INNOCENCE BY ASSOCIATION: CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE WHITE LITERARY IMAGINATION

BY

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Abstract

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This study investigates how the modern civil rights movement (1954-68) shaped the literary production of four white writers, Robert Penn Warren, Norman Mailer, Eudora Welty and William Styron. It begins by situating their literary output in the longstanding interracial tradition of writers who linked the status of America's democratic experiment with the fate of Black Americans. If, beginning with Phyllis Wheatley, Black people in America began to assert intellectual parity with whites by producing sophisticated and politicized texts, then whites writing in support of these emancipatory narratives demonstrate their innocence, i.e. their expansive and catholic morality, by identifying with the oppressed group. I call this dual practice of politicized Black writing and white endorsement of it the Black textual tradition. Placing Mailer, Welty, Warren and Styron's post-WWII texts into this larger historical tradition permits insights into the notions of social justice that pertained in supposedly liberal post-War America, because these writers found engaging the Black textual tradition problematic. Although all four writers eventually crafted texts that declared their sympathy with the goals of the Black textual tradition, like many liberal white Americans in the post-WWII moment these authors did not want their earlier silence interpreted as an assent to the

repressive racial politics that were the norm across the nation. The texts they contribute to the national conversation on race negotiate these concerns by conveying their studied approval of the goals of Martin Luther King, SNCC, and the NAACP while displaying their insights into the reluctance of many of their white countrymen to support reform. Invariably, this kind of balancing act reveals much about the conflicted psyches of these four post-war liberals and the consensus driven middle class morality their writing represented. Their reluctance to embrace, indeed their fear of, the rapidly evolving expectations of the Black textual tradition helps explain why explorations of race and democracy in white literary fiction effectively cease for thirty years after Styron's acrimonious confrontation with Black critics of his work, and reveal why the liberal embrace of progressive politics in the 1960s proved to be so fleeting.

To Valerie: for staying in my corner

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We speak now against the day when our Southern people who will resist to the last these inevitable changes in social relations, will, when they have been forced to accept what they at one time might have accepted with dignity and goodwill, will say, "Why didn't someone tell us this before? Tell us this in time?"

William Faulkner, "American Segregation and the World Crisis." *Three Views of the Segregation Decision,* Southern Regional Council, Atlanta, 1956.

Introduction

"The Black Textual Tradition: Racial Writing and "The Condition of Democracy"

> …the writers of that period took a much greater responsibility for the condition of democracy and, indeed, their works were imaginative projections of the conflicts within the human heart which arose when the sacred principles of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights clashed with the practical exigencies of human greed, and fear, hate and love….In a sense the Negro was the gauge of the human condition as it waxed and waned in our democracy.
>
> Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 1953[1]

This project seemed straightforward enough when I began. In it, I examine a selection of texts from four prominent American writers, Robert Penn Warren, Norman Mailer, Eudora Welty, and William Styron. The individual works that I scrutinize by these four authors all concern themselves, in some fundamental fashion, with the social and political standing of African Americans in the United States during what has become popularly known as the Civil Rights Movement. These texts also seek to address the proper role that writing and writers can and should play in calling attention to a social ill or a given group's political status, though this is more of an issue in the pieces penned by Welty and Styron than for those by Warren or Mailer. I thought that these authors represented an interesting cross-section of post World War II white literary perspectives on Civil Rights and that my study might provide a fresh perspective to two overlapping and scrutinized

topics: the influence of the modern Civil Rights Movement on culture and society, and the various divergences of literary culture in the United States during the transformations that occurred in post-World War II America. And yet, as I began to investigate these authors and think more seriously about the issues represented and raised in their texts, I realized that answering my questions and providing insight about the literary response to the Civil Rights Movement demanded a consideration of earlier white responses to issues of race, democracy and justice. This introduction offers a preliminary sketch of these larger issues.

I did not think that this step would be necessary, since in many ways my study is not at all novel. Similar investigations into the connections between the literature produced by white Americans and contemporaneous understandings of representative democracy have been done by, among others, Kenneth Warren, Werner Sollors, Eric Sundquist, Shelly Fisher Fishkin, Eric Lott, Aldon Lynn Nielson, and Ashraf Rushdy.[2] Perusing their scholarship to better orient my argument in light of their claims, I realized that although each of them in their own way called for a revision of the American canon to better accommodate their assertions, none of them formalize their claims in such a way as to codify that revision.[3] Perhaps these critics are sensitive to the postmodern notion that to craft canons, even in revision of earlier classifications, is to violate the capacious nature of literary inquiry by walling off arenas of discourse from one another. And yet, the opportunity to trace the arc of a literary tradition that predates the foundation of the United States, a tradition concerned with representations of race and democracy, would seem to warrant the risk. This introduction is not that attempt, merely an outline that will permit discernment of how texts produced by Warren, Mailer, Welty and Styron fit into this larger project, for a serious attempt at describing that architecture deserves it own

study. And, since most of the scholarship on white American representations of African Americans focuses on the nineteenth century, I thought it best to start at the beginning, even though my study concerns authors writing much closer to the present day.

A Historical Overview

Since Phillis Wheatley first published *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* in 1773, literary production has been viewed as a central means for black people to assert their humanity in the Americas.[4] Even after the Civil War, when it became clear to African Americans that the rights of citizenship could not be guaranteed by amending the Constitution, the belief persisted that literature was an essential means of attaining equal rights. In the first decades of the twentieth century, when James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, W.E.B. Du Bois and others were laying the intellectual foundations for what would become the New Negro Movement, there was an explicit understanding that creative writing and fine art served the black American in his quest for full participation in every sphere of life in the United States. Johnson, in fact, asserted in the preface of *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, his groundbreaking 1921 collection, that

> [t]he status of the Negro in the United States is more a question of national mental attitude toward the race than of actual conditions. And nothing will do more to change that mental attitude and raise his status than a demonstration of intellectual parity by the Negro through the production of literature and art.[5]

As would be made clear in the 1960s, African Americans needed to engage more than just their white countrymen's aesthetic appreciation of art and of artists before they would be extended the rights and privileges promised by the American creed. However, while Johnson's belief in the ability of art of the highest caliber to produce social change

would ultimately prove to be mistaken, the idea that art could help enable the emancipation of black people, first invoked with Wheatley, would continue to influence the production and reception of texts by African Americans well into the twentieth century.

Given the abject social and legal status of African Americans for most of their history in the United States, it is easy to understand Black people's desire to demonstrate their humanity in the face of skepticism and political indifference. If evidence of artistic achievement could produce the change in temperament that would lead to the abandonment of laws and customs that consigned African Americans to the status of property, then producing that evidence was one of the most important things one could do for the race. It is no surprise, then, to find that many African Americans capable of creating art did so with the explicit aim of contributing to the end of various forms of discrimination. Yet Black writers were not the only people involved in this project. Indeed, whites collaborated in almost all of the emancipatory texts produced by African Americans prior to the Civil War. The abolitionist movement was, as has been well documented, an interracial project invested in extending democratic rights to African Americans, and it produces a flourishing multicultural literary community that, in the run-up to the War, composed passionate and provocative texts designed to transform the legal status of the African American.

As many scholars have noted, Phyllis Wheatley's first volume of poetry includes a prefatory statement endorsed by eighteen white signatories, among them John Hancock and the governor of the Massachusetts colony, which confirmed that the verse that followed was indeed penned by Wheatley. These eighteen worthies included their statement of authenticity to declare themselves convinced of Wheatley's artistry, which is

to say her humanity. It is this interracial assertion, the composition of verse by Wheatley preceded by her patrons' declaration of authorship, which garnered considerable attention on both sides of the Atlantic for Wheatley and her text. That Wheatley's volume established a formula whereby white authorities would vouch for African American writers underscores the cross-racial cooperation produced by these texts. There is a paternalistic element to these collaborations, to be sure, but statements by whites in pre-Civil War America were almost always made with the intention of helping the cause of the individual author and advancing the political status of African Americans. This is why defenders of chattel slavery like Thomas Jefferson took such pains to denounce Wheatley's poems as beneath notice. As Henry Louis Gates correctly observes, Jefferson makes a political judgment, and not an aesthetic one, when he dismisses Wheatley's poems in this fashion.[6] What Gates terms a political judgment I would refer to as a juridical claim, since he is essentially asserting that Wheatley's ability to win praise with the demonstration of a particular artistic talent does not alter her legal status as property.

Whites writing on behalf of African Americans before and after the Civil War did not limit their production to prefatory statements, composing essays, poems, sermons, and novels throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century designed to change "the national mental attitude toward" enslaved and segregated African Americans. Indeed, the literary output by white authors during two of the richest periods in American literature, 1840-1865 and 1945-1970, features many texts that seek to dramatize the status of the African American in relationship to the evolving democracy in the United States, in addition to texts by black authors objecting to their abject political status. Until recently these texts have often been considered separately, as though the literary tradition that includes *Benito Cereno* is somehow distinct from the one that includes *Narrative of the*

Life of Frederick Douglass. Of course, in the last twenty-five years this has begun to change, as scholars have noted the indisputably interracial nature of American literary culture. These scholars have identified an interracial writerly practice that spans the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries and is concerned with racial oppression, democracy and the political rights of people of African descent. I submit that the scholars pursuing this interracial line of inquiry view the texts that participate in this distinctly American literary project as Black texts emerging from a Black textual tradition concerned with expanding the political status of African Americans in order to perfect the democratic experiment in the United States. This mode of American literary expression is marked by collaborations between African Americans and whites that produce a series of documents whose content conspires to upset the logic of the American racial hierarchy.

Facts of 'Black'ness

The Black textual tradition is perhaps the most enduring and fecund in America letters, preceded perhaps only by the sermon and the captivity narrative in early American written discourse. This tradition subsumes distinctly American literary genres and includes texts that are properly understood as part of the romantic, gothic, realist, modernist, and post-modernist traditions. And, while the sermon and the captivity narrative have all but disappeared as genres, contemporary authors continue to churn out Black texts as the status of the African American continues to be a source of debate in the United States.[7] A Black text can be understood simply as a creative piece that argues explicitly for the recognition of black people's humanity and all the social and political

implications that come with that recognition. Whether produced by white or black authors, these works participate in destabilizing the

> dialectical relationship between (white) critical assertions that the person of African descent has not produced, or cannot produce, written art and that, because of this absence or lack, the black person has demonstrated, prima facie, evidence of his or her innate mental inequality with the European.[8]

Placing works that concern themselves with exploding the racial dialectic in the United States into a Black textual tradition regardless of their authors' race permits a fuller understanding of the American literary landscape by allowing critics to make exciting linkages.[9] While classifications are always problematic, I prefer one that encourages readers to place contemporaneous novels like Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) and William Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932) into dialogue, or reflect on the thematic resemblances of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Calling attention to the commonalities that these works possess, despite being written by authors from opposite sides of the racial divide, is the initial contribution of the textual reorganization that I advocate.

The term Black text also reverses the author/text binary in American literary studies. As John Guillory points out in *Cultural Capital*, despite the theoretical declaration of the death of the author, the study of American literature and culture continues to privilege the biological and biographical over the textual. Thus we have seen the rise of literary classifications that, however well meaning, derive in part from an essentialist understanding of the author that may have little to do with the content of a given work. I am not suggesting that we re-homogenize the discipline of English by undoing current classifications like African American literature, Women's literature, Gay

and Lesbian literature, and the like, but rather that in addition to attending to these markers of difference we emphasizing the role that certain texts play in the larger ongoing project that seeks to solve the problem of the color line in America. Interdisciplinary studies that concerning themselves with what Guillory calls the "social identity" of the author remain vital for the study of literature, but they also promote an understanding in which the symbolic, allusive, allegorical and literal content of a text is somehow secondary to whom the author is. This study does not intend to denigrate or supplant the scholarly recognition of social identity, or call for the abandonment of these intellectually rich fields of study. Instead I hope to demonstrate that in some contexts the textual should take precedence over matters of social identity.

If the Black text complicates the classification of authors via their social identity, it simplifies the reception of so-called problematic or orphaned texts. As Toni Morrison points out in *Playing in the Dark*, the scholarly reception of Willa Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* was occluded by what readers thought they understood about her political and authorial concerns, as if such things could remain static. Richard Wright's *Savage Holiday* continues to baffle (and be dismissed by) many Wright scholars, largely because of Wright's decision to craft a text about violence and moral choice in a white community. The absence of race in *Savage Holiday* conflicts with what critics have adduced about the importance of black social identity to Wright. Indeed, Wright does privilege the problematic social identity of the black man throughout his fiction and nonfiction, and the exploration of the political status of African Americans could easily consume an author's career. That Wright takes on a different project in mind in *Savage Holiday* seems to utterly confound his critics.[10] Similarly, James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* once defied classification until the rise of Queer Theory and Gay and Lesbian

Studies helped find it a home in the critical landscape. That *Giovanni's Room* could become a central text of the Gay and Lesbian literary tradition despite being produced by a black author demonstrates the fallacy of insisting on categorizing texts by their authors' social identity. [11] The scholarly practice that grows out of the Black textual tradition would lay claim only to some of Baldwin's work, which in no way diminishes the texts he produced that fall outside that tradition.

Focusing on the text also solves the continuing problem of racial identity in the African American canon and ethnic identity in the American canon. If one were to judge by the racial phenotype evidenced in the photographs of Charles Chestnutt, Walter White, and Jean Toomer, three of the greatest writers in the African American literary tradition, all would be considered white. The indeterminacy of the social identity of these writers has caused some consternation among scholars of the African American tradition, especially in the case of White and Toomer. The focus on the social identity of these authors has lead some scholars to attempt to reconcile their physical appearance with their essays, novels, short stories and poems. This winds up treating race as if it were a biological, and not a social and political, fact and also assumes that only people with the proper racial and social identity can write with sensitivity and nuance about matters of race. By invoking a Black *textual* tradition, the social identity of these artists becomes a secondary concern. This is especially freeing in the case of Toomer, or even Frank Yerby. Rather than struggling to shoehorn Toomer's deracinated post-*Cane* writings or Yerby's historical pieces into some sort of inherently politicized African American tradition, as some have done, invoking a Black textual tradition allows scholars to focus on texts that are engaged in questions of race, equality and democracy and to treat those with different orientations accordingly. Sometimes, as in the case of Yerby, historical

fiction is just historical fiction, despite the social identity of the author producing it. If this seems wrong headed, one should realize that there would be little debate about making a similar discrimination between *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *Huckleberry Finn*.

A consideration of two recent works by Phillip Roth further demonstrates the usefulness of Black textual scholarship to uncoupling textual production from ethnic or racial identity. Roth, who early in his career was branded a lapsed Jewish writer and even occasionally accused of self-abnegation, has recently written *The Human Stain*, an outstanding novel about the continuing importance of racial categories in the United States and *The Plot Against America* about the existence of a nativist anti-Semitism in 1930s US that might have changed the course of human history. These texts complicate Roth's earlier critical reception and contribute to his recent reappraisal, but such re-visions are necessary only because critics insisted on linking his textual production to their own expectations based in part on their understanding of his social identity. Better, I think, to begin with the text and identify the web of influences that contribute to its production than to situate an author based on limited biographical evidence and then try to make all subsequent works fit that paradigm. The Black textual tradition would attempt to make sense of *The Human Stain* without reductively asserting that the text was actually (which is to say, only) an allegorical commentary on Jewish social identity.

I expect people to find the term 'Black text' objectionable if not the tradition it seeks to delineate. However, 'Black' is a term that can subsume many racial and ethnic perspectives and as such is far more useful in this context than African American, white, interracial or other markers of difference. There is still an overwhelming, if unconscious, desire to understand the American tradition as a European-derived tradition with other

social identities in orbit around a privileged whiteness. Articulating an interracial tradition that would logically include Melville, Emerson, Twain and Faulkner and calling it Black forces a reevaluation of their literary and our scholarly assumptions. Further, by identifying (for example) Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* as a Black text, it prevents facile understandings of literature from a particular individual, region, or period, in this case the post-WWII American South. The designation Black text also perverts and complicates the one-drop rule that continues to shape how most Americans understand race. Most importantly, the catch all phrase Black does not eradicate national origin or familial history, any more than the inclusion of texts by the Jamaican poet Claude McKay, the Canadian novelist Austin Clarke, the Haitian author Edwidge Dandicot or Trinidadian Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott in a Black literature class destroys theirs. Rather, Black alludes to affiliation with a group that has always existed as much in the public imagination as on the soil of the nation. If mixed race children continue to be identified as black, then miscegenated texts should be similarly designated.[12]

By invoking a Black textual tradition I take seriously the contention that the evolution of democracy in the United States cannot be properly understood without taking into account the presence of enslaved people of African descent. This is what W.E.B. Du Bois asserted twelve decades ago in *Souls of Black Folk*, and, while much lip service has been paid to this idea, structuring the American canon around social identity often limits our understanding of how often whites and blacks collaborated politically and culturally, and how these collaborations expanded ideas of what was possible in America. For example, if the Suffragette movement grows out of the Abolitionist movement, in the sense that almost all of those early feminists first participated in the debates around slavery before turning to the issue of women's rights, it is no distortion to claim that the

texts this movement produces derive in part from the Black textual tradition. A similar case could be made for more the literature that grows out of more recent political movements like Gay Rights and the environmentalist movement, since that literature often mimic the tactics and strategies of texts inspired by the contemporary Civil Rights movement. Each of these examples indicates how a greater understanding of the collaborations that coalesced around those supporting the political and civil rights of African Americans would deepen our understanding of the connections between them and other groups in the United States.[13]

Black textual scholarship also enriches our understanding of American literature by allowing a comparison between works where there seems little connection. It accomplishes this not only by placing sympathetic texts by black and white authors into dialogue, but also by doing the same for white texts from the Black textual tradition and those opposed to the goals of that tradition. These conflict between white authors writing across the racial divide are fairly easily detected during the Abolitionist movement, but are often harder to identify post-Reconstruction and especially in the twentieth century. It would seem, for example, odd to consider Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* as a reply to the interracial relationships depicted in Smith's *Strange Fruit* and Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*.[14] Feminist scholars have long criticized Kesey's novel, with its heroic protagonist McMurphy beset by the castrating Nurse Ratched, as hostile to women's increasing authority in contemporary society. By broadening our scope to reflect on the alliance between Nurse Ratched and her sodomizing and silent black orderlies, it becomes possible to perceive in Kesey's novel a narrative that declares white masculinity imperiled by an alliance of women and African Americans. This narrative inverts and reverses the interracial alliances between white women and black

men as portrayed by Smith and Lee and echoes arguments made by pro-Slavery writers against white female abolitionists as well as those made by so called Reconciliation literature. Black textual scholarship broadens our understanding of American literature by placing texts supposedly from the same tradition, in this case post-WWII American fiction, into conflict. Similarly, much of Faulkner's fiction might be evaluated not as a response to the moral claims made by Du Bois and his cohort, but to the myth of the defeated genteel South at risk from miscegenation as represented, for example, by the work of Thomas Dixon.[15]

In fact, if the interracial project that produces Wheately's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* represents the first Black text, then Jefferson's dismissive reply might be perceived as the formal establishment of a counter-narrative seeking to resist and refute the claims made by the Black textual tradition.[16] Indeed, these competing rhetorics ebb and flow in a symbiotic relationship throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, yet unless the textual output is blatantly hostile to the goals of the Black textual tradition, as in the plantation novels of the 1880s, it can be difficult to recognize a given text's participation in the dialogue inspired by Black textual production. Writers that obviously oppose the articulations of minority rights, like Jefferson and Dixon, or those whose antipathy is more difficult to detect, like Kesey or Saul Bellow, must be evaluated in light of their response of the claims advanced by the Black textual tradition.[17] The openly racist hostility that might inspire some critics to dismiss many Reconciliation texts from the nineteenth century as retrograde or wrongheaded is often not present in texts that work against the demands of the Black textual tradition by questioning the cost of the social reforms so desired. A criticism that fails to recognize this risks oversimplifying the sophisticated considerations that

motivates textual production.[18] Indeed, that Dixon wrote separate trilogies, one condemning socialism while the other rejected the concept of social equality for African Americans, suggests that an exploration of the links between anti-communist texts and texts hostile to minority rights might yield some interesting insights into the racial politics that lay at the literary roots of American conservatism. Thus Black textual scholarship promises to shed light on more than just the construction of literary canons in the Americas.

Evaluating the Black Textual Tradition

As I hope I've begun to demonstrate, the Black textual tradition and the counter-narrative it inspires are integral to a fuller understanding of the literary, political and cultural landscape in the United States, particularly in the twentieth century when these concerns were often obscured by considerations of other aesthetic, political and philosophical concerns. Given this, the process by which texts are identified as part of the tradition or its counter narrative assumes added importance. As I have intimated above, the Black textual tradition is a distinctly American literary practice that includes works which challenge the racial hierarchy upon which first chattel slavery and them racial segregation in the United States were based. Work from this tradition accomplish this by asserting first, that African Americans are indeed humans and therefore citizens, that all citizens of the United States deserve equal protection of the law and the respect of fellow citizens, and that when others engage in practices that abridge these rights they harm their souls and the fabric of the democratic experiment. These texts also inspire resistance among writers dedicated to preserving the white privilege produced by the American racial hierarchy. Fortunately, almost all the literary output of African

American writers falls into the Black textual tradition, at least until the conclusion of World War II. Jean Toomer's post-*Cane* texts and perhaps Zora Neale Hurston's novels, although not her work on folklore, loom as the most prominent cases of black writers who were not necessarily advancing the ideals of the Black textual tradition among African American authors. Among white authors, the texts that seem warrant inclusion either in the Black textual tradition or its antithesis seem obvious, with Melville, Emerson, Faulkner, Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe on one side of the tradition and Jefferson, George Fitzhugh, Thomas Nelson Page, Dixon and Margaret Mitchell on the other.

As one might expect, white engagement in the Black Textual Project correlates closely to the place of the African American in the nation's political imagination. The participation of the Northern literary mainstream in the blatantly political abolitionist project that produces the Black textual tradition stands in stark contrast to what occurred after the end of Reconstruction. Unlike their predecessors, white authors publishing after Reconstruction were less inclined to problematize the nation's racial hierarchy in their work, choosing to construct narratives that addressed other concerns. Indeed, one might argue that the growth of local color in the fiction of post-bellum America and the literary cosmopolitanism that helped produce modernism as a central topos are the direct result of a turning away from issues of race and democracy in the United States. Louis Menand claims in *The Metaphysical Club* that after the Civil War the nation was much less inclined to invest intellectual energy articulating the kinds of moral certainties that abolitionists used to advocate for the eradication of slavery. This reluctance is borne out by the North's disinterest in fully reforming the former Confederacy, as evidenced by the compromise of 1876 that led to the withdrawal of Union troops from the South and left

African Americans trapped in a political and social limbo between citizenship and slavery.[19] Eric Foner, Stetson Kennedy and others have argued that once the preservation of the Union and the abolition of slavery were accomplished, there was little will to confront Southern rhetoric of reconciliation that ceded the South the right to manage the freedom of the formally enslaved.[20] The success of this rhetoric and fatigue over matters of race, despite the best efforts of committed racial reformers like George Washington Cable, helps explain the sociopolitical context that contributed to the comparative lack of Black texts produced by white authors between 1877-1914.

Indeed if one could graph white participation in the Black Textual Tradition from eighteenth century to the present it would closely resemble a sine wave. The publication of *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* in 1773 would serve as the origin, with interest in Black texts (the amplitude) rising until it crests from 1855-65, at which point interest begins to falling away to its nadir (trough) in the 1890s before returning to its point of origin during the Harlem Renaissance, only to return to previous heights in the 1950s and 60s. This is not to suggest that depictions of African Americans are entirely absent from the works of Henry James, James Fenimore Cooper, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Edith Wharton Ernest Hemingway and their contemporaries. Instead I would expand Warren's claim about Henry James peculiar use of race in his fiction. Warren claims that the literary production by white authors between 1876 and 1919, James chief among them, is compromised by

> the creation of a climate of opinion that undermined the North's capacity to resist Southern arguments against political equality for African Americans during the 1880s and 1890s through its conflicted participation in discussions about the American social order. On the one hand [certain] works…mythologized the

> alliance of culturally conservative elites and new capitalists, thus resisting the "radical democratic ideology" that underwrote Radical Reconstruction. On the other hand, these fictions often evinced a commitment to imagining the consequences that would ensue from

radical democratic reform.[21] Because of this reluctance the work produced by authors from this period lacks the desire to thoroughly interrogate and dismantle the American racial hierarchy that marked the texts produced by the generation of writers shaped by the events leading up to and including the Civil War. Despite the interracial origins of emancipatory writing in the eighteenth century, and despite it being a dominant theme in the works of prominent nineteenth century figures, by the 1920s the creation of Black texts was seen as the obligation of Black writers, and unnecessary for those writing for the American mainstream, a reversal from the 1840s and 50s. This disinterest on the part of most post-Reconstruction white authors outside of Cable and Twain left the creation of Black texts to Black writers like Cable's associates Charles Chestnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar, Sutton Griggs, Pauline Hopkins and thinkers like Du Bois, Locke and Johnson and the younger generation of Harlem Renaissance artists they cultivated, encouraged and inspired.

While the riots that accompanied the return of black WWI veterans to the South and Mid-West in 1919 occasioned some interest from mainstream white writers, the socialist writers who emerged in the 1920s and 30s were perhaps the most prominent exception to the general disinterest in racial writing shown by whites after Reconstruction but before the onset of World War II.[22] However, I want to make the preliminary claim that like post-Reconstruction writers, white socialist writers did not participate in the Black textual tradition, but rather in an international Marxist literary tradition dedicated

to creating a revolutionary literary practice capable of inventing an audience that would contribute to the abolition of global capitalism. American socialist texts unflinchingly confronted issues of race and political reform, but for the most part these texts sought to demonstrate that communism was a more just political and economic system than representative democracy as practiced in the United States. This goal placed socialist texts at odds with the desires of the Black textual tradition, as well as with the younger generation of Black writers influenced both by the socialist thought as well as the New Negro Movement, among them Langston Hughes, Wright, and Ellison. Socialist writings' incompatibility with the Black textual tradition is demonstrated by the fact that Hughes, Wright and Ellison ultimately broke with the socialist organizations in the United States, if not the teachings of Marx, well in advance of the Red Scare of the 1950s. Indeed, Ellison dedicated a large section of his masterwork, *Invisible Man*, to refuting the claims made by American Communist Party, and for entirely different reasons than those cited by white critics who comprised the anti-communist left. Despite the promises unfulfilled by the United States since Reconstruction, the Black textual tradition hoped to repair and perfect the American experiment, not end it.[23]

I would also place the separatist texts inspired by the writings of Alexander Crummell in the nineteenth century and Marcus Garvey and Elijah Muhammad in the twentieth outside of the Black textual tradition.[24] Like the socialist works of the 1920s and 30s, these texts advocated African Americans abandon the United States, in this case by emigrating to their 'home' on the continent of Africa or by fashioning an autonomous Black state within US borders. This Black Nationalist perspective viewed the United States as an inherently corrupt lost cause, a nation unworthy of the presence of people of color, even if it eventually proved capable of treating black people as equals. As with the

arguments made by American socialists, nationalist entreaties were vehemently resisted by writers instrumental to the articulation of the Black textual tradition like Douglass, Du Bois (who lived long enough to rebut his mentor Crummell in the nineteenth century and Garvey in the twentieth) and Ellison. Whatever the merits of the arguments advanced by Crummell, Garvey, Muhammad and the young Malcolm X, they exist outside a textual tradition that presupposes both a sustained African American presence and the eventual redemption of a multiracial United States through the realization of justice and democracy.[25]

While the texts that advocated a social and political Black nationalism are, I believe, inimical to the Black textual tradition, I would hesitate to marginalize the texts that attempted to reconcile the competing desires of Black Nationalist rhetoric and Black textual tradition in this fashion. The Black Arts Movement, which attempted to reconcile the aforementioned competing traditions, advocated a kind of African American cultural purity as the logical transition from an the inherently interracial Black textual tradition to a partial realization of Black nationalist rhetoric through the political articulation of Black Power. The attempt to identify a culturally pure Black aesthetic, while ultimately misguided, produces some of the most intriguing Black criticism in the post WWII period. The scholarly work of Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, Stephen Henderson, Addison Gayle and others reveals interesting areas of cross-cultural influence and collaboration, even as these critics insisted that African American artists abandon such inauthentic practices. More importantly for the purposes of my study, these critics scrutinized Black texts by white authors for their failings, decrying works that failed to depict black culture with nuance and respect. Unfortunately, in the process of calling attention to the outrages committed by authors who lacked a sophisticated understanding of African American

culture, the Black Arts critics tended to generalize from the worst examples of the Black textual tradition, or worse from texts written explicitly in opposition to its goals. By collapsing the vital difference between texts these critics misidentified the Black textual tradition as well as underestimating the influence those texts continue to have on how the nation conceives matters of race and democracy.[26] Indeed, the issue of authenticity would wind up being central to evaluations of white participation in the Black textual tradition during the post-WWII period and the Black Arts critics were at the forefront of defining just what it was to be authentically black.

Innocence by Association

The rise of the modern Civil Rights movement inspired a new generation of white writers to participate in the latest permutation of the Black textual project. As before, those hostile to the goals of the Black textual tradition, in the North as well as the South, attempted to delegitimate the claims advanced the legal texts the NAACP's team of lawyers, chief among them Thurgood Marshall, as well as the speeches penned by Martin Luther King, to say nothing of the literature of Ellison, Wright, and Baldwin. These efforts were less than successful because television unwittingly conspired with Civil Rights activists to make the counter-narratives of white supremacy increasingly untenable. However, the return of the Black textual project to the forefront of literary culture created a number of uncomfortable implications for the white majority. Aided in part by the competing discourses during the post-Reconstruction period, the vast majority of white Americans passively turned away from the plight of their black countrymen living under Jim Crow in the South and under de facto residential segregation in the North and West. White Americans writers were no different from their countrymen and

other concerns took precedence in their writing, even when that writing was explicitly political. The modern Civil Rights Movement, beginning with the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Birmingham, returned issues of race and democracy to the forefront, but other perspectives complicated literary depictions of this issue.

While the texts I consider support the goals of the modern Civil Rights Movement, engaging in the Black textual tradition represented a problem for these writers in particular and the nation as a whole. I do not mean to suggest that these writers were the only, or even the most effective, white writers inspired by the modern civil rights movement to participate in the Black textual tradition. Writers as disparate as Smith, Lee, Carson McCullers, John Steinbeck, and others turned their attention to the topic, producing important and interesting meditations on race and civic identity in America, while more conservative writers like Bellow, Kesey, and Hannah Arendt questioned the assumptions of the literary and political reformists. Mailer, Welty, Warren and Styron interest me in part because of their reluctance to embrace the tradition, a reluctance that might help explain why white participation in the Black textual tradition effectively ceases for thirty years after Styron's acrimonious confrontation with Black critics of his work.

There is something recursive to the project as well. If Black people in America proved their intellectual equality with whites by writing, then whites who wrote approvingly of the civil rights movement demonstrated their innocence, i.e. their expansive and catholic morality by identifying with the oppressed group. This helps explain why many of those who wrote in favor of the civil rights movement, or against the violence being used to preserve segregation, were sons and daughters of the South, including Robert Penn Warren, one of the original Southern Agrarians. If the four

authors under consideration here could be said to share a particular trait, it is their keen awareness of the shape and scope of American literary history. African American protest forced each of them to confront the fact that their literary forebears, Melville, Twain, and most especially Faulkner, had participated in meaningful ways in presenting the complications that arise in a democracy where one segment of the population is subordinated by another. The failure of these writers to engage, and in Warren's case his active hostility to, questions central to the Black textual tradition forced a reassessment from each of them. Ultimately all four writers crafted texts that declared not just their sympathy with the goals of the Black textual tradition, but each struggled with their belated decision to produce Black texts. Like many liberal white Americans in the post-WWII moment, these authors did not want their earlier silence interpreted as assent to the repressive racial politics that were badly in need of reform. Instead the Black texts they contributed to the national conversation are meant to convey their studied approval of the goals of King and the NAACP and display their insight into the reluctance of their white countrymen, many of whom feared or resisted these changes, to support reform.

My project opens with "Weaving the 'Seamless Garment' of History: Robert Penn Warren and the Limits of Responsibility" which details the evolution of Warren's perspective regarding the Black textual tradition. In 1929 Warren produces "The Briar Patch," his contribution to the Southern Agrarian's *I'll Take My Stand*. As a collaboration, *I'll Take My Stand* represents one of the most powerful valorization of the segregated South since the plantation novels of the 1890s. Warren's contribution, a defense of segregation that justifies the second class citizenship of African Americans, in part by using the arguments of Booker T. Washington to support his claims, is especially troubling to him after the onset of the modern Civil Rights Movement. His reorientation

begins with *Segregation*: *The Inner Conflict of the South* (1956), an essay that attempts to objectively assess the mood of the South in light of the recent Brown v. Board of Education decision. Warren reveals his continued ambivalence to the forced reform of the South during a fascinating self-interview that concludes his text. In his self-interview he refuses to grant added significance to the goals of the Civil Rights movement, calling desegregation "one small episode in the long effort for justice." Indeed Warren clings to the fiction that white Southerners will emerge from this struggle able to provide moral leadership for the nation. In this he sounds like the 19th century realists so taken with the nobility of the defeated South.

Warren strikes a somewhat different note in *The Legacy of the Civil War* (1961), though the ambivalence remains. Warren now declares that the history of the United States properly begins with the Civil War, which places added importance on the current effort to resolve the issue of race and democracy once and for all. Given the importance of both the war and the question of the African American in the Unites States, Warren wishes that both the North and the South could have dispensed with myths that allowed them to avoid the seriousness of the issue. This text seeks to warn both Northern liberal and Southern segregationist that without a fresh perspective, a change in national attitude, the mistakes of the Civil War may repeat themselves. After criticizing the traditional Northern and Southern viewpoints on race and democracy, *The Legacy of the Civil War* seems to offer a qualified endorsement of the project undertaken by the Southern Christian Leadership Coalition and the NAACP. By *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (1965) Warren's support is no longer qualified, and it stands as Warren's Black text. Here Warren explicitly endorses the goals of Martin Luther King and the NAACP and warns that unless white America is willing to accept the cost of the reforms they propose the

resurgent Black Nationalism represented most starkly by the Nation of Islam will attract enough adherents to make a just and fair resolution to the problems of race and democracy in the United States impossible.[27]

"The Apocalyptic Hipster: "The White Negro" and Norman Mailer's Achievement of Style," details the forces that shepherded Mailer into embracing important aspects of the Black textual project. Mailer imagined himself a progressive and anarchic artist trapped in the studied conformity of the 1950s. His first two attempts to write himself out of his times, *Barbary Shore* and *The Deer Park* would be dismissed by critics and failed to attract the audiences of his debut, *The Naked and the Dead*. *Barbary Shore* (1951) rejected both the materialism of the post-war period and socialism rhetoric as a proper remedy, preventing both anti-capitalists and anti-communists from embracing the text. *The Deer Park* (1955)explores the psychosexual corruption of Hollywood, but does so primarily through a director who rejected his past radicalism during the McCarthy witch-hunt and an amoral pimp, a choice of character that again marginalizes his critique. The Montgomery Bus Boycott inspires Mailer to investigate African American conduct, which seems to him more authentic and freer than the stultifying white conformity that he rejects.

After a serious misstep Mailer produces "The White Negro" (1956) a text that contrapuntally argues for African American equality by asserting that black people possess a kind of moral superiority derived from their talent for graceful living in the face of annihilation. Mailer finds this talent a necessary skill for modern life, one that would help white Americans better confront the threat of the nuclear war between the US and the USSR and the bilious hysteria spread by Senator McCarthy. To this end Mailer champions a language of hip, an interracial vernacular that rejects the sterile conformity

demanded by an escalating Cold War. For Mailer adopting the perspective of marginalized African Americans will enable a critique of what he perceives as an increasingly disciplinary society, and thus lead in the end to greater freedoms for all. This is the perspective that enables him to produce *An American Dream* (1965) a critique of middle class conformity that connects with both critics and a mass audience although in some ways it is just as nihilistic as his earlier failures. Mailer's embrace of the Black textual tradition is ultimately qualified by his avowedly selfish desire to say something meaningful in a society where criticism of society has been made increasingly difficult by wealth and the threat of the Soviet Union.

