

Undoing Home: Queer Space and Black Women's Writing 1865-1953

by

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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes, through the trope of home, queer characters' location in black communities and black women's representations of queer space. Embracing the anti-domestic narratives in black fiction and histories, *Undoing Home* formulates a literary history of black sexuality. This history challenges queer studies' accounts of black women that begin with the 1970s, and black studies' idealizations of home as the bastion of community and guarantor of heterosexuality. *Undoing Home* is about the social and material construction of homes that served as symbols of both respect for and restrictions on black sexuality. By bringing a queer lens attuned to the historical locations of black women's writing, I show how home becomes a central literary site for struggles over the meaning of heterosexuality. Through readings of Harriet Jacobs struggling with contraband camps and housing for ex-slaves; Pauline Hopkins's representation of homosocial intimacy in John Brown's militia; Glenn Carrington's trips abroad to meet other gay men; Zora Neale Hurston's white female heroine who can only quell her racial anxiety by sailing off into the Atlantic; and Ann Petry's violent portrayal of interracial heterosexuality, I trace how representing home often undoes sexual and racial boundaries.

Introduction

I had long thought I had no attachment to my old home. as I often sit here and think of those I loved of their hard struggle in life -- their unfaltering love and devotion toward myself and Children. I love to sit here and think of them. They have made the few sunny spots in that dark life sacred to me. (Harriet Jacobs to Edna Dow Cheney)

In April of 1867, Harriet Jacobs returned to Edenton, North Carolina, 25 years after she left her self-confinement in her grandmother's garret where she hid from Dr. James Norcom, her master and tormentor. In her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, Jacobs tells of his repeated sexual demands, his threats to have her children sold south to be "broken in," and his imprisonment of her brother, son and daughter.¹ In 1835, Jacobs's children are bought by Samuel Sawyer, their white father, who allows them to live with her grandmother, Molly Horniblow. Jacobs's uncle builds a trap door into the ceiling of Molly's shed, and Jacobs is hidden there, without

¹ *Incidents* fictionalizes Norcom as Flint, and Jacobs represents herself as Linda Brent. Because I am interested in Jacobs as a historical figure, rather than a literary character, I don't use their pseudonyms. For excellent reading of how Jacobs creates Linda Brent and the function of Brent as an authorial persona, see Doriani, "Black Womanhood in Nineteenth-Century America: Subversion and Self-Construction in Two Women's Autobiographies." For a reading of Jacobs's narrative strategies in relation to nineteenth century autobiographical forms, see Painter, "Of Lily, Linda Brent, and Fried: A Non-Exceptionalist Approach to Race, Class, and Gender in the Slave South."

light or air circulation, with rats and mice crawling over her bed, for almost seven years.

This garret, memorably described as seven feet wide, nine feet long, three feet in height, is a canonical space for black women's literature. Seen both as the primordial space of captivity and of resistance, black female agency and authority, Jacob's grandmother's garret allows her to trick her owner into believing she has already escaped. Thus it is a space of masquerade;² narrative empowerment and voyeurism;³ liberty;⁴ disobedience;⁵ subjugation by the law;⁶ maternal challenge;⁷ complicity and redemption;⁸ a possible trap for black women's literature within the academy.⁹ Much like Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech, Jacobs's hiding spot has become an Ur-text for black feminist criticism. Indeed, if Jacob's grandmother did not have a garret, we would have to invent one.¹⁰

The foundational assumption behind most readings of Jacobs's garret is that her longing "for a hearthstone of (her) own" propels her journey towards freedom. No matter what terms critics use to read her resistance to captivity, we generally take Jacobs's word

² Warner, "Harriet Jacobs at Home in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl."

³ Smith, "Loopholes of Retreat: Architecture and Ideology in Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl."

⁴ Sanchez-Eppler, "Righting Slavery and Writing Sex: The Erotics of Narration in Harriet Jacobs Incidents."

⁵ Goldman, "Harriet Jacobs, Henry Thoreau, and the Character of Disobedience."

⁶ Kaplan, "Women's Writing and Feminist Strategy."

⁷ Ernest, "Motherhood Beyond the Gate: Jacobs's Epistemic Challenge in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl."

⁸ Smith, "The Tender of Memory: Restructuring Value in Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl."

⁹ Garfield, "Vexed Alliances: Race and Female Collaborations in the Life of Harriet Jacobs."

¹⁰ Many commentators when *Incidents* was published charged that it was not a true story – in fact, Jacobs preempts these charges in her (and Child's) introduction. Jean Fagan Yellin has proved that the space did in fact exist and authenticates many of Jacobs's incidents for 20th century readers. See Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*.

that a home up north is the goal, a universal aspiration of black women as subjects and authors. Claudia Tate's seminal work, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire*, argues that texts like *Incidents* follow generic formulas of white domestic fiction to publically validate black women's ability to be the wives and mothers of male citizens; in doing so, they work to counter the stereotype of the hypersexual slave woman.¹¹ Scholars such as Hazel Carby and Tate, drawing on *Incidents* as a key text, argue that nineteenth century domesticity upheld the sexual virtue of white women and the racial purity of the middle class home by denying that black women could be virtuous and enforcing racial "impurity" in black homes. While these scholars brilliantly show how black authors infused politically radical ideas into the "cult of domesticity" in nineteenth century women's literature, it also reproduces the texts' valorization of home as a symbolic state that will provide the respectability black women have been long denied.

Undoing Home begins with Jacobs's return to Edenton, not with Molly Horniblow's garret, because I'm interested in how the valorized ideal of home is challenged. Whether it's Jacobs struggling with contraband camps and housing for ex-slaves, Pauline Hopkins's representation of homosocial intimacy in John Brown's militia, Glenn Carrington's trips abroad to meet other gay men, Zora Neale Hurston's white female heroine who can only quell her racial anxiety by sailing off into the Atlantic, or Ann Petry's violent portrayal of interracial heterosexuality, I trace how the ideal of home is undone by texts that most critics have avoided up to now. *Undoing Home* traces a separate literary history of black sexuality, using texts that fall outside critical agendas that establish home as black women's eternal aspiration to show how "home" stands in

¹¹ Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century*, 23-41.

not just for respect, but also for containment and restriction. By beginning with Jacobs, whose narrative is the Ur-text that has helped establish home as the early black women writer's desire, but switching to her "miscellaneous" writing, we begin to see a fuller picture of the cultural and historical realities of what she wants, what she can have, and what normative functions of home she's required to adopt.¹²

For Jacobs and the rest of the figures in this project, home is the very opposite of what the normative ideal dictates – settled, stable, strictly gendered, homogenous location. These author's later works are often less well regarded because they are messier; they foreground ambivalence, instability, mobility and disruption. For example, Jacobs never found her own home, instead she travelled extensively in the south, trying to set up schools and homes for freedmen and "contraband." Her letter to Edna Cheney was just one of the ways Jacobs continued to use *Incident's* legacy to mobilize southern and northern constituencies, and to move into local political issues in the south.

My reading of Pauline Hopkins's serialized novel, *Winona: Negroes in the South and Southwest* (1902), argues that it undermines many of the values that are, at least purportedly, upheld in Hopkins's *Contending Forces* (1900). *Winona* is Hopkins's western novel, published serially, and centered on a brother-sister pairing of a black male refugee from slavery (Judah) and the mixed race daughter of a former slave and a British

¹²Recently, Jacobs post-Incidents journalism and letters, recently made available to the public by Yellin, point to the sexual dynamics of home and migration in Jacobs's representations of her life and the lives of southern blacks post-emancipation. These writings survey the field of gender, sexuality and race as represented in terms of home in the post-bellum south. As Jacobs represents freedmen and women who don't find home in the north, she also represents their homelessness as a failure to uphold gender and sexual morality. This message was shaped by the history of slavery and was then reworked in the uplift movement of which Jacobs was one of the foundational black members.

white man (Winona). Winona and Judah are remanded into slavery after the Fugitive Slave Law passes, but are then freed by John Brown and join his militia. In chapter three, I consider Zora Neale Hurston's last novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948). This is Hurston's novel about white characters, in which she recycles some earlier writing about black characters and dumps their dialogue, wholesale, into her white characters' mouths. *Seraph* expresses Hurston's general enjoyment of being an iconoclast and spokesperson for conservative blacks in the 1940s, which is a period most critics prefer to leave out of her literary biography.

Throughout *Undoing Home*, I focus on works written after the authors' most canonized novels; often messier works which are set outside, rather than working within genres about home. Rather than reconstructing womanhood, these texts are often abandoning structures of womanhood altogether. *Undoing Home's* selection of texts also challenges allegorical critical practices that make black women's writing into case studies for the inadequacy of U.S. racial policy, or their authors into exemplary figures of resistance. Both of these strategies freeze authors in terms of the intellectual program of Black, Women's or Queer Studies, limiting the reach of their words to the goals of the disciplines that take them up.

As cultural geographers, critical race theorists, and transnational feminists repeatedly point out, the meanings of home are intimately connected to local, regional, national and global systems of power.¹³ Doing home, in such accounts, is a process of

¹³ See Stoler, Martin, Mohanty, Gopinath, Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996). For a discussion of black women's relationship to nationhood see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought : Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Perspectives on Gender ; V. 2 (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990). For a good critique of experiential theories of difference, see Chay, Deborah G., "Rereading Barbara Smith: Black Feminist Criticism and the Category of

negotiating relationships with these systems of power. Jacobs's letter shows her negotiating relationships to northern abolitionist circles as well as the south. The letter serves as a testimony for Jacobs's efficacy in working with southern freedmen because she can connect to their experiences of the south as home, sharing feelings that are inexplicable to Cheney as a northerner. In some ways, Jacobs's power as a literary figure is demonstrated by her ability to refuse the burden of explaining her feelings about the south to Cheney and broader northern audiences. The question of how to do home within, or despite, ideals that consolidated racial and gender hierarchies is topic of debate in black literature throughout the first half of the 20th century.

Homes Change over Time

Each home in this dissertation is located in a specific time and place, and that time and place are crucial to understanding how the homes function. The spatial organization of a given home – both internally and in relation to external geography - influences and reflects forms of sociality associated with a given historical context.¹⁴ As the context for “home” changes, both the spatial details and the meanings of these details change.

Gardens grow and are harvested, neighborhoods integrate or gentrify, basements flood, holes are pounded into walls, a walk in closet becomes a bedroom, or someone finally removes that god-awful wallpaper. Even if the material structure does not change, it's surroundings and meanings cannot stay static. For example, the roof that Jacobs sits on to

Experience,” *New Literary History*, (1993) 635.

¹⁴ See Witold Rybczynski *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (1986). Also see Casey “Getting back into place” p. 120. See Brindley (1999) for a discussion of the Modern house in England.

write her letter stands the same “twelve feet from the spot” where she “suffered all the crushing weight of slavery” three decades prior. However, those twelve feet are not the same dangerous open space that they once were for Jacobs. She can now sit outside, basking in the free air and light, with a far wider view than she had from the hole “about an inch long and an inch broad” that she carved out of the wall of the garret. The roof is a material surface that Jacobs sits on to write, but she also represents her location on the roof as a significant historical shift in the meaning of the structure. The letter points to Jacobs continued engagement with home, beyond *Incidents*. Looking at materials that Jacobs wrote after the civil war, at a time when she was nursing freedmen sick with smallpox and other diseases, trying to find homes for those who were either apprenticed back to their masters (until they were of age), or were aged and had no recourse except charity, shows how *Incidents* was part of her longer, much more complex, relationship with “home.”

By 1867, as Jacobs writes her letter to Edna Dow Cheney; back in Edenton, her brother and son are mining in Australia (she sent \$400 for her son’s safe passage home, but never heard from him again); her grandmother and aunt are dead; and her daughter is in New York trying to make a living as a teacher. We might read Jacobs’s practice of looking back on her old home and focusing on her sacred memories of family as a kind of nostalgia;¹⁵ except that Jacobs hauls her memories, and her symbolic capital, directly into the post-civil war present. She makes her grandmother’s home do political work beyond *Incidents*. Jacobs still finds herself in the role of reminding white women of the horrors of slavery. Jacobs writes, “Freedom is a priceless boon, but its value is enhanced when

¹⁵ Or, as Morrison writes, “It wasn’t sweet and it sure wasn’t home.” (Paul D) shook his head. “But it’s where we were,” said Sethe. “All together. Comes back whether we want it to or not” (*Beloved* 20-21).

accompanied with some of life's comforts,"¹⁶ such as shelter and bread. Whereas *Incidents* showed the contamination of "home" by slavery and the parasitic nature of the master's domesticity, the "homes" that Jacobs observes amongst freedmen also make a mockery of domestic ideals.

Jacobs's literary practices after *Incidents* show how the meanings of a space change with the passage of time and the perspective of the viewer, and how home is always historically contingent. As a free woman, Jacobs interacts with her grandmother's house in new ways, surprised that the space that used to define her is now empty, surrounded by a region devastated by war and drought. From being the place where she stopped for leftover pastries or bread, the place where she "received all her comforts "temporal or spiritual," Jacobs's grandmother's house and her garret continues as a structure and a symbol long after she has left it behind.¹⁷ Like Jacobs herself, the house continues to do important work for abolitionists and southern blacks through the nineteenth century, as a representative site for reformers. for freedmen, but Jacobs's relative celebrity imports more weight to this letter (for us) than to the many other meanings of the structure.

Homes are material sites, symbolic ideals, and relational practices that gain meaning through the doing. They are nominalized verbs, not nouns; processes not products; constructions not constructs. Doing home involves building, cultivating, maintaining, representing, changing and inhabiting a space. This space can be one building – the house – but it can also be a block, neighborhood, town, region or country.

¹⁶ Jacobs, "Savannah Freedmen's Orphan Asylum."

¹⁷ Jacobs eventually sells her grandmother's house, in 1892, to support herself and her daughter in Washington D.C.

As Iris Marion Young explains, “in many societies ‘home’ refers to the village or square, together with its houses, and dwelling takes place both in and out of doors... even in modern capitalist cities some people ‘live’ more in the neighborhood or on their block than in their houses. They sit in squares, on stoops, in bars and coffeehouses, going to their houses mostly to sleep.”¹⁸ For Jacobs, the south is an extension of her grandmother’s house in that she has similarly strong and ambivalent feelings about it as a space. In her letter to Edna Cheney, Jacobs reflects that she “cannot tell you how I feel in this place. the change is so great I can hardly take it all in”; where “this place” refers as much to the surrounding region as to her grandmother’s house, and the new social and political context that confronted Jacobs.

While the post-emancipation contexts of Jacobs's home were different for The

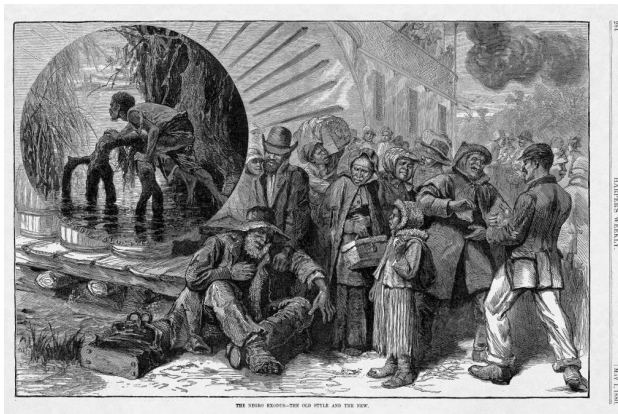


Figure 1: Negro Exodus, Old and New

bleak conditions of housing and homelessness for blacks in the south continued through the first half of the 20th century, fueling waves of northern migration in addition to further emigration campaigns.¹⁹ The meanings of home for those who

stayed and the many who left were shaped by these conditions and by representations of black homes in both regions. These representations used historical references and gender

¹⁸ Young, Iris Marion. *On Female Bodily Experience*.

¹⁹ For more discussion of black emigration and its connections to colonialism, see Stephens, M. A. (2005). Black empire : the masculine global imaginary of Caribbean intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962. Durham, Duke University Press.

, Gaines, K. K. (2006). American Africans in Ghana : Black expatriates and the civil rights era. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

stereotypes to either warn blacks about leaving the south or to recruit them for industrial jobs in the north. Harriet Jacobs' autobiography was a precursor to 20th century migration narratives; her escape from the swamps of North Carolina represented one case of the history of African American northern migration. An illustration in Harper's Weekly from May 1, 1880 entitled "Negro Exodus – The Old Style and The New," shows the comparative framework used to understand waves of northern migration. The one stable point in this representation of migration is gender – migrants are coded as masculine, with facial hair clearly drawn to distinguish between masculinized women and men. The personal stories of migrants made up a riot of images buried underneath Harper's neat, two-dimensional representation of freedmen's search for home. Meanwhile, public forums for discussions about the politics of gender were opened in growing publication of domestic narratives written by black women.

Jacobs's connections to abolitionist networks helped her promote circulation for her narrative, which was published "for the author" with a forward from Lydia Child, a well-known abolitionist and social reformer. Child pushed for an increase in the first printing of Jacobs's narrative from 1000-2000 copies. She also arranged for the Anti-Slavery Society to buy copies for their agents to distribute across the country. *Incidents* was published to high acclaim in abolition journals like the National Anti-Slavery Standard, and Jacobs attempted to use this celebrity to elicit donations for her work with southern refugees relocating in northern cities post-emancipation. This work is prefigured in the narrative itself, which Farah Jasmine Griffin points to as the precursor of stories about black heroines who migrate to the north to try and find "homespace" that

confirms their respectability.²⁰

The meaning of home for slaves and freedmen, as represented in *Incidents* and theorized by Hortense Spillers and Claudia Tate (among others), made up the “anti-domestic” underbelly of the ideal white southern home. *Incidents* emphasizes that the U.S., north and south, were materially and ideologically built through the violability of black homes (violently distilled in the violability of the black body). Jacobs casts her heroine as a strong housekeeper and mother searching for a home to keep and raise her children. As she gazes out the attic window of her grandmother’s house waiting for a chance to escape north to freedom, Linda Brent watches her children grow up, her relatives die, and her master’s unending searches to find her and recover “his property.” Jacobs idealizes her grandmother’s house as a safe space. As noted in many critical readings of *Incidents*, Jacobs’s narrative emphasizes her grandmother’s control over her own living space, casting her journey as one in search of her own home like her grandmother’s.²¹ Dr. Flint can walk into Linda Brent’s grandmother’s house and leer at Linda, but eventually he exits with his tale between his legs, after being told that he was the cause of all his own troubles and should get out.

The story of Jacobs’s grandmother made its way into Lydia Child’s²² *The*

²⁰ Griffin, “*Who Set You Flowin’?*”: *The African-American Migration Narrative*.

²¹ In a somewhat idealistic reading of *Incidents*, Mark Rifkin suggests that “*Incidents* employs the rhetoric of ‘home’ and representations of the intrusion into and destruction of African American houses” in order to offer “an expanded notion of citizenship in which the security of black homes speaks to a broader national commitment to individual and collective African American well-being” (Rifkin 2007, 86). Jacobs’s project seems, to me, focused on a specific subset of African American homes – those modeled on her grandmother’s standards of propriety and respectability – rather than claiming citizenship through the bleak domestic situation of the majority of blacks.

²² Lydia Child herself supported mass slave emigration to Haiti as early as 1824, and published accounts of the Haitian revolution in *The Freedmen’s Book*.

Freedman's Book, a collection of stories compiled for use in the freedom schools that were teaching literacy to former slaves in the south.²³ Child's changes to the text from *Incidents* shows how ideas of the day about home and domestic labor shaped the reception and circulation of Jacobs's work. As Jean Fagen Yellin writes in her introduction to "The Good Grandmother," the story emphasizes "the virtues of faith and hard work." As Anna Stewart shows in her recent work on *The Freedman's Book*, Child strips Jacobs work of the tensions between her own and her grandmother's domestic gender performances. "'The Good Grandmother' ultimately represents the value of (her grandmother's) strong work ethic and virtuous womanhood" by losing "the foil of Linda Brent's gender constructions."²⁴

Jacobs's description of her Grandmother's cabin collapses the virtue, womanhood and home; and Child's version of Jacobs's writing further emphasizes faith in the ideal of home and hard work in securing control of that home. Child further emphasizes the virtue of industry in her changes to a passage in which Jacobs expresses her desire for her own home. In *Incidents*, Jacobs doubts her grandmother's faith that the families' circumstances were "the will of God" and "though it seemed hard, we ought to pray for contentment."²⁵ Jacobs responds to this faith; "We (the younger generation) reasoned that it was much more the will of God that we should be situated as she was. We longed for a home like hers" (351). In "The Good Grandmother," the same passage reads; "It appeared to us that it was much more according to the will of God that we should be free,

²³ Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, 594

²⁴ Stewart, A. (2010). "Revising "Harriet Jacobs" for 1865." *American Literature* **82**(4): 701-725.

²⁵ Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives*, 351.

and able to make a home for ourselves, as she had done.” Child omits the sentence about longing for their own home.²⁶

Child’s version neatly transfers the right to home into a right to be able to work for one’s home; reflecting what Saidiya Hartman describes as a transition from republican to liberal ideals, in which “freedom increasingly became defined in terms of the release from constraint and liberty of contract rather than positive entitlements.”²⁷²⁸ Jacobs’s grandmother is certainly an idealized image of womanhood, one who attests to the existence of “worthy” black women, even amidst slavery. Primers like *The Freedmen’s Book* were particularly important tools of enforcing gender prescriptions. Michele Mitchell argues that primers like *The Freedman’s Book* “instructed readers in the duties of citizenship, and provided idealized examples of manhood and womanhood.”²⁹ According to the stories by Child herself in *The Freedman’s Book*, the first thing that signified men’s freedom was marriage to “a worthy young woman,” followed closely by the purchase of land and a comfortable house “through industry and strict economy.” “The Good Grandmother” could easily have been titled “The Good Grandmother’s Home,” as both the home and the grandmother provided models for virtuous citizenship. In a speech about the value of home, Ana Julia Cooper says that to reform a man you must start with his great grandmother (uplifting the race).³⁰

²⁶ Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*, 594.

²⁷ Hartman, S. V. (1997). *Scenes of subjection : terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America*, 139.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 102-112

²⁹ Mitchell, M. *Righteous propagation African Americans and the politics of racial destiny after Reconstruction*, 116

³⁰ As Mason Stokes has recently noted, Jacobs’s position in her grandmother’s home – her loophole of retreat - coincides with her position vis. a vis. the genre of women’s fiction subscribed to by women like Stowe and Child. Linda Brent is trapped inside the house, but isolated all the same from the full sense of connection and kinship that her grandmother’s home fostered. Stokes, *The Color of Sex:*

Wanting to model reformed citizenship for her children, Jacobs's "life's dream" was a home of her own, modeled after her grandmother's. She never did achieve this dream; Jacobs and her daughter Louisa struggled to pay the mortgage on a series of homes in Boston where they ran boarding houses. When boarders' rents, in addition to her daughter's income as a teacher were not enough to support them, Jacobs returned to domestic service – caring for Cornelia Grinnell Willis and her children. This work often kept her from writing *Incidents*, as she reports to Amy Post, a friend and fellow abolitionist; "Mrs W(illis) dont know from my lips that I am writing for a Book and has never seen a line of what I have written I told her in the Autumn that I would give her Louisa services through the winter if she would allow me my winter evenings to myself but with the care of the little baby and the big Babies and at the houshold calls I have but a little time to think or write."³¹ Jacobs's surreptitious representation of her grandmothers' house was, at times, at odds with her own living situation. This dissertation began with a question about how the relative instability of black women's housing situations during periods of migration affected the representations of home. My historical period shifted partly because black women's writing took me beyond the framework of migration, which implies distinct starting and ending points. Instead, the novels and projects in this dissertation represent a state of mobility, less linearly directed and less beholden to northern and southern migration routes.³²

Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy.

³¹ Yellin, *The Harriet Jacobs family papers*, 213.

³² Krasner, J. (2010). Home bodies : tactile experience in domestic space. Columbus, Ohio State University Press.

Refugees and Migrants

Often indentured to the same masters they belonged to under slavery, living on the same estates, mobility was perhaps an aspiration for southern blacks post-emancipation. But mobility also left freedmen and women huddling in shelters. When Harriet Jacobs returned to live in Washington in 1877, she noted an encouraging “lack of rags” amongst black crowds. Intraracial class divisions were expanding, and the geography of the city was marked by the segregation of the black “fust families” and the crowded alley houses of the poor.³³ Black women who fell between the domestic worker’s class position and that of the “fust families,” like Harriet Jacobs's daughter, Louisa, committed themselves to teaching jobs, pushing for girls’ education in cleaning, sewing, parenting and other domestic skills in order to stay competitive. Mary Church Terrell, a famous advocate within the black club movement, “fear(ed) it (was) growing more and more difficult for colored women to secure employment in the houses of the well-to-do because they lack that training in domestic science which the intelligent housekeepers of the country demand and for which they are willing to pay.”³⁴ Training in the domestic sciences was both a competitive advantage and a way of uplifting the race. Home was represented as an economic project, one which blacks were barred from by social pressures other than poverty.

Abolitionist journals that had once printed stories about the evils of slavery now reported on the continued poverty and homelessness of blacks in the south. Jacobs took her search for a home of her own to a communal level, using her abolitionist connections to stir up indignation about blacks’ treatment during reconstruction. If slavery had made

³³ Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs : a life*, 230-234

³⁴ M. C. T. w. a. E. (1924). ""Women's World"." The Colored American: 1.

the landscapes of the southern uninhabitable for blacks, then northern citizens had to be convinced to make a place for blacks to be at home in their own country. As part of this effort, in William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, Jacobs reported on housing conditions amongst the "contraband" (black southern refugees) who flooded to Washington in the wake of a bill abolishing slavery in the capital.³⁵ Jacobs reported that, on her arrival in Washington, "(she) found men, women and children all huddled together, without any distinction or regard to age or sex," many suffering from measles, diphtheria, scarlet and typhoid fever. Their living conditions were such that "some had a few filthy rags to lie on; others had nothing but the bare floor for a couch" and the lack of "established rules among them," made it "almost impossible to keep the building in a healthy condition."³⁶ Although there were very real health and sanitation issues in these refugee headquarters that Jacobs was responding to, but we can also see in this letter the way that disease of the community – the lack of rules, the lack of distinction between sexes, the lack of family structures becomes a metaphor for sexual and gender dysfunction.

Jacobs and her fellow reformers calculated that white citizens would step up their charity donations in order to maintain distance between their idealized vision of American "homes" as a space of sexual order, and the conditions of southern refugees. Jacobs uses the refugees' captive bodies, much like she uses her own in *Incidents*, as characters in a sentimental narrative with the aim of attracting white patronage. The refugees from the slave south loose gender distinctions as they crowded into the headquarters; where their bodies literally and figuratively represent the lack of space in

³⁵ As opposed to the anonymous letters she published pre-*Incidents*; see *The Liberator*, August 1862.

³⁶ Fagan Yellin et al., *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, 400.

the U.S. for black people to make into home.³⁷ Domestic space, or the lack thereof, is a main character in this narrative. She contrasts the neat, industrious home with others, in which “chaos reigned supreme.” Jacobs testifies that these chaotic houses “bore abundant marks of the half-barbarous, miserable condition of Slavery, from which the inmates had lately come.” These “inmates” lived in homes without gender differentiation, where “there was nothing about them to indicate the presence of a wifely wife, or a motherly mother.”³⁸ These homes, Jacobs argues, are not more civilized than the barbarous conditions of slavery, which can be measured by the lack of gender differentiation and the lack of opportunities to make homes where these differences could be upheld.

Throughout this article, Jacobs makes an appeal for material assistance in procuring cots, linens, and clothing for the refugees, with an eye towards establishing proper homes where properly differentiated genders are reproduced. In the post-bellum period, freedom was increasingly cast as the chance to work toward civilization, and this civilization was increasingly represented by images of black-owned homes. The freedmen’s appreciation of homes of their own was further proof that they were fit for citizenship; as Jacobs puts it, “The consciousness of working for themselves, ... will inspire them with energy and enterprise, and a higher civilization will gradually come.”³⁹ If you let us have enough space, Jacobs argues, we can become properly gendered subjects. As proof, Jacobs describes the good home where “the more favored slaves” lived; “the little children you meet” at the door and “the older ones” were “intelligent,”

³⁷ The crowdedness of the headquarters is reminiscent of what Hortense Spillers identifies as the culturally “unmaking” of the captive body: dehumanizing, ungendering and defacing effects and project of the middle passage.

³⁸ Jacobs, H. A., *The Harriet Jacobs family papers*, 558.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 558.

and “many of the young women and children beautiful.”⁴⁰ If only they had the resources, Jacobs assures her readers, the refugees would build houses that hold beauty, with “clean floors, clean white spreads on their cots, and general tidiness throughout the building.”⁴¹

Jacobs and her fellow reformers first fought for space to house their school and orphanage, which was difficult because most land in Alexandria was claimed by the Baptist church or the Presbyterians.⁴² Jacobs and her daughter organized a “fair” to sell “finery” sent from their comrades in the north. This model of fundraising has clear ties to the popularity of international expositions and the arts and crafts movement in American art. Jacobs’s fair was a necessary precursor to the Negro Building committee’s taking control of their space at the Atlanta exposition; it established black women as gendered subjects and domestic equals of their white counterparts. According to one northern supporter, the fair brought together “those who were free before the war, and live comfortably” with the “degraded contrabands” around the mantle of domestic self-sufficiency.⁴³

As we will see with Pauline Hopkins characters in the next chapter, fairs both poked fun at and replicated the gender roles of the “well-to-do.” As Jacobs bragged to her northern audiences that the freed men and women of Alexandria owned their own schoolhouse, she was forced to accept certain conditions of gender in that space.⁴⁴ Even as the Harriet Jacobs school was established and the debt paid off through the proceeds of the fair, Jacobs continued to battle Supt. Gladwin over the rights of refugees in their

⁴⁰ Fagan Yellin et al., *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, 403.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 404.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 552.

⁴³ Yellin, J. F. *Harriet Jacobs : a life*, 180.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

facilities. In one particularly bitter incident, Jacobs was incensed by Gladwin's attempts to turn her out of her rooms, especially the rooms she had established for "old ladies" and "orphaned children." While Jacobs represented freedmen in her reports to funders and religious committees as independent, she was clearly committed to making space for the dependent among them; space that conferred the dignity and privacy denied to these women in slavery. Although, as Hartman and Rosen point out, this private sphere was regularly violated by white mobs as well as charitable inspectors. Jacobs asks primarily for clothing and blankets, to create at least a marginal private sphere of the body for the refugees. Her appeals for figurative space in the national ideal of home, and for financial support to cultivate (and refine) black homes, aimed across regional and class lines to break down the conceptual opposition between "blacks" and "home" inherited from slavery.

Much of Jacobs's work post-emancipation was aimed not only at claiming homes for freed men and women, but claiming control of the meaning of home. In this, she is an important model for the rest of the authors in this dissertation. In a letter to Lydia Marie Child (dated March 26, 1864), Jacobs reports the good news about the homes built by and for freedmen in Alexandria, Virginia; "when we went round visiting the homes of these people, we found much to commend them for. Many of them showed marks of industry, neatness, and natural refinement." In the discourse of the period, "industry" was a code word for "they are not shiftless," and "neatness and natural refinement" was code for hygiene – strongly linked to civilization and sexuality,⁴⁵ purity and class. Likewise, Child's contribution to *The Freedman's Book* entitled "Hygiene" writes "Dirt was a

⁴⁵ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-century America*.

necessity of slavery; and that is one reason, among many others, why freeman should hate it, and try to put it away from their minds, their persons, and their habitation.”⁴⁶ Dirt, in the minds of missionaries and social reformers like Child and Jacobs, could seep into inhabitants’ minds from their floors and sheets. These assessments show how representations of black homes carried implicit judgments about blacks’ ability – natural or trained – to claim national ideals of gender and sexuality. According to Jean Fagin Yellin’s authoritative biography of Harriet Jacobs, after collecting her grandmother’s property from her old home in Edenton, Jacobs “could not go home again. She had abandoned her hopes for land and homes for her people in the South.”⁴⁷

Black Home Space, Qualified and Quantified

Jacobs entered the literary field just as the idea of an African American literature was gaining popularity. Beginning in Jacobs’s writing and continuing through turn of the century domestic fiction by Pauline Hopkins, a main task of this literature was to negotiate the gendered and sexual meanings of home. A home is built by physical labor and materials, but its meaning is built through representations of and lived experiences in the space.⁴⁸ As noted in *The Negro American Family* in 1908, southern migrants and refugees “were obliged to avail themselves of any kind of shelter they could find.” Into the 1890s and beyond, black families were limited to “rough board shacks with leaky roofs” which “were occupied for years by growing families” without structural

⁴⁶ Child, L. M. (1865). *The freedmen's book*. Boston, Ticknor and Fields, 249-250.

⁴⁷ Yellin, J. F. *Harriet Jacobs : a life*, 211.

⁴⁸ For more detailed discussion of the philosophy of how spaces are made, see Lefebvre, H. (1971). *Everyday life in the modern world*. New York, Harper & Row.

improvement or expansion, and with “rents paid out of all proportion to the value of the property or the means of the tenant.”⁴⁹

In DC, three decades after Jacobs described the “infants pining like birds for their native surroundings,” two thirds of the children of migrants were in the care of the state. Some of these children were placed with families who formerly owned slaves, in Virginia and Maryland, where “they are taught to work, and made to be useful and respectful, which is considered the best and only thing for them.”⁵⁰ Others were placed with black families who were firmly settled in the country; where they experienced the same poverty and sub-par education as the other children in the family. The “facts of home” in these different placement settings made social workers anxious that the children would grow into uneducated, poorly gendered adults on the one hand; and corrupted, “mischievous” adults on the other. Exposed to danger of sexual servitude on the one hand, and cut off from “refining, elevating influence” on the other.

Just as Harriet Jacobs worked to foster “respectable” standards of home life for civil war refugees, reform groups like the Ladies Auxilliary in the Urban league and the NAACP made huge efforts to train migrants in how to be “at home” in the north. One such effort was the Chicago branch of the Urban League’s “Education of Southern Migrants” campaign, which distributed flyers with affirmations about how to behave at home. According to these flyers, by “attending to the neatness of (their) personal appearance on the street or when sitting in front of doorways,” “arranging (ones) toilet within doors and not on the front porch,” and “insisting upon the use of rear entrances for coal dealers, hucksters, etc.”; migrants could “help bring about a new order of living in

⁴⁹ Negro American Family (62).

⁵⁰ Herbert W, L. (1895). "Colored Children in the District of Columbia." Charities Review 5(2), 96.

(the) community.”⁵¹ Maintaining order and neatness were primary markers of national belonging – a point emphasized by the image of the black soldier returning from WWI that graced the front of the NAACP’s educational materials.⁵² Home was linked to ordered interior spaces in terms of strict gender differentiation and racial borders, as we saw from Harriet Jacobs and the beginning of reform movements. If the home can be properly headed by a male breadwinner, tended by a wife and mother enclosed in the privacy of her domain, and kept free of intrusions like boarders, vagrants, and “shiftless” extended family members; it will foster industrious, heterosexual children.⁵³ The question of how to “civilize” southern migrants came down to home education: a job that both white and black women represented as an imperialist duty at the turn of the century.

Especially amongst the black middle classes who complained vociferously about their inability to separate themselves from lower class blacks, establishing order over who and how could enter ones home was an important way to claim belonging in the

⁵¹ Crew, *Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration 1915-1940*, 44.

⁵² Farah Jasmine Griffin reads the Urban League’s commandments as orders for migrants to “adopt a Northern middle-class outward appearance... as if their citizenship is directly related to these external features and not to any real notions of democracy or service to country and community.” Griffin, “*Who Set You Flowin’?*”: *The African-American Migration Narrative*, 104. In the context of national campaigns for cleanliness and respectability, this flyer without a doubt asserts mastery over middle class codes of appearance. While I agree that the “new order of living” promoted by the Urban League is based on aesthetic and behavioral conformity, I would argue that this conformity is being promoted as service to the community. Furthermore, such presentations were meant to serve the country by enforcing the boundaries between public and private space – that key boundary in establishing gender, racial and class hierarchies. Although scholars have long contested the public/private binary, the instability of this division adds urgency to campaigns that claimed to reestablish such hierarchies and “order” in rapidly changing urban areas.

⁵³ Ferguson, As Rob Ferguson explains, this is linked to growing liberal ideology. See Ferguson, *Abberations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*, 20.

nation. Amy Kaplan puts this most directly in *Anarchy of Empire*; “domestic has a double meaning that links the space of the familial household to that of the nation, both imagined in opposition to everything outside the geographic conceptual border of the home.”⁵⁴ As debates about the inclusion of independent domestic territories continued in political and juridical circles, debates about the rules of what was allowed inside and outside the home heated up in Northern black communities.

Home is a Normative Ideal

Postbellum conversations about home amongst black communities was so prominent, in part, because it was a way to discuss the state of the race more broadly. Jacobs’s appeals for donations to her projects in the south -- education and farming with freedmen -- often used the ideal of home in order to obtain the tools needed to construct material homes. I read Jacobs’s correspondence as an early version of W.E.B. Dubois’s concern about black sexual morals, which he measures in terms of black homes’ correspondence with middle class propriety.⁵⁵ As Michele Mitchell, among others, has demonstrated, the ideal of home was the main organ that conveyed sexual and gender regulations within black communities between 1890 and 1920. While maintaining respectability, discourses of home were rife with sexual meanings and allowed black women to discuss sexuality with minimal dissemblance. But homes themselves, as structures, were also a form of political intervention: proof of blacks’ fitness as citizens.

This is especially and explicitly true for the Negro Building of the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exhibition in 1895, which I investigate in chapter one alongside

⁵⁴ Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, 25.

⁵⁵ Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 157.

Jacobs's later writings, as exemplified by her letter to Cheney. The Negro Building was the first separate space constructed to display the artistic and scientific work of African Americans; setting a precedent for representations of home in the modern "New South," where industry could count on a relatively docile, segregated labor pool. In a way, exhibits like the Negro Building showcased the disinterestedness of the white public with black homelessness and slum housing. The construction of the material building in Piedmont Park – including the labor, materials, arrangement and collection – was a display of black political and financial capital. Despite compromises with the exhibition committee, the building was a huge "success" for Booker T Washington and his reform minded colleagues in the south. The Negro Building was explicitly promoted as a "modern spectacle," unlike the slave cabins, turned sharecropper shacks that now served as homes for post-slavery black families. It was surrounded by campaigns to include African Americans in the world's fairs, and thus in the nation's self-conception. Just as much as the Negro Building was made of bricks and covered 2500 square feet, it was produced through narrative conventions and associations with modernity, progress and respectability, and encompassed many conversations about art, gender and racial progress. The stories about the Negro Building are, in themselves, also arguments about gender, race and sexuality. One of these discourses was Booker T. Washington's representations of the nation as a home that blacks and whites could share, as long as each knew their proper floor.

Much of the work of the organizers, campaigners, fundraisers, contributors and curators of The Negro Building was not recorded in the Smithsonian archives' collection

from the exposition. So the narratives we have access to are mostly recorded by and spoken amongst whites, and predominantly men. Understanding the production of the building through these testimonies is fraught. In summarizing a speech by a black speaker during "Negro Day," a white newspaper stated "...[he] admits that the Negro is not the equal of the white man and that the Negro's place in this country is to work."⁵⁶ Another ambivalent but friendly reporter claimed "the display is not so much of general progress as of achievements by individuals of the Race" such as Frederick Douglass, and not "representative of the negro race on the whole."⁵⁷ Overall, reporters expressed relief that Southern industrial development would continue according to plan, unhampered by black political protests. But a closer look at the way the building was arranged, both internally and externally, reveals the complex negotiations at work between normative gender roles and the need to "fit into" the exhibition. This fitting in always involves staying in place.

Home, as an ideal, usually expresses aspiration for bounded and secure identities, and it is rarely used to call for change in gender, racial or sexual hierarchies. Both Chandra Mohanty and Bidy Martin warn that "home is often a metaphor for mutually affirming, exclusive community defined by gender, class, or race."⁵⁸ Like the cult of domesticity which Jacobs writes against in the nineteenth century, home has been a

⁵⁶ *The News and Courier* [Charleston, NC], October 22, 1895. The paper paraphrases a speech by Reverend J. W. E. Bowen, an educator, who stated, "It has been stated that the negro's place in American life was as a slave or servant, and he must be a worker. All sensible negroes agree to that. The Negro does not shirk from work. All he asks is an equality of opportunity."

⁵⁷ "The Negro Building at the Exposition." *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), October 22, 1895. The reporter argues that great individual achievements, such as those by Frederick Douglass, were an exception and only possible when blacks imitated whites. Rather than look to unattainable goals, the reporter urged African Americans to heed the message of Booker T. Washington to find their rightful place.

⁵⁸ Martin, Bidy and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do With It?" *Feminist Studies/Cultural Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. 198.

deeply ambivalent value for feminist criticism. Feminist geographies, queer of color sociologies, and black feminist theory analyze the many dichotomies inherent in representing home. They ask: is home a normative or nonnormative structure? A resistance to racism or a rephrasing of racist ideals in new forms? A space of exclusion or of radical inclusivity? Is it built on profound black displacement and forced dislocation or forged out of communal black self-valuation?

Amy Kaplan's work on imperialism shows that the "domestic has a double meaning that not only links the familial household to the nation but also imagines both in opposition to everything outside the geographic and conceptual border of the home."⁵⁹ On the contrary, bell hooks defends "homespace" as a grounds for revived black politics and understanding of identity, as well as a space of black female agency. Homemaking "was not simply a matter of black women providing service," hooks argues, "it was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination."⁶⁰ I draw from both sides of this dialogue, looking at meanings of home in terms of their containing restrictions of sexuality and gender, as well as oppositional meanings of family that present home as a point of sexual contestation. I also offer a new perspective to this debate by arguing that, in the novels I consider, home is found wanting as an ideal narrative goal. Considering the work of genre and narratives in shaping the way we experience our surroundings, I argue that homes are formally and metaphorically "undone," partly through narrative transgressions, including a skeptical stance towards

⁵⁹Kaplan, Amy. *The Anarchy of Empire*, 587.

⁶⁰ Hooks, bell. *Yearning*, 42.

heterosexuality.

For example, the second part of Hopkins's *Contending Forces: A Tale of Negro Life North and South* is set in the late-nineteenth century and recounts the post-Reconstruction experiences of a northern urban black family, the Smiths. Sappho Clark is a beautiful, mysterious young woman who boards with the Smiths. A classic beauty, Sappho and Will Smith fall in love, forcing the mystery of Sappho's past out into the open. She was kidnapped by a white relative, raped, and left in a brothel. Rather than lie to Will and truck him into a marriage with a "fallen woman," as she thinks of herself, Sappho runs away back south and is rescued by a convent. Hopkins describes each domestic space in meticulous detail, and we see the ways that homes look different in New Orleans (where Sappho is from) and in Boston (where the Smiths live). When she leaves the convent behind and finds her "new home" in a space "with a garden and a carriage drive winding around a smoothly cut lawn." The physical details of homes, meticulously described by Hopkins, shape their inhabitants; just as the practices of the inhabitants shape the space. Sappho's new home suited her because of "its retirement, its quiet interior, recalled her childhood happy home."⁶¹ Sappho "became the spirit of the house," as her routines of life were worn into the structure of the home. But they are also is the same foreboding set of routines that once led to her "fall."

Dora, Will's sister, and the dutiful daughter that helps to run and keep the Smith's boarding house, also winds up in the south. After a failed love affair, Dora marries out of a sense of racial duty. She follows her husband – who is modeled on Booker T Washington – to the rural south to establish industrial education. They move against the tide of the Great Migration which was driving blacks northward in search of, as Will puts

⁶¹Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 353.

it, “a land where a man’s self respect and independence is not hampered in any way by prejudice.” In the south, Dora’s “own individuality was swallowed up in love for her husband and child.” This description, when combined with Dora’s explanation that her husband “thinks that women should be seen and not heard where politics are concerned,” satirically displays the promise of sentimental romance as a genre.⁶²

Each home in this project is also located in relation to other narratives from the period, many of them with normative aspirations. The Smith’s boarding house is part of a set of representations of black urban life at the turn of the century. Dora’s piano is related to racial goals for material culture – Hopkins uses Dora as an example of “the many families of color who manage to live as well as they do and to educate their children and give them a few of the refinements of living” that are “supposed to be beyond the reach of a race so recently released from bondage.” Like the piano, the furniture and layout of the Smith’s house is in part of broader conversations about race and gender. Within these conversations, Dora’s southward trajectory is so overwhelmingly normative that it points to the horrible relentlessness of normativity.⁶³ But Dora was not inevitably destined for

⁶² Defining “sentimental romance” is difficult because of the longstanding conflation of sentimentality and domesticity with romance. Romance novels have plots that center a on a quest (usually for marriage, but sometimes for freedom, land, spiritual purity, etc.). They reject realism in favor of drama that reveals the human psyche. “Sentimental” novels use scenes of distress and tenderness, using a young woman’s quest for social-emotional actualization, to elicit emotional responses from readers. Most romances of the 19th century were pretty sentimental in that they devoted a lot of attention to the emotional experiences of their characters and worked really hard to get readers emotionally invested but the generic distinction “sentimental romance” goes to stories about the search for domestic ideals (kinship, home, family, etc.). See Nina Baym, Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs*. Oxford University Press, 1986. Douglass, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1977. Howard, June. *Publishing the Family*. Duke University Press, 2001.

⁶³ Normativity is an important concept to queer theory – which defines queer as an oppositional stance towards the normative. Normativity is a consolidation of

such a sacrifice. In fact, earlier in *Contending Forces*, she voices the novel's queer impulses.

Queer Changes Over Time

“That’s queer talk for an engaged girl,” says Sappho. Sappho does not mean queer in the present day sense of sexual transgression, but she does use queer to mark a gender transgression in Dora’s feelings about her upcoming marriage. Dora Smith, Sappho’s friend and fellow protagonist, has provoked this accusation by confessing anxiety that “once you marry a man, he’s on your hands for good and all.” After she marries, Dora is worried she will miss her “blessed singleness” and “bachelor girl” life with Sappho. *Contending Forces* mostly takes place in a black, northern middle class community during the 1890s, wherein Dora’s marriage will confirm her heterosexuality and the race’s continued improvement. Unfortunately, the balance of the Smith’s family, and ultimately Dora’s marriage plans, are thrown off by Sappho’s sensuality and her mysterious, “southern beauty.” Both Dora’s brother, Will, and her fiancé, John, fall for Sappho, leaving Dora to lose her best friend and her brother to each other, while her own love affair falls apart.

Dora listens with growing resentment to her mother’s happy plans for Sappho to marry Will, Dora’s brother. “Isn’t it strange what a queer old world this is?,” Dora asks

behaviors and attitudes that are constructed as ideal, natural, and not in need of explanation. When Cathy Cohen calls on queers to “envision a new politics based on relations to power rather than identity positions,” she does not mean that heterosexuality is not a normative position, but that we have to recognize the ways that heterosexuality, as a category, is stratified by race and class. Your sexual object choice matters, but only insofar as your behaviors and attitudes comply with dominant norms. An “opposite” sex partner does not protect you from scrutiny, it is only by mastering cultural norms in behaviors and attitudes that allows you to fall in to privileged realm, where your sexuality does not bear mentioning.

her mother, “It does seem that one thing or another is always happening to vex a body.”⁶⁴ What is vexing Dora is not dissimilar to her queer talk earlier with Sappho; she is called to be “sweet-tempered” and happy in her brother’s good fortunes, but she feels unhappy and “obstinate.” She should also be happy marrying John, but she worries that she will get tired of him. In both cases, Dora’s progress through the sentimental romance plot is in jeopardy. In both cases, Dora’s feelings about Sappho threaten to queer her story; just as Sappho – who was raped by her white uncle and gave birth to a child as a result, which she left with relatives in the South – threatened to queer Hopkins’s arguments about black women’s inherent chastity.

Dora’s “queer” reluctance to marry makes her feel “utterly unsexed,” having failed to meet expectations for her gender, as set forth in domestic fiction. Dora’s queerness does not necessarily imply sexual desire or behavior, but it does imply the possibility that a heterosexual marriage is not the fulfillment of her personal quest.⁶⁵ Because of the surrounding economic peril and racial “mystery,” Sappho and Dora are not visible within the lens of intimate friendships between women, which LGBTQ histories have shown to be models for same sex eroticism in the nineteenth century between white women. But that does not make Dora and Sappho any less a part of the history of same sex eroticism in literature. As Deborah McDowell notes about Nella Larsen’s *Passing*,

⁶⁴Hopkins, Pauline. *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 179.

⁶⁵ In the nineteenth century, queer was used to signal disturbance or curiosity, much as it does for Sappho. According to the OED, The meaning “odd” or “out of sorts” was merged with sexual connotations in the first decades of the twentieth century. Queer meaning “odd” and queer meaning “homosexual” coalesced at the turn of the century around Oscar Wilde’s trial. “Queer” Def. 2, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2012. Online.

the impossibility of explicitly representing same-sex desire between black women relegated these desires to subplots. In Larsen's case, as in Hopkins's, these subplots are never fully developed, but are nevertheless productive.

Throughout *Undoing Home*, I use the term queer to mark critiques of normative genders and genres that inscribe home. I draw on queer of color analysis, which argues that liberal ideology hides the intersecting saliency of race, gender, sexuality, and class in forming social practices.⁶⁶ I add to considerations of home as the obvious site of confirmation.⁶⁷ Queer of Color studies insists that queer is a relevant analytic for a wide field of social critique, recognizing the way normativity functions through an intersecting axis of privilege and oppression. Using "queer" in this way returns to the kinds of vexing abnormality that Dora and Sappho each refer to, although with the trace of sexuality that Hopkins would not have endorsed.

To me, queer is a critical relationship of misalignment – between subjects and their stories, between identity categories, between expectations for inhabiting space and behaviors, between our desires and what we are supposed to desire. I follow Michael Warner in defining queer as a skeptical relation to "the normal, the legitimate, the dominant," with no particular referent. In the late 1970s, Henri LeFebvre concisely articulated the misalignment between queers and the ideal of home: the abstract space of home "denies the sensual and the sexual, (but) its only immediate point of reference is genital: the family unit, the type of dwelling (apartment, bungalow, cottage, etc.),

⁶⁶ Ferguson, *Abberations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*, 3.

⁶⁷ Chandan Reddy, in "Asian Diasporas, Neoliberalism, and Family: Reviewing the Case for Homosexual Asylum in the Context of Family Rights," *Social Text*, Fall-Winter 2005 23(3): 101-119 defines QOCC as - queer of color analysis shows that racist practice articulates itself generally as gender and sexual regulation, and that gender and sexual differences variegate racial formations. This articulation, moreover, accounts for the social formations that compose liberal capitalism.

fatherhood and motherhood, and the assumption that fertility and fulfillment are identical.”⁶⁸ Homes are organized around sexual relationships, even while the ideal of home disavows any connection to sexuality. Homes recode a particular set of sexual relations as natural, sanctified, and even good for society. The ideal of home poses as universal by erasing differences within heterosexuality, within genders and between races. In fact, home is a powerful ideal precisely because it can construct and convey white racial and heterosexual normativity without seeming to do so.

This mutual exclusivity between the ideal of home and sexuality also haunts black communities whose houses were considered violable precisely because of the supposedly untamed sexuality. As Hannah Rosen demonstrates in her research on night rider violence in the South during and after Reconstruction, white mobs regularly dragged black men out of their homes and assaulted them, sometimes burning the house down and raping women behind them as they left. Rosen argues that these actions communicated the disregard whites had for black men and women’s identities as husbands, wives, mothers and fathers.⁶⁹ By citing this history, I am certainly not claiming equivalence between acts of violence and exclusion that queers often feel in heteronormative space. But I would argue that recognizing the role of the ideal of home in consolidating racial and sexual hierarchies brings unacknowledged connections front and center, particularly in shared critiques of home as a gender normative space.

Despite recent, and hard won, attention to race within sexuality studies, queering black literature too often means looking for authors with homosexual desires and tracing

⁶⁸Lefebvre, H. *Everyday life in the modern world*, 50.

