exported to a hemispheric South via the occupation and imperialism of formerly independent nations like Haiti. The latitudinal lines of this map are both global and intimate, carving spaces across entire islands in the Caribbean, rivers and fields in the Southern plantation states, and bathrooms and water-fountains in the Jim Crow metropolis. It is a map that we continue to witness today, in the form of Third World zones of industry and free trade, as well as the racially coded Prison Industrial Complex spreading across cities of the Global North. It is a map that, as we continue to uncover its origins, its keys and legends, we might likewise outline the means for its dismantling, transformation and rebirth along new contours, boundary-less and whole.

If the re-orientation of neoslavery is fully obscured in its exportation to the occupied Caribbean, it is all but silenced in the 1930s US South. Realigned, not only
to the ever expanding reach of colonialist cartographies, but also to the ever enclosing walls of the post-emancipation prison, geopolitical dynamics and spatial arrangement become key components in the preservation of slavery throughout the early 20th century US and Global South(s). How individuals speak out from these enclosed conditions of preserved slavery will be a concern of the final Chapter, where African American labor organizer and author, Angelo Herndon, offers alternative visions of historical justice and new forms of listening, apart from and beyond the reductive confines of preservationist discourse.
Chapter 4:

“Something Within:”
Specters of the Plantation in Angelo Herndon’s Let Me Live

Only remnants of the artist and prisoner Odea Matthews remain to be categorized and reduced, battered and theorized, perhaps even listened to by those writing within and outside, about and against the modern US prison industrial complex. It is known, for instance, that Matthews was one of the 100 or so other female prisoners housed in a building called The Willows at the infamous Angola Louisiana State Penitentiary. It is known that in 1959, Dr. Harry Oster, an American folklorist and musicologist from the University of Iowa, visited Angola and recorded Matthews' rendition of the spiritual number "Something Within Me." One could deduce upon listening to Oster's recording, that a sewing machine is present in the room; that, between and in conjunction with the verses sung, a needle is lifted and set back from the material cloth and a set of dead weights are then forced through the metal slots in the machine surface and dragged horizontally past the needle before being lowered once more into their original place beneath the machine. Regardless of whether or not Odea Matthews is the woman working behind this machine, the lift and set and drag of the weights place forth a rhythm inseparable from the lone vocalist as she sings:

_There's something within me, oh Lord\_ That hole in the rain\_ Something within me, oh child\_ I cannot explain_
Nothing is known of Odea Matthews' crime, and the particularities of the violence committed against her mind and body while bound in the Angola Louisiana State Penitentiary. Her remnant stands only as a cultural product, a voice and a machine, detached from any specific histories, any known part in the civil, social and cultural rituals that would seek even the exclusion of her liminality as a sacrifice to the illusive wholeness of a unified socio-political body.

And yet it is indeed this very 'something within' - that space between the thinking, feeling being and pure, bare biological survival, that ability and necessity of cultural creation in the face of a most brutal repressive violence that would seek to cast out new forms of death, a new politics of genocide - which might testify to mere existence as a means of haunting the structures to which these victims are bound.

I invoke the term 'haunting' here not to mystify or romanticize the very real brutalities enacted upon the bodies of those housed in state penitentiaries across the United States. Nor do I wish to locate this 'something within' in a metaphysical realm or even within the abstract political categories of macro-theories about the human and the biospecies. Rather, haunting takes form in its capacity to locate intersections between particular and collective experiences of victimization. It is a product of conflation - the unity of past barbarity with current systems of extermination, not in terms of their relationship on a linear scale of differentiation, but as reproduced forms of a historic moment that has never ceased. In her book, Ghostly Matters, Avery Gordon locates haunting as an ongoing realization of contradictions whose mere
existence deconstructs a political or pedagogical model that would seek to neutralize
them as (H)istory:

Haunting is a frightening experience. It always registers the harm inflicted of the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present. But haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing something-to-be-done. Indeed, it seems to me that haunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, the moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks of rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done. It is this sociopolitical-psychological state to which haunting refers." (xvi)

Gordon’s definition of haunting (which has already been briefly discussed in Chapter 2) represents the transcending movement from infliction and recognition (trauma) to the forecasting of revolutionary struggle and rebirth (the something-to-be-done). It realigns the individual's injury (psychological) to trace out a genealogical wound located in collective resistance (sociopolitical). Most importantly, haunting is made active when the invisible - those who cannot participate in the ritual of civil society - shed their voice on the fragmented and destructive institutions which would seek exclusion and legally-sanctioned systems of genocide as the nomos of a 'unified' body politic.

Thus, it should be known that for the figure of the ghost, haunting is indistinguishable from the mere act of existence. In a democratic society that functions only at the civil extermination of the demos (the surplus labor market, the industrial refuse, Fanon's 'wretched of the earth'), the body or voice of the incarcerated, that remnant still capable of speaking existence, calls into question not only the walls in which these lives are held, but the seemingly complete and airtight
ritual of civil life itself.

If haunting is not an espoused ideology or a speculative, totalizing history in the making, but the mere act of existence itself, then it is paramount that those engaging the songs, visual arts, writings and other cultural products of incarcerated persons thoroughly examine the weight and responsibilities of their own roles in the act of listening. For as Joy James notes in her work on imprisoned intellectuals:

The lack of ‘parity’ between political prisoners and their political allies is based on the reality that, in theory and practice, the imprisoned intellectual can be ideologically ‘frozen’ in or physically ‘freed’ by the work of non-incarcerated academics and activists. The ‘free’ intellectual has no such dependence upon the imprisoned intellectual. It seems, then, that captivity mutates into many strange forms. (*American prison notebooks*, 25)

For Odea Matthews, the *something within* that sparks the enduring ghostly flames of political testimony is doubly imprisoned in both the Angola Louisiana State Penitentiary, and via the framing of the recording itself, as taken, produced, and disseminated by Dr. Harry Oster.

Oster, whose ideological project was not one of resistance against or even abolition of an emerging racist prison industrial complex, but the use of such systems to *preserve*, what he and others deemed to be a more ‘pure’ plantation culture, fits neatly into an early-twentieth century canon of white folklorists, like John and Alan Lomax, whose claims to antebellum ‘authenticity’ relied on the existence of such institutions in the first place. In reference to his recordings of early 19th century slave songs still sung by the incarcerated peoples at a 1920’s prison camp, John Lomax wrote:
If one wishes to obtain anything like an accurate picture of the workaday Negro he will surely find his best setting in the chain gang, or prison...[where prisoners] thrown on their own resources, still sing, especially the long-term prisoners who have been confined for years and who have not yet been influenced by jazz and the radio, the distinctive old-time Negro melodies. (as cited in Ted Gioia’s *Work Songs*, 205)

John’s son, Alan, would likewise circumscribe the haunting voices of Reconstruction Era African American music within the discourse of confinement and preservation. In a statement regarding the post-Reconstruction Delta Blues tradition, Alan Lomax wrote that “like cunning Br’er Rabbit, the African-American creative tradition was ‘bred and born in the briar patch’ created by Jim Crow.” (as cited in William R. Ferris’ “Alan Lomax: The Long Journey,” 137) While Lomax recognizes the relationship between blues music and the systems of oppression from which it spawned, his means for interpreting this connection (via the African American children’s stories collected by the racist folklorist Joel Chandler Harris during the era of Radical Reconstruction as a last-ditch ideological attempt to keep free individuals morally bound to plantations) frames these strategies for resistance and historical testimony as always already couched within the language of plantation property and white ownership. The early US penitentiary, in this instance, as a means of reorienting slavery toward the more ‘progressive’ qualities of Northern industrial capitalism, had, by the time of Alan Lomax and Harry Oster, also become a space for the preservation of antebellum plantation culture, where now criminalized African Americans could be produced apart from the historical movement of ‘civil’ society. It becomes crucial then to understand Odea Matthews ghostly voice as both that whose mere existence alone testifies to the contradictions wrought by slavery still left unresolved, and as that
which was heard through the recording devices, the modes of production, distribution, and circulation by the very masters of such contradictions.

To understand how the ghostly voices of incarcerated peoples are produced via the ongoing injustices of historical past, we must also consider the transition from antebellum plantation slavery as an accepted historical reality to its status as a preserved and oftentimes obscured or buried liminal space in the contemporary neoliberal nation-state. Indeed, even within the legal codes inscribed in the 13th Amendment are found avenues for the preservation and sustenance of slavery and involuntary servitude when cast as “punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.” It is this specific historical transition from the plantation to the penitentiary, the legal exception that allowed for the reproduction of the horrors of slavery in the unified and reconstructed nation, that must be unearthed before we can adequately understand the significance of the prison industrial complex in American culture today.