My next chapter, "The Whole Heart of Fiction: Eudora Welty inside the Closed Society," focuses on the only short stories Welty produced during the 1960s: the monologue "Where is the Voice Coming From?" (1963), and "The Demonstrators," (1967). These texts take up the Black textual tradition by presenting the repressive and violent nature of life in the South.[28] Welty writes "Where is the Voice Coming From" to protest of the assassination of Medgar Evers, like Welty a lifelong native of Jackson, Mississippi. This story shows how the ideology of white supremacy that serves as the logic for segregation and Jim Crow deforms the moral values of white men in the South. It remains one of the most powerful texts produced during the Civil Rights Movement. "The Demonstrators" works more subtly, depicting the injustice endemic to Southern life through the perspective of a small town doctor who finds himself increasingly unable to abide the logic of life in his community but at a loss as to how to properly, which is to say without endangering both his life and his livelihood, agitate for change.

While the widespread violence and repression in Mississippi inspired Welty to endorse the goals of the Black textual tradition, she resisted supporting the expectations

of Black textual practice. In 1965, between the publication of her two Black texts, Welty issues an essay titled "Must the Novelist Crusade?" The essay was in part a response to Northern correspondents who urged Welty to take a bigger role in the Civil Rights protest movement, but it also represents Welty's attempt to defend art that fails to engage meaningfully in moral crisis of the day. This text betrays Welty's reluctance to sacrifice her commitment to depictions of local color in her art in order to attain a discrete political end. This is why in this essay Welty, who was famous for her baroque and peculiar short stories, asserts a utopian color-blindness that rejects the articulation of particularized difference in literature as grounds for reflection about political reform. Art can never take the place of political speech, she warns, refusing to art's ability to dramatize the everyday. Indeed, despite her hesitancy in this essay, her fugitive stories from the 1960s expresses Welty's opposition to the restrictive mores of her community and the South as a whole.[29] Both "The Demonstrators" and "Where is That Voice Coming From?" depict that damage the segregation inflicts on white Southerners from every social class.

I close my study with "'Negroes, and blood, and horror' Existential Freedom and *The Confessions of Nat Turner*." Styron, whom Mailer considered among his chief competition for the mythical claim of best young writer, possesses a curious perspective about the South. Like Warren, Styron was concerned that increasing industrialization would compromise the unique character of the Southern states. As with Welty, Styron was personally progressive about matters of race, though like her he did not feel the need to publicly advocate his perspective. Styron also shared with Mailer a fascination with existentialism and a desire for his work to reveal something meaningful about the nature of American society. To this end Styron produces two existential texts, the novella *The Long March* (1953) and the novel *Set This House on Fire* (1960). The protagonists of

these texts are faced with profound moral choices and each struggles to express his personal desires within the conforming milieu of the state. *Set This House on Fire* is particularly interesting because among the many incidents its protagonist struggles to assemble into an existentially whole self is a racist assault on a sharecropper in his youth. The novel ends with him at peace, having successfully reconciled his past actions into his authentic self.

The way that *Set This House on Fire* is resolved, I argue, should informs any reading of *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967), Styron's brave attempt at producing a Black text. As the interviews he gave as the project was progressing demonstrate, Styron finds himself increasingly unwilling to imagine a Black protagonist who could make peace with actions that seem more justifiable than destroying a sharecropper's home at the urging of a racist co-worker. Having devoted his previous two novels to questions of choice and justice, Styron creates in *The Confessions of Nat Turner* a narrative consumed with guilt and betrayal. Styron creates in my opinion, a failed Black text, but a text that is the most important of the those under consideration for it allowed Black Arts and Black nationalist critics to declare that whites were incapable of truly sympathetic portrayal of Black characters. The abandonment of the Black textual project is accomplished in the 19th century by an unwillingness to complete the reforms began after the Civil War and the blandishments of Southerners committed to the maintenance of their society. The controversy over *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, informed by the moral superiority that the Civil Rights Movement granted Styron's critics, inspired many white authors too abandon the project, unsure of their right to participate in the Black textual tradition.

As in post-Reconstruction, the reluctance of white fiction writers to participate in the Black textual project after the Styron affair for fear of censure from a group of dedicated critics, with a romantic view of their culture, in the modern case essentialist African American critics, harmed the discourse of the nation. The nation again turned away prematurely from unresolved issues surrounding race and democracy as the broader electorate lost patience and perspective as more radical elements gained an increasing voice in the Civil Rights Movement. In part because of the lack of white literary voices willing to dramatize the effects of incomplete or ineffectual reform, in part because the goals of that reform became increasingly diffuse, politicians again began to cater to the will of the so-called silent majority. The modern attempt at reconciliation was over and the United States was profoundly better for it. Unfortunately, without fiction testing the boundaries of this new dispensation, much of the opportunities presented by the reforms were squandered, both within literary circles as well as the culture as a whole.

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[1] Ralph Ellison, "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity, *Shadow and Act*, 36

[2] see, among others, Kenneth Warren, *Black and White Strangers*, Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Literature*, Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, Eric Lott, *Love and Theft*, Shelly Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?*, Aldon Lynn Nielson, *Reading Race: White American Poets and Racial Discourse in the Twentieth Century*, and Ashraf Rushdy, *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Life of a Literary Form*.

[3] *Criticism and the Color Line,* edited by Henry B. Wonham, and *The New American Studies* edited by John Carlos Rowe, contain a series of sophisticated attempts to systematize the scholarly examinations of race and democracy in cultural studies.

[4] Throughout this thesis, I capitalize Black when discussing a formal idea, such as my Black textual tradition or the Black Art Movement, and also when referring to people of African descent who live in the United States. I do not capitalize white, since whiteness primarily describes skin color and not the ethnic and social circumstance of a people. For example, Norman Mailer is a Jewish American white writer, while Ralph Ellison is a

Black, that is African American writer. I use the terms Black and African American interchangeably, even though not all of those that participated in the African American literary traditon were in fact African American.

[5] James Weldon Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, 9.

[6] Gates, *Figures in Black*,

[7] Among white writers, see for example, Phillip Roth, *The Human Stain*, Scott Spencer, *A Ship Made of Paper*, Richard Powers, *The Time of Our Singing*, Jonathan Letham, *The Fortress of Solitude*.

[8] Henry Louis Gates, *Figures in Black,* xxxi.

[9] I am not forgetting that race is an invented category. Indeed, the argument here depends on race being a marker of a social and political position, not a biological fact.

[10] Indeed, much of the criticism of *Savage Holiday* purports that the text results from Wright's fixation on existentialism and/or his relationship with Simone de Beauvior. Wright cannot, it seems, have an authentic interest in the ways of white folks.

[11] I in no way claim that Baldwin's social identities should not be brought to bear on our understanding of his texts, merely that such a concern should be secondary to an analysis of the content of the text. I reject any attempts to qualify Baldwin's ethnic identity due to some imagined conflict with his gendered identity. It is my hope that by focusing on the text we might avoid these essentialist arguments.

[12] I find the question of whether to always capitalize Black to be a vexing one. I am sympathetic to arguments that claim that when used to describe people the adjective Black assumes a unique significance since for many in the United States it is not possible to identify the region of Africa where one's family descended from. So, while a white American might be Irish and French-Canadian, a Black American cannot reliably say she is Ghanaian-American, thus the capitalization of one and not the other. However, to capitalize thusly also privileges social identity in a way I actively resist in this thesis. But, I do capitalize Black when referring to the Black textual tradition simply as a way to differentiate it.

[13] *The Port Huron Statement*, a foundational text in the establishment of the New Left that gives rise to the environmentalist movement, was written by Tom Hayden, who was himself radicalized while participating in SNCC's Voter Registration Project in Mississippi. This is one example of how ostensibly 'white' rhetorical practices grow out of participation in Black political movments.

[14] I am assuming that one can concede that *Strange Fruit* and *To Kill A Mockingbird* are part of an interracial Black textual tradition.

[15] Incredibly, if you search for Dixon and Faulkner in the MLA database, it returns one result!

[16] It might be more accurate to claim that Wheatley's poetry is in fact a response to a longer standing tradition, but I resist constructing my argument this way for two reasons. First, the political claims embodied in the Black textual tradition are now widely regarded as proper for any nation. Secondly, the claims about Black inferiority were part of a larger, trans-Atlantic discussion that predates the founding of the thirteen colonies. Wheatley's text establishes a uniquely American tradition.

[17] I do not mean to suggest that these evaluations should displace other scholarly considerations, merely complicate these earlier understandings.

[18] Warren's *Black and White Strangers* demonstrates how the realist and romantic texts of the antebellum period debated the question of reform in several guises, even though this question was linked during that period with the status of African Americans.

[19] Louis Menand's *Metaphysical Club* suggests that, in the aftermath of the Civil War, writers sought to avoid provoking debate around issues of race and democracy, and activists sought to perfect society incrementally through strengthening its institutions instead of demanding radical policy change.

[20] See Stetson Kennedy's *After Appomattox* for an account of how the rhetoric and policies of the Confederacy triumphed in the decades after the war, even though their army did not. It is also true that as the artistic community in the United States began to see its work appreciated in Europe, they selected themes better suited for consumption by sophisticated Europeans.

[21] Warren, 13.

[22] Faulkner is, of course, a special case.

[23] There has been much work done on the American Communist Party and Black participants, be they writers or not. See Richard Wright's chapter in Richard Crossman's *The God that Failed*, Gerald Horne's *Black Liberation/Red Scare*, William Maxwell's *New Negro. Old Left*, and Bill Mullen's *Left of the Color Line.*

[24] I make this move in part to circumvent arguments like Paul Gilroy's *Against Race* that collapse and confuse the reformist bent of the Black textual tradition with the apocalyptic nature of narratives of racial purity as he advocates a specious cosmopolitanism that is need to rescue notions of political reform from the supposedly racist and fascist discourse employed by black Americans. These texts are certainly part of the larger African American tradition, but that is not what we are talking about here.

[25] Malcolm's move from a Black nationalist position towards a Black textual position that acknowledged the faults of the United States democracy but acknowledged the interracial tradition that desired to correct these wrongs represented the greatest threat to the

narrative of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, which is why the Nation conspired to assassinate him.

[26] For example on the emasculated figure of Uncle Tom, undermined the tremendous positive influence Stowe's text exerted in the 19th century as well as conveniently overlooking Stowe's attempt to balance her depiction of Tom in her next novel, *Dred*.

[27] Although I don't consider it in this chapter, Warren's *Democracy and Poetry* represents an interesting post-script to his racial evolution.

[28] Although I'm willing to entertain arguments about "Powerhouse." Welty steadfastly refused to grant that "The Burning" contained any political content although the text seems to lend itself to Black textual practice and interpretation.

[29] I call "Where is the Voice Coming From?" and "The Demonstrators" fugitive tales because in *the Collected Short Stories of Eudora Welty* they are found in the last section, titled "Uncollected Stories."

Chapter One

"Weaving the 'Seamless Garment' of History: Robert Penn Warren and the Limits of Responsibility"

> In a little while I realized I simply couldn't have written ["The Briar Patch"] again. If you are seriously trying to write fiction, you can't allow yourself as much evasion as in trying to write essays. Robert Penn Warren to Ralph Ellison, 1957[1]

> …my attitudes on a particular question have changed very greatly and I hope they will continue to do some changing. I'd hate to think I was frozen. But on the question of historical relevance of history to my way of thinking or feeling, I don't think there's been much change. You know the habits, how things were in the South….The sense of the past and the sense of the present are somehow intertwined constantly.
>
> Robert Penn Warren, 1969[2]

Unlike the other authors considered in this project, Robert Penn Warren engages the Black textual tradition from the onset of his long and productive career. His first book, *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr*, published in 1929 while he was at Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship, treats the abolitionist leader not as a symptom of the polarizing force of slavery, but as a violently unbalanced man driven by an otherworldly megalomania to reckless acts of violence justified by his opposition to slavery. This text

is of a piece with the continuing revisionist project that was the rhetorical response to the brief success of Reconstruction. Because of this stance, and Warren's roots in rural Tennessee and Kentucky, reviewers labeled him a partisan, a defender of the Southern way of life against Northern interpretations informed by the Civil War era Black textual project.[3] Warren did nothing to disabuse this reception with his next piece of non-fiction, a rationalization of segregation titled "The Briar Patch" published as part of *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930). Given these beginnings, many Warren scholars laud him for rejecting his segregationist stance later in his career and producing two texts, *Segregation: The Inner Conflict of the South* (1956) and *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (1965), that ostensibly support the goals of the civil rights movement while openly challenging the repressive traditions of the South. However, Warren's embrace of the goals of the Civil Rights era Black textual tradition is qualified by the conservative Agrarianism that grounds much of his thinking.

Who Speaks for the Negro explicitly repudiates Warren's earlier Southern partisanship and demonstrates the evolution of his thinking about race in the United States. Still, Warren couches much of his thinking about civil rights within a critique of liberalism and the Northern liberals who were the strongest supports of the Civil Rights Movement. The simultaneous critique of Southerners committed to maintaining segregation and Northerners who thought that social justice could be achieved with little cost to the society as a whole is most evident 1961's *The Legacy of the Civil War*, Warren's intellectual history of the attitudes and ideas that shaped life in post-bellum America. This text demonstrates how Warren remains at least partially committed to notions of Agrarianism and might strike some as out of synch with the perspectives reported in *Segregation* and *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, but in all three texts Warren

relies on a peculiar understanding of history, a way of thinking about the past established in his early works that continues to motivate his later, more progressive writing. Tracing the assumptions Warren makes about history and the possibilities it yields for the articulation of social justice from "the Briar Patch" through the three civil rights era texts reveals a surprising continuity that betrays his continuing embrace of regionalism and discomfort with "any Federal action that might impose upon the South a moral vision not entirely its own."[4] Despite Warren's ostensible approval of the transformation of the South demanded by Black Americans, his civil rights writing foregrounds his attempts to reconcile his own idiosyncratic views about history, region, and responsibility with the prevailing opinions of the day.

Agrarianism was an inclusive and catholic movement from its beginnings.[5] The introduction to *I'll Take My Stand*, subtitled "A Statement of Principles" declares that "no single author is responsible for any view outside his own article" although all "the articles…tend to support a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way" (xix). Agrarianism, though a defensive response to attitudes outside the South, was not conceived as an oppositional stance per se, but as an already present alternative to the dehumanizing industrial society that originates in the Northeast and Great Lakes states. The Agrarians considered the cosmopolitan, pro-industrial, pro-metropolitan society championed by Northern elites as inappropriate for their region, and by extension, much of the nation. Although *I'll Take My Stand* offered a strong critique of industrial capitalism, they Agrarians rejected communism as a suitable alternative on the grounds that both systems were equally committed to a technological development they found relentless and alienating.

Rather than endorsing capitalism or communism, *I'll Take My Stand* attempts to articulate a humanistic way of life tied as closely as possible to the land, "not an abstract system, but a culture, the whole way in which we live, act, think, and feel. It is a kind of imaginatively balanced life lived out in a definite social tradition. And, in the concrete, we believe that this, the genuine humanism, was rooted in the agrarian life of the older South…" (xxvi). This argument subsumes economic productivity to the restricting necessities of regional culture. The Agrarians felt that only by protecting this past Southern existence could one escape the hastening tempo of modern life in a society that provides more and more goods but fails to deliver the time or the means to integrate these goods into "the life pattern of the community" (xxix). Agrarianism celebrates and insists upon the contemplative leisure necessary to achieving balance between the economic and the socio-cultural phases of life and scoffs at the notion that rising wages or increased efficiency are worth the sacrifice of man's speculative time.

"The Briar Patch," Warren's contribution to *Ill Take My Stand*, concerns itself with the Agrarian program's capacity for permitting the development of the Black community in the South, for, if "the Southern white man feels that the agrarian life had a certain irreplaceable value in his society, and if he hopes to maintain its integrity in the face of industrialism…he must find a place for the negro in his scheme" (263). Warren carefully asserts in an evenhanded, if paternalistic, fashion that Agrarianism must account for the status of its minorities, like representative democracy, Soviet communism or any other system that hopes to maintain legitimacy. This position was simultaneously conservative since Warren conceives of Black people as serfs, dependent for the foreseeable future on the largesse and equanimity of a white Southern gentry, and progressive because, as Warren is painfully aware, many Southerners would happily

"keep the negroes forever as a dead and inarticulate mass" instead of permitting their gradual development and preparing a course of action that accounts for the resentment of the white community once this development finally occurs (248). Warren traces slavery in the United Sates back to its genesis in the West Indies and its introduction to the Colonies in 1619 before quickly focusing on the post-bellum period. This allows him to invoke the historical realities of Black life, foregrounding aspects of the social context that produced the segregated South.

While Warren daringly engages a taboo topic by acknowledging Black people's second-class status in the former Confederacy, he was not free of the typical Southern racism when he produced this text. Warren asserts, despite their presence in the South since 1619, that after emancipation "the negro was as little equipped to establish himself in it as he would have been to live again…in the Sudan or Bantu country" (247). In Warren's interpretation, reconstruction offered a fleeting opportunity for social integration between the races, but Black people could not consolidate their gains in part because "people in the North thought that the immediate franchise carried with it a magic which would insure it success as a cure-all and fix all for the negro's fate" and thus wasted their resources protecting suffrage without providing the economic base from which Black people might preserve their vote (249). Unfortunately, after "the bluecoats and bayonets disappeared, when certain gentlemen packed their carpet-bags and…scalawags settled down to enjoy their profits or sought them elsewhere, the…negro found himself in a jungle as puzzling and mysterious, and as little answering to his desires, as the forgotten jungles of Africa" (247). This hostile state of affairs was not, in Warren's view, the result of continuing racial prejudice and economic exploitation on the part of Southern whites, but instead stemmed from "Reconstruction [which] badly

impaired the white man's respect and gratitude. The rehabilitation of the white man's confidence for the negro is part of the Southern white man's story since 1880" (248). Reconstruction, then, cruelly deceived Black people by nourishing an unrealistic hope of political efficacy that served to deny them their proper place in Southern society, a place they have struggled to find since.

For Warren in 1929, segregation in the South is a natural consequence of Black people's economic and social inferiority and the Northern insistence on the franchise for Blacks at the close of the Civil War, an interpretation that fails to acknowledge the tremendous effort exerted by Southerners to return their former slaves to a subordinate position. It is only by excluding this historical reality that Warren can posit that "Reconstruction did little to remedy the negro's defects in preparation" for life after slavery, or that the Black politicians who held office during Reconstruction were, in effect, "used as an instrument of oppression" by Northern carpetbaggers (248). Segregation is, Warren asserts here, simply the penance that Blacks must pay in order to regain the esteem of the white community lost during Reconstruction. That Warren's account ascribes the debased condition of Southern Blacks to historical circumstance rather than the result of some genetic defect or Biblical decree is perhaps the only saving grace in his presentation of the logic of segregation, and, based on this assumption, he attempts to articulate an Agrarian program through which Southern Blacks might improve their lives in the South.

Warren's Agrarianism offers some hope in the eventual rehabilitation of the Black community by splitting the difference between two "extremes of prejudice," an oppressive or conservative pole which desires to "keep the negroes forever…dead and inarticulate" and a more progressive pole which, mistakenly in Warren's opinion,

continues to portray Black development as contingent on the franchise.[6] Between these two "extremes…there lay a more realistic view that the hope and safety of everyone concerned rested in the education of the negro" (248-9). Warren cannily incorporates the language of perhaps the most prominent text produced by an African American to work against the goals of the Black textual tradition, Booker T. Washington's 1895 Atlanta Compromise, into his Agrarian position, asserting that it is futile to permit universal suffrage in the South if Black people lack the education necessary to properly discharge the responsibilities of citizenship.[7] Warren supports educational advances for the Negro masses, but "the end [i.e. Blacks being granted full citizenship via some demonstration of educational achievement] is far from sight….[and] to realize this one has only to see the negroes in the deep South, or even in the middle South, sitting before the cabin, stooping over the cotton row or tobacco hill, or crowding the narrow streets of a town on a Saturday nights in summer" (249). Again, Warren refrains from commenting on the forces keeping the overwhelming majority of Southern Blacks in this state of peonage, and indicates that the possibilities for the mass of Black people transcending their abject status remains remote and undefined. Warren's argument relies on the image he evokes of Southern Blacks as immutable peons tied to the land, a metaphor that appears again and again in every genre of Warren's writing even as the social realities for Black people underwent tremendous change.[8]

While Warren supports increasing standards for Black education, he insists that any training attained could only benefit Blacks in "a separate negro community or group…which is capable of absorbing or profiting from those who have received this higher education." The creation of this community is vital, for if "the negroes in the South cannot support their more talented and better equipped individuals…the educated

negroes will leave the South to seek his fortune elsewhere" (251). Warren laments these departures because they rob the Black community of examples of Black achievement, while compromising the expatriated individual's "comprehension of the actual situation" in the South by exposing him to life in the North (251). This leads, in Warren's opinion, to talented Blacks making their careers in the North, losing sight of the necessity of Southern segregation and then foolishly demanding its abolition. By this logic, Warren transforms Black people reared in the South but living in cities like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles into outside agitators ignorant of the social reality in Dixie. Warren's argument recalls similar claims from an earlier era made by Southerners against Abolitionists, while conveniently overlooking the lived reality of the South where any Black Southerner willing to challenge segregation in his community was taking his life into his own hands.[9]

Still, as part of his Agrarian program, Warren proposes the South grant Blacks "equal right before the law." This is the one area where Warren concedes that whites must adjust the customs of their society in order to preserve it, for "justice from the law is the least that [the negro] can demand for himself or others can demand for him" (252). Still, if Warren's Agrarianism promotes legal equality, it remains conditional since Warren finds separate standards and accommodations fitting and appropriate in non-juridical matters.[10] Indeed, Warren considers the idea of a white man hiring a Black lawyer, doctor or architect "to say the least, a little eccentric" and approvingly cites Washington's metaphor of separate fingers on a hand as a justification for continued segregation in the South (254). According to Warren, high achieving Black people should expect to be rewarded for their professional and intellectual ability "when, and only when, the negro is able to think of himself as the member of a group which can

afford an outlet for any talent or energy he may possess" (255). Warren's Agrarianism insists that a Black physician unable to make a living solely on Black clientele must simply wait for the day that his community improves enough to support him, rather than foolishly expecting white patronage. Similarly, by Warren's logic a Black civil engineer should abandon his craft since the white community would rightfully not consent to employ him and the Black community lacks the resources to utilize his expertise.

Given these restraints, massive industrialization might represent the best hope for a Black professional class to realize a living from their own community, since under-educated factory workers enjoyed larger disposable income than their rural counterparts during the 1920s regardless of race. The Agrarian program, of course, opposes industrialization because it leads to the breakdown of tradition, and so Warren rejects this argument with an interesting twist of logic. The new factory "come[s] to profit from the cheap labor, black and white, which is to be had" in the South, but this enterprise threatens the segregation because the presence of cheap Black labor serves as "a tacit **threat** against the demands which white labor may make later of the factory owner" (256, emphasis added). Warren acknowledges that Black workers can effectively compete for wages even though "negro labor is unorganized and unable to bargain effectively with its employer," because they remain free to cross a picket line due to their exclusion from the organized labor in particular and Southern society as a whole. Warren fears that economically insecure whites would seek to erase the perverse competitive advantage African Americans derive from racism and segregation in the South through lynchings and other acts of intimidation, which might cast the South in a poor light or cause the withdrawal of capital (256).

In response to this potential hazard, Warren proposes "an enlightened selfishness on the part of the Southern white man…encourag[ing] the well-being and possibly the organization of negro, as well as white, labor" (258). Warren's tentative call for labor to organize whites and Blacks, indeed for unions of any kind, is heresy in the South. Warren hopes that permitting the labor movement to organize Southern workers would remove an incentive for modern corporations seeking locations in the South and thus slow the pace of industrialization. Moreover, this prescription supports his conviction that equal protection under the law is a precondition for a palatable segregation, for "white workman must learn…that he may respect himself as a white man, but, if he fails to concede the negro equal protection, he does not properly respect **himself** as a man" (260, emphasis added). Granting Blacks equal protection in the courts and in unions benefits white Southerners by slowing the spread of industrial capital in the South, by enabling the realization of higher wages in a peaceable exchange of services, and by removing much of the guilt that might burden whites as they continued to benefit from the exclusive policies associated with segregation. Thus, though Warren's essay sought to describe a program whereby African Americans could develop in the segregated South, it seems that the material and spiritual benefits of his plan most benefit whites.

Warren's Agrarian prescription keeps Southern Blacks tied to the land indeterminately, deferring the moment that whites might permitted them full citizenship until they somehow improve the economic conditions in the Black community. It is important to note that Warren attempts to historicize his essay, but offers a one-sided account derived from the segregationist plantation and reconciliation narratives that continues to excuse Southern culpability in Black underdevelopment. Nefarious carpetbaggers, bluecoats, lazy Negro politicians and scalawags populate this essay, but

the pro-segregationist politicians that forced the withdrawal of federal troops from the South in 1877 and enacted the Black Codes, and the rampaging Klansmen of the 1880s and 90s that enforced Jim Crow are entirely absent. Warren submerges Southern agency with these omissions, turning the establishment of the segregated South into an inevitable phenomena caused by a series of unfortunate historical events precipitated by Northern hubris. While Warren's affiliation with this exculpatory history would shift over time, he remained resistant towards historical perspectives that repudiated Southern whites for their role in establishing a segregated society. Forrest Robinson notes that Warren sought to "dissipat[e Southern complicity in oppression by using] essentially determinist constructions of history and human will" throughout his career, and if we can detect one of the earliest manifestations of that tendency here if we look past Warren's surprising suggestion that whites grant Blacks limited political rights.[11]

More than twenty-five years would pass between the publication of "The Briar Patch" and Warren's next non-fictional consideration of race and Southern society, *Segregation: The Inner Conflict of the South*.[12] During the interim, events conspired to alter Warren's attitudes about segregation, but not, as we shall see, about historical accountability. According to Warren, the most important change in his evaluation of history was the fact that he started writing novels.[13] Prior to "the Briar Patch," excluding his biography of John Brown, Warren's only publications were poems in little magazines. Warren composed "The Briar Patch," at Oxford "at about the same time [he] began writing fiction, the two things were tied together—the look back home from a long distance."[14] Fiction writing produced in Warren a change in perception and, shortly after he returned to the South from England, he realized that the sentiments he expressed in "The Briar Patch" conformed to a Southern tradition, but failed to represent his

"subjective [self], yours truly, in relation to the objective fact" of racial subjugation.[15] Warren castigates himself for being unable or unwilling to explore his discomfort with the system he was defending in print, but not for making the defense itself.

While Warren grappled with the shift in sensibility brought about by his turn to fiction, he migrated from the South to the Midwest and eventually to New York City and its surrounding environs, a change that further altered his particular notions of place and pace. Warren was tenured in the English department at Louisiana State University, but he moved to Minneapolis to teach at the University of Minnesota due to a salary dispute with the administration. He would never make his home in the South again. As his biographer notes, Warren had never lived in such a large city as Minneapolis before, "a metropolis of nearly four hundred thousand individuals," but this prepared him for his next move, which was to New York City and then to the Connecticut suburbs and a long professional association with Yale.[16] In New York, Warren participated in the literary salon scene that placed him in intimate contact with Black writers Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. Ellison and Warren, and their wives, became friends and the couples sought out each other's company, spending evenings together in Italy, New York and Connecticut.

While Warren's personal accommodations changed significantly, the nation experienced an epochal transformation between 1930 and 1956. In those years the United States faced depression, enacted the New Deal, fought World War Two, birthed the atomic age, began the post-war process of suburbanization, nervously witnessed the rise of the Soviet empire and Red China, and endured a demagogic McCarthyism that exploited the fears of an anxious American public. The Black community also gained in economic power and political prestige during this period. Franklin Roosevelt issued

executive order 8802 banning segregation in the military industrial complex in 1941 in order to avert a strike called by A. Phillip Randolph's Brotherhood of Pullman Car Porters. Six years later Randolph's Pullman Porter union a successfully pressured Truman into issuing executive order 9981 banning segregation in the military. Randolph's stratagems were probably not what Warren anticipated when he called for whites to permit Black to organize their labor. The two executive orders represented top down rejections of the Southern way of life issued from the nation's capital, but the Warren Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision fundamentally undermined Southern traditions as nothing had since 1877. As if emboldened by the Court's decision, African Americans organized the Montgomery Bus Boycott to challenge their subordinate social status in the South. The white Southern backlash against both the *Brown* decision and the efforts of the Montgomery Improvement Association led Jack Jessup, a friend of Warren's family and an editor at *Life*, to suggest Warren produce "an article for *Life* on desegregation in the South."[17] *Segregation: the Inner Conflict of the South* emerged from that article.

Segregation is an interesting piece of what would come to be understood ten years later as the New Journalism. Though most people associate Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Joan Didion and Tom Wolfe with this genre, Warren's reflections on the various challenges to Southern tradition emerging after the *Brown* decision is an early example of the form.[18] Warren records events for this article as an implicated observer, permitting his interior reactions to various incidents to shape his novelistic organization and presentation of the facts. Warren organizes *Segregation* thematically rather than chronologically shifting the narrative backwards and forwards through time, digressing to treat different subjects and abruptly shifting locales. *Segregation* is divided it into six

sections, beginning with a fragmentary opening that places him in a familiar region tantalizingly different from the South of his youth. The next three sections revolve around several questions Warren asked of his subjects, white and Black: "What are the white man's reasons for segregation?", "What does the Negro want?", and "What's coming?" While he rarely uses names when reporting his subjects' responses to these queries, Warren reveals enough about several of the speakers so that their voices recur in a dialogic fashion throughout the text, despite the pretense of anonymity. The fifth section of *Segregation* serves as a conclusion of sorts, as Warren attempts to frame the political and social implications of his respondents' answers to his questions. *Segregation* closes with a self-interview where Warren reveals his own hopes and fears regarding integration in the South, which he now welcomes and admits is inevitable.[19]

The first section of *Segregation* opens with Warren manipulating his sense of time, exaggerating the length of his absence in order to convey how fundamentally the South has changed since he lived there last. As such, Warren has not been absent from the South since he left LSU in 1942, a period of less than fourteen years. Instead it has been

> a thousand years since I first drove that road, more than twenty-five years ago, a new concrete slab then, dizzily glittering in the August sun-blaze, driving past the rows of tenant shacks, Negro shacks set in the infinite cotton fields.… Last week, I noticed that more of the shacks were ruinous, apparently abandoned. More, but not many, had an electric wire running back from the road. But when I caught a glimpse, in the dark, or the interior of a lighted shack, I usually saw the coal-oil lamp. Most shacks were not lighted. I wondered if it was too early in the

> evening. Then it was early no longer. Were **that many** of the shacks abandoned?" (285, my emphasis).

Warren would assert to Ellison in 1957 that when he made his defense of segregation "in 1929—the South wasn't ready for [change], the North was not ready for it, the Negro wasn't," but he seems truly astonished upon his return that so many Black people seemed to have escaped what he once thought were incontestable social conditions and set out for parts unknown.[20] Later, the refined speech of one of his Black respondents "surprises me the way my native ear used to be surprised by the speech of a Negro born and raised, say, in Akron Ohio" (295). Warren finds these changes, the shanties left behind and the unselfconscious display of proper diction, unnerving since they fly in the face of his understanding of historical circumstance and imply the possibility of increased Black agency.

While his mention of the shacks recalls "The Briar Patch" Warren's description of traveling on "Highway 61 striking south from Memphis, straight as a knife edge through the sad and baleful beauty of the Delta country, south towards Vicksburg and the Federal cemeteries, toward the fantasia of Natchez" is remarkably like his famous beginning of *All the King's Men* a decade earlier (284-5). The novel opens with a depiction of "Highway 58….straight for miles, coming at you [with] the heat dazzl[ing] up from the white slab," but while Jack Burden could comfortably regard the sharecroppers' "white washed shacks, all just alike" as he drove along Willie Stark's new highway, Warren must grapple with the reality that these supposedly immutable objects, now abandoned or improved, represent an unnerving indication of shifting social conditions in the South.[21]

It is with much relief that Warren encounters a family that seems to conform to his outmoded expectations. As he continues south along 61 Warren spies

> the figure, suddenly in our headlight…ris[ing] from the roadside, dark and shapeless against the soaked blackness of the cotton land: the man humping along with the croker sack on his shoulders (containing what?), the woman with a piece of sacking or paper over her head against the drizzle now, at her bosom a bundle that must be a small child, the big children following with the same slow, mud-lifting stride in the darkness….They will move on, at their pace. Yes**, they are still here."** (285, my emphasis).

This tableau seems to greatly comfort Warren, and serves as a timely signpost that allows him to orient himself in the South just as he was struggling with the implications of the abandoned shacks. This scene is so novelistic and recalls his earlier work, fiction and non, so distinctly that it suggests a foundational trope for Warren, as well as an indication of his Agrarian reluctance to truly embrace change in his beloved South. Moreover, rather than serving to indicate permanence, this family might be traveling along the interstate in order to escape the privations of the rural South. That is, after all, how the shacks came to be abandoned in the first place. Warren is so relieved at the familiar sight that he ignores this possibility.

Warren presents this opening section of *Segregation* in a fragmented, literary style complete with flashback to earlier historical events. Indeed, the paragraph after Warren observes the family along the roadside finds him contemplating the battle of Shiloh, one of the bloodiest of the Civil War. The battle of Shiloh was a daring assault by Confederate troop desperate to halt the advance of Union soldiers at the Tennessee-Mississippi border. Both of Warren's grandfathers fought in this battle for the Confederacy and it proved a costly defeat for the South. Still, to many, Warren included, the Confederacy's daring willingness to attack a larger force in the hopes of transforming

impending defeat into victory signified the gallant daring of the Southern forces. Having established this idiosyncratic historical context, Warren takes stock of a contemporary battle currently testing the mettle of the South: the admission of Autherine Lucy, a Black woman, into the University of Alabama. By juxtaposing the lost battle at Shiloh with his brief comments on the unfolding Lucy case, Warren suggests that, like their Confederate forbearers, those attempting to keep Alabama segregated are destined to lose their struggle. This allusion also suggests that others, if not Warren, are as ready as his progenitors were to wage a futile and bloody battle to beat back a new form of Northern encroachment. Still, without bothering to elaborate explicitly on the connection between Shiloh and Tuscaloosa (and few readers would be able to make this connection independently), Warren shifts his narrative, describing a conversation with a transplanted Northerner on his flight back to New York at the conclusion of his project. Only after Warren augurs his safe retreat from the South and return to the North does he return to the Lucy case.

Autherine Lucy entered the University of Alabama during the spring semester in 1956, the first Black student in its history. She attended her first class on Friday, February 3rd, and students protested her presence by rioting that Saturday while the university president was away. The following Monday hundreds of Alabama students, augmented by an equal number of "local B.F. Goodrich rubber workers" who were, ironically, also card carrying members of A. Phillip Randolph's AFL-CIO, rampaged across campus and drove Lucy from the school.[22] Warren arrives in the South after these events, but they continue to reverberate throughout the region. Discussing the case with a segregationist Memphis taxi driver, Warren reports that the driver disapproved of Lucy being set upon by the "Goodrich plant fellers," while a segregationist "school

superintendent, in middle Tennessee" complains that when "good…segregationists…read about a thousand [against] one, it sort of makes them sick" (286-7). These comments suggest that some Southerners are no longer willing to bear the cost of maintaining a segregated society, but Warren reveals that "an organizer of one of the important segregation groups, a lawyer" advocates continued resistance to Lucy's admission to Alabama because "it was just the Federal Court [that] ruled it" (287). This resistance to top down, federally mandated change seems uncomfortably close to the Southern attitudes the precipitated the Civil War and prevented the goals of reconstruction, feelings that were not entirely absent in Warren's earlier texts.

Next, Warren presents two episodes that he identifies as clichés: an interview he conducted with a Black woman, and a chance encounter with a teenaged boy from Atlanta. The woman is a victim of racist violence; her husband murdered by an intoxicated white man whom, she anticipates, will be acquitted of the crime. The widow reveals to Warren that when she visited a store shortly after the murder and was recognized as the wife of the victim, the clerk asked her if "that man up yonder is still in jail for killing a nigger?" When the wife cautiously informed the clerk that her husband's killer was indeed still in jail, the clerk replies "they can't do anything to a man for something he does drunk," a denial of culpability that completely devalues her husband's life (313). She tells Warren, in a Southern dialect that he reproduces faithfully, that these events have carried her to her wit's end. If the town "try him and 'quit him, doan know as I kin stay heah….He git 'quitted, that man, and maybe I die, but I die goin" (288). Warren dismisses this episode as "the cliché of fear….come fresh and alive," curiously refusing any attempt to make sense of the senseless racial violence that is characteristic of

life in the South. Warren's evasion here also complicates any attempt to discern Warren's purpose for including this episode in his text (288).