⁶⁹ Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Post-Emancipation South*, 179-222.

those desires in fiction. While queer may not, theoretically, have a specific referent, we typically operationalize the term queer to look at same-sex attractions. This over-privileging of author's sexual identity and practice in measuring the "queerness" of a text can hide the queer work done by straight authors and all authors who lived before heterosexual and homosexuality were nameable forms of behavior and identity. Gay and lesbian studies tends to be much more attentive to the problem of locating same-sex desire and identifications before the terminology of "gay and lesbian" is historically accurate.⁷⁰ Queer studies is interested in the unnamed and often un-nameable, so we have less trouble locating queer subjects in all sorts of times and places.

Consequently, I do not want to limit queer space making practices to self-identified homosexual subjects or texts; in fact, I am most interested in models of heterosexuality that are represented as geographically queer, and also queer in terms of class and racial norms. While I ultimately agree with Somerville's argument that "the privileging of same-sex sexual expression limits the possibility of understanding a whole range of sexual practices and identity formation that historically and theoretically can be understood as having been arranged and articulated under the purview of 'queer,'" ⁷¹ the texts in this project also point out the limitations of "queer" as a categorical umbrella for interracial heterosexuality, homoeroticism and other nonnormative desires. Rather than limiting the concept in this way, they demonstrate that queer can be everywhere and nowhere. The authors in my dissertation locate same sex sexuality in terms of deviance from regional and national geography, of movement between rural and urban spaces.

They challenge the boundedness of regions and nations by challenging the boundedness

⁷⁰ See Duberman, Martin. Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past. New York, NY: NAL Books, 1989.

⁷¹Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 139.

of homes. Thus, they lead me away from what Marlon Ross has identified as a foundational problem with queer theory: its tendency to recognize same-sex desire in racialized subjects only insofar as it mimics or differs from white homosexuality.

Queer Space

Even though normative order in *Contending Forces* is eventually re-established, at least nominally, we can read Dora's "queer" concerns as points where the instability of homo and heterosexual binaries, and of black/white racial binaries come into full view. These spaces are queer in that they represent critiques to normative orders that would separate and classify people according to race and sexuality. Queer space refuses such classifications. Because the designs, activities, and narratives of home seem determined to draw boundaries around "us" and keep "them" out, queer theory has a longstanding aversion to "home" (and vice versa). As Dwight McBride argues in relation to James Baldwin, Americans fear queerness because "it threatens an ideology in America that is older and stronger even than baseball or apple pie - it threatens the idea of 'home.'"⁷² McBride suggests that this fear is also at the heart of Black studies' disavowal of queerness.

My dissertation participates in queer of color theory's interest in heterosexuality as a structure of segregated racial spaces. One of the most important books in this field is Kevin Mumford's *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*, which traces the nonnormative sexual cultures that were created when "heterogeneous marginalized populations rubbed up against each other." While

⁷² Johnson and Henderson, *Black Queer Studies : A Critical Anthology*.

Mumford's work "excavate(s) a genealogy and map(s) a geography of nonnormative sexuality,"⁷³ Somerville does a similar mapping within literature. Her groundbreaking *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* argues that "the heightened surveillance of bodies in a racially segregated culture demanded a specific kind of logic, which gave coherence to the new concepts of homo and heterosexuality."⁷⁴ In her queer reading of *Contending Forces* and *Winona*, Siobhan Somerville argues that the novels are exemplars of "unstable division between homosexuality and heterosexuality" in early 20th century America and the ways that this instability structured the instability of the color line. Somerville is surprisingly unique within queer of color theorists in paying attention to black women's cultural productions before the 1970s.

I will address Somerville's readings of Hopkins further in chapter 2, but for now I'd like to point out that, in Hopkins's time and on through the first half of the 20th century, much of black literature and political writing took a stance on the idea that blacks and whites intermingling, called "amalgamation."⁷⁵ The supposedly "natural

⁷³ Mumford, *Interzones*, 27-31, 147-150.

⁷⁴ Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 4.

⁷⁵ Amalgamation and miscegenation were linked but not identical in U.S. political discourse. Amalgamation was a term for the mixing of human races, taken from metallurgy. In Hopkins's case, she writes elsewhere that she supports "amalgamation," referring to the mixing of racial blood to create a better race altogether. In terms of the metallurgic reaction, the two races coming together were seen to make an even stronger product. Miscegenation was taken up as a term to describe the "evils" of racial admixture, whereas amalgamation managed to escape some of those negative connotations. Miscegenation was a political term taken up in a pamphlet (supposedly written by a mulatto woman) arguing for racial transcendence (although also casting Irish as of lower stock than blacks). The pamphlet, titled "Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro," an ironic piece of writing that ostensibly promoted race-mixing from a deceptively Republican perspective. With its Latin roots *miscere* and *genus* ("to mix races"), the word "miscegenation" carried a scientific authority, one designed to validate interracial relationships as natural and

division of the races” in order to breed racially pure offspring came to a legal head in 1912, when a nationwide anti-miscegenation law was proposed to congress.⁷⁶ Meanwhile imperial subjects of U.S. rule in sites such as Haiti were imagined as hypersexual and homosexual and sexual violence was used as a weapon against those occupied communities. In so many ways, race and sex became regional and national obsessions, with sexology and racial science reaching popular audiences in court documents, political forums, and in serialized fiction like Hopkins’s.

Hopkins was accused of being anti-black because her novels feature “amalgamated” characters.⁷⁷ Hopkins argued that racial amalgamation would ultimately resolve racial conflicts by eliminating racial differences, *Contending Forces* also suggests that Anglo and African American blood was already hopelessly intermixed; as Ma Willis says, “it is an incontrovertible truth that there is no such thing as an unmixed black on the American continent. Just bear in mind that we cannot tell by a person's complexion whether he be dark or light in blood.”⁷⁸ The racial mixture that Hopkins advocates

desirable. Indeed, in the opening paragraph of the hoax *Miscegenation* pamphlet, Croly and Wakeman assert that “science has demonstrated that the intermarriage of diverse races is indispensable to a progressive humanity [but] its votaries, in this country, at least, have never had the courage to apply that rule to the relations of the white and colored races” (1). See Pascoe, Peggy. *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. Also see Sharpe, Christina. *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. Also see Jackson, Cassandra. *Barriers Between Us: Interracial Sex in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2004.

⁷⁶ These laws did not pass but were supported by state politicians throughout the U.S.

⁷⁷ See Richard Yarborough's introduction to *Contending Forces* by. For discussion of the history of “amalgamation” as a matter of sexual deviance, see Nyong'o *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance and the Ruses of Memory*. MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

⁷⁸ Hopkins, Pauline. *Contending Forces: A Romance of Negro Life North and South*.

directly challenges racially homogenous ideal of home by emphasizing the generations of interracial sexual encounters that defined the nation. Somerville's examination of early twentieth-century sexology and racial science discourse suggests that those subjects who crossed the color line, in terms of racial identification (the paradigmatic "mulatto") and in terms of sexual desire, were linked to queer subjects who violated gender norms.

Somerville suggests that Hopkins tempers the threat of amalgamation by confining it to a "corner" of the novel, Sappho's bedroom.

According to most versions of "queer space," Sappho's bedroom doesn't count as one because it's private.⁷⁹ Early works on white queer space echoed the "we're here, we're queer, get used to it" politics of the 1990s, which emphasized coming out as much and as often as possible. Queers had been kept in closets far too long, and we were busting out!⁸⁰ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's much-celebrated essay "Sex in Public" argues for public acknowledgement and defense of sex, they tend to level out all private space by pointing to its function as the opposite of the "public sphere."

Contemporary queer politics still tends to equate marriage, privacy rights, and

homonormative identities with any claims for "home."⁸¹ In this logic, the ideal of home

The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, 151.

⁷⁹ See, for instance: Bell, David. Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities. London: Routledge, 1995. Of all the essays collected in this volume, only one treats the home as potential queer space; Ingram, Gordon Brent. Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance. CA: Bay Press, 1997; and, most recently Chisholm, Dianne. Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space In the Wake of the City.

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. However, Aaron Betsky's Queer Space: Architecture And Same-sex Desire. New York: William Morrow, 1997, in addition to treating the public scenes of cruising, does treat architectural interiors, particularly those of Elsie deWolfe, Philip Johnson and Charles Moore

⁸⁰ Unfortunately, this strategy was more applicable to queer subjects with enough privilege to cushion the blow of rejection by family, landlords and employers.

⁸¹ For lots of good reasons. "home" belongs to a word-cluster that is generally invoked by conservatives, and by liberals to advance policies of queer exclusion. The

overpowers any individual queer's attempts to transform it from within. But even a cursory reading of 19th century black literature points out the unrelieved crisis of the idea of home within conditions of the institution of slavery and its aftermath. In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Hortense Spillers famously points out that "the anti-domesticity of the slave ship" defined, by contrast, American ideals of home.⁸² An ideal produced on such volatile and violent ground should be more porous and diverse than many in queer studies suggest.

In J. Jack Halberstam's analysis of postmodern cultural production, queer space "refers to the place making practices in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counter-publics."⁸³

(8). "Because so many queers resist or refuse the heteronormative imperatives of home and family," Halberstam argues that we have more time and resources to invest in counter-cultural spaces. The typical queer countercultural spaces – parades, urban districts, stages, sex clubs, etc. – are not features of the novels of in this project. But neither are the kinds of homes that were contemporarily promoted as bastions of racial "straight acting" gays turn away from traditions of public sexuality and sexual subcultures to make it over the bar of groups with protected rights (at least in name).

⁸² Hortense Spillers describes American sexual projections of Black women as "a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth" (Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe 257), not least of which is the power to define "family." See Winston Napier, *African American Literary Theory : A Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 2000. Most of the theorists that I draw on in this project cite Spillers as a formative influence (For example, Jacqui Alexander, Somerville, bell hooks, Dorothy Roberts, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Elizabeth Ammons, Licia Fiol-Matta, Linda Gordon, Toni Morrison, Nell Irvin Painter, Carol Stack and Cheryl Wall). Unfortunately, very few key scholars in queer of color studies also cite Spillers.

⁸³Halberstam, Judith. In a Queer Time And Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives. New York: New York University Press, 2005, 8.

and sexual order. The subject of chapter 3, Glenn Carrington, did visit the Harlem cabarets, but he seems to connect as much with men over listening to Beethoven and Schubert recordings in his apartment. If, as Sara Ahmed reminds us, our ability to feel “at home” depends on our orientation toward others and toward the spaces around us, the subjects in this dissertation are certainly “disoriented” from the spaces of home around them. “Societies are sexually orientated,” she argues, and “heterosexuality is also something that we are orientated around, even if it disappears from view.”⁸⁴

Feeling disoriented is the usual response to most of the narratives in my dissertation. In chapter two, *Regional Romances*, why is Hopkins – an author known for abolitionist work and uplift movement credentials – writing a novel about characters living in caves and camps out west? In chapter three, *Deviant Spaces*, what is Glenn Carrington – an educated black social worker – doing collecting “beefcake” photographs from around the world? In chapter four, *Interracial Misogyny and Southern Spaces*, why is Zora Neale Hurston – an author famous for collecting black folktales – writing a novel about white characters? In chapter five, *Queer Home in The Narrows*, how do we make sense of a Ann Petry’s novel written in the fragmented and associative stream of consciousness voice of several characters?

Although, as Julian Carter reminds us, disappearing heterosexuality is a privilege historically enjoyed by whiteness, Jacobs, Hopkins, Carrington, Hurston and Petry were working within uplift movements that equated eroticism with barbarity. This is particularly true for the Negro Building steering committee and for Harriet Jacobs, the subjects of chapter one. Even if authors could resist the imperative of respectability, they

⁸⁴Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006, 90-91.

were writing against both moral reformers who often promoted patriarchy and the seamy stereotypes associated with black subjects. No wonder many of the characters in these novels dream of escape from home altogether, and that Carrington works so hard to find black queer subjects to photograph. In addition to endings on ships bound for England (for Hopkins), houseboats in the Atlantic (for Hurston), and frequent trips to Russia, Germany and Switzerland (Carrington), the authors don't orient characters or readers towards heterosexuality even within the boundaries of home. Instead, these authors represent spaces, like Sappho's bedroom, that push against assumptions about domestic space – for example, that it mandates and protects heterosexuality, for example. *Undoing Home* is grounded in a Black feminist analytic that critiques heteropatriarchal discourses of race, gender and sexuality. The structures of home that maintain regional, racial, gender and sexual boundaries are questioned in each chapter.

Chapters

Chapter 1, *Racial Order at Home: Regional Space after Reconstruction*, begins with an analysis of the construction of the first hyperbolic, public self-display of black domestic space at the Negro Building in Atlanta (1895). This building was the first separate space constructed to display the work of African Americans; setting a precedent for representations of home in the “New South.” The ways that the Negro Building was used as a symbol of regional progress (and racial self-actualization) are an important example of how gender roles were policed through the use of space.

I continue to trace representations of the south as a space for black homes in

Harriet Jacobs's returns to establish schools in Virginia. Jacobs's work settling southern refugees and protesting colonization projects (1864-69) also points to the struggle of black people who stayed in the south to establish homes there and the conditions of relocation. I argue that Jacobs represents freedmen and women who don't find home in the north as a national failure to uphold gender and sexual morality. Both Jacobs's writings and the Negro Building show how gender, sexuality and race were implicated in representations of home in the postbellum south. Overall, Chapter One offers a snapshot of how black homes were idealized for the new post-slavery era by African Americans and their supporters, examining the compromises made in representing home and its range of meanings amongst blacks themselves. Homes are undone, in this chapter, by representations of the reality of black homelessness.

In Chapter 2, *Regional Romances: Pauline Hopkins's Contentious Marriage Plots*, I argue that Pauline Hopkins, writing in the same period as the Atlanta Exposition, offers an alternative, queer image of black domesticity that is not interested in acquiring public approval. Like many writers of this period, Hopkins shows black men and women being torn from their homes, lynched, raped, and trapped in burning houses. I specifically focus on Hopkins's western novel, *Winona: Negroes in the South and Southwest* (1902), in which Hopkins suggests models of home function outside fixed national and racial borders by drawing on the homoerotic masculinity that is a generic feature of western romances. Hopkins's characters migrate westward, building homosocial families of national outcasts.

As the characters move from an island off of Buffalo, NY, to a Missouri Plantation; from Kansas City to Canada; and from Canada to a briefly imagined England

of marital bliss and economic vindication, Hopkins highlights the ways that location shapes sexual desire. Each location also shapes understandings of race and gender, represented by different homes. As these relationships move around, against and through domestic spaces, Hopkins uses the bonds between black and white men to illuminate hierarchies of gender and race in contested national spaces. Unlike Somerville's emphasis on Winona's queer "mobility across lines of race and gender," my reading of the same scene emphasizes the connections between its homoeroticism and the interracial homoeroticism between Maxwell and Judah (Winona's Black adopted brother). If Judah and Maxwell are the central couple in this story, *Winona* is less a story about the queerness of interracial heterosexuality than one about the shifting rules of male same-sex sexuality in relation to regional contexts. Judah, Maxwell and Winona form a classic western triangle of desire between two men who fight over one woman. Hopkins expands ideas about possible territories for black homes, and undoes the direct linkage between these homes and patriarchal gender roles.

Hopkins uses queerness to challenge normative geography that plots of southern repression and northern freedom as proof of "progress," citizenship, racial rationality and heterosexual achievement.

In Chapter Three, *Deviant Spaces: Homosexuality and Race in the Glenn Carrington Archives*, I focus on Glenn Carrington, a gay black social worker in the 1930s and 40s. I trace Carrington's life and work against social scientific theories about racial integration and sexual development that he was being taught as a social worker. Carrington was born in Virginia to two immigrant parents from Jamaica in 1904. After

leaving home to attend Howard University, Carrington went on to study social work, sociology and psychology at Harvard and Columbia (on a scholarship from the Urban League), eventually earning his Masters in psychiatric social work in 1941. Although almost nothing has been written about his life, when he is noted it is because of his association with Harlem Renaissance figures like Alain LeRoy Locke, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and Harold Jackman.

A closer look at Carrington's life and work shows the tensions in racial, sexual and intellectual life for black gay subjects during the 1930s and 40s. Even when racial and sexual categories seem mapped out in historical narratives, Carrington's own life suggests the fissures and contradictions hidden in plain sight. On the one hand, Carrington was participating in reform movements to teach domesticity to immigrants and returning black veterans, enforcing heterosexuality through rigid definitions of home and family. But internally, Carrington participated in undoing ideals of home through a broader range of queer spaces. I show how Carrington navigates the worlds of black respectability, queer culture, pleasure and surveillance, and sociological "objectivity"; showing the way black and gay communities were constructed by people flowing between them, making space for queerness in both. This chapter draws the background for my literary readings of Hurston and Petry, much like chapter one sets up a historical backdrop for the issues and stakes of Hopkins's representations of home.

Chapter Four, *Interracial Misogyny and Southern Spaces*, moves back to the south to look at Zora Neale Hurston's last novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee*. Hurston scholars have mostly rejected *Seraph on the Suwanee* outright, due to the racism and overwhelming misogyny of its white main characters.⁸⁵ In this chapter, I trace Arvay's

⁸⁵ Walker, "Forward," xvi.

journey through a series of domestic spaces and show how her failure to “find” herself in these spaces reflects the failures in Hurston’s political attempts to unite blacks and whites through regional stories. Although it was published in 1948, the story is set against the Florida land boom of turn of the post WWI period. Seraph tells stories similar to those in her WPA reports about black laborers in the turpentine industry, but written from the perspective of a white family.⁸⁶ The novel seems intent to prove Hurston’s theory that cultural environment rather than race is responsible for “Negro dialect.” As such, there is no particularly black cultural imaginary, only a southern one, shared in common by whites and blacks.

Deploying theoretical insights from queer of color critique and Black feminist criticism, I read *Seraph* as a series of trees, porches, bedrooms, and swamp lands that portray the failures of racial integration and, ultimately, the weakness of Hurston’s intellectual agenda. In both chapters 4 and 5, focusing on the counter-sentimental trends within black writing of the post-war period, I show how these novels exploit the anxiety about the stability of home as a manifestation of heterosexual gender roles to suggest the limits of heterosexuality as a broader institution.

Chapter 5, *Queer Home in The Narrows*, focuses on Ann Petry’s novel about returning WWII veterans and dysfunctional heterosexuality. The Narrows takes its title from the setting, in the town of Monmouth, CT, that narrows as it gets closer to the river that makes up its eastern boundary. The last street in Monmouth, Out by the docks, is

⁸⁶ A range of black authors wrote “white novels” in the post-war and early cold war period – including Ann Petry’s *Country Place*, James Baldwin’s *Giovani’s Room* and Willard Motley’s *Knock on Any Door*. Writing about white characters allowed black authors to explore desires outside the normative, heterosexual household model of the times without participating in the sexual stereotypes about African Americans.

called Dumble Street, but it's also thought of as "Eye of the Needle, The Bottom, Little Harlem, Dark Town, Niggertown."⁸⁷ Petry outlines the power structure of Monmouth, CT in terms of symbolic geography, and the use of domestic space. The pivotal figure in the novel is Link Williams, who returns from his military service (roughly 1946-48) without his youthful drive for achievement. Link used to be a Paul Robeson-esque figure studying to be a historian, but when he returns he decides to work as a barback for the local crime boss, Bill Hod. Bill Hod is also one half of Link's surrogate male family, along with his cook, "Weak Knees." Link's adoptive mother, Abbie Crunch, and her homosocial partner, FK Jackson (also referred to as Frances and Frank).

With these two homosocial pairs of parents, Petry sets up a conflict between black nationalist, patriarchal and sometimes violent masculinity (in Hod/Weak Knees), and harsh, middle-class respectable domesticity (in Abbie/FK Jackson). Both of these couples have faults, but they also both present queer alternatives to the failed heterosexual couples that form the story's bleak backdrop.⁸⁸ Based on archival work with Petry's correspondence and manuscripts, I argue that Petry's unhomey characters and spaces suggest the limits of heterosexual models of family, community and race. *The Narrows* is also the story of when the tranquil surface, tenuously upheld by strict spatial segregation, ruptures, and we see how oppressive the tranquility was in the first place. When Link tries to escape the constricting world of Dumble Street, he falls in love with a white heiress named "Camilla Treadway" (who tells him her name is "Camilo Williams"). Both Abbie/FK and Bill Hod/Weak Knees throw him out on the street because of this

⁸⁷ Petry, *The Narrows*, 5.

⁸⁸ Petry's own experiences growing up in the New England Black middle class obviously also shaped her characterization of Abbie Crunch. However, Petry's hometown of Old Saybrook, MA did not have a Black ghetto, a port or a munitions factory – the key spatial markers of New England in *The Narrows*.

affair. In the end, Link finds out the truth and dumps Camilo, and in revenge she accuses him of raping her. Link's death stands as an indictment not just of the segregation and racism that structures the town, but also of the failings of both his parents and their ideals of home.

In this final chapter, I return to questions about displays of orderly homes and the kinds of negotiations that are done to maintain respectable facades. Abbie Crunch's "almost aristocratic" house, Number 6 Dumble St., is compromised by her need to take in upstairs boarders, long before Link brings a white girl to sleep there. At Bill Hod's, Link is exposed to prostitution, homoerotic displays of violence, and possibly incest.⁸⁹ Like Arvay, none of the characters are "safe inside," and also like Arvay they are caught in a version of Hollywood melodrama.⁹⁰ And like Hopkins's novels, the grounds for hope for the future are slim, and the plans are vague. More than any other chapter, this one shows the complete undoing of homes – both the heterosexual ideals, and then, ultimately, some homosocial possibilities.

Conclusion

I could have chosen a less relentlessly dismal novel that represented homes in the post-WWII period, but *The Narrows* is actually on par with the pessimism of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), Richard Wright's *The Outsider* (1953) and James Baldwin's

⁸⁹ There are hints that Bill Hod and one of his prostitutes, "China," are Link's biological parents. As a young man, Link begins lusting after China, only to be whipped for approaching her by Hod (who doesn't have that reaction when he has sexual adventures with other prostitutes).

⁹⁰ Petry, like Hurston with *Seraph on the Suwanee*, intended for *The Narrows* to be turned into a film.

Giovanni's Room (1956). As is the case with the other novels discussed in this dissertation, *The Narrows* is a work that has not been considered as part of any queer literary histories, or for that matter African American literary histories. It is a later work that troubles understandings of Petry that are based solely on her more popular work, *The Street*, and it takes a critical stance towards a canonized black male literary tradition. After being celebrated for *The Street* as “the female Richard Wright,” Petry went on to write a short novel with all white characters (*Country Place*), and then wrote *The Narrows* – a modernist psychological drama, dedicated to her white lesbian writing teacher (Mabelle Robinson).

By reading *The Narrows* alongside *Seraph on the Suwannee*, *Winona*, *Contending Forces*, Glenn Carrington's papers, and Harriet Jacobs's work with freedmen and black southern refugees, I show the changing sameness of discussions about finding or making home in landscapes defined by dislocation, disorientation and displacement. In addition to the common themes in their non-canonical work, these texts show the range of political debates on gender and desire within black communities, from emancipation through the post WWII period.

It is no coincidence that the subjects of my study are mostly black women, and are all outsiders inside their specific black communities. Jacobs's abolitionist allies decided to cut down *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, because of her positive descriptions of John Brown in later chapters. While Frederick Douglass could continue being a political figure, in England and America, Jacobs was too busy helping poor southern freedmen in Savannah, GA to be involved in debates around the 14th and 15th amendments. Hopkins supposedly “retired” from the *Colored American Magazine* because of “health reasons,”

but historians have shown that members of the magazine pushed her out because of her opposition to Booker T Washington's agenda for the race. Hurston, much like Arvey, could only find home on board her houseboat. Ann Petry left New York and settled back in the small, mostly white, New England town where she grew up, preferring "small minded country life" to "all that Harlem." But still she considers herself an outsider in the town, where she and her sister were stoned on the way home from school "for being the wrong color." Glenn Carrington continues to lead a double life, even in his memorials, as his archives are divided between the "professional" collection at Howard University, and the "gay" collection at the Schomburg Center for Black History and Culture.⁹¹

Carrington is the only central man in this dissertation, although many of the chapters investigate masculinity. He made his way into this project through the questions he shares with Jacobs, Hopkins, Hurston and Petry. Carrington too had a complex, ambivalent relationship with home as a concept. He lives his gender oddly, just as these black women a generation prior.

Petry's novels were reprinted in 1988, Hopkins's also in 1988, and Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee* was reprinted in 1991. These are all texts that were a part of recovery efforts by black feminist criticism in the 1980s, and have only recently begun to be revisited by a new generation of critics. This critical work resisted marginalization within American literature by illuminating the ways in which black women's literature forms its own literary lineage, in which texts speak to each other across historical divides. Scholarship placed emphasis on the ways black women's literary and cultural

⁹¹ Where even there he is not found in the Black LGBT Finding Aid.

productions were central to American Literature and Feminist Theory.⁹² Partly because of that tradition, it matters to me to use the words “black,” “women,” and “queer” as a framework for the project. These identity labels may be a useless moniker in terms of any measurable “blackness,” “queerness” or “femaleness” to the texts, but it is productive as a kind of space making practice within academic disciplines.

⁹² Recently, it seems as if social constructionists (such as Paul Gilroy, Omi and Winant, Stuart Hall) and queer of color scholars (such as Sharon Holland, Mea Henderson and Robert Ferguson) have settled on the idea that race is a socially constructed category, always radically unstable, that has material effects in the world. In other words, race isn’t a useful category of analysis, as much as racism or white supremacy. But still, it seems like the material effects of racism are only discussed when they relate to white people doing something to black people, rather than the myriad kinds and examples of racism that are a daily reality. Regardless of the social construction of racial identities, we have racialized categories of literature and literary traditions (whether named or unnamed).

Chapter 1. Racial Order at Home: Regional Space after Reconstruction

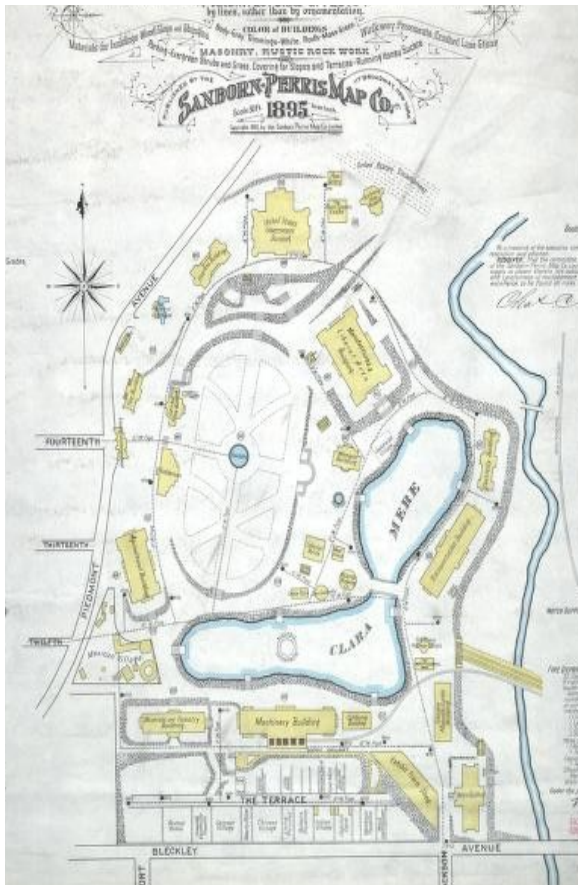


Figure 2: Official Map from Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition

According to the “Official Views of the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition” (1895), a black woman looking for representations of herself would have to walk past the official Woman’s Building, take a left at the Horticulture Building to cross Clara lake, and continue past the Buffalo Bill tent. According to the “Official History of the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition,” the black woman would first see herself on one side of the main entrance to The Negro Building, as “the slave mammie with the one-room log

cabin, the log church, the rake and basket in 1865.” On the other side of the entrance, she would see “the face of Frederick Douglass, a true representation of the growth of intelligence in the colored man” standing in front of “the comfortable residence, the stone

church and (other) symbols of the race's progress."⁹³ While she celebrated this progress, she might have also wondered who cleaned the stone residence and church – certainly not Douglass himself.

By using Douglass as the symbol of modern black homes, the Negro Building committee implicitly condoned his second marriage to a white feminist, and may have further alienated black women.⁹⁴ By representing the future of the race with a bust of Douglass, the Negro Building committee risked angering both white and black exposition audiences. Like all decisions involving the Negro Building and especially its entranceway, its face to the outside world, the bust of Frederick Douglass in front of a modern house links the claims of black masculinity and heterosexual “fitness” to representations of home.



Figure 3: Dahomey Village, Atlanta Historical Society, photo by Fred L. Howe

In fact, Douglass' modern home and the other side of the street slave cabin were caricatures of black homes; their facades exaggerated the progress within and harmony between races that the exposition used to market the new south.

Rehearsing the message of the American Negro

⁹³ Cotton States & International Exposition Company, *Official Guide to the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition*, 60.

⁹⁴ Critics of the marriage felt that it was a repudiation of Douglass's first wife; a stalwart free black woman who kept his home and raised his children while he was on speaking tours. Douglass's children broke ties with him over this issue. For a contemporary view on Douglass's second marriage, see Grimke, F. J. (1934). "The Second Marriage of Frederick Douglass." *The Journal of Negro History* 19(3): 324-329. See Moses, W. J. (2004). Creative conflict in African American thought : Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey. New York, Cambridge University Press. 46-83

Exhibit at the Paris Exposition in 1900 that “the newly reconstructed American nation-state had come of age as an imperial power,”⁹⁵ Atlanta’s Negro Building marketed the city as an imperial gateway whose modernized spaces regulated racial difference and prevented disorder. The key to this argument was in representations of black households that, as Robert Reid-Pharr explains, reproduced self-contained black bodies “indisputably distinct from a presumably white community and culture” yet indebted to white culture for their existence.⁹⁶ That is where culture - literature, photography, sculpture and painting – fills in for the more biologically based reproduction deemed impossible for cross breeds. In genealogical terms, slave cabins were to adopt big house values and structures, but to stay indisputably distinct from “white” spaces. These improved households could then establish colonies of African American reform in urban slums and African villages. This neat domestication of the other on display corresponded to European and American colonial campaigns in Africa at the turn of the century, where domestic order and modernization were frequently explanations for conquest.⁹⁷ But, as in African colonization, representations of progress and harmony emphasized in international fairs barely covered over the disorder of struggles – cultural, national and military – inside the modern households.

The “midway” entertainment strip at the Atlanta exposition, just a few blocks

⁹⁵Rydell, R. W. (1984). All the world's a fair : visions of empire at American international expositions, 1876-1916. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
Rydell, R. W. (1993). World of fairs : the century-of-progress expositions. Chicago, Ill., University of Chicago Press.

⁹⁶ Reid-Pharr, R. (1999). Conjugal union : the body, the house, and the Black American. New York, Oxford University Press.

⁹⁷ Pakenham, T. (1992). The scramble for Africa : white man's conquest of the dark continent from 1876 to 1912. New York, Avon Books.

from the Negro Building, also featured a “Dahomey Village,” where crowds could gawk at the “savagery” of the West Africans’ nudity and “primitive” houses. As the exposition hit a cold streak, the foreignness of the “dahomeys” was accentuated by reports of “the tribe huddled together on the sunny side of their huts” for warmth. When stirred by the manager, “every one appears with red eyes, a dead blue shade on his face and a natural opal at the end of his nose.”⁹⁸ The constitution of neither the dahomey’s houses nor their bodies was meant for North America – even a summer spent in Atlanta. Graphic descriptions of the Dahomey women’s dress and bodies emphasized the sexual otherness of the village. According to the Atlanta Journal and Constitution, the “half naked Africans” were “rendered even more uncouth” by pockmarks that were “the result, in great measure, of their filthy habits and mode of life.”⁹⁹

The set-up, construction and representation of The Negro Building at the Atlanta exposition is an important example of the contested meanings of home at the turn of the century. Read against surrounding exposition images of primitive homes and vanishing natives, the building shows how home carried the weight of racial self-determination post-reconstruction. The Negro Building is framed by Douglass and Mammie, two representations of home which, together, assert a “modernizing” narrative. The narrative

⁹⁸ “Where Fakirs Thrive. Note About the Midway at the Atlanta Exposition.”

⁹⁹ In case white Americans got the sense that they weren’t the center of the universe, the Buffalo Bill tent reconfirmed the nationalism inherent in the midway – with performers from “all over the world” dressed up as Native Americans and enacting the founding myth of American imperialism. As Joy Kasson shows in *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001, the Wild West mythology of battles between “civilization” and “savagery” resonated with southern audiences in search of “new” narratives to bolster white supremacist campaigns.

power of modernity as a goal and symbol relies on contrasting contexts for black gender. As opposed to denials of black heterosexual gender roles during slavery, the black woman continually asserts herself as a modern homemaker, while the black man fights against marginalization in proclaiming his triumph over the degradation of serving in others' homes. With the Negro Building, the Atlanta exposition hoped to affirmatively answer the question of whether modern black homes could be built in a southern landscape shaped by slavery.

From the Centennial Exhibition in Philly in 1876 to the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 to the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, the turn of the century U.S. celebrated and marked its "new" imperial status. By joining in the originally European circuit of such fairs, the U.S. hoped to promote its global connections and to expose the working classes to the "civilizing effect that came from participating in the arts."¹⁰⁰ "Civilizing" the population and promoting itself as a "civilized" region was a particularly pressing mission for the south, as it sought foreign markets for its agricultural exports, particularly cotton, and rebranded itself as "the new south." Expositions formed a space where local cultures and spaces came together with international spectators. Atlanta, a city in a good position to profit from trade alliances with Latin America and which was hard hit by the depression of the 1890s, was a perfect candidate for the kind of economic boost and

¹⁰⁰ Bennett, T. (1995). The birth of the museum : history, theory, politics. London ; New York, Routledge.72-75. Bennett argues that exhibitions created new methods for control of the working classes through transferring "art" into a public good – and therefore the business of the public to prove their civilization through, rather than the business of wealthy collectors to decorate their mansions. Bennett dates the exhibitions of the 1890s as the beginning of this transfer. I would add that the exposition sites were also used to transfer ownership of history and the regulation of historical narratives from exclusively private institutions to public/private partnerships.

commercial connections that an international fair could bring. Hosting a successful fair would also help Atlanta promote itself as the headliner of the “New South,” open to more “modern” ideas – in industry and in race relations.¹⁰¹

Historians have long acknowledged that the newness of the new south was a matter of representation rather than any material changes in people’s lives or race relations. Although the exposition opened Atlanta to northern industry, the jobs brought to the city – whether in trade or in manufacturing – were unlikely to go to the city’s black population. The cultural politics of the Cotton States and International Exposition were deplorable in many respects; most important for this work is the display of black homes and black people. Contemporary commentator Mabel Smith Bacon noted that audiences in Atlanta could view “the negro exhibit” and “the exhibit of the negro.”¹⁰² Likewise, The Negro Building was at once a space controlled by “negroes” and an exhibit of “negro space.” As Michelle Wallace argues, these fairs were also the primary sites for Americans to construct a “discursive regime of black visual culture” whose representations echoed well into the 20th century.¹⁰³ Displays of live and dead brown bodies at these fairs were metonymies of the way “freedom” came to mean participation in white-controlled narratives of regional and national identity. Similarly, displays of black homes at these fairs were metonymies of the way “home” came to mean

¹⁰¹ For a discussion of how states competed at these fairs to attract capital see Cronon, William. *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991.

¹⁰² Larsen, J. (1998). *Three Southern World's Fairs: Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta, 1895 Tennessee Centennial, Nashville, 1897 South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition, Charleston, 1901/02*. Atlanta, Emory University. Doctor of Philosophy. 169

¹⁰³ Wallace, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture*, 150.

participation in white-controlled narratives of sex and gender.

Given blacks' lack of control over both the material conditions of their homes and representations of these homes, the Negro committee's successful lobbying for control over a separate Negro Building at the Atlanta exposition is remarkable, as is the building's forceful representation of "modern" Negro homes. The Negro Building in Atlanta set a precedent for future fairs in Tennessee and South Carolina. The Atlanta building also reflected, on an international stage, the complex negotiations of belonging that black men and women performed at the turn-of-the-century in their individual and communal homes.¹⁰⁴

The Atlanta cotton exposition of 1895 was the first such fair that included a separate Negro building. The white architect, Bradford L. Gilbert, designed the building, making it match with the Romanesque style of the other buildings in the exhibition. Atlanta's promoters hired Bradford Gilbert, who was primarily a railroad architect, to design most of the expositions' buildings, because he offered Romanesque designs that were in fashion and would give Atlanta the image of a modern city. Gilbert's designs also had the advantage of being cheaper and distinguishing the Atlanta fair from the neoclassical "White City" of the Chicago World's Fair. After the debacle of the "Negro" exhibit in Chicago in 1893, white Southern leaders were convinced that incorporating a proper class of Negroes into future expositions would quell racial tension and show the

¹⁰⁴ In his overview of the role of "World Fairs" in American History, Robert Rydell argues that such fairs provided a space to "re-ignite patriotism" and to sell the nation as an imperial power. Histories of the world's fairs have highlighted these important racial functions, but have not discussed the overlapping gender and sexual ideologies embedded in the fairs' racial programs. The figure of "home," evoked in the words rekindle and patriotism, is a cite of these interlocked racial and gendered productions.

North and the world that the "New South" was ready for the modern 20th century. The Negro exhibit at these fairs provided both a chance for black Southerners to represent themselves and celebrate those representations, and a chance for white Southerners to promote investment in their state and region by laying a façade of racial order on top of the chaos, lynching, and growing racial violence.

Representing History of Home

The meaning of buildings, especially at such a loaded display of built and natural environments, is shaped by the interplay between their internal spaces, external structures surrounding them, and their all-important external façades. Facades immediately impact our experiences of spaces inside and surrounding the building, stitching the seam between a building's internal and external space. Representations of The Negro Building formed part of the building's façade, even though they were materially remote. Official representations of the Cotton States and International Exposition from histories and guides show us the broad strokes geography of the exposition; they also convey the struggle to contain the meanings of the exposition as a space. The fire-code map of Piedmont Park as it was set up for the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition shows "The Negro Building" at the bottom right-hand corner. The building is separated from The Terrace's international exhibits by Jackson St., and from all but the "General Manufacturing Building" and the "Public Comfort" (toilets) by railroad tracks. The Negro building's physical location represents the Cotton States International Exposition Company's segregation of blacks in Atlanta – a white fairgoer would only have to mix

with Negroes if they got their hands dirty in Manufacturing or a bathroom. Because of this segregation, the editor of the *People's Advocate*, a local black paper, urged its readers not to attend unless “they want to be humiliated and have their man and womanhood crushed out.”¹⁰⁵ This editorial points to how racial segregation maintained stereotypes about African American gender: blacks did not belong inside each state's exhibits because their gender did not fit the national ideals represented at the exposition.

Garland Penn, the chief of the Negro Department, pitches his review of the exhibit in the same official key of modernization and progress. He declares, “The greatest evidence that the new Negro is deserving is afforded by the display which was made in the Negro building at the Cotton States and International Exposition.”¹⁰⁶ The Negro's “deserving” white northern patronage for the newly constructed Hampton and Tuskegee institutes was a primary theme of the building, from its entranceway to its internal exhibits to its write up in official histories. Penn played a major role in the exposition and in its historical legacy by inviting Booker T. Washington to give one of the opening speeches. Penn's passive construction of blacks' efforts to build their exhibit reflects his successful politicking between white exposition organizers, who wanted a separate opening ceremony for The Negro Building, and black community spokespeople, who lobbied for a more confrontational opening.¹⁰⁷ Booker T. Washington was himself a compromise, a skilled orator who accepted the industrial and segregated vision of the

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Rydell, R. W. (1984). All the world's a fair : visions of empire at American international expositions, 1876-1916. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 85.

¹⁰⁶ Garland-Penn, *The Negro at the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition*.

¹⁰⁷ John Mercer and John E. Bruce in particular. Langston was founder of Howard U law school and had served as consul general in Haiti. Bruce was a journalist who advocated resistance to violence against African Americans.

New South.¹⁰⁸ Even so, many white committee members objected to his presence, arguing for a separate opening speech for “Negro Day” rather than contaminating the white opening ceremonies.

In the eyes of white exposition supporters, this use of common space to show black and white men on a common plane would prove the dangers of giving space to blacks to define the broader space of Atlanta and the New South. As one spectator put it, “I don’t want to do him an injustice, but I simply can’t take him into my house or into my confidence.”¹⁰⁹ Taking blacks into your house was unthinkable in a context where “social equality” was code for interracial sex and violence. Washington’s 1893 marriage to Margaret James Murray, a respectable Fisk graduate, might have ameliorated his threat to whites in the audience, even as he eclipsed the white opening speakers. Washington’s opening speech, later disdainfully dubbed the “Atlanta Compromise” by Du Bois, was delivered in this context – balancing white fears with black demands for space. The Atlanta Compromise quickly became famous as an official program for African Americans in the industrializing south. In this speech’s most memorable image, Washington holds up a rather phallic fist and proclaims to a segregated audience that whites and blacks must work together for the industrial progress of the south. Although Washington protested the interpretation of his “separate fingers” analogy a month after the exposition, he could not displace this “wrong idea” from the narrative about Atlanta and about his leadership. The speech became famous partly because other black leaders

¹⁰⁸ Gaines, K. K. (1996). Uplifting the race : Black leadership, politics, and culture in the twentieth century. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

37-41

¹⁰⁹ Cotton States & International Exposition Company, *Official Guide to the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition*, 6.

and literary figures contested the Atlanta Compromise, in ways that they could not contest the compromising position of the Negro Building.

The meaning of the Negro Building, according to the white exposition company and its promotional material, was that the south knew how to handle blacks better than the north: separable and manageable. Atlanta could keep Negroes in their proper place—the corner. Unfortunately for the exposition company, a complete segregation of the exposition space was not feasible. A black man or woman could traverse the bridge between the women’s building and the Negro building. White exposition goers complained about crowding and jostling on the streets, because solid lines could be drawn between black and white space only in official representations of the exposition – those lines represented penetrable boundaries like shrubbery. These maps, guidebook, and histories try to clean up what Doreen Massey calls the “loose ends” of space – the way that a space is shaped, at every moment, by its many surroundings and uses. Massey’s work on space suggests that the Negro Building, as well as the exposition space as a whole, were messy sites of regional, gendered, racial, sexual and national meaning making – on material and representational levels.

Similarly, although a black committee, including Washington, had some control over the Negro Building’s internal exhibits, the executive committee of the fair decided on the location of the building. By placing the building right next to the old railroad structure, the exposition company impeded access to the Negro Building – it was literally across the tracks. The building’s setting would have also been unpleasant due to trains’ noise and fumes.¹¹⁰ In the decade following the Cotton States and International

¹¹⁰ The Exhibit Train Shed set next to the Negro Building might also evoke case in

Exposition, this same train station was known as the “sewer of smoke,” and city reformers were desperate to have the tracks covered to hide the “chasm of smoke and din.”¹¹¹The place of the Negro Building was part of the “landscape” of the exposition, one building in a system of interrelated parts that communicated blacks’ “place” at the exposition and in the city itself.¹¹² Tucked in its uncomfortable corner, the Negro Building was placed within the exposition’s framework; representing the race as one that respected that place and worked within it to make claims on the region and the nation. This strategy mirrored Booker T. Washington’s strategy for the Tuskegee Institute: purchasing and working with otherwise unusable land and constructing a campus that faced inward, rather than a typical college campus which proclaims its importance with a lavish entranceway and central building.¹¹³ Like the Tuskegee campus’s emphasis on “privacy” and strict gender segregation in its lodging and curriculum, the two houses that flanked the entrance to the Negro Building asserted a racial goal about how to find home in the south.

which Ida B Wells case sued the Chesapeak and Ohio railroad company for being forcibly removed to the smoking car. Well’s victory in the suit and damages award of \$500 was overturned on appeal in Dec. 1894. See Davidson, J. W. (2007). 'They say': Ida B. Wells and the reconstruction of race. New York; Oxford University Press.

¹¹¹ LeeAnn Lands, *The Culture of Property: Race, Class and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950*, 67-68.

¹¹² Grandison, K. I. (1999). "Negotiated Space: The Black College Campus as a Cultural Record of Postbellum America." *American Quarterly* 51(3): 529-579. Although, as Kenrick Grandison argues, black institutions such as Washington’s Tuskegee Institute gained protection from white mobs and hostility by relocating to inconvenient or inaccessible places.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 542.

The Negro Building in Atlanta reveals the messiness of building a home in the U.S. south for African Americans and the claims that competing narratives of regional and national space tried to route through the symbolism of the building. The official history highlights the building's importance, claiming that it was "all things considered, the most distinctive of all the exhibits." The author goes on to praise the Negro exhibit as "a new departure possessed of a historic value which transcended in importance any collection of products or display of handiwork, however excellent or admirable it may be."¹⁴ In naming the historical significance of the Negro Buildings, the author qualifies his praise enough to indicate that the exhibit's existence is the accomplishment, rather than its displays of "products and handiwork." In fact, many black artists were reluctant to contribute to the exhibit for fear that their work would be used against them by white visitors and press. This self-selection process reproduced the kinds of compromises that the Negro Building's location made with the white exposition company – exhibits that suggested black aesthetic value beyond the "modern" agenda of the building were less likely to be displayed.

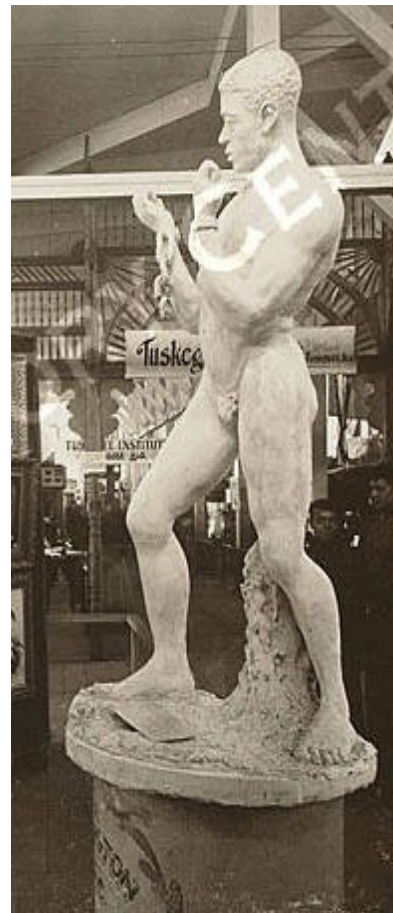


Figure 4: "Negro with Chains Broken But Not Off" Fred L. Howe 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition Photographs

Inside the Negro Building

¹⁴Cotton States & International Exposition Company, *Official Guide to the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition*, 57.

In line with the exposition's theme, the Negro committee emphasized blacks' modernity in both the domestic displays outside and in the exhibits inside the building. The same sculptor who sent the bust of Frederick Douglass to be placed outside the Negro Building, the self-taught W.C. Hill from Washington DC, submitted the centerpiece of the building, "Negro with Chains Broken but not Off." Hill's statue of a naked and powerful freedman, "The Negro with Chains Broken but Not Off," is stepping forward rather than looking back. The "Negro with Chains Broken but Not Off" also represents a regional figure that summarizes the message of The Negro Building itself. "The Negro" stands in charge of *his* own destiny, despite being hampered by the dangling chains, just as the Negro committee in charge of the building presented a strong front of black *male* leadership, despite the racist displays that surround the building.

The statue's message is even more clear in comparison to the most famous "Negro" statues of its time: the "Freedmen's Memorial" in Washington D.C. (1876) and the "Booker T. Washington Monument" in Tuskegee, Alabama (1922). Both of these statues portray crouching male slaves being ushered into the light of citizenship by Lincoln and Washington. Particularly in the Booker T. Washington memorial, the newly freed man, shirtless and directly facing outward, suggests a powerful force of black



Figure 5: Booker T. Washington Memorial, Tuskegee Alabama (National Parks Association Photograph)

industry.¹¹⁵ But, as Houston Baker points out, he is only the raw material of this industry,

¹¹⁵ Trail, S. L. (2011). Retrieved 1/13/11, from <http://www.southernliterarytrail.org/tuskegee.html>.

needing Washington's training to turn him into a civilized man.¹¹⁶

In the 19th century's final decades, whites in the new south were reclaiming national and regional power through the twin arts of sculpture and architecture. Confederate themed museums and libraries were modeled into the center of southern towns and cities, while neoclassical monuments to confederate generals partook of the neoclassical sculptural style to proclaim the whiteness of the region.¹¹⁷ The Booker T. Washington monument at Tuskegee stands in opposition to these nostalgic reclamations of the confederacy, even though, as Ian Grandison points out, it physically stands enclosed within the college grounds, facing in on the students rather than outwards in triumphant proclamation of black learning.¹¹⁸ These more famous memorials and Hill's statue in The Negro Building also revisit a tradition of sculptures of freedmen that represented the moment of emancipation as an unrealized promise. The whiteness of the marble was meant to elevate the sculpture's subject and protect the nude figure from pruriency.

White marble was inherent to neoclassical aesthetics and white's ability to pose as a non-color was key to the sculptures' suggestion of purity, truth and morality. This presented a problem for anyone interested in sculpting black figures, and in particular black female figures. In her study of the black female figure in 19th century sculpture,

¹¹⁶ Baker, H. A. (2001). Turning south again : re-thinking modernism/re-reading Booker T. Durham, NC, Duke University Press.

¹¹⁷ Bishir, C. W. "Landmarks of Power: Building a Southern Past, 1885-1915." Southern Cultures 1(1): 5-44. Bishir uses the landscape and history of North Carolina to make her argument that the ideology of the new south was "arranged" rather than "invented" – a matter of physical structures and the use of space, rather than only of literature .

¹¹⁸ Grandison, K. I. *Negotiated Space: The Black College Campus as a Cultural Record of Postbellum America.*

Charmaine Nelson concludes that adding "African" characteristics to sculptures of black men was far more common than in sculptures of black women. "The Negro" at the exposition is standing on his own, proudly displaying his musculature in a nude pose. The detailed musculature of "The Negro" is a forceful statement of African American men's fitness for the neoclassical aesthetic tradition.¹¹⁹ "The Negro" is not a kneeling figure; he stands up in a confrontational pose. He needs his chains removed but also gives the impression of independence; he will be a force in the region's future, chains or no chains.

Unfortunately, in negating the freedmen's memorial's representation of dependence on Lincoln, the white leader, to grant freedom and deem the negro worthy of it, "The Negro" hides the labor of black women in creating this independent male figure. The Negro Building cast women's domestic labor (symbolized in brooms and laundry) as a minor note in the narrative of progress that culminates in "The Negro With Chains Broken but not Off." Like the example of the modern home outside the building's doors, this statue conflates masculinity and modernity, with the surrounding feminized displays marking the past.

Hill also contributed a third sculpture that was placed at The Negro's feet; a representation of a young girl (modeled on his daughter Ruth) struggling to dress herself, entitled "The Obstinate Shoe." This statue, un-remarked in official accounts of the space, is also a fitting symbol of the gendered meanings of the building. In fact, what Nelson calls the "White Negro type," modeled on the tragic octoroon figure in 19th century

¹¹⁹ For a more famous example, see *The Freedman* by John Quincy Adams Ward. Hatt, M. (1992). "'Making a Man of Him': Masculinity and the Black Body in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture." *Oxford Art Journal* 15(1).

painting and literature, was the only way to represent black women in marble.¹²⁰ Hill's sculpture of his daughter exemplifies this type. In portraying the innocent girl, Hill accentuates her "white" characteristics.¹²¹ It is no coincidence that a young girl is cast in the role of struggling to clothe herself while the adult male is proudly undressed. Hill's "obstinate shoe" sculpture tries to conceal and correct for a history of forced sexual vulnerability while the black man's post-emancipation gender work is to display sexual prowess.