One of the earliest texts tracing this transition, Angelo Herndon’s prison autobiography Let Me Live (1937), provides an insightful look into the means by which African American political voices were neutralized within the carceral state of civil death so as to re-articulate the ideological norms of antebellum slavery within the 1930s Jim Crow South. As Marlon B. Ross notes, Herndon’s imprisonment itself, an indictment for insurrection after attempting to organize black and white workers into labor unions, represents a new Southern fear emerging out of the 1920s and 30s, wherein African American political voices needed to be contained not through technologies of violence produced by interpersonal white property relations alone, but
through the much larger more-encompassing guarantor of white property, the state. In such a historical moment, Angelo Herndon comes to represent:

…a black man placed on trial for overtly political crimes, rather than one being lynched, legally or extralegally, for crimes against white property. The arrest and protracted prosecution of this obscure black laborer for the political crime of state insurrection seemed to portend a pivotal change not only in black American consciousness and agency but more crucially in the assumed direction of U.S. national politics and history. (“Introduction,” viii)

Angelo Herndon’s arrest, indictment and incarceration, like the Scottsboro Boys and other imprisoned contemporaries, signals toward a transition from the plantation to the state as one’s legally defining community, where the instruments of violence and mechanisms of subordination are not employed by white antebellum overseers or Jim Crow lynch mobs alone, but through the seemingly banal and neutral actors of the state apparatus – the police, the judges, the legislators, and the legal codes themselves.

Herndon’s specific circumstances in this case also set him further apart from such contemporaries as the Scottsboro Boys, in that his concocted charges are not explicitly directed against either white female sexuality or white private property, but are political charges concerned with overarching systems of social and economic organization. Such a distinction sets the Jim Crow narratives of apolitical black subjects in inherent contradiction. As Ross notes:

On the one hand, [the prosecutors] need to spotlight the danger presented by Herndon as a person fully capable of political thought and action so momentous that it can topple the state. On the other hand, they need to reinforce his status as a mere ‘nigger,’ a man incapable of having any intelligent relation to such political thought and action (ibid, xxii)
I would read this contradiction even further, and also note that Herndon’s charge is not directed against any specific political actions taken – (the actual indictment itself comes only via the uncovering of communist literature in Herndon’s bedroom) – but through his self-assertion of political subjectivity alone. Indeed, it is, and only is, his mere claims to existence as a black political subject, his pronouncement, “Let me Live” that casts Herndon as apart from civil Southern society, a criminal in the US and an insurgent in the state of Georgia.

The result of this contradiction, that which arises when the State is forced to recognize Herndon as a political subject so as to prosecute him, is resolved or temporarily smoothed over by the existence of the carceral state itself, which is not designed to punish or reform Herdon, but to remove him entirely from political society and recast his claims of resistance within the confines of civil death. This juridical reorganization of personhood and political rights is indeed directly linked to the abolition of slavery (which can most clearly be seen in the 13th amendment’s exceptional clause) and can be traced throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the US penitentiary began to replace plantation culture as the primary means for controlling African American lives and livelihoods. A key example of this deconstructive process can be seen in the 1871 Supreme Court of Virginia's *Ruffin v. The Commonwealth* case wherein the court presided that:

A convicted felon, whom the law in its humanity punishes by confinement in the penitentiary instead of with death, is subject while undergoing that punishment, to all the laws which the legislature in its wisdom may enact for the government of that institution and the control of its inmates. For the time being, during his term of service in the penitentiary, he is in a state of penal servitude to the state. He has, as a consequence of his crime, not only forfeited his liberty, but all his
personal rights except those which the law in its humanity accords to him. He is for the time being the slave of the state. He is civiliter mortuus; and his estate, if he has any, is administered like that of a dead man. (HN6, Ruffin v. Commonwealth)

*Civiliter Mortuus*, not just as a legal code but as a social construct, becomes a means by which political contestants like Herndon are rendered seemingly impotent and removed from the discourse surrounding continual re-articulations of US civil society as premised on the sovereign white subject and the apolitical, asocial, and ahuman black subject. It is from this position that Herndon is forced to speak, and it is from this position that such a cultural document as *Let Me Live* is ultimately produced.

My argument regarding civil death here is not to suggest however, that the transition from forced black labor under the plantation system to the incapacitation of black laborers under unified US legal codes denotes a reformation or even a major transformation in the economic systems at play. I would argue rather that any claims made by Progressive Era capitalism to the reunification, reconstruction, and development of antebellum economies and infrastructure, without taking into account the role of proliferating penal institutions, rely on myriad false assumptions. First off, such claims would ignore the role played by both the chain gang and the convict-lease-system in accounting for much of the infrastructural and financial development of the US South during the era of Reconstruction. As both David Olshinsky’s *Worse Than Slavery* and Alex Lichtenstein’s *Twice the Work of Free Labor* have noted, the transition from plantation overseeing to capitalist entrepreneurialism had far more to
do with the exploitation of chain gang labor and convict-lease systems than any invisible free-market hands.

Secondly, such claims ignore the means by which 20th century penitentiaries work to relieve the market anxieties caused by an oversaturated work force. Indeed, Angelo Herndon’s imprisonment as a labor organizer during the height of the Great Depression is as much an economic solution for the free-hand of capital to remain unhindered as it is a punitive solution for anxieties wrought by the voicing of African American agency. And finally, and perhaps most importantly, such claims rest on the false presumption that antebellum plantation economics in the US South can be understood apart from or prior to both the industrial capitalism of the North and the neoliberal economics of our own late-capitalist phase. What I am ultimately hoping to argue here is that the early 20th century racialized prison is born not out of the transition from, but through the understudied and ongoing relationship between slavery and capitalism in the United States. Within such a relationship neither of these institutions is deterministic, but rather both serve to accommodate the other and rearticulate their terms legally, morally, socially, psychologically, and culturally depending on the historical circumstances at play. Angelo Herndon, a socialist labor activist and advocate for African American political rights, a labor organizer and an incarcerated subject, was well aware of these intersections and overlaps, and it is through his own narrative testimony that I hope to further unearth the US prison as a crucial focal point in understanding socio-economic race relations in the 1930s.

Additionally, when critically considering the early 20th century prison as a product of the relationship between capitalism and slavery, it becomes necessary to
consider both the macro-genealogies of these interwoven institutions as well as the very intimate horrors placed upon particular bodies and minds incarcerated within such confines. Herndon’s autobiography, in alignment with other socialist texts of the era, is both an anecdotal account of the author’s own specific experience in confinement, as well as a projected social text, assuming a voice for a broader community as premised upon race and class in the 1930s US South. It will be necessary then, while always seeing in Herndon the personal as political and vice-versa, to pay attention to the way in which large scale political acts of violence are most often manifested in the specific brutalities experienced by particular individuals.

This Chapter, in attempts to negotiate between the broad histories and intimate horrors of the early 20th century prison, and to negotiate the role of Angelo Herndon’s autobiography, Let Me Live as both a product of the institutions themselves, and as a critical ghostly voice outlining the means for their dismantling, will take the following course: I will begin with a detailed discussion of the early 20th century penitentiary as a pre-Keynesian solution to both a perceived crisis of labor during the Great Depression and a perceived crisis of African American political voice in the Jim Crow South. These crises would be alleviated or obscured, I argue, by the reinvention of plantation culture (both economic and social) within the modern penitentiary. This will lead to a discussion of the subjectivities formed through the carceral process itself, highlighting the relationship between individual experience of prisoners and the state systems dictating the structures of both criminality and incarceration. Through this relationship of scale, I hope to show how the genealogy of the penitentiary serves
not only as an economic solution to post-reconstruction labor markets, but as an attempt to *preserve* the interpersonal relationships and intimate horrors of slavery. Ultimately, I hope to come to a reading of Angelo Herndon’s *Let Me Live* as a text which through the use of *haunting* as a socio-political voice, exists not only as a preserved remnant of antebellum slavery in the modern Prison Industrial Complex, but as an active tool for both the historical reflection upon and strategies for the dismantling of the racist capitalist institution itself.

*Fiscal Resolve and Intimate Horror: The Economic and Ideological Construction of the Jim Crow Penitentiary*

Both Angelo Herndon’s incarceration in the Fulton County State Prison of Georgia and the constant threat throughout his narrative of being thrown into the Georgia chain-gang, straddle a transitional moment in the development of the early 20th century penitentiary regarding questions of labor. That prisons came as a response to the labor crises generated by Emancipation should not suggest that they stand between plantation slavery and capitalism, as if the two were separate or distinct institutions. Rather, they serve as one means for maintaining labor and racial hierarchies outside of the plantation bloc political economy and within the ‘free’ market as various modes of capitalist exploitation take on new forms and guises.

Of course, prisons had existed prior to the 1930s, and prior to 1863. However, as David Olshinsky has noted in *Worse than Slavery*, antebellum prisons were almost entirely comprised of white inmates, whereas after Emancipation and the series of
legal codes generated during Reconstruction (from the Black Codes of 1865 to the Vagrancy Act and ‘Negro Law’) the racial dynamics of penal institutions underwent a dramatic and dynamic shift. The large scale penitentiaries of today, where over seventy percent of inmates are nonwhite, as well as the Fulton State Prison of Georgia where Herndon was caged, must be understood through the more historically specific genealogy of racist capitalist exploitation that continued to redirect itself from the plantation to the convict lease system to the establishment of institutions like Parchman Prison Farm in 1901, (what is now the Mississippi state penitentiary), ultimately transforming into what can be seen as the early-modern US Prison Industrial Complex.