The next clichéd episode occurs in Nashville where Warren meets a youth, who with his "tattered brown leather jacket, blue jeans…faded blue stocking cap [and] a mop of yellow hair" seems to emerge fully formed from Warren's imagination (289). After exchanging pleasantries, the teen acknowledges that he hates Black people. When he asks Warren if he feels the same and Warren replies "can't say that I do," the boy "utters the sudden obscenity, and removes himself a couple of paces from me" (290). Warren characterizes this display as "the cliché of hate" (290) and declares these episodes "thing[s] the uninitiated would expect" (288). Warren's takes this position in the hopes of presenting a more in depth and atypical examination of Southern society. However, even as Warren dusts off his Tennessee accent in an attempt to pass as a Southerner, several of his respondents denounce or avoid him as he tries to gather information, though not so stridently as the blond youth, once they learn of his progressive views. So, even as his text maintains that clichés reveal little about the South, Warren fails to achieve the insider status that justifies their exclusion. Warren dismisses this journalistic failure, insisting that "in the end people talked, even showed an anxiety to talk, to explain" (293). "Segregation" purports the existence of something more profound than easy stereotypes, but Warren's reluctance to scrutinize these two events indicates his reluctance to embrace the goals of the Black textual tradition and contemplate the eradication of two conjoined pillars in Southern life: white violence and Black victim-hood. "Segregation" frustrates the expectations of liberal white readers by the manner in which it refuses to draw the seemingly obvious conclusion about the need for reform in the South from these episodes.[23]

As Warren makes his way through the Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky and Tennessee, and he discovers a profound mistrust of outsiders, even expatriate Southerners like himself. Ironically, native Southerners now view Warren the way "the Briar Patch" perceived a Black Southerner gone North: as an exile who lacks comprehension of the situation he abandoned. Warren attributes this to a "suspicion of the outsider, or of the corrupted native…tangled up sometimes with suspicion of the New York press, but this latter suspicion may exist quite separately, on an informed and reasoned basis" (292). This statement simultaneously critiques Southerners for being insular, and the national media for presenting a distorting view of the South. Indeed the text sympathizes with Southerners who bristle at the depictions of the South in the mainstream press, including "a Southern newspaper man of high integrity and ability" who, despite being an integrationist, exclaims "it's not in them not to load the dice in a news story" about the South (292-3).[24] These statements grant *Segregation* an iconoclastic authenticity by positioning it between what Warren maintains are the extremes of Southern and Northern prejudice. Still, taking this position essentially means that Warren supports the continued resistance of the South.

Warren calls attention to the liminal positionality he attempts to articulate in his text by recalling a joke he shared with a Northern compatriot. The friend complained that Southerners were like Jews, "exactly alike…so damned special" to which Warren replied "Yes…we're both persecuted minorities" (293). Now, in the South again, mingling among "black Southerners, a persecuted minority, too" Warren begins to reevaluate his tongue-in-cheek statement made from the safety of the North (293). Although Warren tacitly recognizes that white Southerners still maintain the balance of power in the South, that the text even facetiously equates Southerners and Blacks as persecuted minorities in

this text demonstrates the lengths he was willing to go in the hopes of being fair. This equivocation, combined with Warren's refusal to closely examine what he considers the clichés of the region and his antipathy for the Northern media that dares to pass judgment on the South, reveals his reluctance to confront the excesses of Southern agency, the fact that the Southerners worked aggressively to achieve and maintain a segregated society. Warren seems prepared to absolve the entire South from blame for the problems they confronted in 1956 without demanding an understanding of who is persecuting whom, and why. *Segregation* suggests that all members of Southern society are victims of history persecuted in some fashion and therefore beyond blame for the shortcomings of their society. While this is a very different sentiment than that expressed in "The Briar Patch" it falls short of articulating the goals of the Black textual tradition.

Segregation fails to produce any meaningful insights as it pursues the first of the three questions that organize the middle section of the text, the white justifications for continuing Jim Crow. Blacks who hazard an answer cite a fear of "mongrelization" (295), or the strong current of white supremacy, expressed either as simple "pridefulness [in] being white" or a dissatisfaction with the inferior status of Black people (296). The rationales offered by whites vary, with the subjects in the text attributing "pridefulness, money, level of intelligence, race, God's will, filth and disease, power, hate contempt, legality" as reasons to enforce segregation. For Warren, these responses emerge from the Southerner's profound fear of change, for, as one respondent notes, "change is disorienting, especially when you are pretty disoriented already" (305). This explanation resonates with Warren, who suspects "a lot of them are disoriented enough already, uprooted, driven from the land…befuddled by new opportunities, new ambitions, new obligations. They have entered the great anonymity of the new world" (305-6). This

observation conforms to the old Agrarian conviction that industry-based capitalism removes the masses from the traditions that provide their lives with meaning. So, despite his ostensible approval of integration, Warren excuses Southern fear of change by evoking their persistence sense of filial piety, their deep regard for a "connection [to the past] they don't want to break" (306). The South has rejected the mores of Northern society for so long, *Segregation* asserts, that it needs time to adjust itself to the non-Agrarian realities of post WWII America.

When Warren asks his subjects what African Americans hope to gain from the changes they are working toward, he gets answers that are less varied than the evasions of the segregationists. All the Blacks Warren interviews wish to end segregation, although they differ on exactly how much time one should allot for this to occur, as well as the nature of the benefits of integration. Many are fearful that integration will be studied and deferred for decades by those with no real interest in seeing it realized. Some insist that enforcing *Brown* will not just create better opportunities but increase "human dignity" and "respect" from whites, while making it clear that they are not necessarily desirous for social interaction with whites beyond this realm of mutual regard (312-3). Warren questions whether respect will be the ultimate dividend of a post-segregation South, reminding his Black subjects that all people face "exclusions…at some point" (314). Unsurprisingly, his subjects insist that there is a qualitative difference between 'normal' exclusion and discrimination based on the color of your skin. Warren's text seems to be testing the sociological underpinnings of the Supreme Court's findings in the *Brown* case by inquiring as to whether one from of discrimination is truly more significant than the 'normal' exclusion that people face due to divergent talent, common interest or even class.

Surprisingly, when pressed about the future of Southern society only a few of the whites queried in *Segregation* defend Jim Crow, invoke the Civil War, and promise resistance. One of the respondents, however, expects "to fight this bogus law [the *Brown* decision]…based on social stuff and progress" (316). His response troubles Warren, and not simply for the violence implied in its expression, but because his fear of change extends to the notion of progress and he "wonder(s) how deep a cleavage the use of that word indicates" (316). Flying out of Memphis, Warren describes his sense of "relief, the expanding vistas." Clearly he has found his survey of the segregated South exhausting. Yet even though Warren feels relief, he recognizes it as "the relief from responsibility" rather than the absence of tension (320). Safely ensconced in the North, where the segregation is de facto and not de jure, Warren is no longer confronted with the daily possibility of mob violence or listen to genial bigots declaim about the relative cranial capacities of whites and Blacks. Circumstance has transformed Warren into a kind of carpetbagger able to flee in the face of mounting resistance to change, despite his intentions to commune with the land of his youth. The next section of *Segregation* attempts to articulate the ramifications of Southern intransigence and possible solutions to that reality.

The penultimate section of *Segregation* attempts to locate "a fifth column of decency" in the segregated South, reporting on an overlooked racial killing in Glendora, Mississippi (321). After Elmer Kimbell, a friend of one of Emmett Till's murderers, killed a Black man named Clinton Melton, the town reacted compassionately, paying the widow's funeral expenses, raising funds to send Melton's children to college, providing the widow with a three bedroom house and a clerical job and publicly repudiating the murder. Of course, the same community could not bring itself to convict Kimbell of the

murder, which led the local newspaper to lament the botching of the case (320-1). It seems that equal justice before the law, an accommodation that Warren demanded twenty-five year prior, was still beyond the reach of Southern society. Warren interprets these events hopefully, seeing in this "self-division," the break between what Southern society expects and accepts and what human decency demands. Warren hopes that these "lines of fracture" indicate an emerging willingness to embrace change, but he fails to consider that guilt over the Till verdict may have played a role in Glendale's solicitous care towards the Melton family. Warren does correctly perceive that Glendora's repudiation of Kimbell is insufficient in light of the community's inability to convict him, but he cannot bring himself to suggest any potential remedy (321).

Warren identifies many such "lines of fracture" among Southerners struggling between defending segregation and accepting reform. Some of these include the Southerners "social views and his fear of the power state….his allegiance to organized labor and his racism [though, in the Lucy case, the latter won out rather easily]…his own local views and his concern for the figure American cuts in the international picture" (322). Warren assumes that good Southerners will eventually reconcile these lines of fracture by concluding that integration is the proper course of action for the South and the nation. To advance this possibility, Warren features segregationist subjects who are struggling to accommodate themselves to the new reality of Black equality throughout this section of *Segregation*. One of the respondents, from Kentucky, admits that a "man can hate an idea and know it's right, and it takes a lot of thinking and praying to bring yourself around. You just have to uncover the unrecognized sympathy in the white man for the Negro humiliation" (325). This presentation of a submerged sympathy signals the potential for the peaceful accommodation of both races in a New South, and is

remarkably similar to what Martin Luther King (whom this volume curiously ignores) insisted to the boycotters in Montgomery was present in Southern whites.

Interestingly, the reasons that *Segregation* provides in support of integration seem more idiosyncratic and ahistorical than the reasons to oppose it. The text portrays those promoting reform in the segregated South as possessing an idealistic view of society, but, as *The Legacy of the Civil War* would demonstrate, idealistic social views may prove immature and wrong-headed. Warren also includes Christian decency and a commitment to democracy as reasons to support the petition for Negro rights, but faith in religious or democratic values can be as naïve or self-serving as an idealistic belief in progress. According to the text, the integrationist sentiments which avoid the impractical utopianism of the progressive replace this sentiment with the rapacious self-interest of the profiteering organizational man, whose support of desegregation rises from his concern for how America is perceived on the international stage and his unease at the economic drag caused by the Negro's depressed condition. Although it refrains from commenting on these rationales, it is uncertain if *Segregation* approves placing the economic and political needs of the nation over the lived reality of the region. In fact, the summation that closes this section encapsulates all the resistance to change while deferring a presentation of the most substantial reason to enforce the rule of law in the South, i.e. that America's credo apply equally to all of its citizens. *Segregation* continues to present the South's need to fight against the inevitable as romantic and noble and claims that the North's desire to impose change on the South derives from an avaricious need to protect the image of the nation and keep profits flowing. Agrarianism opposed this zero sum mercantilism, and it seems clear here that Warren retains some of his old distaste for the transformations demanded by capital in a modern industrial society.

Of all of the fractures the text identifies, however, one stands out because it reveals the source of Warren's continued protectiveness towards the South. Warren claims that there exists in some Southerners, a dichotomy between their "own social idealism and [their] anger at Yankee Phariseeism. (Oh yes, he remembers that in the days when Federal bayonets supported the black Reconstruction state governments in the South, not a single Negro held elective office in any Northern state)" (321). Although Warren imbeds this statement amongst a list of reasons that explain the South's struggles with integration, this assertion recalls his argument in "The Briar Patch" that Black elected officials served as agents of Northern oppression, and is too historical and specific to represent anyone's position but his own. Indeed, on the previous page, as Warren describes his flight from the South as an abdication of responsibility, he admonishes those who

> eat the bread of the Pharisee and read in the morning paper, with only a trace of irony, how out of an ultimate misery of rejection some Puerto Rican school boys—or is it Jews or Negroes or Italians?—who call themselves something grand, the Red Eagles or the Silver Avengers, have stabbed another boy to death, or raped a girl, or trampled an old man into a bloody mire. If you [Northerners] can afford it, you will…send your child to a private school, where there will be, of course, a couple of Negro children on exhibit

In this passage Warren castigates Northern liberals who criticize the South and send money to the NAACP and the Montgomery Improvement Association without lifting a finger to address the deplorable conditions that pertain in their local communities. He scoffs at the notion that things are better in the North simply because some Jews, Italians or Puerto Ricans live in the same miserable conditions as poor Blacks, or because there

exist in Northern cities a few Black families with the wherewithal to send their children to private school. Warren maintains that without addressing these flaws, which are from the perspective of Northern liberals simply problems with wage distribution and the allocation of resources, outsiders lack the moral standing to criticize the South.

Warren erroneously equates persistent and structural limits in opportunity in the North with the dehumanizing segregation of the South, yet this is not what is most troubling about his statement. While criticizing Northerners for the blind eye they turned to their own region's problems was perfectly justified, the phrase "Yankee Phariseeism" carries connotations of which a student of Southern history like Warren could not have been ignorant. The theologian Robert Lewis Dabney, a Civil War veteran who served as a Confederate chaplain and then as Stonewall Jackson's chief of staff, provides one of the earliest print references to "Yankee Phariseeism" in his *A Defense of Virginia* (1867).[25] In this text Dabney holds Northern ship builders and financiers responsible for the spread of slavery in the South, while maintaining the innate inferiority of the Negro based on a complex reading of the Bible. Dabney, a popular speaker and widely read figure in the post-bellum South, helped transform "the Union Theological Seminary at Hampton-Sydney [Virginia into] a leading educational institution of Presbyterian clerics."[26] Dabney authored the first authoritative biography of General Jackson in 1866, a text Warren's dear friend and fellow Agrarian Allen Tate consulted when he was researching his 1928 biography of Jackson.[27] Tate, of course, helped secure Warren's contract to write a biography of John Brown.[28] It is therefore almost a certainly that Warren discussed Dabney with Tate and scoured Dabney's papers for references to John Brown when he conducted research in Virginia, since Dabney was a prominent educated Virginian who kept an extensive diary. Civil War historian Wallace Hettle credits

Dabney with being the first to equate fallen Confederate soldiers with Christian martyrs and describes him as "the Lost Cause defender of slavery and social hierarchy."[29] It is from this influential conservative theologian, an apologist of the plantation tradition who "defended the bygone values of an *organic society* based on social conservatism and slavery" that Warren almost certainly took the phrase Yankee Phariseeism.[30] Given this context, the phrase becomes is more than a Biblical metonym for Northern hypocrisy and reveals Warren's continued sympathy with the South's plantation tradition, if not its segregation and racism, a tradition long at odds with the goals of the Black textual tradition.

At the close of this section, in what is undeniably his voice, Warren states that "we are the prisoners of our history. Or our we?" (328). While *Segregation* alludes to events like the battle of Shiloh and the presence of "pale eye[d] lean-hipped men…like the men who rode with Forrest" throughout the text, nothing indicates the continued influence of the plantation school's view of history than Warren's gratuitous evocation of Dabney's unique take on Northern disingenuousness (288-9). This becomes evident when perusing the concluding section of *Segregation*, the self-interview that strongly echoes positions taken in "The Briar Patch." For example, *Segregation* asserts "you can [not] live with yourself when you are humiliating the man next to you," a statement strikingly similar to those written in 1929 (328). More troubling, Warren admits that he believes "the Northern press sometimes distorts Southern news [i.e. the South's history because] they like to feel good," a serious charge from a man who would claim in his next meditation on the subject that one must struggle with history in order to achieve a moral identity (328). Warren then asserts "responsibility is a seamless garment. And the northern boundary of that garment is not the Ohio river" which suggests that the North is

somehow implicated in the maintenance of segregation (329). Ultimately, Warren supports integration and he recommends "a process of mutual education for whites and blacks. And part of this process should be in the actual beginning of the process of desegregation" (330). Still, Warren declares himself "a gradualist" when it comes to matters of reform, for, despite possessing a deep seated desire to transform the world around you, "gradualism is all you'll get. History, like nature, knows no jumps," (330). Certainly history as understood by Warren in *Segregation* demands a gradual approach and a long perspective, but events like the outcome of the *Brown* case should have indicated that events were conspiring to produce change at a more judicious rate.

Throughout *Segregation*, Warren's reportage reveals a subtext of reluctance and resistance that this reading has tried to uncover, a resistance that has its roots in Warren's Agrarianism. Still, Warren correctly identifies "desegregation [as] just one small episode in the long effort for justice" (329), and concludes both his self-interview and *Segregation* with the hope that "if the South is really able to face up to itself and its situation, it may achieve identity, moral identity" (330). This hope is grounded in Warren's sense of Southern exceptionalism, for "in a country where moral identity is hard to come by, the South, because it has had to deal concretely with a moral problem, may offer some leadership" (330). This conclusion encapsulates the text's ambivalence about the future of the South. The expectation that the South might yet achieve a society that could serve as a paragon for other regions of the country to emulate recalls the hope of *I'll Take My Stand*, even as the means to produce that society, by confronting and reversing the laws of segregation throughout the region, is decidedly progressive. Ironically, the South would indeed provide moral leadership for the nation over the next decade. However, that leadership would emerge out of the members of the Southern

Black community striving to eradicate segregation, out of the words and deeds of Martin Luther King, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ralph Abernathy and Medger Evers, and not, as Warren desperately hoped, from reformed segregationists like himself.

Segregation marks Warren's first attempt to record and interpret contemporary history as a mature writer and received enthusiastic reviews, selling about twenty thousand copies, impressive for a sixty-six page pamphlet that took a complex position on a controversial subject.[31] Warren would next address issues of race and history in 1961's *The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial*. *The Legacy of the Civil War* could not be more different than *Segregation*. While the earlier text is a piece of impressionistic journalism that subsumes Warren's thoughts on the topic in order to better record the responses of his subjects, *Legacy* is an ambitious intellectual history that attempted to identify the continuing psychological cost of the 19th century conflict. If *Segregation* serves as Warren's qualified attempt to revise the arguments he advanced in *I'll Take My Stand*, then *Legacy* seems designed to broaden Warren's earlier examination of the psychological genesis of John Brown's attack on the South. As with *Segregation*, *Life* magazine played a role in this text, publishing an excerpt three weeks before the full study was published on March 17.[32]

Warren opens his assessment of the psychological effects of the Civil War, by noting its singular centrality in the nation's history. Warren declares the conflict "the great single event of our history" and claims that prior to "the Civil War we had no history in the deepest and most inward sense" of the concept (3). Warren claims that the Civil War inaugurates American history, serving as "our only "felt" history—history lived in the national imagination….It is an overwhelming and vital image of human, and national, experience" (4). These statements seem in keeping with the goals of the Black

textual tradition, but Warren's take on the Civil War's legacy is quite conflicted. Warren claims that while the objective of the Civil War was to preserve the Union, the conflict in fact created a union far more powerful and real than Lincoln could have envisioned. Prior to the Civil War, Warren asserts, the nation could negotiate the terms of its federation, but after the war unionism became "the overriding, overwhelming fact, a fact so technologically, economically, and politically validated that we usually forget to ask how fully this fact represents a true community" (6). *Legacy* identifies the emergence of strong national, as opposed to regional, identity due in part to the fundamental changes enacted during the Civil War. This unquestioned sense of belonging to a large and disparate nation rather than to a local community troubles Warren even as it continues to resonate it the minds of Americans North and South.

According to the text, the Civil War's legacy continues to be felt in part because it "demanded the great American industrial plant, and the industrial plant changed American society" (10). The Civil War allowed the North to embrace the mercantilism and manufacturing that was to transform the nation's economy, complete the transcontinental railroad, establish "a national banking system in place of the patchwork of state banks, and the issuing of national" currency, and inaugurate "Hamilton's dream of a national debt to insure national stability….including the new income tax" (11-12). The War restored the Southern states to the nation, but it also domesticated frontier states like "Ohio and Minnesota [both] claimed so effectively that for generations the memory of the Bloody Shirt and the GAR would prompt many a Middlewestern farmer to vote almost automatically against his own interest" (13). Warren's Agrarianism manifests itself in his emphasis on the changes manufacturing wrought on the nation, the lack of choice in the South as to the direction of the nation after the War, as well as the concern

that the Republican party doesn't truly represent the values of Agrarian Midwesterners. These sentiments would not be out of place in *I'll Take My Stand*.

If the Civil War provided the nation with the sense of national unity that pertains today, a "second clear and objective fact is that the Civil War abolished slavery, even if it did little or nothing to abolish racism" (7). Warren does not use this as a point of departure, which might be expected given his approach in *Segregation*. Instead, he focuses on something else the Civil War helped produce, pragmatism, the uniquely American philosophy of thought that William James called "a new name for an old way of thinking" (17). Warren notes that "more than one historian has found in Lincoln the model of the pragmatic mind" who was forced by circumstance to "make a rule for the practical matter in hand than to decide a general" principle (17). Oliver Wendell Holmes, "thrice wounded" in the war (18), used his experiences in battle to help him determine, later in life "that the process of seeking truth through the free collision, coil, and jar of ideas is more important than any particular "truth" found" (19).[33] Warren portrays Holmes' legal "philosophy as being a reaction [against] two type of…. opposing absolutes "higher law" and "legalism"" (20). These opposing forces were, in Warren's opinion, responsible for quickening the disagreements that surrounded slavery into Civil War. Warren's admiration for Holmes is not difficult to credit, given Warren's own attempts at resolving opposing and seemingly incompatible 'extremes' in "The Briar Patch" and again in *Segregation*.

Legacy asserts that when abolitionists began appealing, in the hopes of ending slavery, to a "higher law" than the democratic government of consensus and compromise enacted by the Constitution, they articulated an extremist position. Unable to persuade their fellows as to the moral repugnance of slavery, the abolitionists quickly abandoned

democratic principles in their quest to eradicate what they felt was the most pressing evil in the nation. *Legacy* quotes William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore D. Weld, Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, Emerson, Thoreau, and, of course, John Brown, demonstrating that their uncompromising morality left no room for the negotiation that one expects in a representative democracy. Warren feels that the abolitionists were drawn to slavery because poverty, "the most obvious abuse in that new society," failed to excite the passions of these scions of the wealthy New England gentry (28). A subtle cause like eradicating poverty, with its relative ends and means and ceaseless negotiation between factory owner and worker, might be tedious, but "with slavery all was different. One could demand the total solution, the solution of absolute morality; one could achieve the apocalyptic *frisson*" (29). *Legacy* condemns the transcendentalists who advocated abolition for abnegating the Aristotelian pragmatism offered by leaders like Lincoln and other realists on the issue of slavery. Warren believes that Northern idealists still exhibit little patience with those who work towards social justice realistically, as he demonstrated by evoking of Yankee Phariseeism in *Segregation*.

What distinguishes *Legacy* from Warren's earlier writing on race is that Southern apologists for slavery and segregation receive as vigorous a condemnation in the text as their Northern counterparts. *Legacy* maintains that if the abolitionists were ready to sacrifice democratic principles to achieve their goals, "Southern constitutionalists and philosophical defenders of slavery did not deny the concept of society. But the version of society which these egregious logicians deduced so logically from their premises denied, instead, the very concept of life" (33-4). Southern apologists accomplished this with their "defense…of bondage" and their "refusal to allow…for change, for the working of the life process through history" (34). *Legacy* laments "the Nat Turner insurrection"

because in the South, after this uprising "the possibility of criticism—criticism from the inside—was over" (35). At that point "the only function then left open to intellect in the South was apologetics for the closed society, not criticism of it; and in those apologetics there was little space for the breath of life, no recognition of the need for fluidity, growth, and change which life is" (39). Apologists for slavery suffocated the intellectual and moral culture in the South, *Legacy* claims, in order to preserve the "profits to be had from the slave system" (35).

Warren carefully insists that he has "not intended to imply that the Civil War was "caused" by the extremists on both sides," he is merely trying to ascertain how American society after the War rejected extremists to produce the more pragmatic temperament that pertains today (40). Through this nifty rhetorical slight of hand, Warren places those committed to ending slavery and those committed to preserving it on the same moral ground without making a comparison between the relative merits of their opposing positions. This is again in keeping with Warren's view that one should not attempt to assess blame for past historical actions, that the best use of history permits those living in the contemporary moment to ascertain how the prior informs the present.[34] Warren identifies the two party system, which he claims settles into place after the War, as a legacy of this bias against extremist expression, because the dominance of the two parties tends to muzzle the conflicting desires of groups on outer fringes of political thought. The Civil War taught voters in the United States "that logical parties may lead logically to logical shootings, and they had had enough of that" (43) because Americans "have an instinctive distaste for being made martyrs themselves to the admirable convictions of a politician who happens to have won an election" (44-5). This argument recalls a similar rejection of two extremes Warren presented in "The Briar Patch." Unfortunately,

according to the text, in addition to embracing a pragmatic and political conservatism the War also "gave the South the Great Alibi and gave the North the Treasury of Virtue" (54).

Despite Warren's earlier pronouncements about pragmatism, he feels that the "Great Alibi" and the "Treasury of Virtue" remain the most deeply felt legacies of the Civil War in their respective regions. Warren asserts early in his essay that defeat "made [the South] more Southern" (14), claiming that "only at the moment when Lee handed Grant his sword was the Confederacy born; or to state matters another way, in the moment of death the Confederacy entered upon its immortality" (15).[35] If, prior to the War, the South stifled serious intellectual debate about the nature of its society, the Great Alibi worsened this tendency. "By the Great Alibi" Warren writes "pellagra, hookworm, and illiteracy are converted into badges of distinction. Laziness becomes the aesthetic sense, blood-lust rising from a matrix of boredom and resentful misery becomes a high sense of honor, and ignorance becomes divine revelation" (54-5). The Great Alibi may allow a Southerner to think of himself as "an innocent victim of a cosmic conspiracy" but Warren remembers the populist accomplishments of Huey Long that managed to minimize the importance of race, and so perceives the typical Southerner as "trapped in history" unable to realize his potential because he is too busy "parrot[ing] the sad clichés of 1850" (56). This statement reveals Warren's personal/textual refusal to accept the tired excuses being offered by demagogic Southern politicians and answers definitively the question left undetermined at the conclusion of *Segregation*.

The Legacy of the Civil War dismisses the continuing Southern protest against school integration as "a debasement of [Southern] history, with all that was noble, courageous, and justifying bleached out, drained away" (57). Confederate soldiers were

willing to die for their beliefs, not just kill for them, and they faced a formidable foe armed with that knowledge. The contemporary "mob…howling vituperation at a little Negro girl being conducted into a school building" dishonors "those gaunt, barefoot, whiskery scarecrows who fought it out…at the Bloody Angle at Spotsylvania, in May, 1864" (57). Warren again uses Southern history to form a telling dyad, as he did by comparing those harassing Autherine Lucy in 1956 to those attempting to hold Union forces at Shiloh. Bloody Angle was one of the most savage battles of the Civil War, a conflict that played out over two weeks with heavy losses on each side. Warren mentions Bloody Angle, perhaps, because the battle began by accident, with Union and Confederate forces marching to the area as each sought to reinforce a potential weakness along the front. The conflict in Arkansas in 1957 between the so-called "Little Rock nine" and Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus seems as circumstantial a battlefield as Spotsylvania, VA, a town of questionable importance. However, if the Southern partisans acquitted themselves with valor during the war by trying to hold the line, the forces confronting the Little Rock nine dishonor their memory, for there is little chance of defeating the execution of a Supreme Court decree in this way.

There was little indication that in September of 1957 the Little Rock nine's attempt to enroll in Little Rock's Central High would precipitate a international crisis. Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus used that state's National Guard to effectively void the decision to desegregate reached by local school officials and a federal district court the previous year. The impasse between Gov. Faubus and his National Guard and the students and the federal government lasted three weeks, attracting headlines across the nation and around the world. Yet, after Eisenhower convinced Faubus to withdraw the Guard, the situation deteriorated as a mob encouraged by Faubus' speeches attacked the

Little Rock nine as they tried to enroll on September 23.[36] Eisenhower responded by literally sending in the Marines, as "paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Divison…ringed Central High School on the morning of September 25."[37] For the proponents of the Great Alibi, this Yankee invasion revealed that the program of integration initiated by the *Brown* decision as a pretext to re-occupy the South and extract further punishment for the Civil War by denying Southerners their constitutional right to assembly and association. Warren, as he indicates by comparing the standoff at Little Rock to one of greatest battles of the Civil War, found this line of reasoning contemptible and a dangerous example of the kind extremist thinking he feared.

Despite *The Legacy of the Civil War's* rejection of interposition and the texts refusal to celebrate the mob violence inspired by Faubus, the position delineated here remains remarkably consistent with claims in Warren's earlier texts. Immediately following the renunciation of Faubus, Warren wonders if the Arkansans exhorted to mob violence understand that "whatever degree of dignity and success a Negro achieves actually enriches, in the end, the life of the white man and enlarges his own worth as a human being" (58). This statement recalls assertions in both "The Briar Patch" and *Segregation* that insisted that white Southerners must grant Blacks respect in order to realize their own self worth. *Legacy* explicitly supports desegregation here while reminding Southerners that the reorganization of society suggested by the dismantling of Jim Crow creates tremendous logistical and personal problems even as it opposes Southern apologetics in part because they "rus[t] away the will to confront those difficulties, at either a practical or an ethical level" (58). Warren may hold out hope, as he did at the conclusion of *Segregation* that the South may assume a position of moral

leadership by working out its race problems, but after "the events of Tuscaloosa, Little Rock and New Orleans" *Legacy* does not seem to place much stock in this happening.

Still, according to *Legacy*, while the Great Alibi forces Southerners to devalue the memory of their forefathers and robs them of the will to solve the problems inherent with integration, the Treasury of Virtue leads Northerners to misunderstand their historical tradition. *Legacy* recounts the racism the North exhibited even while fighting the Civil War, rebutting the notion that the War was waged to free the slaves rather than preserve the union. Warren asserts that, in their interest to forget their own history, Northern fabulists recast the War "as a consciously undertaken crusade so full of righteousness that there is enough overplus stored in Heaven…to take care of all small failings and oversights of the descendents of the crusaders, certainly unto the present generation" (64). For Warren, the Southerner who allows an appeal to his forefathers to manipulate his action by engages in a bad faith struggle with the meaning of his history. Conversely, the self-righteous Northerner maintains a sense of superiority by willfully avoiding history, by refusing to seriously consider the difficulties inherent in any reform. Northerners do not universally ignore history, as the text reminds us by consistently valorizing Oliver Wendall Holmes and Abraham Lincoln. However, Warren's text places these Northern heroes on the same moral plane as the principled Southern Generals Lee and Stonewall Jackson, making the dubious claim that modern society lacks men of comparable character. This lack of character produces untenable situations like the standoff in Little Rock, where neither the governor nor the president demonstrated moral leadership, and the condemnation from the international media only served to reinforce the regional identities of the North and the South.

The Northern refusal to objectively examine history and recognize their own prejudice stems from the fact that they won the War and "external victory always seems to signify for the victor that he need spend no more effort on any merely internal stuggle" (64). So, *Legacy* claims, rather than grapple with the proper reintegration of the South into the Union, the North turned to profiteering and expansion, clearing the Indians from the Plains and building railroads and financial institutions to extend their prosperity and monetize California gold. The possession of a treasury of virtue that prevented a serious discussion of moral issues obscured the North's abandonment of the problem of reconciliation. The South found itself in an entirely different circumstance, according to the text, victims of "a confused and aimless Reconstruction ending in the Big Sell-Out of 1876" (67). In a slight shift from Warren's earlier essays, *Legacy* does not place the sins of reconstruction on the heads of ex-slaves vaulted into positions of leadership after the War, but in the hands of corrupt Northern Republicans, uninterested in completing the difficult tasks left to them by Lincoln and uncaring about the tenuous status of the Negro in the South. Warren asserts that the Republicans ignored the recommendations of the Freedman's bureau to provide freed black men with forty acres and a mule because a program of massive land redistribution was not "acceptable to sound Northern business sense in that heyday of rambunctious young capitalism" (68). This perspective conveniently overlooks intense Southern resistance to the goals of the Freedman's bureau. Warren, idealistic Southerner at heart, suspects that this redistribution would have changed the course of Southern history and thus the history of the nation, perhaps by making the Agrarian program feasible. From this point of view, it would seem that the seamless fabric of blame for the segregated South indeed extends into the North.

The moral problems the North faced after the War dwarf the problems in the South because the Northerner chose to create a society where "prosperity was clearly a reward for virtue. In fact, prosperity *was* virtue" (69). The equation of wealth with moral standing caused the North to ignore non racial issues of social justice in the wake of the Civil War, and even today a Northerner "casts a far more tender—or at least morally myopic—eye on the South Side in Chicago or on a Harlem slum than he does on Little Rock, Arkansas, and when possible insulates himself from democratic hurlyburly by withdrawing into penthouse, suburb, or private school" (70). These assertions clarify *Segregation's* earlier accusations of hypocrisy, while linking this hypocrisy to the undemocratic tendencies of the abolitionist movement. It is this unreflective willingness to ignore our democratic principles that allows many Americans, especially in the North, to uncritically perceive themselves "as the Galahad among nations" (71), exhibiting a "moral narcissism" that "gets us into the wars" of the twentieth century (72). The Northerner is quick to embrace a moral cause without reflection, but this tendency isolates him in his righteousness and "the man of righteousness tends to be so sure of his own motives that he does not need to inspect consequences" (74), not even the "obligation of our "inclusiveness"" (73). The civil rights movement, as Warren would realize later, would finally force the North to consider the practical implications of achieving the color blind society they unreflectively held as the ideal.

Warren hopes that the Civil Rights Movement forces the nation to reexamine the Civil War, which will, he hopes, lead to a recognition of the national tendency to "self-division" that has its origins in the Civil War. The Civil War continues to resonate in part because "the self-division of the country [is] a great mirror in which the individual may see imaged his own deep conflicts, not only…of political loyalties, but those more

profoundly personal" (84). *Legacy* attempts to lay many of the nations current difficulties at the feet of the twin evasions of responsibility and history that grow out of this dived self. The self-division that derives from the legacy of the Civil War sustains the urges that produce segregation in the South, and a misguided sense of innocence in the North. In contrast, the heroic participants of the Civil War were "individuals; that is, by moral awareness they had achieved identity." This heroic achievement of a moral sense of self through resolute struggle with the great issues of the day could not be more unfamiliar to "our age of conformity, of "other-directedness," of uniformity and the gray flannel suit, of personality created by the charm school" (90). Contemporary men, faced with the twin challenges of the civil rights movement and the cold war, hearken back to the Civil War "to define clear aims and certain commitments in the complexity of life" (89-90). "In our world of restless mobility" *Legacy* claims "we look back nostalgically on the romantic image of some right and natural relation of man to place and man to man, fulfilled in worthy action" (92). That this natural relation of man to place and man to man suggests arguments about society made in *I'll Take My Stand* in 1929 should by now come as no surprise.

The question of the War's inevitability continues to separate the North from the South and *Legacy* suggests that both regions free themselves of such preoccupations in order to make the best use of our shared past. Southerners prefer to think that the war could have been avoided, for if that was the case, "both sides participated in the responsibility…the guilt can be spread around" (96-7). Northerners tended to perceive the war as inevitable, and this helped them forgive the South, since "the Southerner had merely enacted his inevitable role" (97). This stance also allows all blame for the War to be placed at the feet of the inflexible South. However if we "see the problems and values

of that moment and those of our own, set against each other in mutual criticism and clarification" we come to understand "that there can never be a *yes-or-no* answer, but that the framing of perspectives of causality and context…fulfils our urgent need to try to determine **the limits of responsibility** in experience" (99-100, my emphasis). Warren, throughout his texts on the Civil Rights Movement, rejects claims that sought to assign blame for events that occurred one hundred years prior, in part because he felt that many of the revisionist historians attempting to reevaluate the Civil War worked "under the shadow of Karl Marx" (95). This statement demonstrates that Warren has lost none of the Agrarian antipathy towards Marx, and as such finds attempts at historical revision, by Marxist historians and others, distasteful.

Indeed, unlike *John* Brown, *Legacy* avoids attempts at historical revision by detailing the difficulties contemporary scholars have with comprehending the social context that motivated many of the participants of the Civil War. In fact, *Legacy* finds a striking resemblance between the cold warriors that were then advocating unwavering opposition to the spread of communism and the transcendentalist abolitionists who demanded an immediate end to slavery without considering the difficulties inherent to their position. Warren fears the nation is again under the sway of absolutist and millennial thinkers and thus at risk for repeating the mistakes of the Civil War with our Soviet counterparts unless "we learn that we can make, or at least have a hand in the making of, our future" (102). The chance of a nuclear conflict between the USA and the USSR, something no Agrarian could have foreseen in 1929, pushes *Legacy* beyond the limit of Warren's previous political philosophy, dedicated as it was to the preservation of regional distinctions in national life. The Cold War forced Warren, and many

Southerners of his generation, to come to grips with a reality that existed beyond region and nation.