Also within the Negro Building, Black women from several states assembled needlework displays, canned fruits, jellies, quilts and baked goods for display.¹²² The women who worked with the Negro Committee vociferously protested the use of convict labor to construct the exposition.¹²³ In their political use of the building for forums on "clean tenants" and the need for adequate housing, the women's congress demonstrates how buildings gain meaning through use, uses that can be shaped but not determined by the building's physical design.

The Negro Building staged both narratives of the past and narratives of the

¹²⁰ Nelson, C. A. (2007). Color of Stone : Sculpting the Black Female Subject in Nineteenth-Century America. Minneapolis, MN, USA, University of Minnesota Press.

¹²¹ As explained by Judy Larsen in her dissertation Larsen, J. (1998). *Three Southern World's Fairs: Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta, 1895 Tennessee Centennial, Nashville, 1897 South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition, Charleston, 1901/02*. Atlanta, Emory University. **Doctor of Philosophy**, 241.

¹²² The inventory of the exhibit lists "the obstinate shoe" – the only thing in the inventory that could possibly be a description of this statue. (the items are divided up by categories and then by states - the statues and the exterior exhibits are listed under "art" but not under any individual state.

¹²³ The black laborers who built the Negro building and these external structures were "leased" to the exposition committee through a convict labor system that pervaded in the South as a way to enslave the newly freed men. The use of convict labor saved the exposition company \$100,000. Perdue, T. (2010). Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition of 1895. Athens, University of Georgia Press, 24.

present in its representations of home. Fighting against the notion that the race was stuck back at the plantation, black leaders used the Negro building to represent themselves as a "modernized" race. They tried to greet the nation as a race with modern homes that maintained the very gender distinctions that whites aimed to crush with the Old Plantation exhibit and segregation.¹²⁴ In the decades leading up to the Cotton States and International Exposition, the south was awash in anti-black violence that emphasized dragging freedmen from their homes and burning the homes down. As Hannah Rosen shows, "night riders' intrusion into African American homes asserted that claims to a secure and autonomous domestic space, a man's authority over his home and his dependents, and a woman's protected status when in the company of her family were exclusively privileges of whiteness."¹²⁵ Segregated housing at the Atlanta exposition displayed the tenuousness of whites' hold on this privilege, especially when fractured by regional and national geographies.

Finding a place to stay outside the exposition grounds was as much of a negotiation of race and gender roles as finding a place for the Negro Building within the exposition. Segregated housing for exposition visitors was complicated by the racial chaos of an international audience, and black-owned hotels courted blacks and whites from across the Atlantic with names like "European House" and "The Parisian." The most distinguished African American and foreign guests received special invitations from the Black-owned Pierian Club. Their upscale furnished rooms on Auburn Avenue were conveniently housed in a building that included a "nice reading room full of daily and

¹²⁴ Winton, "Negro Participation in Southern Expositions, 1881-1915," 41.

¹²⁵ Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*, 192.

weekly papers, together with plenty of good books and all the leading magazines, both home and foreign.”¹²⁶ Although I haven’t been able to find any accounts of racial contestation about housing at the exposition, the stakes for properly regulating race through geography were very high.

The exposition was to be “a city within a city,” as well as “a world within a world,” a one-stop-shop for all things “national” and “other.” But exposition visitors were also encouraged to look at the city of Atlanta as an exhibit, and the Negro Building had to contend with black homes outside the exposition grounds. According to the official guide, “the Atlanta of today” was distinct from “the city of the civil war,” which could be seen in “the back streets and among the negro quarters.”¹²⁷ As blacks continued to live in slave-like housing conditions, the meanings of home represented within the exposition were shown as necessary aspirations. African Americans at the turn of the 20th century, who found themselves “freed” but still often living in cabins where they or their parents once lived as slaves, were keenly aware of the claims that a house could impose on its inhabitants. The architecture of tenant and sharecropper cabins descended directly from slave cabins, and it marked the power of plantation and farm owners just as the cabins did.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Dodge, c. b. P. S. (1895). Official Guide to the Cotton States and International Exposition. Atlanta. 30

¹²⁷ Cotton States & International Exposition Company, *Official Guide to the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition*, 4.

¹²⁸ In his detailed study of the Sheilds-Etheridge property, Mark Reinberger shows that owners’ houses had larger rooms and two stories. Although much of this architecture and landscape has been reclaimed by nature, the case of the Sheilds-Etheridge farm, located in Greene county, GA, has retained eight of its tenant and sharecropper cabins and tells the story of how buildings and their surroundings mark race, gender and power.

Many of these structures were falling apart while they served as slave quarters. The one-room, cramped quarters of tenants and sharecroppers were not designed to have a separation of living, cooking and sleeping spaces, and they therefore denied black families the kind of privacy that structured planter class gender roles, with separate bedrooms for husband and wife. Just like the labor force itself, which was deemed expendable, cabins were unsheathed and roofed with wooden shingles that perpetually leaked – literally washing the ground out from underneath sharecroppers in their own homes. This poor construction often led to fires; as Robert Shepard remembers, in Georgia the log cabins were “made out of stick and red mud. Dem chimblies was all de time catchin’ fire. Dey didn’t have no glass windows. For a window dey just cut a openin’ in a log.”¹²⁹ Despite these homes, which literally placed blacks as the sexual and gendered other of the white planter class. Slaves were also placed apart from the white indentured servants, who had separate dwellings and were typically located a little closer to the big house, slaves formed families and communities by working within and alongside their surrounding southern landscapes.

Representations of the slave cabin and the negro quarters romanticized slavery within what Anne McClintock terms “anachronistic space” – a space frozen in the past, embedded within concepts of modernity.¹³⁰ Atlanta’s efforts to display modernization

¹²⁹ Vlach, J. M. (1993). "Back of the big house : the architecture of plantation slavery." Fred W Morrison series in Southern studies.

¹³⁰ “Colonized people –like women and working class in the metropolis- do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency” (30). Like McClintock, I am interested in how people’s actions and desires are mediated by institutions of power - such as the home. Black leaders at the Atlanta exposition found their meaning within the geography of the new south and transformed that meaning (through

went hand in hand with a romantic reinvention of the “Old South” as a domestic ideal.¹³¹

The Romanesque style of the Cotton Exhibition buildings, with their “brutal” brick frontages and their sturdy columns, evoked the universities and factories that shared this Romanesque revival style, as well as the ancient churches and castles built during the original Romanesque movement. Through this architectural hybridity, the exposition’s buildings mixed industrial and nostalgic references to herald Atlanta’s modern independence – proclaiming itself the capital of a “New South” with economic power and strength to maintain its racial order, enshrined in the buildings’ ties to the past. The architecture and design of the buildings reflect the committee’s attempt to control the meanings of the exposition, and, through that, the meaning of the New South.

The New South was developing at the time as an architectural order as much as an economic one. Anxiety about Yankee influences combined with anxiety about the modernization of the home eroding cultural reproduction, spurring calls to defend the southern home. Economically, the region was hard hit by the severe depression that began in 1893, and the generation of whites that came of age immediately after the civil war generally built simple dwellings in the antebellum form, or continued to live in the older plantation homes. Perhaps this architectural stability helped soothe the psychic wounds of defeat, or perhaps it kept up hopes for a slave society. The patronizing Yankee voice of the editor of the New York Herald reflects the way that regional identity was linked to architecture: “There are some houses in which one traces a pleasant

representations of home). I build on her analysis of domesticity as a relation to power by investigating the home.

¹³¹ The condition of sidewalks and alleys was a vital marker of modernity according to the tenets of the new urbanism, and Atlanta's leaders traveled around the country in the 1890s to learn from street and sidewalk construction in other cities.

likeness to the old mansions of slavery days, which ought to be the model for young architects to draw upon... something will crystallize out of this in time and the South will have its architecture, as the North is beginning to have.”¹³² In order for the New South to establish itself “in time,” slavery’s architecture had to be firmly left in the past, in order for it to reemerge in nostalgic literature of the “Lost Cause” genre. World’s fairs and international expositions were prime spaces for this process.

The “lost cause” genre of literature and architecture was a way of representing and using space that justified slavery. Lost cause representations appealed to whites across the board; northern and southern audiences at the 1893 World’s Columbian exhibition found common ground by watching “a band of old-time plantation darkies (sing) their quaint melodies and strum the banjo.”¹³³ These “real ignorant,” “contented darkies” were as much a post-bellum invention as the sentimental Mammies who populated “lost cause” representations of southern history. As George Carroll writes in his 1958 memoir, “in an effort to keep alive in the memory of all who claim the South as home, this essay is dedicated to that greatest of home institutions throughout the South; the old black Mammy.”¹³⁴ The “home institution” of the Mammy is a good example of how inevitably integrated domestic space was and the vital role of black figures in marking the oldness of the old south. Representations of the Mammy served as code for home in turn of the century southern literature; this deployment was hardly comforting for black women whose conditions of domestic work had improved much since

¹³² West, “New York Shines in Atlanta.” *New York Herald Weekly*, August 13, 1895.

¹³³ Brown, J. (2010). “Picturing Fairs and Fairness.” *Picturing America*. Retrieved November 20, 2010, from <http://picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu/?p=564>.

¹³⁴ George E. Carroll, *Mammy and her Children*, (1).

emancipation. One predictable area of overlap between whites and blacks was that white mothers who wanted to explore the exposition unencumbered could drop off their children for two hours at a time at the Negro Building, where squads of black women would look after them.

The Old Plantation

Across the road from the Negro Building's representation of a slave woman tending to her home was The Old Plantation exhibit, where none other than President Glover Cleveland was greeted by "an old ante-bellum mammy" as "massa president." This "mammy" sat on the porch of a slave cabin at the Old Plantation, authorizing the "home institution" of the plantation as a whole. It was the Old Plantation exhibit rather than the Negro Building that the *Atlanta Constitution* (the white local paper) celebrated as "the most complete all round representation of the colored race possible to conceive."¹³⁵ Part of the completeness of this scene was its temporal dislocation; the Old Plantation claimed, even in its title, that it accurately represented southern homes in the past. By fronting its historicity, the exhibit avoided challenges to its authenticity – relying on the repetition of stereotypes to support its "truth." Leigh Anne Duck summarizes the cultural work of such representations of the old south in these terms: "the insistence on regional difference served to disavow southern racism as the archaic remainder of a backward culture – preserving the nation-state's emphasis on its liberalism and modernization – the romanticization of the southern past served to retain white

¹³⁵ Perdue, T. (2010). *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition of 1895*. Athens, University of Georgia Press. (48-51)

supremacist conceptions of a national people as a prominent trope in U.S. nationalism.”¹³⁶

Northern audiences could embrace white supremacy as a southern trait, something that was “happily only a memory in politics” according to the exposition’s official history. Thus The Old Plantation exhibit was a necessary site within the exposition that showcased Atlanta’s liberalism and modernity.

Representations of black homes and families, such as the modern home that flanked the entrance to the Negro Building, were also crucial for the image of the New South. Images of the “Old South,” like the Old Plantation’s rendering of a slave cabin, needed to be cast away as “the most unique piece of our great American history plucked up from the past and placed down before us compact and complete.”¹³⁷ “The old plantation cabin” is one example of “the lost home” that Linda Williams cites as a central piece of racial ideologies in the post-emancipation era. She argues that “the antebellum South began to be constructed through minstrelsy as a timeless, lost home,” a “rural everyhome” that was fixed in time “as eternally antebellum.”¹³⁸ The Old Plantation Cabin became a class leveling midway attraction, repeated in future southern fairs and expositions, a site for the expansion of the franchise of whiteness through representations of the nation as home; particularly when set against the “international” attractions of the midway which showcased the otherness of foreigners. Because the mythological home of the Old Plantation Cabin was always already lost, it was far from “compact,”

“complete” or “unique.” The Atlanta Journal and surrounding magazines overstate the

¹³⁶ Duck, L. A. (2006). The nation's region : southern modernism, segregation, and U.S. nationalism. Athens, University of Georgia Press, 20-21.

¹³⁷ *Atlanta Journal*, December 5, 1895.

¹³⁸ Williams, L. (2001). Playing the race card : melodramas of Black and white from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press. 71.

power of home as a container for history. Williams's work on minstrelsy emphasizes the social construction of stories (melodramas) performed by writers, actors and audiences, and the same can be said for exhibits in Atlanta; while it might seem like a perfect container for the past, audiences (including journalists) and actors had as much power to define the meanings of the exhibit as its planners – and the same limitations in terms of space and placement.

It may seem idealistic to think that audiences at the Old Plantation Cabin brought with them memories from The Negro Building, or that the Negro Building was, in a way, a refutation of the “happy darkies” playing on the cabin's porch. But whatever combination of exhibits the audience experienced, the Old Plantation Cabin and the Negro Building both represented black homes as a part of historical narratives about slavery, emancipation and reconstruction. Individual exhibits in the Negro Building told this story in more detail, displaying the progress of black domesticity from slavery to the present. Quilts were shown with placards explaining that their makers lived in slavery, jam and preserves were displayed with authors noted to be from a long line of slaves.¹³⁹ Many women who contributed brought items from older relatives, shaping the historical narrative asserted by the building.

Julia Britton Hooks arrived at the exposition with a clipping from the Kentucky Gazette from 1822, advertising “a light-colored girl” for sale, a poignant example of the homelessness created by black women's enslavement. The girl from the add was

¹³⁹ Larsen, J. (1998). *Three Southern World's Fairs: Cotton States and International Exposition, Atlanta, 1895 Tennessee Centennial, Nashville, 1897 South Carolina Inter-State and West Indian Exposition, Charleston, 1901/02.* Atlanta, Emory University. **Doctor of Philosophy, 138.**

Hooks's mother-in-law, who had kept the clipping as a reminder of 'when the family was sundered.'¹⁴⁰ By sending in that ad for the exposition, the elder Hooks claimed the power to represent her own home – even if that home was absent, she could resituate and share that absence. Julia Hooks also claimed such power by sharing her own story, even if the details were not necessarily accurate.¹⁴¹ Hooks's storytelling is also a reclaiming of family, separated during slavery, in a new context. Slavery's legacy of uprooted and infested family trees is also frequently narrated as a destruction of homes. The tenuous nature of the experience of home for slaves' descendants sustained the legacy of homelessness.¹⁴²

As Saidiya Hartman writes, “the transience of the slave's existence still leaves its traces in how black people imagine home as well as how we speak of it” (87).¹⁴³ In *Lose Your Mother: a Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*, Hartman argues that representations of black homes are shaped by their historic denial and destruction. Such

¹⁴⁰ Perdue, T. (2010). *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition of 1895*. Athens, University of Georgia Press, 39.

¹⁴¹ The advertisements in the Kentucky Gazette for that year don't include an add for a “light skinned girl” but there are repeating ads for “a likely girl” which, at the time, probably meant the same thing.

¹⁴² There is very little data about homeless blacks and whites in Atlanta in 1895. The census – a fallible and partial record – reports that most “inmates of benevolent institutions” were housed at the “home for indigent colored girls, Atlanta” (6) and the “Providence Infirmary, Atlanta” (run by the “Sisters of St. Joseph”) (5). The rest were inmates of “City Hospital, Columbia” (7) “Freedmen's Hospital, Augusta” (3) and “City Hospital, Augusta” (1) – all This adds up to a total of 22 Negro inmates, which would necessarily not include the transient and the “paupers” who were kept in almshouses. Stats as follows, “ratios to 1,000,000 of the population”: 545 white and 428 negroes. Under “causes” (in numbers) the most prevalent one for both whites (66,300 – native born, 27,552 – foreign born) and blacks (6,374).

¹⁴³ Hartman, S. V. (2006). *Lose your mother : a journey along the Atlantic slave route*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

representations, both imaginary and documentary, are necessary parts of the construction of material homes. Hartman's title foregrounds the importance of family, particularly the



Figure 6: "Picaninies of the Old Plantation Cabin," Sharon Jones_The Atlanta Exposition: Images of America_

maternal line, in how blacks imagine and represent home. Family is a constituent part of home, and vice versa, a fact illustrated by Hooks's mother in law sending a record of the destruction of her family in response to a call for "domestic arts/industry." Home is a term whose meaning is shaped by its association and connection with other terms such as "family" and "nation." Home, family and nation are both material and figurative

ways that we structure our relationship to racial and sexual others.

In his history of black families, Herbert Gutman lays out the ideology of slavery that reasoned that blacks had no conception of family: "the Nation identified sexual restraint, civil marriage, and family stability with civilization itself."¹⁴⁴ The bedraggled group of children on the steps of the Old Plantation Cabin represents the opposite of "civilization itself": unrestrained sexuality, children left to care for each other with scarce resources, who share only their instability and lack of home, found in a population that had historically been denied the right to "civil marriage." These children, identified as southern rather than American based on their living conditions, most likely wound up sharecropping the same fields that stole their fathers and mothers away from the home – in Greene and Macon counties, which includes Atlanta, over 90 percent of blacks were

¹⁴⁴ Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*.

landless through the 1930s.¹⁴⁵ Only a quarter of the landless blacks were renters who owned some animals and equipment, the majority of the rest were sharecroppers. Visitors travelling by rail to the Atlanta exposition would pass by these land use patterns and cheap, poorly designed housing that characterized the southern landscape at the turn of the century.¹⁴⁶

In comparison to local black homelessness, the Negro Building is clearly an aspirational display for black middle class in Atlanta. Booker T Washington, like some local preachers and politicians, continued to cite the Negro Building as an example of authentic black space, against the broader popularity of the “Old Plantation Home.” The tension between aspirational representations of home and the surrounding realities was an issue throughout the nadir period in race relations. The next chapter focuses on domestic fiction by black women at the turn-of-the-century. Participating in the struggle over what black-owned space should look like, if and when black families gained control over that space, authors like Pauline Hopkins took up fiction. Hopkins argues that “Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs—religious, political and social. It is a record of growth and development from generation to generation.”¹⁴⁷ In 1900, Boston was a center of black industry and development much like Atlanta, and

¹⁴⁵ This figure shifted due to migration – resulting from soil erosion and boll weevil epidemics that slashed cotton prices across the south. It is not that sharecroppers were then set up to own land, but that the conditions got so bad that they were forced to flee or starve.

¹⁴⁶ Reinberger, M. (2003). "The Architecture of Sharecropping: Extended Farms of the Georgia Piedmont." *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 9(ArticleType: research-article / Issue Title: Constructing Image, Identity, and Place / Full publication date: 2003 / Copyright © 2003 Vernacular Architecture Forum): 116-134.

¹⁴⁷ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance of Negro Life North and South*, 1900, vi.

Hopkins's novels are grounded in conversations amongst literary circles and social reformers, much like the Negro Building was a product of local and national organizing by artists, politicians and women's church networks. But Hopkins does not set most of her fiction in the religious, political and social life that surrounds her in Boston, although that life is certainly reflected in key scenes. Instead, Hopkins imagines black spaces in New Orleans, Virginia, and aboard ships. In the following chapter, I explore these spaces for their potential as sexually nonnormative settings.

Chapter 2. Regional Romances: Pauline Hopkins's Contentious Marriage Plots

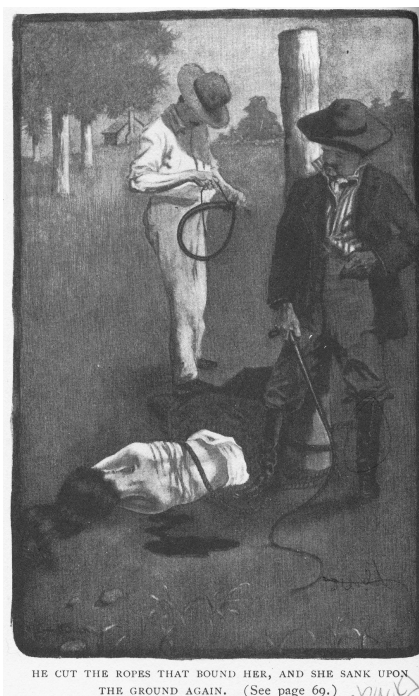


Figure 7: Frontispiece, *Contending Forces* "He cut the ropes that bound her, and she sank upon the ground"

The May, 1902 edition of the Colored American Magazine (CAM) a serialized literary journal and political magazine that Pauline Hopkins edited from March 1901 to November 1903,¹⁴⁸ uses the opening illustration in *Contending Forces* to advertise a free book offer of "The Greatest Race Book of the Year." CAM promises to give away "a limited number" of copies of the novel, "sure that a few copies in each town will immediately sell a still larger number, once the book is well known."

The image of Grace Montfort lying cut up on the ground as two villainous working class white southerners stand over her taps into common and affectively powerful abolitionist images of violated black bodies, calculated to appeal to readers in the same literary

¹⁴⁸ On the editorial politics of CAM, including Hopkins's dispute with Booker T. Washington about the direction of the journal, see Bergman, J. (2004). "'Everything We Hoped She'd Be': *Contending Forces* in Hopkins Scholarship." African American Review 38(2): 181-199.

circles as Jacobs's patrons, and as Hopkins herself.¹⁴⁹ In the eyes of the white mob that has come to punish Grace and her husband, Charles Montfort, their violence is justified by suspicions about Grace's racial background.

In order to “protect” their community from the bad example of the Montfort’s interracial marriage, the mob loots the Montforts' house and then burns it down, casting Charles Montfort’s dead body on top of its flames. This coincidence of a violated home and a violated woman’s body embedded in an explicitly southern landscape encapsulates Hopkins’s argument about the south (and possibly America as well): racism destroys homes. Grace’s body predicts the future of race relations in America, while at the same time it is firmly rooted in the legacy of southern violence against black women.¹⁵⁰ The illustration’s southern setting is emphasized in the villains’ hats and boots, as well as the open landscape in the background. Grace’s emphatically white naked skin alludes to a regional gender code – a discourse of excessive white southern feminine vulnerability. Contemporary readers objected to the interracial sexual violence¹⁵¹ in this scene– Grace as possibly a “quadroon” being violated by two, working class white men – as well as the violence in the later story of Sappho’s rape. They objected so vociferously as to prove the truth of CAM’s claims that *Contending Forces* would generate its own publicity and

¹⁴⁹As Sandra Gunning argues, Grace’s rape, motivated by fears about miscegenation and disintegrating racial categories, uncannily links the sexual violence and victimization of the immediate post-bellum period, to the Plessy v. Ferguson case, a contemporary example of these same fears about national contamination. See Gunning, *Race, Rape and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature 1890-1912*, 99.

¹⁵⁰ For further discussion of Sappho’s relationship to the heritage of the southern past, see McCann, S. (1997). ““Bonds of Brotherhood”: Pauline Hopkins and the Work of Melodrama.” *ELH* 64(3): 789-822.

¹⁵¹ Hopkins never confirms or denies the rumor that Grace is a quadroon.

reputation.¹⁵²

Grace's story has the popular appeal of American melodrama, which Linda Williams defines as a narrative form "in which virtue becomes inextricably linked to forms of racial victimization." Although Grace's innocence is emphasized by her victimization, her husband Charles Montfort has earned his destruction, if not its extreme violence, by moving his family and estate to America to escape the British laws against slavery in its colonies. Charles cast the Montfort family out of the edenic Bermuda, a "delightful land, formed from coral reefs, flat and fertile" with "a temperate climate, limpid rivers, (and) balmy fragran(t) and fresh air,"¹⁵³ whose beauty reflects the "restraint" of its planters and thus a space where "slavery never reached its lowest depths."¹⁵⁴ Despite warnings from friends that "the social laws are different" in the United States, Charles sets off, thinking of the U.S. as a "friendly land invit(ing them) to share its hospitality," and he vows to "be a good subject or citizen of whatever country I may be compelled to reside in."¹⁵⁵ Here Hopkins ironically points out the theme of hospitality, protection, and how these ideals are hypocritical in a land where even the rumor of a drop of black blood justifies violence and indignity.

In a further ironic turn, the Montforts don't get to be "citizens" of the United States, if citizenship entails the right to protect one's family through an inviolable, secure home. Beginning with their arrival in Newbern, NC on "The Island Princess," the

¹⁵² For more on publicity surrounding *Contending Forces*, see Wallinger, H. (2005). *Pauline E. Hopkins : a literary biography*. Athens, University of Georgia Press.

¹⁵³ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 21.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

Montforts' wealth, particularly as demonstrated in their elaborately furnished home, stirs up local jealousy and enmity. Hank and Anson Pollock, the two lower class white men pictured standing above Grace's body, express this jealousy by starting a rumor that Grace has some African ancestry. Although the caption under the illustration explains that Pollock has just cut Grace down from the post, what is emphasized is Grace's position on the ground and her naked back. Grace's figure alludes to the famous image of "Gordon," "a typical Negro" whose photograph, taken after a Christmas day whipping, with "his back furrowed and scarred with traces of the whip," saturated abolitionist publications that sought to "illustrate the degree of brutality which slavery has developed" in southern whites.¹⁵⁶ As Opposed to Gordon, who with extraordinary feats managed to escape and join the northern forces, Grace's emaciated body, barely as large as one of Pollock's boots, re-centers sexual violence as the brutal legacy of the south. Grace's defenseless body represents the tragedy of the color line as sexual violence – and families such as the Montforts as its victims.

Compared to the romanticized Bermuda,¹⁵⁷ Hopkins represents both the U.S. in general and the south in particular as hellish landscapes that enforce segregation. This is seen from the first when the Montforts build a slave cabin far away from their big house. Grace remarks on the different quality of heat in America, where "the rolling fields of

¹⁵⁶ (ed), M. A. H. (2009). The Black Book: 35th Anniversary Edition, Random House.

¹⁵⁷ Bermuda seems to get a pass because of its connection to Britain: to which it "once was second only to Virginia," drawing "the paternal bonds of interest closer as the years have flown by." Hopkins implies that because of this British influence, "slavery never reached its lowest depths in this beautiful island," where "a desire for England's honor and greatness had become a passion with the inhabitants, and restrained the planters from committing the ferocious acts of brutality so commonly practiced by the Spaniards" (Contending Forces, 22).

cotton” leave “crops twisting in the heat and the steady glare of the sun.”¹⁵⁸ She longs for “the blue waters of the bay” and “the cedars outside the entrance gates” of the Montforts' Bermuda estate. While Charles Montfort has bought into the U.S. national progress narrative, Hopkins juxtaposes their family and home's destruction with the progress narratives of Grace and Charles's children, who also look northward for spaces where they can establish protected home and family.

Contending Forces then jumps forward in time and northward in space to investigate the possibilities and limitations for black homes in the “northern escape”¹⁵⁹ section of the book. This northern section follows the Montforts' descendents: a Boston family now going by the name of Smith. Hopkins connects the two directly through the character of Sappho, a southern escapee who carries with her a hidden past of rape and imprisonment. Along with thousands of others, Sappho has migrated north hoping to leave behind the racialized violence of the south. Both Grace and Sappho's hopes are disappointed by the reality of northern racism, showing the impossibility of domestic grace in a land of slavery.

Grace's death is one in a line of mulatta heroines whose suicides in the face of failed marriages and houses represent the failure of national aspirations for family and home at the turn of the 20th century. The connection between the domestic, as in home space, and the Domestic, as in national space has long been fraught for Black women.

Anna Julia Cooper's argument that “the atmosphere of homes is no rarer and purer and

¹⁵⁸ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 47.

¹⁵⁹ Echoing Uncle Tom's Cabin dual plot lines of “southern bondage” and “northern escape” Williams, L. (2001). Playing the race card : melodramas of Black and white from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press.

sweeter than are the mothers in those homes. A race is but a total of families. The nation is the aggregate of its homes”¹⁶⁰ shows how tightly ideals of nation, race and family are interwoven. As Shawn Michelle Smith notes, “Cooper situates African American women at the center of a nation composed of ‘true’ families and homes.”¹⁶¹ The marriage plot is held up with these ideals of home, family and nation, establishing a firm set of generic expectations that in turn drew and policed the color line. Cooper and Hopkins were not alone in taking up these discourses of home, family and race to argue for black women’s political role.

Claudia Tate categorizes Hopkins amongst a generation of black female authors of “post-Reconstruction domestic novels – about courtship, marriage, and family formation.” According to Tate, the domestic novel is a kind of social melodrama, which, in the hands of black female authors, promotes racial progress through “literary strategies (which) all rely on ideologies of romantic and sentimental love and domesticity.”¹⁶² Within these ideologies, black heroines’ quests for marriage and family reflected broader aspirations “to live in a world where such stories were possible;” where black women could authorize themselves as national subjects.

A world where blacks were protected from such vulnerability by ideals of home and family was becoming even more unimaginable during Hopkins’s career. Her literary community in Boston¹⁶³-- proud of its history of black leaders, resistance to segregation,

¹⁶⁰ Cooper, A. J. (1892). *A voice from the South*. Xenia, Ohio,, Aldine Printing House,.

¹⁶¹ Smith, S. M. (1999). *American archives : gender, race, and class in visual culture*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press.

¹⁶² Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 99.

¹⁶³ Despite a stint in NY while working on CAM. See Wallinger, H. (2005). *Pauline E. Hopkins : a literary biography*. Athens, University of Georgia Press.

and radical activism--was faced at the turn of the century with deteriorating economic and political power.¹⁶⁴ *Contending Forces*'s opening illustration makes it clear that the color line destroys the very ideals of family that it claims to uphold. Hopkins points out the conjunction of black women's personal and political vulnerability by representing her world as one that doesn't allow Grace, and later Sappho, to be successful romantic subjects. Sappho's life reflects blacks' continuing struggles to access a plot-line that represented racial self-definition, social mobility, and regional reconciliation.

As Hopkins writes in the preface to *Contending Forces*, "the atrocity of the acts committed one hundred years ago are duplicated today, when slavery is supposed no longer to exist."¹⁶⁵ In response to this continued violence, Hopkins argues that literary representations of African American homes and families are important political weapons. She calls for representations that record "growth and development from generation to generation" as proof of black aptitude for citizenship and the protections thereof.¹⁶⁶ Despite writing this in *Contending Forces*'s preface, Hopkins doesn't center a traditional model of home and family in either *Contending Forces* (1900) or *Winona* (1902). The migration narrative of the story, its progress northward over generations, sets up readers' expectations for home as the concluding settlement of narrative tensions, but Hopkins confounds readerly expectations for both family and home. If Hopkins wants her fiction to fulfill a political purpose, she must have another one in mind than joining the nation as a foundation for home.

¹⁶⁴ Cromwell, A. M. (1994). "The other Brahmins : Boston's Black upper class, 1750-1950." 64.

¹⁶⁵ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 15.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

Hopkins's perfunctory marriage plots deter readers' interest in the nation and heterosexuality as mutually guaranteed categories. These categories are useful for entering into and understanding the drama of most marriage plots, but they are singularly unimportant for Hopkins's characters. *Contending Forces* and *Winona*'s disregard for the nation as a way for people to imagine a collective sense of home opens up possibilities for Hopkins to represent non-heterosexual relationships. In this chapter, I argue that Hopkins challenges the marriage plot from its ground floor: the search for an idealized home that ties each individual domestic space to broader spaces, national and international. I trace this argument through *Contending Forces: A tale of Negro life in the South and North* and *Winona: Negroes in the South and Southwest*, both of which use the marriage plot as a carrier for characters, spaces and relationships that undermine the marriage plot's foundations—its claims that heterosexuality and nation are the key ingredients and benefits of home, and its reserving of these benefits for white characters.

Both Sappho and Winona, *Winona*'s eponymous heroine, end their respective novels on board ships, with forecasted but unconsummated marriages, and without a stable place to call home in their future. In *Winona*, the triumphant couple “made no plans” for their post-marital future, because “What necessity was there of making plans for the future? They knew what the future would be. They loved each other; they would marry sooner or later, after they reached England.”¹⁶⁷ *Contending Forces*' marriages are less hurried, if not less troubling for readers seeking the traditional closure of domestic novels. According to Somerville, Sappho's marriage, in particular, “suggest(s) that marriage does not necessarily represent the complete fulfillment of (black women's)

¹⁶⁷ Hopkins, *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, 435.

sexual or political desires.”¹⁶⁸ Hopkins’s heroines leave behind spaces of intense homosociality and gender “play,”¹⁶⁹ and head towards pre-narrated marital gender roles without the pay off of national political influence gained by fitting into (or performing) these ideals.¹⁷⁰

Hopkins seems to have faith that her readers will imagine happy futures in England (in *Winona*), or in the global sphere of education (in *Contending Forces*): futures that will provide Winona and Sappho ideological access to the black counterpart of “true womanhood.”¹⁷¹ Hopkins encourages this reading in her preface, and critics have overwhelmingly argued that *Contending Forces* uses the marriage plot as narrative proof that women have a political role: to serve the race through their association with home and family. But what if we locate the political message of Hopkins’s novels not in their conclusions, but in the messy, middle sections? What if the point of the novels is not the ending marriages but the middle, the messy, the transitional, flexible and homosocial, the not quite national, the ambiguous status between independent adult womanhood and marriage, and the search for rather than the achievement of home?

¹⁶⁸ Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*, 92. See also Tate, C. (1998). Psychoanalysis and Black novels : desire and the protocols of race. New York, Oxford University Press.

¹⁶⁹ Play isn’t the right word here, but neither is flexibility really, or dynamism or materiality, although there is a way that the spaces they leave behind are not as abstract/idealized as the spaces they head towards – and that might have something to do with the way gender roles can be contested. After all, you can’t fight what you can’t grasp a hold of.

¹⁷⁰ For more on this charge and its effects, see Lerner, G. (1973). "Black women in white America: a documentary history." 150-166.

¹⁷¹ Tate, C. (1992). Domestic allegories of political desire : the Black heroine's text at the turn of the century. New York, Oxford University Press. DuCille, A. (1993). The coupling convention : sex, text, and tradition in Black women's fiction. New York, Oxford University Press.

Answering this question requires reading with a deep understanding of the racial and sexual meanings of spaces. To explore *Contending Forces* and *Winona* as representations of mobile desire encased in transparently thin marriage plots, we also have to suspend the assumption that marriage was a primary political aspiration and social ideal for black women at the start of the 20th century. A reading method that suspends the assumption and the ideal of marriage actually reflects the “up for grabs” nature of sexual and racial identity at the turn of the century. This uncertainty drew from the shifting meanings of regional and national space that formed the contexts for understandings of sexuality and race. A vast body of scholarship has characterized the turn of the 20th century as a time of transition into “modern” understandings of sexual identity.

This period saw a hetero-homosexual divide which increasingly organized sexuality, and the growth of disciplines such as anthropology, phrenology, psychoanalysis, and sociology that claimed to provide hidden truths about sex and race.¹⁷² These pseudoscientific disciplines worked alongside popular discourse to produce a new *species* of people – the invert, also known as the homosexual, although the specifics of homosexual identity varied according to class, race and location.¹⁷³ Where to draw the color line around this new category of people, particularly as it varied in different

¹⁷² See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* vol. 1. This mutually constitutive relationship is not unlike the function of Hopkins’s representations of (nonheterosexual) desires which both threaten the marriage plot and also form containers for the desires that don’t fit in the standard narrative.

¹⁷³ For example, working class men in NYC considered the insertive partner in a homosexual act to still be straight, while middle class men made no such distinction. See Chauncey *Gay New York*, D’Emilio and Freedman *Intimate Matters*, Simmons “Companionate Marriage and the Lesbian Threat.”

contexts, was comingled with white male general anxiety about homosexuality. Different contexts drew different boundaries around the invert in order to contain threats to the sexual status quo, but the idea of sexual deviance brought together interracial sex and homosexuality. The former is represented when the Monforts settle in the south, where their relationship was contextually recast as a problem of racial intermingling and thus a corrosive threat to the sexual status quo.¹⁷⁴

At the turn of the 20th century, the boundaries of the developing sexual identities were drawn in relation to the boundaries of the developing American nation, and vice versa.¹⁷⁵ In *Downs v. Bidwell*, the Supreme Court ruled that Puerto Rico¹⁷⁶ was a possession of the United States, and therefore not covered by the American Constitution without a separate act from Congress. In her reading of the case, Amy Kaplan points out that the Justices represented the dangers of incorporating Puerto Rico as dangers to American family bonds – threatening to domestic coherence on the micro and macro level. Like Puerto Rico, U.S. imperialism in Cuba and the Philippines highlights the need for “foreign” sexual threats in constructing national boundaries; protecting the integrity of the nation excused the usually violent policing of interracial sexuality within the nation. In this context, Hopkins uses representations of heroines who, like Sappho, have

¹⁷⁴ See Somerville, Mumford, K. J. (1997). Interzones : Black/White sex districts in Chicago and New York in the early twentieth century. New York, Columbia University Press.

¹⁷⁵ There is a long tradition of literature about marriage and the nation codependent ideals, see Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations On Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, And the Sacred*. Also see Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas And South Asian Public Cultures*. and Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays On Sex And Citizenship*.

¹⁷⁶ recently ceded to America, along with Guam, Cuba and the Philippines in the Spanish-American war

racial and sexual pasts kept secret even from themselves, to expose the cracks in American myths of familial and national purity, the same myths that fed imperialist ideologies.

Hopkins refuses to have her heroines reinforce national mythology of home by refusing to do away with her own ambivalence and suspicion about these heroine's marriages. Alongside her deemphasized marriage plots, Hopkins employs other popular genres and cultural forms to highlight relationships and spaces that the marriage plot can't accommodate. These generic combinations prime readers for representations of space and sexuality that don't necessarily resolve or evolve. As Elizabeth Ammons suggests, "Hopkins's employment of the novel registers precisely the radical instability of (the novel) form," combining many different voices and kinds of stories.¹⁷⁷ After I discuss the two novels in detail, focusing on the ways that regional and domestic spaces impact women's gender roles and sexual relationships, I will conclude by discussing the migration narrative and the western in more detail to show how Hopkins utilizes the spaces that these genres afford to both critique and augment the marriage plot.

Contending Forces is ostensibly a story about finding home and love through national and racial union, but under the surface, it is also a story about the dynamics of mobility and self-definition amongst northern black communities and southern migrants. These dynamics play themselves out in the regional contexts of the South, North and "the islands," represented respectively by New Orleans, Boston and Bermuda. *Winona* is ostensibly a story of a mixed race heroine, who, through marriage, is found and reclaimed by her British aristocratic forebears. But it uses the non-domestic resonances of the west

¹⁷⁷ Ammons, "Winona, Bakhtin, and Hopkins in the Twenty-first Century," 213.

and southwest in order to displace national heterosexuality and the corresponding marriage plot. In addition to the south and southwest, *Winona* takes place on a nameless island between Buffalo and Canada, where many varieties of race, gender and sexuality coexist. In both novels, the deeply contested regional spaces left out of the subtitle¹⁷⁸ – the island and Bermuda – are the starting paradises which the heroines inevitably fall out of, only to submit to racial and gender disciplining in the broader U.S. Struggles over the symbolic meanings of regional space were a key part of the formation of racial and sexual identities at the turn of the century, and this is reflected in the expanding genres of popular fiction about travel and difference internal to the nation.¹⁷⁹

Borders and Boarders in *Contending Forces*

The North, in *Contending Forces*, dominates Hopkins's representation of the key domestic spaces in the novel. Domestic space in the North is shown to open up opportunities for black women, making space that relocates and thus disrupts the gender and sexual codes of the south. The novel's most prominent domestic space is Ma Smith's boarding house, which represents aspirations of respectability and authority for black women. Hopkins's lengthy and ornate description of the house introduces the northern section of the novel, and the "present" according to Hopkins's contemporaries, through a chapter appropriately titled "Ma Smith's Boarding House." Even the name of the

¹⁷⁸ *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South, Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest.*

¹⁷⁹ Including westerns, travelogues, folklore, even detective stories in a way, because the detective figure stands apart from a community as a combination of anthropologist and psychoanalyst.

boarding house indicates economic transitions, as Ma Smith took over the mortgage and ownership of the house after her husband's death.¹⁸⁰

Debra Bernardi usefully reads this setting as “underscor(ing) the instability of domestic borders in the tale,” because “the very concept of a house of boarders, a home in which members constantly arrive and depart” emphasizes Hopkins's (and her contemporaries') concern with the lack of inviolable black domestic space.¹⁸¹ I would argue that the boarding house also indicates the lack of stable borders for heterosexual identity in a time of mass migration and economic transitions. This sexual instability is a precarious position, but also one of opportunity and self-definition. In *Contending Forces*, establishing economically inviolable domestic spaces goes hand in hand with establishing the right to play with sexuality and gender within those spaces, as long as one kept clear of the windows.

The first sentence of *Contending Forces*'s Northern section depicts Dora Smith's exhaustion after washing the outside of the boarding house's windows, showing the effort of remaining respectable to outside viewers. Ma Smith's boarding house is located in Boston, a center of middle class Black aspirations at the turn of the century and Hopkins's own home city.¹⁸² Hopkins aligns Dora with Boston and the North from the beginning, and uses her to contrast northern and southern gender roles; “into Sappho's

¹⁸⁰ Interestingly, Henry Smith's demise could be said to be *caused* by the house. Buying the house “began the struggle of Henry (and Ma Smith's) lives” (83). The effort of trying to keep up with mortgage payments, combined with “the force of prejudice,” wears Henry down until eventually he sickens and dies. After his death, Ma Smith transforms a space that was once a drain on resources into a profitable business.

¹⁸¹ Deborah Bernardi, “Domestic Imperialism and the African American Home,” 215.

¹⁸² Hopkins was born in Portland, Maine but raised and educated in Boston, where her literary activity was also centered.

lonely, self-suppressed life, the energetic little Yankee girl swept like a healthful, strengthening breeze.”¹⁸³ Dora is an integral part of the natural landscape of the north, as well as the boarding house’s domestic environment of playfully unstable gender.

Given Dora’s association with the North and thus with freedom and relative sociability, the confluence of her marriage taking her south and swallowing her individuality is more troubling. Hopkins introduces further suspicion about Dora’s fate with her description of their home: replete with “flowers indigenous to the Southern clime,” “plentifully supplied with porches and piazzas,” and long, open French windows signifying New Orleans’s colonial past. Dora, within this southern space, adopts the attitudes of her husband (and Booker T.) about the role of women in the home. Arthur Lewis, Dora’s husband, argues that “industrial education and the exclusion of politics will cure all (our) race troubles.” For her part, Dora thinks of herself as “not the least bit of a politician,” and “generally accept(s) whatever the men tell (her) as right.”¹⁸⁴ As Deborah Wallinger suggests, Hopkins had doubts about Washington’s “industrial education” program as early as 1900 and increasingly felt her own position threatened by his influence; “to her, it appeared that Washington was the driving force behind people who sought to antagonize her.”¹⁸⁵ Sacrificing Dora to a Booker T. figure, therefore, conveys the corruption of northern ideals of freedom to southern utilitarianism (and its

¹⁸³ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 144. For further discussion of Dora as a representative of the north and Sappho of the south, see McCullough, K. (1996). *Slavery, Sexuality, and Genre: Pauline Hopkins and the Representation of Female Desire*. *The Unruly Voice*. J. C. Gruesser. Chicago, University of Illinois Press: 21-49. Sappho has to go through further regeneration, this time in the south, in order to be a proper mother and wife for Will.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁸⁵ Wallinger, *Pauline E. Hopkins: A Literary Biography.*, 79.

gender roles).

When Hopkins writes about Washington in her “Great Men of the Negro Race” biographical series, she claims that “Dr. Washington and Tuskegee are one,” literally: “Tuskagee in the soul of the man outlined in wood, in brick and stone, pulsating with the life of the human hive within on whom he has stamped his individuality.”¹⁸⁶ Hopkins’s description of Tuskegee echoes her representation of Dr. Lewis, in terms of their buildings characterized by industrious labor rather than by imagination or love. Dr. Lewis’s prioritizing of masculinized industrial education over feminine domesticity in his theory and architecture of racial progress is echoed in the Lewises’ marriage. Hopkins’s reservations about Dora’s marriage come through in her representation of “Doctor Lewis’s house.”¹⁸⁷ Not only does their house belong to Dr. Lewis, or at least to his vision of the future of the race, upon which “he has stamped his individuality,” the marriage completely erases Dora’s individuality.

Hopkins’s ambivalence about the marriage plot as a tool for black women’s political aspirations comes through clearly in her representation of Dora’s marriage as her sacrifice (albeit willing) of “her own individuality (which was) swallowed up in love for her husband and child.”¹⁸⁸ The southern regional context of Dora’s marriage and new house highlights the ways that domestic structures shape gender and race in relation to histories that are also embedded in regions’ self-understanding. The Lewis’s marriage

¹⁸⁶ Hopkins, P. E. and I. Dworkin (2007). Daughter of the revolution : the major nonfiction works of Pauline E. Hopkins. New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press. 77.

¹⁸⁷ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 387.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 390.

also falls in line with a broader vision of the future of the race, one that is modeled on a specifically bourgeois, missionary ideal. Claudia Tate argues that within this model, “respect kindles love, and mutual commitment to advancing the race engenders love.”¹⁸⁹ According to Anne DuCille, Dora’s apparently passionless marriage may thus translate romantic love into a narrative of social purpose, encoding sexual desire into “the much safer realm of political zeal and the valorized venue of holy wedlock.”¹⁹⁰ Tate and DuCille’s readings critically excavate the contemporary political and social resonances of Hopkins’s marriage plots, but they tend to overlook problematic geographical resonances, which are particularly important given Hopkins’ representation of sexuality as embedded in regional space. Hopkins has Will, the W.E.B. DuBois figure in *Contending Forces*, express his disapproval of his sister’s husband; Will remarks that he would not build an institution of racial progress in a land where blacks’ “self-respect and independence (is) hampered in any way by prejudice.”¹⁹¹

The prejudice that would hamper black self-respect and independence is structural. Doctor Lewis’s home resembles Tuskegee in purpose and structure, but it also echoes Charles Montfort’s house, bringing *Contending Forces* full circle back to the south. Hopkins uses architectural references to colonialism and to these two other examples of home (the Monforts’ and Tuskegee) to suggest the power of southern history in shaping family structures. The architecture of the Lewis’s house signifies New Orleans’s history of racial segregation through ordinances meant to contain the “vice”

¹⁸⁹ Tate, *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race*, 117.

¹⁹⁰ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 45.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 398.

districts. In 1899, the same new methods of pumping water out of the city that opened land for Lewis to buy and build a college on allowed the crowded and integrated city to segregate in its expansion.¹⁹² In the years after Plessy v. Ferguson, segregationists in New Orleans would use the city's sinful reputation to argue that, "like prostitutes, African Americans should be separated from respectable whites because of their natural propensity towards disorder, sensuality, immorality, filth and disease."¹⁹³

Segregationist discourse about the dangers of interracial sex fed off of the international popularity of New Orleans as a hub of sexual tourism, where "there was scarcely a block which did not contain at least one brothel." "The French Quarter," just north of Storyville, the central vice district, specialized in "pretty women of all nations" and fellatio.¹⁹⁴ "French" locations and even architectural styles came to signify disorder and a lack of the ability to contain the immoral sexual desires of inhabitants. Lewis's New Orleans house reflects the colonial influence of the French, with "long French windows" that "stand open to catch the soft breezes of April." Hopkins also represents the Montforts' house with long, open windows designed to catch breezes during the hot southern summers. Both the Lewis's and the Montforts' houses have "plentiful" piazzas, porches and rolling lawns. They both boast "gorgeous beds of flowers indigenous to the Southern clime." These similarities are haunting, despite the key difference that the Montforts' flower beds "divide(d) the great house from the Negro quarters," while the

¹⁹² Soards (1885). Soards Guide Book Illustrated, and Street Guide of New Orleans. New Orleans, L. Soards. 35-36

¹⁹³ Long, A. P. (2004). The great Southern Babylon : sex, race, and respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920. Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press. 129.

¹⁹⁴ Roach, J. R. (1996). Cities of the dead : circum-Atlantic performance. New York, Columbia University Press.

Lewis's flower beds express a more progressive reservation of separate living spaces for each race.¹⁹⁵

New Orleans is also important in *Contending Forces* as the setting of Sappho's initial violation and the birth of her octoroon son. Sappho is raped and "kept prisoner in a house of the vilest character" by her white uncle (a Louisiana Senator).¹⁹⁶ By the time Sappho and Dora are reunited in New Orleans, they have both had to give up their formerly close relationship and the spaces that fostered their bonds. Both Dora and Sappho give up the northern space of Ma' Smith's boarding house in order to complete the two main marriage plots that structure *Contending Forces*. Dora and Sappho's ends are forecasted by the very packaging of the novel, but the sexualized transience of the boarding house emphasizes the heroines' losses. Dora hopefully names her first child Sappho, hinting at the possibility of a region where Sappho could find home, but Hopkins also details Sappho's history in New Orleans to throw a damper on this optimistic conclusion.

In contradistinction to New Orleans, Hopkins represents the boarding house as a space where romantic and sexual roles can be defined through black women's mobility. From her arrival, Sappho brings out the possibilities for performing alternate sexual and gender roles. Sappho's wages as a typist afford her little luxury or security, but her beauty forecasts a change in her fortunes: Sappho is introduced to readers as a mysterious

¹⁹⁵ The Montfort's house is described on p. 43 and then again on 47, the Lewis's on 387. Although I'm using the collective possessive form of Dora's married name, it is clear in the novel that Lewis alone has the house built for her, bringing her into a pre-formed role in the house and the marriage.

¹⁹⁶ Although, at the time, she is known as Mabelle Beaubean

stranger, a lodger who is “too beautiful for (a) dreary back room.”¹⁹⁷ The stranger’s beauty overrides Dora and her mother’s financial concerns with renting the upstairs rooms to those willing to pay more. Siobhan Somerville suggests that Sappho’s mobility – her ability to pass across the color line, although she chooses not to – adds an erotic edge to her presence in the novel.¹⁹⁸ She adds to the erotics of the boarding house from the beginning, coded in her restructuring of the division of bedrooms. As a quadroon, Sappho also represents movement between the races and the regions.¹⁹⁹ Sappho’s name cites the 17th century Greek poet who, at the time of Hopkins’s writing, was constructed as an allegorical figure for the threat of women’s sexuality and artistic power.²⁰⁰ In *Contending Forces*, Sappho’s eroticism also moves between hetero and homosexual categories; both Dora and her brother Will immediately fall for “the beautiful girl” who “seemed to fill a long-felt want in (Dora’s) life.”²⁰¹

I agree with Somerville that Sappho’s mobility is tied to her attractiveness for both Will and Dora, and I would add that Hopkins’s representation of Sappho’s mobility is also tied to larger conversations about regional space. Sappho disturbs the heterosexual functions of the home by introducing geographic as well as racial uncertainty. Hopkins makes this clear by first emphasizing that Will and Dora’s attraction to Sappho takes

¹⁹⁷ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 81.

¹⁹⁸ Somerville, Siobhan B. *Queering the Color Line : Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. Series Q. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2000, 84-87.

¹⁹⁹ For more on the connection between mulatto figures and mobility see Hazel Carby’s introduction to Iola Leroy. The other boarders remark that Sappho could only have been grown in N.O.

²⁰⁰ Gunning, *Red Record*, 100-101.

²⁰¹ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 98.

place in terms of the way Sappho's presence changes their domestic space. From that point, *Contending Forces* is fueled with the mystery of Sappho's origin. The combination of respectable exterior and dark past comes out in how Sappho decorates her room.

Proving the wisdom of Dora's decision to give her the best room through her domestic talents, decorating her room with such class that "the first time Dora entered the room after Sappho had settled herself in it, she was struck by the alteration in its appearance" and exclaimed, "How pretty you have made it." Sappho and Dora then stood beside one another and "smiled at each other in a glow of mutual interest, and became fast friends at once."²⁰² Their first mutual glow and their first conversation takes place in relation to domestic labor – the work of making a lodging into a home. Dora expresses curiosity about how Sappho embroidered the curtains and improvised a couch by covering two packing-cases and a spring with denim and cushions. Sappho promises to teach Dora these domestic skills but does not reveal their origin. Thus, Dora and Sappho express interest in and affection towards each other through their mutual interest in and affection for Sappho's bedroom. This introduction to their relationship foreshadows the way that domestic space will shape their intimacy.