These earliest forms of this racist Prison Industrial Complex were established, following Ruth Wilson-Gilmore’s line of argumentation, as geographic solutions to socio-economic crisis (Golden Gulag, 9). The crisis, in this specific historical case, was the abolition of the convict lease system, a penal labor law that allowed both private companies and state departments to lease incarcerated peoples for everything from agricultural production to infrastructural development. The convict-lease system, first enacted in 1865, had appeared in an era where the abolition of slavery and the spread of capitalist wage-labor relations were being held up as dramatic worldwide examples of moral and economic progress. And yet, the lease system, with its private exploitation of unpaid labor, was ultimately responsible, as Alex Lichtenstein and David Olshinsky have argued, for much of the economic development of the post-emancipation South. Additionally, these scholars have noted that the decision to employ forced labor for the project of infrastructural development and economic
growth came not from members of the post-plantocracy South, but from the area’s strongest proponents of ‘progress,’ looking to reconcile modernization with the racial hierarchies of slavery. Indeed, across the South, leasing provided a vast amount of revenue for both the state and county municipalities; it lowered the tax rate for middle class citizens and provided money for many of the South’s public projects like new bridges, road repairs, and secondary schools. But the actual and significant profits from convict leasing went to the corporations that hired out these prisoners. Ultimately the system would come to even further position corporate capitalists against the working class, whites against blacks, and plantation overseers against former slaves. And, as a result, the system would be officially abolished in 1910, with its complete disappearance by 1928. (Worse than Slavery, 92)

The abolition of the convict lease system generated then a crisis in what had once been a massive supply of unpaid African American labor. Indeed, during the reign of the convict lease system, prison populations grew to unprecedented extents. In Georgia there was a increase between 1868 and 1908 of up to 10x’s; in North Carolina the population rose from 121 prisoners in 1870 to 1,302 prisoners in 1890; in Mississippi it rose 400% between 1871 and 1879; and in Alabama it went from 374 prisoners in 1869 to 2,453 prisoners in 1919 (ibid, 130). With the abolition of the system came an entire labor force seeking employment in a wage-bearing market. Additionally, a large percentage of African Americans who had previously been obscured in bondage were now a part of the Southern public sphere.

This abolition of the convict-lease system and the subsequent labor crisis cannot, however, be understood through a neoliberal politics of moral progress and
transformation of the Old South. Rather the convict-lease system, like its precedent in slavery, generated a crisis for capitalism, in that the system, like slavery, exploited its laboring force to such an extent that work lost value and alienation became the foreground of production. Indeed as Karl Marx noted in his reading of Southern slavery as an integral part of the global economy:

…as soon as people whose production still moves within the lower forms of slave-labor, corvee labor, etc…are drawn into the whirlpool of an international market dominated by the capitalist mode of production, the salve of their products for export becoming their principal interest, the civilized horrors of overwork are grafted onto the barbaric horrors of slavery, serfdom, etc…Hence the Negro labourer in the Southern states of the American union preserved something of a patriarchal character so long as production was chiefly directed to immediate local consumption. But in proportion, as the export of cotton became of vital interest to the states, the overworking of the Negro and sometimes using up his life in 7 years of labour became a factor in a calculated and calculating system. It was no longer a question of obtaining from him a certain quantity of useful product, it was now a question of production of surplus-labor itself. (Das Kapital, 48)

The convict lease system as a means for regenerating the post-war Southern economy, much like the antebellum plantation’s role in the global economy, brought with it not a question of production and surplus value, but a question of labor. These contradictions between the supposedly free-market and the value of labor constituted not only an economic and structural problem, but a problem of ideology as well. As Orlando Patterson notes in his analysis of the ideological dilemma wrought on capitalism by enslaved or imprisoned labor:

The use of personally dominated individuals for the productions and reproduction of wealth exposed the reality behind the so-called free labor. The laborer came to see his work for others for what it really was - alienation from the means of production and exploitation by the employer. Faced with the stark reality of personal power exercised over slaves, the worker could easily see that his much-vaunted freedom
to change employers was simply a meaningless freedom to change masters. *Slavery and Social Death*, 33-4)

The heightened level of alienation felt by workers in both the North and South would become even more apparent during Angelo Herndon’s time, when the Great Depression, (an economic collapse primarily caused by the unrestricted exploitation of labor and the complete deregulation of the marketplace), further challenged the rhetoric of freedom in the United States. As Herndon himself witnesses immediately after his first release from prison:

> All along the way, in plantation after plantation, and in every state I saw bales of cotton stacked one upon the other, rotting in the sun. The economic servitude of America’s millions of tenant and sharecropper peons beggars description. Everywhere, as far as the eye could see, clustered the tumble-down shacks in which they lived. I raged within myself: A dog in a kennel, a horse in a manger, or a pig in a pig-sty was better housed than the people in these dwellings. *Let Me Live*, 323

The incapacitation and confinement of black labor in the prison-system then becomes a means by which capitalism accounts for and disguises its own excesses. Whereas slavery and the convict-lease system revealed the inherent mockeries embedded in the ‘free’ market labor schema, the incapacitation of this labor, as premised on the racism of white civil society, help the Depression-era Anglo worker to reinstate his own previous myths about the value and power of wage work. The prison, by violently maintaining a black labor force (as well as providing a plethora of white jobs through the construction, maintenance and supervision of such institutions), becomes a pre-Keynesian means by which the state assumes control over, accounts for, and covers-up gaps in the logic of unrestricted capital flow and circulation, all the while reinforcing the racial hierarchies constituting its very structure.
To consider the prison as a site for the violent maintenance of a racial caste system as premised upon questions of labor rights and notions of personhood, forces us to re-evaluate popular histories and theoretical genealogies of penal institutions as sites for civil discipline. Indeed, it appeared that following the Vagrancy Act, Black Codes and Negro Law instituted throughout the US South during Reconstruction, if crime was the precondition for imprisonment, then such crimes must be based primarily, and oftentimes solely, on race. As can be clearly seen in the earliest convictions at the Parchman Prison Farm in 1901, crime was primarily used as a pretext for obtaining lengthy sentences for black prisoners throughout the South:

Instance No. 1. In Phillips County…two negroes jointly forged nine orders for one quart of whisky each. For this offense one of them was convicted for eighteen years and the other for thirty-six years…
Instance No. 8 In Mississippi County a negro was found serving a sentence of 180 days for disturbing the peace…
Instance No. 10. In Miller County a negro convicted in a justice of the peace court was…sentenced to over three years for stealing a few articles of clothing off a clothes-line. (as cited in David Olshinsky’s *Worse than Slavery*, 69)

Our own contemporary legal codes and penal policies (from Nixon’s failed War on Drugs to the state of California’s Three Strikes Act), all of which come to guarantee that one in three African American males will be imprisoned during their life-time, continue to haunt these narratives of racial criminality and torture as they remain unresolved since the beginnings of slave-labor in the Americas.

That those subjected to the brutalities of racist legal codes and the horrors of incarceration are all too well aware of the genealogies of such laws and institutions comes as no surprise. For, as Angelo Herndon notes in his reading of the racist
mockery of his own presumed trial, “those legal criminals were capable of any act of violence.” (Let Me Live, 195) The failure rather has come from the theoretical and academic narratives that have chosen to obscure or foreclose these violent, racist institutional processes so as to chart the story of incarceration and criminal law as one grounded primarily in discipline and punishment. Joy James, in acute awareness of the ideological blind spots permeating Michel Foucault's foundational and widely accepted analysis of carceral methodologies in Western society, calls attention to the stakes renegotiated when exclusion is premised as the base of civil society:

Discipline and Punish posits a Hobbesian view of political society, in which the arrest of the plague or the exclusion of the leper shapes political dreams. Yet this politics of exclusion and arrest signifies not the development but the demise of a political dream based on community. (Erasing the Spectacle, 42)

By “erasing the spectacle of violence” as it has continued to dictate and define US prison policy since Emancipation, James illustrates how Foucault’s notion of the Panopticonal disciplinary regime is in many ways an illusion, disguising the very real brutalities, far more integral to the articulation of US civil society, enacted upon the bodies of formerly colonized and enslaved people. James goes on to trace another genealogy of post-Emancipation US prisons wherein "superfluous or expendable bodies, institutional inequalities, and racism as components of discipline and punishment in the United States mean that the carceral is customized to fit racialized body politics and that race is a marker for criminality and repression." (ibid, 34-35) If we are to consider the prison not merely as that which is associated with the racist dividing lines of civil life, but as part and parcel of the racist civil ritual itself, then this violence committed behind barred walls is most clearly not a project aimed at
rehabilitation or even the Foucauldian normalization of discipline, but an
extermination camp designed to uphold a society whose civil livelihood is founded on
the extinguishment of all 'Others':

If the 'art of punishing, in the regime of disciplinary power' is designed
not to expiate or repress but to 'normalize'...then one must recognize
that some bodies cannot be normalized no matter how they are
disciplined, unless the prevailing social and state structures that
figuratively and literally rank bodies disintegrate. (*ibid*, 27)