The nation's simultaneous engagement in a global struggle with the distinct possibility of unprecedented carnage and a domestic movement that precipitated violence by demanding social justice foregrounds the need for a healing of the divisions that separate the North from the South. Such a rapprochement allows the nation to apply the unheeded legacy of the Civil War to the internal divisions revealed by the civil rights movement. This is imperative for, despite the United States emergence on the world stage, "we have not yet achieved justice. We have not yet created a union which is, in the deepest sense, a community. We have not yet resolved our deep dubieties or self-deceptions….we are sadly human" (107). It is this mutual humanity, or more properly its limits and imperfections, that the great alibi and the treasury of virtue obscure, and it is only by acknowledging our shared communal being-with (to invoke Heidegger) that we can create a society with a deep understanding of our moral and political obligations. That the United States has assumed a position of leadership in the world without having done this work gives Warren pause and he hopes that by studying the Civil War free of preconceived notions of accountability, the US might begin to understand "the powerful, painful, grinding process by which an ideal emerges out of history" (108). Warren also hopes that in contemplating the legacy of the Civil War "some of that grandeur, even in the midst of the confused issues, shadowy chances, and brutal ambivalences of our life and historical moment, may rub off on us." Despite a consumer culture that creates false desires, the elevated sense of identity that comes from serious contemplation of moral issues "may be what we yearn for after all" (109).

Even as Warren's intellectual history of the Civil War strikes notes resemble those of the Black textual tradition, it fails to adopt that position. Warren again considers Blacks as a problematic group exerting moral claims on the white citizenry of the nation and not as autonomous agents who shaped the legacy of the Civil War with their thoughts, words, and deeds. Surprisingly, *The Legacy of the Civil War* ignores the Black intellectual tradition that emerges after the war, particularly the longstanding dispute between the Northerner W.E.B. DuBois and the Southerner Booker T. Washington on the shape of progress in the Black community, a dialog he enthusiastically referenced thirty years earlier in "The Briar Patch." Warren's text makes several passing references to the events of the civil rights movement without pausing to consider how the seemingly contradictory program of nonviolent confrontation might have emerged from the intellectual culture and lived experience of Blacks in the South. And, despite its fetishistic use of Justice Holmes, Warren makes no attempt in the text to reconcile his juridical opinion that the law must respond to "the felt necessities of the time" with Thurgood Marshall's successful exploitation of this legal perspective.[38] As in *Segregation*, Warren was willing to cede the point that segregation was unjust, yet he seemed unable to understand that the moral leadership that he hopes for has, by 1961, already emerged in the Black leaders of the civil rights movement in the post-*Brown* South. Warren seems blind to the elevated sense of moral identity civil rights workers, from King to the lowliest maid, derived from their confrontation with segregationists thus he fails to appreciate what the nation has already begun to learn from these battle tested civil rights veterans.

Warren's failure to reflect on the civil rights movement in this text was probably deliberate, given that Warren was not as familiar with the movement as he later become.

In fact, when faced with a hostile review of *Legacy* in *The New Republic*, a review that claimed Warren's latest text exhibited the same racial biases he displayed in *I'll Take My Stand*, Warren's response presages his next consideration of the topic. In a letter to the magazine Warren declares "Martin Luther King a great man, and that the sit-ins conducted **according to his principles** are morally unassailable and will win."[39] This reply only serves to underscore the absence of any meaningful discussion of Black leadership and the implications of their moral stand in *Legacy*, yet also reveals Warren's deep fear of what might occur if Black people in the South began meeting violence with violence. Warren also refers in his letter to an "explicit repudiation, some time back, of what I said in 1929." Warren may have been referring here to the interview conducted by Ralph Ellison and Eugene Walter published in *The Paris Review* in 1957, although for a man as obsessed with the slow process of history, four years does not seem a sufficient duration to justify his use of the statement "some time ago." This is, as far as I can tell, the only place where Warren explicitly rejects in print the views advanced in "The Briar Patch" prior to 1965. Still, Warren's response to *The New Republic* demonstrates his awareness and approval of what many whites continued to perceive as a homogenous Civil Rights movement led by King, which makes his reluctance to identify the intellectual tradition that produced King, a Southern gentleman if there ever was one, more baffling.

Warren published two novels after *Legacy*, *Wilderness: A Tale of the Civil War* (1961) and *Flood: A Romance of Our Time* (1964). These works were critical failures, earning scathing reviews for a variety of reasons. Given that the two texts together run to almost 800 pages, there is no easy way for me to deal with them within the context of this chapter. Still, it is worth noting that each text occurs in past historical eras, with

Wilderness set during the Civil War, and *Flood* opening in 1935 during the Depression as it follows the fortunes of a Kentucky town for a generation. Warren seems reluctant, at least with his fiction, to assess the political ramifications of the contemporary moment as he had once done masterfully in *All the King's Men*. This is not to suggest that Warren ignored the reality of the 1960s in these novels, particularly in *Wilderness*, but that the frames through which he choose to explore issues of racial justice and democracy seemed increasingly irrelevant to those reviewing the texts.

Turning his attention back to the contemporary moment, the incredibly productive Warren accepted an assignment with *Look* magazine for an article based on a series of interviews with the leaders of the Civil Rights movement. Warren traveled around the South during the semester break in January of 1964, interviewing many prominent figures associated with the movement.[40] Once he was safely back at Yale, Warren conducted a series of interviews with Black leaders and intellectuals based in the North such as Adam Clayton Powell, Carl Rowan, Ralph Ellison, and Malcolm X. The article, titled "The Negro Now," appeared in the 23 March 1965 issue of *Look*, with the book that grew from this project, *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, published in May of that year. It is here that Warren expounds on the allegiance to the principles of Martin Luther King that he first articulated in *The New Republic*, a perspective that allows his text to fully participate in the Black textual tradition.[41]

As was the case when Warren produced *Legacy*, the civil rights movement was the dominant domestic issue when *Who Speaks for the Negro?* was published, but the nation's understanding of that movement had changed in one important way. Thanks to increased activism in the North, agitation that met with as much resistance and resentment as in the South, if not as much violence, the general public was now aware

that racial injustices were in no way limited to one side of the Mason Dixon. Prominent Nothern Blacks like Malcolm X and James Baldwin helped focus attention on the problems that existed in places like Harlem, the South side of Chicago and West Philadelphia; problems that were certainly not the product of Southern style segregation. That this perspective was just taking hold, a decade after the rise of the movement in Montgomery, confirmed Warren's longstanding criticism of the North's myopia about race. While Warren was working on a draft of the text and reviewing his first series of interviews, the well-publicized Harlem riots erupted in July of 1964, further confirming that the web of responsibility indeed reaches North. The riots were precipitated by a Brooklyn police officer killing a Black youth on his way to night school, an act as contemptuous of Black life as those committed by Bull Connor. The somewhat hysterical tone of the New York press corps covering the story revealed entrenched misgivings about racial harmony.[42] If, as Michael Szalay claims, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* "is without doubt Warren's most heartfelt denunciation of Southern bigotry" this is in part due to the fact that the nation now recognized that bigotry was not simply a distinctive Southern trait.[43]

Who Speaks for the Negro is one of the 1960s finest achievement in non-fiction journalism and cultural criticism, a comprehensive and sophisticated examination of the leaders of the civil rights movement, the implications of their goals on the politics and culture of the nation, and the movement's effect on liberalism in the North. *Who Speaks* finally grants Black leaders their due, recognizing the fullness of their contribution to the nation and the righteousness of their cause. *Who Speaks* combines the narrative and analytical styles of *Segregation* and *The Legacy of the Civil War* blending long interviews of prominent civil rights figures with historical background, analysis of

contemporary scholarship, and other digressions. As in *Segregation*, Warren utilizes journalistic techniques that call attention to himself as an implicated observer. Indeed, Warren admits in his foreword that his "reader, were he more than the silent spectator which he must here be, would put more probing questions than mine, and would have other, more significant reactions," foregrounding his role as interlocutor (ix). James Perkins details how tightly Warren edited the interviews, but I trust that he represents his subjects and their positions faithfully.[44] What interests me is not so much the comments by his subjects, or how Warrren's editing shaped their responses, but Warren's observations, asides, and scholarly musings. This being the case, I will regrettably ignore his most of his interviews and focus on how the text participates in the political sensibility inherent to the Black textual tradition. As such, this analysis will focus on three important sections of the text, the first Warren's reassessment of "The Briar Patch," the second a revealing discussion about John Brown, and finally the amazing "Conversation Piece," Warren's critique of the white response to the civil rights movement.

"The Cleft Stick" opens with an interview of the Reverend Joe Carter, from "West Feliciana Parish...twenty-five miles north of Baton Rouge, Louisiana," a choice that Warren makes for several reasons. Warren reveres the splendor of the South, "a region of great plantations and beautiful houses. Even now…you can pay a dollar and enter to inspect the dusty or tarnished or mellowed grandeur" (3). This is an interesting observation, for *Who Speaks* allows Northern liberals (the text's assumed audience) to pay their dollars to gain an understanding of the great Black Americans springing from the fertile soil of the South. In this context, Rev. Carter represents a stereotype both familiar and disconcerting to Northern liberals and Southerners alike, given that this

unlettered elderly preacher was the first Black voter registered in West Feliciana. Rev. Carter might well have lived in a primeval shanty by the side of the highway in his youth, and his inclusion here allows Warren to demonstrate how fundamentally change was sweeping through the South for he "had seen aging Negro men like him, back in my boyhood in Kentucky and Tennessee" (10). While many white Southerners claimed that those protesting against segregation were doing so at the behest of outside agitators, the down-home background of Rev. Carter puts the lie to that claim, recasting Warren's familiar trope while disproving a segregationist argument.

Warren, sensitive to accusations that he remains a segregationist at heart, denounces "The Briar Patch" early on in *Who Speaks*, claiming to have never read the essay since he produced it, citing "some vague discomfort, like the discomfort you feel when your poem doesn't quite come off, when you've had to fake, or twist, or pad it, when you haven't really explored the impulse" (10-11). This discomfort emerges even though the "essay envisaged segregation in what I presumed to be its most human dimension" (11), because "even then, thirty five years ago, I uncomfortably suspected, despite the then prevailing attitude of the Supreme Court and of the overwhelming majority of the United States, that no segregation was, in the end, humane. But it never crossed my mind that anyone could do anything about it" (12). Reminding his readers that he was in England at Oxford when he wrote "The Briar Patch," Warren admits that "the image of the South I carried in my head [while in Britain] was one of massive immobility in all ways…an image of the unchangeable human condition, beautiful, sad, tragic" (12). The South has changed radically since the publication of "The Briar Patch," and Warren now ascribes his earlier pessimism to a failure of his imagination. Interestingly, during this elaborate repudiation of "The Briar Patch" Warren never refers

to the text by name, referring to it instead as "an essay" or "that essay." It seems that Warren, while taking the opportunity to disavow "The Briar Patch" does not want to make it too easy for a new generation to read the text and draw their own conclusions about him or his essay.

Warren then describes a tableau that he witnessed in Baton Rouge in 1939, ten years after his sojourn at Oxford: a white worker seizing a Black boy behind a movie theatre and striking him with his belt. Warren felt compelled to act, but cannot bring himself to exit his car and confront the duo. Warren attributes his hesitancy less to cowardice than to an "appalling sense of aloneness. I had never had that feeling before, that paralyzing sense of being totally outside my own community" (13). Warren forces himself out of the car, but before he can cross the street and approach "a bulky, blunt-headed" LSU football player intercedes, demanding to know why the man is striking at the boy with his belt. Warren ends this episode ambivalently, happy that the youth had been rescued, but relieved that he "had not had to get 'involved'" (13), a testimony to the culture of fear that permeated the South, one capable of keeping him riveted to his seat as he witnesses a potential injustice. Warren, while admitting throughout *Who Speaks* that change is inevitable in the South, fails to consider when recounting this experience how making history rather than simply being inspired by it might be the necessary moral act that contemporary circumstances demand of American citizens in order to produce an understanding of how difficult it is to reform an unjust society. While Warren honestly reflects on his past failures in *Who Speaks*, and ostensibly supports the goals of Dr. King, he still struggles to endorse direct action.

After interviewing civil rights figures throughout the South, Warren turns North to visit with prominent Blacks based in New York City. One of these is Dr. Kenneth B.

Clark, the famous psychologist trained at Howard and Columbia, who was then working on an in depth study of racism's effect in Harlem.[45] During their discussion, Dr. Clark makes the (deliberate?) mistake of invoking John Brown and comparing him to Christ, which makes Warren apoplectic. When pressed by Warren, Clark maintains that "Christ was clearly a person committed to values other than those prevailing in his time" as was John Brown (318). Warren attempts to dismiss John Brown as a madman, but Clark reminds him "it isn't always easy to differentiate between a madman and a martyr, or a person who irritates the status quo" (319). Warren wonders if we "must trust the madmen to be our moral guardians?" refusing to accept Clark's claim about the metaphorical import of John Brown while begrudgingly granting to Clark that Brown's perspective was ultimately proven right by history (319). Searching for a way to foreclose this discussion of Brown, Warren then asks Clark if he would "judge the morality of an act by its consequences?" When Clark carefully responds that in certain cases "morally valuable…consequences might be contaminated by the immorality of the act" Warren advances "John Brown [as] almost a test case for" a noble cause despoiled by an immoral act (320). Exasperated, Clark can only marvel at Warren's obsession with Brown.[46]

As he did earlier in *Who Speaks* with "The Brair Patch," Warren uses this conversation as an occasion to revisit his earlier text, *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr*, providing contemporary readers insight into his fascination with the historical figure. Unlike Warren's reflection on his controversial and unnamed essay, Warren reveals the title of his first book during his reflection, indicating perhaps, a willingness to test the ideas contained within against the contemporary moment. As with "The Briar Patch," Warren regrets that the "book was shot through with Southern defensiveness,"

claiming that *John Brown* is "far from the book that I would write now (320). Warren also admits to oversimplifying his psychological presentation of Brown, but declares "the work on the book…my real introduction into some awareness of the dark and tangled problem of motives and values" (320). The problem of motives and values occurs so consistently throughout Warren's oeurve that "a French novelist and critic…remarked that the mythic Brown figure recurs again and again in my fiction [as] the man who at any cost, would strike for absolute solutions—a type toward which, I suppose, I am deeply ambivalent" (320-1). Warren's profound discomfort with political actors who possess moral certainty informs his treatment of Willie Stark/Huey Long in *All the Kings Men*, abolitionists in *Legacy of the Civil War* and his dogged insistence on the conflicted nature of the average Southern white in *Segregation* and *Who Speaks for the Negro*.

Warren ends his digression and returns to Clark, who maintains "that major social changes toward social justice in human history have almost always come—if not always—through irrational and questionable methods" (322). Warren replies to this observation by wondering if the more privileged in society exploit those who are less able to abide the cruelties of American life in order to advance social justice. Clark responds by reminding Warren that "apparently rational, reasonable men, who are for making a change in the status quo, are generally ineffectual. Changes …are more likely to come from irrational, unreasonable, questionable men" (322). The dispassionate Clark seems most concerned with an accurate apprehension of how social change occurs in the U.S., while Warren again worries about the ramifications of the reality that Clark has identified. Warren frets over the necessity of conflict, but Clark, even as he deplores violence, recognizes that "horrible things have to be done to prepare the way for the possibility of a little bit of change, or justice" (322). Warren does not immediately

comment on Clark's fatalistic observation, which the violence in Mississippi and elsewhere supported as a kind of negative example, though he might have pointed out that Dr. King's program of non-violence, still the dominant method of dramatizing the inequities of the nation, seemed to refute this claim. Warren, however, wonders how long the non-violent center can hold, and worries that if the political structure does not begin to respond in some meaningful way to the grievances of Black people, "terrorist organizations, like the Russian nihilists or the Stern Gang [might] emerge among Negroes" (407). "Conversation Piece" is Warren's appeal to whites, especially Northern liberals, that this not be allowed to happen.

"Conversation Piece" details Warren's hopes and fears for the future and it is here that one can see, despite the Agrarian origins of his political though, how far Warren has come from the days of "The Briar Patch." Warren shifts from investigative reporter to cultural critic in this concluding section, and by naming it "Conversation Piece" insists that the issues detailed throughout deserve a serious discussion from his (presumably) white audience. With this conceit, one purpose of the project becomes clear, a goal that signals Warren's embrace of the Black textual tradition. *Who Speaks for the Negro?* is designed to bring to the attention of whites, liberal and conservative alike, the understanding that, despite the relative progress being made an outburst of violence from within the Black community still remains a distinct possibility.[47] Warren fears that an outburst of Black violence would permit Southerners to strike against back against the Black community with impunity and blunt the impetus for reform. If this outburst occurs, "Conversation Piece" maintains, the white community will be primary to blame for failing to attend to the demands of the civil rights movement in good faith. The continued lack of good faith on the part of the white community undermines the

maintenance of order in society by making plausible militant Black claims that white people, at least those in power, only respect violence or the threat of violence. This is why, throughout the text, Warren takes such pains to denounce Black Nationalism, for he has seen what Southern white Nationalism has led to. Indeed, Warren is amazed that the Black leadership from Douglass to the present has been able to blunt the Nationalist appeal in the face of continuing violence for so long, but fears that this cannot last.

Warren, who spoke in 1956 of being a gradualist, and who throughout the preceding sections of this text privileges the historical process, now dismisses the sentiment that "a certain condition of heart must generally and ideally prevail before a social change can occur" because this claim suggests "that no social change can ever come except in the Sweet Bye-and-Bye" (413). However, Warren understands that integration is no panacea, and cautions his audience to think of it as an expression of the democratic process, a "process by which we exercise our will to realize and explore, individually and institutionally, in the contingencies of life, that ideal of mutual human recognition and appreciation" (413). To understand how completely Warren has shifted his understanding, consider his reevaluation of State's Rights, which in 1929 he had evoked by implication while asserting an Agrarian defense of regionalism. Now Warren perceives States' Rights as a tool which "has frequently been used, and is being used today, as an alibi and a screen for some very unworthy proceedings—often quite cynically used and only for some special ad hoc advantage, with total contempt for the principle itself" (418). With this statement, Warren finally extends to his analysis of Southern politicians the same moralistic separation between principle and intent that he used to implicate John Brown. Warren recognizes that evoking a democratically sound

position in the hopes of committing or perpetuating an injustice imperials the democratic experiment in the U.S., and he now refuses to endorse this.

Warren agrees with other commentators that the civil rights movement simply attempts to force the nation to live up to its ideals, but Warren does not assume that the recognition and appreciation he calls for will come easily, even in the North. He observes, in a footnote, that many liberals aim "to homogenize American society—that is, to create an abstract America….In other words, the mystic fear of difference is not confined to the Ku Klux Klan" (414*n*). Warren does not fetishize Black difference here as Norman Mailer does in "The White Negro," but he does demand that white America accept Blacks into the community as they are, prepared to honor their strengths, respect their difference and alleviate their shortcomings. Warren hopes that a formal acknowledgement of the distinct traditions and needs of Black Americans will inexorably extend to Southern Americans. "Negroes and white Southerners do," Warren claims, "want to be Americans, but by and large they want to be themselves too; and the fact that both belong to minorities means that both may cling defensively to what they are, or what they take themselves to be" (426). Warren realizes that any admission of dependency on the part of the South is unlikely, but reminds Southerners that they might elevate the discourse around civil rights by "trying to make that philosophy to which the Yankee gives lip service actually work" (428). It seems that everyone must embrace the ultimate goal of the Black textual tradition.

Warren suspects that the reluctance throughout the nation to cede to the changes demanded by the civil rights movement stems from an unwillingness to embrace the unknown. "The word *integration*" he declares, "does not refer…to one thing. It refers to a shifting, shadowy mass of interfusing possibilities. It refers, in short, to the future"

(415). While as recently as 1956 Warren sympathized with those Southerners unable to accommodate change, he now supports that transformation. Ending segregation "will mean a great change; and change, however deeply willed, is always shocking; old stances and accommodations, like the twinge of an old wound, are part of the self, and even as we desire new life and more life, we must realize that a part of us…has to *die* into that new life" (415). This passage suggests that Warren's decision to return to the South again and again and again from 1956 to 1965 can be perceived as his desire to reconnect to his region in order to understand the possibilities of its future. As with the spread of industrialism in the South, Warren wants a potentially wrenching change to be well thought out and monitored so that the community can transcend any problems and realize its fullest democratic and spiritual potential. Any understanding of the demands of integration that does not address these psychic demands, Warren feels, is doomed to failure or worse, to incompleteness.

Warren traces the reluctance to embrace integration to conflicting desires. On the one hand, some wish to maintain an unjust society in order to preserve their status. Others, Warren feels, attempt to avoid responsibility and escape change out of the uniquely American desire to perceive oneself as an innocent. Civil rights workers have attained some modicum of political power by exploiting this contradiction, and Warren feels that a better society might be built through solving it. Warren's observation that

> There is one kind of power Negro leaders feel they have which is not relative [i.e. hegemonic or dialogic]. It is moral power. For, by the American white man's own professed standards the Negro is in the right, and enough white men know it to create a climate in which the Negro can proceed with his nonviolent Revolution (410).

Like Mark Twain, another white writer who embraced the Black textual tradition, Warren is ultimately less concerned with the so called 'Negro problem' than with the white problem. Whites can only "deal with the "Negro problem" [after] he has learned to deal with the white man's "white man" problem…[which] is…to distinguish between whatever "de facto superiority" he may, in fact, have and whatever notion of inherent superiority he may cherish" (431). If this is the primary stumbling block to social progress, it remains to Warren primarily a liberal one because they underestimate their own sense of entitlement. Southerners are very aware of their entitlement, in part because they gone to any length to defend it. As such, they don't find the murder of Schwerner, Goodman and Chaney shocking, they find white integrationists shocking because "the Southerner knows that [racial murder] evil as it is, is implicit in the structure of the society in which he lives" (425). This diagnosis is quite a change from the writer who cavalierly dismissed the "cliché of violence" eight years before.

Warren fears whites sentimentality will undermine their ability to recognize the claims of citizenship demanded by Negroes, in part because their protest are so effective as moral rather than intellectual appeals. He suggests that "rather than depend on our spontaneous and uncriticized feelings we had better consult our intelligence, fallible as it is, to see what is reasonable, decent, socially desirable—and even just—and then, as best we can, act on that" (432). Whites must be willing to confront dispassionately their failure to live by the rule of law because the civil rights movement has not, as Warren acidly notes, "been mounted exclusively for the purpose of giving [white men] a spiritual cathartic" but to create a more just society for all US citizens (433). Despite this reality, when Warren interacts with Northern liberals he detects "a strange sort of sentimentality…like all sentimentality it is ultimately self-centered, but here the self-

centeredness is obscenely cloaked in selflessness, a profound concern for the rights and feelings of others" (434). Warren does not make this statement simply to demean liberals, but to suggest that achieving a more just society will demand more than just sympathy and the occasional monetary donation. Warren wonders if, despite a decade of demonstration that the nation must transform itself, whites are truly ready to sacrifice and bear the cost. In fact,

> the worst shock for the Yankee is to discover what he, himself, really feels. He has to find out if he really wants a Negro family next door. If he really wants to take orders from a Negro department head. If he really wants to be arrested by a Negro cop. If he really wants to have his children bused into a school in a Negro neighborhood. If he really wants a tax boost for a crash program for the "disadvantaged"—i.e. Negroes. If he really wants his daughter on mixed dates. (430)

Warren identifies issues that believes threaten to blunt the change he has now embraced, issues he feels, with much justification, as we can now see, white liberals in the 1960s were not honestly confronting.[48]

Warren sees an opportunity in confronting the ramifications of integration. While several of the figures that Warren interviewed declared the Black community's need for assistance from the government in order to correct decades of neglect, Warren rejects any compensatory program that fails to acknowledge that many impoverished white communities need the same helping hand. Warren believes that any program designed to address urban poverty and make Negroes competitive in society should also assist poor whites. Warren again identifies another bone of contention that will undermine the Johnsonian liberal project, but he does not oppose racial set asides because they might discriminate but because they allow the perpetuation of a nefarious stereotype. Warren

feels that we must not fall into the trap of thinking that Negroes are inferior in some fashion (for example, in education), nor that they superior in some other ways (moral grounding, for instance). He detects in the "admiration for the betterness of the Negro…little more than a simple turning upside down of the white man's old conviction of the Negro inferiority. The ineffable fear of what is mysteriously different becomes its inevitably linked opposite, an attraction; loathing becomes desire, strangely mixed" and government programs threaten to codify this difference. In a line that seems a direct response to ideas Mailer asserted in "The White Negro" Warren identifies "the hairy and breathless dark where such mumbo-jumbo takes place, the Negro's Original Sin—i.e., the notion of a superior and more free sexuality—may put on the disguise of superior moral force; which disinfects everything" (438). To Warren, the problem "with this negrophilism is that it doesn't recognize the Negro as a man" and thus fails to require of him the highest demands of citizenship (439).

In making this argument, the influence of Ellison on Warren seems clear. Ellison was, at this time, beginning to come under fire for his decidedly cool stance on integration and his refusal to embrace the nascent Black Arts Movement that privileged the naturally poetic sensibilities of America's oppressed minority.[49] During the interviews conducted while compiling *Who Speaks* Warren often detected an urge by his respondents to assign to all Black people some inherent nobility of spirit. Warren categorically rejects any notion of Black superiority here, and resists any attempt by whites to buy into the notion of superior Blackness out of guilt or a desire to accommodate difference. "If any man," Warren asserts, "black or white, isn't content to pass up a notion of group superiority…and to be regarded and judged as an individual man, with individual virtues and defects, [then] there is something wrong with him"

(440). Whites and Blacks must be able to reject notions of superiority and inferiority without embracing the reverse, especially when apprehending the other.

Warren closes the argument in "Conversation Piece" as he did "The Brair Patch," with an appeal to the self-interests of whites. Having disabused them of the notion of thinking of Blacks as intellectual inferior or morally superior, Warren demands the creation of a society that would accept them almost as an afterthought. Such a society would benefit all for

> It is self-interest to want to live in a society operating by the love of justice and the concept of law. We have not been living in such a society. It is self-interest to want all members of society to contribute as fully as possible to the enrichment of that society. The structure of our society has prevented that. It is self-interest to seek out friends and companions who are congenial in temperament and whose experiences and capacities extend our own. Our society has restricted us in this natural quest. (443)

This sentiment resembles the "enlightened selfishness on the part of the Southern white man [that] must prompt him to encourage the well-being and possibly the organization of negro" in the "Briar Patch," but Warren has moved beyond defensive arguments in the service of a single racial group in one region of the United States. *Who Speaks for the Negro* dramatizes how the self-interest of Black people coincides with the self-interest of white Americans, and argues for a reflective criticism that might produce a society capable of speaking to the needs of all its citizens. Warren is thought of as a Southern liberal, which in personal conduct and attitude he undoubtedly was dating back to his awakening in 1939 in Baton Rogue twenty-five years before the publication of *Who Speaks for the Negro*. However, it is not until he produces *Who Speaks* that his evolution

become complete and he becomes a Southern liberal in fact and deed, for with this text Warren's public, writerly self declares sympathy with the true legacy of the Civil War, the civil rights movement.

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[1] *Talking With Robert Penn Warren*, 33.

[2] "An Interview in New Haven with Robert Penn Warren" *Robert Penn Warren Talking*. 114-115.

[3] I largely ignore this effort because it proved impossible to handle in a succinct fashion.

[4] Michael Szalay, "*All the Kings Men*, or, the Primal Crime", 345

[5] For an extended discussion of Agrarianism's eclectic nature see Marc Jancovich's *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism*.

[6] Warren's essay was controversial with several of his fellow Agrarians, particularly Donald Davidson and Allen Tate, a disagreement that critics like Hugh Ruppersburg cite to claim that this essay is actually more progressive than it is. Given that Warren's program for helping Southern Blacks still denied them the franchise, that he was willing to admit that Southern Blacks needed assistance and goodwill from the white community, a painfully obvious, fact, does little to redeem this piece.

[7] I am not certain where Washington's infamous text falls on the continuum of texts supporting the goals of the Black textual tradition. Washington clearly wrote it in the hopes of ameliorating the fears of Southern whites, but it also seemed to justify the erection of Jim Crow. See Louis R. Harlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 3, 583–587.

[8] This includes the fiction, which I cannot discuss here. But every novel that touches upon race, beginning with *All the Kings Men* contains a scene where the narrator notes the presence of peasants Black people, often without commenting.

[9] The danger that Southern Blacks exposed themselves to by speaking out in favor of civil rights would be apparent after *Brown*, perhaps exemplified by the dozens of bombings, on both his home and his place of business, that Dr. Aaron Henry endured in Mississippi in the 1960s.

[10] Several of the other Agrarians were put off by Warren's stance on this issue, to the point where Donald Davidson, the organizing force behind the volume, considered dropping Warren's contribution from *I'll Take My Stand*, before Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom (of all people) convinced Davidson to allow it. As Anthony Szczesiul notes, many Warren scholars seize upon this dispute as proof that this essay was

progressive for its time and circumstance, a claim that does not hold up when one considers larger historical and cultural events from the period.

[11] Forrest Robinson, "A Combat with the Past: Robert Penn Warren on Race and Slavery," 513.

[12] I do not mean to suggest that Warren was not seriously interrogating race in his fiction and poetry. Race plays a crucial role in the development of both. For an in depth consideration of the role race played in the development of Warren's poetry, see Szczesiul's *Racial politics and Robert Penn Warren's Poetry* for a detailed description on why this notion proves false.

[13] Warren's essays grounded his fiction and vice versa. As he began crafting novels Warren became less interested in writing polemical defenses of the South and more interested in discovering the nature of the society in which he lived. This search, however, is not necessarily distinct from the values of Agrarianism. As M. Thomas Inge notes in "The Fugitives and the Agrarians: A Clarification" for Agrarian writers "there are profound and significant connections between them [art and politics]….the Agrarian movement was not a desertion of art and poetry for politics and social change. In both contexts, they saw themselves preeminently as men of letters" (492

[14] "Warren on the Art of Fiction" *Talking with Robert Penn Warren* 33

[15] ibid, 33.

[16] Joseph Blotner, *Robert Penn Warren, A Biography*, 202.

[17] Blotner, 302.

[18] John Hollowell claims, in *Fact and Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel*, that the new journalist is often a novelists "placed in the role of witnesss to the moral dilemmas of our time" in a literary form that incorporates "aspects of the novel, the confession, the autobiography, and the journalistic report" written with a sense of crisis (15-6). If this is so, both *Segregation* and *Who Speaks for the Negro* qualify as specimens of the genre.

[19] See James A. Perkins, "Robert Penn Warren and James Farmer: Notes on the Creation of New Journalism" *rWp: An Annual of Robert Penn Warren Studies*, 1:1, 2001 for a discussion of Warren's journalistic tendencies. Frustratingly, Perkins focuses his study on 1965's *Who Speaks For the Negro*, instead of the earlier *Segregation.*

[20] "Warren on the Art of Fiction" 33.

[21] *All The King's Men,* 3.

[22] Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham Alabama, The Climatic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*. 99, 103.

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[23] As with the other texts considered in this volume, I am more concerned with the potential effects on a liberal white audience.

[24] This is an interesting assertion considering that the stories from the South in the national consciousness at the time included the conflict at the University of Alabama; the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which had begun late the previous year and would continue until December; the ramifications of the *Brown* case; and, looming over all of this like a half-forgotten dream, the murder of Emmett Till.

[25] This is the earliest reference that I could find of the term. Dabney, who was a prolific and felicitous writer, might have coined it himself.

[26] Wallace Hettie, "The Minister, the Martyr, and the Maxim: Robert Lewis Dabney and Stonewall Jackson Biography" 357.

[27] Ibid, 366

[28] Blotner, 84

[29] Hettie, 363-5, 366.

[30] Ibid, 356, my emphasis

[31] Blotner, 304.

[32] Blotner, 343.

[33] If Warren's argument here seems familiar it is because he anticipates Louis Menand's *Metaphysical Club*. While *Legacy of the Civil War* addresses the psychological ramifications of the War as such, Warren doesn't dwell on the depths and development of Holmes and James' thought, while Menand traces this exhaustively in his text.

[34] As Kenneth Warren observes, this rejection of extremism also allowed the South to construct the plantation narratives that justified the establishment of Jim Crow during what historians termed the period of reconciliation. See *Black and White Strangers*, 13, 35, and as follows.

[35] Setson Kennedy makes a similar point in *After Appomatox: How the South Won the War* (1995).

[36] Dudziak, 115-8

[37] ibid, 128. The 101st is an Army division, so Eisenhower actually sent in the Army.

[38] Oliver Wendell Holmes, quoted in *Legacy,* 19.

[39] Blotner, 344, my emphasis.

[40] Blotner, 359.

[41] Ibid, 360. In less than four years, from 1961 to May of 1965, Warren produced a 110 page intellectual history of the Civil War, 770 pages of fiction, and a 445 pages text comprised of interviews, critical assessments of current scholarship on the Negro problem and personal evaluations of nearly every person of interest in the text. He also made a number of appearances throughout the country and taught classes at Yale. Warren's productivity seems impossible.

[42] Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 417-20

[43] Michael Szalay, "*All the King's Men*; or, the Primal Crime" 345.

[44] James Perkins, "Robert Penn Warren and James Farmer: Notes on the Creation of New Journalism," 164-6.

[45] The study, *Dark Ghetto*, was published in 1965 a month after Warren's text. Warren was certainly aware of Clarke's work, he cites Clark's claim that practicing non-violence in the face of violence might psychically harm Blacks throughout the text. Warren asked several of those he interviewed, inclding King, about Clarke's idea.

[46] Szalay claims that Warren disliked the Northern liberal identification with, and in some cases hero worship of, Black civil rights workers, even though he approved of the cause. Assuming this is true, it might explain Warren's obsession with Brown rather than Nat Turner or Denmarck Vescey.

[47] In this sense, "Conversation Piece" resembles noting as much as *The Fire Next Time*.

[48] Indeed, the Republican assault on the reforms of the sixties was accomplished in part by appealing to precisely these issues.

[49] See Jerry Gafio Watts' *Ralph Ellison: Heroism and the Black Intellectual* for a discussion of Ellison's views on various government policies designed to help Black people

Chapter Two

The Apocalyptic Hipster: "The White Negro" and Norman Mailer's Achievement of Style

> I don't know anything about writing, I'm virtually an imposter, I've had incredible good luck, I don't belong here. I'm not a literary writer….I knew I was no stylist. I think one of the reasons I became a stylist was precisely because I had so poor a sense of style to begin with…
>
> —Norman Mailer, interview[1]

Robert Penn Warren wrote out of a Southern tradition, treasured the distinctiveness of the South and sought, throughout his literary career, to reconcile the contradictions between Southern deed and the American creed. Warren considered himself an academic as well as a writer, serving on the faculty of various colleges and universities for over thirty years. Norman Mailer was, in many ways, the anti-Robert Penn Warren. Mailer rejected conventional schools of thought, sought to provoke as much as he did to enlighten, and rejected the staid responsibilities of the academy. Mailer was fascinated with race, but unlike Warren, Mailer thought it necessary to identify with Black Americans in order gain a measure of insight and strength from them. Yet Mailer began his writing career almost totally ignorant of the conundrums of race and the Black textual tradition in American letters, in part because Mailer's negotiations with what he perceived as a limiting Jewishness, his attempt to transform himself into an American archetype, a process that intensified after the publication of his first novel.

Early success is a curious thing for a writer to experience, especially in the United States during that fifty-year period in the 20th century when producing a best-selling first novel often granted instant celebrity and wealth. Fame can hinder an author, for writing is a solitary vocation, and even the most socially integrated writer feels some measure of isolation while crafting a novel or collection of poetry. Ironically success often deepens that sense of isolation, for, as Norman Mailer observed, as "a node in a new electronic landscape of celebrity, personality and status, [the newly successful writer] has been moved from the audience to the stage."[2] Some writers find their newfound notoriety liberating and continue to create their art secure in the knowledge that they have earned a place in the literary market. Other writers seem intimidated by the sensation their breakthrough novel occasions and find themselves either desperate to duplicate that achievement or determined to preserve their authenticity as a struggling artist by challenging their public with a narrative designed to be as difficult as possible. Some, like Harper Lee, simply abandon their literary career altogether.[3] Norman Mailer, whose debut novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, was arguably the most successful of the period immediately following World War II, distinguished himself by enduring, and acting upon, each of these impulses before circumstances led him to engage the Black textual tradition and he stumbled upon the insight that would shape his career.