Isolated due to a typical northeastern snowstorm, Dora and Sappho retreat to Sappho's room to "play 'company.'"²⁰³ While describing this play, Hopkins also relates the women's mutual teasing, admiring gazes at each other, and Dora's reservations about her upcoming marriage; all connected and all contained in Sappho's room. Hopkins also

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid., 117.

emphasizes the details of Sappho's room in this scene – the closed window curtains, the little stove that “gave out a delicious warmth,” the cushions that Sappho lays back among, the scarlet afghan wrapped around Dora's knees. These domestic details are entwined with their growing connection to each other and give both the relationship and Sappho's room aspects of fantasy and intense femininity. Somerville contends that “in this private, safe, and domestic space, the tea party enacts a displacement of Dora's and Sappho's desire, sexual satisfaction, and veiled sexual aggression.”²⁰⁴ The domestic setting of the women's homoerotic attachment also references the broader northern geographic context outside the house. It is partly Sappho's not fitting into Dora's existing surroundings that enables Dora's confession of worries about marriage and about being “unsexed.” Since Sappho is a figure of sexual mobility, it is significant that Dora's concerns with marriage have to do with its permanence, the intransigence of having one man “on (her) hands for good and all.”²⁰⁵ The impermanence of the boarding house, the experience of new people and the variety of interactions and relationships that are possible suits Dora more than marriage to John, who, once married, will never leave.

Dora's comfort with transience is fostered by the boarding house, which is a domestic space where, as Deborah Bernardi points out, “members constantly arrive and depart.”²⁰⁶ Hopkins represents Sappho's bedroom as a particular space within the

²⁰⁴ Somerville continues, “In this private, safe, and domestic space, the tea party enacts a displacement of Dora's and Sappho's desire, sexual satisfaction, and veiled sexual aggression” (90).

²⁰⁵ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 121.

²⁰⁶ Bernardi, “Narratives of Domestic Imperialism: The African-American Home in the Colored American Magazine and the Novels of Pauline Hopkins, 1900-1903,” 215.

boarding house that mirrors its transience. Sappho's couch of two packing cases and a spring, covered by denim and cushions reflects the improvisational and impermanent nature of the room. She tries to make herself at home in the Smith family by drawing attention away from her packing crates, the symbols of her migration and her past. Sappho's unsettled economic and social position, represented by her bedroom at the boarding house, also facilitates Will Smith and Sappho's courtship.

Similar to Dora and Sappho's intimacy, Will's access to Sappho's interiority is represented by his special relationship to her room. In the scene which first explicitly introduces their burgeoning romantic relationship, Sappho walks in on Will while he is performing his duties to the house by tending to her fire. Will is dressed in "one of his mother's ample kitchen aprons," with "the long strings, crossed in the back, (meeting) in front in a huge bow-knot,"²⁰⁷ a sight which disarms Sappho's objections to having him in her bedroom. Although Will is, in a way, transgressing upon Sappho's space, Hopkins also emphasizes Sappho's "pleasure," "comfort," and "relief" at "finding the machinery of the home running smoothly without her aid"; Sappho trades off full and complete ownership of the room for relief from full and complete maintenance of the room. Will's attire suggests that he is compliant with the feminine space of the bedroom and willing to perform feminine tasks and gender in order to get closer to Sappho.

Hopkins introduces the scene by pointing out that "Propinquity is responsible for many matches." Will and Sappho's "propinquity" is in terms of place in this scene, but also in terms of relation and kinship, a relation that they are just discovering and defining,

²⁰⁷ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 172.

one that still has room to be constituted outside assumptions of heterosexual gender. Will meets Sappho's opposition to his service by suggesting a number of kinship relations they could have: "imagine that you're my mother," "Play I'm your father, "play you are my other sister."²⁰⁸ Will's teasing points to the novel's central concern with defining familial relationships through domestic space; in this case, Will and Sappho's physical closeness leaves room for them to play with gender in relationships. Again, it is the setting of the boarding house in the north that facilitates this play. This association between Will and Sappho's courtship and the north gets even stronger, and more curious, as they progress.

The couple first declares their love in "the fairy grotto," a fair booth set up by Ms. Ophelia Davis, one of Ma Smith's other boarders. Ms. Davis is competing with other church women in a contest to see whose booth can draw the most money from fair-goers, with the proceeds to benefit the church. To make her fair booth, the fairy grotto, more decorous and pleasing, Ms. Davis recreates a scene from the wedding of the daughter in her first and only domestic employment in the North. Ms. Davis's story ("which had become a legend") provides comic relief and a hint of subversion, as she remembers sitting in the family pew up front with her employers. The fair chapters are more comedic in general, as factions of church women gossip about each other's domestic skills in the tea booth, the needlework booth and the fancywork booth. Ms. Davis's "fairy grotto" – where oysters, ice cream and salad are served – draws out Will and Sappho's romantic confessions in humorous tones.

The humor of this idyllic scene is undercut by the racial hierarchies that carry

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 173.

over from the south. Not only does Ms. Davis model her grotto after the wedding of her white mistress, Miss Mason, she also appeals to Miss Mason's largess and draws a \$150 donation. Hopkins makes it clear that this contribution comes from a distinctly southern relationship between blacks and whites. Mrs. Davis explains that "Mis' Mason's a lady borned; she don't know how to be like some o' yer Northern people" Sho! These ladies up here are so 'fraid thet the black'll rub off. ... Up here it's diffurunt; you can do all right and live all right, but don't put yer han' on a white man or woman, or they'll have a fit fer fear the black'll rub off."²⁰⁹ Even in northern black communities, southern inflected ideas about race and gender are economically and culturally privileged.

By highlighting the tension between northern and southern ideals of home, as well as their mutual dependence, Hopkins further challenges the notion that a unified national ideal exists upon which to hold together the nation as home. The narrative of the nation as a family, as Cooper puts it, "the aggregate of its homes," served as an even more important narrative around the time of the civil war, when romantic heroes often represented the northern modernizing influence, and southern heroines the seductive if slightly barbarous culture of the south. The marriage of these figures allegorized national reunion, as regional strife gave way to binding love, and the U.S. as well as the couple was blessed by God in the triumphant wedding ceremony. The similarity between north and south in *Contending Forces* undermines this structure of a national narrative, pointing out the role of domestic space in upholding or subverting hetero-gender roles.

The Marriage Plot and the Migration Narrative

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 192.

I find it useful to think of *Contending Forces* in terms of the migration narrative because of its thematic interest in regional space, mobility and searching for home. Although migration narratives do represent that migration was partially driven by family bonds and hope for heterosexual homes, there is also room within the genre for representations of black women's sexual mobility – and not only in heterosexual terms. Farah Jasmine Griffin famously defines the migration narrative through four main stages/plot points: leaving the south, the initial confrontation with cities, navigating northern urban space, and finally, for some, return migration to the south or expatriation. In *Contending Forces*, these stages are represented by different generations of the Smith and Montfort families.²¹⁰ Dora's father, Henry Smith, arrives in Massachusetts from Virginia and is transformed by “the draughts of salt air,” which imbued him with “an unwavering desire for all the blessings of liberty, and strong notions that a man must depend upon himself in great measure and carve out his own fortune to the best of his ability.”²¹¹ (82). Will does not seek an autonomous American masculinity like Henry Smith or Dr. Lewis;²¹² rather, he seeks an “environment abroad,” “there across the water”

²¹⁰ Ma Smith's boarding house also connects with the Montfort migration narrative (narratives of the previous generation in general) through Sappho's entrance (who has a somewhat similar history to Grace/Lucy. Griffin writes that these spaces of “South in the city” are made up of “those remnants of the South” retained in migrants “spaces, rituals, and belief systems” (Griffin, F. J. (1995). “Who set you flowin’?” : the African-American migration narrative. New York, Oxford University Press, 52). Like the blues, home is a key space where sets of rituals, including housework, establish a location for the transference of belief systems. Belief systems about gender and sexuality.

²¹¹Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 82.

²¹² A character who, as Hazel Carby points out, represents the Booker T. Washington position on racial progress (with its marked nationalism, conservatism and at times chauvinism).

(where) “the Negro shall give physical utterance to all the splendid possibilities which are within him.”²¹³

Unfortunately, just like Grace and Charles Montfort, Will and Sappho may not find such an environment across the water. This is a particularly inconclusive ending due to Hopkins’s representations of Sappho’s searches for home and love as equally important. For example, when deciding whether her past “sins” disqualify her for marriage, Sappho exclaims; “I cannot! It must not be! So good, so noble! Oh, the happiness of home and love! Must I be shut from them forever?”²¹⁴ Although *Contending Forces*’s ending does suggest that Sappho has found love, there is something unsettling, and possibly productively unsettling, about the book ending on a ship and not with her actually finding a home.

In this way, *Contending Forces* can be read as a precursor to later 20th century migration narratives, wherein Jasmine-Griffin shows that, “For the most part, female protagonists attempt to create ‘home’ in hope of providing a space where dreams are possible,” as opposed to male migrants who “seek instead to carve out some degree of manhood in a male-defined street culture and its accompanying spaces.”²¹⁵ This gender division in the work of navigating northern space is aptly represented by Henry and Ma Smith. Henry Smith is among the first generation to navigate urban space in the north, and although his role in the novel and his narrative are short, they emphasize the gendering of domestic space in relation to national space. According to the narrator,

²¹³ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 389.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

²¹⁵ Griffin, “Who Set You Flowin’?": *The African-American Migration Narrative*, 110.

“Henry Smith’s early manhood was spent upon the sea,” where he explored foreign ports and countries. Compared to this sense of freedom, trying to establish a home in America “began the struggle of their lives,”²¹⁶ even after the couple escapes the impossibility of home in the south by migrating to Boston.

Henry’s struggles to find work that can support their mortgage and Ma Smith’s struggles to maintain this mortgage through taking in boarders after Henry’s death illustrate the ways that domestic space was linked to inclusion in the nation. In the standard “American” dream, Henry’s desire for “a clean, self-respecting citizenship for himself” should have been realized with his first payment on the Smith’s house. But this narrative does not apply to Henry Smith on the level of individual home or of citizenship in the broader “home” of the nation.

The marriage plot is an ideal form for the nation. Dora’s marriage and return migration are possible fourth phases of *Contending Forces*’s migration narrative; in contrast, Sappho’s marriage is another possible ending to Henry’s journey – expatriation. Through Sappho and Will’s marriage, Hopkins suggests that some freedom to reinvent norms can be gained by seeking home outside of national space. Lois Lamphere Brown reads Will and Sappho’s marriage as proof that “they are a unit that can be successfully, and perhaps rightfully, separated from the American violence that has plagued her family and the Smiths’ eighteenth-century ancestors.”²¹⁷ Will and Sappho’s marriage, especially opposed to Dora and Dr. Lewis’s, signifies a type of separation from the nationally bound

²¹⁶ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 83.

²¹⁷ Lamphere Brown, “To Allow No Tragic End: Defensive Postures in Pauline Hopkins’s *Contending Forces*,” 67.

narratives that end in violence for the earlier generations in *Contending Forces*.

While many scholars have read Sappho and Will as representing Du Bois's position on education and racial improvement,²¹⁸ few have noted Hopkins's ironic commentary on Du Bois's focus on black male education. Hopkins shows the problematic gender arrangements within Will's Du Boisian rejection of the boundaries of nations and colonies by excerpting Alfred Lord Tennyson's *The Princess: A Medley* as *Contending Forces*'s last lines. *The Princess* is an extended parody of female education, and the particular section that Hopkins cites represents a turning point where the heroine gives up the pursuit of her own education to marry and serve the hero. In turn, he promises her that "we will walk this world/ Yoked in all exercise of noble end."²¹⁹ The excerpted lines provide, within the context of the novel, a final commentary on the marriage plot's inevitably limiting conclusions for women. The princess surrenders her feminist ideals – women's education, equality between the sexes – and agrees to marry the speaker; joining him in bringing comfort to hearts abroad "cloaked in despair."

Tennyson's hero resembles Will in that he has learned about strong women from his mother, remains uprooted and homeless, and joins in the missionary tradition of modeling heterosexuality to teach "the natives" about "civilization."²²⁰ The lines that

²¹⁸ See Yarborough, "Introduction."

²¹⁹ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 402.

²²⁰ Tennyson, *The Princess* part 7. Hopkins begins most of *Contending Forces*'s chapters with epigraphs from dead white men, a not uncommon practice at the time. But this is the only time she uses a quote to conclude a chapter, and it seems particularly significant as the closing quote for the whole novel. Hopkins ends Winona with a quote from "Aunt Vinnie," who "invariably ended the tale (of Winona's strange fortunes) with a short sermon on the fate of her race" (436). In this case, her sermon predicts deliverance. Hopkins's choice to give the last word to Aunt Vinnie rather than to God (as in *Of One Blood*) or Tennyson reflects the

Hopkins leaves out of this closing quotation – “Indeed I love thee: come,/ Yield thyself up: my hopes and thine are one:/ Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself;” – are as telling as those she includes. Hopkins strips away the language of servitude within the poem but does not disguise the fact that Sappho is, in many ways, yielding herself –her private space and her individuality – to Will’s dreams of traveling the world. Sappho’s surrender accomplishes Will’s manhood, but it does not, as DuCille argues, lay claim to America by embracing the national ideal of patriarchal marriage as the grounds upon which to claim black masculinity.²²¹ In fact, Sappho’s marriage returns her to the homelessness that she hoped to shed in leaving her past behind her and migrating north. At the end of her migration, Sappho gains two of three qualifications for true womanhood: husband and child, but the third, home, remains elusive.

Although Will and Sappho’s marriage fits into a bourgeois narrative of racial progress, as they will “work together to bring joy to hearts crushed by despair,” the ends of this progress are unclear. Will and Sappho have no explicit final destination, setting off to “walk this world...through those dark gates across the wild that no man knows.”²²²

They end the novel on the deck of a ship bound for Europe:

United by love, chastened by sorrow and self-sacrifice, he and she planned to work together to bring joy to hearts crushed by despair. They stood upon the deck that night long after the others had retired to their staterooms, watching the receding shores with hearts filled with emotion too deep for words. (402)

This scene on the deck returns to and revises *Contending Forces*’s other prominent deck

audience for her serialized novels. It may also reflect Hopkins’s changing ideas about the role of writing/historical narratives in racial politics.

²²¹ DuCille, *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women’s Fiction*, 50.

²²² Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 402.

scene, when Grace and Charles Montfort leave Bermuda for America. They too “look through blinding tears at the receding shores of what had been a happy home.” Like Sappho and Will, Charles and Grace Montfort form a family in relation to their ship (“the island princess”) as a mobile space. Both generations of the Montfort-Smith family seem to anticipate Du Bois’s focus in his later novel, *Darkwater: Life Behind the Veil*, on “transient tenants,” using these characters to “uproot the organic meaning of home... exposing its foundation in unequal economic exchange.”²²³

The image of Grace hanging onto her husband’s arm, trusting him to make their home in a new land, represents the unequal economic exchanges of the slave trade, which Montfort leaves Bermuda to continue profiting through. The image also represents the unequal exchanges within the marriage itself, where Grace vows to be happy wherever as long as she is with Charles. “Beside the devoted couple” on deck, standing over their children, stands “Charles Jr., named for his father, and Jesse, the young darling of his mother’s heart.”²²⁴ Grace and Charles Montforts’ children represent not just hope for the Montfort family but also for future generations to express proper gender roles of the nation, with one child set to carry on his father’s name and the other to carry on his mother’s idealized feminine virtues of goodness, beauty and likeability. Sappho and Will continue Charles and Grace Montforts’ journey; both journeys express optimism about new homes and the reassertion of traditional gender roles in the face of migration’s disturbances. In Hopkins's next novel, *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest*, her characters' migration takes a different route. Using the tropes of western

²²³ Du Bois, *Dark Water: Voices from Within the Veil*, 187.

²²⁴ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 31.

novels, Hopkins imagines settings for homosocial intimacy that goes beyond what she represents in *Contending Forces*.

Winona: Home and Homosociality

Winona is set in antebellum Kansas and Missouri, and is also Hopkins's only novel set entirely before Reconstruction. This historical setting changes the stakes of her representations of domestic spaces, as the novel critically re-imagines a moment when the meanings of home and nation were violently in flux. In a story about what could have been the birth of a (better) nation, Hopkins highlights similarities in sexual violence used to police concepts of home in her contemporary society. In the post civil-war period, as in the first decade of the 20th century, lynch mobs aimed to protect white supremacy by violating black bodies. Reproduction of successive generations of racist misogynists was precisely the agenda of the lynch mob; whereas, in the late 19th century, representations of this reproduction were increasingly depoliticized through the marriage plot and cleansed of explicit association with sex or race.²²⁵

In the first decades of the twentieth century, an idealized image of marriage as the foundation of nation and civilization was promoted as the key to American futurity.²²⁶

The marriage plot achieved a kind of transcendent, ahistorical status through its constant

²²⁵ For more on eugenic discourses of "civilization" and the perils of white racial degeneration, see Bederman, G. (1995). Manliness & civilization : a cultural history of gender and race in the United States, 1880-1917. Chicago, University of Chicago Press. For more on Hopkins's use of history, see Patterson, A. H. (2008). Race, American literature and transnational modernisms. Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press. 445.

²²⁶ Carter, J. B. (2007). The heart of whiteness : normal sexuality and race in America, 1880-1940. Durham, Duke University Press. 88.

repetition, association with whiteness and middle class values.²²⁷ Even within western novels, the genre of nostalgic anti-domesticity, the marriage plot was gaining ground and taking over the frontier such that uncivilized homosociality (the standard bearer of such novels) had to be set in the past to escape the marriage plot. In *Winona*, Hopkins further struggles with the expectations of the marriage plot. The novel is set outside the constraints of the marriage plot and its effective recoding of racism and sexism into stories about the “universal” search for proper home and family.

The novel opens on an idyllic island, similar to *Contending Forces*'s Bermuda in that mixed race families are unremarkable and slavery does not “reach the depths” of brutality that it does in America. Winona’s father, White Eagle, builds a home on the island in order to escape an unjust murder conviction in England. After fleeing England, White Eagle (née Captain George) crosses onto Canadian soil to marry Winona’s mother, a former slave dragging along “a black mite of humanity” that lost his mother on the way north. The family is composed of a British man “playing Indian,” the adopted black boy and his mother. After Winona’s mother dies during childbirth, White Eagle brings Nokomis, “a half-breed Indian Sqaw” into the family, mostly, Hopkins implies, to clean their house and perform childcare. As many critics have noted, this family structure points to the fluidity of race in communities where Indians, newly freed or escaped

²²⁷ Middle class in this period became a universalizing category, see Berlant, L. G. (1997). "The queen of America goes to Washington city : essays on sex and citizenship." *Series Q*.

, Rooks, N. M. (2004). *Ladies' pages : African American women's magazines and the culture that made them*. New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press.

, Berlant, L. G. (2008). *The female complaint : the unfinished business of sentimentality in American culture*. Durham, Duke University Press.

slaves, and whites intermarried.

However, critics have missed Hopkins's dynamic use of the island and the west as spaces that facilitate such families. This fluidity in some sense echoes race relations in western settlements, where "the railroad (had recently) revolutionized the demography (of the west) . . . In part as a result of the new technology, blacks and European immigrants searching for a better life and Mexican and Chinese laborers responded to the high wages of the West . . . in unprecedented numbers and reach the farthest corners of the region."²²⁸ These immigrant and migrant groups brought divergent systems of family and society; organized through gender and realized in newly made domestic spaces.

However, few critics have touched upon Hopkins's representations of these fluid racial categories in terms of the island home that constitutes them. Like Sappho's bedroom in *Contending Forces*, this island and the later setting of the romance in the west set the terms of the novel's engagement with history, sexuality, and genre. Also like Sappho's bedroom, the island and the novel's continued setting in the shifting and transient space of its titular "west and southwest" undermine ideas of home based on nationalist ideals.

To introduce readers to White Eagle's "little cottage" on the island, Hopkins uses the perspective of Warren Maxwell, a white British solicitor who is trying to track down Captain George to reunite him and his father, Lord George. In his old age, Lord George feels the need to pass on the family land and homestead, and he employs his British law firm to "search for them." Maxwell does not realize that Winona is Lord George's heir because of her father's name change. With Winona's future hanging on this secret of

²²⁸ Cronon, Miles, and Gitlin, *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, 113.

identity, Hopkins introduces us to White Eagle's home as an expression of the "primitive" family. Thus Maxwell is free to fall in love with the girl safe from accusations of monetary interest. Maxwell's point of view provides an entranceway into the otherwise unfamiliar setting of the island, and Hopkins emphasizes the extraordinary circumstances of the encounter between the British gentleman and a "native" home by marking his astonishment: "The picture remained with Warren Maxwell always."²²⁹ The domestic and familial details of Winona's life before her adventures begin to prepare readers for the novel's story about finding family and home outside the standard marriage plot.

Maxwell remarks on the bareness of the room, its "unplastered floor and walls of rough boards; the rude fireplace filled with logs; the feeble glow of the 'grease lamp'; the rude chairs and tables," and, in particular, the bed of skins" where "The old squaw (Nokomis) was rocking to and fro and moaning."²³⁰ Hopkins's representation of White Eagle's home as "rude," at the time associated with uncivilized races, is one example of how domestic space was historically read as a marker of places along a hierarchy of racial development. Hopkins also invokes the figure of "the squaw," Nokomis, to personify the island as an extension of White Eagle's home. Carol Douglass explains that "for centuries, Native women served Anglo-America as an incomparable symbol of *terrae incognitae*," land left to the irrational forces of nature instead of being cultivated and productive.

The contrast between Nokomis and civilization is introduced when, in response to

²²⁹ Hopkins, *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, 305.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

White Eagle's death, Nokomis rocks on shins on the floor and Winona faints. Hopkins uses Nokomis's "uncivilized" behavior to represent the state of disarray of native homes as domestic spaces and of the extrapolated lack of civilization on Native land – joining figures like Booker T. Washington who claimed that his Hampton Institute would bring civilization to the south. Washington was, in turn, an exemplary graduate of the Hampton Indian Program, established in 1877 to "uplift the Negro from his state of degradation; civilize the savage and teach him how to work."²³¹

The Hampton Program intended to teach both races to dress, speak, work, and behave as whites. To diffuse Native and Black anger against a system that substituted industrial training for the civil and economic rights promised to both populations, white educators used a "divide and conquer" strategy, where blacks were taught to think of themselves as ideal educators of Native students. In turn, blacks were held up as examples of what Native students could become, once they were "civilized" by their education.²³² Frances Harper's 1892 novel, *Iola Leroy*, also shows the commonness of this trope. Iola Leroy's uncle explains to her that "the Indian belongs to an old race and looks gloomily back to the past, and the Negro belongs to a young race and looks hopefully towards the future."²³³ Iola Leroy, both couples in *Contending Forces*, and the brother-sister pair of Winona and Judah look toward the future by moving into new

²³¹Lindsey, Donal. *Indians at Hampton Institute, 1877-1923*. University of Illinois Press, 1995, 9.

²³²This was a comparatively benign counter to other plans for Indian extermination; the ideology of "the only good Indian is a dead Indian" could be softened to "the only good Indian is assimilated." See Wilson, C. R. (1976), *Racial Reservations: Indians and Blacks in American Magazines, 1865-1900*. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 70-80.

²³³Washington, M. H. (1987). *Invented lives : narratives of black women, 1860-1960*. 1st., 97.

regions where they can spread “civilization” (read heterosexual gender roles).²³⁴ Both Harper and Hopkins temporally position Native Americans to contrast their “uplift” messages. In taking over these classically white roles as “the frontier couple,” Hopkins’s black characters enlist stereotypes about Indians to mark the black race as civilized.

Hopkins's strategic use of native houses and land in *Winona* resonates with common turn of the century deployments of Native Americans as the group “below” both blacks and whites, a group over which blacks and whites could bond in “saving” themselves from Natives' savagery. But Hopkins is more measured in her attitude toward interracial marriage, pointing out that “the question of marriage is one of three about which no man can speak with certainty; it defies all laws and bows only to the will of Infinity.”²³⁵ Through Winona’s fear of marrying Maxwell, whom she considers outside her race, Hopkins also suggests that the inability of the U.S. to bow to the will of Infinity, in terms of its violently enforced laws about interracial marriage and sexuality, weakens the nation’s claims to divine sanction. In *Contending Forces* and *Winona*, through the help of extra-national spaces including the island, marriages are allowed to evade state laws in favor of natural law. In England, Canada, and around the world, Hopkins predicts future generations of “the new genus Negro” that span tribes and nations.²³⁶ The characters must all eventually take off to England to establish interracial homes.

Although Hopkins also idealizes White Eagle, Judah and Winona’s closeness to nature,

²³⁴ On the other hand, Hopkins is less optimistic than Harper about uplift projects like Iola Leroy’s, as seen in her representations of Dora’s fate.

²³⁵ Hopkins, P. E. and I. Dworkin (2007). Daughter of the revolution : the major nonfiction works of Pauline E. Hopkins. New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press. The other two “questions” are birth and death – a nice trinity.

²³⁶ “Of one Blood have I made all nations of men”

their “rude” home makes it clear that Winona is not supposed to make her own home there.

Hopkins links the islands’ naturalist setting and White Eagle’s ability to make a home there to its position outside the U.S. On the island, “the free air of the land of the prairies was not polluted by the foul breath of slavery,” and thus “the free Negro was seen mingling with other settlers upon the streets, by their presence adding still more to the cosmopolitan character of the shifting panorama.”²³⁷ As Michael Johnson puts it, “In the middle of Lake Erie, White Eagle’s small island is an ideal space, belonging to neither Canada nor the United States, a place of harmony between individual and environment and between one racial group and another.”²³⁸ Positioned between America and Canada, the island falls outside domestic space in both senses of the word. This place of harmony is set in the past, using Indians’ alleged historical distance to imagine what could have been in America. But *Winona* also borrows from common tropes of Indians as closer to nature and therefore free from the racial codes of “civilized” homes in America. In her series on “The Dark Races of the Twentieth Century,” Hopkins positions “the Indian” in “the second stage of existence, that of barbarism,” justifying this categorization by explaining that “one would scarcely apply the word architecture to the rude homes of the aborigines.”²³⁹

Hopkins sets this outsider character, the “barbarism” of the island and its dwellings, in relation to ideas about “the west” as a frontier region: characterized by the appeal of lawlessness and whites’ ability to imagine their society as a civilizing force.

²³⁷ Hopkins, *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, 288.

²³⁸ Johnson, *Black Masculinity and the Frontier Myth in American Literature*, 119.

²³⁹ Hopkins, *Voice of the Negro*, 327.

White Eagle's "rude" home also evokes more specific formulas found in western novels. The scene "arouses" Maxwell "from his solitary life" and "in a strange land (he) become(s) an actor in a local tragedy."²⁴⁰ Like most narrators in westerns at the turn of the century, Maxwell has few opportunities in his contemporary society. Limited by his generational location as a youngest son, Maxwell follows in the footsteps of the unnamed narrator of the *Virginian*, "seeking adventure on a primitive frontier abroad." Maxwell's adventures include joining John Brown's army, being imprisoned by pro-slavery rangers in Kansas, and falling in love with Winona. These are not separate missions; Maxwell and Winona exchange their first kiss in a southern jail cell, and Winona functions throughout the novel as a means through which men express their regard for each other. As John Brown becomes a father figure for Winona, Hopkins points out that Maxwell connects to John Brown the patriarch through infantilizing regard for Winona as a "darling, irresistible child," whom he sees as "innocence personified" in the form of a "childwoman."²⁴¹ Maxwell and Winona's romance serves as a backdrop for these homosocial masculine relationships.

The major homosocial relationship in *Winona* is between Judah and Maxwell, as Judah gradually and reluctantly cedes to Maxwell his romantic interest in Winona. This exchange, or passing of Winona between the two men, is framed in terms of the island's natural landscape. Like the island, Winona's appeal is based on the "natural" beauty expressed by her freedom of movement between the races and even between genders. Men from all different racial and national backgrounds share a desire for Winona – drawn

²⁴⁰ Hopkins, *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, 307.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 404.

to her attractiveness as a representative of “nature.” Judah feels “a strange sense of pleasure stir his young heart as he involuntarily glance(s)” from “the delicate, gauzy Indian-pipes” to Winona’s “childish face.”²⁴² Hopkins further connects Judah’s desire for Winona with the native natural landscape by describing Winona’s complexion as olive, “with a hint of pink like that which suffused the fragile flowers before them.” Setting this scene against “the regular booming of Niagara’s stupendous flood,”²⁴³ Hopkins suggests that Judah’s very natural desire for Winona is an expression of the island landscape defined by flowing borders between countries and idyllic natural landscapes.

The main distinction between the homosocial spaces in *Contending Forces* and those in *Winona* is gender. Whereas Sappho and Dora bond through housework, coming together to serve Will and the boarding house, Maxwell and Judah bond through what amounts to anti-housework, coming together to serve Winona by destroying houses built on racist violation – whether these are specific homes such as Colonel Titus’s or the figurative home of the nation.

In *Winona*, Hopkins idealizes the homosocial space of the camps – where both men and women can “be men” together, released from codes of gender by the severity of their battles and their commitment to the abolitionist cause. Winona, Judah and Maxwell join “the Brown camp” where “the great family of fugitives dwelt together in guileless and trusting brotherhood,” and where “one soul of harmony and love was infused into each individual dweller.”²⁴⁴ Hopkins’s representation of this “great family” points out that they are *necessarily* fugitives in a country where a natural existence “without racial

²⁴² Ibid., 291.

²⁴³ Ibid., 292.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 391.

or social barriers” is illegal.²⁴⁵ However, Hopkins also makes it clear that nature – both human nature and the frontier landscape – are on the fugitives’ side. After Winona, Judah and Maxwell leave the islands, they continue to find comfort in nature. Across the border from the cultivation of cotton in Missouri, the unconstrained woods in Kansas “calmed (Winona), their grays and greens and interlacing density of stems,”²⁴⁶ reminding her of her upbringing on the island.

In the camp, Winona reverts to her childlike relationship to the land and to patriarchal authority. Brown shows his affection for Winona by calling her “the pretty squaw.”²⁴⁷ In both cases, hierarchies of gender are re-established through a model based in the western form. This model dictates that the heroine proves herself by the masculine code of the west, in Winona’s case by taking up arms to “guard the home front,” but eventually accepts masculine superiority.²⁴⁸

Hopkins emphasizes that this “great family” is led by its patriarch, John Brown. This family belongs outside the nation, particularly the “unwashed democracy of Missouri.” It is also a model for truly democratic nation building. As Colleen O’Brien shows, Hopkins understood John Brown as an international hero, connected with Toussaint L’Ouverture, rather than solely as a figure in U.S. racial struggles.²⁴⁹ The model of home, therefore, in Hopkins’s representations of Brown’s camps, is a call for

²⁴⁵ For more on the theme of nature in *Winona*, see Johnson, M. K. (2002). Black masculinity and the frontier myth in American literature. Norman, Okla., University of Oklahoma Press.

²⁴⁶ Hopkins, *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, 376.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 375.

²⁴⁸ For more on Winona’s fit within this model, see *ibid.*

²⁴⁹ O’Brien, C. C. (2009). ““Blacks in all Quarters of the Globe”: Anti-Imperialism, Insurgent Cosmopolitanism, and International Labor in Pauline Hopkins’s Literary Journalism.” American Quarterly 61(2): 245-270.

families that span nations, connected by ideological rather than geographic contiguity. The Brown model of family, organized without regard for social or racial barriers, is focused on “elevating” black men to standards of masculinity that depend more on homosocial exchanges of women than heterosexual romance.

It is in Brown’s camp that Judah “receive(s) his first lessons in the true principles of home-building and the responsibility of freedom.”²⁵⁰ Judah learns the true principles of equality and patriarchy in this family, both necessary for his later marriage to a British heiress. Both Judah and Winona end up moving, via Maxwell, to England and settling down as pseudo-aristocracy. Although we don’t see their lives in England, or perhaps even because of this ignorance, we are uncertain about how these endings work out, especially for Winona. After all, from the beginning of the novel, Winona has a certain frontier spirit fostered by growing up in “the perfect freedom of nature’s woods and streams.”²⁵¹ Maxwell wants to marry Winona as a symbol of freedom and defiance of racial/national restrictions, but once they are married he will also want to domesticate her into British or American understandings of gender. Because Winona is both a mixed race woman and an indigenous “princess” who “needs” cultivation into British or American society, Maxwell and Judah’s desires for Winona represent a “just” desire to civilize her through marriage. Maxwell and Judah’s contest over Winona also casts her as the grounds for struggle over which model of masculinity – British or American – will move humanity towards racial integration.

The two men’s relationship with each other is also a space of integration, made

²⁵⁰ Hopkins, *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, 374.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 320.

possible by the temporary suspension of heterosexual partners as the primary couple in typical marriage plots.²⁵² From their first meeting, Maxwell is impressed by Judah because, despite the rough waters of a stormy night, Judah steers a canoe “boldly for the little island without a sign of fear” to bring Maxwell to try and save White Eagle’s life.²⁵³ Maxwell himself “loved aquatic sports and his blood tingled with the excitement of the battle with the storm... he did not shrink from death by drowning were it in a good cause.”²⁵⁴ Hopkins draws on conventions of the frontier romance²⁵⁵ here, representing two men willing to die together on the water rather than fail to come to Winona’s aid.

If we think of Maxwell as the “civilizing” influence in this frontier romance, Judah is the reformable “cowboy” who stays a bit “wild,” hanging onto the strength developed in a western landscape. This landscape is contrasted to the middle section of the novel, when Judah and Winona are kidnapped and sold into slavery; Hopkins highlights the sexual violence at the heart of southern homes as built into these structures.

²⁵² This is an exception to the rule made possible by Indians as a third term that undermines simple black/white binaries. Traditional theories of homosociality have relied on the assumption of racial homogeneity. Marlon Ross coins the term “homoracial” to emphasize black men’s necessary exclusion from male homosocial relations Ross, M. B. (2004). Manning the race : reforming Black men in the Jim Crow era. New York, New York University Press. The cementing of these relations through the exchange of women cannot work in mixed race groups at a time where more laws prohibited interracial marriage than prohibited interracial sex.

²⁵³ (White Eagle has been murdered by Southern rangers who want to kidnap Judah and Winona and sell them into slavery).

²⁵⁴ Hopkins, *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, 304.

²⁵⁵ The frontier romance takes place on the border between civilization/domestication and savagery. Typically, the frontier couple is a more “eastern” white woman, who provides a civilizing influence on the anti-domestic cowboy, while the cowboy provides a model of a husband who hasn’t bought into the corrupting materialism and mores of society. For further discussion of the frontier romance, see Kaplan, A. (2005). The anarchy of empire in the making of U.S. culture. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 92-101.

Magnolia Farms is the ultimate expression of the Southern home, complete with the fiction of slaves as members of “the ‘family’ of the ‘big house.’” Even though Colonel Titus was born in England, Hopkins describes him as “one of the most bitter partisans on the side of slavery, contrary to the principles of most of his nationality.”²⁵⁶ Subverting Titus’s power, Maxwell goes south to investigate the institution of slavery and the whereabouts of Winona and Judah. Hopkins then stages an elaborate escape scene aboard a ship.

Maxwell is drawn into this plan by his respect (and desire) for Judah, who stridently disobeys the physical segregation of Magnolia farms to steal away from “the quarters” at night and climb into Maxwell’s bedroom window. Judah convinces Maxwell to help Winona escape the fate of a beautiful, light-skinned female slave using both the masculinity of his own body and the purity of Winona’s body as draws. “To emphasize his story,” Hopkins writes, “Judah stripped up his shirt and seizing the young white man’s hand pressed it gently over the scars and seams stamped upon his back.”²⁵⁷ As in this scene, Judah frequently appeals to Maxwell through the mutual lures of his own body and desire for Winona. This scene may be in line with “normal” desires given the disparity in age and position between Maxwell and Judah.²⁵⁸ However, Hopkins sets this interaction in Maxwell’s bed, emphasizing its place within the larger house and the southern landscape. As “the sweet scent of the magnolia envelop(s) them in its

²⁵⁶ Hopkins, *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, 316–317.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 334. Meanwhile pointing out that these scars are nothing compared to what’s in store for Winona as a beautiful female slave: “the torture of hell cannot surpass it” (335).

²⁵⁸ Chauncey, G. (1994). *Gay New York : gender, urban culture, and the makings of the gay male world, 1890-1940*. 120-121.

fragrance,” Maxwell “listen(s) to whispered words that harrowed up his very soul.”²⁵⁹

Thus Hopkins carves out a space of homosocial intimacy where men can bond over the horrors of the broader southern space.

In some sense, Maxwell and Judah’s conversation reflects abolitionist tropes that exploited the appeal of wounded black flesh, tropes not without an erotic edge. Like many abolitionist stories, Maxwell and Judah’s relationship is both a part of southern structures of homoerotic relationships, but also represents a departure from these structures. Hopkins shows how Maxwell and Judah are in but not fully of southern space partly through the scene’s setting in Maxwell’s bed. But also, partly, by routing the men’s connection through Judah’s “Indian training” that removed him from what Hopkins sees as American racial binaries that threaten black families and homes - those twin pillars of nationalist sentiment and romance narratives. While Judah tells (and physically illustrates) his story, a wave of admiration sweeps over Maxwell, who “thought (Judah) a superb man, and watched him, fascinated by his voice, his language, and his expressive gestures.”²⁶⁰ Echoing the ways that Maxwell’s initial appreciation of Judah was built on his “Indian” trained skill with canoes, it is Indian heritage that gives Judah such a fascinating voice, language and gestures. As Maxwell “affectionately” lays his arm on Judah’s shoulders, he physically corroborates his conclusion that Judah’s “life with White Eagle had planted refinement inbred,” making him a fellow man worthy of affection.

In Maxwell’s remarkable, and somewhat sexual, claim that being raised by a

²⁵⁹ Hopkins, *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, 334.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

white man playing Indian planted “inbred” refinement in Judah that will ultimately grow into “the innate nature of the Negro when given an opportunity equal with the white man,” Hopkins reveals one of *Winona*’s main arguments about race, place and gender. As Hopkins explicitly asserts in *Contending Forces*, “our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency.”²⁶¹ Judah’s nature is literally bred by his surroundings on Grace Island: having a chance to blossom because of the natural environment of the island – where complexion does not determine racial or national belonging. Similarly, we see Colonel Titus’s embrace of the “semi-barbarous” south through the image of his great pine trees, which shelter his piazza from the sun while he observes his slaves working in the fields.

Representations of southern households like Magnolia Farms in *Winona* and the Montforts’ estate in *Contending Forces* highlight, by comparison, the possibility of more flexible gender and sexual roles for black women who make homes in the north and the west. These homes are absolutely related to regional states, although they are also characterized by the flow of people in and out of them and of their surrounding regions. *Winona*’s emphasis on the homosociality of regional spaces sheds light on the homosociality in *Contending Forces*, and especially the ambivalence written into the heterosexual romances and marriages of its two heroines. We have seen how both Sappho and Dora’s marriages are shaped by their regional location, and how Hopkins emphasizes these regional spaces through representations of domestic space. The heroines’ future homes - Dora’s in the South and Sappho’s in an unspecified international space – give up

²⁶¹ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 282.

on the possibilities for homosocial connections modeled by Ma Smith's boarding house. Particularly in Dora's case, she gives up her access to the world of movement from city to city, neighborhood to neighborhood and class to class; in return, she is set within a geographic stability that represents proper norms of class, race and gender.

Winona inherits its focus on movement from tropes and themes made popular by Owen Wister's classic novel, *The Virginian* (1902). These tropes and themes include: alternative family structures, emphasis on landscape, particularly the use of landscapes to explain characters' genders, intense homoeroticism, and romantic portraits of American expansionism. *Winona* also inherits from westerns its focus on a regional space where marriage is always already troubled. In its standard form, the marriage plot resolved conflict and expressed the dream of white American dominance in terms of romantic and familial love. In westerns, the marriage plot usually takes a beating because of their setting: the west, which is associated with a lack of domesticity and femininity. Part of how westerns represent this trouble with marriage is by excluding traditional domestic space from their purview, as Hopkins does in *Winona*. *Winona* is set in the west and on islands and ships entirely, all of which are represented as nondomestic space where the marriage plot can gain little purchase.

Like Dora and Sappho, *Winona* gives up some freedom of gender associated with the west – as a region and a genre – for the presumed stability of a marriage abroad. But *Winona*'s sacrifice is secondary to Judah and Maxwell's, in terms of their lost homosociality that was based in the west. Claudia Tate points out that in her serialized novels, Hopkins "shifted her focus from the courtship story – or the romance formula – as

the expressive medium of the reformist imperative of idealized domesticity to the courtship story as a frame for other popular formulaic plots found in the classical mystery, the western, and the psychological ghost story, that were gaining popularity on the pulp market.” Tate argues that by framing popular pots with romance narratives, Hopkins “exaggerate(s) tensions found under the surface in her more canonical work.”²⁶² Although I find Tate’s model of genre analysis a bit too psychoanalytic, she does provide a useful way of connecting Hopkins’s work across various genres.²⁶³ As Hopkins's scholarship and our access to her writings have grown, her magazine novels have been read and discussed more as important in their own right, aside from connections between the serialized novels and *Contending Forces*.

In her afterword to *The Unruly Voice: Rediscovering Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*, Elizabeth Ammons argues that “although seldom discussed, *Winona: a tale of Negro life in the South and Southwest* is an excellent example (of Hopkins’s experimental form). The multi-vocality of the text is immediately obvious – and by no means totally under control. Generically the novel combines the Western, fugitive slave narrative, romance, potboiler soap opera, political novel, and traditional allegory to tell the story of the

²⁶² Tate, C. (1998). Psychoanalysis and Black novels : desire and the protocols of race. New York, Oxford University Press, 195-97.

²⁶³I agree with Tate's point that black authors should be allowed to have as complex inner lives and desires as white authors are routinely granted. But her exploration of those inner lives via psychoanalytic models leads to predictable focus on mother/son and father/daughter relationships, which can reduce the complexity and nuance of inner lives as much as it illuminates. The larger problem with psychoanalytic interpretation is shown in Tate's argument that “each of the novels in this book suffers from eruptions of desire that are external to racial and/or social narratives.” Rather than ground desire in racial and social narratives, Tate's readings isolate desire to familial terms and the one on one relationship between analyst and patient.

paradise possibility for real-life destruction of the truly mixed-race North American family.”²⁶⁴ For Ammons, the multi-vocality of *Winona* confirms theories of the novel as a form under the control of its many voices and entrance points.²⁶⁵ She concludes that Hopkins’s politics are ultimately co-opted by *Winona*’s “generic participation in the western,” by definition an imperialist form.

Of course, representations of imperial American heterosexuality were not limited to westerns. *Winona* merely exaggerates a feature of ideas about sexuality in many spheres, what Ammons calls “the imperial plot of valorizing white men” through patriarchal narratives, despite the fact that Hopkins promotes black men from understudy to headliner in this plot. As the headline hero in *Contending Forces*, Will reclaims Sappho as a possible heroine by accepting her impure past and proposing marriage. *Contending Forces* also employs imperial tropes in Sappho and Will’s future goal to travel “through those dark gates across the wild” in order to “bring joy to hearts crushed by despair.”²⁶⁶ But while Sappho and Will “work together” to save lost souls, modeling heterosexuality for “the natives” in other countries, Maxwell’s civilizing process is mostly a homosocial matter – teaching Judah the proper way to be a man.²⁶⁷ Maxwell’s

²⁶⁴ Gruesser, J. C. (1996). *The unruly voice : rediscovering Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*.

²⁶⁵ See Bakhtin, M.M. 1981. 'The Epic and the Novel: Towards a Methodology for the Study in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press).

²⁶⁶ Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, 401.

²⁶⁷ Tompkins, J. (1993). *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. This aspect of the western genre leads Tate to conclude that women’s political issues “have been abandoned entirely in *Winona* (“Foremother” 61). Reading from a queer angle, we can see the ways *Winona* looms large in her very invisibility, serving as a transparent beard for the novel’s homosocial desire.

role as a hero is to cross national and racial boundaries, where Will's role is to cross regional boundaries. Although they both end up modeling a kind of mobile heterosexuality, Maxwell is involved in the anti-nationalist generic requirements of the western from the beginning, while Will is involved in the more specifically anti-southern generic requirements of the migration narrative. Both novels' main relationships follow imperialist courses but in different historical and geographical contexts. In both novels, Hopkins uses several genres to point out each one's limitations.

Hopkins's use of multiple genres also emphasizes their overlapping thematic emphases on home. The western and the migration narrative feature the barriers to home for subjects outside the urban-based, middle class "normal" white family. While cowboys embrace their lack of stable, protected domestic space, it is also clear that they don't fit in to "modern" ideas about marriage, family and home. Marriage, as normatively represented at the turn of the century, guaranteed "normalcy," and thus state protection for families and property. Needless to say, the divine sanction and state protection that went with marriage were cast as a matter of romance, not as a matter of race: although marriage and romance as ideals were ultimately used to buttress and reproduce white supremacy. The migration narrative includes several stock scenes of black men being dragged from their home and lynched, emphasizing their inability to protect these homes against southern racism.

These outside genres also make it possible for Hopkins to challenge the marriage plot's stabilization and collapsing ideals of heterosexuality, family and home. Hopkins spends no time on Maxwell and Winona's marriage; the novel hardly even represents a

romance between the two characters – devoting far less space to the hero and heroine’s relationship than even some westerns, such as *The Virginian*. As Tate shows, “the closing marriage does not write itself into harmonious prosperity beyond the ending; the happy ending (to Winona) is conditional, ... emphasizing the failure of the U.S. civil sphere of Hopkins’s epoch to sustain the ideal ending.”²⁶⁸ *Winona* and *Contending Forces* show Hopkins’s waning belief in the U.S. civil sphere. Further, Hopkins challenges the marriage plot’s nationalist aspirations by shifting the ground of the nation under her couples’ feet. I argue that Hopkins uses representations of domestic space that correspond to regional locations to counteract the nationalist aspirations of the marriage plot.

In the next chapter, I explore the life and work of gay, black social worker, Glenn Carrington. Carrington was also very invested in Harlem and in international circuits of gay men, and rather uninterested in Nationalism. He provides an example of queer-space making practices that are unorganized into any genre or plot structure. But Carrington’s work within the social work field takes on some of the same questions that Hopkins considered, 40 years earlier: how to make space for queer subjects without sacrificing them to normative ideals. Where can the queer, racialized subject go? Where can they find home?

²⁶⁸ Tate, *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race*, 194–195.

Chapter 3. Deviant Spaces: Homosexuality and Race in the Glenn Carrington

Archives

On a stately, tree lined, brick street in Richmond, Virginia, a woman and three small children pose on the porch of a Late Victorian style family home.²⁶⁹ The mother, Fanny Carrington, leans proudly against a column,



Figure 8: Carrington Family Home, Virginia, c. 1911

while the three children cluster around her feet, protected by the solidity of the porch awning and the prominence of their mother. Slightly apart from Fanny and her children, who are all clad in white as a group, stands a man in a black suit, sitting on the porch railing and leaning against a separate column.²⁷⁰ While the Carrington family claims emerging middle class status through this picture of proper home life, the image also conveys the stakes for representations of housing and family. The main object of the photograph is the house, with the people serving as adornments, shot in partial profile from far across the street. The house conveys the classiness of Jackson Ward, a black up-

²⁶⁹<http://dig.library.vcu.edu/cdm/search/collection/jwh/searchterm/Leigh%20Street/field/areab/mode/all/conn/and/cosuppress/1>

²⁷⁰ "Carrington Home."

and-coming neighborhood at the heart of Richmond, which some called “The Black Wall Street.”²⁷¹

This particular portrait of a home is part of a genre that was popular in the early 20th century amongst the black professional class. WEB DuBois displayed similar portraits of African American-owned “modern” homes at the Paris Exposition in 1900, as well as in a series of articles in *The Southern Workman*.²⁷²

As Michele Mitchell amply documents, black calls for an end to slave cabin-like accommodations were implicated in broader movements that largely blamed black people for lack of sexual and gender conformity.²⁷³ By the time Glenn Carrington was photographed on the porch of his family home in Jackson Ward, around 1907,²⁷⁴ the broader movement represented by Du Bois’s photography was in full swing, advancing an argument for African American fitness for modern citizenship through representations of stable homes. Individual houses, like the Carrington’s, could stand in for racial groups just like Jackson Ward could stand in for “Wall Street” – surrounding local geography interacted with racial and sexual geography.

Just like Wall Street people intermingled with those who lived in Harlem, Jackson Ward was also sometimes called “the Harlem of the south,” because it hosted musicians like Duke Ellington, Lena Horne, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Cab Calloway.²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ a b “National Register Nomination”. Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Retrieved 11 June 2012. Center for History and New Media.

²⁷² Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction*, 160–165.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 38–45.

²⁷⁴ there is no date on the photograph, but we know that Glenn Carrington is the one male child in the group of three – the other two being his younger sisters – and his younger brother was born last in 1908.

²⁷⁵ National Parks Service, “Jackson Ward Historic District’: National Historic

Wall Street's connotations of buttoned-up shirts and profit-based morals, and Harlem's connotations of permissive sexual and racial culture, might seem like conflicting characterizations of the neighborhood. But the relative lack of prominent, up and coming, black neighborhoods around the country frequently consolidated cultural meanings in those few that were available.²⁷⁶ Growing up in Jackson Ward, Carrington was exposed to the overlapping cultural requirements of respectability and creativity. So when he arrived in Harlem and began to explore the scene – professionally and socially – Carrington was in some ways prepared to navigate the tension between the two spaces. Carrington's professional life developed and peaked during three historical periods: the 1920s with post WWI demilitarization and the Renaissance of Black Culture, the 1930s with the great depression and the New Deal, and the 1940s with WWII and the post-war emphasis on domestic modernity.

Historians characterize these periods in both gay and black life as times of mass migration and urbanization. In the 1920s, southern blacks moved to cities in the south and north, and gay communities were forming in cities despite migrants' varied definitions of "gay." Gay history dates the "national coming out movement" during WWII, and African Americans' contributions to the war are cited as one of the causes for the end of legal segregation. But the overlap of the two allegedly separate histories has been harder to draw out.

Glenn Carrington's life helps illustrate narratives about gay black communities beyond the Harlem Renaissance. His personal correspondence with gay men stationed

Landmark Summary Listing."

²⁷⁶ Jones,, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, And the Family From Slavery to the Present*, 187–194.

abroad but returning to Harlem, his collection of photographs of gay black subjects, his educational records from his training as a social worker, and his professional archives from his career as a probation and parole agent in New York State are useful sources that document black gay history from the 1920s-1940s.²⁷⁷ Carrington's archives also bring up new questions about more mainstream histories of these periods from the perspective of a gay black social worker who worked within both black and gay communities, as well as the academic communities who studied them. How might a black gay man process lectures about how to treat homosexuals and delinquent black youth? How much of his experience with homosexual relationships and attractions could he admit, even to himself, in classrooms where he was trained to prevent and cure deviance? Did he hope to be a living example of a well-adjusted homosexual for his clients and colleagues?

Carrington navigated at least three semi-distinct groups with their different normative ideals. In his professional life, including his educational training in his profession, Carrington was expected to model mainstream normativity and scientific objectivity. But he failed a priori at performing objectivity due to his racialized identity and ties to the object of study. In the gay social world he occupied, he was expected to be cultured and carefree, which he also failed insofar as he was a concerned professional, anxious about the health and status of black communities. In the black middle class Harlem community, he was expected to maintain and enforce respectability, which might

²⁷⁷ Carrington's educational records are kept at the Morland-Springarn Research Center at Howard University, including notes on classes he took at Howard University, correspondence with academic mentors, and records from collecting first edition Harlem Renaissance texts. Carrington's personal correspondence is mostly kept at the Schomburg Center for Black History and Culture, and contains a rich archive of the daily lives of gay men in the military, veterans' bureau, and later with young gay men caught up in the juvenile justice system from 1923-1967.

be the expectation he was most successful at meeting.