Saidiya Hartman, in her seminal text on the interpersonal sites of violence and
resistance in the plantation, recasts Foucault’s disciplinary schema, not merely through
an acknowledgement of enslaved violence in the larger histories of discipline, but
through the foregrounding of this violence as necessary in understanding the specters
continuing to haunt our carceral systems today:

If Bentham's Panopticon is the model of discipline, the exemplary
exercise of a modern power that is mild-lenient-productive, then how
does our understanding of the carceral society change if, in fact, the
carceral is a caricature of the plantation and presumes continuities
between the management of slaves and free labor? If this totalizing
vision of managing labor had one eye directed toward slavery and the
other toward freedom, it then becomes necessary to consider the way
discipline itself bears the trace of what Foucault would describe as
premodern forms of power but which perhaps are more aptly described
as 'discipline with its clothes off.' (*Scenes of Subjection*, 138)

To understand modern power, or carceral discipline, in this manner we need
understand the post-Emancipation prison not solely as a response to socio-economic
anxieties alone, but also as a local site where more specific brutalities are acted out on
particular bodies. In such a locale, Foucault’s model of modern surveillance and a
disciplined civil society holds no ground. Rather we need look to the carceral not as a
sight for the reinforcement of civil values, but as a site of civil death where the
violences and intimate horrors of slavery are preserved and continue to be rearticulated. More useful then Foucault in this instance, is Orlando Patterson’s depiction of the power relations embedded in both slavery and civil death:

The power relation has three facets. The first is social and involves the use or threat of violence and control of one person by another. The second is the psychological facet of influence, the capacity to persuade another person to change the way he perceives his interests and his circumstances. And third is the cultural facet of authority, 'the means of transforming force into right, and obedience into duty' which, according to Jean Jacques Rousseau, the powerful find necessary 'to ensure them continual mastership.' (Slavery and Social Death, 5)

If we approach our understanding of the US carceral through Patterson’s model of power, we see the rise and rapid proliferation of prisons throughout the 20th century both as a geographic solution to socio-economic crisis, as Wilson-Gilmore asserts, and as reiterations of the dehumanizing psychological and cultural strategies employed by overseers in the colonies and carried out today by prison guards, policemen, legislators and politicians. As Saidiya Hartman points out, the power relations of slavery and the dehumanization of others is a foundational element in the making of white US civil society:

Racism retarded the development of social rights; perhaps the amazing indifference to blacks' physical and material needs resulted from the ascription of blacks as the ultimate bearers of the bodily and/or to the quieted needs of the white working class effected through an imagined racial integrity - that is, membership in a grand and corruptible social body that enabled an escape from the immediacy of needs...examining the social question from this historical vantage point, it is clear that the history of enslavement and racism shaped the emergence of the social in the United States. (Scenes of Subjection, 168-9)

It is indeed this subjection and subjugation of the body that is transferred from the plantation to the penitentiary by the close of the Civil War and the beginnings of
Reconstruction. And as Hartman notes, the more ‘rights’ that are prescribed to African Americans during the 20th century, the more this language of racism and enslavement becomes couched in the presumably neutral terminologies of liberal legal codes:

The abolition of slavery presumably announced the end of subjugation based on race or servitude, but the ascendancy of formal race - that is, immutable, inherent, and naturalized racial differences - perpetuated the 'stigma of inferiority based on race' or 'stigmatic injury,' to employ the language of Brown v Board of Education, in the guise of neutrality and objectivity. (ibid, 162-3)

In such a genealogy, race, that which was once conditioned by slavery, becomes normalized within the discourses of law, and the incarcerated subject is likewise sacrificed to society through the re-articulation of its own racial caste system as now determined by a juxtaposition of normativity (white) and criminality (nonwhite). As Dylan Rodriguez notes in his work on the contemporary prison industrial complex:

American civil society (in both its local and global articulations) aggressively constructs normative whiteness as biopolitical power, creatively transposing the technologies of racism and white supremacy into alternative (putatively 'nonwhite') racial identifications and embodiments. The contemporary hegemony of law and order, its materialization into a 'way of life,' is based on a discursive and material expansion of civil society's normative whiteness, to the extent that 'nonwhites' or 'people of color' have increasingly invested in the protection of this sanctified property interest: the sustenance of civil society and its reproduction on a scale of globalized magnitude as the United States of America. (Forced Passages, 70)

If civil society and its reproduction rely on a continuous re-articulation of social categories based on race, exclusion, criminality and enslavement, then the slave, as a social category, cannot simply be explained away in terms of systems of labor and presumed pre-capitalist models of exploitation. Rather, if we adhere to Patterson’s
definition that slavery is “the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons," then we can bear witness to the means by which this social condition has been reproduced through various legal codes and violently reinforced within the walls of the prison itself (Slavery and Social Death, 13). Thus, as we hear Mississippi governor (1904-1908) James K. Vardaman, also known as “The Great White Chief,” describe his ideological goals for the Parchman Prison Farm, what was arguably the first modern US prison, we see not an interest in disciplinary reformation or policies of assimilation, but the re-articulation of slave subjectivities and the desire to normalize African American men and women as always already criminal within white civil society:

…a good prison, like an efficient slave plantation, could serve to ‘socialize’ young blacks within the limits of their God-given abilities. It would not raise their intelligence or their morality, but it could teach them proper discipline, strong work habits, and respect for white authority. You cannot create something when there is nothing to build on, but they can be well trained, and that is the best that can be done with the genuine negro. (as cited in David Olshinsky’s Worse than Slavery, 110)

In this genealogy of discipline and punishment, Foucault’s model of light power and the self-conscious reproduction of social norms are somewhat irrelevant. Rather what we see here is a form of power that does not obscure or do away with violence, but relies on it in so much as it relies on civil society not as a unified Hobbesian body, but as a racially divided community of castes, one in which the plantation dynamics of differentiation and subjugation are reiterated through the language of the law.
Angelo Herndon was certainly attuned to this transitional genealogy from plantation violence to legal incarceration, and it is through his own deft historical knowledge that we are able to interpret his unique circumstances via a liberalist legal discourse seeking to assume the authority of antebellum overseers and Jim Crow lynch mobs. Herndon makes this transitional ambiguity most clear upon his initial release from prison:

My release on bail created two main bodies of opinion in the South. One, represented by the lynch officials, rent the air with their denunciations of giving ‘niggers’ legal protection. Their slogan was: Hang him and damn him! The other group was more ‘cultured,’ more refined, set on preserving the notion of Southern gentility. They upheld the notion that the ‘law should take its course.’ If I was to be hanged they would have it done with the sanction of Section 56 of the Penal Code of the State of Georgia. They too were determined that no ‘impudent’ or ‘uppity’ nigger should get away with insulting the white upper class of Georgia. (Let Me Live, 221)

Herndon sets his position as one straddled between what would seem to be two opposing forms of justice, but, as he clearly notes, are in actuality just two separate means of accomplishing the same goal. He thus unfolds his trial, imprisonment, and subsequent narrative within the constant negotiation of what could be considered historical transition without historical justice or transformation.

Jim Crowed between antebellum plantation culture and the Civil Rights gained during the 1960s, between the convict lease system so essential for Southern Reconstruction and the Prison Industrial Complex which would become integral to maintaining the post-WWII capitalist state, between the advent of neoliberal free-market fundamentalism and the economic doubts caused by the Great Depression, Herndon’s text begs a reading that can be situated within a broader genealogy of the
prison as a US institution designed for the preservation and re-articulation of antebellum slavery and civil death, as well as a reading attuned to the text’s own particular historical moment, where the specific possibilities of new collective social organization and labor movements during the 1930s allowed for certain activists and writers to consider their particular circumstances within the larger framework of capitalism and the US nation-state. As Marlon B. Ross notes, while Herndon plays on many tropes from previous slave narratives throughout his text, he ultimately locates freedom as not simply being that which exists outside from the plantation, but as residing outside of the capitalist nation-state itself:

Slave narrators often remind their readers that they could not be fully free individually until the practice of enslavement itself was eradicated from the nation. Herndon’s narrative intensifies this logic by showing how industrial capitalism prolongs and universalizes the property abuses of enslavement. (Introduction, xxxiii)

Herndon is likewise able to articulate the role of the prison in this relationship between plantation ownership and the enslavement of industrial capitalism. Just as, throughout the trajectory of his narrative, Herndon becomes “fully convinced that my people will be free only when they themselves will rise from their centuries-old sleep and strike a mighty blow against the system which is destroying them,” he additionally recognizes that “as long as there will be men rotting unjustly in foul prisons, neither I, nor anyone else, can ever be free.” (Let Me Live, 141; 300) Thus, as we begin to see the processes of social death and spectral transformation as depicted throughout Let Me Live, we must do so in constant recognition of and negotiation between both the broad historical genealogies at play and the specific, intimate horrors to which Herndon
testifies and which drastically shape and alter the particular contours of his own struggle.