The iconoclastic Mailer is simultaneously one of the most idealistic and one of the most cynical writers in the post-WW II period. In *Advertisements for Myself* (1959), his biographical review of his literary career to date, Mailer reports that "before I was seventeen I had formed the desire to be a major writer" (27). Whether this claim serves as a self-fulfilling recollection or is an accurate representation of his adolescent desires, Mailer certainly participated in various literary activities while at Harvard, though

nominally an engineering major. Mailer, whose talent for anticipating the trends of literary fashion has been overshadowed by his gift for reckless self-promotion, recognized during his senior year at Harvard that there would be great demand in the literary marketplace for fiction about the war, and he volunteered for the Army after graduating so that he could acquire the material he needed for a such a novel. After he was discharged from the service, Mailer crafted his war novel *The Naked and the Dead*. Mailer wrote well, if derivatively, and *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), was a best seller, with two hundred thousand copies sold in the first nine months alone. Everything proceeded according to Mailer's plan, but when "it became obvious that *The Naked and the Dead* was going to be a best seller…a depression set in on me. I was twenty-five, living in Paris with my first wife" (91). It takes a uniquely perverse sensibility to resolve to be a writer at age seventeen, devote years of creative energy developing the skills necessary to realize that desire, formulate a plan, the execution of which demands that you risk your life in the Pacific Theatre, so that your first novel would find a market, and then become despondent just as your strategy succeeds beyond your wildest expectations; but Norman Mailer possesses perhaps the most unique perspective of his generation, derived from his conflicted sense of being absolutely central yet completely marginal.

Mailer, who was spoiled terribly by his mother, was the dominant personality in his extended family, as well as his age-group in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. While his peers matriculated to Brooklyn College, Mailer went on to Cambridge. Yet once he arrived at Harvard, Mailer found himself on the margins for the first time. According to Adele Morales Mailer, Norman's second wife, "he…felt like a fish out of water [at Harvard]. It was probably a combination of his family not having a lot of money and being Jewish" (Manso, 179). Still, Harvard was a meritocracy in the classroom, and

Mailer did well there as a student. Mailer's experiences in the Army reinforced his feelings of inadequacy, and this time not because of religious or class differences. Mailer discovered that, despite his intellect and Ivy League education "when it came to taking care of myself, I had little to offer next to the practical sense of an illiterate sharecropper" (*Advertisements*, 91). As an outsider Mailer had to learn, both at Harvard and in the Army, to discern quickly what the dominant group found permissible and how to use this knowledge to his advantage, and fortunately his instincts were usually correct. Mailer exploited this talent for anticipating the preoccupations of his public throughout his literary career, but it wasn't until he produced "The White Negro" that Mailer achieved the contrapuntal sensibility that would enable him to fully exploit his dichotomous perspective.

To his credit, Mailer realized fairly quickly after *The Naked and the Dead* that while he could fashion a respectable career out of his sensitivity to literary, political, and cultural trends, this would not make him a respected writer, merely a well compensated one.[4] Mailer recognized that his life to that point was not commiserate with his ambition, and so he spent the next ten years "gobbling up the experiences" that he hoped would enable him to become a great writer as well as a prosperous one (92). Since he possessed a facile mind, Mailer was able to synthesize an idiosyncratic philosophy from various ideas that struck his fancy. The composition of "The White Negro," his famous essay about hipster culture, almost ten years after his debut, demonstrated that Mailer had finally derived a productive literary perspective from his search, one that would produce his best works of the 1960s. Mailer's contradictory insight in this essay was to merge incompatible ideas, the notion that Black Americans possessed a more accurate understanding of the true nature of democracy as practiced in the United States and the

idea that African American men ere inherently more virile and instinctual than thier white counterparts. In the eyes of most who think about race, Robert Penn Warren, for example, these views are antithetical, one a stock assertion of the Black textual tradition since at least Douglass, and the other a belief usually attributed to Southern racists. Mailer's attempt to fuse theses competing thoughts into a coherent critical perspective enabled him to produce prose that was both entertaining and challenging.

If "The White Negro" remains, in Mailer's estimation, his most important work, *Advertisements for Myself* is as pivotal to a scholar seeking to understand the development of Mailer's career. Mailer is delightfully self-critical throughout this collection, offering up rationalizations for each of his developmental missteps while playing down the importance of *The Naked and the Dead*. While William Faulkner's interviews and self-referential writing demonstrate the risk of using a writer's own thoughts to critique his work, Mailer is too self-aggrandizing and too brutally honest to present this risk.[5] Still, throughout this investigation of Mailer, I try to resist blindly accepting his claims at face value, and instead unpack his statements and evasions to better make sense of the choices Mailer made en route to developing his distinctive literary style. Many of the more innocuous statements in *Advertisements*prove to be most revealing and so, even as I consider *Barbary Shore*, *The Deer Park,* and "The White Negro," I will investigate Mailer's own claims about these works in *Advertisements for Myself* to find support or insight into many of my contentions.

While Mailer was struggling in Paris with the dreadful throes of his unmitigated success, his verve for new encounters and ideas drove him into the arms of Jean Malaquais, a French socialist thinker. Interestingly, *The Naked and the Dead*, written before his encounter with Malaquais, closes with a meditation on the possibility of a

totalitarian bureaucracy infecting a democratic society, represented in the novel by the Army platoon, with Major Dalleson embodying "the postwar triumph of the bureaucratic mentality."[6] With this coda Mailer anticipates the conservative reversals that accompanied the onset of the Cold War in the U.S. The Cold War mentality coerced the citizens of the nation into 'choosing' against their best interests and threatened to obviate the gains of the New Deal in post-war America, and Mailer demonstrates his sensitivity to cultural trends by addressing this embryonic reality in his debut. Mailer's deep mistrust of state coercion and conformity announces itself at the conclusion of *The Naked and the Dead*, and this hostility to cultural pressure would remain throughout his prodigious body of work.

Mailer's antipathy to state manipulation made him sympathetic to Malaquais, who felt that any society that permits a market economy is fundamentally coercive. Mailer had not yet reached Malaquais's conclusion about capitalism, but sensed an affinity of spirit and made sure they remained in contact when he returned to the U.S. Returning to New York with his book at number one on the best seller's charts, and reveling in his novel status as a notable literary figure, Mailer decided to lend his celebrity to Henry Wallace's presidential campaign, joining his Progressive Party, and stumping around the country for him in 1948. The phenomenal success of *The Naked and the Dead* transformed Mailer into a minor celebrity and he was more than willing to spend the social capital that comes with fame supporting Wallace. Mailer must have identified strongly with Wallace, a charismatic upstart outsider dissatisfied with the status quo, and by campaigning for him Mailer gained valuable exposure to the realities of the political process in the U.S.

Wallace campaigned for, among other things, a more constructive engagement with the USSR, and by supporting him Mailer allowed those suspicious of Wallace's loyalties to think of Mailer as a fellow traveler, if not an undeclared member of the American Communist Party.[7] Mailer's brief allegiance with the fading Popular Front would prove troublesome because, after Wallace's dismal showing at the 1948 presidential election and the USSR's subsequent invasion of Czechoslovakia, "it would be difficult if not impossible for a politically left artist or writer to make a living in the United States" and a left writer was how Mailer cast himself by supporting Wallace.[8] Mailer, I suspect, found Wallace's naïveté about the intentions of the Soviet Union a more troubling revelation than his dismal showing in the polls, since the former demonstrated Wallace's failure to understand and anticipate the intentions of the Soviets, and anticipating the intention of those with power was the skill that Mailer depended on and so respected. Despite the penetrating insight he developed at university and in the Army, Mailer found himself credulous in the face of a magnetic and idealistic leader, precisely what he warned against at the conclusion of *The Naked and the Dead*. The ability of certain authority figures to enthrall their constituents and maintain this hold even as their position worsens fascinated Mailer, and he spent much of his career trying to understand how and why human beings permitted themselves to be exploited in this way by military officers, politicians or pimps.

When Malaquais arrived in New York in 1949 to teach at the New School, Mailer studied with him eagerly, absorbing a socialist discourse that Mailer hoped would equip him with a critical vocabulary that would insulate him from the blandishments of political figures whose rhetoric he found compelling, and enable him to denounce the pervasive

coercion and conformity rising in American society that so troubled him. Unfortunatley for Mailer, their relationship was not quite as productive as he might have hoped. Malaquais tended to attribute any problem in a society, even cultural or psychological ones, to the presence of capitalism, either the unfettered kind practiced in the West or the state capitalism of the Soviet Union. Mailer would prove unwilling to adopt the denial of gratification that is at the core of socialist thought, particularly Malaquais's idiosyncratic brand of Trotskyism, nor was he willing to ignore what his instincts told him about certain vectors in American culture that was at odds with Malaquais's philosophy. Still, in *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer attests to "the powerful intellectual influence of my friend Jean Malaquais" during the frantic period following his debut (94). Malaquais's influence over Mailer became evident during a speech Mailer gave at the Waldorf Peace Conference in New York in 1949, a conference organized in part to protest the Truman Doctrine.

The Waldorf Conference, a three day affair heavily covered in the national and international press, intended to extol the revolutionary possibilities of the USSR as an alternative to Truman's paternalistic policy and promote a rapprochement between the two nations. By this point Mailer, like his mentor Malaquais, believed that the Soviet Union offered no protection from state enforced conformity and he delivered a speech to this effect at the Conference, declaring himself a "Trojan horse" who believed the United States and the Soviet Union did not represent different ideals but were inexorably becoming more similar.[9] Mailer's speech pleased anti-communist left figures in the audience like Irving Howe and Norman Podhoretz, but dismayed the progressives at the Waldorf Conference who assumed, due to Mailer's critique at the conclusion of *The*

Naked and the Dead and his participation in Wallace's campaign, that the young literary lion supported their goals. Feeling pressure to produce another novel and perhaps wishing to withdraw for the time being from political life, Mailer began working in earnest on his second novel shortly after this event. Having alienated one segment of his readership by campaigning for Wallace and another segment with his Waldorf speech, Mailer set out, in his own inimitable way to win them back with *Barbary Shore.*

Although *Barbary Shore* (1951) is a more difficult novel than *The Naked and the Dead*, Mailer was not trying to diminish his readership. If anything Mailer wanted more people to read his second novel than had read his first. Emboldened by the large audience he earned with his debut and the trenchant analysis that concludes that novel, Mailer decided to challenge his audience by critiquing the conformity of the emerging middle class society and the cold warriors demanding that conformity. Yet in order to do this, Mailer needed the proper form, for, as Godfrey Hodgson observes, "to dissent from the broad axioms of consensus [in the 1950s] was to proclaim oneself irresponsible or ignorant. That would risk disqualifying the dissenter from being taken seriously, and indeed from being heard at all."[10] Mailer, ever sensitive to the demands of the literary market, knew that in response to the continuing deterioration of the relationship between the U.S. and the USSR,

> [a]nybody who worked and wrote for newspapers, magazines, television, movies and advertising was discovering (if he were still innocent) that the natural work of his pen was to hasten our return to chastity, regularity, pomposity and worship of the lifeless, the senseless, and the safe (105).

Once again, Mailer correctly diagnosed the direction of the literary marketplace, but this time he deliberately, and courageously, chose another direction in crafting *Barbary Shore*.

Barbary Shore is perhaps Mailer's least personal book.[11] The milieu that Mailer created for his second novel emerged from "Jean Malaquais…the books I had read, and the aesthetics I considered desirable" (94). There is very little of Mailer's lived self in the novel, because, as was acutely aware, he had not accumulated enough experiences to ground his fiction. This wouldn't have been problematic for another writer, but Mailer was searching for a style that could reduce the artificial wall of language that separates narrative from actual experience. Perhaps still stung by his belief in Wallace, Mailer wanted *Barbary Shore* to demonstrate to his readers the need for skepticism and independence of thought in the face of competing ideologies. *Barbary Shore* depicts a terrifyingly (in?)competent government agent Hollingsworth who pursues something once possessed by a disaffected Marxist spy named McLeod. Both McLeod and Hollingsworth attempt to coerce Lovett, the everyman protagonist of the novel, into realizing something important about himself and history. In *Advertisements for Myself* Mailer describes *Barbary Shore* as "this first of the existentialist novels in America," but it seems instead an attempt to blend the psychological interiority of the modernist novel with the thinly disguised political polemics of the social realist novel (106).[12] Mailer admits as much when he complains that "the end of the novel collapsed into a chapter of political speech and never quite recovered" (94). *Barbary Shore*, flawed in its execution, failed in a literary marketplace that sought reassurance in the face of disorientating change, and received emphatically scathing reviews.

If most people seemed unaware or unconcerned about the "partially totalitarian society" that the U.S. was slowly becoming, Mailer hoped his second novel would enlighten them.[13] Yet not only was the novel a commercial failure, it seemed to offend many of the critics assigned to review it. The hostility of the critics derived in part from the historical circumstances that pertained when the novel was published. Mailer himself regretted that **"***Barbary Shore* showed its face in the worst of seasons, just a few months after the Chinese had come into the Korean War and set [the country] off another of our clammy national hysterias" (105). What Mailer derides as hysteria might be more charitably viewed as legitimate concern. After all, in less than a year the Soviets exploded an atomic bomb, China fell to Mao Zedong and his Communist army despite the USA lavishly providing funding and military aid to prevent this, a hot war broke out in South Korea, and Alger Hiss was convicted of perjury and imprisoned. Right-wing fear-mongers, led by Richard Nixon, J. Edgar Hoover and Joseph McCarthy, created a narrative of creeping communist infiltration that exploited the looming threat of both the Soviet Union and China. With the benefit of hindsight, Mailer attempts to dismiss the historical circumstances surrounding the publication of his second novel, but even he recognized that any single novel that attempted to swim against this national current would have to be perfectly executed, and *Barbary Shore* was far from that. Given this reality there is little wonder why critics found *Barbary Shore's* muddled critique of the U.S. not just irrelevant but perverse.

Barbary Shore defeated the expectations of Mailer's public by presenting a narrative that encouraged readers to take a second look at the goals of both socialism and market capitalism at a time when the nation was being instructed that the former sought

to eradicate the latter. While Mailer willfully ignored contemporary trends while shaping the content of his second novel, his awkward embrace of high modernism and social realism demonstrates his lack of confidence in his writing style. Mailer was seeking to unearth a style that could be his alone, and his self-conscious aping of previous methods resulted from this quest.[14] With his disappointing second novel Mailer found himself behind the times literarily, politically and stylistically, yet he was also racing headlong towards a stance that would soon place him in the avant-garde. While little notoriety would accrue to his efforts, after his debut Mailer had become infatuated with the democratic socialism offered by the Progressive Party, quickly become (thanks to Malaquais) disenchanted with the pro-Soviet Left in the United States that sought to normalize relations with the USSR, written a social realist/ modernist novel, and was beginning to arrive at the conclusion (to Malaquais's consternation) that dialectical analysis was impotent and therefore dangerous. Many socialist authors and artists who began working during the 1920s and 30s would reach a similar conclusion by the early 1950s.[15] Mailer, of course, made his debut in 1948 and, in a hurry as always, arrived at this point by 1952.

Mailer's frustrations derived in part from his immersion in the politics of the Left. As a novelist associated with progressive causes, Mailer had to grapple with the erosion of acceptable discourse under McCarthyism. McCarthyism's repression of the American Communist Party, left leaning labor unions and Hollywood creative talent has been well documented. Perhaps less well understood is how McCarthyism complicated writing for those who wished to critically engage national issues in their texts by thoroughly discrediting socialist and progressive movements in the U.S.[16] The early nineteen fifties

produced the age of consensus in American life, when few dared to question publicly the direction of U.S. policy. Writing about this period in *Advertisements,* Mailer laments that "radical political life in America has become difficult, and to hold the position of a libertarian socialist is equivalent to accepting almost total intellectual alienation from America, as well as a series of pains and personal contradictions in one's work" (202). Mailer was unwilling to accept intellectual alienation from America; indeed Mailer wanted nothing more that to export his idiosyncratic (and oxymoronic) brand of libertarian socialism to the American people. The fearful conformity of the early 1950s made this achievement, which would be difficult for Mailer under the best of circumstances, almost impossible.

After McCarthyism's initial flourish, Mailer could no longer depend on a wide American audience finding socialist discourse, or indeed any overtly critical stance, persuasive. And, after his performance at the Waldorf Conference, as anti-communist liberals like Irving Howe, Dwight Macdonald, and Norman Podhoretz sought him out, and the Trillings became more inclined to have him over for drinks, Mailer realized that the rhetoric of these New York intellectuals limited itself to critiquing the various iterations of Marxism and capitalism and sterile reviews of culture, but failed to address the ramifications of the conformity that Mailer sensed coursing throughout American life. Casting about for a lens through which to understand his society, Mailer, like many from his generation, became fascinated with psychology, although Mailer's interest was far from typical. Befriending the psychiatrist Robert Lindner after reading his *Rebel without a Cause: the Hypnoanalysis of a Criminal Psychopath* (1944), Mailer would often journey to Baltimore during the fall of 1951 to deepen his understanding of the

"psychosocial motivations behind alienation and aggression."[17] Lindner's approach to understanding the psyche was distinct from the doctrinaire Freudianism that was sweeping the nation.[18] Mailer, who intuitively grasped mainstream trends in American culture, was beginning to seek out other contradictory perspectives to inform his perceptions and Lindner would prove to be an important source for him.

Alienated both from the U.S. and the prevailing critiques of the U.S. as articulated by disillusioned communists or *Partisan Review* liberals, Mailer began exploring how society created and disciplined its outsiders.[19] Indeed, when *Partisan Review* invited Mailer to contribute an essay for a symposium titled "Our Country and Our Culture" that sought to determine the proper role of the artist in the face of the Cold War and American consensus, Mailer delivered a stinging rebuke to those in attendance, rejecting the notion that any artist should ever consider himself integrated into his culture. Mailer felt, and not without justification that "the writer does not need to be integrated into his society, and often works best in opposition to it" (188). Mailer's position is somewhat ironic since he had proven himself as skilled as anyone at evaluating the directions of the American consensus. Mailer had not yet produced a cogent oppositional stance, but he recognized that to accept the logic of the current status quo was to reduce literary work to sophisticated cultural propaganda.

In the "Our Country and Out Culture" speech Mailer begins to articulate exactly what it was he was in revolt from, even as he admitted that he was unsure of the means to resist. Mailer remains skeptical about artists enthusiastically identifying with the U.S. when the nation "threatens, suggests, nudges and promises" in order to achieve its broad consensus. Mailer also rejected an artistic community where "One does not ever say that

total war and the total war economy predicate a total regimentation of thought. Rather, it is suggested that society is too difficult to understand and history impossible to predict" (189). Mailer felt this to be untrue, after all he had twice correctly anticipated how historical trends would shape the consumption of literature, and tailored his texts accordingly. Mailer believed that the writer who uncritically concerned himself with "a strapping participation in the vigors of American life" forfeited his opportunity to create an art that might introduce a radical new perspective (190). Mailer felt that a true artist would continue to try to produce a new perspective even if, as in the early fifties, there seemed to be no coherent alternative available.

Still struggling with the shift in the political sensibility of the nation, Mailer reports in *Advertisements* that he woke one morning with an ambitious premise: an eight part novel where the protagonist "would travel through many worlds, through pleasure, business, communism, church, working class, crime homosexuality and mysticism" (154). This audacious plan indicates how badly Mailer struggled with the limits of discourse associated with McCarthyism. Despite the failure of his earlier attempt to find an audience, Mailer decides to rewrite *Barbary Shore* on a far larger scale, to repeat his attempt at a kind of reorientation and reinvigoration of the national discourse. Mailer composed "The Man Who Studied Yoga" as the overture to his eight-part masterwork and this story casts a harsh light on the well-adjusted suburban lifestyle born of prosperity and a fear of dissent that was transforming the nation. Mailer completed this prelude in 1952 and included it in *Advertisements for Myself,* and it is of interest in part because it encapsulates his discontent with post-World War II America, its embrace of limits on behavior and harmonious conduct and acceptable forms of artistic content. Although this

story does not yield a new style for Mailer, it demonstrates what, in his view, was wrong with the audience *Barbary Shore* had failed to reach.

In the "The Man Who Studied Yoga," Mailer reproduces the middle class society for whom "a revolution in the consciousness of our time" is necessary. A disembodied narrator relates the story, a character privy to the desires and inner thoughts of the protagonist Sam Slavoda, a frustrated comic books writer, although his exact relationship to Sam remains uncertain. Sam, a former member of the American Communist Party, lives with his wife Eleanor and their two children in a middle class housing development in Queens, NY. Before Sam speaks the narrator reveals several telling bits of information about him. Sam, we learn, "never [attempts his endeavors] with a whole heart;" longs for new experience but fears people, especially the homeless; and possesses a sincere desire to better understand himself through psychoanalysis (157). He is, with these characteristics, a depressingly typical member of his class. Worse, particularly for a working writer who longs for a broader forum for his ideas, Sam contentedly expresses himself in the empty idiom of the day.

The story opens at the Slavoda residence the morning after a party that granted Sam and his wife a temporary escape from the ennui which plagues them, as well as their coterie of post-radical friends. The narrator suggests that the novelty of the situation granted the Slavodas this breakthrough: "Last night at the party, there were perhaps half a dozen people whom [Sam] met for the first time, and he talked animatedly with them, sensing their reactions, feeling their responses, aware of the life in them, as they were aware of the life in him" (160). That moment of connection has passed, however, and Sam wakes to the sound of his wife making breakfast feeling depressed and hung-over. Sam and Eleanor immediately begin to reprise their experiences from the previous night

in an attempt to restore their fleeting vitality. Quickly, however, their recollections revert to sterile Freudian psychobabble, with Sam clinically observing that his friend Charles "hates women…almost everything he says about them is a discharge of aggression" (161). Later in the conversation they wonder if an attractive woman at the party was a hysteric or merely compulsive. Sam and Eleanor cannot evade the empty and comfortable psychoanalytic jargon of the day, even as they attempt to recreate the moment where they felt authentic and alive. The couple, formerly bohemian representatives of the political Left, have traded in their Marxist discourse for secondhand and inexpert Freudian analysis.

After breakfast, settling back into his armchair—that symbol of suburban status and isolation—Sam begins to question the direction his life has taken. He longs to reject the dull employment that leaves him empty even as it provides for his tastefully appointed apartment complete with its own "television-radio-and phonograph cabinet" (163). Although "writing for the comic strips seems to exhaust his imagination," Sam sabotages any serious attempt at creative art, placing the security his job affords him and his family above his fulfillment. Looking through the Sunday paper Sam rails against the "dishonesty, at the smooth strifeless world which [the media] presents" (163), even as he participates in this deception by writing vapid comic strips. Sam seems unaware or unwilling to act upon the disconnect between his feelings of outrage and his middle-class lifestyle.

Lacking the programmatic analysis of the Communist Party, Sam is incapable of producing an insight that must be carried through into action. In fact, Sam has fled so far from his former self that he has begun to wish for the relative ignorance of the working class, dreaming of a life where "to be happy it was necessary only to have more money,

more goods, less worries" (165). Sam sees no viable outlet for his critical perspective and so he wishes for the bliss that comes with ignorance. Genuine human interaction like the sort that occurred at last evening's party, connections that seem to somehow transgress the notion of organized leisure, ease the disquiet that Sam feels, but Sam experiences such contact too infrequently for it to sooth him completely. Unlike the supposedly blissful working class, Sam's unhappiness stems from ontological rather than material conditions, forcing him to seek vitality in others lest he face the feelings of impotence and betrayal that lurk within.

Luckily, Sam's friend Marvin Rossman provides an opportunity for stimulation when he asks Sam to screen a pornographic movie in his apartment, a request than Sam quickly accepts. Sam, however, cannot revel in his anticipation of this event, clinically noting that his excitement possibly betrays an anal fixation (166). The friends that assemble to watch the film represent a cross-section of post-war middle class occupations: staff writer for a mass media outlet, dentist, lawyer, schoolteacher, painter, social worker, and homemaker. Their impassioned conversation prior to watching the movie demonstrates their attempt to escape the conformity of the middle class by maintaining a faux-critical stance to the society at large. In their discussion of the day's prominent issues (the Negro question, the uncertain future facing their children), each seems intent on proving to the others that they remain progressive and bohemian despite their comfort and safety. As the narrator observes with a disdain that suggests Mailer's voice, "[t]hey are all being the most unconscionable hypocrites," equally so for their feigned detachment towards pornography as for their seemingly radical stances. The consumption of the pornographic movie provides a welcome respite from their pantomimed performance of radicalism as parlor game.

Despite the group's stultifying ennui, the frankness of the movie, a fantasy of seduction and domination, invigorates them, pushing Sam in particular towards another moment of vitality. Flush and stimulated from the film, Sam muses on the differences between 18th century and 20th century uses of power:

> [During the 18th] century men sought wealth so they might use its fruits; this epoch men lusted for power in order to amass more power, a compounding of power into pyramids of abstraction whose yield are cannon and wire enclosure, pillars of statistics to the men who are the kings of this century and do no more in power's leisure time than go to church, claim to love their wives, and eat vegetables.

The pornographic seduction of the innocent presented on screen suggests to Sam an earlier understanding of power that is personalized, concerned with mastering the flesh and with human conquest. Sam lives in a different, more impersonal era, the century of the Holocaust and Hiroshima, where bureaucrats mass-produce the means for faceless destruction in exchange for an upper-middle class lifestyle and a façade of respectability. Sam's musing suggests that power in the 18th century was humane in that it sought to dominate life, while the merciless yet sterile power of the 20th century searches for increasingly efficient means to produce death. Still, Sam remains unable to conceive of a meaningful response to this state of affairs. For Sam, as for Mailer, the loss of personal autonomy, the reduction of men into mindless consumers attempting to ignore the Damoclean Cold War, represents the biggest threat to creative individualism.

Sadly, none of Sam's cohort seems able to posit a meaningful alternative to the contemporary life of conformity. This becomes evident when Sam and Marvin speak

about Jerry O'Shaugnessy, a former member of the Communist Party. Marvin reports that O'Shaugnessy, once a working class hero in the Party whom Sam idealized, has become a wino. This comment begins a reverie that locates Sam's ontological angst in his loss of faith in the transformative potential of Communism. Sam's knowledge of the USSR's prison camps, show trails and corrupt bureaucracy has marooned him "between the loss of a country he has never seen, and his repudiation of the country in which he lives" (179). This loss of faith plunges Sam into his "friendly depression" (179), the feelings of impotence and isolation that result from his struggle to find a place in the McCarthyist present. Indeed, as Mailer would later observe, "The average American Communist held to the myth of Stalin for reasons which had little to do with the political evidence and had everything to do with their psychic necessities" ("The White Negro," 356-7). This is why it is possible for Sam, who really does know better, to wish for the blissful ignorance of the working-class.

Sam's aborted novel cannot fill the void left by his loss of the Soviet Union as an idealized space, working on it chiefly serves to allow him, as he admits to Marvin, to hope that "I'll do something good some day" (179). This honesty should be refreshing, but since it derives from the guilt he feels about the loss of the Party he finds no solace. Of course, Sam fails to notice that he gains this breakthrough in dialog with a friend rather than with the help of his therapist. Therapy, like his unfinished novel, enables Sam to maintain the illusion that he will eventually accomplish something meaningful without creating the impetus to actually do so. Due to his loss of faith with Communism, Sam lacks a cause, and thus the passion, purpose and ability to theorize a world where goals

different circumstances might pertain. There seems no way out for Sam; he is every inch a one-dimensional man.[20]

After their company leaves, Sam and Eleanor have sex while watching the movie, consummating the intimacies they have felt over the past day. Psychological conceptions of sexuality emerge in Sam's minds as he couples with Eleanor causing him to wonder about his latent homosexuality while he is penetrating his wife (181-2). Later, as their post-coital connection fades and he learns that Eleanor was pleased by his lovemaking, Sam castigates himself for his inability to lose himself in the experience, for wasting his life and talent, for abandoning his novel, the one thing that "would lift him at a bound from the impasse in which he stifles" (183). Sam's final thoughts before sleep concern a former friend of Eleanor's, a woman whom society has tossed aside as contemptuously as Jerry O'Shaugnessy. The unnamed woman has been institutionalized and claims, when Sam and Eleanor visit, that the orderlies sexually assault her during the night. Eleanor and Sam, unsure of the legitimacy of her claim, choose not to act and when they next visit her she is less lucid than before. Uncomfortable at their silence in the face of another person's (possible) mistreatment, Eleanor and Sam subsequently put her and her claims of abuse out of their mind. Except that, years later, the memory of this woman returns unbidden to Sam.

That Sam recalls Eleanor's unnamed friend on the same day that he learns of Jerry O'Shaugnessy's fall from grace is surely no coincidence. Troubled by the memory of his inaction in the face of institutional mistreatment, which suggests that Sam lacks the power to shape events, he makes an inevitable association: "the mental hospital. A concentration camp…Perhaps it would be the world some day" (185). Sam's lack of faith in the future of the USA or the USSR causes him to imagine that the world will soon

become an inhumane expression of the totalizing statistical power of bureaucratic destruction. Sam justifies their refusal to help Eleanor's friend by evoking the monolithic power of the state, yet their refusal to investigate the woman's claims of abuse belie their self-image as radicals or reformers. When given an opportunity to challenge the authority of an institution, the couple turns uneasily away. Sam's reverie reveals that he suffers not from depression or a loss of faith but a failure of the imagination. The story suggests that Sam and his cohort once derived their identity from their commitment to reform the U.S. via the Party; the failure of the Left to produce a viable alternative to current US policy undermines their sense of self.

"The Man Who Studied Yoga" offers an eloquent illustration of the coterie that Mailer desperately wished to inform, the post-radical middle class intellectuals cowed by McCarthyism who despaired the loss of the progressive movement that shored up their sense of self. This class, for Mailer, possessed an inert transformative power stifled by the failures of the Popular Front, the threat of nuclear war, and their seemingly effortless achievement of a prosperity that made it easy to conform. Yet, like the various authors of *The God That Failed*, the members of this group found it difficult to replace Marxist schemas in their epistemological frame. Due to their skill at dialectical analysis, this class recognized the failings of communism and the flaws of U.S. policy but seemed unable to use this information in any productive way. Instead, they relied on psychoanalysis to assuage the anxiety and guilt that derived from their inability to transform their knowledge into meaningful action.

In "The Man Who Studied Yoga," Mailer confronts the yawning gap between insight and purposeful action, and he demonstrates that any critique that concludes without a call for direct action is useless. Yet, just as the last section of *The Naked and*

the Dead signaled Mailer's attitude toward bureaucratic capitalism, so does "The Man Who Studied Yoga" foreshadow the importance he placed on sexual conquest. In light of Marxism's increasing irrelevance to his class and generation, Mailer searched for another oppositional position that challenged the mores of Eisenhower's America, and sex was it. Sex, as fetishized by Mailer, was more than merely a reproductive act; it remained one of the few areas where his contemporaries would not permit to regulation by society or adhere to conservative standards of acceptability. But if sex offered individuals one of the few remaining opportunities for an unmediated connection with another person, Mailer remained uncertain as to how this connection might help one resist conforming to the demands of the coercive state outside the bedroom. Mailer would investigate this theme in his next novel, *The Deer Park*.

Mailer attempted to achieve a balance between the political and the sexual in *The Deer Park* (1955), the first of the eight novels that was to follow "The Man Who Studied Yoga." *The Deer Park* featured a cast of dissolute men living in and around Hollywood and Palm Springs, attempting to find meaning in their lives through exploitative or titillating relationships with women. Mailer's depiction of sex here is markedly different from "The Man Who Studied Yoga," where sex offers Eleanor and Sam the possibility for a genuine connection. Sexual relationships abound in *The Deer Park*, but because none of the participants is ever sure of their standing in their relationships couples break apart and reform throughout the novel. Sex in the novel, while subtly depicted, serves as a proxy for power and demonstrates how coercion can deform even the most elemental and necessary of connections. In *The Deer Park* sex serves both as a way of keeping

score, a way to determine who currently has the power to coerce whom, and a means to cope with one's artistic failings.

Sergius O'Shaugnessy (abandoned son of Jerry from "The Man Who Studied Yoga?"), a newcomer to California and one of the two protagonists of the novel, comes to understand that Hollywood is an elaborately socialized world where knowing when to transgress is as important as the talent that permits that transgression. Charles Eitel, the other protagonist of the novel, loses his artistic integrity through the machination of Hollywood's studio system and, after being blacklisted for refusing to testify before HUAC, pines away isolated from the community he needs to sustain him as an artist. Neither Sergius nor Eitel is quite what they seem, a claim that could extend to all the characters in this novel, but both men lose their sexual potency and place in society after confrontations that expose weaknesses they had hidden from themselves and others. The sexual politics of *The Deer Park* displaces the inert competition between socialism and capitalism of *Barbary Shore* and Mailer augments the philosophical sexuality in the former novel by linking it throughout to a kind of social ambiguity typical of Hollywood.[21]

In *The Deer Park,* Marion Faye, a bisexual pimp whose mother hosts a popular Hollywood salon, seems the only character unaffected by the need to prove his sexual worth. Indeed, because Faye finds sex worthless, he is free in an anarchic sense and delights in humiliating the women and men who place themselves under his power. Interestingly, the rebellious Faye, unlike other characters in the novel, rejects the respectability that comes with upwardly-mobile success. Faye in fact descends from questionable stock, he never knew his father (although his mother claimed Faye's father

was a nobleman) and his mother was "a call girl, a gossip columnist…a celebrity, a failure, she had been born in Chicago and discovered in New York, her father had been a drunk and died that way, her mother had disappeared with another man" (6). Despite these roots Faye's mother achieved wealth, stability, notoriety, and the parvenu notions of propriety that often accompanied such upward mobility, and Faye seemed to inherit a world-weary cynicism from his grandparents that resisted her attempts at sophistication. [22] Faye finds his place on the margins of society and refuses to rationalize his extra-legal behavior, granting him a kind of nobility in spite of himself.

While sexual negotiations play a central role in *The Deer Park*, Mailer also exploits ethnic ambiguities in the novel. Sergius is an orphan who passes, admittedly, as a "fake Irishman," claiming his identity after surviving the fights that occurred at his orphanage (20). Like the protean Jay Gatsby, Sergius presents himself as more accomplished than he is and so he constantly seeks to understand other people's place in the social pecking order so that he can better exploit his position. For example, when Sergius meets Charles Eitel, he hears "more than one accent. I could hear New York in [his voice], and the theater, and once in a while if he was talking to somebody from those parts, a trace of the South or the Middle-West came into it, and with all of that it was a controlled voice – most of the time he sounded like society" (29). Mailer extends the notion of white ethnic ambiguity further, revealing that Faye's family name is actually O'Faye, a play perhaps on the Black vernacular "ofay," a term used to disparage whites. In light of Sergius's manufactured ethnic identity, the ambiguity he detects in Eitel, and the central role played by the sexually ambivalent pimp of unknown ethnic stock, *The Deer Park* can be represented as Mailer's first attempt to fashion characters who clarify

their sense of self through sexual conquest, resistance to coercion, and adopted ethnicities.

Nevertheless, Mailer remains unsure what to make of Faye's resistance to the empty value system of the coercive bureaucracy represented by Hollywood, despite Faye embodying the ideals and tone of Robert Lindner's rebel without a cause. So, while Eitel and Sergius remain vulnerable to various forms of coercion and are both ultimately defeated by it, Faye, who ends the novel imprisoned for carrying a gun without a license, fails to offer a meaningful alternative. Although Mailer intends Sergius to be a representative type, a modern man lost in the society that has emerged out of World War II, he remains a reworking of F Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby, without Gatsby's quixotic devotion to the idea of redemptive love. Indeed, none of the female characters in the novel are as fully realized as Fitzgerald's Daisy, and the relationships the women in *The Deer Park* have with men brings none of them much happiness. Marion Faye actually comes closer to representing the kind of contemporary man that interested Mailer, but he was reluctant to place him at the center of his narrative, choosing the immature artist over the cynical pimp, the naïve self-made man over the knowing libertine. Although Faye's attitude may transcend contemporary sexual mores, Mailer resists granting him moral authority in the novel. Try as he might, Mailer cannot depict the rebellious Marion Faye as a heroic exemplar around which one might found a movement.