The inside cover of the catalogue of his collection at the Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University shows Carrington reaching for one amongst many of his books. He seems right at home in his jacket and tie, posing alone as a model of both librarian and patron. This image represents Carrington's life as a collector and



Figure 9: The Glenn Carrington Collection Dedication Pamphlet

appreciator of the arts, an archivist of black experience. While the titles on his bookshelf are untainted by homosexuality (e.g. *The Dark Ghetto*, and *Prominent Negroes*), collecting books and records was as much a part of Carrington's homosexuality as his relationships. He was encouraged early in this right by mentors like Locke, who collected and edited work by young black gay men. Carrington's half smile and upwards stare communicate optimism about the difference it makes to have a deep collection of black history and culture, and how powerful some of the original documents of the Harlem Renaissance can still be. Carrington's collection looks back to the Renaissance as a movement where black literature actively and self-consciously engaged in the formation of homosexual communities.

Except for the Renaissance, Carrington's archives are split into the respectable and the homosexual. His personal and more homosexual papers are collected at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black History and Culture, and his more professional

and race-focused papers are at the Morlang Springarn Research Center. The former represents Carrington as a social butterfly: hosting parties, putting together concerts, attending cabarets and working with communities. The latter represents Carrington as a scholarly protégé, and an institutional treasure and testament to Howard University's commitment to black achievement. This dispersal of his archives actually conceals his movement between the world of homosexual community building, professional social worker, and black cultural historian.

Looking closely at either collection shows hints of the other – a postcard from Carl Van Vechten amidst letters to Alain Locke, photographs with famous Harlem Renaissance authors in three-piece suits, surrounded by their female partners. Exploring both collections together shows the overlaps amongs social workers, sociology students, homosexual soldiers, and international homosexual exchanges. Too often, we follow normative historical formulas that separate black and homosexual subjects into diverging narratives. The two stories come together during the Harlem Renaissance, touch briefly in the 1950s around James Baldwin, and then collide in the 1980s around black feminist and gay mobilizations. Or else, as Sharon Holland demonstrates, after “gliding over signal events in the Americas such as transatlantic slavery or Indian removal as if these events bear no mark upon our sexual histories... the imagined place for the black body is (re)produced out of the thin air at the critical heights of queer theory.”²⁷⁸ These imagined places are predictably supported by queer readings of a set of canonical black texts from the 1970s and 80s, or the work of figures like Langston Hughes and James Baldwin.

Carrington's archives suggest that the everyday life of homosexual and black

²⁷⁸ Sharon Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism*, 11.

communities coincided, often intimately, and not always in resistance to normative sexuality. In our desires for black queer history, we need to reckon with Carrington's path, which resists attempts to re-establish a stable historical subject in either the gay or black community. As more of his papers become available for scholarly attention, we need to analyze how black gay subjects maneuvered through and shaped spaces of compliance and contestation. This chapter traces the paths that Carrington walked between policing and spreading of deviance. Carrington balanced on this path using coded language, reaching beyond geographical boundaries, humor, and selective scientific detachment. Exploring Carrington's work on the way racial and sexual communities formed during this period, alongside his non-professional life as a black gay man, opens up new questions about how "deviant" communities operated within systems of knowledge that tried to categorize and decrease "deviance."

Plans for Housing, Plans for Heterosexuality

Changes in architecture have long been understood as reflections of ideals for family and society.²⁷⁹ In particular, public housing plans and normative gender ideals are mutually reinforcing.²⁸⁰ As a student of sociology, anthropology and psychology at Howard University, Carrington found himself in a world that studied and analyzed minority identity and homosexuality. Coming into this world and into the growing black

²⁷⁹ Clark, "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840-1870." See also Rose, "Engendering the Slum: Photography in East London in the 1930s." For theoretical background, see Rendell.

²⁸⁰ Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974*.

professional class, Carrington was introduced to various methods of evaluating housing situations and sexual behavior. He served as a sort of inside-outsider within the social work community, with access to black and homosexual communities and also to the language of academic sociology and psychology.

One way of integrating these new languages with his homosexual tendencies was modeled by Alain Locke, Carrington's mentor at Howard. Early in his studies, Carrington developed a close friendship with Locke, a professor of philosophy and "godfather" of the Harlem Renaissance. Along with encouraging Carrington's interest in documenting black culture and communities, Locke might have also taught Carrington how to gain ground in the professional class by hiding his own sexuality. Locke's homosexuality, although unacknowledged by himself and his literary critical lineage until a recent biography,²⁸¹ was an important part of his draw as a mentor to many young black, homosexual scholars. Carrington was also influenced by activism on campus, including strikes at Howard against compulsory military training and faculty control of the student council. This student activism revealed a serious need for negotiation between those in power and those disempowered by traditional structures. Perhaps to meet this need, Carrington became interested in social work as a career and volunteered at the Children's Temporary Home School in Anacostia (Washington, D. C.).²⁸² Following an Urban League fellowship, Carrington enrolled in a masters program for social work at Columbia University. There he studied housing policy and minority identity formation, participated

²⁸¹ Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth, *Alain L. Locke: The Biography of a Philosopher*, University of Chicago Press (2009). Interestingly, the cover photo on this book was taken by Carrington.

²⁸² "Glenn Carrington Papers."

in the homosexual community in Harlem, advocated for tenants rights and continued to work with juvenile delinquents. In the 1950s, further into his career, Carrington worked with returning WWII veterans and as a parole officer for the New York State Department of Corrections.²⁸³

In his professional life, Carrington studied movements in housing design that aimed to create normal “family life” in impoverished and overcrowded communities, all the while not necessarily aspiring to normal “family life.” In his social work training in



Figure 10: Carrington's Diagram of Lower East Side Tenement

1923, Carrington went on a field trip to some East side tenement houses of “the new law type” to investigate how the structure of the house shaped its tenants' lives.²⁸⁴ His diagram of one such house shows an open-air court with four flights of stairs at each corner leading to the maximum number of stories. Carrington describes that “there were

three or four kids and an old man, prices average \$40 per month for four or five rooms.”²⁸⁵ He was interested in this type of housing design because it allowed for green space and gardens within the tenement itself, impacting the ways community could be formed in the building. Through these research trips, Carrington was witnessing “the Garden City idea” in housing policy, which encouraged small gardens to be planted near cities so that farmers could share the advantages of city life and city people did not have

²⁸³ “Inventory of the Glenn Carrington Papers, 1921-1971.”

²⁸⁴ Before this time, tenements were often built in “dumbbell” or “railroad” style, which had no green space, air circulation, few windows, and often caused sanitation problems.

²⁸⁵ Carrington, “Field Work Notes.”

far to go to find the field of country.²⁸⁶

As Alan Trachtenberg shows in his history of central park and surrounding ideas about the city, Olmstead and other champions of the garden city movement in housing development designed urban space for the purpose of incorporating immigrant groups and other lower class subjects into the “modern” ways of using space.²⁸⁷ The 1920s produced an enormous housing boom, especially in Harlem, which was opened up by the completion of the New York City subway system in 1917. The apartment that Carrington sketched is a good example of the early 20th century school of architecture which was more racially and economically diverse than the high-art tradition. The garden apartment was similar in structure to the palazzo type, bringing to the growing middle class in Harlem a form that historically upheld upper-class values.²⁸⁸ Another important reflection of the growing black middle class was the Tenement House Act of 1919, which allowed large single-family houses, like the famous brownstones in Brooklyn and Harlem, to be converted into apartments for rent.²⁸⁹

Carrington entered the ranks of social workers in the context of recovery from the WWI economy and a housing boom in Harlem. The recent proliferation of architects who were trained in modest professional schools rather than the Ivy League helped housing in New York City to undergo its highest percentage growth in its history or since,

²⁸⁶ Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City: Dwelling Type and Social Change in the American Metropolis*, 122–135.

²⁸⁷ Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*, 68–72.

²⁸⁸ Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City: Dwelling Type and Social Change in the American Metropolis*, 122.

²⁸⁹ Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*, 123.

particularly public housing projects and other state buildings. Plans for new tenement housing were not only about new building codes and new norms of socializing within and between families.²⁹⁰ They were also dedicated to the idea that successful houses produced successful families. The concept that the family with the basic unit of society was, as we have seen, not at all new; but the housing boom, particularly in Harlem and in other African-American urban areas, materially illustrated this concept, as buildings were designed for the raising of communities.²⁹¹



Figure 11 Harold Lloyd's most famous character, the "glasses man."

Carrington's outsider position in these communities is illustrated by the remarks of the tenement's tenants that he reminded them of "Harold Lloyd in blackface!"²⁹² A symbol of the times, Lloyd was famous for taking on daredevil stunts himself and for his "glasses man" character, who was always striving to succeed. This character captured the imagination of audiences in the 1920s because he connected to Americans' self-image of determination and ambition.²⁹³

²⁹⁰ King, *The Impact of Federal Housing Policy on Urban African-American Families, 1930-1966*. The 30s also featured public housing projects specifically built for African Americans and designed by the African American modernist architect, Hilyard Robinson.

²⁹¹ For example, windowsills were fixed so that no bottles could not be set on them, a common practice in Harlem at the time, because such bottles could fall off and killed children. Brass screws were necessary in the window screens themselves, reflecting what Carrington calls "care in details" necessary for the safety of the family with small children. On the connections between housing design and race, see Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*, 157-169.

²⁹² Carrington, "Field Work Notes." Harold Lloyd was a silent film actor even more famous and prolific than Chaplin in the 1920s.

²⁹³ Giammarco, "Harold Lloyd: Horatio Alger in Straw Hat and Horn Rims."

Carrington's glasses did suggest Lloyd's, although the "blackface" would be necessary for the full resemblance. But the lower east side residents might have also picked up on the ways that Carrington, like Lloyd, was playing a character. Carrington's career depended on the ease with which he occupied the character of the objective social scientist, purveyor of modern family and gender, not unlike Lloyd's character. As one of the first generation of black social workers in integrated Masters programs, Carrington carried a lot of weight and significance, with departures from the norm being especially risky.²⁹⁴

Carrington also took a job reporting on social services in Harlem for the Amsterdam News, further establishing himself in the world of the black middle class. His beat included successful uplift movement organizations around Harlem, spotlighting their contributions to the community and promoting their strategies. Carrington's features from October-December, 1930,²⁹⁵ highlight community institutions like hospitals and boarding houses, the sorts of institutions that showcased the stability of Harlem despite its reputation for inchoate sexuality and racial identification. In one such article, he profiled Mrs. Victoria Earl Matthews, "the pioneer in organized social work among her people in New York City," who established the White Rose Mission and Industrial Association in 1897. The association (which at that point consisted of Matthews and four friends) decided that housing was the most important neighborhood need to focus on, and they raised money to rent a "suite" on 98th street, and eventually to buy a building on West 136th St, in what was fast becoming the "Negro Capital" of the nation.

²⁹⁴ Bowles, "Opportunities for the Educated Colored Woman."

²⁹⁵ Carrington, "Amsterdamm News."

His article puts Carrington squarely on the side of respectability, promoting organizations that attempted to create (or recreate) heterosexual kinship structures with normative gender roles, despite their exclusion of his gay community. He paints Matthews as the savoir of migrants' sexuality. Matthews would visit grand central station and the steamboats from as far away as Florida, meeting young black female travelers who came to the city to "try their fortunes." These "pilgrims" were threatened by the lascivious streets of the city, and Carrington recounts the harrowing tale of a girl "accosted by a man and lured away" right under Matthews's nose on the dock.²⁹⁶ Matthews clearly felt as if the girls' sexual morality was compromised by their arrival alone in the big city, where prostitution could easily lead them astray.²⁹⁷

In his article, Carrington highlights the "respectability" of the White Rose Home with mentions of Booker T. Washington's visits and the white sash that Matthews would wear to the dock to catch the attention of northbound girls. The White Rose Home was named for its founder's characteristic sash and its association with whiteness as a code for sexual purity; as well as by its roots in the settlement house movement and support by wealthy white philanthropists. Carrington's profile endorses the Home's overlapping missions of domesticity and industry, particularly praising the association's policy that women who found jobs in domestic service through the "Home" were required to live in with those employers, regardless of space available at White Rose.²⁹⁸ Carrington closes

²⁹⁶ Carrington, "Bereaved Mother's Loneliness Caused Founding of Pioneer Welfare Service: White Rose Home Group Has Aided Girls for 33 Years."

²⁹⁷ For popular literary examples of the debasement of southern migrants who arrive in the city, see Dunbar, *Sport of the Gods*.

²⁹⁸ Carrington, "Bereaved Mother's Loneliness Caused Founding of Pioneer Welfare Service: White Rose Home Group Has Aided Girls for 33 Years," December 3, 1930. For more on struggles over live-in versus live-out housework in northern cities, see

his article with an image of the group of women and “working girls” at the Home, gathered before “the warmth of a homelike fireside.”

Writing about the city’s threats to southern migrants’ sexual mores, Carrington might have been deflecting attention and concern away from the gay community, buying him face in the respectable professional community in two ways – making connections with established organizations and establishing young girls as the sexually threatened population. Carrington’s foray at the Amsterdam News in 1930 was a transitional moment in his relationship with the black community in Harlem and with social uplift movements. Carrington's position at the Amsterdam News, and his connections in education, lead to a trip to the Soviet Union, to report on daily life in the communist state.²⁹⁹ Carrington’s notebook from his Soviet trip is sparse, but reports on such trips from other travelers suggest that he was ushered around Moscow and shown the best of Soviet culture, in the hope that he would bring some of this knowledge back to African Americans in Harlem. But after returning, Carrington moved away from public speaking and political theory, taking a job on the ground working with Harlem youth at the YMCA.

Carrington began serving as the boys’ worker at the 135th St. branch of the YMCA in 1932. Not only was this branch located on the same street where he recorded

Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to the Present*, 164–68.

²⁹⁹ Between 1925 and 1938, several dozen African and West Indian blacks and between 60 and 90 American blacks were invited to study at the Comintern-controlled Stalin Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in Moscow. Most completed a 14-month program, which principally dealt with Marxist-Leninist theory. See Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism Between the Wars*.

visits to popular cabarets, the job itself came with a legacy of homosexual stigma. The YMCA's strength was the intense friendships it promoted between men, but this same strength came under suspicion as homosexuality more broadly discussed as a problem of environment, and "new ideas" about sex were introduced by psychiatry and anthropology.³⁰⁰ The passionate homosociality that was supposed to lead young men to Christ risked becoming "excessive" in an environment where homosexuality was widely acknowledged. In the 1930s, the physical education department of the YMCA began a stridently homophobic sex education curriculum.³⁰¹ Many gay men who lived during the 1930s refer to living a "double life," and Carrington would have acutely experienced this duality on 135th street, moving daily between heterosexual and homoerotic spaces.³⁰² He was upholding at least the façade of respectability in his career, while breaking that code in his behavior at the cabarets. In his notes from a lecture on social work practice in 1932, Carrington reflects that "forces producing craving for excitement must be considered, man wants place to let loose outside of working hours."³⁰³

This shift in Carrington's career also mirrors the shift in priorities for social workers through the 1930s and into WWII towards the morality of juveniles. The YMCA and other quasi-familial organizations took on the task of stabilizing the rapidly shifting meanings of heterosexuality and homosexuality caused by the depression and cycles of military mobilization. The Harlem riot in 1935 acutely heightened concerns about the

³⁰⁰ Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand: Same Sex Relations and the YMCA*, 45–49.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁰² Chauncy, *Gay New York*, 271–301.

³⁰³ Carrington, "Glenn Carrington Papers: Professional."

need to reinforce boundaries around domestic and racial spaces,³⁰⁴ represented by “stronger” families. Social workers were on the front lines of communities dealing with the meanings and stakes of heterosexuality between the wars.³⁰⁵ The profession expanded and partially integrated to meet these community needs. In 1933, in 40 locations around the country, the Urban League employed about 150 black social workers. The gender balance in the social work field was about equal through the 1920s, with both the Young Men’s and Young Women’s Christian Associations regularly hiring black social workers. The requirements for such employees included church membership, “self control,” “good health,” and “mental hygiene.” Black women were also able to find work in Juvenile and Women’s Courts, Child Welfare organizations, and psychiatric clinics:³⁰⁶ all positions that traded on their gender roles and conformity. The standards for gender conformity among black men entering the social work profession were just as strict.³⁰⁷ These organizations created job opportunities for black social workers like Carrington, who tried to reform both black communities and racialist sociological theory from the inside.

Representing Homosexuality

Carrington and this new cohort of black social workers had to draw on and contest representations of aberrant black sexuality from sociology, the arts and popular culture.

Whereas literature, especially poetry, represented homosexuality as an everyday part of

³⁰⁴ timeline of riots in the 30s, possible reference to *Invisible Man*

³⁰⁵ Sociologists were directly called into this effort; Frazier and Locke were charged with implementing recommendations for stabilizing neighborhoods after the 1935 riot, and reporting back to Harlem residents and city officials.

³⁰⁶ Bowles, “Opportunities for the Educated Colored Woman.”

³⁰⁷ For more on masculinity and professional success in the black middle class, see Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*, 23–65.

life in Harlem as early as Countee Cullen's *Color* (1925),³⁰⁸ social work represented homosexuality as a deviation from the norm.³⁰⁹ Harlem's literary elite and the loudest voices cast for respectability struggled over how much and what kind of sexuality could be represented in Harlem, and who had the right to do the representing. Carrington learned both of these languages for representing homosexual desire, partly through his friendship with Locke. In the pages of *Opportunity Magazine*, itself a harbinger of the sociological passions descending upon Harlem, Alain Locke writes about the shift to sociological ways of documenting black experience: "It is significant that this year has witnessed a waning of creative expression and an increasing trend towards documentation of the Negro subject and objective analysis of the facts."³¹⁰ Locke approves of this change because "it owes its inspiration to a force far different from the flippant exhibitionism by which some of our younger writers aimed to out-Herod *Nigger Heaven*."³¹¹ The force that Locke is referring to is the same force that W.E.B. Du Bois noted in his famous speech, "Criteria for Negro Art"; "we have within us as a race new stirrings; stirrings of the beginning of a new appreciation of joy, of a new desire to create, of a new will to be."³¹²

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, writers fiercely debated the black artist's responsibility to represent his race and the need for racial justice.³¹³ Carrington delivered

³⁰⁸ Garber, "A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem."

³⁰⁹ See Ferguson, *Abberations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*, 54–82.

³¹⁰ Locke, "Book Reviews," 48.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

³¹² Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art." For more on the debate over "Negro Art" and aesthetics, see Castronovo, "Beauty Along the Color Line: Lynching, Aesthetics, and the Crisis."

³¹³ W.E.B. Du Bois famously argued that all art is propaganda in his 1926 essay

a lecture to students at Hunter College in 1931 repeating these same ideas – the “New Negro” was moving past sentimentality and expressing himself in “scientific thought in the areas of education, economics, politics and literature.”³¹⁴ Carrington, like Locke, saw black literary production as giving way to science as grounds for arguing racial equality.³¹⁵ Locke and his colleagues celebrated the eclipse of the “slumming” narrative in literature, although the allegedly objective analysis of sociological studies and social work mission statements shared many of the assumptions about race and sexuality that could be found in earlier white literature. As the agenda for racial representation shifted towards social science, Carrington found new spaces in which to hide his sexuality.

By the time the Harlem Renaissance was waning, black authors were turning to urban realism to explore racial conflict and post-war life, whereas sociological knowledge of black communities had a two-pronged agenda: to usher black middle class subjects into American citizenship through heterosexual normativity, and to create social order by stabilizing black communities with heterosexual normativity.³¹⁶ Liberal sociologists and social workers fought to include social factors in explanations of non-normative family structures in black communities, and they promoted images of black life that conformed to normative standards as proof of blacks' ability to perform in these

“Criteria for Negro Art.” While Locke had less faith in art’s ability to represent truth, beauty and justice; he agreed with Du Bois about the need for scientific study of how race is constructed by contacts between groups.

³¹⁴ “Social Notes,” col. 8.

³¹⁵ Black authors also decried *Nigger Heaven*, Carl Van Vechten’s novel of “slumming” and the sexual exploits of Harlem’s community, but there were some who followed in Van Vechten’s footsteps – trying to “out-Herod” *Nigger Heaven*’s protagonist. See, for example, Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*. See also McKay, *Banjo*.

³¹⁶ Ferguson, *Abberations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*, 75–79.

roles, should social conditions change.³¹⁷ Albeit, these representations were more aspirational than based in reality – as the depression decimated chances for improvement in living standards for black communities. In 1925, canonical sociologist E. Franklin Frazier praised the growing ranks of middle class blacks: “No longer can men say that the Negro is lazy and shiftless and a consumer. He has gone to work. He is a producer. He is respectable. He has a middle class.”³¹⁸ Frazier’s comments are just one example of prominent discourse from and about the black middle class, from the 1920s through the 1940s.

Black uplift literature and sociological studies of black communities were deeply in dialogue throughout these three decades. Charles Johnson, whom Langston Hughes called “one of the midwives of the Harlem Renaissance,” was also a department head of social sciences at Fisk University. Hughes’s verse also frequently appeared in *Opportunity*, a journal published by the Urban League. In *Opportunity*, literary critics like Locke and Sterling Brown could be found reviewing novels alongside articles by Charles Johnson and E. Franklin Frazier on the sociology of the black community, interspersed with short stories and plays by writers like Dorothy West and Langston Hughes.³¹⁹

For Carrington, the key overlap was their focus on urban space. Both attributed the achievements and failures of black culture to the cramped, mobile conditions of segregated, urban communities. Anthropologist St. Clair Drake and sociologist Horace

³¹⁷ Frazier.

³¹⁸ Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*, 287.

³¹⁹ See *Opportunity Magazine 1930-1933*

Clayton – both African American – argued that blacks could function as healthy citizens, if only their environments would let them. Because of prejudice and its resulting emotional damage, Drake and Clayton in their classic study *Black Metropolis* (1945) claimed, blacks were forced into situations of low self-esteem and intense frustration both within their families and in relation to mainstream ideals.³²⁰ Langston Hughes encapsulated this frustration in blues-inspired poetry about homelessness and confinement.³²¹ Black artists, sociologists and social workers of the time were all trying to use new disciplines and literary forms to break down the oppression of everyday life in Harlem and the south side of Chicago, among other black neighborhoods. But even Hughes used layers of displacement to discuss homosexuality in the black community.³²²

From Frazier in 1925 to Drake and Clayton in 1945, Harlem was represented as the black cultural center and second only to the south side of Chicago as the center of social work efforts. Richard Wright was not the only black intellectual to make connections between literary and cultural production, scientific studies and social policies. Literary figures were directly involved in social work projects around Harlem. Whether diagnosing problems of urban black communities, or claiming the vibrancy of black urban cultures, sociologists and psychiatrists were highly influential (and influenced by) literary movements of the time. Richard Wright claims in his introduction to *Black Metropolis*, “sincere art and honest science were not far apart”³²³ in describing

³²⁰ Drake and Clayton, *Black Metropolis*.

³²¹ See Hughes, *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*. Also see Hughes, *The Ways of White Folks*, chap. 4.

³²² Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters Between Black and Red, 1922–1963*, chap. 2.

³²³ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, xvii. For more studies about the cultures of black urban life in the 1930s, see Johnson, *Patterns in Racial Segregation*.

urban life. His realist version of authentic art was not far from sociological studies that treated homosexuality with distasteful dismissal.

In addition to writing the introduction to *Black Metropolis*, Richard Wright saw promise in more explicitly psychoanalytic work for combatting racism. He joined with iconoclastic psychoanalyst Frederick Wertham³²⁴ to establish the Lafargue Mental Hygiene Clinic in Harlem, which offered psychotherapy to the community in Harlem regardless of race or ability to pay. The Lafargue clinic is a key example of the uses of fundamentally (normative) social sciences by members of the black left, who explained apparent racial differences in affect and behavior through social explanations and analyses of everyday life.³²⁵ Instead of biological explanations for racialized income and health disparities, a new generation of psychologists worked alongside social workers to battle the familial upheaval of WWII and the Second Great Migration.

You could not achieve optimal mental health or economic freedom, they argued, while living with housing shortages and redlining. Migrants crowding into small spaces had trouble maintaining what a growing social work profession called “social morality.” While black women were more likely to rely on extended kinship and neighborhood networks of women to pitch in to raise children,³²⁶ as well as to find domestic employment opportunities, they were also more likely to be condemned by social

³²⁴ Wertham was a German Jew who was naturalized as an American citizen in 1922, yet remained an outsider within the psychoanalytic field due to his insistence on linking psychiatry and social justice. See Hale, *The Rise And Crisis of Psychoanalysis In the United States: Freud And the Americans, 1917-1985*.

³²⁵ Rather than using supposed biological basis for racial difference. On how psychiatric literature on race was influenced by liberal social scientists and activists, see Dwyer, “Psychiatry and Race During World War II.”

³²⁶ Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to the Present*, 186.

workers and sociologists for their reliance on these networks. As the Bureau of the Census points out in 1949, housing conditions impact communities' family structures. For example, families often "double-up" with relatives because of a lack economic independence and affordable housing.³²⁷ The strategy of explaining non-normativity as a result of housing shortages, overcrowded cities and unemployment – as opposed to biological inferiority – was more successful for black and immigrant communities than for homosexuals.

In the post-WWI years, both communities were under surveillance for their failure to produce normative heterosexual citizens. As Tyler Schmidt points out in his work on race and sexuality in the post-war years, "both black masculinity and queer sexuality – sharing a history of social regulation – were viewed as tangential and, in the extreme, paradoxically threatening to domestic protocols."³²⁸ Champions of the settlement house movement like Jane Addams, and feminist intellectuals like Charlotte Perkins Gillman began to argue for eugenic policies that would geographically isolate and reproductively limit "colored" populations.³²⁹ At the time, Carrington was corresponding with Locke about his educational path, and Locke sent him a syllabus with the history of studies of "The Negro Problem."³³⁰ This syllabus highlighted the work of southern whites writing

³²⁷ About half of the subfamilies had less than \$2,000 income in 1949, and half of the family groups with which they lived had less than \$2,000 income. In only one case out of four, both the subfamilies and the family group with whom they lived had incomes of \$2,000 or more." By contrast, only one-quarter (24.8 per cent) of all families had incomes of less than \$2,000 in 1950.' See Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status and Household Characteristics*, 4.

³²⁸ Schmidt, "Dreams of an Impossible Blackness: Racialized Desire and America's Integrationist Impulse, 1945-1955," 163.

³²⁹ For a complete and popular example of this political program, see Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*.

³³⁰ Carrington, "School of Social Work, Course Work 1941," f. 13.

about race relations, many of whom continued to argue that domesticating blacks would bring the southern economy back online and decrease the draw of unionism for black workers. The percentage of articles about “the Negro Problem” that were written by southern whites was almost 50% in both the 1930s and 40s, as opposed to 25% in the 1920s and 17% in the 1950s.³³¹ Locke might have intended to encourage Carrington to continue studying race relations and help diversify the conversation, but in diversifying the conversation in terms of race, the pressures for representing respectability would be stronger.

Carrington particularly pulls out and highlights a text called “Studies in the American Race Problem” by A. H. Stone (1908) from Locke’s syllabus. Stone was a prominent southern writer who explained racial conflict as a matter of close contact between two groups who both think they are superior. He describes his confusion, as a child, on his family’s plantation where “between (black and white playmates) here and there the lines were drawn and here and there they disappeared.” Like many southern liberals of the time, Stone believes that slavery encouraged racial harmony and that migration is the cause of most “racial friction.”³³² Stone writes explicitly as a southerner, setting out to answer the question of “why our people, the people of one common country, should think and feel and act so differently wherever this black figure loomed upon the horizon.”³³³ In all of Stone’s writings, he continues to blame migration for “the American Race Problem” and to describe racial divisions as a matter of space – where

³³¹ Kinloch, “White Perspectives on Black Americans: A Study of Journal Articles in Professional Sociology.”

³³² Stone, “Is Race Friction Between Blacks and Whites in the United States Growing and Inevitable?”

³³³ Stone, *Studies in the American Race Problem*, 4.

only some places allowed interracial conflict. As a student of racial identity and the role of built environments, Carrington circled the paragraphs with domestic metaphors in Stone's article, presumably because he was also working with youth either confined in juvenile detention facilities or adjusting to life coming out of detention.

Carrington was not alone in his concern about how migration and overcrowding of the city would affect young people. Black social workers of Carrington's generation were charged with bringing up black youth, a group that Frazier accuses of "conspicuous consumption," unrespectable social conduct, and scandalous "sex behavior."³³⁴ The concern with black youth, particularly issues of "juvenile delinquency," reflected a broad concern throughout WWII about the stability of heterosexual identity and patriarchal gender roles.³³⁵ Part of the trouble with patriarchal gender roles in this period was the instability of whiteness, with immigrant groups who brought either "continental" views about sexuality or "undemocratic marriage values" such as arranged marriages.³³⁶ Popular culture often linked the expansion of whiteness to the expansion of borders around what a heterosexual marriage and household looked like; ethnic groups who could represent themselves having normative marriages were closer to whiteness. Both expansions excluded homosexuals and blacks from normativity. But homosexuality, unlike race, could supposedly be prevented with stable family structures. Literary representations of heterosexuality and sociological studies of black families had

³³⁴ Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*, 285.

³³⁵ See Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*. Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, 260-342. Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*.

³³⁶ See Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*.

extremely high stakes.

New Models of Deviance

Throughout WWII and into the post-war period, social sciences and reformers tried to locate and fix the homosexual within increasingly unstable and mobile communities. Returning veterans, widowed spouses and economically empowered women³³⁷ constructed new forms of heterosexuality that called for new terms of analysis and evaluation. The Harlem craze was all but faded and programs for veterans were limited to white battalions. The double standard of fighting for democracy abroad but promoting segregation at home shows up in most 1940s African American novels. As racial divisions heated up and cracked under the pressure of migrations and industrialization, black writers also critiqued the white patronage models of writing that dominated the Harlem Renaissance. In his “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (1937), Wright accuses past writers of “curtsying to show that the Negro was not inferior, that he was human,” and his fiction throughout the 1940s attacks this curtsying stance with virile heterosexual male characters who ultimately achieve patriarchal manhood.³³⁸ Ralph Ellison, who was much influenced by his friendship with Wright, was also spurred to write *Invisible Man* by “the humiliation of being taught in a class in sociology at a Negro college that Negroes represented the ‘lady of the races.’”³³⁹ Carrington would have been exposed to the same stereotypes, coded as science by his sociology texts, yet another

³³⁷ Mostly white women.

³³⁸ Ferguson, *Abberations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*, 44–46.

³³⁹ For more on Ellison’s treatment of black masculinity, see *Ibid.*, 56–60. Also see Scott, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination*, 144–145.

reason to conceal his homosexuality: fear of further challenges to black masculinity (defined by writers like Wright as patriarchal heterosexuality).

Newspapers and other popular sources also warned black communities about the emasculating force of homosexuality. In 1943, The Afro-American warns readers that “she-males” prey on soldiers: “Prey, what with the heavy call on manpower for the armed forces, has become somewhat lean on the streets of the nation’s busy cities and so the ‘she-male’ who is ambitious decides to go where the most men are – into the armed forces.”³⁴⁰ While psychologists and military officials were trying to protect heterosexual soldiers from the she-male predators, the definitions of heterosexuality became more stridently gendered. Paradoxically, increased attention to homosexuality as a menace made it easier for gay men to find each other, as groups like the Mattachine society began in Los Angeles and soon spread to the east coast.³⁴¹ As gay and lesbian communities grew through the exchange of magazines, photos, and letters; treatments for homosexuality focused on their detection and exclusion from mainstream environments, with special efforts to expel homosexual military members.

The years leading up to WWII brought Carrington into deeper study of the psychology of sexual identity and deviance. He took courses focused on minority group formation and sexual disorders, and he spent the latter half of his career working as the

³⁴⁰ Douglas, “Sissies Get Into Army Despite Many Precautions: Homosexuals in for Stern Punishment When Officers Find Them Out; Psychologists Take No Chances,” 11.

³⁴¹ The Mattachine Society was officially founded in 1950, although members of the gay community in Los Angeles were working together on the society’s magazine “One” as early as 1947. See Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*. The organization established a New York branch in 1955, but “One” was on newsstands in the city from the beginning. See also “Mattachine Society Part 02 of 02,” 18.

first black probation officer in NYC, working with juvenile delinquents. Carrington's educational history demonstrates the mass of "objective" sources on black sexuality and gay sexuality. His syllabi and bibliographies, marked with titles like "sex adjustments of young men" and "new light on delinquency," point to this overlap. People who didn't practice proper restraint became new categories of deviants. Returning veterans, economically independent (white) women, and vagrants (who refused to settle down into proper homes and families) deviated from "normal" sexuality. Carrington himself would have been considered a deviant by some of the standards of his day, yet in other areas like education, he fit the norms and ideals of post-war sexuality. Ferguson summarizes Carrington's possible positioning, as a gay black psychiatric social worker "trying to assume gender and sexual normativity against technologies of race that locate them outside heteropatriarchal ideals."³⁴² As Carrington's reading lists grew with moralistic studies urging black families to adopt normative sexuality, he gained certification in the very "technologies of race" that classified his community as deviant.

The reading list for Carrington's course on "American Youth" mixes a clear interest in normative sexual development – *Youth and Sex*, *The Sex Life of Youth*, *One Thousand Juvenile Delinquents*, *Sex Adjustments of Young Men*, *Demon Daughter: the confession of a young girl and her mother* – with a racializing interest in how sexuality is shaped by environment – *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, *Personality and the Cultural Pattern*, *The Adolescent Personality and Culture*.³⁴³ These books are characteristic parts of popular and scientific discourse about

³⁴² Ferguson, *Abberations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*, 48.

³⁴³ Carrington, "Glenn Carrington Papers: Professional," f. b. 3 f. 11.

youth and deviance during WWII and in the post-war period. They document the mix of culture, race and sexuality that Carrington studied, and the ways “personality” and “temperament” became matters of social morality. Carrington was attempting to “solve” juvenile delinquency through psychiatry, “a humane way for society to restrain individuals.” Restraining delinquent youth was then seen as a step along the path to restraining communities.

Juvenile delinquents were thought to be alienated from family life and to have subversive attitudes towards sex that needed to be stabilized through domestication. Carrington began work in “homes for boys” in the early 1950s as a parole officer for New York State and in the Bureau of Child Guidance. In his records on the “people’s program to combat juvenile delinquency,” Carrington includes a lecture given by a military man formerly stationed in Calcutta. He compares the “displaced insecure children” in Calcutta who “had no home” “and slept in the streets” to “Our Kids” that were “spawned in the wake of the chaos created by World Wars.” While that may be a paternalistic and imperialist analogy, it also reflects the seeming homelessness of many post-war children. Social workers’ goals for juvenile delinquents and veterans were to establish them in stable homes. As Carrington himself tried to navigate black and gay communities, he also tried to help boys navigate normative sexuality. These boys’ relation to space – lacking a stable home and family – was considered one of the causes of their deviance, and also its proof.

Children born during the war were considered particularly at risk for delinquency because of their families’ instability. A separate study from Carrington’s work with

United Community Defense Services (UCDS) reports that “about one-quarter of the areas affected by defense mobilization are overwhelmed by their community problems...

Juvenile delinquency is a specific problem in at least 13 of the 44 communities given special study and nine others report a sharp increase in family tensions, drinking and promiscuity. Crowded living, brought about by the housing shortage, was given as a major factor behind such problems.”³⁴⁴ Carrington himself moved between at least 3 apartments in Harlem and 2 in the Village (because of rent hikes and neighborhood shifts).³⁴⁵ But he may not have agreed that this caused his homosexuality.

Carrington’s training as a psychiatric social worker offered an alternative theory of deviance and a different treatment model. Psychiatric social workers located deviance within patients’ internal lives in addition to patients’ relationships with external environments. In the 1940s, as WWII refugees established themselves in the U.S., psychoanalysts began to relate their work to popular concerns about family stability and juvenile delinquency, proposing a “psychosocial model of development” for both individuals and communities. The psychosocial model brought psychoanalysis and social theories together, balancing the interests of social workers in individual relationships within political, economic and social environments. These models drew from psychoanalytic concepts of homosexuality as immature ego development, but they also linked ego development with family and community stability, acknowledging that sexuality develops in a social context as well as within individuals.

As Gordon Hamilton writes in “Theory and Practice of Casework,” a standard

³⁴⁴ United Community Development Society, *UCDS Sees Big Community Organization Need in Defense Areas*.

³⁴⁵ “Glenn Carrington Papers,” f. box 7–10.

text for social work curricula from 1940-1957, “the psychiatrist is most directly concerned with the intra-psychic aspects of maladjustment, although of course taking into account the environmental aspects; the social worker is more directly concerned with the environment, though taking into account the psychological factors.” He explains that “the borderland between psychiatry and social work which does pose interesting research and training issues” should be seen from the perspective of a “psychosocial approach, where the case worker can respond to symptomatic expressions of dependency and delinquency.... and also utilize relief, employment and other practical services to help clients.”³⁴⁶ Carrington, on the ground, also wanted to serve this population. We don’t have access to Carrington’s notes from this period of his education, excepting bibliographies and syllabi, but his decision to undergo further training in the realm of individual personality and development suggests that he began to think about deviance in those terms. After all, Carrington himself didn’t grow up in overcrowded housing, nor did he experience any of the other environmental “causes” of sexual deviance, so it makes sense that he’d be drawn to explanations of deviance that stressed individual development.

The “psychosocial model” and “mental hygiene” were two languages that social workers used in the 1940s to talk about deviance as both internal and external. Carrington continued his training as a psychiatric social worker while working with veterans set adrift by the war and their families. The mental hygiene movement became popular and national during this period, in large part because of the needs of military, industry, and

³⁴⁶Hamilton, 325.

prisons to prevent “maladjustment” of veterans returning home from service abroad.³⁴⁷ Mental hygiene discourse introduced courses of treatment for juvenile delinquents to create “healthy personalities” and healthy relationships, in terms of normative family structures and gender roles. Psychiatrists were deployed in WWII to improve the morale of troops and employed at home to mentally examine soldiers for “maladjustment” before they were sent abroad. Maladjustment was an explicitly sexual category that included “marital incompatibility, venereal disease, birth control, prostitution, perversion and sterilization.”³⁴⁸

Although the Mental Hygiene movement was largely responsible for policing sexual normativity in military environments, it was also responsible for reforming state housing and treatment for “degenerate” and “maladjusted” prisoners. In his notebook from 1933, Carrington remarks on “a class of sexual perverts, about 1 ½ dozen” who were kept separate from the rest of the population, “the only class of its kind in the country.” Foreshadowing some of his later correspondences with young men in prison, Carrington protests that “some of these (sexual perverts) are fine looking, young, well-built, normal minded men.” “Why are they so cursed?” Carrington exclaims, “God deliver thy people!”³⁴⁹ The teachings of psychiatry at the time in America held that robbers and sex offenders could be equally well trained in “social habits” to replace their “anti-social habits” partly through “the formation of habits of cleanliness.” But Carrington writes about “sexual perverts” as innocent victims of both their desires and the state’s prohibitions against those desires, showing a lot of empathy mixed with the

³⁴⁷ White, “The Origin, Growth and Significance of the Mental Hygiene Movement.”

³⁴⁸ Stevenson, “History of the Mental Hygiene Movement in the United States.”

³⁴⁹ Carrington, “Class Notes.”



Figure 13: Postcard from Eddie Long to G. Carrington, 1946, Matteawan from the front

distancing of his position outside the prison population. Although Carrington was not in fact witnessing the first confinement of homosexual prisoners,³⁵⁰ he was part of a generation of social workers who worked to classify homosexuality as a disease rather than a crime, better handled in medical facilities than in penal institutions. Black gay people were also under attack from the developing psychiatric institutions; Jonathan Katz cites a tragic case in which a young black gay man was incarcerated for most of the 1920s at the Worcester (Massachusetts) State Hospital.

Carrington carried on a sustained correspondence with Eddie Long, a young gay man living at the bottom of the hill outside Matteawan State Hospital (NY), which shows Carrington’s continued interest in homes for delinquents. It is not likely that Carrington’s notes on “a special class of perverts” were about the Matteawan hospital, but his continued interest in spaces where homosexuality and blackness were criminalized made Matteawan a key site for research. The hospital was the primary site in NY for housing the “deficient delinquent” population, a population created during the first half of the 20th century as “disorderly un-American children” were conceptually



Figure 12: New York Dept. of Corrections in 1945 - Picture Matteawan from behind with an internal view

³⁵⁰ This honor goes to the Government Hospital for the Insane in Germany (1917).

merged with truants and criminals. The Children’s Court Act of New York consolidated the rules for delinquent and normal childhood behavior and established a separate category of tribunals to try juvenile delinquents, and the deficient delinquent population was particularly unable to establish stable familial relationships.³⁵¹

The façade of Matteawan looks like a pleasant enough space, with trees and manicured lawns. But the internal view reveals a space designed to atomize and standardize daily experience. Prisons that opened at the turn of the 20th century, like Matteawan, were designed as industrial sites, where inmates’ work supported most of the costs of operations. Filled with devalued minorities, mostly African-Americans, these prisons were regimented warehouses for those deemed threatening to society.³⁵² Threats to society were mostly sexual, as can be seen in the list of crimes committed by the “criminally insane and mentally deficient”: persons indicted for forcible rape or forcible crimes against nature; and persons indicted for impairing or endangering the morals of a minor, carnal abuse of a child, or indecent exposure.³⁵³

By 1931, Matteawan was largely known as the facility that falsely diagnosed and confined people without due criminal procedures or hearings. The striking similarity between the internal view of the Fishkill facility and Carrington’s earlier sketches of the “new law type” of public housing structures in his field notes shows how logics of incarceration shaped domestic spaces built for black and poor people. Based on the postcard alone, one would think that God might visit and deliver his people inside the

³⁵¹ Carrington, G. (1956). Correspondence. *Carrington Papers*. New York, Schomburg Center for Research on Black History and Culture. **box 2 1**.

³⁵² Roberts, *Reform and Retribution: An Illustrated History of American Prisons*, 27.

³⁵³ Ploscowe, *Suggested Changes in the New York Laws and Procedures Relating to the Criminally Insane and Mentally Defective Offenders*, 312.

Matteawan Hospital of the postcard, but the view from behind the hospital's walls shows the institutional layout of agricultural training grounds, along with a map of the larger Fishkill facility – with its agricultural training grounds and square buildings designed to standardize movement. New York State's prison population was exploding in the 1930s, as classifications of criminals began to proliferate, with “aggressive homosexuality” and “sex crimes” as the adult versions of deficient delinquent juveniles. Building an internal courtyard with natural landscape might have served to bring the country to urban dwellers, but it might have had the dual purpose of keeping city folk from contaminating the more idealized countryside.³⁵⁴

Although we do not have access to most of Carrington's correspondence with juveniles committed to institutions like Matteawan, we do know that he continued relationships with several delinquents that lasted beyond the time of their delinquency. Along with his personal correspondence with juveniles committed to such facilities, Carrington entered training as a psychiatric social worker in the late 1940s, working eventually with Bureau of Child Guidance, Harlem Hospital and Morrisania Hospital. In his practice notes, he includes an essay from the *Quarterly Review of Neurology and Psychiatry* from 1942 about the causes of juvenile homosexuality: “Psychoanalysis was successful in eliciting proof of ...the patient's own unrequited emotions that go with unconscious homosexuality which presses for release, but cannot find its release because of the pressure of the environment.”³⁵⁵ In highlighting this article, Carrington might have been considering the pressures of living under the shadow of Matteawan prison for Eddie

³⁵⁴ Although historians have shown that rural poverty was no less prevalent, it was not characterized by “delinquency” or deviance in sociological narratives.

³⁵⁵ Sanders, William B. *Quarterly Review of Neurology and Psychiatry*, 1942, vol. 1, 420.

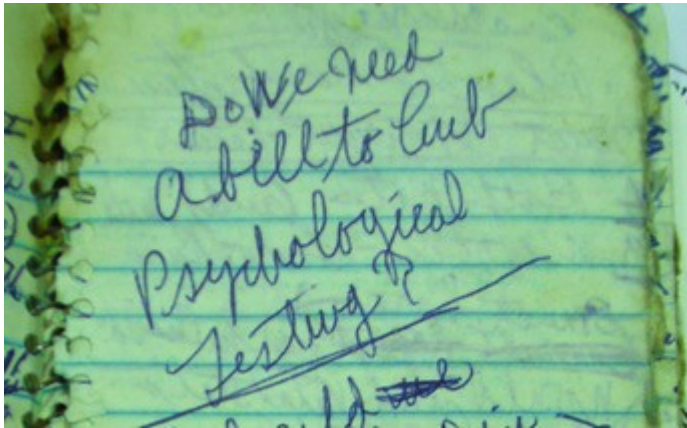


Figure 14: Carrington Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Box 4, f. 22

Long, or the pressures of adult psychiatric facilities and prisons for the juvenile delinquents he worked with, or even the pressures of his environment as a social worker whose homosexuality had to be hidden from his colleagues and clients.

Carrington was part of all sides of the feedback loop

between community activism, casework, and psychiatric research about deviance.³⁵⁶

Seeking release from the pressures of the environment, the article continues, these latent homosexuals are yet another dangerous tension, mirroring on an individual level the sense of living in a powder keg that characterized urban race relations in the 1930s.

Carrington was hardly a latent homosexual – a category taken from psychoanalytic diagnoses – but doing work with juveniles from unstable neighborhoods, Carrington would have been alert to the ways that both blackness and homosexuality were associated with delinquency. Neighborhood associations sprung up in some black neighborhoods and in white immigrant areas to regulate racial identities³⁵⁷ and to try to deal with problems of juvenile delinquency and sexual deviance, in order to prevent racialized

³⁵⁶ Another example of Carrington's travel in many worlds - a psychiatric social worker wondering about a ban on psychiatric testing.

³⁵⁷ See Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*.

stereotypes.

Neighborhood associations were generally made up of people from the community doing self-policing and promotion. One example that Carrington documents comes from Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn. Their recommendations on juvenile delinquency include honesty about the neighborhood's benefits and downfalls; “Bedford-Stuyvesant is not the slum so often depicted by ignorant outsiders and newspaper reporters... Nor is it the idyllic paradise that old families and respectable church folk think.”³⁵⁸ Their report warns outsiders against meddling in their neighborhood problems based on false depictions, while also encouraging insiders to take the community’s challenges seriously. Carrington was not an insider in this particular community, but he was listening to their concerns that “psychologists with their tests will never be more familiar with the problems of juvenile delinquency than the residents themselves.”³⁵⁹ Later in his reporter’s notebook, he wonders if “we need a ban on psychological testing,” perhaps wanting to cede authority to communities to work on their own problems.

In the 1940s, conflict within black communities flourished over representations of themselves as upwardly mobile and yet physically rooted, where rootedness became the standard for morality. From 1941-1960, Carrington took courses at the Graduate Faculty of Political Science, ranging from the study of social stratification of urban black communities to social theory about sexuality and its applications. His records from these courses, including his second masters program in sociology, show the growing concern – and professionalization of concern – with the lack of settled neighborhoods for blacks in

³⁵⁸ Carrington, “Glenn Carrington Papers: Professional,” f. Box 4 f. 12.

³⁵⁹ *ibid*

nyc. The housing shortage in the 1940s and growing trends of mobility hit black neighborhoods especially hard, as Carrington reflects in his report about “mobile areas” in Brooklyn. According to the Bureau of Family and Child Welfare, “housing types congenial only to the family-less individual or the childless couple” characterized mobile areas. These housing types fit the needs of “broken families (in) precarious economic situations,” “young migrants from the hinterland, the aged, and the ‘marginal’ family-less urban dwellers.” Because these groups are unstable and rootless, the bureau argues, ties are weak between individual neighbors, as well as between families and the organizations that aim to “help” them. Family systems are absent, and the services that would replace some of the functions of stable families can’t gain a foothold.

Carrington worked to understand this geography in order to help stabilize mobile areas. All the areas in which Carrington worked and studied – housing, psychiatry and delinquency – were used by social workers to stabilize communities and thus hopefully to regulate sexuality and gender. Part of those stabilization efforts were housing reform and construction, as unfurnished kitchenettes were thought to not only reflect but also to cause neighborhood instability and lack of integration. Proper housing development was meant to insure a bumper crop of new citizens with ideally regulated gender roles, and the “family-less” were depicted as threats to the continued health of communities. Kevin Mumford labels these “mobile areas” full of “family-less” people as interzones: areas where heterogeneous marginalized populations rubbed up against each other and, in the process, created nonnormative sexual cultures.³⁶⁰ Carrington’s records point out that the

³⁶⁰ Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*, xi.

“geography of nonnormative sexuality” in *Interzones* also included professions of normativity and stability. Thinking about the interzone through the eyes of a provisional reformer and an erstwhile participant maps a space of ambivalence towards normative sexuality. At the same time, Carrington was involved in “family-less” and possibly “maladjusted” activities – the very things that neighborhood associations aimed to keep out of their communities.

The form of his notes illustrates Carrington’s position as both insider and outsider to these communities. Just a few pages after his notes on the neighborhood association meeting, we find his notes about the Harlem cabaret scene. While participating in this “maladjusted” community, Carrington also kept meticulous notes from his visits to various cabarets, documenting the community’s spaces. He describes Happy Romans, located on Lennox at 141st St., as “one of the finest cabarets I have ever entered” with good jazz music, with “two good entertainers, one mulatto and one brown skin.” Entranced by the entertainer’s heavy voices and keeping close to the stage, Carrington makes a point of noting the second floor surrounding the entertainment, where socializing took place with “more privacy.” By contrast, he describes Leroy’s, located on fifth Ave. and 135th St., as “just the reverse of the above, but fascinating just the same. Only Basement floor. Whites not admitted.”³⁶¹ In his description of the basement versus the second floor, Carrington turns his social worker eyes to the hierarchy of space that constructs race and sexuality. But Carrington also might have been assessing for future trips the levels of contact allowed between men at the various cabarets.

Despite the segregation in place at specific cabarets, Carrington’s notes also show

³⁶¹ Carrington, “Field Work Notes.”

how the scenes were fluid; despite the clubs' various rules on the use of their space, the patrons' desires flower between distinct floor spaces and between separate clubs. During the 1940s, Carrington worked and played on 135th St., known to slummers as "Jungle Alley,"³⁶² living just two blocks uptown on 137th. The name "Jungle Alley" signals the no holds barred cultural atmosphere of the neighborhood, where sexual and racial boundaries dissolved in a kind of fantasy "elsewhere" within the city. As Chad Heap shows in his history of slumming practices, these hot spots offered space for urban communities to come to terms with shifting demographics and racial definitions. While rubbing up against immigrants in dance halls in Chinatown, or sampling homosexual culture at interracial drag balls, people of all races defined themselves in terms of distance from other groups' sexual practices.³⁶³ In some ways, slumming was similar to the work of sociologists and psychiatrists, who defined themselves as scientific observers of sexual practices. Carrington and his records, personal and professional, offer a view of the overlap between science, entertainment, and homosexuality.

Wartime Sexuality

Allan Berube estimates that between 1941 and 1945, more than 4,000 sailors and 5,000 soldiers were discharged for homosexual conduct, although a much larger number might have been considered for such discharges but were not.³⁶⁴ Kinsey's midcentury reports estimated that half a million of WWII military men and women would have been

³⁶² Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*, 266.

³⁶³ *ibid* 270-277

³⁶⁴ *Coming Out under Fire* 147, 245

exclusively homosexual (roughly 4% of adult men and 2% of adult women).³⁶⁵ As a social worker and a homosexual, Carrington participated in a blossoming gay culture and a ramped up anxiety about heterosexuality, both activated by WWII. Heterosexual ideals were in flux as the mobility of the war years displaced a generation and destabilized neighborhoods across the country. Carrington's correspondence with soldiers shows how they used their mobility and instability to develop their own norms around sexuality and deviance. Although much of his correspondence from the WWII period is restricted, what we can access shows how homosexuality functioned in military life during deployment and afterwards.

Carrington's correspondence with soldiers and veterans points out the ways that homosocial environments affected relationships and sexual identities beyond these environments. Carrington's photographs and letters from soldiers abroad and from men he met while traveling show the travel of homosexual ties beyond particular spaces, even while preserving their separate contexts through postmarks as well as mentions of local scenes. Many returning veterans from WWII were labeled deviant and unstable because they had been removed from the proper home environments and were shaken by what they'd been through. The intensely homosocial environment of the military was also suspected of causing men to have trouble "settling down" when they got back home. Carrington worked with a committee on veterans' adjustment, dedicated to re-norming veterans' heterosexuality through domestication. Their statement explains that the military "introduces (the veteran) to the fierce loyalty of fighting men," and also "gives him a period of moral irresponsibility and endows him with an atypical set of attitudes

³⁶⁵ See John D'Emilio "sexual Politics, Sexual Communities" p. 34

toward sex and family life.”³⁶⁶ The two together create men who become “delinquent or dependent,” unable to resume typical patterns of settlement and family.