“...a stranger to me yet a brother in sorrow:” The Civil Death and Haunting Praxis of Angelo Herndon

The crux of Herndon’s autobiography, the crucial transitioning point between his emergent political consciousness as a labor organizer in the Depression Era South to his role as a political prisoner and haunting specter of social protest, is born of both the conditions of his incarceration and the courtroom tactics used by the Georgia prosecution in implementing judicial norms of the plantation South within the liberalist legal codes of a unified nation-state. In particular, the indictment with which Herndon is charged signals to the ambiguous and transitional nature of his historical circumstances. One of only two people indicted with such a charge, Angelo Herndon is sentenced under the Georgia statute of insurrection, an antebellum law enacted to allow for state punishment of slaves attempting to organize or incite rebellions on Georgia plantations. The law reads as such:

If any person be in any way instrumental in bringing, introducing or circulating within the state any printed or written paper, pamphlet or circular for the purpose of exciting insurrection, revolt, conspiracy or resistance on the part of slaves, Negroes or free persons of color in this state, he shall be guilty of high misdemeanor which is punishable by death. (as cited in Herndon’s Let Me Live, 204)
In 1877, near the end of Radical Reconstruction in Georgia, the law was amended and reworded so as to fit into the ‘universalizing’ legal discourse of the new nation. When Herndon was prosecuted in 1932, the law would now read:

Any attempt, by persuasion or otherwise, to induce others to join in any combined resistance to the lawful authority of the State shall constitute an attempt to incite insurrection. Any person convicted of the offense of insurrection shall be punished with death; or if the jury recommend mercy, confinement in the penitentiary for not less than five years nor more than twenty years. Insurrection shall consist in any combined resistance to the lawful authority of the State, with intent to the denial thereof, when the same is manifested, or intended to be manifested, by acts of violence. (ibid, 204)

This 1877 rewording of the antebellum law, while guising itself under a universalizing language where race and ethnicity are made absent, is actually far more incorporative of the means for its own manipulation. Indeed, it can only be under the 1877 statute, and not the previous one, where intent is now registered as a punishable offense, that Herndon can be indicted. For it should be recalled, that Herndon’s arrest is entirely based on the socialist literature found in his bedroom during an unwarranted police search. And so, while his indictment was presented within the seemingly more neutral and objective language of the amended statute, we cannot be distracted from the means by which Herndon’s charge of insurrection was likewise manufactured in such a way so as to reinvigorate the ideological codes of the plantation system as a lawful adversary to both communism and African American political voice. As newspaper journalist William Wade Brewton remarked in a racist tirade celebrating the outcome of Herndon’s trial:

A great hue and cry has been raised in the land of communism, and I am here to tell you that if you will revive the principles of the Old South, a Communist cannot live in this country. The principles of
communism are here today solely because the principles for which the Old South stood were put under the heel of the Conqueror. Your fathers made a government of compact and agreement, not of consolidation and force, but the war of the sixties transformed this Union from one of consent to a consolidation compelled by force. That is why all these undermining principles came here and that is why your consolidation, your bureaucracy, is today invading every man’s rights and every man’s home. I do not say it was not inevitable, consolidation once having been established, but I do say such a system could never have arisen had the Union established by our fathers and as interpreted by Madison and Toombs not been put under the heels of the Conqueror. (as cited in John Hammond Moore’s “The Angelo Herndon Case, 1932-1937,” 67)

Herndon’s sentence, along with Georgia being the only state in 1932 with an antebellum insurrection law in place, allowed the white supremacist elite of the South to argue for this specific case as evidence that the principles of plantation slavery were capable not only of maintaining the racial caste system within civil society, but could alleviate the nation-wide fears of communism that continued to spread throughout the pre-war Depression era.

And yet, as Marlon B. Ross points out, Herndon’s prosecution as a political agitator, as opposed to a trespasser or violator of white property, raises new questions and problems for the racist myths surrounding white legal justice:

By prosecuting Herndon under a Georgia statute passed in 1866 based on an antebellum slave anti-insurrection law, rather than concocting a rape charge as they easily could have done, the authorities were acknowledging Herndon’s actions as historically related to these previous slave rebellions, if not to previous national revolutions. (Introduction, xxi)

This statute then, in attempting to evoke a neoplantation legal culture in 1930s Georgia, likewise sets Angelo Herndon’s own narrative within a ghostly temporality concerned not with chronological (H)istory as such, but with the contradictions,
rebellions and revolutions left unresolved. It thus signals directly, albeit unintentionally, to Angelo Herndon’s political presence, more specifically, his role as a US political prisoner whose danger lies not in his body, but in his voice. As Herndon himself notes:

"Rightfully they understood that the seat of my resistance was in the brain. So if they could only batter their way in and punish it for its defiance they would at last make me do their will. (Let Me Live, 152)"

Herndon acknowledges here not only his own power as a critically thinking subject, but the sentence of civil death that will be placed upon him as a result of this threat. He is now aligned, as Ross notes, within a particular genealogy of rebellions and political struggles for African American voice and agency, “intimately linked to a history of the political imprisonment of African Americans, whose mere claims to volition, autonomy, agency, and mobility could be viewed as subversive to both the racial and class status quo.” (“Introduction”, Xi) And so it is the preservationist sentiment exhibited by the Southern anti-communist white-supremacy and instituted in the liberal, legal discourse of Georgia, that inversely sparks the contours of Herndon’s ghostly presence and places him in conversation with new temporalities and spatialities, both personal and political, charting and voicing bold critical narratives of the prison and the capitalist system responsible for its inception.

Angelo Herndon’s own civil death and subsequent political praxis as a ghostly resister is not formed solely within the confines of the penitentiary, but rather, it is realized there as a climactic moment in the continuing narrative of violence that shapes his existence and subsequent struggles. For even as a young child, Herndon is
confronted with the tensions between his own subjectivity and the emergence of that subjectivity through and within the brutalities of white society:

‘Do you want to know what ‘nigger’ means? Asked the white boy spitefully. ‘Let me show you.’
Together with the other boys he began to pelt me with stones and I fled for dear life. After a while, tiring of the sport, they let me along. With feelings smarting more than did the bruises on my body, I turned in the direction of home. (Let Me Live, 10)

Here, in the earliest part of his narrative, Herndon reflects upon his childhood, his first identification in civil society, as one immediately associated with a racist violence that would continue to manifest itself in more perverse and expansive forms. By the time of his incarceration, Herndon has charted the path by which this violence moves from the interpersonal relations of racist schoolyard brawls, to the confines of the state, wherein a legal bullying is applied to now criminalized African American men, whose bodies were always already permeated by this social and physical brutality. Toward the end of his narrative, when sharing a cell with three young men awaiting death by the electric chair, Herndon attempts to articulate this narrative of violence and its associative in the body of the incarcerated African American subject:

‘Well, you silly child, if we didn’t commit the crime, why should they electrocute us?’
He thought he had crushed me with the question
What could I answer to that?
Almost wearily I told him that he and the other two boys must not forget for one moment who they were.
‘You are Negroes and no Negro can expect justice from the white lynch courts.’ (ibid, 255)

As both a speaking subject, a political prisoner, and civiliter mortuus, he who can only speak through the confines and constraining framework of incarceration itself,

Herndon is able to trace back his own life through a racialized violence and likewise
chart the broader, socio-political means by which the interpersonal horrors of Jim Crow communities were translated into legal doctrine and assumed by the liberal state via mechanisms of governance, policing, and imprisonment. Race, as articulated through the racist nation-state, becomes both an intimate force in his autobiographical particularities, and a thematic key in linking his own narrative to the larger historical patterns of injustices in the United States.

In addition to relationships of intimate and historical scale, Herndon is also able to translate and repeatedly rearticulate his circumstances through an array of distinct and sometimes contradictory narrative devices. Politically identifying as both a working class organizer and African American, Herndon struggles on two intersecting fronts for labor and race rights. Raised in a religious Christian household, and developing his own political consciousness via a 1930s’ Marxism, he negotiates oftentimes-conflicting cultural codes for interpreting narratives of the state and socio-political resistance. Consider the multiple framing devises at work in Herndon’s early descriptions of the labor camps to which he was subjected after leaving his childhood home:

After we had deposited our belongings on our cots we were led into the company office. In a corner sat the doctor, looking contemptuously at us. He examined us for venereal diseases. Later on I discovered that this examination was just a formality, for there were quite a number of diseased men working in the camp. We were put to work on a dam which the company was constructing across the Alabama River. We worked in the broiling sun. I was perpetually thirsty and somehow it recalled to my mind the stories my mother used to tell me out of the Bible, about the Egyptians who put the Children of Israel to work building the cities of Pisom and Rameses, and how they groaned under the lash of the taskmasters. A whole army of company watch dogs (‘floor walkers,’ we called them) kept guard
over us night and day so as to prevent the possibility of our escape.
(ibid, 51)

This depiction of a 1930s’ Southern US labor camp is framed both by the Judeo-
Christian narrative strands of biblical injustice, as well as a fine-tuned modern mode
of description that would seem to pre-figure the more infamous camps of Nazi
Germany. Likewise, the reference to the Alabama River as a threshold between the
camp and the outside world, as well as the descriptions of the “company watchdogs,”
signals both toward the many common tropes embedded in the antebellum slave
narrative, and also toward the more contemporary cultural portrayals of chain gangs
and labor prisons like the Parchman Farm.