After Mailer willfully ignored the trends of the market with *Barbary Shore*, he sought to reach a compromise with his public and the critics with his third novel. As usual, Mailer's correctly perceived that there would be a market for a book like *The Deer Park*. Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which treated many of the same themes as *The Deer Park*, enjoyed a prosperous run on Broadway during the 1953-54 season, demonstrating

that it was permissible at least to critique McCarthyism, the chief cause of American conformity. Senator McCarthy was in decline throughout 1954, with Joseph Welch's famous denunciation of McCarthy in June of that year leading to his censure in the Senate that December.[23] The literary marketplace would not reject out of hand a fictional exploration of the ramifications of McCarthyist repression in hedonisitic Hollywood. Of course, Mailer couldn't have anticipated that seven houses would find his novel unfit to publish due to its sexual content. Yet Mailer, adaptable as ever to the expectations of the marketplace, was able to turn this unfortunate series of events to his advantage.

After months of shopping his novel to various publishers, Walter Minton at G.P. Putnam agreed to bring forth *The Deer Park* with minimal changes, changes that were typical of the publishing process and had nothing to do with imposing standards of decency upon Mailer. However, while examining his novel in galleys Mailer realized that the form and the content of his third novel did not align. While the novel's narrative still pleased Mailer, he concluded "the style was wrong…I had been strangling the life of my novel in a poetic prose which was too self-consciously attractive and formal" and "came out of nothing so much as my determination to prove I could master a fine style" (*Advertisements*, 235). Against the wishes of Minton, Mailer forced himself through a manic re-write where "for the first time…I was able to color the empty reality of [the] first person with some real feeling of how I had always felt, which was to be outside, for Brooklyn where I grew up is not the center of anything" (237). Mailer's rejection by virtually the entire publishing industry awakened his feelings of being an ethnic interloper from Brooklyn in Cambridge, feelings that had subsided when he achieved his literary success eight years prior. Even the dozens of bad notices earned from book critics for *Barbary Shore* proved that Mailer belonged, that his novels were important

enough to warrant reckoning with. The serial rejections of *The Deer Park* relieved Mailer of the need to master an agreeable literary idiom, and he begun trying to create a more personal style that explored the ramifications of liminal status.

This new style that emerged from his rewrite allowed Mailer to link the insights into alienation he gained via his studies with Linder with his personal history and his own self-conception as an artist. For the first time since he began gobbling experiences, Mailer realized that he must arrive at a better understanding of himself and how he related to the various artistic, social and political communities he belonged to in order to find his style. In the eighteen months that followed Mailer's epiphany, he experimented with drugs, systematically ended (or seriously tested) his friendships with WASP contemporaries like James Jones and William Styron, and threw himself into the jazz scene in New York. Jazz, especially the be-bop modes that were currently en vogue in the downtown New York scene, seemed to Mailer to be outlaw music. Mailer was right in a limited sense: although it was sufficiently popular to have a large and devoted following, bop lacked the mainstream respectability of swing and big band music, to say nothing of Frank Sinatra. Mailer had demonstrated his ability to anticipate respectable society, he now sought to educate himself about the outsiders, people he now recognized as kindred spirits. Mailer combined feelings of outsider-ness with his embrace of a combative first person narration to reorient his self-perception, and this was a crucial step in his development as an artist.

After publishing *The Deer Park,* Mailer would rehearse his confrontational style as a columnist for *The Village Voice*, the alternative newspaper he helped found.[24] While the *Voice* would eventually earn a reputation as a weekly that offered a decidedly

progressive perspective on the events of the day, during its first few years the most radical content in the paper were its free-form reviews of off-Broadway shows and art house cinema. With the paper losing money weekly, Mailer, recovered from the intense rewriting of *The Deer Park*, decided to contribute a column to the paper, trusting that this would bolster circulation. So, when Mailer began writing his column for the *Voice* at the end of December of 1955, less than a month into the Montgomery Bus Boycott that was to catapult Martin Luther King onto the national stage, the paper was more concerned with surviving the winter than reporting on the storm brewing in the South.[25]

Mailer's difficulty publishing *The Deer Park*, following what he perceived as the reactionary reception of *Barbary Shore*, only served to confirm to him the continuing power of conformity in the U.S. despite the political demise of McCarthy, and Mailer devoted his new stage at the *Voice* to his attempt to rouse the silent generation. Mailer felt that if he "had one noble emotion [while writing his *Voice* column] it was rage against that national conformity which smothered creativity, for it delayed the self-creation of the race, a most desperate delay, since man might no longer have all the Time of eternity to discover himself" (*AM,* 283). This is another reference to the potential global annihilation that supposedly justified the timorous compliance with McCarthyism that so incensed Mailer. He felt that if there was indeed a distinct possibility that the world would be destroyed in a nuclear conflagration, then people should live every day like it is the last day of our lives while trying to change the global conditions that placed human existence at risk. At the very moment that Mailer was searching for a literary form to shatter the smothering national conformity, the Civil Rights Movement brought

forth a social protest movement that promised to do just that, and Mailer was soon to take notice.[26]

Mailer mentioned the Montgomery Bus Boycott in his eighteenth and last column for the *Voice* (actually a full-page advertisement intended to rectify his earlier wrong-headed meditation on *Waiting for Godot*). In this column Mailer referred to "the mysterious and exciting phenomenon of the White South terrified of the Birmingham bus strike and the growing power of the Negro" (325). Of course, Mailer meant Montgomery and not Birmingham, but this allusion demonstrates his interest in the protests occurring in Alabama, which he perceived as a possible break in the wall of conformity established by McCarthyism and maintained by the fear of nuclear death. Mailer was obviously trying to assimilate the implications of King's Montgomery Improvement Association into his personal schema of conformity and revolt. Epochal events like *Brown v. Board of Education*, the murder of Emmett Till and now King's protest signaled that there would soon be a national reassessment of the place of Black people in the nation. The Montgomery Bus Boycott must have reminded him of Lindner's assertion that "the resources of human salvation can be found more abundantly among that very group whom we have been instructed latterly by every possible means to despise and dismiss as lost than among the thronging shadows of the so-called 'adjusted'" (*Prescription for Rebellion*, 107). While Lindner was referring to the psychopath whom society excludes, Mailer understood that Southern Blacks, like Jews at Harvard, intellectuals in the Army, and daring writers in an age of conformity, also formed an excluded group, and those in Montgomery were demonstrating that they possessed the will to resist their exclusion.

While seeking to predict how the events in the South would transform the social and political and thus the literary sensibility of the nation, Mailer had also begun to

investigate notions closer to home that would emerge in "The White Negro." Indeed, Mailer's sixteenth *Voice* column, "The Hip and the Square" offers his first attempts to define Hip.[27] Hip

> is an American existentialism. Profoundly different from French existentialism because Hip is based on the mysteries of the flesh, and its origins can be traced back into all the undercurrents and underworlds of American life, back into the instinctive apprehensions and appreciation of existence which one finds in the Negro and the soldier, in the criminal psychopath and the dope addict and jazz musician, in the prostitute, in the actor, in the—if one can visualize such a possibility—in the marriage of the call-girl and the psychoanalyst" (314).

It is important to note that Mailer articulates an underground consensus somehow hospitable simultaneously to performers, disaffected military, criminals and Negroes. Mailer felt that these groups, whether they knew it or not, formed an anti-consensus that he hoped could appeal to a significant segment of the national population once they understood and appreciated its vitality as such. Indeed, Mailer believed that the jazz clubs in the Village and house parties in Harlem that he frequented demonstrated that the various groups of his anti-consensus were already beginning to come together to some degree. What this new disposition lacked was a prophet, someone to popularize and explain it. This new scene energized Mailer, and he promised "to continue writing about it for at least the next few weeks" (315). Mailer ended his column at the *Voice* two weeks later, but he eventually kept his promise.

Mailer's *Village Voice* column "Hip" presages many of his points in "The White Negro" but at this point Mailer had not explicitly written about the emerging Civil Rights Movement in any meaningful way. Mailer, as attuned to the pulse of society as any of

his peers, decided to seize upon how fundamentally the *Brown* decision and Martin Luther King's Montgomery Bus Boycott were challenging the prevailing mores of U.S. society, and his early awareness of this fact drove him to create "The White Negro." This was to change in the winter of 1956. Responding to a challenge by Lyle Stuart, Mailer wrote four paragraphs on integration in the South to be published in Stuart's *Independent* a monthly newsmagazine with a small following. According to Mailer, "Everybody who knows the South knows that the white man fears the sexual potency of the Negro" (332). Whites could not allow Blacks to attain social equality because "the Negro already enjoys sensual superiority" (332). Following this tortured calculus, if the sensually superior Blacks attained social equality they would surpass the sexually inferior whites in the South. Mailer sees justice in this impending turnabout, but "like all poor winners and small losers the Southern whites are unwilling to accept the reversals of history" (332). This is a ridiculous argument for man reasons, particularly for someone familiar with Marx, but the bloody history of segregation, emblematized most recently in the public imagination by the murder of Emmett Till for supposedly whistling at a white woman, made white fear of Black sexuality plausible to Mailer, who most assuredly did <u>not</u> know the South as well as he claimed.

Stuart loved the provocative piece and decided to send it to William Faulkner for comment before publishing it. Faulkner's reply was withering:

> I have heard this idea expressed several times during the last twenty years, though not before by a man. The others were ladies, northern or middle western ladies, usually around 40 or 45 years of age. I don't know what a psychiatrist would find in this (333).

Mailer was outraged and devastated by this reply. Not only did Faulkner fail to take Mailer's ideas seriously, he compared him to a middle aged middle-western lady, which the cosmopolitan and chauvinistic Mailer simply could not accept. Faulkner also implied, correctly, that Mailer did not know the South, and worse that Mailer should seek psychiatric counseling so that he could come to terms with his fascination with Black masculinity. Faulkner's replay was so condescending and dismissive that in that moment Mailer must have felt like an interloping outsider again. Although Hemingway was the writer that Mailer most admired, Faulkner was a major figure and this insult must be returned.

In his rejoinder to Faulkner, Mailer's acknowledges the Nobel laureate's "extraordinary body of work" but wondered why his most stimulating conversations occurred with middle-aged Midwestern women. Mailer then claimed to have learned of white men's fear of Black sexuality from "a most intelligent Negro carwasher…a mulatto sneak-thief and pimp, [and a former] madam of a whorehouse in South Carolina" (333). So there. Faulkner's insult reminded Mailer that despite his friendship with the Arkansan writer Francis Irby Gwaltney and his experiences with Southern white men while enlisted, Mailer really had no first hand experience with Southern racism. Of course Mailer was fascinated with the Montgomery Bus Boycott which ended the very December that Mailer composed his thoughts on racial integration, but that was second-hand knowledge, delivered through the filter of the media. What Mailer did know was the New York jazz scene where hipsters frolicked. Indeed in order to properly research Hp Mailer had gone off on "that happy ride where you discover a new duchy of jazz every night and the drought of the past is given a rain of new sound" (234) an experience that allowed him to realize that amoral pimps like Mickey Jelke and idealistic preachers

like Martin Luther King weren't the only people rejecting the conformity of the 1950s and that something life sustaining might be made from that rejection.

Stuart, a crusader for free speech who loved a good controversy, sent copies of Mailer's letter, with Faulkner's reply and Mailer's reply, to Eleanor Roosevelt, W.E.B. DuBois, William Bradford Huie, and Murray Kempton, among others. While the Faulkner-Mailer exchange generated denouncements of various intensities, Mailer realized that he had not done his topic justice, that he

> would have to do a good deal better, because if I did not, I might lose one emotion and gain another, an exchange I was in fever to avoid, since the first emotion included no less than my faith that I was **serious**, that I was **right**, that my work would give more to others than it took from them" (334, emphasis added).

If his four-paragraph meditation on sex and race was the best he could do on this topic, Mailer feared, perhaps he was not an insightful writer capable of altering people's perceptions of society after all. "The White Negro," the essay that grew out of Mailer's attempt to treat Southern racism and Black masculinity seriously, became, for Mailer, a demonstration and confirmation of his talent. Mailer fails to explicitly mention the Southern Black protestors in "The White Negro" even though their attacks on Jim Crow were an inspiration for the essay, because he lacked first hand experience with the social conditions in the South and Mailer privileged experience in his writing. Instead Mailer uses jazz to establish a link between Southern and Northern Blacks. In the decade between *The Naked and the Dead* and "The White Negro" Mailer, cognizant of his ability to read U.S. cultural life, developed a desire to do "nothing less than [create] a revolution in the consciousness of our time" and producing "The White Negro," contradictory

though the essay may have been, assured him that he had the analytical and creative talents to accomplish this goal (17).

As recently as 1998 Mailer anointed "The White Negro" his most important piece of writing, a comment that seems at odds with the publishing history of a writer who has won three Pulitzer Prizes and a National Book Award since publishing this piece.[28] The essay was initially published in *Dissent*, the influential postwar little magazine, and saw its widest dissemination in *Advertisements for Myself.* When "The White Negro" initially appeared it was derided by figures as diverse as James Baldwin, Ned Polsky and Jean Malaquais; and Irving Howe, the editor of *Dissent*, had second thoughts about publishing it. Worse for Mailer, many of intellectual heavyweights of the time thought his essay beneath notice, with the notable exception of Mailer's good friend Diana Trilling. Despite these circumstances, this essay signaled to Mailer that he had succeeded in retraining his sensibility and was now in touch simultaneously with the underground currents in American life and culture as well as the dominant trends. Although ultimately triumphant, Mailer's attempt to realign his perspective met with much difficulty, and the story of his troubles demonstrates that without "The White Negro" it is doubtful whether Mailer would have produced his award winning texts.

Mailer's various literary, philosophical and psychological fascinations are distilled into "The White Negro," first published in 1957 in Irving Howe's journal *Dissent*. "The White Negro" blends the ideas about marginalized communities that Mailer gleaned from Kerouac, Lindner, and Wilhelm Reich, with his rather muddled understanding of existentialism, and his impression of the historical realities of the times.[29] But mostly "The White Negro" concerns itself with articulating a new philosophy of creative performance that would permit whites to escape the repressive

bonds of their society. Blacks, Mailer realized, faced far worse coercion and a more serious and imminent threat of death than anything McCarthyism or the emerging arms race had impressed on whites, and they had endured this oppression for decades. Indeed, sexual expression was one of the most policed aspects of Black masculinity, as the very pubic murder of Emmett Till demonstrated, yet despite this Negroes seemed to be more comfortable with their sexuality than the denizens of the middle-class that Mailer derided in "The Man Who Studied Yoga." Not only were Blacks (at least the ones Mailer hung out with inside jazz clubs) more at ease with themselves sexually, they turned their lives into art, from the way they spoke to the be-bop jazz that, to Mailer's perceptions, celebrated virtuosic improvisational performance.

Mailer realized that the bohemians who flocked to be-bop performances in the Village, and the even more intrepid hipsters who followed jazz Uptown, were participating in performances that defied conformity, indeed that typified the creative potential of committed artists by their very being. Unlike Sartrean existentialism, which Mailer rejected as too rational, the American existentialism that jazz improvisation typified for him, freed its practitioners of doubt and fear through embodied practice. Mailer believed that the way to escape the pressures of conformity and attain a truer understanding of the self lay in performance, and the ultimate performers were the jazzmen who seemingly created new musical fugues at every show. Equally important were the sexual appetites of these jazzmen, their (seeming) ability to take a different woman, white or Black, every night. The be-bop jazzmen, who existed in a haze of drugs, sex and masterful music, must have seemed like Zarathustran *Übermensch* to Mailer, and he synthesizes a vocabulary of performative resistance out of the refreshing

originality of bop-jazz players, his strong aversion to Freudian psychoanalysis and his limited experience with the language of existentialism.[30]

Much has been made about the racism at the center of "The White Negro", and with good reason. Jazzmen may have been, as Mailer supposes in the essay "the cultural mentor[s] of a people" (348) in the 1950s, but there were other cultural mentors (Jackie Robinson and Langston Hughes to name but two), and of course most Black people in 1950s paid more attention to the victories of Martin Luther King and Thurgood Marshall than to the exhortations of Bird Parker. Further, a cursory glance at the traditions surrounding the African American church, particularly in the South, reveal that despite Mailer's pronouncements to the contrary, African Americans do indeed possess "the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization" although these inhibitions are often very different from those of whites (341). The bohemian jazz that Mailer celebrates in fact rises out of the Black artist's negotiations with the particular conservatism of African American culture, a negotiation that begins with Duke Ellington, if not before. Indeed, Mailer's appreciation for bop musicians, his favorites being Thelonious Monk and Miles Davis, reveals his basic misunderstanding about Jazz improvisation. While Mailer thought that bop solos were expressions of the anarchic impulse that underlies every act of self creation, performers understood that even bop performances were highly formal and coded. Mailer's misunderstandings reveal more about his own prejudices than they do about the Black people he came into contact with.

Despite the manifest flaws in the White Negro, it remains an important example of a white writer taking up the central tenant of the Black textual tradition, that African Americans have a truer understanding of the values of democracy and some inherent grace deriving from their negotiations with slavery and depravation. The rising Civil

Rights movement allows Mailer to refract his ambitions through the prism that it provided. That the novel that followed "The White Negro," *An American Dream*, attempts to dramatize in fiction what Mailer had asserted in non-fiction and earned him his best notices since his debut demonstrates his success at deriving a compelling literary perspective from the observations that went into the essay. "The White Negro" does not accurately represent how New York bohemians actually interacted, or properly diagnose the inhibition-lessoning psychological effect of decades discrimination on Black people. Scrutinizing Mailer's essay, however, does allow us to note the stylistic development permitted by his recognition and simultaneous repudiation of what he understands to be mainstream white conformity and logic. Mailer musings on race offer little understanding of subjects other than Mailer.

Although "The White Negro" celebrates the hipster, the essay opens with a bewildering section that seems to have little to do with bohemian culture. The second sentence of this famous précis, an excerpt of which follows below, is especially informative in light of my discussion:

> …we have been forced to live with the suppressed knowledge that the smallest facets of our personality or the most minor projection of our ideas, or indeed the absence of ideas and the absence of personality could mean equally well that we might **still** be doomed to die as a cipher in some vast statistical operation in which out teeth would be counted, and our hair would be saved, but our death itself would be unknown, unhonored, and unremarked, a death which could not follow with dignity as a possible consequence to serious actions we had **chosen**, but rather a death by *deus ex machina* in a gas chamber or a radioactive city… [338, emphasis added]

This fragment presents directly the fears that Mailer alluded to in *Barbary Shore* and "The Man Who Studied Yoga." As the ideals of the progressive movement atrophy, weapons proliferate that lessen human agency because they implicate the weak and indifferent alongside the bold and daring, rendering choice, even the choice to flee, meaningless. Worse, much of this technology lies in the hands of the two dehumanizing bureaucracies, the USA and the USSR, each dominated by a politics of personality and seemingly inured against compassion or caution. In the face of an inevitable clash between these two cultures, all but the most rigorous of intellects demur, and indeed conform, eager to avoid the despair occasioned by serious contemplation of this impending conflict.

Mailer asserts that the hipster, the "White Negro," intuits a way out of the triple bind of concentration camp, nuclear destruction and mind-numbing conformity. The hipster is for Mailer "the American existentialist…[who] accept[s] the terms of death, [who] live[s] with death as immediate danger" and as such breaks through his fear by merely accepting potential destruction as a condition under which life is to be lived (339). Rather than cower in the face of eradication, the hipster embraces "the psychopath in oneself (sic)…in that enormous present which is without past or future, memory or planned intention" (339). Life as a Western and American subject, Mailer asserts, burdened by the memories of such rationally inhuman endeavors as Dresden, Auschwitz, and Nagasaki, and the fear of an impending nuclear war, demands an embrace of psychopathic irrationality. If the cold war and McCarthyism on the one hand and sterile liberalism on the other represent the contemporary existential choices of Western men, then the only sane choice is to abandon the ways of the West and forge a new path, as Mailer claims the hipster has done. That decision places the "white Negroes" into a

sympathetic relationship with Blacks, who have faced death and destruction as a fact of life for over 300 years as outsiders within the United States.

Obviously, the symbiotic relationship between Blacks and whites lies at the center of this text. Mailer claims that "the source of the Hip is the Negro" (340) and that one might avoid the conformist traps of 1950s Americas by "absorb[ing] the existential synapses of the Negro" (341). Once this occurs the hipster will be able to "accept the terms of death…as immediate danger…divorce oneself from society…[and] exist without roots" (339). There is freedom in this social arrangement, Mailer feels, perhaps the only freedom possible for many in the wake of the crushing conformity of the 1950s justified by the rise of the USSR and Red China. Mailer realizes that U.S. society has begun to demand of its white citizens what it has always expected of Blacks: silence in the face of policies that are unjust and inhumane in exchange for a limited form of safety. Such silence is inimical to the kind of critique of the U.S. that Mailer desperately wished to offer, and to the creation of a truly free nation. Mailer's notions about the origins of Hip depend on the unequal relationship that Blacks have with mainstream white society, their existence between what he calls "totalitarianism and democracy," but what might more accurately be termed the space between white supremacist conservatism and a naive liberalism that believes in incremental progress (340).

While Mailer was certainly never an apologist for segregation or institutional racism, he believed that the Negro's tenuous existence on the margins of society granted him a valuable perspective, just as his own presence on the margins did. Negroes, to their credit, had long ago ceased subscribing to the myth of the United States as a virtuous democratic meritocracy that honored hard work. Conversely, clinging to this myth allowed Cold War whites, in their obsessive struggle to achieve sub-urban

prosperity, to excuse and endure the mendacity of Senator McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee and the many loyalty boards that his work inspired. Mailer thinks that the racist exclusion of Blacks from mainstream society enables them to in fact be more insightful and ethical by virtue of their skepticism about the American creed, and whites would benefit, indeed the hipster has already benefited, by adopting "a black man's code to fit their facts" (341), the rebellious worldview that "in a bad world there is no love non mercy nor charity nor justice unless a man can keep his courage" (340). This would certainly be a radical thing for a well-adjusted suburban commuter to believe in the 1950s, but Mailer asserted that without a critical perspective of this kind, American discourse would remain toothless.

Despite the essay's embrace of violence and interracial sex , discourse is finally what "The White Negro" is all about.[31] The white Negro is born of "a ménage-á-trois" between "the bohemian…the juvenile delinquent [and] the Negro" and in the mouth of this infant hipster "was the language of Hip [which] gave expression to abstract states of feeling which all could share, at least all who were Hip" (340). The language of Hip is, according to Mailer "a set of subtle indications of their success or failure in the competition for pleasure" (349). And so, Mailer predicts that a universal and critical language of protest and pleasure will emerge out of a nascent counter-culture involving those excluded from the dominant discourse of the day, "a language of energy, how it is found, how it is lost" (349). Mailer felt that "Hip [is] a special language...that cannot really be taught—if one shares none of the experiences of elation and exhaustion which it is equipped to describe," but in an age where everyone lives on edge as Sputnik orbits the globe, few can rationally be free of the elation and exhaustion he describes (348). Mailer hopes he has discovered at last a truly American discourse that knows of Marx yet is not

bound by him, that comprehends Freud yet finds him absurd, that enjoys a privileged outsider status in a revelatory culture that one can only truly understand by experiencing it.

For Mailer the most important aspect of the language of the Hip is not the common vocabulary this subgroup shares, nor that vocabulary's potential application to the society at large, but the kind of interpretations made possible by that language. Mailer invents a scenario to demonstrate his point invoking the word "swing," an example that allows him to return, in a roundabout fashion, to the issues he first raised in his four paragraph first draft.[32] Mailer claims to have witnessed an illiterate "Negro friend" having an intense conversation with a white girl who had graduated from college a few years before. Mailer's unnamed Black friend possesses "an extraordinary ear and a fine sense of mimicry" that allowed him to "respond to one or another facet of her doubts" (350). Mailer concludes that example by claiming

> The Negro was not learning anything about the merits or demerits of the argument, but he was learning a great deal about a type of girl he had never met before….Being unable to read and write, he could hardly be interested in ideas nearly as much as in lifemanship, and so…he sensed her character (and the values of her social type) by swinging with the nuances of her voice (350-1).

Mailer avoids mentioning just what the illiterate Negro's swing accomplished, but his example suggests that the white girl took Black man to bed and received some valuable lifemanship of her own.[33] Mailer suggests here that the language of Hip enables freedom by equipping to hipster with the skills to deconstruct the dominant discourse in order to produce a counter-narrative, and even if the only content of that counter-narrative is a racially transgressive coupling, once expressed it permits further destabilizations.[34]

The hipster achieves a Nietzschean kind of freedom, by refusing the standards of society and embracing all the radical potentialities of his existence, which are simultaneously denied and permitted by the repressive language of American society. There are limits to this freedom, however, for "Hip sees the context as generally dominating the man…because his character is less significant that the context in which he must function" (353). The language of Hip does not, then, grant an anarchic critical freedom, but an exploratory and testing freedom, eager to ascertain what real and imagined limits each context presents.[35] The language of Hip enables greater expression than the empty dialog permitted by the conformist 1950s, and this expressiveness is theoretically available to all who are willing to 'get with it.'

Having articulated the revolutionary possibilities of a new sensibility possessed by and an emerging multi-ethnic subculture, Mailer returns to themes he explored in his final *Voice* column and attempted to clarify in his four-paragraph first draft. For, while Mailer has demonstrated the emancipatory potential of Hip's language, there remains no guarantee that the governing forces in American society would permit Hip to flourish. Indeed, according to Mailer, "the future of the hipster…[and] the organic growth of Hip depends on whether the Negro emerges as a dominant force in American life" (355-6). Mailer's next point is plainly a refinement of the crude soliloquy that so upset Faulkner:

> Since the Negro knows more about the ugliness and danger of life than the white, it is probable that if the Negro can win his equality, he will possess a potential superiority, a superiority so feared that the fear itself has become the underground drama of domestic politics. Like all conservative political fear it is the fear of unforeseeable consequences, for the Negro's equality would tear a profound shift

> into the psychology, the sexuality, and the moral imagination of every white alive (356).

Given the potential shift represented by the full integration of the Negro into society, Mailer supposes that liberal suppositions, which are simply another form of conventional discourse, might prove false because "for the average liberal whose mind has been dulled by…the professional liberal, miscegenation is not an issue because he has been told that the Negro does not desire it" (356). The many evenings Mailer spent in jazz clubs, and the language of Hip that derives from this experience suggests to him that the opposite may in fact be true. Indeed, Mailer feels that the desire to experience a forbidden sexuality must either continue to "vent itself nihilistically or become turned into the cold murderous liquidations of the totalitarian state" (357) through systemic repression. With his knack for forecasting political and cultural life in the U.S., Mailer speculates on the final shape of American society once Blacks have achieved parity, hoping that when this occurs "the mean empty hypocrisies of mass conformity will no longer work….and Hip would end up being absorbed" into the dominant discourse (356). By asserting that Negroes were more in touch with their sexuality, Mailer unwittingly supports a Southern discourse that suggests that African Americans were inherently sinful creatures. His brilliance lies in asserting that it is only through adopting the carriers of the original sin can white Americans avoid hell on earth.

Mailer concludes his essay by wondering if "it is perhaps possible that the Negro holds more of the tail of the expanding elephant of the truth that the radical" and it seems clear where Mailer falls on this issue (357). For Mailer the philosophy articulated in "The White Negro" enables him to complete his reorientation by abandoning his respectable whiteness to achieve an existential solidarity with other marginal groups by

becoming a hipster. Mailer rejects the incremental progress preferred by liberals, instead espousing a philosophy of contact, conflict and genuine confrontation, a grappling that could be sexual, intellectual or physical in nature. This is his theory of the psychotic, of men (and presumably Mailer is one of these men) so committed to testing the possibilities of themselves and their society that they risk the destruction of both to achieve its, and their, highest expression.[36] This is also, tellingly, the sort of statement that one might have expected to hear from radical abolitionists one hundred years prior. Like those earlier exemplars, Mailer believes that the United States can only be a just society through the achievement of some sort of social equality for its Black citizens.

With this essay, Mailer identifies for a nation of Sam Slavodas a method of defying American conformist power that challenges the logic of that society through disengagement as well as confrontation. Indeed, Mailer alludes in "The Man Who Studied Yoga" to a generation sensitive to the ethos of the hipster, the "kids" who "merely drift" yet have enough savvy to wonder of their parents "why are you so anxious?" (170-1). What the respectable middle class perceives as purposeless wandering, Mailer understands as a determination to escape the strictures of an increasingly conservative society. According to Mailer this radical potential was evinced in the hipster's sexual attitudes and appetites which placed them into intimate relationships with one another, involving them in a contest of desire that evokes Sam's 18th century notion of power. Indeed Sam and the hipster function as reflections of one another with Sam relishing superficial public interactions at parties but unable to experience communion with his wife, while the hipster viewed public mingling as merely a preliminary step for the greater intimacy to follow. Mailer trusted that the hipster's inversion of the public/private sphere presaged other inversions to come and hopes that

the children of Sam Slavoda will mature into psychotic "white Negroes" who refuse to be cowed into a useless anxiety by the crushing circumstances of their existence.

With the publication of "The White Negro" Mailer created a perspective that matched the masculine style that he had excavated during his revisions of *The Deer Park*. For Mailer the psychopath, both internal and external, became his muse and he would devote the next twenty-two years, from 1957's "The White Negro" to 1979's *The Executioner's Song*, to varied (though invariably first person) considerations of this character. Mailer became over this period the primary celebrity writer of the era in that many more people knew his face and one or two details about his life than had read his books. This tendency made it difficult for his contemporaries to get a hold of his writing, for there was always the temptation to match the content of his prose with his latest exploit. Mailer, I think, deserves better, and his flaws and strengths as a writer are more readily appreciated if one divorces them from the public persona he created, a persona that often threatened to supersede the other Norman Mailer, the literary iconoclast determined to make his public see the world in a strange new way. With "The White Negro" Mailer finally discovered a program that he could articulate to his readership, a provocative point of view that could guide his own political and sexual performance while rousing his audience from their middle class obsessions with comfort and the Cold War.

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[1] Peter Manso, *Norman Mailer*, 119

[2] *Advertisements for Myself*, 92.

[3] Truman Capote's refusal to collaborate any further with his cousin may have had something to do with Lee's retirement.

[4] Although critical respect is itself a form of currency, so perhaps it might be more accurate to state that Mailer sought compensation of a different kind.

[5] Richard Poirier calls *Advertisements* "a turning point in Mailer's career: being a remarkable literary critic, he was able there to expose the previously submerged, often disguised, and only tentatively operative forces that had been at work in him" (*Norman Mailer*, 59).

[6] Menand, Louis. "Norman Mailer in His Time" *American Studies,* 147.

[7] Mailer's father, who worked in a low-level government position in New Jersey, was briefly the subject of HUAC investigation which sought to determine if Mailer's father shared his son's political views. See Manso, 154.

[8] Dearborn, 68.

[9]Tellingly, Mailer does not reprint this speech in *Advertisements*although the speech was excerpted in the 27 March 1949 *New York Times.*

[10] Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, 72-3.

[11] By Richard Poirier's estimation, despite its many flaws "*Barbary Shore* is nonetheless marked by passages of lurid, startling brilliance" (Manso, 65).

[12] Apparently, while in Paris, Mailer missed the news that Sartre had declared *Native Son* the first existentialist novel in America.

[13] "The White Negro," 339

[14] I certainly do not mean to suggest that modernist or social realist texts were or are moribund, simply that Mailer's willingness to abandon the more contemporary idiom he created for *The Naked and the Dead* for these forms in *Barbary Shore* demonstrates his search for a literary style all his own.

[15] The God That Failed would exemplify the crisis of faith Marxist writers went through as Hitler rose to power and the left stood by impotently. Louis Menand makes this point about Richard Wright in "Richard Wright: The Hammer and the Nail" in *American Studies*. Some writers in the 1950s were compelled by McCarthyism to rethink their political commitments, but many became dissatisfied with Communism during the war.

[16]"A Good Deal of Trauma" the Impact of McCarthyism, chapter ten of Ellen Schrecker's *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* attempts to address this issue.

[17] Dearborn, 92.

[18] For example, in *Must You Conform*, Lindner claims that "there exists *nothing* [in contemporary society] which does not require the young to conform, to adjust, to submit, to become regimented. Examine religion, education, psychology, social work,

philosophy, recreation, pediatrics…each is infused with the rot-producing idea that the salvation of individual and of society depends upon conformity and adjustment" (27-8).

[19] One wonders what the young Mailer would have made of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*.

[20] Mailer's critique of American society predates Marcuse's study, of course. As a result, I would add Marcuse to the list of thinkers that Mailer anticipates (McCann, 295).

[21] Seemingly every conversation in the novel involves a misunderstanding, and characters declare their love for one another at inopportune times, either too early or too late. Eitel ultimately fails because he cannot declare his love for Elena, while Sergius realizes his love for Lulu after forces conspire to break them apart.

[22] Marion Faye is based on Mickey Jelke, a New York pimp who happened to be the scion of rich socialites from the Upper East Side, Dearborn, 101.

[23] A transcript of the Senate hearing may be found at http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Have_you_no_sense_of_decency.htm

[24] A sense of exactly how much help Mailer offered, aside from an initial cash stake, depends on your source. In Mailer's eyes he was essential.

[25] King would give the *Voice* an interview in 1965 an indication of how quickly the paper grew to prominence.

[26] I distinguish King's program of direct action and confrontation from the juridical efforts of the NAACP and the rhetorical efforts of forbearers of the modern Civil Rights Movement. King's program, while non-violent, appealed to Mailer even as it dismayed other liberals.

[27] Mailer includes an excerpt from "The Hip and the Square" in *Advertisements.*

[28] Mailer, *The Time of Our Time*, 15. The title of this collection recalls his short story, "The Time of Her Time," included in *Advertisements* where Mailer first attempts the new literary style, that writing "The White Negro" allowed him to achieve.

[29]According to Rhoda Wolf, wife of Dan Wolf one of Mailer's partners in *The Village Voice* "When he'd been planning *The Deer Park* he'd started picking people's brains for their insights into the unconscious. He was doing it with Lindner, the psychiatrist, and also with Dan, trying to get information about psychoanalysis. I was in Reichian therapy, and he was asking me all sorts of questions, maybe because he was turned on by Reich. This was back in '53 and '54" (Manso *Mailer: His Life and Times*, 231).

[30] As his biographer Mary Dearborn notes, "However ridiculous Mailer's extrapolation of issues about masculinity from a musical movement might seem, his exploration of the

jazz world shows his creative process at work. He found, in this culture, themes that obsessed him personally: in this case, an apprehension approaching paranoia about black male sexuality and his own ability to measure up… (Dearborn, 117).

[31] Poirier asserts that "many of [Mailer's] arguments about historical or social change are really arguments about changes in the language, changes in verbal fashion" (65).

[32] I am almost certain Mailer invented his illiterate "Negro friend," much as he did the thief and madam in his letter to Faulkner.

[33] Mailer states parenthetically some pages later that "it is the ultimate human right of the Negro to mate with the white" (356).

[34] The modern reader is of course likely to find this example wholly ridiculous, in that there is nothing particularly subversive or novel about a man at a party not actually listening to what the woman he is in conversation with is saying but rather what her subtext reveals about the prospect that the two of them will have sex. And while interracial relationships have indeed served as a catalyst for change at a social level, if only because of the contested legal status of the progeny of such affairs, the kind coupling that Mailer describes here would seemingly only resonate on a personal level.

[35] One might perceive Till's alleged wolf whistle an example of Hip language: a risky communication designed to explore the possibilities of a context others perceived as fixed.

[36] Interestingly, perhaps the best literary example of such a man in not *An American Dream's* Stephen Rojack, who after all flees a stable upper middle–class life, but Ken Kesey's McMurphy from his *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1963), a character truly at the mercy of the dehumanizing system that Mailer hopes to escape.