As Margot Canaday shows in her recent work on sexuality and citizenship in 20th century America, returning veterans were frequently found in vagrancy camps set up in the 1930s as a joint effort between the Veteran’s Administration and the Federal Transient Program.³⁶⁷ Based on reports from and about vagrancy camps and federal policy efforts to deal with population mobility, Canaday argues that “it is impossible to cull the taint of perversion from all of the other factors that led to the public’s condemnation of the transients: their dependency, their potential criminality (delinquency), and above all, their mobility.”³⁶⁸ I follow Canaday’s lead in seeing mobility as a link between juvenile delinquent and veterans, two populations that Carrington worked with and studied. Mobility was a discourse that operated in tension with binary ideas of normality and deviance. Some mobility had to be considered normal in a time of war, but the ability to settle down was the final marker of normative personhood.

The army was quick to emphasize the sexual normality of its officers,³⁶⁹ moving to administratively discharge homosexual soldiers and increasing court-martial prosecutions for public homosexual conduct. But what it could not formally police were the in-between intimacies of soldiers’ lives – when it was a matter of interpretation

³⁶⁶ “Glenn Carrington Papers,” f. 11.

³⁶⁷ Part of FERA, the Federal Emergency Relief Association, established in response to the devastation of the great depression.

³⁶⁸ Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, 94.

³⁶⁹ Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*.

whether the two men sleeping together in one bunk were homosexuals or non-sexual close friends. In one case that reached a court martial, the commanding officer explained that he didn't discipline the accused soldiers, because the two men shared "such a quiet, unassuming, and genuine" friendship.³⁷⁰ In spite of the army's efforts, the war was historicized as a break with heterosexuality, at least for some soldiers if not for the country at large. Carrington's personal photography collection features images of naked and half naked soldiers, sitting facing each other on a cot in the barracks, hinting at the "the fierce loyalty of fighting men." This photograph was not included in Carrington's "beefcake" collection, and it is relatively tame compared to some of the explicit erotica in that collection. But the mundane eroticism of the barracks was almost more of a threat to normative sexuality than the explicit spectacle of homoeroticism in beefcake photography.

A postcard from Carl Van Vechten to Carrington, sent while Van Vechten was in Germany following the end of the war, conveys the barely subtextual homoeroticism of wartime fellowship. As one black soldier crouches down to remove a cactus needle from another soldier's ass, the barracks in the background are clearly separated from the couple and their exotic desert setting, communicating a sort of "boys will be boys when loose in the wild" message. The text of the postcard reads, "One of the Joys of Life in the Desert – Ouch!," inviting readers to chuckle at and with the soldiers in their predicament, outside their comfort zone, surrounded only by men and cacti. Readjusting to civilian life, though, was no laughing matter for either the returning vets or the communities to which they returned. And the broader culture feared that the homosocial

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 78.

military ways of relating would come home with the soldiers.

Expanding Homosexual Spaces

In his seminal and comprehensive history of homosexuality during WWII, Alan Berube shows that “the veterans of World War II were the first generation of gay men and women to experience such rapid, dramatic, and widespread changes in their lives as homosexuals.”³⁷¹ As social workers, like Carrington, struggled to make sense of homosexual behaviors conducted by otherwise heterosexually identified soldiers, gay communities in cities like New York drew veterans from across the country, the populations Gayle Rubin documents as “sexual migrants.”³⁷² Homosexual lives were reshaped by this migration and by neighborhood formation around sexual deviance.

After the war, Carrington continued to be involved in building the homosexual community in Harlem. Wally, Carrington’s friend and a returning WWII soldier, asks him to “arrange a Billie Holiday night for me? (because I) Have several affairs d’Amor on hand and expect to have lots of fun in N.Y.”³⁷³ Wally’s letter confirms what Shane Vogel calls “the cabaret style intimacy of participants, performers and audiences” in “an explicitly and implicitly sexual space,”³⁷⁴ where Carrington himself was responsible for organizing the space. Vogel and Mumford both argue that music structured people’s interactions and relationships in 1930s Harlem, perhaps as much as physical structures. As the 1940s brought bebop to Harlem, sexual dances and energies were as public as

³⁷¹ Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Lesbians During World War II*, 257.

³⁷² Rubin, *Deviations: a Gayle Rubin Reader*, 141–142.

³⁷³ Walter Woody, “Glenn Carrington Papers,” f. 10, Box 9. Letter dated Oct. 6th 1945.

³⁷⁴ Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance*, 41.

ever, although the homosexual edge was tempered by the spread of jazz and bebop music throughout the country.³⁷⁵ Wally's request for a "Billie Holliday night" refers to the kind of "affairs" conducted at the party as well as the kind of music that occasions the party. The black investigator hired by the Committee of Fourteen reported that at one speakeasy "several of the men were dancing among themselves, two of the women were dancing with one another going through the motions of copulation (...) two men were dancing with one another and one sucked the other's tongue."³⁷⁶ This was a common enough sight that researchers blamed housing conditions for sexual perversion. In most northern urban centers, flats that had originally served as housing for black travelers who were denied space at white-run hotels were converted into virtual speakeasies. These spaces also contained gambling and drinking, as well as gay sex shows and prostitutes.³⁷⁷

The flexible sexuality conceived in blues music was just one of many discourses that homosexuals used in Harlem to discuss relationships and sexuality. These discourses offered space for homosexuality outside the binary of deviant/normal constructed in social work practice and sociological theory of the time. In another friend's warning against throwing a "Billie Holiday party" for Wally, partly because of the trouble it might cause amongst Carrington's professional friends,³⁷⁸ we can see the tension between these discourses. As opposed to the explicitly sexual language from Wally, Carrington's friend Richard Pena (Dick) uses the language of friendship to outline homosexual desire. Dick and Carrington's correspondence draws from older, Hellenistic discourses that vaunted

³⁷⁵ D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters: a History of Sexuality in America*, 195.

³⁷⁶ Chauncy, *Gay New York*, 248.

³⁷⁷ Garber, "A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem."

³⁷⁸ Carrington, "Personal Correspondence," f. 14.

male friendship and erotic connections as pure and moral. Earlier in his career, Carrington recommends to Locke a French novel of schoolboy romance called *Special Friends*, which displays these discourses.³⁷⁹ Carrington's letter suggests that Locke might enjoy the novel as a narrative about identity formation in homosocial environments. Carrington's correspondence with Dick also shows how "special friend" functions as a code word for homosexual relationships in their community. We have only half of their correspondence, and none of the surrounding letters from other friends, but a picture of the friendship and romantic relationship emerges.

The bulk of their correspondence falls in 1942 and 1943, while Dick was stationed in North Carolina for basic training, and then in Hawaii for deployment. His letters make it clear that he is looking forward to seeing Carrington, but also that his military friends are enjoying sexual adventures on the base. In one such letter, he shares a story about a soldier named Billy, who vows to move in with his lover Earl after the war, instead of going back to living with his mother. Dick's comment, "you never can tell what these love-sick cows will do these days, (smiles)," implies a group of homosexual men who are finding new ways to live in the context of the war.³⁸⁰ While Dick dismisses the "love sick cows," his smile indicates awareness that he, too, is one of them. Whether Carrington is part of this group or not, he is included in the community that understands such people, who move in with short term lovers rather than stay with their families of origin.

From his outpost in the Pacific, Dick's affections seem as much directed towards

³⁷⁹ Carrington, "Carrington Collection."

³⁸⁰ Carrington, "Personal Correspondence," f. 14.

Carrington's apartment as towards the man himself. Dick's lists of things that he loves about Carrington are all site specific - his silly laughter in the doorway, a favorite chair in Carrington's library, raiding the icebox together in the middle of the night, Carrington's library of classics, and "those Tom Collins we used to make in the hallway." Dick continues, "most important, your friendship, which made 1942 the most enjoyable, happiest year of my life."³⁸¹ On March 29, 1943, Dick writes that he is "even more determined that our friendship will always keep its warm glow...and increase its intensity." But the friendship did cool despite Dick's determination. Their correspondence ends in 1946 when Dick writes, "to Glenn's future friend (I won't say lover, smiles), I hope that you love Glenn like I have, and don't treat him as bad as he says I treat him."³⁸² These letters make it clear that "friendship" could be used as code for "relationship." The word "friend," or the phrase "special friend," facilitated gay men moving between communities with acceptance, or at least willful ignorance. But Dick didn't survive the upsurge in anti-homosexual violence and discrimination during the cold war; he was strangled in 1958 in a suspected act of gay-bashing.³⁸³

Gay bashing was one of the dangers of exposure for Carrington, but he could also use his defensive shield of respectability and professionalism to investigate such acts. When Wally also died from a fractured skull during routine maneuvers in U.S. waters, Carrington suspected that his death was more than an egregiously preventable accident and tried unsuccessfully to uncover the details of the incident. He was working on this during a time of police raids on gay bars and increasingly public purges of homosexuals

³⁸¹ Ibid., n. January 23, 1943.

³⁸² Ibid., n. November, 1943.

³⁸³ "Inventory of the Glenn Carrington Papers, 1921-1971."

from the military. The everyday violence of either concealing ones' sexuality or being vulnerable to disapproval rippled through lesbian and gay reports from the time, and even the entertainment world was not immune, as USO restrictions guarded against “ladylike” male performers who could “inflame (the) hungers” of the troops.³⁸⁴ In writing to the military commissions and officers, Carrington was able to use his official title and status as an employee of the New York State Department of Corrections. He garnered respect as an apparently normative citizen who understood the need for military discipline and service.

Carrington’s agility in languages of homosexuality and respectability helped him move between the discourse communities of professional social work and homosexual codes for relationships. His shifting cultural locations illustrate Marlon Ross’s advice to “consider how individuals and social groups constantly revise themselves within historically changing environments” and with the resources they have available.³⁸⁵ Perhaps Carrington’s deepest resources were his education and professional success, which granted him access to sometimes-conflicting environments. His sexuality was revised within and across two environments that seem completely at odds: the sociological and psychoanalytic professionals, and the gay nightlife in Harlem. But Carrington himself may have created a small realm of synergy between the two, bringing personal experience to reflect on social work practices, while also bringing academic understanding to his gay friends and lovers.

We don’t have access to Carrington’s writing about his own sexuality, but we do

³⁸⁴ D’Emilio, *Intimate Matters: a History of Sexuality in America*, 214.

³⁸⁵ Ross, “Camping the Dirty Dozens: The Queer Resources of Black Nationalist Invective.”

have evidence that he was part of conversations about identity and homosexuality. As Dick begins another relationship with a man named Paul, he relies even more on Carrington as a person to talk through his desires: “I can hardly wait to return from my vacation with Paul to see you, to talk of many things. Since I know so little of my temperament, so utterly blind in dealing with such a reality as I find myself confronted with, I need your guidance constantly.”³⁸⁶ Dick was in some real way “blind” in navigating the reality of a relationship with Paul, and may have relied on Carrington’s special knowledge blend about Dick’s “temperament” and theories of homosexuality identity.³⁸⁷ As far as Carrington’s own sexual development, Dick writes that he knows it has been hard to find “the happiness your heart yearns for,” but he encourages Carrington that “sooner or later, you will find happiness in this world.”

If he did, there is no trace of it in the archives that we have access to, but we can see his many friendships with otherwise attached gay men in Harlem made up a world where relationships between gay men were possible. For Carrington, figuring out his personal sexual identity was intertwined with finding a place in the circles of academic, professional and literary circles he participated in. Carrington attended the cabarets and speakeasies that were a staple of gay life in Harlem, but he also joined gay male circles where appreciating classical art and culture served as a gathering ground. He could throw Billie Holiday parties for the gay crowd and also invite friends over to listen to classical music. Dick advises Carrington’s “next friend (to) also pretend that (he) loves

³⁸⁶ Carrington, “Personal Correspondence,” n. September 12, 1946.

³⁸⁷ I would again be very, very interested in researching Carrington’s correspondence with homosexual friends to see if this was a role he took up, especially in his later work with juvenile delinquents who were segregated because of “sexual perversion.” But this is all still classified in the archives.

Beethoven and Schubert and all the other great musicians, (smiles) because that's what Glenn likes."³⁸⁸ Within Carrington's lifetime, gay communities would claim Schubert as a shared code for homosexuality, and orchestral music in general came to signal gay community.³⁸⁹ It was even more important for Carrington to enjoy music from jazz to Schubert because of his involvement in cultures of black respectability. For gay men like Carrington, secrecy was a necessary condition of respectability. As George Chauncey describes the stakes for keeping homosexuality behind closed doors, "most middle-class gay Harlemites struggled to keep news of their homosexuality from spreading, lest it cause their social downfall."³⁹⁰ But gay men in Harlem could partake in the circulation of gay images along with homosexuals around the world, as the development of cheaper photographic equipment and printing paper facilitated a growing trade in nude male images. They used the available resources to connect despite their spatial separations. Black gay communities in the 1930s and 40s were hardly contained in Harlem, although they participated in the fluorescing spaces of deviance above 110th street. In fact, gay heartthrob and "beefcake" photos, available only through seedy catalog companies, often show images of sailors and military men that are meant to evoke adventures outside any particular gay community.³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ Pena, R. (1941). Letter. Glenn Carrington Papers. New York, Schomburg Center for Research on Black History and Culture. **box 7**.

³⁸⁹ Brett, P., E. Wood, et al. (1994). Queering the pitch : the new gay and lesbian musicology. New York, Routledge.

³⁹⁰ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 228. Leading poets of the Harlem Renaissance became more and more secretive and coded about their homosexual liaisons in the 30s and 40s, scared about losing their literary audience and middle class status.

³⁹¹ Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall*.



Figure 15: Physique Pictorial, first published in 1950, collected images of body builders and other "beefcakes" that had been circulating for at least a decade.

The image above is of one of Carrington's frequent portrait subjects, posed here as a sailor he can also be seen lying on top of other half naked black men, and sitting fully clothed on stoops in Harlem. Gay culture at the time may have still been clandestine enough that Carrington only had one of each portrait and pose printed, never named or labeled the men in his pictures



Figure 16: Sailor Pose, Photograph by Carrington 1944

(although he did label pictures of families and mixed groups). This "sailor" is one of three consistent models in Carrington's files, and we can only imagine what their relationships might have been with each other. Although these images are not labeled by year, they are markedly subdued and "classy," at least in comparison with images from Carrington's beefcake photo collection. Most of Carrington's personal portraits are topless or with their shirts open, but none appear clad only in jock straps.

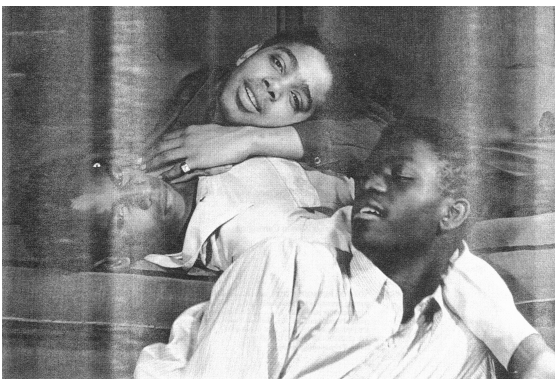


Figure 17: Glenn Carrington Photograph Collection, SC-CN-94-0040

In one particular image, the three men lie together on one couch, shirts partly unbuttoned and arms entangled. Their pose conveys the blurry lines between homosocial friendship and homoerotic desire – it is not quite suggestive, but also not quite innocent.

The man who plays the sailor in the picture above leans his head and shoulders on the

chest of another of Carrington's frequent subjects, who lies on his back on a couch with one arm draped down over the shoulders of the third man. This third man, who appears in more "suggestive pose(s)" in another portrait on the same couch, gazes up at the other two with half closed eyes and an open-mouthed expression of sexual interest.³⁹² The man on top stares back at the camera (and Carrington behind the camera) with a slight smile that almost invites participation. The men's poses and expressions convey intimacy of an indeterminable kind, exploiting the same space that Carrington did by referring to his lovers as "special friends." Carrington could have been friends with these three men, they could have been lovers, and they could have simply been photographer and photographic subject, or any combination of these options.

Along with the more domestic scenery of most of Carrington's portraits, he collected photographs of the men he knew across the country. These small, square headshots usually came in their own cardboard envelope-frames and were sometimes signed by sender. By WWII, the technology of photography – including widely available portable cameras and mass circulated photojournalism – helped to feed a burgeoning homosexual "class" across national borders (one that was more disparate than similar, but, as Halperin and Weeks argue, participated in a common gay male erotic imaginary). These images take the blues' homosexual insinuations and the military's homoeroticism one step closer to the surface. They also brought Carrington (and Harlem) into contact with a broader world of homosexuals, with whom he exchanged both personal and mass produced photographs. Carrington continued to travel to France, Belgium, Switzerland

³⁹² From description on back of photo, Carrington, "Personal Photographs."

and Germany from 1949-1952³⁹³ and maintained correspondence with several homosexual men he met abroad.³⁹⁴

Carrington's stacks of male portraits, most unsigned, are a kind of commemoration of the gay world that is not necessarily limited to homosexual men. In his landmark study of gay male print culture and the circulation of homoerotic images, Thomas Waugh argues that physique magazines and photographs of the 1950s made "gay" identity possible and accessible before the Homophile movement took hold and long before Stonewall.³⁹⁵ Using 381 individual homoerotic photographs, Waugh highlights the common homosocial spaces in which most of the naked men are posed: military barracks, locker rooms and sporting events. Although Waugh labels these spaces as "heterosexual and at times homophobic," saving most of his praise for the romantic shots of openly gay male couples, recent scholarship about homosocial spaces has questioned their assumed heterosexuality.³⁹⁶ What does it mean for a gay social worker, removed from the front, to be looking at and even creating military-themed erotic photography?

Maybe Carrington imagined a less heterosexual version of the barracks, or maybe these images served as an ironic comment about the military's recent purge of homosexuals. Will histories of the military and homosexuality take these second order

³⁹³ "Social Notes," col. 2.

³⁹⁴ See, for example, Carrington's correspondence with Claus Klingman, Carrington, "Personal Correspondence."

³⁹⁵ Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall*.

³⁹⁶ For a more comprehensive coverage of the queering of homosocial spaces, see Ingram, *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*. On the particular work of gay male erotic re-imaginings of heterosexual spaces, see Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion Before Stonewall*.

representations into account? Will histories of the Harlem Renaissance and gay poets include archivists like Carrington? We tend to write lgbt history about triumphantly “out” subjects, rather than those like Carrington who maintained a respectable façade to blend into the black middle class and professional communities. While it is understandable to want to create a community of black queers in order to ground histories, we also need to stay conscious of black and gay outliers that travelled selectively within these communities.

Recent work about “situational homosexuality” has shown just how much environment shifts sexual practices and identifications. This work is mostly sociological and, in fact, echoes much of what Carrington was studying in the 1940s about “primitive cultures.” Focusing on how (usually male) sexual behaviors change in strictly homosocial environments, this work often represents these environments as ahistorical and contained – again, not unlike early studies of “primitive culture” that represented a “wild, never touched by modernity” subject for research. As Regina Kunzel points out, spaces like boarding schools, military barracks and prisons float alongside more historicized work on homosexuality (no matter how situated).³⁹⁷ No matter where and when, prison or boarding school sexuality seems to peculiarly transcend its immediate locations.

Just as histories of black gay communities haven’t considered the role of outliers like Carrington, lgbt historians have mostly dismissed situational homosexuality as an

³⁹⁷ Regina Kunzel, *Situating Sex: Prison sexual culture in the Mid-Twentieth-Century United States*, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* **2002** Volume 8, Number 3:253-270. 254

outlier rather than a product of genuine homosexual desire or a part of genuine homosexual history. By maintaining this (self)-segregation, we limit our understandings of the ways homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is produced within particular historical environments. But subjects like Carrington, who may have never considered themselves homosexual, despite their behaviors, are essential to considering gay life and black community formation in the 1930s and 40s. Spaces marked as black and those marked as homosexual were shaped by the outliers who moved between them. Putting Carrington's archives together helps trace this movement, and suggests how we might see more of the black gay world in history by looking within institutions trying to normalize both black and gay communities. These institutions created spaces for discussing racial identity and sexual deviance, two of Carrington's favorite topics, and they opened doors to the world at large.

The next chapter takes us back to literature, and back to the belly of the beast – the sentimental romance of the new south. Zora Neale Hurston's use of this genre could be read as a similar strategy to Carrington's, working within structures that defined home. Both Carrington and Hurston were travelers, looking to understand other communities through immersion, and they also both thought intensively about homes. Furthermore, Hurston and Carrington overlapped amongst Carl Van Vechten's circle of friends and luminaries. The community was small enough that Carrington acquired three first edition Hurston novels – *Moses*, *Man of the Mountain*, *Jonas Gourd Vine*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* – and one autographed copy of “Caribbean Melodies” collected by Hurston and made out “To Glenn.” “Caribbean Melodies” was put together by Hurston

in 1947 as a way to increase press for her forthcoming work on folktales and voodoo in Haiti, Jamaica and Honduras. Almost none of this material made it into her last novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948), which obsessively constricts its horizons to the internal journey of its insecure, masochistic heroine Arvay.

Chapter 4. Interracial Misogyny and Southern Spaces

“It’s just like my husband says. He says folks makes a bad mistake when they call places slums. He says folks are the slums instead of the places they live in. Places don’t get nasty and dirty and lowdown unless some folks make ‘em like that.” (304).

While Arvay Henson, the heroine of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Seraph on the Suwanee*, explains her feelings about her extended family being “slums,” she also poses the novel’s central questions. Do places “get nasty and dirty and lowdown” regardless of who lives there? Or do places reflect their residents? Arvay poses this question standing in her parents’ house, in the south Florida town of Sawley, characterized by “ignorance and poverty, and the ever-present hookworm.”³⁹⁸ Sawley’s economy is solely fueled by the turpentine stills that will move on to the next town after decimating the forests. The novel’s title introduces this key tension between people’s surroundings and their character: can a Seraph come from the Suwannee River? In fact, Hurston changed the novel’s title several times – from “Sang the Suwannee in the Spring,” to “Angel in the Bed,” to “Lady Angel with her Man,” to “Seraph with a Man on Hand,” to finally “Seraph on the Suwanee” – showing how the river’s location implies a sexuality that is usually disavowed by seraphs and angels. Throughout *Seraph on the Suwanee*, Arvay

³⁹⁸ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 1.

struggles to fit into the kind of white, desexualized identity held up as angelic in southern culture during the first decades of the twentieth century, the novel's setting. But Arvay's sexuality and class get in the way of any angelic self-interpretation.

Arvay's theory of people as slums, or, more importantly, her husband Jim's theory of the same, illustrates the conflict between the external environments of western Florida and the ideals of white femininity that persisted through the 1940s as Hurston was writing *Seraph*. In the opening paragraph, Hurston describes Sawley as "flanked on the south by the curving course of the river... running swift and deep through the primitive forests, and reddened by the chemicals leached out of drinking roots."³⁹⁹ The "curving course" of the river makes up a porous border for the town and connects Sawley to "deep primitive forests" which are equally uncontainable. Instead of a stable ground for the reproduction of proper white women, as Delia Konzett points out, "Sawley is presented as a degenerate community of white crackers" who will continue to drag down white racial stock.⁴⁰⁰

Crackers are fitting subjects for Hurston's critical paean to whiteness and Florida, because crackers represent both abject and spectacular versions of southern whiteness. Several critics have noted that *Seraph on the Suwanee* reflects eugenic discourses about gender and abject whiteness in the 1920s,⁴⁰¹ especially in terms of its "white trash milieu." Matthew Wray and Annalee Newitz discuss white trash as a racial problem in

³⁹⁹Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 15.

⁴⁰⁰ Konzett, "Getting in Touch with the True South: Pet Negroes, White Crackers, and Racial Staging in Zora Neale Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee*," 133.

⁴⁰¹ See Jackson, "Waste and Whiteness: Zora Neale Hurston and the Politics of Eugenics." Also see Tate, "Hitting 'A Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick': *Seraph on the Suwanee*, Zora Neale Hurston's Whiteface Novel."

their history of race and class in the south. Wray theorizes white trash as “both inside and outside whiteness, the difference within, the Other that inhabits the core of whiteness,” signifying the gender, class and sexual deviance that whiteness proper can never own or do without.⁴⁰² Just as white trash inhabits the core of whiteness, Arvay’s “proud Cracker” identity also inhabits (and threatens) the core of her growing identity as a proud wife.

Understanding Arvay’s place as a “cracker” in a specific genre of fiction about poor southern whites helps us understand Hurston’s broader critique of femininity. Arvay’s story is very much about her journey through different domestic spaces, trying to find “where she belongs in the world” by figuring out how to feel safe at home – in her space and in her body. In this chapter, I will trace Arvay’s journey through a series of domestic spaces and show how her failure to “find” herself in these spaces reflects the failures in Hurston’s political attempts to unite blacks and whites through regional stories. Hurston scholars have mostly rejected *Seraph on the Suwanee* outright, as the story seems to endorse the misogyny of its time, and “isn’t even about black people.”⁴⁰³ Even the novel’s satiric commentary on whiteness is combined with a patronizing disregard for the black characters in the novel. *Seraph* seems to be written to prove Hurston’s theory that dialects are specific to places, not to races – black characters written in whiteface and white characters written in blackface sound the same because their experiences of the world are so similar.

Most critics also point to Hurston’s poverty and need for lucrative material when

⁴⁰² Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, 62.

⁴⁰³ Walker, “Forward,” xvi.

she wrote *Seraph*, which she did in fact intend to be bought by Warner Brothers and made into a Hollywood success.⁴⁰⁴ The novel's overwrought scenes of marital conflict and one-dimensional supporting cast may be due to Hurston writing it to be a successful film, or they might be due to Hurston's anger at the critical demand for politically rebellious black heroes, and her dismissal by much of the black press as a sentimental writer about love rather than a writer of useful political fictions. In *Seraph*, Hurston overdoes the very aspects of her writing that sparked the ire of critics like Richard Wright and Alain Locke. She writes to Carl Van Vechten that she had "hopes of breaking that old silly rule about Negroes not writing about white people,"⁴⁰⁵ expressing her typical enjoyment of being an iconoclast and spokesperson for conservative blacks in the 1940s. But Hurston's ambivalence about her characters' racist and sexist positions comes out clearly in the way she describes southern spaces. In the novel's conclusion, Jim and Arvay Meserve ride out into the sunset in a shrimping boat, finding peace finally in the ocean rather than in any humanmade environment or domestic space. Yet here, the space can still be a "slum" if Jim and Arvay behave as slums themselves.

Sawley, Florida and Mulberry Trees

Arvay grows up in a house that represents the rotting, impoverished "old south" mentality of her "cracker" roots. The Hensons are low status even within the poor town of Sawley. Their house is located on the periphery "more than two miles east of the heart of Sawley, and nearly a mile from the Baptist church." Brock Henson "had never made

⁴⁰⁴ Binggeli, "The Unadapted: Warner Bros. Reads Zora Neale Hurston."

⁴⁰⁵ Carby, "A True Picture of the South," 17.

as much as a hundred dollars in any month in his life,” and even his small income stream is drying up with the declining turpentine industry in western Florida.⁴⁰⁶ Hurston emphasizes the ugliness and disrepair of the house, which “was now a rusty, splotchy gray-brown” with only the parlor “ceilinged overhead.” In the kitchen and bedrooms, “the rafters were bare and skinny.”⁴⁰⁷ The fact that the parlor was ceilinged but other rooms were not represents the Henson’s priorities – guests were to be seen in the best room, and the rooms for private use could be left without repairs.

Under these bare rafters, Arvay feels understandably “unsafe inside,” and Hurston implies that Arvay’s experiences of home are all shaped by this fundamental vulnerability. Perhaps because she feels unsafe inside the house, Arvay spends most of her time building her own miniature home in a mulberry tree in the Henson’s backyard; “that redeemed the very back of the unkempt garden space.”⁴⁰⁸ Inside the Henson’s parlor, family portraits represent Arvay as “a fat blob on her mother’s lap, while another disfigurement that had to mean (Arvay’s older sister) in a highly ruffled dress leaned against her knee.” Over the mantelpiece is “some artist’s interpretation of General Lee at Manassas,” about which Hurston comments that “though the enemy was right up under the feet of the general’s horse, he assumed that the men he led could not see them” and

⁴⁰⁶ as forests produced their “best” tar in the first 3 years of stripping, and the boom in construction tore through pine forests for lumbar. Hurston did a WPA essay and photo series and video of turpentine camps in Florida. According to Hurston’s reports, the “over-rider” position that Brock Henson was promoted to before they bought their house paid 12.50 per week. But these wages stopped from Nov – March each year when the forests while the forests were cleaned up to prevent fires. See Hurston, *Visit to Aycock & Lindsay Turpentine Camp*.

⁴⁰⁷ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 8–9.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

“pointed (his) sword to show (his) men the enemy.”⁴⁰⁹ These images romanticize family and war, respectively, and Hurston’s satirical commentary on the two points to the key vulnerability in idealized panoramas of southern whiteness. If you look too closely at the details, Hurston suggests, you can see the assumed stupidity of the confederate troops and the deformation of the white trash babies. The Henson’s house produces both deformations – of family and of history.

The only thing that “redeems” the Henson’s house is the blossoming mulberry tree in “the back of the unkempt garden space” in their backyard. Here Arvey engages in fantasies about her future marriage and homemaking with Carl Middleton: the preacher that Arvey falls in love with and gets close to before he betrays her to marry her older sister, Lorraine. Just like the pear tree in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* for Janie, this mulberry tree becomes the basis for Arvey’s sexuality, against which all other desires are measured. To understand herself, Arvey has to revisit the mulberry tree over and over again. It becomes “a sacred spot” for Arvey, where “her real life began.” It is under this tree that Arvey “found out that Heaven was so far off,” by looking through the trees’ top branches and not seeing anything, “no angels moving around or nothing.”⁴¹⁰ Her real life begins after she gives up on seeing angels, yet another reference to the conflict between Arvey’s sexuality and the idealized white femininity of the symbolic “seraph.”

The mulberry tree, like the pear tree for Janie, symbolically offers knowledge that Arvey, Eve-like, accepts.⁴¹¹ Arvey’s loss of faith under the tree foreshadows her first

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁴¹¹ For more on the pear tree as a twist on the biblical tree of knowledge, see Weathers, “Biblical Trees, Biblical Deliverance: Literary Landscapes of Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison.”

sexual encounter with Jim, who pulls her out of the branches of the mulberry tree to rape her on the ground. Before taking her off to marry him, Jim asks Arvay to take him out to “her playhouse,” and asks her to “go long acting like (she) was playing house again” while he watches. Then “in a fraction of the second (she) was snatched from the sky to the ground,” her clothes “ruthlessly dragged down her legs” and “in a moment more, despite her struggles, Arvay knew a pain remorseless sweet.”⁴¹² Arvay’s sexuality is literally grounded here: “Here had been her dreams since early girlhood. Here, in violent ecstasy, had begun her real life.”⁴¹³ Hurston’s descriptions of the girl being torn down from the mulberry tree and overpowered on the ground are overladen with details about the physical geography, the greenness of the branches mingling with the tearing fabric of Arvay’s “tight legged-drawers.” The scene’s descriptions also invoke the symbolic weight of trees in southern fiction, as representatives of southern beauty and also terror.⁴¹⁴ Arvay’s “pain remorseless sweet” reflects this beauty and terror, and Hurston’s description of rape under the mulberry tree emphasizes the connection between violence and sexuality built into the environment of the novel.

Sexuality continues to be a “pain remorseless sweet” for Arvay throughout the novel, the same phrase that Hurston uses to convey Janie’s “revelation” underneath the pear tree.⁴¹⁵ But unlike Janie, who “wanted to struggle with life but it seemed to elude

⁴¹² Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 51.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁴¹⁴ Sethe puts this best in her reflections on Sweet Home: “although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world.” Morrison, *Beloved*, 7.

⁴¹⁵ “She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from

her” at 16, Arvay is whisked off into a marriage that Hurston describes as a daily struggle. In fact, Arvay considers herself extremely fortunate that Jim tells her she’s “going to keep on getting raped... every day for the rest of (her) life.”⁴¹⁶ Jim’s smugness about their future and Arvay’s resolution to “take refuge in her man” are part of Hurston’s satire of white fiction’s romance of the south. Throughout *Seraph on the Suwanne*, Hurston’s anxiety-ridden and sexually repressed heroine struggles for inclusion in 1940s narratives of femininity. Within southern regional romances, the national realm of politics is cast as immoral and dirty, men’s work. The home, on the other hand was women’s realm as the true desire of women, whose sexuality and embodiment is seen as almost a threat to the stability of home life and national reproduction.⁴¹⁷

In her introduction to the 1991 edition of *Seraph on the Suwanee*, Hazel Carby points out that nonwhite and working class female authors partly bought into “women’s culture’s” ideology of universal communication among women, using it as a marketing tool and also critiquing the ideology from the inside. Nonwhite women both participated and critiqued narratives of universal gender roles. In a letter to Burroughs Mitchel, a prospective editor, Hurston explains her characterization of Arvay: “You know yourself that a woman is most powerful when she is weak... all a woman needs to have is sufficient allure, and men will move the world for her.”⁴¹⁸ This same sort of claim that

root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid.” Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 11.

⁴¹⁶ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 57.

⁴¹⁷ Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, 12, 19–24.

⁴¹⁸ Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, 562.

her readers already know about women seems to be Hurston's design in her tongue-in-cheek dedication of *Seraph* to Marjorie Rawlings, the author of a romantic fantasy about south Florida pioneers that emphasizes the relationship between manhood and the preservation of land, and to Mrs. Spessard L Holland, the "first lady of Florida." Either dedication without the other would seem more sincere, as both figures romanticized the everglades of west Florida and promoted narratives about domesticity that *Seraph* satirizes. At the same time, Hurston participated in the valorization of Florida's landscape and past.⁴¹⁹ Hurston praised Rawlings in the highest terms for capturing the essence of Florida,⁴²⁰ and she seems eager to profit from efforts at documenting Florida's culture – including the growth of regional literature written by women.

But Hurston's self-representation as the bridge between Florida folk culture and the national interests in preserving history does nothing to temper her cutting humor at the expense of Florida "folk." Rawling's most popular novel, *The Yearling*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1939, portrays a southern male coming of age process and was considered an instant classic in regional fiction.⁴²¹ The novel's charming young hero, Jody Baxter, leaves behind his contemplative, nature-loving, lost in the woods boyhood – symbolized by his friendship with a young deer – for a more sturdy, grounded relationship to their land. In the pivotal moment, Jody shoots his deer friend, who won't

⁴¹⁹ Not just in her WPA project works, which can be found at http://www.floridamemory.com/onlineclassroom/zora_hurston/, but also in her autobiography. See particularly Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Dirt Road*, 140–154. See also Kaldec, "Zora Neale Hurston and the Federal Folk."

⁴²⁰ For more on Hurston and Rawlings's mutual influence, see Lillios, A. (2010). *Crossing the creek: the literary friendship of Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*. Gainesville, University Press of Florida.

⁴²¹ Despite Rawling's repeated disavowals of "regional literature."

abide by the ever-taller fences that Jody and his father build around their subsistence crops, becoming a man by protecting his family's home. Arvay's male children don't come of age in this typical way; they both end up leaving the south and, in different ways, refusing to become southern men. Hurston also revises the role of mother in Rawling's representations of southern home. In *The Yearling*, Jody's mother, "a woman all of Hell couldn't amuse," represents a frontier style femininity of self-reliance and resourcefulness, whereas Arvay is anxious and ambivalent about her ability to function on her own.

Hurston and Rawlings do share, however, a particular disdain for conventional womanhood. Although they both write within femininity's defining genre, the romance, both Rawlings and Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwannee* indirectly endorse their hero's misogyny. Both Rawlings and Hurston rely on the threat of heterosexual incompleteness to drive their narratives, a force generic to "women's culture" and regional fiction. If place is defined through the heterosexual romance, with the home representing a microcosm of its surrounding landscape, the coherence of the region itself is placed in jeopardy by conflicts between heterosexual gender roles. The simplistic psyches and omniscient, at times cruel, narration of Arvay and Jim Meserve emphasize their links to generalizations about gender and sexuality. Arvay, like femininity itself, is marked by anxiety and ambivalence, dependency and resentment.⁴²² The swashbuckling "new southern" idealist, Jim Meserve, represents mobility for Arvay from the beginning. He rescues her from Sawley and her family: "Where this man was hurrying her off to, she

⁴²² To see Hurston's commentary about the basic "maleness" and "femaleness" of Jim and Arvay, see Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, 559–562.

had no idea, but she was going, and leaving her old home behind her” (54).⁴²³

Unfortunately for her sake, Arvay cannot leave Sawley behind her – the Henson’s house shapes her experiences throughout her married life. She thinks it “a lucky chance (that) she had been carried away from it at a fairly young age, but still, its fumes and vapors stuck to her sufficiently to scar Jim and bruise her children.”⁴²⁴ Even in this passage where Arvay is recognizing that she brings with her everywhere she goes “the doing-without, soul-starvation, brutish vacancy of aim, absent dreams, envy of trifles, ambitions for littleness, smothered cries and trampled love” of Sawley; she is concerned that her past hurts Jim and her children, overlooking the effects that carrying Sawley around has had on her own happiness. Hurston describes the Henson’s house as a dynamic force, literally reaching for Arvay through the miles of her journey, yet her character stagnates in her role as wife – to put everyone else’s needs before her own. Arvay must burn down her parents house in order to finally be done with it, but she finds the strength to do that to protect her family, not in her own desire to leave it behind.

Turpentine Shacks and Southern Masculinity

Jim hurries Arvay off to be married, and to claim her home in the turpentine



shacks. Hurston explains that the turpentine shacks were “not built for beauty,” but “this house with its four crude rooms looked beautiful to Arvay.”⁴²⁵ By contrasting the stark images of turpentine shacks and camps that Hurston

Figure 18: Turpentine Shack, from *wanee*, 54. Hurston's photograph collection that accompanied her WPA project ethnographies

took during her WPA fieldwork, we can see the possible blinding effects of femininity and the idealization of home.⁴²⁶ “Love” keeps Arvay from seeing the brittle structure of her new home and of the industry that keeps workers moving from forest to forest, camp to camp, destroying the land as they harvest the turpentine.

The importance of the turpentine shacks and the relationships they foster cannot be overemphasized in *Seraph*. As opposed to the Henson’s place in Sawley, and the Meserves’ later home in Citrabelle, the turpentine shacks promote partnerships across racial lines, partly through cementing gender difference and hierarchy. Jim’s “pet Negro,” Joe Kelsey, and his wife, Dessie Kelsey, are key figures in the Meserve’s marriage. It is Joe who tells Jim to “get the bit in (Arvay’s) mouth and ride her hard and pull her up short...(women are) all alike, take em and break em.”⁴²⁷ After they are married, on Arvay and Jim’s wedding night, Joe shows up outside their window to serenade them with a song about a “careless love” that makes the vocalist “leave my happy home.” The song “was an old, old ballad and it haunted you, sweet and bitter mixed up in just the right amounts,”⁴²⁸ reflecting the tenor of the turpentine camp and the quality of love that makes up the Meserve’s relationship. It is not a coincidence that Arvay hears this music and sees “the trees and the woods for the first time from the inside.” The music of the laborers helps Arvay enter the woods and the camps, and she can hear it “from the inside” partly because of the ragged walls and windows of the turpentine shack.

⁴²⁶ See Bordelon, *Go* for Hurston's folkloric texts. See also Bordelon, "New."

⁴²⁷ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 46.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 59. The song seems to be a combination of many versions of the blues ballad “Careless Love.”

Joe and Dessie Kelsey show Jim and Arvey how to be a married couple through their examples of using space, especially Dessie's example of how to be a wife. Just like Joe instructs Jim in heterosexual masculinity, Dessie shows Arvey how to "take care of" Jim and the shack. Hurston comments: "Dessie often helped her out in more ways than she was being paid for."⁴²⁹ One of these extra-monetary duties is telling Arvey that she is pregnant: "I declare! That husband you done married is all parts of a man," Dessie proclaims. Not only does Dessie teach Arvey how to measure Jim's masculinity, but she also teaches Arvey how to observe her own body's changes. Whereas Arvey doesn't notice anything special, Dessie sees the throbbing in her neck and the change in her appetites. Their relationship evokes the commonplace exploitation of black domestic labor, but Hurston portrays Dessie and Arvey as "quite fond of each other," sharing the job of taking care of Jim without argument or incident. It's hard to read this version of cross racial women's relationships without thinking of Hurston's offer to help Marjorie Rawlings as her maid while Rawlings was finishing her final novel.⁴³⁰ Whether or not Hurston would truly have moved in with Rawlings as her maid, she paints Dessie as a necessary source of understanding for Arvey, who comes to count on Dessie to share knowledge about "how men folks are" and how "we women have to take advantage 'em every once in a while."⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁴³⁰ "Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings to Edith Pope." "Did I write you that Zora Neale Hurston wrote me of her distress and disgust at Idella's leaving, and knowing that I was trying to get to work on a book, offered--though she is working on a book of her own--to come and take over until I finished my book? It is one of the biggest things I have ever known a human being to do. It made me ready to go--all for the Negro race."

⁴³¹ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 70.

As Jim waits, drinking, with Joe Kelsey while Arvay gives birth. Dessie serves as her midwife, ushering their first-born – Earl David Meserve – into the world and causing his first (and only) cry as she “smacked the breath of life into him.” Even though Dessie delivers Earl to Arvay, he is definitively not “of” the turpentine shacks. Arvay reflects that he reminds her of “her Uncle Chester... the one that they seldom talked about, the one who was sort of queer in his head.”⁴³² Although there is no direct evidence that Hurston read eugenic theories of the 1940s, her prior work with Franz Boaz would have made her familiar with ideas about racial degeneration, and her descriptions of Earl come at times directly from her WPA work on “crackers” in west Florida.

Early- twentieth-century anxiety about lower-class whites overpopulating the nation led to a panicked movement to research poor whites as a “race.” Eugenic reports on the white rural poor argued that white America needed to be “purged” of the “deteriorating” influences of the deformed, feeble-minded, albinos, alcoholics, and criminals.⁴³³ By the 1940s, successive booms in immigration and expansionism put pressure on existing racial categories and miscegenation laws to define numerous “new” subcategories of “known” races. Racial scientists argued that poor whites were a separable racial groups by using maps, tables, and diagrams, and they increasingly relied on characterizations of the “marshes, swamps, and forests” that poor whites lived in as the cause of their deterioration. Earl is conceived under the mulberry tree in the Henson’s backyard, takes after Arvay’s extended family, and is so unresponsive that he seems stuck in “a world within himself.” Janet St. Clair argues that Earl is “an image of

⁴³² Ibid., 68.

⁴³³ Jackson, “Waste and Whiteness: Zora Neale Hurston and the Politics of Eugenics,” 642.

the deformed and illogical consciousness that restricts (Arvay's) growth and potential."⁴³⁴

While St. Clair points out many key similarities between Arvay and Earl, for Arvay, these deformities only have purchase insofar as she is still living in her past, reliving her unsafe feeling inside the Henson's house in her new home.

The Swamp and White Sexuality

Arvay needs to leave Sawley behind in order to feel safe in her home, and her marriage. But after Jim finally moves Arvay and their son Earl to the nearby city of Citrabelle, Arvay merely transfers her fears to the nearby swamp – imagining the swamplands encroaching on her home and eroding its foundation. Earl's response to the swamp is exactly the opposite – it is there where he starts playing house, feeling safe, and separating from his mother. Earl has always been closely tied to the ground, and even the underground: Arvay craves clay while she is pregnant with Earl, and asks Dessie to sneak her some so that Jim doesn't know she's indulging her "Cracker" ways. Hurston draws on stereotypes about poor rural whites, their allegiance with swamps and their "brutish" embodiment, explaining that Earl's flat feet were actually a benefit in the swamplands where footing is slippery. At his birth, Arvay thinks of Earl as "the chastisement (she's) been looking for,"⁴³⁵ and Hurston uses him in this scene to chastise the white south for its idealization of the white mother as an "angel in the house." Earl is a throwback in terms of his relationship to the land and his stagnation in the "oral" phase of sexuality. From birth, Earl is maniacally attached to Arvay's breast: "he attacked ferociously when put to

⁴³⁴ St. Clair, "The Courageous Undertow of Zora Neale Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee*," 51.

⁴³⁵ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 69.

the breast,” “he seized upon the breast; he did not simply accept it as most children did.” Earl’s animalistic appetite does not decrease as he is socialized, nor does it transfer onto other sexual objects.

Earl is also a frightening synthesis of dysgenic characteristics and Freudian theories of infantile sexuality and sexual aberrations, published in his 1920 volume “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality.” Hurston represents Earl as not growing intellectually or sexually at all, the “low wimpering sound” that he makes to signal his hunger as a baby is the same as the “whimpering, whining, that broke into a kind of a yelp now and then as it grew more insistent” as Earl fights to break out of his room as a young man. His aim in both cases is biting: on first his mother’s breast and then the thighs of the daughter from the new Portuguese family that move into Jim and Arvay’s backyard. In his similarities to dysgenic figures from reports about poor whites, and his allegiance to the swamp, Earl expresses a uniquely southern category of alienation and abjection that is manifested right on the surface of bodies.

Earl’s albinism is what most marks him as “not favoring Jim,” whose darker complexion highlights his “modern” potential to combine races and ethnicities. Instead, Earl takes on and amplifies Arvay’s complexion, which is marked with pale white skin and blond hair as thin as corn-silk. He scares Jim, and the rest of the community that is moving quickly towards clearing the swamplands for the timber industry. As Patsy Yeager shows in her reading of Hurston’s earlier work, Hurston uses grotesque figures to condense and displace the cruelties of whiteness.⁴³⁶ Like the rabid dog in *Their Eyes*

⁴³⁶ Yeager, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women’s Writing, 1930-1990*, 28-29.

Were Watching God, Earl is characterized by a ferocious appetite for destruction, a symbol of the unnatural force of whiteness that is naturalized into the southern landscape.

While Hurston was writing *Seraph*, the swamplands of the south seemed to take their vengeance on the modernizing era of clearing and draining, as floods became more frequent throughout the south with Florida affected in the great flood of 1927, as well as large floods in 1945 and 1947. Like the swamps, Earl cannot be held in check forever. His animalistic nature and untamed sexuality eventually lead to an attack on a neighbor's daughter. He finds Lucy Corregio, who lives in the cabin next door to the Meserve's house in Citrabelle, and bites her face, her legs, and her thighs, ripping up her clothing and holding her down on the ground.

This scene is the close of act one of the novel, the first climax in the movie-to-be, and a foreshadowing of the later decisive climax where Arvay burns down her childhood home. As Arvay chases after Earl in the dark, holding a lantern and an axe and trying to protect him from the "varmint" in the swamp, Hurston emphasizes the wilderness around her and inside her: as she looks at the woodpile where the axe should be, Arvay "burned and turned to dry ashes inside." Once again, the danger that Arvay feared from the swamp turns out to be within her own house, and she is grateful that her children have left the lights in the kitchen on because "darkness held an unspeakable terror for her this night."⁴³⁷ Hurston's description of Arvay's fear brings to mind Toni Morrison's theory of the African Americanist presence in American Literature – "what are the strategies of escape from knowledge, of willful oblivion" that authors perform to avoid speaking of a

⁴³⁷Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwannee*, 144-145.

society “seething with the presence” of racialized bodies, conflicts and traumas?⁴³⁸ When she realizes that Earl is out there somewhere, Arvey is deathly afraid of the dark. While Arvey explains this fear to herself as a fear about Earl being hunted, she is also clearly in danger herself. As usual, Arvey is willing to lose herself rather than admit the damage and danger of her past.

In her reading of *Moby Dick*, Morrison shows how Melville, overwhelmed by the inconsistencies and brutal force of whiteness as an ideology, tried to both personify and abstract that force in his image of the white whale. In the chapter on “The Whiteness of the Whale,” Melville uses the image of an albino to explain how the white whale “peculiarly repels and often shocks the eye” with “that whiteness which invests him.” Earl’s albinism, like his orally fixated masculine sexuality, is scary because it exaggerates and consolidates the roles of the south. Like the dissolute, impotent white aristocrats in Melville’s and other post-bellum southern fiction, Earl’s stringy fingers make him useless for production (and, symbolically ala Freud, useless for reproduction) of the white southern home.

Earl is a force of destruction inside in a book obsessed with the connection between internal and external landscapes. After patronizing Arvey for 140 pages for her “willful oblivion” about her racial and gendered ideology, Hurston blatantly undercuts Arvey’s misrecognition of Earl as the thing to be protected. Even after seeing that Earl has attacked Lucy Ann Corregio, Arvey bolts home, thinking that “maybe some man, thirsting for her son’s blood” was chasing him and that he would be wanting his mother. But when she gets home, the lights in the kitchen don’t protect her from Earl’s attack; he

⁴³⁸ Morrison, “Unspeakable Things, Unspoken,” 136.

jumps on her from his hiding place underneath the table. Hurston makes a stark point in setting this scene in the kitchen – the one place where Arvey feels really comfortable in her house – and in having Earl emerge from underneath the place where she most actively loves Jim (through his stomach). The threat is internal.

As Earl climbs up her body and bites at her neck, Arvey still identifies with his anger and outsider status, rather than seeing him as an enemy, and she insists that he is just confused and thought she was one of the people after him. In his recent reading of *Seraph*, John Charles argues that Hurston uses her cracker figures to “render a critique of Southern backwardness, . . . depict(ing) the world of the crackers as marked by crushing poverty, ignorance, rape, lynching, and an enduring plantation social structure; she even goes so far as to draw on eugenicist ideas about inferior, animal-like, and unsocializable “kinds” of people.⁴³⁹ Chuck Jackson also observes that Earl is what twentieth century eugenicists would have regarded as a “cacogenic” child, embodying degeneracy and weakness. While this is true, he also embodies a great deal of the novel’s anger; despite being emasculated in almost all ways, Earl’s sexual aggression will out. Earl grows up to be a rapist. And not just any rapist, a rapist of a white woman; as one member of the white crowd says, “What we need is a posse to run the so-and-so down and string him up. Can’t a clean-living, pretty white girl like Lucy Ann get no more protection than that?”⁴⁴⁰ This lynching scene shows the slipperiness of categories of racial degeneracy – Earl becomes what Charles calls “a black surrogate,” abject to the normalizing categories of whiteness signaled by Lucy Ann’s clean-living. Earl’s move from the consolidation of

⁴³⁹ Unspeakable Things in Hurston article by John C Charles

⁴⁴⁰ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 144.

white grotesqueness to a symbol of unnatural black sexuality is facilitated by his closeness with the swamp and his undomesticated aggression.

The Meserve Houses as Racializing Spaces

Throughout *Seraph*, the power of place helps race function like a surrogacy system. Despite the townspeople's claiming Lucy Ann as a "pretty white girl," presumably because of her "clean living" and location in the white suburbs, her race is tinted by her foreign origin. Hurston uses the Meserve house – with its frontier spirit, its screened in porch, and its commanding presence in town – to represent the national house, weighing in on the complex debates about the place of ethnic whites in the first decades of the 21st century up through the WWII era. During this time, as Cara Kaplan argues, "popular culture and the growing entertainment industry were particularly caught up in the pseudo-scientific, proto-political project of homogenizing Americanization, standardization, and classification."⁴⁴¹ (Modern Fiction Studies, 1997). Roderick Ferguson adds that as non-white immigrant and migrant populations grew in response to the displacement of war and its demands for (geographically) flexible labor, nation states measured, classified and homogenized the ideal of the heterosexual family as the road into citizenship. As a novel written for adaptation by "the growing entertainment industry," *Seraph* illustrates the connections between race, sexuality and domestic space in the national "proto-political" project of Americanization.