That Herndon can interchange so many seemingly contradictory themes and
symbols as he both employs and deconstructs a traditional *bildungsroman* suggests
certain political complexities of its own. For Herndon, as both a socialist labor
organizer and member of the civally dead, the individualism and teleological
momentum of the autobiography (in spite of its many different and distinct forms and
tropes) is not a sufficient forum for protest and cross-boundary conversation. Rather,
as the narrative progresses, many of the analytical tropes that Herndon employs
ultimately fall short, and the reader is subsequently left with what becomes the *anti-
bildungsroman*, not the rise of the bourgeois individual within and through the free
market, but rather the collapse of such individualistic myths altogether, and the
subsequent descent of the political subject into the depths of civil death. Indeed, as
Herndon is further confronted with the ghostly voices of bare life as they emerge from
the labor camp, he finds that such models as that of the Judeo-Christian narrative become untenable:

‘This is no life for a man and a Christian,’ I once confided to my partner.
He snorted savagely
‘There are no men – there are no Christians nowhere. Only pigs.’ (ibid, 58)

For Herndon then, the bildungroman becomes a means by which dominant tropes of the capitalist nation-state are rendered obsolete as the subject is deconstructed into a more base and violent form – not a religious subject, not even a human subject, ‘only pigs.’ The prison thus figures as the climactic space in such a narrative, where, once the subject has been completely gutted and collapsed within civil society, they must begin to rebuild their political subjectivity outside of the normative boundaries at play.

Herndon’s most vivid depictions of the incarceration experience thus signal the end of the autobiography as such and the beginning of a voice that extends beyond the contours of traditional Western narratives:

My cell was about 8 by 12 feet, but exceptionally high. It was always cast in shadow. There were no lights inside. Outside of the cell a little bulb cast its dim illumination into the cage. A cement wall rose outside our bars, emphasizing the darkness. I had never understood before what it meant to be buried alive. Now I knew. It gave me a curdly feeling, as if I had been swallowed up into the bowels of the earth where no light of the sun could reach me, where only the ghostly voices and movements of my three fellow-prisoners and the hailers made it possible for me to realize that I still belonged among the living. (ibid, 251)

Herndon’s liminal straddling of the living world and the “ghostly voices and movements” born within the confines of incarceration force him to reconsider his role within the autobiography itself. No longer able to move in any direction through or
among civil society, the *bildungsroman* of the novel’s first section is replaced by a separate and distinct political narrative that holds different relationships to time and space. It is in this second narrative that Herndon sheds much of his individual self to assume a broader socio-political voice for both the working class entrenched in Depression Era capitalism and African Americans confined within the Jim Crow South.

That Herndon stands at the vanguard of and negotiates for both working class and African American political claims does not mean that the two identities hold equal weight for him in his oppression and struggle. For he notes early on that “if I knew what it was to be a ‘worker’ I knew even better what it was to be a ‘nigger,’” and the tensions between his identification as both an African American male and a US laborer often conflict and contradict one another throughout the narrative. (*ibid*, 20) Likewise, Herndon’s acknowledgement of the fact that life outside incarceration (in the labor camps or unemployed) cannot be interpreted as altogether apart from life in prison, does not mean that these spaces are entirely indistinguishable.

Rather, another distinction is revealed at this point in the narrative. It is the boundary between civil life and civil death, a distinguishing line that relies on Herndon’s identification as *both* a labor organizer *and* an African American male, and is embodied and revealed through the state of incarceration itself. It is from the other side of this line, cast within civil death, that Angelo Herndon voices his claims not as a political protester rallying in the streets, but as a ghostly voice testifying to the contradictions left unresolved:
My prison cell, for all its bars and guards, became a sort of sounding board to the whole country of the struggle for the Negro worker to achieve social and economic equality. *(ibid, 326)*

The prison as a preserved space of antebellum horrors within the neoplantation capitalist economies of the 1930s’ United States, becomes a space where politically imprisoned individuals like Angelo Herndon critically speak back toward the contradictions wrought within civil society, as their testimonies emerge from locales on the outside, through narratives that emerge with other points of departure.

“... a nameless curse winging at the enemies of mankind:” Angelo Herndon’s Spectral Emergence in the Neoplantation Penitentiary

Just as Herndon’s incarceration marks not the dénouement of an autobiography, but the climatic transition into a new form of discourse, so too must the prison as a historical reality not simply be seen as the end product of a racist civil and social economy. Rather, it is only the moment by which we first see these divisions of life and death in the human begin to take root in the continuation of a much larger project incorporative of colonialism, chattel slavery, and the extermination of working class political consciousness. The prison, as Colin Dayan notes, forces us to witness "this transformation of categories - the double movement and complex relations between the extremes of flesh and mind, external and internal, and what can be removed and what must remain - [which] gives the juridical order the power to redefine persons." *(“Legal Slaves and Civil Bodies,” 53)*
This juridical redefinition of the incarcerated subject is, of course, not solely a modern invention. Rather it stands as a means by which 20\textsuperscript{th} century liberalist legal discourse absorbs and circumscribes the socio-ontological distinctions of the Enlightenment, those racist dividing lines of subjectivity so imperative to modern constructs of the human, what Sylvia Wynter refers to as “the coloniality of being.” This dividing line, as Wynter traces it from Aristotelian categories to Renaissance humanism to Enlightenment discourse (a genealogy which has been discussed already in detail throughout this dissertation), constructs and reinforces an over-determined, over-represented human subject (white, Anglo-European), a cerebral socio-political intellect disembodied and freed from the constraints and foreboding mortality of all biological life, at the expense of a civil, social, and cultural genocide which would seek to preserve biological life (when needed for the furtherance of the industrial marketplace) while stripping it of its subjecthood:

With this genre of the human being one in the terms of whose dually biogenetic and economic notions of freedom both the peoples of African hereditary descent and the peoples who comprise the damned archipelagoes of the Poor, the jobless the homeless, the “underdeveloped” must be sacrificed as a function of our continuing to project our collective authorship of our contemporary order onto the imagined agency of Evolution and Natural Selection and, by extrapolation, onto the “Invisible Hand” of the “Free Market” (both being cultural and class-specific constructs). ("Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 317)

For Wynter, the divvying up of 'rational' personhood and civil life cannot simply be a stable and fixed representative configuration. Rather, it must be seen as an active process in sync with such ideologically self-justifying illusions as Darwinian evolution and free-market fundamentalism. Not just the civil subjects, but their histories, their
governments, their knowledge-producing facilities and their economic models are all rooted in a colonial project that would over-determine life only at the simultaneous sanctioning of civil death.

Angelo Herndon’s “emergence” within the prison in the form of, what Colin Dayan refers to as, a ‘legally fabricated corpse,’ he who embodies a “loss of status beyond which life ceases to be politically relevant,” is thus part of an ideological project with roots extending all the way to Enlightenment conceptualization of the human itself. ("Legal Slaves and Civil Bodies," 69) And yet, for Herndon, as a haunting subject, another genealogy is revealed - one in which, despite the direct political burial of the subject, certain structures of power might still be contested. This ‘other’ genealogy is perhaps best revealed in Clyde Woods’ reading of Antonio Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks, where Woods notes that:

…the real innovation in Gramsci’s work was the realization that, in capitalist societies, hegemony is never fully achieved – it is always contested…Resistance may not always be active and open, often it will be latent and largely symbolic. (Development Arrested, 27)

For Herndon then, the very power structure that enacts and sustains his status as a legally and civilly dead subject, also positions him within a new temporal and spatial modality from which to critique the system itself.

Of course, Herndon does not immediately recognize this subject position and the critical agency it entails. Rather, upon entering the Georgia State Penitentiary and being subjected to the Kangaroo court - a violent mock trial enacted upon the newly incarcerated by fellow prisoner - he finds the prison community as incapable not only
of civil subjectivity, but as existing beyond all and any subject positions that might be contrasted to bare, biological life:

They raised such a furious din with their maniacal howling, yelling and shrieking that they could have roused the dead. I was so astonished that I remained rooted to the spot. They did not look to me like human beings; they behaved like wild beasts, and I recoiled from them with revulsion. (Let Me Live, 196)

Herndon acknowledges the creation and maintenance of these maniacal circumstances by the supposedly ‘rational’ precepts of the enforced state laws of Georgia.