Chapter Three

"The Whole Heart of Fiction:" Eudora Welty inside the Closed Society

> The South [is] the only place in the western world where a man could become a liberal simply by urging that people obey the law.
>
> Hodding Carter, 1949.[1]

> Mississippi has been a white-supremacy state since its beginning. These rednecks are capable of violence. That's why they make good soldiers, why we use them to lead night patrols in our wars….They may not read much, but they now own television sets. And when they hear on TV every day that everybody in Mississippi is a stupid, tobacco-chewing bigot, then a murder case…is as predictable as sunrise.
>
> An unnamed Mississippi businessman to William Bradford Huie, 1964[2]

> Morality as shown through human relationships is the whole heart of fiction
>
> Eudora Welty, 1965

Eudora Welty, an incredibly productive writer for most of her career, published very little between 1955 and 1970, a period that coincides almost perfectly with the emergence of the civil rights movement as the dominant political and social narrative in the United States. These fifteen years contrast with the fourteen year period from the debut of her first story collection in 1941 until 1955, when Welty produced a major work every two years, three novels and four collections of short stories in all, as well as dozens

of book reviews and other essays.[3] The only manuscript Welty produced between 1955 and 1970, during an increasingly trying time in her life, was a brief children's story called *The Shoe Bird* to free herself of her commitment to Harcourt Brace.[4] Welty neglected her writing during this period in part because her two brothers and her mother lost their health, and Welty, unmarried and childless, devout daughter and sibling, felt obligated to assist her ailing family in every way that she could.[5]

Welty was unable to accommodate her work because her family, particularly her demanding mother Chestina who invariably drove off the homecare nurses Welty retained, was difficult to care for.[6] Despite this, Welty refused to place her mother in a nursing home unless she was called away from Jackson to lecture, which she did extensively throughout this period to make ends meet. Twice Welty submitted to the concerns of her friends and sent her mother to the Martha Coker Convalescent Home in Yazoo City, Mississippi, 50 miles from her hometown of Jackson, but she squandered any time that she gained by this arrangement by making the 100 mile trip to visit her mother several times a week. As a result of her daughter's devotion, Chestina Welty spent much of the final decade of her life at home, while Eudora's production slowed almost to a halt. Despite Welty's faithfulness to family, tragedy struck repeatedly during this period: her brother Walter died on Jan 9th 1959, her mother on January 20th 1966 and her brother Edward four days later on January 24th.[7] Freed from her familial duties, Welty threw herself back into her work, producing her two finest novels, *Losing Battles* (1970), which she had worked on intermittently while caring for her family, and *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972), for which she won the Pulitzer Prize.

From 1955 through 1968, the material that would become *Losing Battles* consumed most of the time that Welty could wrench from her family. Indeed, her need to work on the novel was so pressing that she sometimes wrote notes for her draft while driving. Yet, despite devoting almost all her creative time to her novel, Welty published three important texts about the civil rights movement during this period, texts that engage the Black textual tradition by condemning Mississippi's repression of dissent and its violent opposition to civil rights. "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" (1963), and "The Demonstrators" (1966) are the last two short stories that Welty, a master of the form, published in her life. The third civil rights text, an essay titled "Must the Novelist Crusade?" (1965), grew out of a talk Welty gave at Jackson's Millsaps College the year before, and considers the fiction writer's responsibility to depicting the exigencies of the present in her work.[8] Given the stresses associated with caring for her family while dashing across the country to lecture, and the fact Welty tried to work on *Losing Battles* whenever she could find the peace and energy, that she produced these three texts speaks to how necessary they were to her.[9] Welty claimed that "Where is the Voice Coming From?" "pushed up through something else I was working on," and her other civil rights texts imposed themselves upon her in similar fashion, forcing Welty to set aside precious time to contemplate and complete them.[10] While Welty chose to avoid marches and demonstrations, these three texts collectively were her response to the problem of civil rights in Mississippi.

Welty, an incredibly private person, generally refused to detail her creative process, even denying, in the face of friends and critics who knew better, that *The Optimist's Daughter* was in any way autobiographical. Still, ten years after the

publication of "Where is the Voice Coming From?" Jonathan Yardley reported "if there is anything in [Welty's] routine that is virtually inviolable, it is the NBC Evening News, which comes on in Jackson at 5:30PM…. She also listens to the radio news before going to bed, and she enjoys talking politics 'among friends.'"[11] One wonders when Welty developed her viewing habits, for the NBC affiliate in Jackson is WLBT, the controversial station that broadcast Medgar Evers' 20 May 1963 rebuttal to Jackson's Mayor Allen Thompson, a speech that led to Evers' murder weeks later on 12 June. Evers' assassination inspired Welty to compose "Where is the Voice Coming From?" and the story "begins at that crossroads of television and life where Americans had begun to live."[12]

The rapid expansion of television in the United States after World War II occurred everywhere except the South, in part because the FCC ceased licensing new stations from 1948 through 1952 due to a lack of infrastructure and technical problems. This freeze "left Arkansas, Mississippi and South Carolina completely without television at least until 1953" and, I suspect, similarly effected large sections of neighboring states like Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Georgia, despite affiliates that served population centers in New Orleans, Atlanta, Mobile and Miami.[13] Television expanded rapidly throughout the South once the technical issues were resolved, with Jackson's first station, WJTV, going on-air in January of 1953, and its competitor WLBT debuting in December of the same year. WLBT may have been Welty's network of choice because her father helped build the Lamar Life Insurance building, from which the station broadcast. Christian Welty joined Lamar Life soon after its incorporation, eventually rising to vice president of the firm, and in 1923 he was tasked with commissioning the new

headquarters for the rapidly growing concern. Christian "visited insurance buildings all around the country [and hired] the architects Sanguient-Staats & Hedrick of Forth Worth" to design the building which was "thirteen stories tall and topped with a clock tower," a logical place for a television transceiver. Christian "took his family to see the building often during its construction. The five of them would climb to the top by the fire escape and look at all Jackson spread below," and it is easy to imagine Welty, with her keen sense of history and place, favoring WLBT over its slightly older rival because of this personal connection.[14]

Jackson's television stations arrived just in time to chronicle the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and the murder of Emmett Till in 1954. For whites in Mississippi and other parts of the deep South where television was unknown prior to 1953, the televised media's treatment of Emmett Till's wake in Chicago and murder trial in Mississippi must have seemed intrusive, offensive, and insensitive to their mores; a definite threat to the Southern way of life. The perceived hostility of the national networks caused many affiliates throughout the South to censor broadcasts, including the evening news and important civil rights documentaries. Although nominally an NBC affiliate, WLBT refused to air the *NBC White Paper* "Sit-in" episode, an investigation into the causes and ramifications of the sit-in student movement that was spreading through the South.[15] As a result of this decision WLBT came under dual pressures: NBC wanted its broadcasts transmitted across the nation without alteration in order to justify the rates it billed sponsors,[16] while the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) petitioned the FCC, demanding equal time on WLBT to rebut the segregationist

politicians who purchased blocks of time at the station.[17] The progressive Mississippi journalist Hodding Carter characterized Fred Beard, the station manager at WLBT, as "an unofficial mouthpiece for the total resistance line of" local politicians, and the FCC investigation that resulted from the complaints of SNCC and the NAACP found him "the most active of all broadcasters in the use of radio and television to promote segregation and to oppose federal intervention."[18] With his station in danger of losing its broadcasting license, Beard permitted Evers to respond to an earlier broadcast by Jackson Mayor Allen Thompson the state on 20 May 1963.

We cannot be certain if Welty actually saw Evers' seventeen-minute speech, which interrupted the local broadcast of "The Price is Right," and the historical record does not suggest that the two Jackson luminaries ever met. However, given recent events in Welty's life, she was probably keenly interested in Evers. In the late 1950s, Welty "began to attend events at Tougaloo Southern Christian College," a historically Black college "just north of Jackson." These events were "sponsored by the Social Sciences Forum….as part of an effort to provide a 'model of an integrated society.'" Welty chose to attend seminars at Tougaloo even though the school was almost certainly under surveillance by the newly formed Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission and the local Citizens' Council. In fact, Welty gave a lecture at the Forum at Tougaloo "five months after a 1958 furor about the Millsaps College Religious Forum, which had dared to invite integrationists to speak" and resulted in the re-segregation of public events at Millsaps, Jackson's leading educational institution.[19] Welty would have been acutely aware of the Council's presence in Jackson because in 1958 they "had gone block by block through the city to recruit new members. At the same time, [the Council]

undertook to survey the "expected conduct" of every white resident in Jackson" something that must have greatly perturbed the independent Welty.[20]

Alarmed by the *Brown* decision and the national broadcast media's perspective towards civil rights, and determined to defeat any effort to alter its cherished way of life, segregationists in Mississippi created the Citizens' Councils and the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission to beat back the threat of integration. A series of community-wide grassroots organizations committed to the maintenance of segregation, the Citizens Councils drew its membership from the elite class in the state, a small but influential group that enabled the Councils to exact legal and extra-legal reprisals against any in the local community who sought to change Mississippi's way of life.[21] The Councils, fearful of the Warren Court and the NAACP's legendary team of lawyers, successfully lobbied in 1956 for the creation of a new government agency, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, "whose purpose was to redefine the struggle over Civil Rights in Mississippi. Instead of dealing with issues of segregation and civil rights, the Sovereignty Commission focused on the federal government's encroachment on the state's sovereignty."[22] "These extremists of the right" were "kept at arms length" by traditional Mississippi politicians until the 1960 election, after which the Councils and the Commission controlled nearly all political and economic activity in the state. Having achieved hegemony, these two groups worked to create a disciplinary society where the omnipresent threat of reprisals narrowed permissible conduct for whites and Blacks by coercing anyone sympathetic to the integrationist goals of the civil rights movement into silence.[23]

Welty's participation in a forum at Tougaloo in defiance of local custom might have escaped notice in 1958, but five years later, a voting project led by SNCC and the

Medgar Evers led Mississippi chapter of the NAACP challenged segregation throughout the state. Welty was scheduled to address the Southern Literary Festival, held that year at Millsaps, on 18 April 1963, and the Festival's policy welcomed all races. Millsaps College, in an effort to appease the Council and the Commission, continued to segregate its public events even though most of the college's professors opposed this practice. Millsaps officials anticipated a problem if the Commission or the Council learned that seating at the Festival was on a first come, first serve basis. Welty insisted that her lecture remain open to all, and her talk attracted an interracial audience, including Tougaloo professor and Evers associate John Salter and a group of his students, who had been turned away from another event at Millsaps two weeks earlier.[24]

In light of the sensibility Welty demonstrated by giving these lectures, and given "widespread advance publicity" of Evers' appearance on television, she almost certainly watched his talk on 20 May.[25] Evers spoke as a lifelong native of Mississippi, someone who knew intimately the place he was struggling to change, and his dignified on air presence suggested Mississippi was taking steps towards achieving the model of an integrated society sought by Tougaloo. Evers' speech received even greater media coverage after it aired, and Welty certainly discussed it, perhaps with her dear friend Charlotte Capers, then director of Mississippi's department of Archives and History, who once invited Welty to review Richard Wright's *Black Boy* for the *Journal of Mississippi History*.[26] In any event, Welty certainly thought carefully about the possible consequences of Evers televised appearance, as evidenced by "Where is the Voice Coming From?"

After making his speech on WBLT, "Evers…entered a new, ultimately fatal zone of notoriety." Most people in the state knew Evers' name, but he was not as instantaneously recognizable as James Meredith, who integrated the University of Mississippi the previous year, as indicated by the fact that of the "twenty-nine viewers who called [WLBT] to complain, only one seemed to know who Evers was; eight indignantly demanded the impertinent black man's name."[27] In the aftermath of the speech, segregationist Mississippians moved quickly to reassert thier dominance, savagely beating John Salter and his Tougaloo students when they attempted a sit-in eight days after the broadcast. Unfortunately for the defenders of tradition, network television captured the attempted sit-in and the resultant beatings, as well as the utter lack of a response by Jackson police officers present on the scene, leading to a national outcry that Jackson's business class found alarming.[28] Two weeks after the aborted sit-in, Medgar Evers was shot in the back while coming home from a long day at work, an act of such spectacularly poor timing that segregationist governor Ross Barnett, segregationist mayor Thompson and the segregationist *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* all issued condemnations of his murder and posted cash rewards for information leading to the capture of his assassin.[29]

Welty composed "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" after learning of Evers' death, revising the story over the next few days before sending it to her agent Diarmuid Russell in New York. Russell sold the story to the *New Yorker*, and because Welty worked so quickly and so surely on it, her text arrived in New York before Jackson officers made an arrest in the case.[30] Welty would later report that she chose to tell the story in first person monologue because she had "lived all my life where it happened," and could create an assassin whose inner life and violent deeds exemplified the fatal logic

espoused by Councils and the Commission without descending into caricature.[31] Welty adhered as closely as possible to the reported facts of the Evers' case, later altering a few details over the phone, at the request of William Maxwell, fiction editor at the *New Yorker*, so as not to prejudice the trial of a recently apprehended suspect. Welty's final revision, though not of her own choosing, allowed her to add a level of allusion to the story that strict reportage might not have permitted.

Welty changed the name of the city where the assassination took place from Jackson to Thermopylae, the valley where Spartan forces defended the Greek city-states against an invading Persian army. Though vastly outnumbered, the Spartans, led by Leonidas, held the mountain pass at Thermopylae for days, frustrating the Persian despot Xerxes. Indeed, the Spartans were undone not by their lack of numbers but by treachery and betrayal, and they regrouped a decade later and routed the Persian army. By renaming her native city Thermopylae, Welty positions Jackson as the crucial pass in the fight for civil rights, valorizing the resolve of civil rights leaders like Evers who remain at their posts though outmanned and facing the threat of death. This construction, which equates segregationist Mississippians to pagan Persians, reverses Southerners' central myth of themselves as the noble descendents of a virtuous and persecuted Christian people. Indeed, Evers seems the closest parallel to Leonides, who placed fealty to the Athenian rule of law above his own desires and Spartan customs, in sharp contrast to the coerced and conscripted Persian forces who served Xerxes out of fear of death.[32]

Welty also changed Medgar Evers's name to Roland Summers, and this alteration serves as another indication of her intent. Roland was a mythic warrior, martyred in service to King Charlemagne during Charlemagne's quest to rid Spain of the Moors who

controlled that nation, and his death, like Leonides, occurs because of treachery on the part of those ostensibly allied to his cause.[33] Betrayed and surrounded by his enemies, Roland acquits himself in combat with such valor that when Charlemagne learns of how nobly Roland died he renews his campaign against Spain's conquerors. Instead of dooming the movement, Roland's death merely delays the inevitable return of civilized Christian righteousness.[34] By conflating Evers with Roland, Welty suggests that just as Roland's king avenged him and achieved victory in Spain, so will Evers' ally Martin Luther King avenge Evers and ensure that the change he worked towards in the state becomes reality.[35] The vitiation of the social contract that cost Evers his life, as with the betrayals of Roland and Leonides, prepares the way for a more thoroughgoing triumph. These subtle changes indicate how completely this story embodies the Black textual tradition, yet, so perfectly does Welty evoke the killer's voice in "Where is the Voice Coming From," that it is easy to overlook the allusions that signaled her authorial intent.

Welty's speaker constantly blends the past and present tenses in the monologue, a shift that positions his audience as sympathetic companions listening to an acquaintance unburden himself about his recent deeds. The speaker's presumption of intimacy forces the reader to identify with the mix of nativist pride and anger roiling below the surface of the speaker's narrative, as well as his anxiety at the relationship between the civil rights movement and television. The speaker begins by recounting how he told his wife to "reach up and turn [the television] off. You don't have to set and look at a black nigger face no longer than you want to…It's still a free country."[36] This comment reminds both the speaker and his spouse that whites still possess the power in Southern society, and he realizes that "I could find right exactly where…that nigger's living that's asking for equal

time….without a bit of trouble to me" (603). Notice the slippage here between the phrase equal time and the concept of equality. Roland has already achieved equal time simply by appearing on rigidly controlled Southern television, time he uses to demands full equality for all Blacks, a distinction the speaker cannot bring himself to understand. Instead, the speaker resolves to trump Roland's televisual equality with an act of violence that demonstrates his superiority.

The speaker's claim that he could easily find Roland suggests familiarity with the Black community, and indicates the kind of society he wishes to preserve. He reveals, in a curious circumlocution, that although he knows how to locate the civil rights leader, "I ain't saying it might not be because that's pretty close to where I live" (603). In other words, the speaker knows how to find Roland not because the speaker lives in close proximity to Black people, but because the Black section of town is "where you all go for the thing you want when you want it the most. Ain't that right?" (603). In this indirect fashion, the speaker admits that his knowledge of the Black community derives from his prurient desires, because like many segregationist white men, he heads to the Black side of town when he wants extramarital sex so badly that he is willing to pay for it, or rape for it. The speaker's rhetorical question (Ain't that right?), demonstrates his expectation that his listeners understand, participate in, and approve of this arrangement, suggesting that the speaker murders less to protect a cherished way of life than to maintain a society where Black men lack a political voice and Black women's bodies remain available for illicit white pleasure.

While describing the route he took to Roland's neighborhood, the speaker appallingly notes "his street's been paved" (603). Based on the speaker's use of the past

tense here, there are two possible reasons for his outrage: either the road wasn't paved a few years ago, and has been since the civil rights demonstrations started, or the Black community chose to pave this road despite the continued indifference of the city. Either way, the paved road indicates increased affluence and political efficacy on behalf of the Black community, evoking resentment and economic insecurity from the speaker.[37] As the speaker arrives at Roland's vacant driveway, the civil rights leader is away, "out planning still some other way to do what we tell 'em they can't" (603). In the mind of the killer, the paved driveway with its absent car symbolizes the gains made in the face of white intransigence by the Black community in their continuing efforts to defeat Jim Crow. In contrast to Roland, the speaker must borrow his transportation from a relative, linking the possession of a car and a paved drive in the speaker's mind as an indication of Roland's upward mobility, his material superiority to Southern working class whites.

Despite the late hour, the speaker "didn't come expecting not to wait" for his opportunity, and settles in behind a tree so that he won't be seen when his victim returns from his work (603). As the killer describes waiting for Roland, he insists that he does not intend to murder Roland for financial gain nor to curry favor with local politicians, he "ain't ask no Governor Barnett to give me one thing" and expects no reward unless the governor "wants to give me a pat on the back for the trouble" (604).[38] Instead, the speaker contends that he assassinated Roland for his "own pure-D satisfaction," reinforcing the link between white pleasure and the maintenance of white authority over the lives of Black people established with his earlier comments about sex. For Southern whites the potential loss of this control, symbolized by Roland's appearance on television, the irregular hours he keeps, the paved drive and roadway, even the "new

white car" that the civil rights leader is driving when he finally arrives, must be averted at all costs (604).

As if to foreground the maintenance of pleasure that is at the heart of the assassination, the speaker uses words more appropriate for a clandestine meeting with a lover to recall his feelings upon seeing his victim: "I knowed it [was him] when he cut off the car lights and put his foot out and I knowed him standing dark against the light. I knowed him then like I know me now. I knowed him even by his still, listening back" (604). A moment later the speakers recalls being certain that "He had to be the one. He stood right still and waited against the light….He's the one" (604). The sexual undertone that tinges the speaker's apprehension of Roland highlights his need to protect white masculine identity and his individual sense of entitlement by killing Roland in order to maintain intimate, and occasionally carnal, knowledge of and control over Black people.[39]

At the moment the speaker penetrates the body of his masculine counterpart, his narrative retreats from the assumptions and fears that drove him to act. The speaker now claims he has "[n]ever seen him before, never seen him since, never seen anything of his black face but his picture, never seen his face **alive**, any time at all, or anywheres, and didn't want to, need to, never hope to see that face and never will" (604, my emphasis). Embedded amid the serial contradictions of this statement is a Derridian desire on the part of the speaker to deny the power of the televisual image by privileging actual physical presence.[40] The speaker's reasoning here suggests that segregationist Southerners can escape culpability by ignoring the moral appeals contained in the televised coverage of the civil rights movement because television presents mere images

and not living men. This posture allows the speaker to ignore the moral obligation of Medgar Evers' speech, as well as the international outrage and demands for change that images of noble Black suffering evoked outside the South. By the logic of the speaker, the televised images convey an inauthentic humanity and thus generate a false moral appeal, one that Southerners are free to ignore.

Having felled his man with one shot "there on his paved driveway," the speaker explains his rationale for murder to his victim:

> Roland? There was one way left, for me to be ahead of you and stay ahead of you, by Dad, and I just taken it. Now I'm alive and you ain't. We ain't never now, never going to be equals and you know why? One of us is dead. What about that, Roland? …Well, **you** seen to it, didn't**you** …(604, my emphasis).

This chilling declaration again reveals the desire to preserve a society that places the lowliest white Southerners above any and all Black people as the true motivation behind the massive resistance to civil rights. While disingenuous politicians might attempt to justify the maintenance of segregation through legalistic arguments about states' rights or sentimental claims about preserving the Southern way of life, in the end all such assertions disguise a white desire to "stay ahead." In the speaker's case, he recognizes that white privilege is the only thing granting him superiority over his victim, yet even then he denies his culpability by displacing his capacity for violence onto Roland. "**You** seen to it" suggests that Roland forced his hand by demanding equality and is culpable for his own murder, revealing a certain powerlessness in the very assertion of power the speaker hopes will protect his superiority. The assassin speaks with Roland only when the civil rights leader can no longer contest his claims as he did the mayor's, a reminder that segregationist logic fails to withstand scrutiny and must continually deflect attention

via serial acts of aggression defending the inalienable rights promised by an illegitimate system.

The assassin watches as Roland's wife comes to the porch to find her husband murdered. He then drops his rifle and hurries away from the scene of the crime, but not before noticing the fine condition of Roland's lawn and that his wife left several lights on to greet her husband: "That nigger wife of his, she wanted nice grass! I bet **my wife** would hate to **pay** her water-bill. And for burning her electricity" (605, my emphasis). This observation indicates that his wife is the breadwinner in his household, not the speaker, a reversal that he must find galling. Later, he will complain that his wife "didn't even leave a light burning [for me] when [she] went to bed" spoiling his triumphant return by reminding him of the economic disparity between he and Roland, and of his failure as a wage earner (605). The assassin's inability to achieve a comfortably suburban lifestyle, one seemingly attainable for everyone born free white and male in the post-World War II United States, contributes to his need to preserve his standing in the racial hierarchy by bloodshed since he cannot afford his own car, to water his lawn, or even to burn lights after midnight. Roland's speech interrupted the fetishized presentation of middle class living standards on "The Price Is Right", and the civil rights leader's attainment of this standard of living only heightens the assassin's economic insecurity.

The speaker informs his wife of his deeds the next morning, and her first question is "Didn't the skeeters bite you?" (605). The wife then begins to undermine the assassin's internal narrative, reminding him that the local newspaper had called for someone to "get some of these agitators out of Thermopylae. Didn't the fella keep

drumming it in, what a good idea? The one that writes a column ever' day?" to which the assassin, mortified at this challenge to his accomplishment, grumbles, "find *some* way I don't get the credit" (605). She then asks, with the persistence of a wife, "Don't you ever skim the paper?" (605). This exchange, in which the speaker's wife seems not in the least bit discomforted to learn that her husband murdered a man the previous night, refutes any idealized sentiment that Welty's audience might have had about the tender sensibilities of Southern belles, whose precarious psychosexual status was an oft cited justification for segregation. The speaker corrects his wife, replying that he did not act because a columnist inspired him, or out of civic duty "to Thermopylae. Didn't do it for you. Hell, any more'n I'd do something or other for them Kennedys!" (605). By grouping his wife with the meddling Kennedy brothers, who together were responsible for James Meredith's presence at Ole Miss, the speaker equates her with other irksome know-it-alls who seek to impose their own interpretations on the thoughts and actions of white men defending Southern culture. The wife's comments also remind the reader that the editorial positions of local and the national media towards the civil rights movement were wildly divergent in 1963.

Southern newspapers tended to fashion a reality that reflected the values of the local community, and were far more censorious than television broadcasts, with significant exceptions such as Hodding Carter's *Delta Democrat-Times*. If newspaper consumption enables a disparate society to fashion an image of itself as a nation, then Southern papers during the civil rights movement helped their readers ignore the abuses committed by a segregated society by assigning blame for the violation on civil rights workers or the federal government.[41] So, while the assassin may have been genuinely

ignorant about the local columnist who advocated violence against civil rights agitators, he participates in a regional narrative that will excuse, if not valorize, his action, one that is constantly at odds with the national narrative conveyed on television. His wife reminds him of this divergence by noting that Roland's funeral "will get him right back on TV" and she then chides him for not keeping up with current events, "Didn't you hear the news? The N. double A. C. P. is fixing to send somebody to Thermopylae. Why couldn't you have waited? You might could have got you somebody better" (605). The speaker, in an aside to his audience, minimizes any regrets he might have about sharing with his wife by mockingly noting, "I reckon you have to tell *somebody*" (605). Still, even as she approves of the killing, his wife's inability to collaborate in the speaker's attempts to understand himself as a heroic individual rather than a pawn of a segregationist society necessitates his first person account of his deeds before a more sympathetic audience.

The speaker's recollections take a turn when he tells his wife that he left the gun near the scene of the crime. When she expresses dismay at losing their "protection", he indicts the environment for his mistake, complaining "of ever'thing in the world being just that hot to the touch! The keys to the truck, the doorknob, the bedsheet, ever'thing, its all like a stove lid. There just ain't much going that's worth holding onto it no more" (606). This statement suggests, for the first time in the speaker's presentation of events, some level of discomfort with his action, as does his wife's exclamation that "it's so hot that even if you get to sleep you wake up feeling like you cried all night!" (606). The couple seems to be preparing itself for the possibility that the speaker may be apprehended for murdering Roland. In order to shift the mood, the speaker's wife tells

him "one more joke before time to get up," that President Kennedy's daughter Caroline "can't wait to grow up big" and marry James Meredith.[42] The speaker's wife heard this joke where she works, "One rich bitch to another one, to make her cackle" (606). The assassin, ignoring his wife's attempt at levity and musing on the local newspaper's call for violence, responds "At least I kept some dern teen-ager from North Thermopylae getting there and doing it first…Driving his own car" (606). The killer, who earlier attributed his deed to Roland's impertinence, now transforms the murder into an act of paternal protection, even as his wife unintentionally reminds him that she is the breadwinner in the family.

Despite his earlier claims to selflessness, the media coverage that the assassination generates perturbs the speaker. The media "don't know the half of it" they "know who Roland Summers was without knowing who I am," and, like his wife predicted, his victim's face is again all over the news (606). Still, with a five hundred dollar reward posted for his arrest, the assassin takes morbid pleasure in knowing that he "is worth a good deal more right now than Roland is" (606). The heat remains as oppressive as it was the previous night, suggesting that the murder provides little relief for the assassin, who remains poor and unknown, who "ain't ever had [a picture] made. Not ever!" (606). When the assassin learns that the local media is speculating that the NAACP "killed Roland Summers…at just the right hour and minute to get the whites in trouble" he sighs, "You can't win" (606). Despite his repeated assertions that he killed Roland for his own satisfaction, the speaker's inability to take credit for his action frustrates him, another reason for his anonymous narrative.

When, the killer goes into town, he finds a "thousand cops crowding ever'where you go, half of them too young to start shaving" (606-7). The narrator finds the presence of these peace officers worse than either the stifling heat or the lack of acclaim for his deed because these "new babyface cops" and their superiors symbolize an expansion of the local bureaucracy which has failed to benefit him. The police presence also represents a newfound inability to effectively police, which is to say terrorize and intimidate, the Black community (607). National television, with its unfortunate habit of broadcasting Southern abuse across the world, engendered at least part of the erosion of Southern law enforcement's faculty. In addition to monitoring the Black community, the police now must attempt to constrain the white community from pursuing a program of extra-legal violence in support of segregation. From the speaker's perspective, officers committed sham acts of intimidation when they arrested Black children for waving American flags because the police could not legally detain minors, and cannot teach them a lesson by beating them severely for fear of having their acts exhibited on television. All parties involved know that the children will soon be released and that the adults responsible for the demonstration "can just get 'em more flags" (607).[43] In yet another attempt to deny culpability, the speaker suggests here that law enforcement's recent reluctance to suppress the dissent emerging from the Black community compells him to act.

By rejecting the media-enforced restraint that was changing race relations in the South, the assassin cautions those across the nation who expect Southerners eventually to abide by the new dispensation by asserting that "[i]t don't get you nowhere to take nothing from nobody unless you make sure its for keeps, for good and all, for ever and

amen" (607). This statement, which also serves as an exhortation to other white segregationists, functions as a corollary to the assassin's earlier claim that Roland forced him to kill by demanding equality, and insists white Southerners be as committed to preserving segregation as Blacks are to ending it despite the specter of unfavorable press. Although civil rights workers currently hold the moral high-ground due to their commitment to non-violence, the speaker expects this to shift once Blacks reveal their true nature and "bring out them switchblade knives, like [in] Harlem and Chicago. Watch TV long enough and you'll see it all to happen on Deacon Street in Thermopylae….it's *in* 'em" (607). The speaker pronounces himself "ready…for that funeral" an indication that he eagerly awaits an opportunity to commit more violence in defense of his society (607).

Having offered these insights on the moral imperatives of power, the speaker broadens his address, advising any members of his audience who sympathize with the Warren Court, King or Kennedy to

> go careful. Ain't it about time us taxpayers starts to calling the moves? Starts to telling the teachers *and* the preachers *and* the judges of our so-called courts how far they can go? Even the President so far, he can't walk in my house without being invited, like he's my daddy, just to say whoa. Not yet! (607).

With this elaborate articulation of white male privilege, which anticipates Nixon's evocation of a silent majority, the speaker reminds the nation that change in the South can be prevented by intransigent few prepared to protect white privilege by resisting federal authority despite increasingly unfavorable media coverage, the likelihood of "someone better" appearing to avenge Roland/Evers, and the inexorable advance of the civil rights

movement since *Brown*. The speaker hopes his murder will raise the stakes, preventing the South from reaching an accord with the nation because "people are dead" (607). In light of this, the prospect of being arrested, which earlier caused him some distress, no longer bothers him, for a trial will further polarize the community and "the electric chair…is [just] something hotter than yesterday and today put together" (607). And, even if the speaker is wrong about any of this, even if Mississippi has changed so much that it's citizens will track him down and "railroad" him, they cannot negate his achievement, for "I seen him fall. I was evermore the one" (607). And in Mississippi in 1963, this knowledge can sustain him unto death.

Thanks to her work in the WPA during the Depression, Welty understood that poverty and fear of lost status made segregation palatable in the minds of many working class Southerners, and she documents the danger of this kind of thinking in her story, eloquently presenting the various class issues that are a source of the speaker's anger: his poor education and resultant lack of upward mobility, his resentment towards the nation's political elite, his jealously at the financial benefits bestowed on Mississippi's civil servants, and his anonymity in the emerging media age. In this context violence serves as a temporary balm that grants the speaker the illusion of control, even as he remains a loser in the post-war economy. "Where is the Voice Coming From?" demonstrates just how fundamentally an important segment of the South remains essentially unchanged from its ante-bellum past, suggesting the need for the U. S. government to take a more active role enforcing the rule of law in the South, but also identifying the need for a war on poverty that might provide men like the speaker a better standard of living, thereby integrating them into society.

"Where is the Voice Coming From?" seems a daring act of composition for Welty, particularly given the repression that was then common, but despite the audaciousness of the story she minimized the odds of a reprisal from the Councils or the Commission by placing it in *The New Yorker*. In fact, when a reporter from New York asked her if "anybody burned a cross" in her yard because of her story, Welty's reply that the "people who burn crosses on lawns don't read me in *The New Yorker*. Really, don't people know the first thing about the South?" demonstrates how certain she was that this story would evade the notice of the Council and the Commission.[44] Although Welty and Russell had a good relationship with William Maxwell, and *The New Yorker* generally paid better for short stories than other magazines, always a concern for Welty during this period, other venues with broader readerships would have eagerly published her story. Indeed, one can easily imagine the *New York Times Magazine*, the Atlanta *Journal-Constitution* or Mississippi's own *Delta Democrat-Times* publishing this short piece in the aftermath of the crime, but such a course of action would have alerted a broad section of the South to Welty's elaborate condemnation of Medgar Evers' assassination, and Welty was anxious to avoid such scrutiny, as much for her infirm mother's sake as for her own.[45]

Still, if Welty knew that neither the Klan, the Council or the Commission read the *New Yorker*, she feared for her well-being if she attempted to take a bigger role promoting interracial brotherhood in the South. Evers' assassination after appearing on local television surely played some role in her,

> "late July, 1963…deci[sion] at the last minute…not to be interviewed by Ralph Ellison on national television. She worried that a nationally televised appearance with [her] fellow writer…would create a good deal of white hostility in Mississippi,

> hostility that she feared would be deflected from daughter to mother….affect[ing] her ability to hire desperately needed care-givers for her mother.[46]

Despite her progressive stance toward civil rights in her writing and lectures, Welty had to take care that she did not overstep her bounds, and she felt so constricted by this reality that she abruptly cancelled this television appearance even though it might have led to increased lecturing income from colleges and universities outside the South. Indeed, by the end of that summer Welty contemplated moving to Santa Fe to escape the constant surveillance in her home state. Again, she portrayed this course of action as necessary more to protect her mother's well being than her own, because she no longer felt safe using the Yazoo City convalescent home when she was called away to lecture because that city was "reputed to be now the headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan."[47] Ultimately, Welty decided to remain in Jackson for the time being, with her brother Edward's health playing no small role in that decision.

The summer of 1964 served to make 1963 seem tame by comparison. By the time the summer was over the Klan and others would burn down more than 40 Black churches in Mississippi, even as the Council continued its intimidation of sympathetic whites and the Commission continued to lobby for states rights and interposition. On 21 June 1964, Mississippi authored a civil rights tragedy that again demanded a response from Welty when three civil rights activists, white New Yorkers Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, and black Mississippian James Chaney, disappeared in the small town of Philadelphia. The kidnapping and murder of the three men marked the first time since civil rights demonstrations began in 1955 that Southerners protecting Jim Crow had killed pro-integrationist whites, and the frantic forty-four day effort to locate their bodies

allowed the national media to ruminate on the implications of the South's continued resistance to desegregation. Worse, while official Mississippians had roundly condemned the assassination of Evers and prodded the Jackson police into a credible investigation of the crime, there was considerably less understanding in Philadelphia, surrounding Neshoba County, and across the state.

The official position of local officials towards the disappearance of the men, including Mississippi's powerful Senator Eastland, was that the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), an umbrella group funded in part by the National Council of Churches to coordinate the efforts of SNCC, NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and King's Southern Christian Leadership Committee (SCLC) in the state, had ordered them underground in order to attract attention to the Freedom Summer and raise funds while making Philadelphians and Mississippians in general look bad.[48] Ignoring this fantastic narrative, the FBI and the Department of Justice launched an intensive investigation, code named Mississippi Burning, that unearthed a half dozen other corpses, all Black men sacrificed to preserve the Southern way of life, before finally discovering Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman entombed at the base of an earthen dam. These other bodies provoked additional outrage, since it "was shocking…to anyone except black Mississippians that as soon as the authorities started dragging the rivers and swamps for the two white New Yorkers and their local colleague, they stumbled on other [Black] bodies."[49]

It was during this time, Welty reports, that she started "receiving middle-of-the-night, dead-of-night telephone calls" where she was "harangued by strangers" from the North demanding to know why she wasn't actively promoting civil rights in Mississippi.[50] These callers, ignorant of the South, failed to appreciate the restrictions that Mississippi,

with its strict discipline of dissenting voices, increasingly placed upon progressive Southerners like Welty. Consider Florence Mars, like Welty a free-thinking, college educated, middle-aged bachelor who had traveled to Europe and lived in metropolitian cities before returning to Mississippi.[51] *Witness in Philadelphia*, an autobiographical account of her tangential involvement in the Mississippi Burning case, describes the retribution Mars faced after providing background testimony to a federal grand jury regarding the presence of the Ku Klux Klan in Philadelphia and Neshoba County. In response to her testimony the Klan tormented her for eighteen months, organizing a boycott of the Neshoba County Stockyards, which Mars owned; forcing her from First Methodist Church, her place of worship; spreading rumors about her continued participation in 'anti-white' civil rights groups; and harassing her employees, friends and associates.[52] Eventually tiring of the Klan's abuse, Mars sold her stake in the Stockyards and her farm, but despite this was arrested for drunk driving, which, for a white woman in the South in 1965 was unprecedented.[53] Welty was well aware that, despite her fame, or because of it, she would face similar reprisals from the Klan and the local law enforcement if she took to the streets in a public display of her sentiments.