If we think of the Meserve house as the symbolic ideal of a southern home; white,

⁴⁴¹Kaplan, *Undesirable Desire: Citizenship and Romance in Modern American Fiction*, 152.

strictly hetero-gendered, that Arvay must scrub spotlessly clean as a way to rid herself of fear that she will be “found out” as a Cracker, the Meserve’s second property is a staging ground for regional inclusion. In this cottage, Jim sets up his first in command, whom he trusts as a tenant as well as an employee. Typically, Jim spends as much time in the cottage as he does at home, appreciating the camaraderie of his “pet” men. The first family that lived in the cottage on the Meserve’s property was Joe and Dessie Kelsey, Jim’s “pet Negro” and his “happy, obliging” wife. But when Arvay discovers that Joe has been running Jim’s liquor still, she chases Joe and Dessie away. She thinks that Joe’s “likker ways” were “leading her husband away.” Although Jim points out that Arvay has been benefitting from the fruits of Joe’s labor, and making use of Dessie’s help around the house, she’s still scared of Joe’s influence on her children. Arvay may be modeled, in this sense, on southern whites who were making money on black home buyers in Florida during the boom, but who hated the source of their incomes.⁴⁴² Once Joe and Dessie leave, Arvay realizes that “when the little house in the grove was empty, its silence left a vacancy in her days. Joe and Dessie and their children were a part of the pattern of her life.”⁴⁴³ The two families, like the two houses, function in a symbiotic, hierarchical relationship with each other. Joe runs Jim’s illegal liquor still and connects him to the shadow economy of black construction. Jim hooks Joe up with ever more profitable jobs and allows him to live on the Henson property.

While the Meserve-Kelsey relationship is a kind of nostalgic continuation of the turpentine shacks, the Portuguese family that moves in next represents a new era in

⁴⁴² Mckibben, Samuel T., “Potpourri: This is It” *Kansas*, *The Plain Dealer* (03-31-1950) 7.

⁴⁴³ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwannee*, 118.

southern whiteness. Arvey describes the change as a familial separation; where there once was the “laughing, obliging Dessie,” “there were two separate families on the place.”⁴⁴⁴ She accuses Jim of lying to her in telling her that they were a “white family,” as they are foreigners and thus “will never be fully white.” Arvey’s evaluation of the new family proceeds in terms of the norms of femininity, wherein the whiteness of an ethnically marked household could be measured by the serviceability of their women.

The Corregio family is also marked with America’s desire for the other through its marriage between a white Georgia woman “who lowered herself to marry a foreigner,” “turn(ing) her back on her kind and fall(ing) from grace.”⁴⁴⁵ Arvey’s own biblical narrative of playing in the mulberry tree contemplating God, only to be torn down by the skirts to be raped by Jim, signals that her scorn for Mrs. Corregio is based in identification as well as disgust. Hurston makes it clear that Arvey’s judgements about the Corregios are based in her own discomfort at the social event. Underneath her hatred of foreigners, Arvey is really questioning her own clothing. “She felt awkward and out of place.” What Kaplan calls “the undesirable desire” – the desire for the foreign other that must be constantly and simultaneously disavowed and reconfirmed – is embodied in Arvey and Earl’s reaction to the Corregios.

Although Arvey disapproves of the daughters’ looks, she easily admits that they are attractive, at times in an even more lascivious tone than the male characters. Arvey

⁴⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 121. Hurston also marks this transition in Kenny’s scorn for the Corregio girls, who “could neither skin the cat, turn cartwheels, nor walk on their hands” like the youngest of the Kelsey’s daughters, who Kenny was used to making a spectacle of by ordering her to stand on her hands in crowds so that her dress fell up over her head. Again, minstrelsy references...

⁴⁴⁵ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwannee*, 120.

notices that Felicia “was so fresh and tender looking” and notes that “she was really built from her neck on down.” Describing Felicia as “fresh and tender” and, in an earlier description, as “already ripe-looking, and all in all, a very pretty girl,” Arvey simultaneously represents the foreigners as food and as sex objects. These representations foreshadow Earl’s attack on Lucy Ann Corregio, where he bites her thigh and neck and rips her skirts off, leaving her disfigured literally and figuratively as a now sullied member of the community.

The Corregios don’t have standing in the community to press charges against Earl, “what with Jim paying the doctors bills and all,” but Lucy Ann’s sacrifice is necessary for Felicia to count as American, because Lucy Ann is the daughter with “a sort of the Latin overlay that made her exotic.” First born and a Portuguese citizen, Lucy Ann, like Earl, needs to be sent away for the true melding of the Meserves and the Corregios to occur. In writing *Seraph*, Hurston aimed for “a true story of the south,” one that would show up stereotypes about segregation and race hatred (stereotypes that she thought writers like Richard Wright promoted with their “party” versions of southern life). She sets the novel in Florida in order to portray “white people from all over the world, and Negroes from every southern state surely, and some from the north and west,” Zora reflects, “So I knew, that it was possible for me to get a cross section of the Negro south in the one state.”⁴⁴⁶

Many critics have noted the interracial sympathies of *Seraph*, particularly in Hurston’s characterization of Jim, whom she described as “a member of that liberal class

⁴⁴⁶Pollard, Sam (dir). *Zora Neale Hurston: Jump at the Sun*, (California Newsreel, 2008).

which has always existed in the South in a minority, who believe in the benefits of the Union and advancement.”⁴⁴⁷ Hurston seems to sarcastically bless the bond between the Meserves and Corregios in a scene after the football game, where Kenny takes Felicia to the big post-game celebration dance. At the dance, “union and advancement,” are represented through the evaluation of girls’ beauty. Looking at Felicia and Angeline (Arvay and Jim’s daughter) next to each other, Jim comments, “Home town girls... Products of Citrabelle, prettiest little town in Florida, and grows nothing but pretty girls.”⁴⁴⁸ Jim’s statement here seems to contradict his earlier claim that places don’t cause people’s beauty or ugliness, but that the citizens’ ugliness can cause a place to become a slum. In this case, Jim’s rampant misogyny overrides his general philosophy of places – because women can only be products, not producers, of space. The Corregios, by proximity to the Meserve’s home, are an inter-ethnic white family as a model of social admixture, epitomized in what Arvay calls “those Geechy messes” – plates of fried shrimp, crabs, or “other fish in Savannah kinds of ways.”⁴⁴⁹

Portuguese immigration was not common in Georgia or Florida during the early

⁴⁴⁷ in a letter to Burroughs Mitchell, *Life in Letters* page 501, cited in “Unspeakable Things” article about Seraph. Moving beyond the debate about whether Seraph promotes integration at the expense of realistic portrayals of racism, John C. Charles concludes that the novel exhibits the tension between positive portrayals of integration and the anger felt by many black authors of the post-war period at the sacrifices they had to make in order to write those portrayals.

⁴⁴⁸ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 211.

⁴⁴⁹ Hurston got the “Gees” slur from her WPA interviews in south Florida – used to describe Portuguese immigrants who came through the Carolinas and were associated with seafood and mixing tastes. See <http://www.floridamemory.com/collections/folklife/mp3/hurston/> (particularly “Oh the Buford Boat Done Come”. Savannah cooking at the time was “messy” in mixing in many immigrant flavors and combinations, much like the mixing of raves and ethnicities that Hurston idealizes in the turpentine camps. *Ibid.*, 128.

20th century, and Hurston's characterization of the Corregios brings out a string of Arvay's racism that exposes the closed mindedness of whiteness. Arvay can't enjoy a college homecoming football game that the whole family attends because she spends her day worrying about Kenny's date – Felicia Corregio. Arvay is “thunder-struck by lightning” that Felicia is at such a big-time social event. “Where did she get those clothes?” Arvay anxiously wonders. “Was Kenny bleeding them out of money that they could use otherwise to put clothes like that on that Felicia's back?”⁴⁵⁰ When Arvay finds out that it was, in fact, Jim who gave Felicia the money to buy nice clothes for the event, she accuses him of having an affair. She reminds herself that Jim “always did favor his stomach,” and that there must be something at the Corregios that is even more appetizing than their foreign food.

The metaphors of ingestion, incorporation, and expansion are in tension in this scene, as Hurston struggles to express the violence, hopefulness, and greed of Citrabelle as a staging grounds for whiteness. During the dance that Felicia attends with Kenny, he distinguishes himself with playing his specialty, “House That Jack Built.” Hurston had previously recorded this song in her unpublished musical titled “Polk County: A Comedy of Negro Life on a Sawmill Camp with Authentic Negro Music in Three Acts.”⁴⁵¹ “House That Jack Built” is one example of how lines from Hurston's ethnographies of black communities in Florida are put in white mouths in *Seraph*. These transpositions occur throughout the novel, but the presence of “Authentic Negro Music” being performed by a

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 209.

⁴⁵¹ Zora Neale Hurston and Dorothy Waring, *Polk County: A Comedy of Negro Life on a Sawmill Camp with Authentic Negro Music in Three Acts*, Zora Neale Hurston: Collected Plays, eds. Jean Lee Cole and Charles Mitchell (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2008) 340-342.

white band, while the band's leader courts an attractive immigrant woman, connects the two examples of cross-cultural desire.

Kenny merges into the black music tradition, leaving home and traveling around the country playing the trumpet. Kenny ends up in the Jazz scene in New Orleans and then New York. In response to Arvey's anxiety about Kenny's finances, Jim assures her that;

White bands up North and in different places like New Orleans are taking over darky music and making more money at it than the darkies used to... Kenny claims that it is just a matter of time when white artists will take it all over. Getting so it's not considered just darky music and dancing nowadays. It's American, and belongs to everybody. Just like that swamp; so far they have slept over the darky way of picking a box. He aims to be the first one to make it something for the public, and he might be right for all we know. (202)

Jim's reassurance that Kenny's music will be "just like that swamp" further links the swamp to the grounds of racial disfigurement that must be eliminated for "civilization" (aka white people) to profit. Jim's monologue recounts Hurston's ideas of cultural fusion, that "there is no more Negro music in the U.S. It has been fused and merged and become the national expression."⁴⁵² Just as the "darky music" has been taken over by white bands, the swamp which was originally associated with darkness and savagery has been taken over by whites for profit. For Hurston, music is a space making activity, a way of claiming territory, and a source of figurative and literal mobility. Just like Joe Starks teaches Jim how to woo Arvey (through brute force and generalized misogyny), he teaches Kenny how to "pick the box" and opens doors for Kenny in the black music circuit.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² Carby, "A True Picture of the South," 15.

⁴⁵³ Hurston, herself, performed this service for Alan Lomax, a preeminent white

Jim's clearing of the swamp is also an exercise in patriarchal dominance over a feminized nature, with clear regional inflection as Hatton Howland – Angeline's husband and Jim's business partner in the endeavor – is a "Damnyankee." As such, he "can't let any business get away." Hatton's only distinguishing feature is his Yankee background and skill at "hustling," which wins him Jim's consent and support. Clearing the swamp is a part of Hatton's conquest of the south, a conquest that goes through Angeline.

Angeline integrates him into southern white social circles, and Jim introduces him to business prospects and industrial innovations. In an eerily similar scene to Arvey and Jim's first encounter, Hatton deals with Angeline's reluctance to marry him by threatening to rape her. From down the hall, Arvey hears Angeline "fervently" respond: "so rape me, and I'll help you."⁴⁵⁴ Arvey, incensed, rushes to the cupboard to find a gun and shoot Hatton down, but she is thwarted by her memories about Earl, as "her hand burn(s)" with images of "her boy," memories about Earl, the last person killed with that same rifle. Hurston reminds us of Earl's murder amidst this talk of rape to point out the consequences of such pre-marital violations. Arvey feels like she cannot defend her daughter because of her own sexuality and its results.

Although this scene seems to be just another example of Hurston's casual use of rape to signify marriage, Angeline and Hatton also signify territorial expansion that is echoed in Hatton's clearing the swamp behind the Meserve house. When Jim gets home and Arvey tells him the story, he chuckles, "If I know my daughter, this is one battle the

American folklorist, while he was traveling in the south recording interviews with jazz and blues musicians. Hurston advised Lomax to blacken his face for acceptance into black towns. See Patterson, Tiffany. *Zora Neale Hurston and a History of Southern Life*, Philadelphia: Temple UP (2005).

⁴⁵⁴Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 178.

Yankees will never win.”⁴⁵⁵ Staging the battle of the sexes as a civil war is a common trope in southern literature post-reconstruction, where the lost innocence of Dixie is often symbolized by “fallen” white women. Sexuality maps onto regional space throughout Hatton and Angeline’s courtship.

The Swamp Monster and “The Magic of Man”

Hatton’s primary function in the novel is to clear the swamplands behind Arvay and Jim’s house. The swamp becomes its own character at this point, representing a more destructive version of the racial admixture of the turpentine shacks. Arvay’s inability to go after Hatton because of her memories about Earl foreshadows the way that Hatton will drive Earl’s ghost from the swamp. As Arvay watches the swamp being cleared, she dwells on her son’s mysteriousness and her own inability to understand the swamp. She wonders, “Was there another place in there that she knew nothing about? Something that might reveal the unknown inner life of the son that she had borne.”⁴⁵⁶ Hurston’s use of eugenic theories to represent Earl make it seem unlikely that he had a hidden internal life, but Arvay’s linking his inner life to a secret place in the swamp points to the broader conversation that she is wading into.

According to Anthony Wilson, southern culture typically identifies the swamp as “an area outside civilization whose geographic features render it resistant to colonization or agriculture.”⁴⁵⁷ These associations can be traced back to the “miscegenation” of ideas

⁴⁵⁵Ibid. 179

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 194–195.

⁴⁵⁷ Wilson, A. (2006). Shadow and shelter : the swamp in southern culture. Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, xvi.

that David Miller locates in the swamp as a symbol in 19th century southern literature.⁴⁵⁸ Wilson argues that 20th century modernist writers, such as Hurston, “emphasized the swamp’s connection to racial mixture.”⁴⁵⁹ Nobody can ultimately know what lurks in the swamp, and that mystery makes the swamp scary and appealing. In Hurston’s own work, particularly in *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, swamps are deeply sensuous places of drink, dance, and physicality. The swamp marks one end of John’s home community, bordered on the other end by a creek that separates the community from the rest of the south.⁴⁶⁰ John is raised by a resentful stepfather, and he must learn “the drumbeat” of the water before he can find his calling – preaching – and marry the love of his life – Lucy. But John cannot stay faithful to Lucy, and, in a much cited quote, he confesses that he is a preacher on Sunday but a “natchel man” the rest of the week. Anthony Wilson describes John’s fatal split between his spiritual and sexual selves as the mark of modernity, also symbolized in *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* by the train carrying John further into the “new south.”

Jim also sets off “to get (himself) a piece of the new south,” riding the rails.

Indeed, Jim doesn’t just join the new south, or travel there to escape share cropping and other legacies of slavery, he occupies the new south as he travels. Although he ends up

⁴⁵⁸ Miller, J. D. and William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies. (2002). South by southwest : planter emigration and identity in the slave South. Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, in cooperation with the William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies, Southern Methodist University.

⁴⁵⁹ Hurston’s novel “Jonah’s Gourd Vine” features a swamp as an idyllic primitive space where the protagonist – a light skinned loner – finally fits in and feels at home. Ibid., 121.

⁴⁶⁰ Robert Hemenway describes *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* as Hurston’s calling card to the Harlem Renaissance. The novel tells the story of a philandering preacher who finds his linguistic skill and magnetism through the music of his natural surroundings. Like in *Seraph*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston describes John’s journey to south Florida as a kind of reconnection with his African spiritual roots, as well as a reconnection with a patriarchal sexual license.

dragging Arvay into “the new south” with him, she never quite feels at home in Jim’s territory. Jim has only one relationship to women and to the natural world – ownership. So it makes sense that Arvay identifies with the swamp, as they are both Jim’s possessions. She doesn’t escape the house into the swamp like Earl, but she identifies with Earl and feels “shut off in loneliness by themselves” at home while Jim and her other children are off in the grove. Angel in the bedroom though she might be, Arvay is constrained by both her notion of propriety and her house. If she could overcome her fear of the swamp and her own sexuality, she’d be less likely to be occupied and defined by Jim – as the swamp ends up.

According to folklore-inspired books by Cecile Hulse Matschat (1938) and Marjorie Rawlings herself,⁴⁶¹ the particular swamplands around the Suwannee River were also known for marooned slave ships. A typical story tells of “the ghost of a slave ship (that) sails up the river, manned by the skeletons of long-dead seamen, who abandon their contraband cargo on the hidden islands.” As a literary scene, the swamps off the Suwannee River are ripe with the primordial mixed-race roots of slaves and their captors, plantation home and slave quarters, and the “throw away bodies” that Patsy Yeager describes as the sites of violence and racial admixture. Earl belongs in the swamp, as a throw away body, or at least a throwback body that cannot be incorporated into a modernizing southern landscape.

Built on the edge of the swamp, Citrabelle can expand only after Jim brings in the technology and capital to clear the swamp west of the town. Such swamp clearing

⁴⁶¹ Rawlings, M. K. (1942). Cross Creek. New York, C. Scribner's sons, 21. See also Rawlings, M. K. (1955). The secret river. New York, Scribner.

projects were popular in the 1920s throughout the everglades,⁴⁶² as modernization threatened the traditional lives of swampland communities.⁴⁶³ C. Rieger points out that there are positive and negative valences to Jim's project of clearing the swamp: it is part of a trifecta of clearing the way for new growth, along with Arvay's burning her childhood home down in Sawley and her letting go of her memories of Earl. On the other hand, the new housing development stratifies the town, as those who belonged to its bourgeois ideal moved west of the now-cleared swamp. "The original line of the swamp gave accent like a railroad track. Those who belonged moved west."⁴⁶⁴⁴⁶⁵ But Rieger does not point out that Jim's house becomes the first stop on that railroad track. The Meserve house, like the turpentine camps earlier in the novel, becomes the temporary space where different races, classes and genders can mingle. Joe Kelsey and his family stay to the East of the clearing, and Angeline and Hatton occupy the property furthest out into what used to be the swamp. Jim notes that their property "is worth a whole lot more than it used to be on account of that development." But Arvay is bereft rather than enriched by the swamp's clearing, suddenly realizing her "sympathy with the swamp." This sympathy is based on "long association"; "she and the swamp had a generation of life together and memories to keep." She takes pride in her daughter's economic

⁴⁶² For details of the draining of swamps for profit and land acquisition, see The Florida Everglad Engineering Commision, *Florida Everglades*. Essentially, the federal and state governments were to pay for the establishment of a new river and drainage system, once local governments and citizens could show that the swamplands were needed for homesteads and farming.

⁴⁶³ According to Hurston's own field notes, these traditions were a matter of survival, not necessarily a viable alternative to white plantation society and slavery. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, 38–39.

⁴⁶⁴ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 197.

⁴⁶⁵ Rieger, "Clear-Cutting Eden: Representations of Nature in Southern Fiction, 1930-1950," 114–116.

mobility, and the success of one of Jim's projects, "but underneath, it created a kind of lonesomeness in her."⁴⁶⁶

Arvay feels lost without "her former nemesis," and experiences the "modern machinery" that excites Jim as a cacophony, "more threatening than the swamp's quiet presence."⁴⁶⁷ Instead of a strong separation between swamp and home, reinforced through difference, now sounds surround and penetrate the Meserve property. "Where the loggers had been one day, the bulldozers followed the next, and right behind the thunderous machines came the dump trucks pouring dry sand... tons of cement and steel were dumped and piled not too far from Arvay's front door."⁴⁶⁸ Arvay relates the workers to Earl's death and the change in her environment as a sign that Jim is looking to sell their home out from under her. The "gangs of husky black roustabouts ... singing, chanting, laughing ... and swinging shining axes to the rhythm, felling the giant trees" resemble the work camps where Arvay and Jim's relationship started. Like the work camps, and like Kenny's journey to New York, music forms a link between everyone in the surrounding area, as a shared experience and rhythm of life.

Arvay's ambivalence about this modernization mirrors Hurston's ambivalence about the southern pastoral that she continued to return to throughout her writing career. In particular, Hurston seems to regret the passing of the work songs that black men sing while they clear the swamp, writing to Charlotte Osgood that she was collecting the work songs "just in the nick of time, as I find its greatest era is about 40 years in the past."⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁶ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 195–197.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴⁶⁹ Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, 378.

Patsy Yeager argues that Hurston's collection of work songs are central to her economic history of blacks in the south.⁴⁷⁰ As Hurston begins to integrate elements of southern pastorate tradition, she reflects the pain that some of these songs expressed, as well as a longing for the community they enacted.

The Porch: "A Golden Land of Refuge."

Like the swamp, which represents a space of dangerous racial mixture and sexual fluidity, porches are vital threshold spaces in the southern landscape. Arvey and Jim's porch functions as a threshold space for inclusion in whiteness and heterosexual ideals. Instead of staying inside and trying to shield herself from the swamp clearing, Arvey compromises and sits with Jim on the porch, watching the "development." Even when Jim was away at work, Arvey "kept up her vigil on the porch, keeping track of every new change out there" in the Hatton development. Her vigil is a period of mourning for the lost swamp, but it also reassures Arvey that no matter how noisy the construction, the development will not encroach on her property. Hurston makes a direct connection between Arvey's porch, her roles as wife and mother, and her belonging in the sphere of whiteness. "The porch told her that she belonged," Hurston boldly explains. When Jim brings Arvey word that Kenny has signed a contract to perform in New York for the foreseeable future, Hurston describes Arvey's feelings of abandonment in terms of her distance from the porch: "a golden land of refuge where all would be peace, but from which she was now expelled."⁴⁷¹ Expelled from "the enchantment of the porch," which

⁴⁷⁰ Yeager, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990*, 43-45.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

“she saw as from afar and in a vision,” Arvey’s “power seemed broken.”

Losing access to the porch seems to mean as much to Arvey as losing her son, or to be one and the same thing. This makes sense if we see the porch as a symbol of femininity – the enchantment and the retreat from the world. After losing Earl to the white mob, losing Angeline to the Yankee, Arvey is now losing her remaining child, Kenny, to the call of the north. She is no longer a mother. She has no children to look after, to call in for dinner, to assert power over and on behalf of. Despite Jim’s reassurance that Arvey still has him around the house to look after, she is inconsolable, and thinks “if only I could be setting quiet-like on my porch.”⁴⁷² In the end, Arvey finds a way to return to her porch after a chapter-long rant about the awful Corregio women and how they must be behind Kenny’s move to New York. Having established, again, that the Corregios were “heathens trying to pass themselves off as white folks,” Arvey can once again go “peacefully off to sleep” on her porch of racial regulation.

Seen from the perspective of white southerners at the beginning of the 20th century, the sleeping porch referenced a history of conquest and a “New South” expansionist ideology, just as Arvey’s porch is added to the south side of the house. Helping to “modernize” plantation homes, the sleeping porch craze in the south was fueled by new theories about the health effects of night air, but also by plantation nostalgia – utilizing existing neo-colonial pillars and jutting neo-classical balconies. Magazines of the time were filled with advertisements for porch plans that would increase the value of houses. As Arvey becomes comfortable on the porch, at times referring to it as her “refuge,” she invites more women to come visit with her on her

⁴⁷² Ibid.

porch and praise its grandeur.

Sleeper porches were also sometimes referred to in the south as “galleries,” citing their dual purpose as sanctuary and display, which Arvay thinks of as “an outside show of ownership.” As architectural anthropologist Richard Perry explains, the front porch is “a transitional zone between house and street... extend(ing) the sphere of control from the house into the public arena, (and) offering a seat for the consideration of others who may briefly intrude into one’s space.” These others can be judged and dismissed, like the trampy “Fast Mary” who comes crying to Jim about Kenny having insulted her on her own porch – looking up her dress, pointing and laughing saying “it looked like a mulberry pie.”⁴⁷³ With this reference to mulberries, Hurston loops back to Jim and Arvay’s first encounter, pointing to Arvay’s prior open-air life in Sawley. In fact, as Hurston makes clear, Fast Mary belongs to a class without porches, defined by “a one-story structure of about fifteen rooms, side by side, all facing a common porch,” just like Arvay’s family in Sawley. This common porch, like the “common homely unpainted building inhabited by such as Mary,” contrasts the propriety of Arvay’s porch, which she comes outside to wash in order to drive Fast Mary away.

Arvay’s porch joins a longstanding tradition of porches as key symbolic settings in Hurston’s work. Most famously, Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* travels from her grandmother’s yard to Logan Killick’s fields to the porch outside Joe Starks’ store. For both Janie and Arvay, porches are porous spaces, both inside and outside, and the point of contact between their marriages and broader meanings of gender. Troping on Janie’s entrapment on a pedestal on Joe Stark’s porch, Hurston ironically refers to

⁴⁷³Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 163.

Arvay's screened porch as her "throne room," emphasizing the insecurity of Arvay's position on the threshold of white femininity. As much as Janie is welcomed as the queen of the Eatonville community, Joe doesn't let her join the signifying practices of the men who gather on the porch. Asking for Arvay to express herself on the porch would seem like too much; after all, she rarely expresses herself in her house and, even then, she is usually silenced by Jim's sexual dominance.

Being outside on the porch "made Arvay feel more inside of things"; things like the white community, but "deep down didn't feel she had any right to be there (on the porch) unless Jim insisted."⁴⁷⁴ She thinks that "that kind of thing was a mighty high kick for a low cow." She can't sit on the porch in comfort until Jim drags her to bed out there; declaring "he would be damned if he was going to foot the bill for a sleeping porch and good beds and then stick in the same old room on warm nights."⁴⁷⁵ It's a long way from Sawley to her porch. Arvay can follow Jim meekly into "the inside of things," whereas Janie defiantly takes control of the porch space for herself – vanquishing Joe Starks and his congregation with her cutting remarks about Joe's manhood. Arvay tries desperately to partake of the shelter of Jim's masculinity, symbolized through his purchasing power in improvements to their house. Janie and Arvay's different experiences of porches illustrate one aspect of Patricia Yeager's definition of Southern Literature: "African and Anglo Americans often experienced a world of similar objects – but from within completely different semiotic and cultural systems."⁴⁷⁶

These separate systems are precisely what Hurston sets out to disprove in *Seraph*,

⁴⁷⁴Ibid., 234.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 233–234.

⁴⁷⁶ Yeager, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990*, 36.

partly by appealing to supposedly universal codes of womanhood. According to historian of American culture, sexuality and affect Lauren Berlant, modern sexuality emerged in 20th century America through the conflation of sexual and emotional truths within the romance of the family. This romance disavows sexuality in order to produce an abstracted white citizenship ideal, which in turn conflates the reproduction of life and the project of femininity.⁴⁷⁷ According to this logic, being a good wife and mother ensures the reproduction of everything from morality to white supremacy to imperial conquest.⁴⁷⁸ With the growing popularity of Freudian psychoanalysis in the WWII era, the family romance was endowed with sexual desires, albeit unconscious ones which were expressed in very coded language interpretable by an expert intellectual class.⁴⁷⁹ Hurston may have been signifying on this language when she shows Arvay, standing frozen and helpless on her porch, as Jim is almost killed by a rattlesnake. Most psychoanalytic critics have located Seraph's central turning point in this scene – where Arvay “went into a kind of coma standing there.... She could neither run to the rescue nor flee away from the sight of what she feared would happen.”⁴⁸⁰ Like the rest of Arvay's approach to life, she can't move past her fear and also can't retreat from what she's afraid of; she stands on the porch, between her inner world of anxiety and masochism and the world around

⁴⁷⁷ Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, 19–21. For a reading of Amy Jacques Garvey's version of this narrative, see Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*.

⁴⁷⁸ For more on the construction of morality as whiteness through normative sexuality, see Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940*.

⁴⁷⁹ Hale, *The Rise And Crisis of Psychoanalysis In the United States: Freud And the Americans, 1917-1985*.

⁴⁸⁰ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 255.

her, including her husband.

Although Ann Ducille reads the rattlesnake scene as a partial vindication for female sexuality, with the squeezing of the rattlesnake coils as symbols of how Arvay's sexuality entraps Jim, this scene also revises Hurston's (1926) story "Sweat,"⁴⁸¹ in which an overworked, underloved black woman watches her husband's pet rattlesnake kill him, turning her head away from his dying body with no desire to save him. Sykes, the stereotypical abusive husband, pushes his wife Delia one step too far when he brings the rattlesnake into their home – a home that Delia has paid for with the sweat of her labor. The two scenes share central plot functions as the breaking point for distressed marriages, and both are also set on the threshold between indoor and outdoor space. Although both Jim and Sykes are abusive, Jim is respected by the community because Arvay's body does not show the marks of her abuse, unlike Delia's, which Stykes "uses up until it's like a cane stalk." By comparing Hurston's earlier story and her last novel through these repeated scenes of ill-advised battles with rattlesnakes, we can see her grappling with differences in white and black versions of "wife."

Whereas Delia's love for her husband is worn away into hatred, Arvay is ambivalent and anxious about Jim, just as she has been from the beginning. Delia's decision to let the snake kill her husband is motivated by a more than justified hatred, while Arvay's indecision about whether or not to help Jim fight off the rattler is motivated by an assumed paralysis that defines her as a white woman of the New South. Her racial anxiety makes Arvay exaggerate this femininity, until she literally can't break the paralysis that seems to rule her life. During the snake episode, Arvay imagines that

⁴⁸¹ Hurston and Wall, *Sweat*.

she “flew to Jim and slew that snake and held Jim in her arms like a baby.” But, the narrator reminds us, “Actually, Arvay never moved.” Delia’s extremely mixed blessing of economic independence gives her power over Sykes, at least in terms of not being able to be thrown out of their home: “Mah sweat is done paid for this house and Ah reckon Ah can keep sweatin’ in it.”⁴⁸² Arvay owes her home and her subsistence to Jim and can’t break out of a pattern of Jim being the one to save her, rather than vice versa.

Sailing Off into the Sunset

Arvay does finally learn to understand her place as Jim’s wife, and to accept the racially integrated home space he makes for her. She decides to go on a trip out in Jim’s shrimping boat, which in itself is a huge symbolic move. Throughout the novel, Arvay hasn’t wanted to have anything to do with Jim’s work. But one day she goes to visit Jeff and Dessie and they convince her to take a drive with them out to the coast. It is fitting that Arvay’s reunion with Jim comes through a visit to Jeff and Dessie, whom she once felt were like family back in the turpentine shacks around Sawley. Hurston’s vision of the coast and the shrimping community is idyllic. Arvay learns that “there were many if not more colored captains than white. It was who could go out there and come back with the shrimp. And nobody thought anything about it.” Not only does nobody think about the race of different captains, “Some boats had mixed crews,” with some whites working for “Negro captains.”⁴⁸³ At this point in the story, Arvay doesn’t even pause over this information, laughing with Jim about the way the captains would talk about the owners

⁴⁸² Ibid., 27.

⁴⁸³ Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 323.

behind their backs. The integrated “cussing out” that captains engage in, and the friendly banter between owners and captains, represents a return to the turpentine shacks and work relations. During that period, Jim and Jeff are partners together in their illegal alcohol business, and at the end of the novel they are again partners, running the shrimping company. But, like before, there is a clear hierarchy between Jim and his racially diverse workers; he “gives” Jeff the use of his car, so that Jeff can fetch Arvay from town and help her carry her things into the shore house.

On the boat, Jim steers and commands a three man crew, including the black cook “Cup Cake,” whom Arvay supplants to take over feeding the men while they work. There is a clear hierarchy aboard the ship, and the rest of the men refer to Jim as “My Captain.” The sight of the ocean wows Arvay into even greater reverence towards Jim. She declares him a “monny-ark, and that’s something like a king, only bigger and better”⁴⁸⁴ over the ocean, which Arvay declares is “something too wonderful to even look at.” She feels “like (she had) been off somewhere on a journey and just got home.”⁴⁸⁵ This conclusion seems to echo Hurston’s own sentiment towards the ocean. In a letter dated September 8, 1944, she reports her happiness at finally finding a kind of home space that also expresses her peripatetic spirit. “I have achieved one of my life’s pleasures by owning a houseboat,” Hurston writes in reference to the *Wanago*, the first of her two houseboats. She expresses pleasure in the boat’s solitude, comfort, and the solace of witnessing “the various natural expressions of the day.” On the *Wanago*, Hurston reports that she “can actually forget for short periods the greed and the brutality of man to man,”

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 331.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 353.

and regain her “faith in the ultimate good that (she) was losing for awhile.”

Despite Hurston’s similar feelings about the ocean, it’s hard to believe that “the ultimate good” she’s holding onto hope for can be expressed in Arvay and Jim’s relationship aboard Jim’s ship. The first night on board the ship, Jim comes into the bedroom chamber they’ve built under the deck and tells her: “You brought this on yourself. You could have stayed away from me, but you didn’t. So you’re planted here now forever. You’re going to do just what I say do, and you had better not let me hear you part your lips in a grumble. Do you hear me, Arvay?”⁴⁸⁶ Jim is right that Arvay cannot, in fact, stay away from him, which Hurston emphasizes throughout the novel. Arvay feels cornered, trapped, and set upon by Jim, and despite two attempts to leave him, always comes back. The narrator seems to interpret Arvay’s returns as positive choices, whereas Hurston herself wrote that she couldn’t stand a lover who wanted her to not be an individual and do her work.⁴⁸⁷

The misalignment between Hurston’s self-confidence and Arvay’s insecurity leads many critics to conclude that Arvay is actually a much stronger character than she appears. According to DuCille, Hurston is parodying the conventions of white romance, particularly of *Gone with the Wind*, including the conventionally unconventional masculinity of Rhett Butler in Jim’s sea-captain status at *Seraph*’s closing. Arvay, then, is read as a calculatingly submissive woman akin to Scarlett O’Hara, both women “playing parts” while “neither husband is even aware of the game.”⁴⁸⁸ I would argue that

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 349.

⁴⁸⁷ Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, 558.

⁴⁸⁸DuCille, Ann. *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women’s Fiction*, 141.

Arvey isn't aware of the game either; she reaches the epiphany that "she was serving and meant to serve." The sentence turns on whether Arvey "was serving and (was) meant to serve," or whether "she was serving and (she) meant to serve." Whether Arvey retains some agency in planning to serve Jim, or whether her purpose was settled the moment Jim raped her under the mulberry tree, it's clear from Jim's language that she is reinterpreting abuse as love. But is the novel also doing so by ending on this note?⁴⁸⁹

I am less interested in whether Hurston meant to parody or to reenact the misogyny of the WWII and post-WWII periods, than in the ways that *Seraph* constructs this misogyny as a function of regional and domestic space. In Sawley, the turpentine camps, the town of Citrabelle and the swamps, Arvey feels "unsafe inside" because of the intertwined forces of sexuality and violence. She believes that whiteness will give her security, and she looks to model this whiteness in her domestic surroundings, but there are always external forces breaking down her racial and sexual security. As Arvey is dragged, literally kicking and screaming, outside into the interracial and sexually charged surroundings, Hurston parodies her own attempts to break the scripts for black writers during the 1940s. Instead of writing about the dangers of urban space and way racism emasculates black men, Hurston writes about the failures of white femininity to function in the modernizing south. Some people are slums, as Jim would say, in that they drag disrepair and poverty everywhere they go. *Seraph* shows that some models of racial identity are also create slums; no matter where they go, they bring a fundamentally

⁴⁸⁹ For a reading that argues "yes," see Binggeli, "The Unadapted: Warner Bros. Reads Zora Neale Hurston." For a reading that argues "no," see Dubek, "The Social Geography of Race in Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee*" and Washington, "Zora Neale Hurston: A Woman Half in Shadow."

destabilizing version of oppositional genders, locked together by sexual violence and bound for mutual destruction.

Seraph's generically happy ending with Arvay and Jim sailing into the distance echoes the heterosexual endings of Dora, Sappho and Winona's stories from chapter one. Because these are stories about marriage, heterosexuality, and the search for a home, any gender transgression within the novel must be put aside to reach the conclusion. The implication of happy marriage at the end of each book seems to protest too much, to promise a version of home that is impossible, at best, and a destructive ideal, at worst. Most "white face" novels of the post WWII period focus on the breakdown of marriages and homes due to gender differences.

The post WWII period is traditionally understood as one of male rebellion in black literature, defined by the protest novel traditions of Richard Wright, the cutting existentialism of Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin's cultural radicalism of the Left Bank. But the corresponding protests by black female writers against domestic displacement and sexual containment have been folded into the broader claims of wartime masculinity and the growing civil rights movement.

In writing as formally varied as Gwendolyn Brooks's *Maud Martha*, Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* and Alice Childress's *Like One of the Family*, black women protested the crumbling housing structures they were segregated into and the economic displacement of black communities during the war. Whether it is Maud Martha's domestic battle grounds in a three room apartment on the south side, Selina's trying to come of age in Brooklyn while

being pulled by her father's dreams of returning to Barbados, or Lorraine Hansberry's fictionalization of her own family's struggles to move out of their segregated Chicago neighborhood, these stories focus on the limitations and promises of domestic space. So much so that these authors have been grouped together as a continuation of their turn of the century counterparts, a new generation of black female authors who use the conventions of domestic fiction to stage allegories about political interventions. In her account of African American literature during WWII, Jennifer James concludes that “in very much the same way that the military (and war) had become a site where black men could ‘rehabilitate’ their bodies, the domestic served as a space where black women could also rehabilitate.”⁴⁹⁰ In her analysis of the post-WWII period in the black press, Noliwe Rooks agrees with James's analysis that the domestic sphere was at the forefront of black women's writing. In women's magazines like *Tan Confessions* and *Half Century Magazine* that print serialized fiction overwhelmingly represented marriage and family as the path to racial uplift.⁴⁹¹

Ann Petry, like Zora Neale Hurston, explicitly writes against the domestic narratives that constituted the black political mainstream. While Hurston works from inside the domestic narrative, parodying the incompatible gender roles that undermine home's stability, Petry strips the romance from these roles by emphasizing their racial limits. Anti-domestic spaces in Hurston and Petry's work suggest that sexual and geographical queerness are linked, at least as literary tropes, by representing desires that

⁴⁹⁰James, Jennifer. *A Freedom Bought With Blood: African American War Literature from the Civil War to World War II*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2007, 234.

⁴⁹¹Rooks, N. M. *Ladies' pages : African American women's magazines and the culture that made them*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

overflow the boundaries around home. In the next chapter, Petry takes us to a Connecticut town in the post-WWII period, and undoes the normative assumptions about home and sexuality that trap Arvay and Jim in *Seraph*.

Chapter 5. Queer Spaces in Ann Petry's *The Narrows*

In Ann Petry's writer's notes about her last novel – *The Narrows* (1953) – she repeatedly asks herself: “whose story is it?” If it is Abbie Crunch's story, about an “oaklike” woman who clings to middle class respectability by denying the truth of northern racism and blaming blacks for their disreputability, then how could she interest readers in “the problems of middle class people which are mostly internal.” Things happen in Abbie's life, but during the three-four months in which the novel takes place, she mostly shifts internally – opening slightly to the world outside her doorstep. *The Narrows* opens with an eight page internal monologue from Abbie, describing her weekly shopping rituals and interactions with Dumble Street, otherwise known as “The Narrows, Eye of the Needle, The Bottom, Little Harlem, Dark town, Niggertown.”⁴⁹² Dumble Street lies alongside the river Wye, heading towards the docks and Long Island Sound. Dumble St. is literally the last street of Monmouth, CT, with the black community at “the bottom” of the symbolic geography of the town. Abbie secures her gloves and tucks her basket over her arm, thinking about how crass it is that “women these days carried brown paper shopping bags, impermanent, flimsy, often replaced.” Abbie's basket “was as much a part of her Saturday morning shopping costume as the polished oxfords on her feet, and

⁴⁹² Ann Petry, *The Narrows* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1953), 5.

the lisle stockings on her legs.”⁴⁹³ Abbie concludes, “all my life I’ve been saying to myself, What would people think?”⁴⁹⁴ Petry meticulously details Abbie’s self-display as an introduction to the porousness of internal and external problems in Monmouth. Although *The Narrows* has recently been accepted as part of Petry’s ongoing critique of racism and sexism in the post-WWII period, the novel is not yet recognized as part of post-WWII discussions of homosexuality. In spite of research done on the novel as a radical vision of the period,⁴⁹⁵ including critiques of the sexual politics of the cold war,⁴⁹⁶ queer and gender studies scholars have shied away from the novel’s ambivalent representations of homosexuals. But if we read this ambivalence in the context of interwoven examples of interracial desire, we can see *The Narrows* as part of a historical moment where black communities confronted failed heterosexual ideals with homosexual forms of intimacy and uses of space. But Link and Camilo’s affair points to the similarity between the two and to the limits of desire within a segregated landscape. Petry turns the litmus test for racial integration – “yeah, but would you let your daughter marry one of them?” – against the black community, and, in doing so, shows the ways that homosexual inclusion depended on excluding interracial desire. In the end, neither Abbie and FK Jackson, nor Bill Hod and Weak Knees, can tolerate Link and Camilo in their homes.

Lincoln Williams (suggestively called “Link”), is the character with real external

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁹⁵ Alex Lubin, *Revising the Blueprint: Ann Petry and the Literary Left* (Jackson: U of Mississippi Press, 2007).

⁴⁹⁶ Alan Wald, *American Night: The Literary Left in the Era of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 190–195.

problems. Abbie raises her stepson, Link, to believe that “he had to be cleaner, smarter, thriftier, more ambitious than white people so that white people would like colored people.”⁴⁹⁷ Partly because of this ideology, when Abbie’s husband (The Major) comes home one night sick, actually having a series of small strokes, she accuses him of being drunk and makes him sit alone in a rocker in the living room to sober up. When Link comes home he sees the Major, surrounded by newspapers on the floor (so he wouldn’t ruin the carpet), “head lolled over on his shoulder, head somehow loose, no longer connected to the rest of him, mouth open, and a little trickle of saliva coming out of the side of his mouth.”⁴⁹⁸ He sends for F. K. Jackson, Abbie’s friend and a commanding presence in Link’s life, who comes over and straightaway sends for the doctor. The Major dies in bed later that night. More importantly for Link, Abbie’s guilt and grief shuts him out. She forgets about Link’s existence for three months, during which Bill Hod, the local crime boss, takes him in and becomes Link’s surrogate father.

Abbie tries to separate herself from Dumble St. with her “almost aristocratic” house, “Number 6 Dumble St.,” and by doing so ignores her husband’s distress. On the other end of Dumble St., Bill Hod runs “The Last Chance Saloon,” where Link comes to stay and eventually works as a barback. As opposed to Abbie’s training, Bill Hod tries to teach Link “when people attack you, you have to fight back.”⁴⁹⁹ He tells Link the story of Ma Winters, who “stood at the top of the stairs with a loaded shotgun in her hand... saying ‘I’m going to shoot the first white bastard who puts his foot on that bottom step.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 138.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 146. Critics have noted that Hod’s name signals that he is a “hard man.”

And did. And laughed.”⁵⁰⁰ These two models of home are located as opposite symbolic ends to Dumble Street, pulling Link in opposite directions. As critic Melina Vizcaino-Aleman observes, Number 6 Dumble St. and *The Last Chance* “pull Link Williams in two different directions, between white domesticity and black masculinity.”⁵⁰¹ These two directions are represented by Link’s two sets of homosocial parents – Abbie Crunch and F.K. Jackson at Number 6 Dumble St, Bill Hod and Weak Knees at *The Last Chance*. *The Narrows* is as much a novel about the homosexual foundations of these conflicting pulls as it is the story of the illicit affair between Link and Camilo Treadway, the white heiress to a munitions fortune and the Treadway Mansion.

The Narrows’s story takes up 450 pages and consists of five “external events”: Link meets Camilla Treadway Sheffield the heir to a local munitions fortune (who is referred to as “Camilo Williams” through the novel because that’s the name she made up to lie to Link about her identity), Link and Camilo have an affair (mostly in NY where they stay in a hotel), Link brings Camilo home to Abbie’s and she throws them out, Link finds out about Camilo’s real identity and dumps her, she takes revenge by accusing him of rape, Link is killed. The cover of the mass-market paperback edition (published by Signet press in 1955) is heavy handed about the story’s genre. The Marilyn Monroe look-alike, presumably representing Camilo, wears an alluring expression; in the background, Link is broadly sketched and shaded in brown hues. This puts *The*

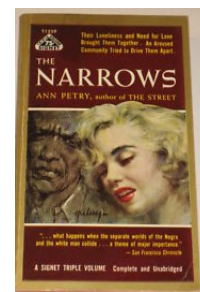


Figure 19: cover of 1st edition, paperback, of *The Narrows*

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 144.

⁵⁰¹ Melina Vizcaino-Aleman, “Counter-Modernity, Black Masculinity, and Female Silence in Ann Petry’s Fiction,” in *Revising the Blueprint* (Jackson: U of Mississippi Press, 2009), 123.

Narrows squarely in the melodramatic potboiler category, and positions it nicely for the film deal which Petry would eventually be offered for the story.⁵⁰² Hollywood never made the movie version of *The Narrows*; perhaps, as Petry reflects, “they realized how

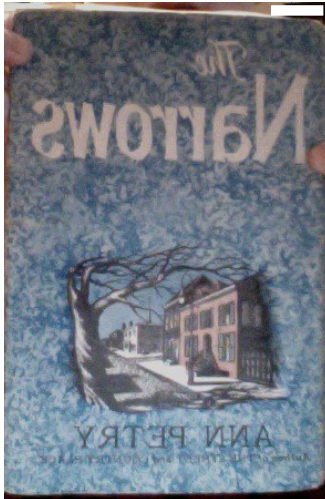


Figure 20 The Cover of the 1st edition of *The Narrows*, published by Houghton Mifflin (under the “riverside press” imprint)

much trouble they could get into with it.”⁵⁰³ A blurb from the San Francisco Chronicle appears on the front cover of the Signet edition, as “a story of what happens when the separate worlds of the Negro and the white man collide... a theme of major importance.” Although the theme of clashing worlds is represented by the interracial affair in *The Narrows*, it is only the most dramatic problem, the most external. In fact, Petry notes that her goal was not to write a story about colliding worlds, but instead to show that the two worlds were not separate at all, that “everything comes together, like five fingers on a hand.”⁵⁰⁴ This idea is aptly captured in the novel by the symbolic “hangman” tree, which everyone in the neighborhood calls “the hangman,” even though Abbie can’t trace the origins of that name. In fact, as Alan Wald notes, it is when Abbie begins to call the tree “the hangman,” almost in spite of herself, that she marks a change in her outlook from closed off to open to Dumble St.

The hangman reveals the connectedness between the north and south, as well as the way that past experiences shape the way characters perceive the present. Even if we

⁵⁰² Paula Rabinowitz, “Pulping Ann Petry,” in *Revising the Blueprint* (Jackson: U of Mississippi Press, 2007), 49–71.

⁵⁰³ Mark Wilson and Ann Petry, “A MELUS Interview: Ann Petry. The New England Connection.,” *MELUS* 15, no. 2 (1988): 71–84.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

were to conclude that *The Narrows* is Link's story, or Abbie's story, Petry constantly reminds us that their stories are connected, formally. She uses flashbacks to make the action of the novel indecipherable without putting together the events that each character recalls within their internal monologues, jumping between characters' inner vocabularies, all reported in third person with no one narrative perspective taking precedence.

In general terms, she writes, "It is the story of race relations in the town of Monmouth Conn – on the surface tranquil but – certainly no equality, no democracy."⁵⁰⁵ When Camilo accuses Link of rape, the Treadway family murders Link, Petry suggests, not because they think he has raped Camilo but because they were "in love." Their love was the crime. Link's life ends much like the white man who first dared entered Ma Winters's boarding house; "there in the hall, lying on his back, a bloody mess where his face had been."⁵⁰⁶ Link's body attests to the violence under the tranquil surface of the Treadway Mansion, Number 6 Dumble St. and The Last Chance.

Abbie Crunch throws Link and Camilo out of the door in the middle of the night; "pushing and pulling at the bed, arms violent, short stout body, violent, long white braids downdangling, violent too," "looking as she would have looked if she'd found a tiger in one of the beds."⁵⁰⁷ Likewise, Bill Hod barely manages to keep his temper when Camilo comes into The Last Chance to look for Link, Bill's "eyes narrowed to slits... that got-you-corned-trapped-beat-you-to-death look."⁵⁰⁸ Both Abbie and Bill Hod respond violently to the interracial sexuality suggested by a white woman's presence in their

⁵⁰⁵ Ann Petry, "Writer's Notes" (Boston University, n.d.), Ann Petry Collection, Box 19, Howard Gottlieb Manuscripts and Archive, accessed May 28, 2011.

⁵⁰⁶ Petry, *The Narrows*, 44.

⁵⁰⁷ Petry, *The Narrows*, 256,302.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 300.

homes, as if she must be eliminated to restore their control over their spaces. But their attempts to shove outside any interracial sexual expressions, and in Abbie's case any kind of sexual expression, have the opposite effect – the violence and unregulated sexuality gets written into the violence inside their homes. *The Narrows* is also the story of when the tranquil surface, tenuously upheld by strict spatial segregation, ruptures, and we see how oppressive the tranquility was in the first place.

In fact, black novels of the post war and cold war period abound in queer figures and sexual outsiders of all stripes, despite the lack of attention given to African American literature in studies of postwar sexuality. The sexual outsiders that dominate *The Narrows* echo Petry's own authorial persona, which she represents as "a survivor and a gambler," "a maverick, not a member of the club."⁵⁰⁹ In fact, an alternate unpublished final chapter of *The Narrows* is told from the perspective of Howard Thomas, the "swishy" embalmer, who Petry comments is a good closing narrator because he is "a true outsider."⁵¹⁰ Howard literally sleeps outside most nights and shows up to work half-drunk, but he also gets to see the residents of Monmouth at their most vulnerable and emotional. In her alternate ending, Petry emphasizes Howard's outsider status through flashbacks from his past life in New York, where he was "kept" by several "gentlemen who were not so gentle" and then by a white prostitute who kept Howard in good Gin. Howard finally wakes up with "a cloud over his head" that sends him to Monmouth, a destination picked at random from wanting to get away from a life of sexual exploitation

⁵⁰⁹ Ann Petry, *Ann Petry*, vol. 6, Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1988), 254–56.

⁵¹⁰ Rabinowitz, "Pulping Ann Petry."

and ruin.⁵¹¹ Howard is far from alone in the role of sexually marginal figures in *The Narrows*.

Holding off The Street

The Narrows opens with a scene of shopping, as Abbie Crunch takes a mental inventory of her appearance on the way to the market. Petry immediately points out the ways that her purchases shore up her identity as a middle class Black woman. Abbie hopes that her stylish wicker basket (unlike the disposable shopping bags other women carry), polished oxfords and beige-colored gloves separate her from “the toothless old women who sat, hunched over, mumbling to themselves, in the doorways, on the doorsteps of the houses in The Narrows.”⁵¹² In this conflation of poverty and urban geography, Abbie replicates reformers’ assumptions that promoting domesticity in the African American community will curb the “immorality” that leads to homelessness.

Opposing herself to the faceless, nameless and dehumanized women who represent the depths of urban poverty, Abbie focuses on her house at Number 6 Dumble Street. The homeless are not welcome on her doorstep, which “ha(s) a very definite air about it – an air of aristocracy. The Brass knocker on the front door gleamed, white paint on the sash of the smallpaned windows, and on the front door, was very white.”⁵¹³ Abbie uses her house to gain a sense of security from association with the surrounding Black community. The “aristocratic” air of Number 6 Dumble Street comes simultaneously from its whiteness and its inviolability. As Margaret McDowell notes, Abbie “not only

⁵¹¹ Petry, *The Narrows*, 240–42.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

keeps her house immaculate, but she also scrubs the wood trim around each tiny pane in her windows and daily polishes her brass door-knocker,” a type of overcompensation that shows her “vulnerab(ility) and fears that she may not fully be measuring up.”⁵¹⁴ No matter how hard she scrubs her door, it still looks out on Dumble Street. Mamie Powther, Abbie’s tenant and sexually promiscuous nemesis, who “was Dumble St.” incarnate,⁵¹⁵ thinks that the posts of the much polished iron railing look a bit like penises, all in a row pointing upwards. While Mamie might be overstating the phallic resemblance, she also points to the ways that sexuality lurks even on Abbie’s doorstep.