Additionally, he views the relationship between the two, the Kangaroo court and the Fulton County court, not as irrelevant or coincidental, but as oftentimes working in a complicit deconstruction of both civil and biological life. When the Kangaroo court kills a recently battered and imprisoned inmate, Herndon notes that, “what the police had begun, the kangaroo court had obligingly finished.” (ibid, 214)

While Herndon’s depiction of socio-political culture within the penitentiary as a violently perverted reproduction of the legal codes in US civil society is an accurate one, his conceptualizations of an actively contesting ghostly community come only after the dramatic reorganizations of time and space necessary for the production of his own haunting voice. Indeed, time, in its Westernized linear form, becomes the means by which Herndon begins to articulate his civil death:

The months lengthened into years; the seasons came and went, and I began to lose all sense of time. Prisoners kept on coming, and departing prisoners heard the doors of the prison close behind them. Each new arrival told horrible and shameful stories of the chain gang for which I was headed. It was a dying by degrees, a slow nightmarish death that awaited me. (ibid, 269)
The “dying by degrees, a slow nightmarish death” that supposedly awaits Herndon on the chain gang, is ironically accomplished not through entry into a prison labor camp, (Herndon never leaves the confines of the penitentiary), but through the period of waiting itself, wherein time, as a means for social and civil connectivity, is made obsolete.

This ambiguous space, between the certain biological death of the chain gang and the civil and political death of the penitentiary, signals to the historical particularities of *Let Me Live* as a cultural document testifying to the transitional horrors from Reconstruction prison camps to neoliberal states of confinement, what Alex Lichtenstein refers to in his work on the convict-lease system as the transformation of the chain gang into:

…modern prison life, which in the South now as in the rest of the United States, is defined by a numbing, brutal inactivity, an 'enforced idleness,' which ironically even in the 1930s one historian of prisons thought to characterize as worse than the forced labor then prevailing on the southern chain gangs. (*Twice the Work of Free Labor*, 191)

It is relevant here in our understanding of Angelo Herndon as a distinctly modern prisoner, subjected to the continuing horrors and violent contradictions of plantation slavery still defining the prison-system today, that we trace his incarceration not only through models of the chain gang and convict-lease system, but via the “numbing, brutal inactivity” of “modern prison life,” that which produces him apart as a civilly dead subject in the ‘reconstructed’ state of Georgia:

Worse than the taunts and the threats of the jailers, worse than the tortures they inflicted upon me, worse than the horrible conditions under which I lived, was the way time dragged and dragged for me. Every minute became an eternity of suffering. I had to fight this enemy
with all the strength of my mind, with all the energy of my will. (*Let Me Live*, 279)

Time - as a linear narrative comprised of minutes, hours and eternities – becomes the means by which Angelo Herndon as a civil subject of the autobiographical *bildungsroman* is ultimately deconstructed, rendered obsolete, and forced to rebuild and regain voice and agency from new temporal perspectives. As he confronts relics of a world rooted in linear, teleological systems of time, a place now foreign to him, Herndon must explore new and alternative means for interacting with the relics and artifacts of this world. When given torn-up newspaper articles of his trial and imprisonment by taunting and abusive jailers, Herndon responds by rebuilding the artifact via his own means and methods:

I would lay the tattered newspaper on the floor of my cell and with infinite patience piece it together again. To hold it together I pressed pieces of moist soap on the edges. Sometimes it took me several days to complete such an operation. But I did not mind. For all I cared it could have taken me weeks and even months. What value did time have in my circumstances? (*ibid*, 282-3)

The newspaper, a device for the maintenance of imagined national communities and the regeneration and sustenance of civil society’s designated temporal order, becomes a relic for Herndon, left behind from a world now gone, to be reconstructed and reinterpreted through other strategies of temporal engagement.

Time, now deconstructed and reassembled in a new context, allows Herndon to engage in different relationships with other temporal constructs, the most notable one being *history*. (H)istory, as an ideological state apparatus that does as much to inform one about past events as it does to alienate them from such events, becomes obsolete for Herndon. He can no longer live in his own history as such. Removed from the
immediate succession of events in the civil societies of his own biological lifespan, Herndon must situate himself within a history of struggle that extends beyond, but is also incorporative of his direct and specific circumstances. Indeed, as *Let Me Live* reflects upon Herndon’s own accomplishments as a labor organizer, it does so not only in regards to the particular revolutions occurring in unions of the US South, but through the framework of a larger genealogy of revolutionary activists in early-America:

> We knew we were carrying on in the spirit of the truest American patriots and Revolutionary Fathers, who, too, had to fight against the same reactionary forces in their day. I saw Frank Williams, Earl Browder and William Z. Foster as the spiritual descendants of Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Patrick Henry, Frederick Douglas and John Brown. *(ibid, 90)*

By locating a spiritual genealogy of the labor union and socialist thought in the US with both the founding of the nation as a settler-colonial state (Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Pain, Patrick Henry) and the abolitionist struggle occurring over a century later (Frederick Douglass and John Brown), Herndon’s struggle is now framed as part of the larger national history of the United States, a history, which as Herndon points out, is widely contested and up for appropriation by various communities with multiple and oftentimes contradictory interests.

Recognizing that history, as an ideological tool and not a banal or disinterested form of knowledge, is born of multiple genealogies, through multiple communities, Herndon is able to play with the distinct and conflicting strands as they weave throughout his own narrative. For instance, when calling out against the imprisonment of the Scottsboro Boys, nine black teenagers falsely accused of rape in Alabama by an
all-white lynch-mob jury in 1931, Herndon categorizes his outrage not as linked to the “American Patriots” of the late 18th century, but to a genealogy of slave revolt and a revolutionary spirit that would stand in direct contradiction to racist historical figures like Thomas Jefferson:

I call upon all Negroes wherever they may be to fight for the lives of the nine Scottsboro boys – to fight with the same might and determination as did Nat Turner, Frederick Douglas and other Negro heroes in the days of slavery. (ibid, 123)

Here, Herndon has removed Frederick Douglass from the previous genealogy of ‘American’ revolutionaries and situated him more specifically in relation to the struggle for African American voice, freedom, justice, and democracy in the United States. Likewise, white abolitionist figures like John Brown are removed from this new narrative as it becomes one couched in the specific terms of black revolutionaries seeking their own paths to justice in an ongoing US slave society.

History as a means for revolutionary play, more specifically, Herndon’s haunting histories through which myriad repressed contradictions of the national narrative are revealed, becomes a means for civilly dead ghosts to locate themselves both through new temporalities and new conceptualizations of space. Indeed, Herndon’s historical play expands horizontally as well, seeking characters, actors and subjects existing outside of the named historical narrative. When he hears the bellowing cries of a fellow inmate several cells away, Herndon laments, “poor unknown prisoner, a stranger to me yet a brother in sorrow, forgive me, whoever and wherever you are!” (ibid, 248) Just as Herndon is able to locate himself alongside recognizable historical figures as result of the contradictions wrought within the US
national narrative, so too is he able to communicate across immediate spaces with other unnamed ghosts, united by the violence and injustice left unresolved.

Thus, through his conflation and subsequent reinvention of linear time and space, Herndon, as the civilly dead narrator testifying to his own existence, is able to emerge at various points throughout his autobiography as a ghostly presence. These emergent moments do not occur along any set chronology, (Herndon’s autobiography is both a reinvestigation of linear narration itself and a cultural document produced during and after his experience of incarceration), but throughout the novel as hauntingly defiant protests toward the injustices framing the conditions of his struggle. When reading Tolstoy and contemplating the question of what it was “which made the revolutionary go so joyously to his death,” Herndon concludes:

What if I had only two more hours to live – what if after that time I was to be dragged by a lynch mob howling like a pack of wolves to the woods, here to be stripped, to be beaten, to be tarred and feathered, to be tortured and mutilated until my body lay still? What if they did? The possibility of such a fate brought to me neither dread nor despair. Instead there passed before my mind’s eye, the grave strong faces of Robert Minor, B.D. Amis and other fighters for the working class. The mere thought of them suffused my heart with a warm glow. I was not alone! Everywhere-everywhere where there was suffering, persecution and exploitation there were men like myself, thousands upon thousands of them, fighting resolutely for a new world order. And if I died, all these, my brothers everywhere, would pick up the loose threads of my unfinished labors and continue to advance to ultimate triumph. I felt sure my life had not been wasted. Few though my years may have been, I had succeeded in crowding them with significance and beauty, not outward beauty, for my worldly condition was wretched and drab, but with an inner beauty, a moral grandeur of which no exploiter could rob me, which gave me strength to sing defiantly in adversity and which now left me tranquil in the face of possible death. (ibid, 138)

Through this fluid movement from the dread of biological mortality to a situated place within the larger genealogies of resistance expanding far beyond his particular
lifespan, Herndon embraces a critical consciousness that exists and extends outside and apart from Enlightenment conceptualizations of the human and biological lifetimes. A member of the civilly dead, Herndon’s political praxis now takes the form of a ghost, wherein time as mortal temporality is abandoned for the specters of protest that continue to rise and voice their claims so long as the contradictions of the state, (in this case, the preservation of plantation horrors within the neoliberal penitentiary), remain unresolved.