Abbie has tried to inculcate in Link dreams of normative heterosexuality, dreams she has worked for within a context that labeled all black female sexual behavior as degenerate, threatening the progress of the race toward good citizenship.⁵¹⁶ Abbie represents Link’s middle class future with an image of the type of house he will buy: “She had picked out a house for him, a brick house, on the other side of town. The instant she saw the For Sale sign on it, she’d managed to marry Link to a nice girl, and get them moved into the house, all in her mind.”⁵¹⁷ Abbie believes that the equally mass-produced “brick house” and “nice girl” will ensure Link’s middle-class future, just as she believes that her middle-class appearance will insulate her home from the disrepair of Dumble Street. In Abbie’s character, Petry shows that although Abbie’s dreams of normativity may be the opposite of Link’s fate, they are part of the same framework that contains The

⁵¹⁴ Margaret McDowell, “The Narrows: A Fuller View of Ann Petry,” *Black American Literature Forum* 14 (1980): 137.

⁵¹⁵ Petry, *The Narrows*, 21.

⁵¹⁶ Hazel Carby, “Policing the Black Woman’s Body in an Urban Context,” *Critical Inquiry* 18 (2007): 745.

⁵¹⁷ Petry, *The Narrows*, 245.

Last Chance: the two ends of Dumble Street.

From the beginning, Link and Camilo's affair is emphatically other than Abbie's dream of stability and middle class morality for Link. Public discourse in the post-WWII period claimed that interracial sexuality threatened to violate the white home and the safety of white women, and proponents of segregation used these fears to suggest that integration would break down the fabric of the American family. Abbie also fears the breakdown of the family, the black family, and sets Number 6 Dumble St. up to protect Link from the world of threatening sexuality beyond its brass doorknocker. But in her overwhelming grief and guilt after the death of her husband (the Major), Abbie "evicts" Link from the house and her affection. While even Abbie herself realizes that she could have saved the Major's life if she wasn't too offended by the alcohol on his breath to mistake his stroke for drunkenness, she doesn't budge in her absolute hatred for *The Last Chance* and her attempts to protect Link from it, thereby symbolically protecting him from Dumble St.

Link sees this first "eviction" as one in a series of betrayals by those he loves: "Abbie: Get out of my house, Mr. B. Hod: Get the hell out of my face, Camilo: Get out of my car."⁵¹⁸ In Link's conflation of these three characters, Petry emphasizes his homelessness; there is no room for Link in Monmouth. There is actually no room for heterosexual partnerships in *The Narrows*, partly because of "the eternal war of the sexes" but also because of the racial segregation that shapes the landscape. Abbie kills the Major, Bill Hod severely whips Link for his interest in a local brothel; and a supporting character, Malcolm Powther, can't keep his wife from cheating on him, no

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 257.

matter how much nice furniture he buys to keep her in the house. As Alan Wald puts it, “in the background (of the novel) there is a stream of references to the horrors of married life, both white and Black: the Powthers, the Bullards, the Orwells, the Valkills, and the Reverend Lord and his widow.”⁵¹⁹ I would add that Petry portrays the horrors of married life as being in the very fibers of domestic arrangements between couples. Abbie leaves The Major sitting in a chair surrounded by newspapers, and Malcolm Powther starts noticing Mamie’s affair while pressing her dresses.

Homes, Hotels and Harlem

In contrast to the heterosexual partnerships in *The Narrows*, Link and Camilo first meet on the dock by the river that circles Monmouth. They both claim to not recognize each other in the dense fog, and immediately get into a car to leave town. Link’s desire for adventure and conquest, stunted rather than encouraged by his service during WWII, and Camilo’s disregard for convention, stunted by her marriage by the aptly named Bunny Treadway, come together in their escape from Monmouth. Not only is their affair out of place in Monmouth, they each individually have reached the end of their ability to conform to the same failed scripts of marriage and property. Link and Camilo are also a symbol of the change in black radical resistance movements from the 1930s to the post-WWII period; the shift from Ma Winters defending her home with a shotgun, to disinvestment in urban centers and growing mobility through new public interstate highway systems. When Bill Hod gives Link a Cadillac for a college graduation present,

⁵¹⁹ Alan M. Wald, *American Night: The Literary Left in the Era of the Cold War* (UNC Press Books, 2012), 197.

he echoes radical ideals of black masculinity in the post-WWII period. Chester Himes's 1945 novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go* is a particularly explicit example of this masculinity, where the protagonist claims that his Buick Roadmaster is "proof of something to me, a symbol" that settles racial scores: "all I wanted in the world was to push my Buick Roadmaster over some white peckerwood's face."⁵²⁰

Automobility, a practice that fused self-determination and self-representation, mobility and rebellion, brings Link and Camilo together.⁵²¹ She also drives a Cadillac. Significantly, the couple's first conversation takes place in a car on an extended drive to nowhere in particular; they are continuously shown in motion, unable to settle down in any particular space. Link comments that Camilo drives "too fast" and accuses her of "ignor(ing) intersections, act(ing) as though you were driving a royal coach, with outriders clearing the way."⁵²² Camilo protests but lets him drive; suggesting that their escape from Monmouth and racial hierarchies is sustained by reinforcing gender roles. But Link and Camilo are victims of stories about black male criminality and white female vulnerability as much as they refuse these scripts. Petry suggests that they are both in love with each other, or at least "in love with love," and that love is made partly of boredom with and resistance to mainstream stories about gender and race.

Link tells Camilo his coming of age story and discusses his masculine role models: motion picture stories of Cowboys conquering the West. Link explains, "(in the

⁵²⁰ Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (New York: Thunders Mouth Press, 1986), 13–14.

⁵²¹ Cotton Seiler, "So That We as a Race Might Have Something Authentic to Travel By": African American Automobility and Cold-War Liberalism," *American Quarterly* (2006): 1097.

⁵²² Petry, *The Narrows*, 129.

movie images) I had seen a new world, found a new world, a new continent, and like all discoverers I decided to conquer it and make it mine.”⁵²³ After Link is finished describing the “world conquering ideas (you) get when you’re eight years old,” he refuses to take Camilo home when she says. “I plan to ride a long while yet,” and Link replies, “I’m afraid there isn’t a damn thing you can do about it except go along.”⁵²⁴ Despite Link’s later claims that he has grown out of his early Hollywood driven fantasies, the couple’s first conversation clearly positions Camilo as a new world of sexual conquest. Petry further emphasizes the connection between Links’ desire for Camilo and such “world-conqueror ideas” when Link stumbles out of The Last Chance bar and announces that he is in love “because once again he felt as though he could conquer the world.”⁵²⁵

Whether or not Link understands his eight-year old desires to conquer the world as sexual, Petry uses post-WWII associations between cowboys, gangsters and other outsider sexualities – including homosexuals – to implicate Link and Camilo’s affair in Hollywood narratives.⁵²⁶ Breaking free from allegedly domesticated, non-individuated masculinity of the assembly line and the suburbs, figures like the gangster and the cowboy populated screens. As Robert Corber shows, the post-WWII culture industry “ascribed an oppositional form of masculinity” to black men, who were cast as “social and sexual outlaws” alongside homosexuals.⁵²⁷ Such figures resisted reformers’ efforts to

⁵²³ Ibid., 78.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 98.

⁵²⁶ In fact, Petry was offered a Hollywood contract for the screenplay version of *The Narrows*, based on its scandalous sexual content and cinematic feel. McDowell, “*The Narrows: A Fuller View of Ann Petry.*”

⁵²⁷ Robert Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997), 23.

pathologize failures at achieving masculinity by standards of property ownership and mass consumption, reclaiming a homoeroticism outside of domestic spaces.⁵²⁸ Although theories of gender inversion placed black men and homosexuals at opposite ends of the masculine spectrum, both groups were considered outlaws by the codes of the day.

Through Link and Camilo's conversations about Hollywood and other forms of gender rebellion, Petry includes their relationship in a constellation of sexual outlaws.

However, in contrast to many of the Hollywood narratives, Link's masculinity will not conquer the world. Like Bub in *The Street*, Link fails to recognize that the motion picture narratives of conquest without repercussions were not intended to apply to Black men.⁵²⁹ Link never had a chance to conquer any kind of world, just as he never has a chance to "conquer" Camilo. She will not go along on his ride; their affair is actually driven by narratives about lynching and rape being the inevitable result of racial integration. After telling Camilo that he won't stop the car, Link sees her clenched fists and thinks, "I'm due to rape her, or try to, because it's written in the cards that colored men live for the sole purpose of raping white women, especially young beautiful white

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 6–9.

⁵²⁹ In her reading of *The Street*, Kecia Driver McBride notes, "When Jones tells him that the police need Bub to catch bad guys, he honestly believes that he is assisting the law. His fondness for thrillers and police films featuring secret agents and undercover cops enables him to create a narrative in which he himself fulfills this role; he simply inserts himself into the preexisting cultural pattern, not understanding all the ways in which that pattern was not cut for him." Kecia Driver McBride, "Fear Consumption, and Desire: Naturalism and Ann Petry's *The Street*." Mary Papke, *Twisted From the Ordinary: Essays on American Literary Naturalism* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee Press, 2003), 315–317. For an extended analysis of both the cinema and the automobile as enabling racial and sexual transgression, as well as a fresh analysis of sexuality and gender in *Native Son*, see Roderick Ferguson, *Abberations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2003), 45–52.45-52.

women who are on the loose.”⁵³⁰ Link consistently reminds himself of why Camilo thinks of him as a stereotype, a character in some narrative written about “silver-collar boys” and rich white mistresses. Although Petry suggests that there is much more to Link and Camilo’s story than the standard narrative represents, unfortunately, that does not keep “the cards” from correctly writing their future.

Link and Camilo can’t be together in Monmouth without breaking the town’s surface tranquility, so they spend most of their time in a hotel in Harlem. Camilo bribes the hotel staff to import luxurious furniture, clean linens, and even hot water into their room, despite the hotel’s seediness; “nobody would believe it was the same place, everything changed, everything fixed up.”⁵³¹ Link interprets the hotel as “a silken bower for the silver-collar boy” that Camilo makes for him inside “a replica, smallscale, of course, but a replica of Treadway Hall.”⁵³² Petry gives readers a glance inside Link’s head and doesn’t distance the narrative perspective from Link’s version of the affair, even when it seems over-determined. All of Link’s stories about what motivates Camilo are layered over the domestic details of their hotel suite, so that heated water signifies his silver collar. Through the couple’s disparate purchasing power within their hotel room, Petry again emphasizes the oppressions rooted in domesticity. Unlike Link’s earlier visions of Camilo as an escape from familiar scripts while they are driving to and from NY, within their “smallscale replica of Treadway Hall,” Link sees her whiteness and her femininity as luxury commodities purchased at the price of sexual servitude. Camilo’s attempts to turn their suite into what she has learned make a home ultimately invoke the

⁵³⁰ Petry, *The Narrows*, 79.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 316.

racist history of these same domestic narratives that set up to original Treadway Hall as a model.

Link's constant translations of Camilo's actions and his environment into historically laden power scripts also signify his submission to the standard narratives. These narratives about miscegenation and lynching are the background drumbeat of tragedy in *The Narrows*, and they are written into its settings. Petry argues in her essay "The Novel as Social Criticism" that novels should illuminate the ways characters are "formed and shaped by the sprawling inchoate world in which they live."⁵³³ Petry emphasizes that it is not only the racism of cold war heterosexual images that destroy Link, but also the ways these images shape characters and communities. Immediately after Camilo charges him with rape, Link reflects on his idealization of Camilo, in the hotel, as "pink and white figure straight out of one of those Fifth Avenue store windows."⁵³⁴ In this scene, the liberatory potential fades from Link and Camilo's relationship within details of the ways their hotel room recreated the consumerism and alienation of the surrounding city.

Petry's critique of Link and Camilo's hotel room points to *The Narrows's* extended project of connecting cold war popular culture and white supremacy. When Bullock uses his paper to shield the Treadways from blame in Link's death, Petry connects his decision to publish stories that vilify Link to his need to pay the mortgage on the "modern" house. Mrs. Treadway, Camilo's mother, pays a visit to the editor, threatening to pull the company's advertisements from his paper if Bullock doesn't

⁵³³ Helen Hull, *The Writer's Book* (New York: Harper 8c Brothers Publishers, 1950), 95.

⁵³⁴ Petry, *The Narrows*, 316.

publish images of an escaped black convict slinking into homes in white neighborhoods through kitchen windows and untended back doors. These images blatantly inflame fears about black male sexuality and racial integration at home. Through Bullock, Petry links processes of domestic consumption to the commodification of the public sphere. Petry uses the details of Bullock's domestic space, like the specially treated wood he buys to burn in his modern design fireplace, for "Decorative effect."⁵³⁵ Not only is Bullock's domesticity depleting his life of real warmth, but it also sets Link's murder into motion in order to serve these same ideals.

Petry implicates Bullock's homemaking in American racism and sexism, with the relationship between him and his wife "just the old war between the male and the female";⁵³⁶ Bullock ends up hating her, hating his house, and echoing Link's version of cross sex relationships as a war. After Abby throws Camilo out onto the street, incensed at finding her in Link's bed, Camilo strikes back at Link by calling him a "black bastard." This insult leads Link to conclude that "no one in the USA (is) free-from, warfare, eternal war between the male and the female. Black bastard. White bitch."⁵³⁷ In *The Narrows*, everyone is always reliving a war that conflates racial and sexual otherness, that positions black masculinity and white femininity as sexually opposing poles. As Michael Barry points out, Link and Camilo struggle in their relationship for dominance – Camilo using relative social status and Link using his relative physical strength.⁵³⁸ Camilo has never been excluded from anywhere, let alone kicked out onto the street; she can't exert the

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 258.

⁵³⁸ Michael Barry, "'Same Train Be Back Tomorrer': Ann Petry's *The Narrows* and the Repetition of History," *MELUS* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 152.

same control over Link's bedroom that she had at the hotel, and it is this lack of control that sets off the violence of the novel's conclusion. Camilo may have lost this battle but she will not lose the war, at least not without also destroying Link.

Petry also makes it clear that the war between the sexes and races is a war about space, about controlling territory. According to Link, Camilo attempts his destruction just as Abbie has: "Don't all of them when it comes to the end decide to scorch the earth, If I go you will, too, if I go down I will take everything with me."⁵³⁹ Link is taken down by Camilo's offended pride, and her eviction notice comes with the backing of her mother's gun. It takes Petry 23 pages to tell the story of Link's murder – the Treadways kidnap him and try to beat a confession out of him, but end up killing him. Camilo's mother wraps Link's body in blankets and drive towards the river to dispose of it, only to be stopped by policemen suspicious of the blinds drawn around the inside of the car.⁵⁴⁰ Petry combines removed descriptions of events, at times formatting dialogue as if the novel is a screenplay, with participant narration that includes characters' unconscious associations. In this section of *The Narrows*, this combination emphasizes Link's experiences of places in Monmouth, rather than the action of his being handcuffed and taken to his death. Although Link is powerless to change his destination, while handcuffed in the back of the car being taken to the Treadway Mansion, he never stops re-narrating the meaning of the route.

In Petry's vision of Monmouth, CT, every street leads both down to the docks at the end of Dumble St., and also to Link's death. By the time Link is killed, readers have

⁵³⁹ Petry, *The Narrows*, 319.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 390–413.

come to expect this ending. After all, the story of a sexual affair between a black man and a white, high born, woman was widespread in the press of Petry's time. In 1952 alone, there were eight black men convicted of raping white women in Miami, two in Louisiana, four in Dallas, two in Arkansas and the death of one of the Scottsboro boys in a Michigan prison.⁵⁴¹ Petry's version of this story lays blame for the outcome on the entire Monmouth community: "It were everybody's fault," Frances's housekeeper Miss Doris' explains, "It were purely like a snowball and everybody give it a push."⁵⁴² Whereas most of the newspaper accounts either stereotype the black community, or criticize the police and courts for racism, they avoid seeing the racist narratives that fuel white violence. Miss Doris's metaphor makes Camilo's rape accusation and Link's murder into a group effort. Like a snowball rolling down Dumble Street, the conditions produced the hard, cold center of the problem, but it needed the whole community to escalate to murder. The breakdown of heterosexuality all along Dumble Street sets the downward slope, and the breakdown of homes casts residents out into the street to help with the pushing.

Homosexual Spaces

Alongside the breakdown of heterosexual partnerships, *The Narrows* offers representations of two homosocial couples that raise Link, as well as a scene of interracial homosexuality. As Link is being driven to the Treadway mansion, to be killed

⁵⁴¹"Negro Freed Of Charges Of Rape Of White Woman." *Crusader*, 12-September-1952: 8. "Scottsboro Boy Dies in Prison." *The Plain Dealer*, 29-August-1952: 1. "Judge Frees Man Named in Rape Case." *The Plain Dealer*, 08-August-1952: 4. "Four Genocidal Frame-Ups of Texas Negroes Since New Year Reported." *Arkansas State Press*, 25-April-1952: 1. "CRC Appeals For Telegrams To Save Innocent, Hunted Negro In Louisiana From Death." *Arkansas State Press*, 30-December-1949: 1+.

⁵⁴²Petry, *The Narrows*, 415.

for “raping” Camilo, he flashes back to another trip he used to take to on the same trolley route, to “the end of the line.” When he was younger, Abbie got him a job cleaning at the Valkill’s house, “an almost-but-not-quite-middle-aged, childless (white) couple, who wanted someone just for the summer.”⁵⁴³ Link is trapped by his tasks in the Valkill’s kitchen, primarily washing dishes, and Petry describes this kitchen as a kind of emasculating entrapment. Even after Link complains to Abbie about the job, she doesn’t listen and insists that “every boy should know how to keep a house clean” and “there aren’t any easy jobs.”⁵⁴⁴ Abbie can’t see through her assumption that wealth and status connote morality to the fact that Mr. Valkill is a pedophile. She buys into the image of tranquility that the Valkill’s project, rather than seeing through to extreme inequalities they practice. In fact, both Mr. and Mrs. Valkill make sexual advances on 12 year old Link, making him dress in a kimono “made of sleazy thin material” to serve tea. Link describes Mr. Valkill “sauntering into the kitchen, wearing khaki shorts, his long hairy leg, his knobby knees, thick blond hair on his tanned chest,” as “something not to look at, to avoid looking at.”⁵⁴⁵ It may be hard for queer studies scholars to read this scene, a clearly homophobic depiction, even amidst the generally positive representations of proto-homosexuality in *The Narrows*. But Petry focuses on Mr. Valkill’s whiteness – his piercing blue eyes, which Link finds disconcerting, and the excessive blond hair on his arm when it reaches out to touch Link.

Mr. Valkill is also related by name to the Valkill cottage in Hyde Park, New York. The cottage was Eleanor Roosevelt’s retreat from the world of her husband, where

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 391.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 392.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 393–394.

she allegedly had assignations with other women. Within the symbolic patterns in *The Narrows*, however, it may be just as significant that Val-kill Industries manufactured popular furniture throughout the 1920s and 30s. Furniture is often representative of characters in *The Narrows* – Mamie’s gaudy bed, the way Abbie and Camilo sit on the edge of chairs, the Major in his chair dying surrounded by newspapers. This seems particularly significant given that Petry’s mother, Bertha James Lane, became a financially independent business woman through starting a company called ‘Beautiful Linens for Beautiful Homes,’ trading in on the pleasure associated with pristine bedrooms and furnishings, pleasures that were assumed to subvert the differences between black and white consumers.⁵⁴⁶

Mr. Valkill uses his racial status and Link’s position in the kitchen to hit on him, cornering Link at the sink and standing in doorways to seal off the room. To avoid looking at Mr. Valkill, Link deliberately dries the breakfast dishes, makes coffee, and remembers Weak Knees’ advice to run if he “smells trouble.”⁵⁴⁷ He calls up the memory of Weak Knees pounding bread on the counter, remembering his advice by attaching it to the smells and sounds of *The Last Chance*’s kitchen. Petry contrasts Valkill’s advances with Weak Knees’s through their common denominator of the kitchen as a symbolic space. Petry’s use of flashbacks to conjoin these two scenes points out the value of controlling your own kitchen.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁶ Elisabeth Petry, *At Home Inside: a Daughter’s Tribute to Ann Petry* (Jackson: U of Mississippi Press, 2009).

⁵⁴⁷ Petry, *The Narrows*, 393.

⁵⁴⁸ Rachel Peterson, “Invisible Hands at Work: Domestic Service and Meritocracy in Ann Petry’s Novels,” in *Revising the Blueprint* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2007), 72–96.

Abbie will never admit that Weak Knees is a good chef, just like she couldn't admit that the Valkills were bad for Link, but she does in the end admit that having two sets of homosocial parents might be better than just having one – herself and FK Jackson. Reflecting on her relationship with Frances Jackson, Abbie thinks, “Frances had no family of her own, so she adopted us, adopted Link and me, looked after us as though we were her family. We were an outsize family, or at least we had outsize problems. We all adopt each other, or marry each other.”⁵⁴⁹ Because of the “outsize problems” of the black community, Abbie has to eventually accept that she and Bill Hod and Weak Knees are part of the same family, and not only in the case of Link. At the end of the novel, Abbie adopts J.C. Powther – who is likely Bill Hod's child.⁵⁵⁰ After spending so much time protecting her reputation and standard of respectability by keeping Dumble St. out, Abbie takes in the son of Mamie Powther, whom Abbie thinks “is Dumble St.,” and Bill Hod, an adulterer who encourages all kinds of illegal behavior.

Link's death is surrounded by the detritus of heterosexual relations and marriages – for example, Powther points Link out to the Treadway family because he is jealous of an imagined relationship between Link and Mamie – and J.C.'s life has always been amongst this same litter. If heterosexual marriage is a dying order in *The Narrows*, extended and chosen family, expanded networks of kinship, and communal parenting are the future. Adopting J.C. is a last beacon of change we have in an otherwise bleak book about human relationships. It is actually her relationship with Frances K. Jackson that

⁵⁴⁹ Petry, *The Narrows*, 414.

⁵⁵⁰ As Alan Wald points out, J.C. was born three years after the Powther's other children, after a period where Bill Hod had been sending her dresses and lingerie and obviously conducted an affair with Mamie. J.C. also physically resemblances Hod. Wald, *American Night*, para. 7873.

moves Abby from her former position as the bastion of the respectable sexual ideologies that lead to Link's murder, towards new ideas about sexuality that reach across racial and class boundaries. The two women's revisions of normative domesticity, along with the practical critique and welcoming kitchen of Miss Dorris, Frances' housekeeper, provide a glimmer of hope in an otherwise overwhelmingly pessimistic story about race and sexuality in cold war America.

Frances K. Jackson, a university educated daughter of an undertaker, plays the role of the son her father never had, inheriting the family business and running it successfully. In an autobiographical sketch, Petry invokes Rose Jackson, a woman from her childhood, as a symbol of the outsider not unlike her own position as a Black intellectual.⁵⁵¹ Throughout her life and writing, Petry embraced figures like Jackson, whose feminism was expressed in joining male dominated professions. In her brief introduction to *The Narrows*, Nellie McKay explains Frances Jackson as part of "that stalwart band of black women of all classes – feminists before the word was even known to their generations . . . the women who, in spite of external limitations, made a way for themselves and others where none previously existed."⁵⁵² McKay's account captures something about F.K. Jackson's improvisational approach to gender roles, providing an important reminder that black feminist critiques of the patriarchal organizations of domesticity echo throughout Petry's work. *The Narrows* pushes *The Street*'s critiques in new directions, offering at least one queer explanation for Frances's independence and

⁵⁵¹ And the way that domestic workers are vulnerable due to their physical position in employers' homes, a cause dear to Petry. See "Ann Petry" in *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*. Ed. Adele Sarkissiah. Detroit: Gale Research, 1988. 253-69.

⁵⁵² Petry, *The Narrows*, xv.

gender nonconformity.

Link explains Frances's possible lesbianism explicitly while reflecting on the possibility that all women are alike in their desire for the "demon lover" of popular cinema:

F.K. Jackson? Impossible to think of her hunting a mate, handsome or otherwise. She was too brusque, too self-sufficient. Perhaps she, in her own person, was the dark handsome lover, and to her Abbie had been the China Camilo Williams that the male hunts for and rarely ever finds; and even if he finds her, never quite manages to capture her. (142)

For Link, as well as for many early 20th century sexologists and psychoanalysts, Frances's "self-sufficiency" makes her into the opposite of a conquerable female object. Frances becomes "the male" in the lesbian dyad.⁵⁵³ She is utterly "unwifely" with "a man's mind."⁵⁵⁴ By stepping outside the "war between the sexes" that is a central theme of *The Narrows*, "Frank" doesn't quite fit into what Link thinks of as the essential heterosexual relationship. As Petry shows how Link scripts the female couple into heterosexual narratives, she also points to the way that Link's view of lesbians as aberrational "dark handsome lovers" is linked to a racist conflation of sexual and racial minorities as "perverts."

Unlike Link's interpretation of Frances and Abbie's relationship, which casts the two in heterosexual roles, Petry shows Frances and Abbie forming homosocial versions of Black female identity. Although Link wants to cast F.K. in the male role because of her intellect and independence, Petry makes it clear that her connection to Abbie functions through an affective connection between them that works through similar

⁵⁵³ Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*, Q (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000), 6–23.

⁵⁵⁴ Petry, *The Narrows*, 145, 234.

experiences rather than models of gender inversion and heterosexual dyads; “Shared experience, I suppose. Tell it and retell it. And finally act on it.”⁵⁵⁵ In a scene following the death of Abbie’s husband, Link describes Abbie’s bed as a setting for non-heterosexual connections:

Abbie was in bed, flat on her back in the big mahogany four-poster bed, and the lamp by the bed had a tan-colored cloth draped over the shade, so that the light in the room was very dim. F.K. Jackson sat beside the bed, holding Abbie’s hand, murmuring to her in a soothing voice. (112)

As Frances then joins Abbie in bed, taking Abbie into her shawl, the dimly lit room, vaguely distinct words, and their merging bodies “both together under the shawl” display how the women’s connection is facilitated by not only language and physical similarity, but also by their domestic spaces. The light is dim in Abbie’s bedroom because of her grief, but it also might signal a kind of semi-secrecy about such homosexual intimacies during the post-WWII and cold war periods. Frances is “soothing,” in opposition to the Major, who kicks constantly in the night, until Abbie “wonder(s) if this bed-mauling was a family trait.”⁵⁵⁶ This scene of Abbie and Frances in bed emphasizes the homosociality of Abbie’s bedroom, a healing space that Link experiences as a rejection.

Link is shut out of this intimate bond between Frances and Abby. He thinks, “the two of them together – but what about me?”⁵⁵⁷ Indeed, Link is literally homeless until Bill Hod and Weak Knees take him in and educate him in black masculinity. Although Petry seems less interested in how homosocial intimacy structures domestic spaces between black men than black women, she does provide an image of Bill Hod comforting

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 235.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 132.

Link that parallels Frances and Abby in bed:

Bill Hod's hand, firm, warm, patted his shoulder, touched his face, lightly, offering warmth, comfort. (Link) recognized the feel of his hand in the dark.

'There, there Sonny,' he said. Then, his voice a little more insistent, 'You're all right,' the pressure of the hand stronger as he said, again, 'You're all right.' (118)

As in the scene with Frances and Abbie, the combination of Bill Hod's physical and vocal affirmation assures Link that he will make it to manhood. Link and Abbie need homosocial bonds during personal times of fluctuating gender and sexual identity: Abbie as a new widow, Link as a boy becoming a man. The distinct social meanings and power invested in these identities is reflected in the domestic settings of these two scenes.

While Abbie and Frances share their homosocial intimacy in "the big mahogany four-poster bed," Link is comforted in "a strange room in a strange bed."⁵⁵⁸ Link's male set of parents teach him the particular mixture of homoeroticism and disavowal necessary to maintain heterosexual masculinity in a time when new forms of labor and family life threaten to emasculate even powerful white (former) patriarchs.

When Link wakes up the next morning, "Bill Hod came into the room, naked, nothing on his feet. He stared at him, surprised, a little shocked, because he had never seen a grownup without any clothes on." As Link meticulously describes Bill Hod's body, he realizes that "he ought not to look at this man who was walking around the room barefooted. But he couldn't help it." Link's knowledge that he shouldn't be looking at another man naked is what allows Petry to explore the "something of worship as well as passion in (Link's) feeling for Bill Hod," something that makes it "impossible for him to

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 118.

describe the way he felt about Bill Hod at that moment.”⁵⁵⁹ Through Link’s inarticulate desire for Bill Hod, Petry suggests the homoeroticism within homosocial domesticity, even between men. Further, she argues that this homoeroticism lays the foundation for Link’s pride in his black masculinity. Again emphasizing bedrooms as problematic intimate spaces, Petry undermines the sacred status of heterosexual gender roles represented in the inviolable marriage bed.

The masculinity of *The Last Chance* involves a homophobia that dissociates the homosocial space of the bed from its erotic content, a sort of disavowal that is not necessary between women, who traditionally gain rather than lose social status when adopting cross-gender sexual roles. The intimacy of Frances and Abbie’s connection becomes clear when paralleled with Link and Bill Hod’s bedroom scene. Their relationship does not necessarily imply genital sexuality or even lesbian “consciousness,” but they are frequently referred to as a married couple – as Link’s two mothers, Frances as Abbie’s husband who asks Abbie to come live with her after Link’s death. However, given cold war associations of both homosexuality and black female sexual autonomy with threats to the domestic Cold War agenda, Frances and Abbie’s relationship can be read as part of *The Narrows*’s radical critique of marriage.

Queers Kicking Out Queers

However, *The Narrows*’s successful family structures hit their limit of inclusiveness when it comes to marrying and adopting white folks. In the end, none of the domestic spaces in *The Narrows* can contain interracial sexual desires, although all can

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 119–120.

make does make space for homosexual relationships in all of these spaces. Petry drew inspiration for Abbie and Bill Hod's scorn in negative reactions to Paul Robeson Jr.'s interracial marriage. Crowds waited outside the apartment house where the wedding took place to both cheer the event as an example of social progress, and also to boo the couple. Echoing Paul Robeson Sr.'s statement about the wedding, *Weak Knees* suggests later in the novel that Robeson Jr. and his white fiancé are better off in Russia, where at least "folks (can) marry when(ever) they got a heat on for each other."⁵⁶⁰ While Link and Camilo's affair is less of a political message than a message about race and sexuality, Petry ties into contemporary debates about the topic to show the national significance of interracial sexuality. Robeson Jr. and Link were cast as traitors to country or race; Link literally goes from fighting under the French flag in WWII (to avoid being in a segregated unit) to abandoning his career as a historian of slavery to run off with Camilo.

Petry emphasizes the connection between national segregation and smaller scale racism and sexuality through the character of Peter Bullock. Bullock, the local newspaper editor, publishes sensationalist stories about break-ins and attempted sexual assaults by blacks on white space, in order to distract the public from questions about Camilo's reasons for hanging around *The Narrows* late at night. How did she even get there to get raped, people wondered, given Monmouth's racial segregation? After printing a menacing front-page picture of a Black convict, alongside the tales of break-ins and sexual assaults, Bullock argues that his actions were no worse than the state department. He asks "what difference does it make, whether we here in Monmouth hunt

⁵⁶⁰ AP, "Robeson, Jr. Weds Young White Girl," *The Morning Herald*, June 20, 1949.

down Negroes or whether we hunt down Communists?”⁵⁶¹ Indeed, in the public sphere as much as in the private, interracial sex could only be imagined as aberrant. Ann Petry, who began her own literary career as a journalist, offers Bullock’s description of cold war ideology as one example of the work ways that popular cultural representations reinforced national policing of black masculinity.

Through Bullock, Petry points out that hunting Negroes and hunting Communists are quite similar in presenting themselves as “cures” for the threatened American family. Bullock’s domestic metaphors for hunting Negroes and Communists also points out that both hunts conflated public homosexuality and integrated institutions as figurative “vermin” that had invaded American homes. In a rapidly changing postwar society, integrated institutions and public homosexuality were simultaneous and connected emerging “threats” to normative heterosexuality. The expansive queer inventory of “heretics and unbelievers” hiding under beds and in attics were often both interracial and homosexual, representing dense sites of racial, sexual and national trespass. The state department and black audiences both disapproved of publicized interracial affairs, with the exception of some communist influenced political communities. Capitalizing on the public’s anxious fascination with these sexual and racial transgressions, the state department hunted for the queerness within America that suggested a weakness to communist influence.⁵⁶² Petry emphasizes the distinctions between interracial and homosexual relationships, in part, by offering the latter as a point of hope in a cultural

⁵⁶¹ Petry, *The Narrows*, 377–378.

⁵⁶² In fact, Petry’s attention to the taboos of both homosexuality and interracial romance “landed *The Narrows* on the list of books banned by the National Organization for Decent Literature.”

moment of barely suppressed violence.

Reading *The Narrows*'s violent treatment of interracial intimacy alongside its homoerotic and homosexual themes shows Petry's contributions to arguments about queer family structures and spaces during the 1940s and early 1950s. Recent work on sexuality in the cold war shows that the category of queer outsiders included interracial and homosexual desire,⁵⁶³ although not always in peace with each other. Tyler Schmidt points out the juxtaposition of "news articles in the black press of the 1950s about juvenile sexual delinquents, hermaphrodites, and southern men passing as women" and articles about the FBI intervention in the hostile school integration in Little Rock. These juxtapositions suggest African Americans' "significant interest in the postwar nation's transforming understandings of interracial sex, gender identities, and family life, as well as perversion, homosexuality and racial deviance."⁵⁶⁴ Interracial sex, gender and sexual deviance are interwoven in *The Narrows*; their queer force emphasized by the opposition of increasingly commodified and segregated domestic ideals.

In particular, Abbie and Frances's relationship is not only a portrait of creating sexual and domestic connections between black women, but is also tied to traditions of political organizing and community support particular to black women in the cold war period. In *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, Jacqueline Jones reminds us of the way these

⁵⁶³ This is not distinct to the post-war and cold war periods. Had Link and Camilo's affair occurred 30 years earlier, perhaps readers would be more perceptive of its links to homosexuality as a "modern" perversion," given the contemporary view that "every sexual deviation or disorder which has for its result an inability to perpetuate the race is ipso facto pathological, ipso facto an abnormality, and this is pre-eminently true of homosexuality" (Ferguson 31).

⁵⁶⁴ Tyler Schmidt, "Dreams of an Impossible Blackness: Racialized Desire and America's Integrationist Impulse, 1945-1955" (Dissertation, The City University of New York, 2008), 146.

expansive visions of family were necessary for African American survival during the post-war and Cold War periods. While the 1950s witnessed large-scale transformations in domestic ideology, the collective ethos of black communities persisted in spite and perhaps also because of capitalist advances in the business of homemaking. Collective ethos was based on need as well as proximity, as black women exchanged goods and services, banded together to fight rent-raising landlords, black evictions and preparing food for festivities and political meetings that brought neighbors together. Jones argues that Black mothers, who found themselves barred from New Deal and Aid to Dependent Children benefits because they lived in what whites considered “unsuitable homes,” used these same homes as bases of protest and resistance.⁵⁶⁵

As Schmidt argues about Bill Trapp in William Demby’s postwar novel, *Beetle Creek*, Abbie and Frances’s homosocial family structure “might be optimistically (read) as part of a larger black literary tradition characterized by an expansive vision of kinship and desire.”⁵⁶⁶ In *The Narrows*, as in many of her short stories written from the perspective of social outsiders, Petry represents queer homes built from the homoerotic and homosocial aspects of Black women’s lives.⁵⁶⁷ The novel forms part of Petry’s feminist project to show the radical survival strategies found outside the home and the varieties of gender and sexuality that serve as better domestic foundations. While Petry refuses to provide a wholly celebratory picture of homoeroticism, lesbian and gay literary

⁵⁶⁵ Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 278–281.

⁵⁶⁶ Tyler Schmidt, “White Pervert: Tracing Integration’s Queer Desires in African American Novels of the 1950s,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 35 (2007): 164.

⁵⁶⁷ For a reference to queer masculinity in “Miss Muriel” and *The Narrows*, see Michael Barry “Same Train Be Back Tomorrer’: Ann Petry’s *The Narrows* and the Repetition of History.” *MELUS* 24.1 (Spring 1999): 141-159.

scholars would benefit from further exploring *The Narrows*'s intricate critiques of the oppression of heterosexuality, an oppression cross cut by racism, sexism and economic exploitation.

In suggesting that heterosexuality does not represent the apotheosis of Frances or Abbie's domestic, political, affective and sexual desires, I do not intend to discipline the novel into a celebratory "gay" or "homosexual" narrative. Frances and Abbie's work of mutual homemaking constructs a space between homo and heterosexuality but not between races. These expansive ideas of family and home, which draw in the community between the women's houses, elude state department surveillance by being unconfined. More importantly, they imagine homosexually queer homes through the exclusion of interracial sexuality. Petry correctly predicted the response to interracial marriage from nascent black power groups throughout the cold war. While *Weak Knees* shrugs off Link's affair with Camilo, Bill Hod is poised on the edge of murder from the beginning, echoing black men's violent responses to interracial intimacy as a threat to racial politics.⁵⁶⁸

The Narrows is the story of conflicting normalization of interracial and homosexual desires; a historical narrative that gay and lesbian politicians, as well as queer of color literary critics, should consider when analogizing the two. Half a decade before the conflict between the expansion of queer studies to include interracial intimacy and the insistence on homosexuality as the most important categorical deviance for queer theory, Petry stages the historical conflict between the two within post-war and cold war

⁵⁶⁸ Renee Christine Romano, *Race Mixing: Black-white Marriage in Postwar America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 128–129.

cultures. Formally marked, at least by literary scholars, by the publication of Siobhan Somerville's *Queering the Color Line*, which investigates the mutual constitution of racial and sexual "queerness" in the early part of the 20th century. Somerville offers Jean Toomer as a queer literary subject, joining Roderick Ferguson in using gender deviant black masculinity as a marker of "non-normative sexuality." In her latest research, Somerville traces the shifting legal status of homosexuality during the 1940s and 50s within the context of interracial (heterosexual) marriage's move from prohibited to constitutionally protected, "a change that we might tentatively map as a shift from 'queer' to 'normative,' at least within the sphere of law."⁵⁶⁹ Interracial sexuality was juridically championed through discourses about and codifications of homosexuality as pathological.

The Narrows reverses this logic, championing homosexual pairings as the racial border guards against interracial sexuality. In the end, Abbie "shoot(s) the first white bastard who puts (her) foot on that bottom step," becoming a version of Bill Hod's Ma Winters's. As Petry wrote about the social problem novels of the post-WWII period, "if I use the words intermarriage, mixed marriage, miscegenation, there are few Americans who would not react to those words emotionally ... and the emotion is violent, apoplectic."⁵⁷⁰ Petry hardly holds herself outside the fray of these violent emotions, and represents them vividly in her characters' internal monologues. In fact, this may be the new emotion that Petry found following Marilyn Robinson's advice: that her New York based works were motivated by anger at inequality, and she had to find new motivation now that she lived in the calmer New England.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁹ Somerville, Siobhan. *Queer Loving*. *GLQ* 11:3, pp. 335-370 (2005)

⁵⁷⁰ Hull, *The Writer's Book*, 38.

⁵⁷¹ Petry, *At Home Inside: a Daughter's Tribute to Ann Petry*, 130. Cited in Wald,

Petry dedicated *The Narrows* to Robinson, partly because this advice helped break Petry out of a writer's block in 1950. Alan Wald concludes that Abbie Crunch and Frances Jackson are modeled on Marilyn Robinson and her lesbian partner, Helen Hull. Indeed, Petry represents Abbie and Frances, alongside Bill Hod and Weak Knees, as mundane features of *The Narrows*'s landscape, the backdrop to the real story of betrayal and violence, just as Robinson and Hull formed the backdrop of Petry's writing while she worked on *The Narrows*. The tranquil surface of Monmouth is at least temporarily held in place by growing segregation, all while inequality fuels anger under the surface of every house and, by implication, every town in peaceful New England. When this violence finally erupts, interracial intimacy is the cause, rather than the homosexual intimacy that goes relatively unremarked in the novel.

The Narrows portrays homosexuality as a stabilizing force in black communities, and heterosexuality as anything but calm. The final "lynching" of Link is tied to all the other battles in "the war between the sexes." His murder is one in a series of heterosexual failures, even if it magnifies the violence of other heterosexual relations in the novel. Perhaps because queer literary histories of the post-WWII and cold war include only examples of homosexuality as the main threat to domestic coherence, *The Narrows* does not show up in any queer literature lists or in queer of color critiques. But Petry's story is essential to studies of homosexuality and interracial sexuality as aberrant practices in U.S. history, as an example of how homosexual acceptance can become the background for racial violence. The historical linkages between interracial intimacy and homosexuality are far more complex than Petry can convey in *The Narrows*'s storylines, American Night, para. 4019.

but the chorus of her characters' internal, interlinked monologues show the ways that sexual relationships were formed from a context of homosexual and interracial intimacies, with one often constructing the other as the scapegoat for communal division.

Conclusion

In 1969, “Harlem On My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America 1900-1968” opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met). The month before, the mayor of New York City had to be hustled out of Harlem by his bodyguards and an armed limousine. With racial tensions boiling over and violence between police and the community escalating, The Met chose to reach out to its neighboring black community. Glen Carrington, as an archivist of black history and literature, was involved in arranging walking tours of Harlem to go alongside the exhibit. After his travels and relationships, Carrington returned to Harlem to teach young people about the neighborhood’s history, and to outreach to academic and cultural institutions on behalf of Harlem. By 1968, Carrington was a dedicated archivist of and witness to Harlem’s cultural history. With Alain Locke and his literary contemporaries dead and the work of The New Negro movement fallen out of print, he continued his educational work at the Cooperative College Center at SUNY, teaching courses in black history. Carrington’s work as a historian and archivist followed from his earlier research on minority identity formation; in studying how the black community in Harlem came to be, he was still studying the mutual

construction of spaces and modes of sociality. Carrington's drawings of tenement buildings on the lower east side in 1930 did not make it into the "Harlem on My Mind" exhibit's version of the great migration, but the exhibit itself was a site of interpreting the populations Carrington had worked with for decades.

The exhibit's subtitle "Cultural Capital of Black America," might have attracted Carrington because of his prior training in the economics of black New York – as well as his general assumption that Harlem was the center of black history. In 1968, as in 1928, it was reasonable to claim that Harlem was the "Cultural Capital of Black America." Harlem was understood both as an exceptional space, characterized by black self-definition and artistic production, but also as a phenomenon that could be generalized to include all black cities. As the exhibit's program explains, "Harlem is not an isolated Black ghetto: it is connected by the bonds of poverty, filth, illiteracy and unemployment to all the other Black ghettos throughout the United States." The exhibit's curator, Allon Schoener, hoped to promote understanding between whites and blacks, by "effectively presenting facts and history." He believed that to understand the black community, you had to understand their spaces, their homes and their streets. As Candice Van Ellison, a local high school, writes in the exhibit's introductory catalog: "In order to understand the problem of the Afro-American in America it is necessary to understand the environment in which he lives."

The relationship between racial knowledge and the built environment is also one of *Undoing Home's* central concerns. I also show how racial and sexual

categories are shaped by representations of the built environment. The “Harlem on My Mind” exhibition is a prominent example of constructing a racial category through representations of their homes. With Harlem so strongly associated with black homes, its history and meanings have always been contested within black communities, not just between Harlemites and outsiders. Harlem has also functioned as a metonym for the overlap of queer and black subjects, and for the broader trends of migration, immigration, and urbanization of black life.

“Harlem on My Mind” exhibit provides one site for understanding the “Cultural Capital of Black America.” But, like every representation of home, the race and gender of the author and audience mattered a great deal. The three co-chairmen of the “Black Emergency Cultural Coalition” of 75 black and white artists tried to shut down the exhibit, saying that it conveyed “the white man’s distorted, irrelevant and insulting picture of Harlem.” John Clark, one of three black consultants on the exhibit, joined with the Coalition and withdrew in protest from the exhibition’s planning due to the “superficiality and distortions” of the exhibit. He continues, “the time has passed for whites to expiate their guilt by presenting this type of show, which seems designed for those of a masochistic nature.”⁵⁷² The exhibit was quite explicitly designed for white people, although the director of the Met, Thomas Heading, would dispute Clark’s charge of appealing to masochism. Heading explains the exhibit as a way for whites to come to terms with black

⁵⁷² Handler, M. S. (1969). 75 Artists Urge Closing of Museum's 'Insulting' Harlem Exhibit. New York Times. New York.

experience and existence: “Negroes, as human beings, did not exist in any real sense when I was eight, nine, ten, eleven, (...) if anybody had said twenty-six years ago, ‘You know, black is proud and beautiful and a black man is strong and creative and male,’ well, everyone would have been puzzled, flabbergasted.” Although Heading admits fault with his youthful views on “Negroes,” he also encourages white audiences to see blacks as human beings through a spectacle, leaving the audience unaccountable as spectators.⁵⁷³

I began this project thinking that Harlem would be an important site to think through the relationship between sexuality, race, gender and home. Harlem is the space most associated with black queerness, historically. But the authors in this project represent home in terms of different regional and literary settings: Boston, New Orleans, an island between NY and Canada, international travel, learning, and the circulation of images, Florida, and Connecticut. What unites these disparate sites is the undoing of home as an ideal, heterosexual, safe and stable space. I want to tie the “Harlem on My Mind” exhibit to the beginning of the black museum movement in Atlanta in 1895, partly because Schoener compares “Harlem on My Mind” to a midway, with images and sounds overwhelming the spectator. He explains that audiences “don’t respond, as they once did, to an orderly progression of facts thrust at them in a fixed order,” thus the exhibit “was conceived as a communications environment – one that parallels our daily lives in which we are deluged with

⁵⁷³ Header estimated that about 15% of the audience “were Negro,” and brags that this is up to 7 times the normal rate of black attendance. (which means vaguely 98% of the museum’s usual clientele were white).

information and stimuli.” The Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition was arranged in a similar fashion, and set out to address similar fears about communicating (and profiting) beyond the color line.

Spaces are always contested; the “Harlem on My Mind” exhibit particularly so. It’s 9,498 viewers had to walk through battling speeches by Reverend Henry Dudley Rucker, who argued that it “revived parts of Harlem’s history that were better off dead,” and a counter protest by Adam Clayton Powell, who saw the exhibit as a tribute to the musical legacy of the community. The debate between Powell and Rucker boiled down to whether it was worth it to show the queerness in Harlem’s history, in order to showcase the artistic achievements that celebrated that queerness. The representations of home in this dissertation also show this struggle over representations of black space. *Undoing Home* argues that representations of home are key sites for struggles over the meaning of black heterosexuality, wherein normative heterosexuality is challenged by home’s dissolution.

Every space in this dissertation is contested. “The Negro Building” was the first separate space constructed to display the work of African Americans; setting a precedent for representations of black homes in the “New South.” The “Harlem on My Mind” exhibit was the first Metropolitan exhibit to feature black history and culture. Both exhibitions attempted to promote cross-racial understanding through telling stories about blacks’ desires for home, whether that was for modern cabins rather than slave shacks in Atlanta, or for a black neighborhood free from white violence and surveillance in Harlem. I chose to bookend *Undoing Home* with these

two displays because they show how representations of home are political interventions that are often aimed at racial change as well as gender and sexual regulation.

The representations of home in Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five are also contentious, and I have argued that they can be read as queer representations in that they promote sexual deregulation and racial ambiguity. Even in cases as starkly heterosexual as the Meserve household in *Seraph on the Suwanee*, or as explicitly homophobic as parts of *The Narrows*, these representations undermine the heterosexual ideologies of home that they ostensibly support. Hurston and Petry exploit post-WWII anxiety about home's stability to suggest the limits of heterosexuality as a broad institution, and heterosexual gender opposition as a destructive force.

Pauline Hopkins's representations of home in *Contending Forces: A tale of Negro life in the South and North* (1900) and *Winona: Negroes in the South and Southwest* (1902) cast the south as an inherently violent setting for black homes, echoing the terror of "the nadir period" in American race relations. Hopkins undoes the ideal of home by showing this violence, and suggesting queer models of home as, if not the solution to violent histories, at least more resolved than attempts to reproduce the ideal homes that cast out black families. Hopkins' non-heterosexual plots contrast with trends in black writing at the turn of the century, which represented normative heterosexuality and home as synonymous goals for racial progress. Slowly over the course of the 20th century, blacks gained ground in

authority to represent black homes, but they did so by emphasizing their compliance with middle class ideals of home. In 1925, Mary McLeod Bethune called for “the breaking down of racial barriers and the conceding to every man his right to own and enjoy his property wherever his means permit him to own it” as “the foundation of the program of organizations like the Urban League and other great social agencies whose militant efforts in these directions have made them national in scope and promise.”⁵⁷⁴ Bethune’s comments link The Urban League’s national scope and its emphasis on Black property right – specifically, the right to own and enjoy home. These goals were the focus of the 1900-1920 section of the “Harlem on My Mind” exhibit, as they have been the focus of most historiography about the first 20th century generation of northern migrants.

The first room in the exhibit, and thus the entranceway to its version of Harlem’s history, was filled with portraits like this one, of “two ladies on the way to



Figure 21: Grandmothers Going to Church c. 1900, Library of Congress

church” (1900). The women seem poised and respectable, if embattled, representing migrants making their way through the northern city. In a mediated way, the women are obeying Hopkins’s call for black self-representation. Keenly aware of the power of fiction to shape attitudes toward blacks, Hopkins argued that “No one will do

⁵⁷⁴ Adero, *Up South: Blacks in Chicago’s Suburbs, 1719-1983*, 112.

this for us; we must ourselves develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history." But in 1969, Schoener was able to select the image below as the cover to the catalogue for "Harlem on My Mind" without any concern that the subjects might not be faithfully portrayed. How the position of the author shapes their representation of black history and black homes has preoccupied, and at times incapacitated, me throughout this project. Whether it was Hopkins's representations of the west, Hurston's cross-race writing in *Seraph* or Petry's portraits of homosocial intimacy in *The Narrows*, these authors claimed little gender or race-based knowledge of the homes that they represent, quite the contrary.

My title specifies "black women's writing" both because *Undoing Home* deals primarily with black women's writing but also because this category references a now widely accepted stance that black women's writing about domesticity is a fundamentally political statement. I see Chapter Three, which studies the writing of Glenn Carrington, as a key site for theorizing the relationship between social identity and representations of race and sexuality. On the one hand, Carrington was participating in reform movements to teach domesticity to immigrants and returning black veterans, enforcing heterosexuality through rigid definitions of home and family. But internally, Carrington participated in a broader range of identities and domestic spaces marked by homosexuality and heterosexuality, pleasure and punishment, transience and stasis. Through the writings of a gay black

social worker, we can see the multiple layers that constituted black urban life between the wars and through WWII, and the problems of historicizing race and sexuality during this period. Putting Carrington's archives together helps trace this movement, and suggests how we might see more of the black gay world in history by looking within institutions trying to normalize both black and gay communities. These institutions created spaces for discussing racial identity and sexual deviance, two of Carrington's favorite topics, and they opened doors to the world at large.

Although Carrington helped to work on "Harlem on My Mind," his version of Harlem was only tangentially related to the neighborhood represented in the exhibit. Similarly, Arvey's experience of domesticity as a vice is only tangentially related to Hurston's own experiences in west Florida's turpentine camps. *The Narrows* has traditionally been interpreted as based on Petry's childhood in New England, which she admits to having drawn on, but all the novel's homes are shattered, whereas Petry had a relatively peaceful childhood (for growing up in the black middle class during Jim Crow). In fact, Petry's relationship with her white, lesbian writing teacher forms the background of *The Narrows's* setting.

I went in asking, how does home open and close down pathways for desire within black women's writing? I came out with an entirely different question; how does sexual desire undo home? Weaving through walls, tying outside and inside, crossing racial categories, disobeying regional narratives, and pointing to the instability of the heterosexual gender roles that were supposedly maintained by having, defending and representing black homes.

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