Yet, the ghostly voice, as a political agent, cannot be overly romanticized. For it must be made clear that Herndon’s haunting praxis is not a choice made outside from the constraints of his incarceration, but contrarily, is a result of the very real binds that hold him apart from and buried beneath the public sphere. As he notes upon hearing the cries of one of his fellow inmates, a young African American male sentence to death by the state courts, his ghostly political praxis is only born of the fact that he is incapable of remedying his circumstances in lived time:

He was weeping and appeared more terrified and unhappy than his companions. He looked about him like a frightened bird, frantically searching with his eyes for some invisible Deliverer to come to his aid…I would have come to his aid, if I only could. But I too was only a bird in a selfsame cage. I too stood in need of rescue. (ibid, 267)

In spite of Herndon’s revolutionary spectral presence, his capabilities as an incarcerated subject are limited.

Likewise, the politics of haunting, with their continual emergence from within the brutal contradictions of civil society, also run the risk of naturalizing those contradictions within their own narrative. As Herndon repeatedly discovers, the
horrors of prison life, through their myriad re-articulations, risk being absorbed into the banality of daily life, what Achile Mmbembe cites as the basis for the *necropolitical*, and what Herndon refers to as the human capacity for extraordinary adjustment:

One thing I have always marveled at – the extraordinary capacity that human beings have for adjusting themselves to every circumstance, no matter how difficult. There was something ghastly about our situation. The old man lay moaning on his bed. Maybe he was dying! Did it stop us from our routine of living? Not a bit! The men quarreled, laughed at each other’s smelly jokes and fought like wildcats. I watched the goings on with dismay. I sent a nameless curse winging at the enemies of mankind and at the way they degrade human beings so that they sink lower than the wild beasts. (*ibid*, 208)

Ghostliness here becomes ghastliness as the inhumane and unjust violence committed against incarcerated peoples is translated into a disinterested and routinized narrative of everyday life. What separates Herndon, however, from the other prisoners is his sentence of the “nameless curse,” his ability to locate, articulate and make frighteningly vivid the horrors that plague the everyday life of inmates in the Georgia State Penitentiary.

Herndon’s spectral praxis does not free him the very real binds and intimate horrors of his incarceration. His release from the Georgia State Penitentiary is premised as much on his own political voice as it is on those historically relevant figures such as Thurgood Marshall, C. Vann Woodward, William Patterson and the International Labor Defense league, all of whom used their notoriety and financial capital to aid in Herndon’s release. For other prisoners, other ghostly voices like Odea Matthews, the transformative power of testimony is far from certain. Indeed, the
political prisoners still incarcerated in US penitentiaries today cannot rely on theoretical discourse and spectral forms of agency alone in the struggle for their actual release from prison or in the abolition of the system itself. Rather, as Mumia Abu-Jamal and others have noted, the ghostly voices haunting unresolved contradictions today rely as much on an awake and aware public as they do upon their own spectral testimonies. Angelo Herndon’s own claims to existence, his historical testimony to the plantation horrors still embedding the racist penitentiaries of the 1930s, are part of a genealogy that must continually be unearthed and re-articulated by those acting in resistance to state narratives of progress that would otherwise obscure the preserved racist violence embedded within the neoliberal legal codes of the 20th century. The abolition of the system itself - a system born from the racist ontology of the Enlightenment, realized in plantation slavery and reabsorbed into the capitalist narrative of progress via the Prison Industrial Complex – relies very much on an awake and aware public invested in the transformation of these structures that continue to hold the ghosts of slavery sealed within their walls.
Conclusion

..colonization = 'thingification – Aimé Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism

I grasp my narcissism with both hands and I turn my back on the degradation of those who would make man a mere mechanism - Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks

That's why I write the shit I write in my raps\ It's documented, I meant it\ Everyday of the week, I live in it, breath in it\ It's more than just fucking believing it - dead prez, "Police State"

In his 8th thesis on the philosophy of history, Walter Benjamin writes:

…the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of exception' in which we live is the rule. We must attain to a concept of history that accords with this fact. Then we will clearly see that it is our task to bring about the real state of exception, and this will improve our position in the struggle against fascism. (Illuminations: Essays and Reflections, 56)

The previous four chapters, each in their own way, have tried to illuminate at least a small concept of this history as it emerged in the United States in the late 19th and 20th centuries, unveiling emergent discourses of preservation, which aided in the US transition from a colonial nation engaged in practices of enslavement, to a neocolonial nation invested in furthering the liberal institutions of neoslavery. I have argued for these discourses of preservation as violently coercing and reshaping their subjects in accordance with an ongoing genocide against people of color in the occupied United States. To view this ontological and biological violence as genocide, moves away from popular Foucauldian notions of the “light” disciplinary force that polices modern society, instead, looking toward Achille Mbembe’s argument that:

If power still depends on tight control over bodies (or on concentrating them in camps), the new technologies of destruction are less concerned with inscribing bodies within disciplinary apparatuses as inscribing them, when the time comes, within the order of the maximal economy now represented by the “massacre.” (“Necropolitics,” 37)
From George Catlin’s vision of “a nation’s park, containing man and beast,” to William Faulkner’s depiction of Haiti as an ahistorical island “set aside by Heaven itself,” I have tried to illustrate the way in which preservation was employed not only for the disinterested acquisition of knowledge, but also as an ideological tool used to encapsulate and redefine certain subjects as static and unchanging, barred from civil lives and political representation, *inscribed* as Mbembe argues, within national and global economies of “massacre.”

Beyond an awareness of these conditions of inscription, these chapters have also outlined diverse and distinct strategies for, not only resistance to such conditions, but alternative imaginings of the spatial and historical dynamics that might bring about Benjamin’s “real state of exception.” These strategies – from Zitkala-Sa’s subaltern ‘universal’ to Angelo Herndon’s practice of *haunting* – were born out from a variety of distinct contexts that I have been hesitant to unite in any one overarching theoretical platform. Rather than further bind these writers and activists in the discursive frameworks of theoretical goals and manipulations, I have tried to hear these primary cultural texts as they themselves alter and reshape the fields of eco-criticism, critical ethnic studies, biopolitics, and canonical American literature. Taking heed of Joy James’ warning of the *double-imprisonment* which can occur when cultural theorists exploit already imprisoned texts to fit their own pre-envisioned projects, I have deliberately chosen to allow certain overarching themes in this dissertation to remain ambiguously aligned and at times even disconnected, in exchange for a more direct reading of the primary texts themselves. Rather than forge the voices of certain subjects into the paradigmatic confines of a predetermined theory, or even speak to or
in conversation with these subjects, I would at best hope for this collection of thoughts and references to serve as a means of critical *listening*, all the while aware that even frames of listening can do violence to their speaking subjects.

*Listening*, in this case, rather than a passive act coming out from fixed and stable positions, takes on political dimensions, and the *listener* gains consciousness of their own privileged position as they attempt to hear embodied voices of a larger collective resistance to the very same structural violence that has paved way for their privilege in the first place. Such acts of *listening* evoke not the political consciousness espoused by the ideologues of the liberal Enlightenment, but look toward an alternative ‘awakening’ prophesied by thinkers like Césaire and Fanon, the latter of whom wrote:

But political education means opening up the mind, awakening the mind, and introducing it to the world. It is, as Césaire said: ‘To invent the souls of men.’ To politicize the masses is not and cannot be to make a political speech. It means driving home to the masses that everything depends on them, that if we stagnate the fault is theirs, and that if we progress, they too are responsible, that there is no demiurge, no illustrious man taking responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people and the magic lies in their hands and their hands alone. (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 138)

Broad and expansive as Fanon’s call is, my own project seems quite limited and begs for consideration of the other ways in which discourses of preservation were subverted and remade into alternative means for collective resistance. From Langston Hugh’s writings in Haiti to Dennis Banks’ and the American Indian Movement’s reinterpretation of Wovoka’s late 19th century ‘Ghost Dance,’ there exists a multitude of other examples – other future chapters – of subaltern historical arrangements
testifying to and exorcizing the ontological binds of preservationist discourse, at the same time that they imagine alternative political and historical identities.

Additionally, questions arise as to how these cultural expressions of both preservationist discourse and pronounced resistance, emerging throughout the late 19th and early 20th century United States, have altered and reshaped the theoretical platforms of critical ethnic studies, eco-criticism, biopolitics, and US literary analysis. Through an examination of the ontological violence born out from earlier institutions of slavery and colonialism, and retooled into the frameworks of 19th and 20th century liberalism through discourses of preservation, this dissertation has simultaneously sought to reconcile these oftentimes conflicting fields of study, even if it does not always address their analytical tools directly.

Ultimately, this dissertation has sought to illustrate and forefront both the embodied violence and embodied resistance occurring within the neocolonial and neoplantation nation otherwise known as the modern United States. In light of what Benjamin called an according “concept of history,” Césaire, a reinvention of “the souls of men,” Fanon, a “political consciousness,” and dead prez, a relationship to history that’s “more than just fucking believing it,” I close, not in remembrance, but rather in immediate awareness of the haunting specters that linger, voices whose testimonies out from the enclosed confines of preservation continue to pave way for alternative embodiments of historical truth, that which might lead us one step closer to the ‘real state of exception,’ a more whole and realized confrontation with the violent contradictions of our own present moment, all that has been left unresolved.
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**Conclusion**