With the nation still in high dudgeon over the disappearance of the three civil rights workers, needing income and unable to make sufficient progress with her novel, Welty accepted a position as writer-in-residence at Millsaps College where she taught "a twice-a-week seminar on the art of fiction" to help pay the bills.[54] The fall semester at Millsaps began just three weeks after the FBI discovered the bodies of Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman, and on Wednesday 2 December 1964, near the conclusion of the semester, Welty delivered "a public lecture on "The Southern Writer Today: An Interior Affair," the first draft of "Must the Novelist Crusade?" This essay serves as Welty's

answer to the anonymous callers who demanded she promote civil rights in the South.[55] Ironically, just two days after her talk at Millsaps, the FBI indicted nineteen people from Meridian and Philadelphia Mississippi in relation to the murders of Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman, including the Neshoba County "sheriff, deputy sheriff, and [Philadelphia's] city policeman," returning Mississippi's summer of racial discontent to national attention.[56] That peace officers were implicated in the murders reinforced the national stereotype that the vast majority of Southern whites were united in their efforts to maintain segregation at all costs, with a timorous minority unable or unwilling to challenge them. Welty's essay attempts to elaborate a writerly stance that avoided this Manichean view of the South.[57]

Welty decided to publish her essay, placing it, with Russell's help, in the October 1965 *Atlantic Monthly*. "Must the Novelist Crusade?" demands careful explication because Welty advances a subtle argument, one that begins with a typically New Critical assertion of art's separateness form politics, but that ultimately asserts that fiction might better serve the *polis* than politicized writing since ethical discourse should induce the populace to endorse a course of action that affirms the nation's democratic ideals. The essay opens with Welty chiding an unnamed critic for demanding that Faulkner be "reassessed because he was 'after all, only a white Mississippian'" a stance that equates the Noble Prize winning author with the Klansmen who kidnapped white youths and burned Black churches.[58] Welty "feel[s] in these words and others like them the agonizing of our times….[t]hey come of an honest and understandable zeal to allot every writer his chance to better the world" (803). Welty admits that fictions writers do have obligations as writers, but insists that politics are merely incidental to these goals, distinguishing the kind of symbolic action she took by lecturing at Tougaloo in 1958 and

before an integrated group at Millsaps in 1963 from the act of writing itself. This is what Welty means when she identifies the writer's obligation to make "the proper use of words for the proper ends" (804), while insisting that the novelist and the editorial writer are on "opposite sides" of the writing spectrum, no matter how honest or necessary each appears (803).

The two prongs of Welty's argument seem contradictory, and perhaps if she had attained her education in the 1970s and 80s she might have possessed the tools to better balance these inconsistencies. Welty, of course, was educated in the late 1920s and 30s, where she was "wildly interested in the Fugitives…including Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, and John Crowe Ransom" and as a young writer eagerly received George Marion O'Donnell, a Southern Agrarian who would "regale [Welty and her friends] with anecdotes about all the great southern writers" he collaborated with.[59] Still, if the New Critics influenced Welty's understanding of the proper aim of writing, her own fiction, as well as Faulkner's, whom she champions in this essay, invites readings that exceed the limits of interpretation placed on fiction by the Southern Agrarians. Rather than resisting these excessive readings, Welty welcomes them, trusting that literature works a deeper and more permanent change on human sensibility than mere moralizing. Peggy Whitman Prenshaw asserts that Welty disdains conventional politics, "linked as it was in her mind with demagogic leaders and racism."[60] Rather than base her "hopes for individual rights or social justice upon a linking of the personal and the political…she makes a case for the supreme efficacy of the separate, personal sphere as the venue where understanding of the Other takes place…and where one's political beliefs may therefore take humane shape."[61] This cautious valorization of personal understanding was difficult to maintain in the face of racial violence that called for immediate action, but Welty was convinced

that the tension in Mississippi would only abate when a plurality of whites attained a humane understanding of the Black Other, one that literature could help produce. This essay seems to endorse one of the more subtle goals of the Black textual tradition while rejecting explicit attempts to achieve it, an indication of the tightrope that Welty was attempting to negotiate.

Welty insists "evidence as to whether any writer, alive or dead, can be believed is always on hand in…any page of his work. The color of his skin would modify it just about as much as would the binding of the book." This assertion should not be understood as a neo-conservative attempt to vitiate the importance of race upon experience, but rather an assertion that if Faulkner were Black or Richard Wright white it would not invalidate nor lend additional tragedy to Joe Christmas or Bigger Thomas.[62] "Integrity" she claims, "stands outside time" (803); a classic New Critical stance that collapses two distinct types of integrity, the literary and the social. Welty elevates literary integrity over social integrity because integration into one's society means joining the crowd, and "nothing was ever learned in a crowd, from a crowd, or by addressing or trying to please a crowd." This does not apply to common utterances, but to political speech, for "the voice that seeks to do other than communicate when it makes a noise has something brutal about it…no longer using words as words but as something to brandish…threaten, brag or condemn (809). For Welty a writer overly concerned with persuasion compromises his "working vision" the "living principle on which [a plot] hangs together and gradually earns its shape" (807) to appeal instead to the pieties of the day, writing to please his audience rather than explore the contours of a situation.

Welty rejects these self-conscious attempts at instructing an audience, which is the raison d'être of a crusading writer, for "to cater is not to love and not to serve well

either" (812). A novelist who shapes a text to convert his audience attempts to achieve a "personal vision [that] can be made to order, [but] then we should lose, writer and reader alike, our own gift for perceiving, seeing through the fabric of everyday to what to each pair of eyes on earth is a unique thing" (807). Persuasive speech, for Welty, must cater to the crowd's preconceptions in order to be effective, and thus ill-serves its constituents. I do not think that Welty intends to denigrate the measured tones of Medgar Evers or Martin Luther King, who took pains to ground their speech in love and redemption, but to the political voice employed by demagogic leaders in Mississippi and elsewhere, exhorting their supports to act immorally and against their community and nations own best interests. Welty claims that most political speech, good intentioned or ill, needs to silence or invalidate differing perspectives, but that the novel escapes this temptation because it strives to create "the possibility of a shared act of the imagination between its writer and reader" (804). Welty does not mean to suggest that fictions must therefore be apolitical and unethical, for "morality as shown through human relationships is the whole heart of fiction" and the consumption of this morality broadens one's ethical universe, offering a reader new perspectives and insights into contemporary problems without necessarily addressing those problems directly (804). Welty transforms the New Critical assumption about the estrangement of the artist from the values of society into the means for achieving genuine communal understanding.

Pandering to an audience with political speech based upon a cynical evaluation of what's permissible, Welty continues, also leaves little room for growth by speaker or crowd. The developing novelist best serves his audience not by crusading, but by "assum[ing] at the start an enlightenment in his reader equal to his own, for they are hopefully on the point of taking off together from that base into the rather different world

of the imagination" (808). The assumption of enlightenment, the expectation of common ground, permits the writer to embrace ambiguity, which "allow[s] his reader to see and hear something for himself" (805) by forcing the reader to rethink his assumptions in order to fully participate in the life of the novel. When, struggling with the internal logic of the text, "a novel of power reveals" to a reader "what we are" it makes a genuinely new perspective possible (808). Only a sincere literary effort can accomplish this revelation, a literary text that "is very seldom neat, is given to sprawling and escaping from bounds, is capable of contradicting itself, and is not impervious to humor" (806), thereby letting "truth…in all its great weight and angelic lightness [be] accepted as home truth" by a reader (808). Appeals to the shared act of the imagination, Welty asserts, do not retreat from the unpleasantness of the present but permit the possibility of transcending it through a recognition of each member of a community's enduring humanity.

Welty would not have produced "Where is the Voice Coming From?" or "The Demonstrators" if she disapproved of topical stories, but she reminds those who demand crusading texts that "If human beings are to be comprehended as real, then they have to be treated as real, with minds, hearts, memories, habits, hopes, with passions and capacities like ours" even if they are racist assassins (807). Welty rejects writing that flattens, that, in its rush to judgment, fails to "show us how to face our feeling and face our actions and have new inkling about what they mean" (810). Invective in the place of insight seems useless to Welty, for "[t]o deplore a thing as hideous as the murder of the three civil rights workers demands the quiet in which to absorb it. Enormities can be lessened, cheapened, just as good and delicate things can be. We can and will cheapen all feeling by…parading in it" (809). While Welty appreciated three civil rights workers

commitment to the democratic ideals of the nation, she would not sacrifice a full understanding of Southern whites in any attempt to valorize them. Only through an understanding of the full humanity of Blacks, white civil rights workers and Southern whites, is it possible to create a society that might transcend the violence and hatred of the present.

Welty acknowledges that "[w]e in the South are a hated people these days; we were hated first for actual and particular reasons, and now we may be hated still more in some vast unparticularized way….Our people hate back" (811). Still, if Southern writers devoted themselves to repudiating all the outrages or committed in the South since 1954, let alone 1800, there would scarcely be any time for anything else, and despite their intentions these texts would fail to transform those capable of committing such deeds, while permitting others a false sense of moral superiority. For Welty the only way out of this double bind was to write with love, as her exemplar Faulkner had done, for

> to enter into the minds and hearts of our own people, **all of them**, to comprehend them (us) and then to make characters and plots in stories that in honesty and with honesty reveal them (ourselves) to us, in whatever situation we live through in our own times: this is the continuing job [of the novelist]. To write honestly and with all our powers is the least we can do, and the most (813, emphasis added).

This sensibility, this need to comprehend even violent racists and their apologists, allowed Welty to produce "Where is the Voice Coming From?" and "The Demonstrators," stories that allude to contemporary events without propagandizing. Welty believed that fiction, if properly received, might operate obliquely on the heart and soul of its reader, and is therefore more likely than direct political appeals to produce an understanding that makes a genuine change in sensibility possible.

Contemporary critics, of course, understand that readers often resist texts, steadfastly ignoring conclusions that they don't wish to arrive at. This resistance to the shared act of the imagination that Welty privileges produces misreadings that can come to shape the reception of a text or even an individual, and such misrepresentations were common in the South. Welty would acknowledge in 1981 that when she appealed to communal acts of the imagination twenty-five years earlier she was

> thinking of the people whose hearts were in the right place, but that wasn't enough. It took more learning. I think we've been through an experience which was more profound than we'd guessed; both black and white….Now, seeing how much more there was to communication than the wish, and the desire, and the heart, I feel I have more to learn now than I had to learn then.[63]

Welty came to realize that her earlier claim that the "novel itself always affirms….and it would waste its time if it told us what we ought to be like, since we already know that, don't we?" granted intractable Southerners far too much credit (808). Unlike Welty's ideal readers, many people in the South neither questioned nor cared about the subjugated status of Black people, and would have been perfectly happy had the changes that occurred in the South during 1960s been delayed a century in the interest of keeping the peace, and their status.

Contemporary scholars might disagree with many of the claims that Welty makes in "Must the Novelist Crusade?"[64] It remains unclear, for example, why fiction cannot both "beat the drum" for social change, and depict "the private place" where "life is lived," something that *Huckleberry Finn* seems to accomplish (809). Welty objects to bad writing, which she collapses into politically engaged writing by assuming that crusader-novelists cannot create characters with fully formed interior lives, but if this so

it is the fault of the writer and not the topic. Also, given that Black literary culture since Phyllis Wheatley has attempted to demonstrate both Black people's humanity and their ability to achieve in the field of culture, skin color plays an important role in whether an author might be believed if the author is Black. To claim otherwise is extremely naïve, especially after Philadelphia whites clung for six weeks, in the face of global disbelief, to the fiction that the three missing civil rights workers were in hiding. Further, questions that strike at a writer's attempts to remain faithful to the values of his community while composing fiction often produce a better understanding of that society's political values, as revisionist scholarship of Faulkner and Conrad (among others) has demonstrated. And, as Welty archly remarked in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1954, "it is also true that nobody is buying books in [small town Mississippi] or generally in the South" a fact, if true, that suggests that fiction has little, if any, role in producing shifts in political consciousness in that region of the country.[65] Ironically, Welty is correct in maintaining that great literary texts remain integral to our understanding of ourselves as political and social beings, but fails to comprehend how these texts retain this integrity as cultural and critical perspectives change. Still, as Welty noted when describing a forthcoming collection of short stories about Mississippi in the 1960s which she was unable to finish before her death, "time is an important ingredient in understanding a situation.'[66]

Welty again found herself speaking at the Southern Literary Festival in April of 1965, a tribute to Faulkner held in his hometown of Oxford at Ole Miss. Despite boasting an integrated audience in Jackson two years prior, in Oxford "a mob…harassed the Tougaloo College delegation that had hoped to participate in the festival" an indication that even literary events were vulnerable to pressures from segregationists.[67] As a result of the harassment, only whites attended that year's festival, but Welty and

other distinguished guests like Robert Penn Warren decided to remain at the festival to promote the interracial perspective of Faulkner's fiction rather than leaving in solidarity.[68] Meanwhile, the Mississippi Burning trial was proceeding in fits and starts, with local officials dismissing the indictments against the men involved on 10 December 1964 and again on 24 February 1965. Welty began work on "The Demonstrators" in the summer of 1965, while the eyes of the nation focused on the civil rights drama unfolding in Selma, Alabama. At this time the men involved in the deaths of Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman had not seen trial and were being feted throughout her home state. Despite the cessation of the summer project that brought white students into the South in 1964, SNCC, SCLC CORE and the newly formed Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party continued to challenge segregation vigorously throughout the state in 1965, with predictable results.

Welty drafted "The Demonstrators," the last short story she published in her life, over the summer and fall of 1965 and it arrived with "Russell in November 1965 and it was taken by *The New Yorker* within a few weeks" although it "was published…almost a year later" in October 1966.[69] The story is set in the fictional town of Holden, in the southwestern section of the state near the Mississippi Delta, an area long targeted by civil rights workers due to its large Black population. Despite the title of the story and its contemporary setting in a region singled out by the SNCC and other groups, Welty adheres to the strictures she detailed in "Must the Novelist Crusade?" and focuses her tale around a white male protagonist, in this case a disaffected country doctor named Dr. Richard Strickland. Like "Where is the Voice Coming From?" this story traces its main character through important events in his life, with Welty collapsing his personal history

by presenting many of the details of his life via flashback. Welty employs a third person limited narrator, which grants her readers a thorough understanding of her protagonist, Dr. Richard Strickland, and his society by granting some access to his thoughts..[70]

"The Demonstrators" depicts Dr. Strickland, the only physician in the town of Holden, as he calls upon his patients one fall evening. Strickland, we learn, followed in his father's footsteps by becoming the town doctor, and, like his father, sees fit to practice on Blacks and whites alike. Strickland's wife Irene left him that summer, months after their paraplegic daughter Sylvia, the couple's only child, "died at age thirteen [having] never sat up or spoken" (616). Sylvia's "death from pneumonia last Christmas" causes Irene to reevaluate her life, and she recognizes that she can no longer abide the hypocrisies that Holden demands of her husband, a realization that she articulates as the couple entertain a white civil rights worker named Phillip. Strickland scolds Phillip for his organization's exaggeration of an episode "in the next county….in June" (617). Despite Phillip's justification that "they won't know the difference [in the North] where the paper is read," and that Mississippians have certainly done worse, Strickland refuses to accept "putting a false front on things…even for a good cause." After Strickland makes this statement, his wife reminds him that he "won't tell Herman Fairbrothers [the mayor of Holden] what's the matter with him" before "jump[ing] up from the table," confronting Strickland with his complicity in the town's self-deceiving narrative (617). Irene's readiness to reveal an untold truth in the presence of a stranger indicates her newfound unwillingness to participate in the town's fictions.

Irene's disavowal exposes Strickland's complicity with the town's narrative by invalidating his claims to impartial truthfulness, and the community offers a censure of its

own. Someone scatters "broken glass…the length and width of [Strickland's] driveway" a warning that indicates the community's awareness that he hosted a civil rights worker in his home, an act that punctures Strickland's sense of well being as well as his tires. Despite years of reprisals in Mississippi against any and all who interacted in the most innocuous fashion with civil rights workers, Strickland imagined that his family's status in the town would permit an unremarkable visit with Phillip. Because of this, he "hadn't seen in time what it wouldn't have occurred to him to look for." Irene "suddenly brok[e] into laughter" at this turn of events, another indication of her disinclination to overlook the flaws in their relationship or the injustices in the town (617). If Irene's laughter indicates her hostility toward her husband and his social position, then the broken glass reminds Strickland that everyone must conform to the xenophobic restrictions demanded by Southern reactionaries, especially country doctors who indiscriminately practice medicine in the Delta.

Welty subverts Irene's moral authority by suggesting that her newfound inability to abide Strickland and Holden signals in a retreat into childhood following the loss of her daughter. Strickland understood intellectually that his stricken daughter's paralysis would probably not improve and he had "mourned her all her life" while she was living, but "Irene had done more, she had dedicated her life to Sylvia, sparing herself nothing, tending her, lifting her, feeding her, everything (616-7). Irene invested emotionally in a lost cause; failing to admit to herself that eventually, in spite of her devotion, her child would weaken and die, which links her to Southerners just as unwilling to abandon the white supremacist society that has become their "Lost Cause." Without Sylvia as a locus for her energies, Irene pours her "devotion to something else that could not be

helped…shun[ning] all the terrible reminders [turning] not to a human being but to an idea." Welty never specifies what this idea is, but given her comment about Strickland's prevarication to Mayor Fairbrothers and how much her self-deception about Sylvia's condition cost her, one might surmise that Irene has found a newfound appreciation for the unvarnished truth.

Strickland seems paralyzed by Irene's disapproval and the town's reprisal against his seemingly innocuous dinner with Phil. In an effort to acknowledge his wife's grief, Strickland offers to leave town, but Irene caustically reminds him that he "wouldn't leave Holden without its Dr. Strickland….to save [his] soul" a statement he is unable or unwilling to challenge (617). Irene recognizes that carrying on the family tradition ties Strickland to Holden, even as he becomes increasingly dissatisfied with his hometown. In any case, Strickland eventually "agreed that she…withdraw herself for as long as she like" an abandonment that only intensifies Strickland's sense of loss and bewilderment without impelling him to any decisive action. When Irene leaves her husband she retreats back to her childhood home, where people from her earlier life "were all giving parties for her" but Irene's devotion to truth does not produce understanding or change; her celebrations fail to address the racial problems in the town or Strickland's passive equanimity that fails to address Holden's racial problems (617). Strickland's interracial practice dissatisfies his wife and his community while leaving him with little recourse.

Strickland remains estranged from his community after he separates from his wife. He returns to his office at "eleven o'clock that Saturday night, " after attending to an elderly patient he inherited from his father (608). Miss Marcia Pope, Strickland's patient, is a retired educator who has recurring seizures and yet refuses to take the

medicine that might alleviate her condition. Strickland recalls that, despite her poor health, Miss Pope "could amuse herself by giving out great wads of Shakespeare and "*Arma virumque cano"* or the like" (608). This fondness for classical literature is unremarkable, given that Pope once taught "Latin, civics, and English" to three generations of Holden, Mississippi" at the local high school (608), but "Welty's reference here to the opening line of Virgil's *Aeneid* invites multiple interpretations." The quote, which can be translated "'I sing of warfare and a man at war' might refer to the pervasive racism in the Jim Crow era, to the civil rights movement's war against segregation and racial injustice, [and] to the white South's feelings of being embattled by the movement."[71] Welty's allusion to the literature of Greek antiquity here also recalls her evocation of Thermopylae in "Where is the Voice Coming From?" though the reference here suggests the dual wars raging in Holden, Strickland's inner turmoil over his life and the non-violent war against the segregated South. Leaving his office for home after making his rounds, Strickland encounters a young Black child who cryptically informs him he is needed, and will only volunteer directions on where she wishes him to go.

While following the girl's instructions driving towards the Black section of Holden, Strickland "met the marshal's car as both bounced over the railroad track" going in the opposite direction. As the cars pass each other Strickland observes "no passenger…with the marshal that he could see" (609). The narrator does not tell the reader what prompted Strickland's examination of the marshal's car, but the presence of a marshal in Holden suggests recent criminal activity by whites, since Mississippi law enforcement consisted of the town police officer(s), the county sheriff and his deputies, and the intra-state Mississippi Highway Patrol. A marshal in a small community was almost always an indication of an ongoing investigation at the behest of the Justice

Department or the FBI into crimes against civil rights workers or the local Black community. As the town's only doctor, Strickland has undoubtedly been called upon to tend to the victims of segregationist abuse in the past, and his examination of the marshal's car suggests an attempts to discern if racial violence necessitates his presence in the Black community.

While the presence of a marshal in Holden foregrounds state law enforcement's unreliable commitment to the rule of law in small town Mississippi, a lesson that hardly needed belaboring after Philadelphia, Welty might be alluding to something more specific by locating Holden's Black community beyond railroad tracks. There had been a recent bombing campaign in the Delta town of McComb, a center of civil rights activity since Robert Moses, SNCC leader and one of the architects of the Freedom Summer project, began working there in 1961. The perpetrators focused on the homes of known civil rights leaders in the area, as well as Black churches. This outrage prompted the FBI to send a task force to the town, though because it was staffed with agents sympathetic to segregation it proved ineffective in apprehending the culprits. In addition to being a front of civil rights agitation, McComb was one of several Delta towns through which the Illinois Central railroad line ran. Although it was then common for Black neighborhoods to be metaphorically on the 'wrong side of the tracks' throughout Mississippi, in McComb the "Illinois Central [railroad] tracks neatly separated McComb's 9000 whites from its 4000 black residents" much like Holden. The situation in McComb was of some note in Mississippi at the time, though it escaped the notice of the national press, who were chronicling King's efforts in Alabama.[72]

After passing the marshal while crossing the railroad tracks, Strickland arrives at his destination, encountering an environment that challenges the faculties of his

perception. The power has gone out in Holden during his trip, and initially Strickland can only make out the impossible sight of white chickens roosting in the silhouette of a tree and "the reds of cigarettes" from a group of Black men milling about in front of a domicile (609). The lack of illumination makes it difficult for Strickland to recognize anything as he stumbles through the house into the bedroom where his prospective patient lies. The repetition of white and red emerging out of blackness continues when Strickland gains his patient's bedside and observes a "young, very black-skinned woman…in a white dress with her shoes on. A maid? Then he saw…the white was not…a uniform but shiny, clinging stuff," offset by a crumpled red banner. That Strickland can confuse what is obviously formal attire with a maid's uniform indicates his difficulty diagnosing this situation, an example of his increasing inability to adjust to the shifting narratives of the society around him. In addition to the red sash there were "splashes of blood on the dress, now almost dry" an indication that her wound occurred some time ago, and Strickland wonders aloud why he was not summoned sooner (609).

As a doctor whose practice accepts both races, Strickland depends upon the goodwill of the Black community and the indulgence of whites to stay in business. The behavior of Strickland's patient, and the women who attend to her, suggests that they, like Strickland's wife, have begun resisting the static social arrangement in an attempt to assert control over their life stories, rejecting the town narrative that Strickland reluctantly represents. The child who summoned Strickland refuses to inform him as to the nature of the emergency, and when Strickland enters the room where his patient lies, the women present greet him with silence or derision, fail to answer his initial questions, volunteer his patient's name, or reveal how she came to be wounded. The new

dispensation disorients Strickland, and it is several moments before he finally recognizes Ruby Gaddy, a cleaning lady who works in his office building, lying wounded before him. Strickland tries to assert his familiarity with her by asking "[w]hat have you been up to?" only to be rebuffed by the women in the room who respond "*Nothin'!*" in their effort to maintain control over the narrative (611). Even the mortally wounded Gaddy refuses to cooperate with Strickland's examination, clawing at his hands as he tries to inspect her injury, holding her breath when he listens to her chest, and covering her puncture wound with her hand when her son's crying distracts the doctor. Frustrated at this response, Strickland asks if he "is supposed to just know" what is wrong with Ruby, an admission of dependence and exasperation that loosens the tongues of some in the room.

After surmising that Dove Collins stabbed Gaddy with an ice-pick, an inference reluctantly confirmed by the women in the room, Strickland attempts to reassure them about his loyalty to the Black community. He reminds them that he's "sew[n Collins] up enough times on Sunday morning, you know that. I know Ruby, I know Dove, and if the lights would come back on I can tell you the names of the rest of you, and you know it" (612). Strickland's claim of familiarity only increases the women's hostility, which suggests that they hesitated in summoning him precisely because they didn't want knowledge of this event to cross the tracks since it reflects badly upon Gaddy and Collins, and by extension upon the Black community. Strickland fails to understand the women's desire to control the dissemination of this event, blithely wondering if "the marshal is out looking for" Collins, an indication of his outsider status despite his earlier claims of intimacy. Even Gaddy, nearing death, has eyes "filled with the unresponding gaze of ownership," eyes that empower her while discomforting the good doctor (613).

Confronted with the hostility of the women, Strickland realizes that individual acts of trans-racial good will no longer grant him immunity from their hostile rhetoric or their silence.

Up to this point, the women have been steadfast in their reluctance to identify themselves to Strickland. Yet, when one of the women is unhappy with his care for Gaddy, she compels an explanation from Strickland by revealing her intimate connections to him. "Remember Lucille?" asks one of the women, thrusting a hot kerosene lamp into Strickland's face, "I'm Lucille. I was washing for your mother before you was born. Let me see you do something….You sure ain't your daddy!" (613). Stung by Lucille's challenge to his assumption of his father's legacy, Strickland authoritatively informs her that he can do nothing for Gaddy other than ease her pain, a statement that mollifies her. Having established some control over the room by informing them of Gaddy's impending death, Strickland requests "a drink of water…in the same tone" and prepares to leave (614). As he exists he recognizes another woman from his past who "used to be the sole factotum at the Holden depot….she called the stations [with] just the power of her lungs….[s]eiz[ed] all the bags, two by two, in her own hands…[and] saw to it that [passengers] left" the depot on time. With her powerful voice and efficiency, Strickland once thought of this woman as a "tyrant," but, his voice still full of authority, he orders her to watch over Gaddy after he departs (614). As Strickland quits the house, "he heard it become as noisy as the yard had been, and the men in the yard went quiet to let him through," a further reminder of his outsider status in the community he serves (615).

The moon has risen since Strickland entered the house, enabling him to notice "his mother's gardening dress, his sister Annie's golf dress, his wife's favorite

duster…and more dresses, less substantial" hanging from a line that runs to the porch (615). As he drives back toward the other side of town, he notices "a grass fire" which is, he tells himself, "not to be confused with a burning church" another allusion to the bombings in McComb (616). While waiting at an intersection for a trains to pass, Strickland recalls this is "a grade crossing with a bad record…he had never started over it in his life that something was not bearing down" another connection to his past in an evening rife with them (616). Strickland begins to meditate on the past, carried along by the "slow creaking" of the train's cars combined with his own car's gentle rocking as it sits awaiting passage. In his reverie Strickland notes that

> He had been carried a cup that might have been his own mother's china or his wife's mother's…a thin porcelain cup his lips and fingers had recognized. In that house of murder, comfort had been brought to him at his request. After drinking from it he had all but reeled into a flock of [his family's] dresses stretched wide-sleeved across the porch of that house like a child's drawing of angels (616).

The doctor's temporary ability to command the women in the room as his father might have done gives him a "feeling of well-being….[which] increased, until he had come to the point of tears" (616). In a changing world, where even Strickland is unsure of his place in the social order, this momentary return to "the way they used to seem" reassures him because he "had felt as though someone…had offered to carry his load for a while…some old, trusted, half forgotten family friend" (617-8). Still, as the glow from Strickland's authoritative assertion in the face of Lucille's challenge of his social role fades, certain facts remain: "his father and mother were both dead, his sister had married and moved away…his child had died [and] he and his wife had separated, by her wish"

(616). The past can act as a salve, but the contemporary problems inherent to any time of great transition remain.

The fleeting protections of the past remind the doctor that he wearies of playing his father's role, "practicing in his father's office [with] all the older patients, like Miss Marcia Pope—and like Lucille and Oree—[remembering] his father" (616). The unrest brought about by civil rights demonstrations has unearthed all the conflicts suppressed by Southern gentility and tradition and Strickland "was so incredibly tired, so sick and even bored with the bitterness, intractability that divided everybody and everything" that he yearns for "the sensation, now returning, that there was still allowed to everybody on earth a *self*—savage, death-defying, private" (617, 618). The doctor finds the appeal of this private self irresistible, the "pounding of his heart was like the assault of hope, throwing itself against him without a stop, merciless." (618). Yet, as the train leaves and these "feelings gradually eb[b] away, like nausea put down" and Strickland realizes there is no privacy in Mississippi, where nameless citizens monitor who has dinner with whom, continually attempting to determine if Strickland remains committed to Southern values despite his egalitarian practice. Strickland tires of the repressive society Holden has become and drives through town rather than return to the family home next door to the Fairbrothers' house, or the tradition bound country club, which "he'd only [joined] to please his sister" (618).

While driving around the town square the doctor notices "the shut down movie house with all the lights removed from [its] sign," still another reminder of the racial conflict that has engulfed the South (618).[73] Turning towards his office, Strickland comes across Dove Collins, who looks up at him and asks to be hidden before he expires. Having discovered Collin's whereabouts, the doctor returns to his blacked out home to

ready a report. Mayor Fairbrothers' wife, Eva Duckett Fairbrothers, calls him at daybreak, complaining that her husband, whom Strickland has apparently informed of his condition, feels depressed. Strickland proves unable to offer a tactful response, "shout[ing] at her, "If I had what Herman has I'd go down in the back yard and shoot myself!"" (619). This exchange demonstrates the danger being the barer of a truth that eliminates possibilities, because Strickland, who presumably kept Mayor Fairbrothers affliction from him in order to preserve his dignity, finds it impossible to disassemble now that the mayor understands the enormity of the situation.

Strickland finds an official report of the intrigue between Gaddy and Collins in the weekly edition of the Holden *Sentinel*, the local paper "owned and edited by Horatio Duckett" (619). While Welty told the first part of the story from Strickland's perspective, the newspaper article represents the views of Holden's elite towards integration and change, and takes every opportunity to denigrate the Black community. The article's headline reports that Collins and Gaddy's deaths contained "no racial content," a declaration that suggests that other crimes in Holden featured "racial content" as their motivation (619). The article later quotes Rev Alonzo Duckett, either the editor's father or brother, who opines that Blacks cannot "expect to be seated in our [white] churches" if they continue to behave in this fashion (621). "County Sheriff Vince Lasseter" who has taken no part in investigating the incident, declares "they can't pin the blame on us for [the double murder]. That's how they treat their own kind. Please take note our conscience is clear" (621). The sheriff's statement suggests that not only is his conscience clear about these murders, but that the very fact of this violence absolves him from prior acts committed to keep Blacks in their place. The article also notes that the

murder weapon was recovered at the "new $100,000 Negro school," a reminder of Holden's commitment to keeping the races segregated despite the *Brown* decision and the 1964 Civil Rights Act that made separate public facilities illegal.

If the article reveals the racial attitudes of Holden, it also calls attention to the stratified nature of the town, since Dove Collins worked at "the Fairbrothers Cotton Seed Oil Mill," owned and operated by the mayor's family. The article also reveals that Eva Duckett Fairbrothers, the mayor's wife, is also related to the Rev. Alonzo Duckett and Horatio Duckett, the paper's publisher. This extended family dominates the economic political and social activity in Holden and is an example of how, in Welty's words, "small town society in the South is often in the control or the grip, whether benevolent or malevolent, of the solid powerful family. It makes it all the harder for any change to penetrate a town like that."[74] Thus, it is no surprise that the paper describes Mayor Fairbrothers terminal illness as "an ailment" in an attempt to minimize public discussion of the powerful family's problems (620).

Dr. Strickland is the only town authority outside the solid family, and he is the only one that declines to transform the deaths of Gaddy and Collins into a demonstration of the inherent inferiority of Black people. Indeed, Strickland "offered no statement" when asked about possible reasons for Collins death, denying Horatio Duckett the opportunity to speculate about why Dove Collin's last words were "Hide me" (620, 619). Still, despite his noble intentions, the Gaddy-Collins episode shows him just as capable of taking comfort from his family's traditional status and his father's authority as a doctor. Yet for Strickland these feelings are transitory and he does not seek to preserve the conditions that permit these feelings of comfort. Still, even as Strickland reads this

account of the previous weekend's events, he fails to notice his servant refilling his cup, just as he failed to initially recognize Gaddy despite the fact that she worked as his cleaning lady.

As Strickland reads the official version of events on his back porch, he recalls how his daughter used to take sun in the garden. As he looks out into his garden, which has become overgrown since Irene left, a pair of woodpeckers picks through the brush. As Strickland idly observes the birds "the cock spread one wing, showy as a zebra's hide, and with a turn of his head showed his red seal" (622). This blend of black and white followed by red brings Strickland back to business, and he imagines that he is the one person who understands the blood ties that link black and white in Holden, ties exemplified by his families dresses on the wrong side of the track and the strong family's desire to control the labor in the town through the maintenance of white supremacy. Strickland cannot quit Holden now, for only he had the standing to see "Herman and Eva Fairbrothers through" the changes to come (622).

Although not as sensational as "Where is the Voice Coming From?" "The Demonstrators" was quite well received, winning the O Henry award for short fiction in 1967. Again, Welty correctly trusted that the story's placement in the *New Yorker* would enable it to escape notice of those who might be compelled to spread glass across her driveway, but the story is so dense that she needn't have worried. Indeed, given that Welty treats racism indirectly in her story, the text seems written to demonstrate the points she made about crusading fiction in "Must the Novelist Crusade?" Having produced these texts from the front line as it were, Welty moved on to her long delayed novel, *Losing Battles*. However, Welty hoped to issue a collection of short stories that

would reflect the powerful change that the civil rights movement had upon the character of the South. Her final two short stories were to be part of a collection that would "reflect the way we were deeply troubled in that society and within ourselves at what was going on in the sixties. [These stories] reflect the effect of change sweeping all over the South—of course, over the rest of the country too, but I was writing about where I was living."[75] Though Welty did not publish any of the other civil rights stories she was said to have been working on up until her death, "Where is the Voice Coming From?" and "The Demonstrators" along with "Must the Novelist Crusade?" represent Welty's sincere effort to document the cost of the changes demanded by the civil rights movement without becoming a polemicist or an apologist.

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[1] Ann Waldron, *Hodding Carter: Reconstruction of a Racist*, 77.

[2] William Bradford Huie, *Three Lives For Mississippi,* cited in *Reporting Civil Rights: Part Two*, 171.

[3] Welty addresses race throughout her career: her first short story collection, *A Curtin of Green and Other Stories* (1941) contains "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden" and "Powerhouse," both evocative and effective set pieces that center around a the creative and communicative potential of a Black man in the midst of performance, as well as "A Worn Path" a touching story about memory and loss. Her last collection, *The Bride of Innisfallen and Other Stories*, contains "The Burning" a story about Union soldiers carrying out Sherman's occupation of the South told from the point of view of a Black servant still caring for her white mistresses. Still, all of these works were completed before *Brown* changed the political and social climate so dramatically and thus fall outside the purview of this study.

[4]Michael Kreyling, *Author and Agent*, 202.

[5] Ann Waldron, *Eudora: A Writer's Life*, 253-5, 261-4.

[6] Waldron, 263.

[7] Waldron 282

[8] Suzanne Marrs, ""The Huge Fateful Stage of the Outside World:" Eudora Welty's Life in Politics," 82

[9]Waldron, 281.

[10] *Conversations with Eudora Welty*, 83.

[11]*More Conversations with Eudora Welty*, 10-11

[12] Carol Polsgrove, *Divided Minds: Intellectuals and the Civil Rights Movement,* 187

[13] Sasha Torres, *Black White and In Color: Television and Black Civil Rights*, 20.

[14] Waldron, 20.

[15]Torres, 22. *NBC White Paper* was a forerunner of shows like NBC's *Dateline* and CBS's *Sixty Minutes*

[16] Torres, 6.

[17] Kay Mills, *Changing Channels: The civil rights case that transformed television*, 39.

[18] Mills, 20, 46. WLBT remained so intransigent throughout the period that local Blacks were eventually granted the station's broadcasting license by the FCC.

[19] Marrs 75.

[20] Adam Nossiter, *Of Long Memory: Mississippi and the Murder of Medgar Evers,* 94.

[21] Nossiter, 90. The Citizens Councils exist today as the Council of Conservative Citizens, www.cofcc.com, which was organized in the mid 90s in part by Robert Patterson, the founder of the original Citizens Council.

[22] Nossiter, 96, Maryanne Vollers, *Ghosts of Mississippi: The Murder of Medgar Evers, the Trails of Bryon De La Beckwith, and the Haunting of the New South*, 52.

[23] James Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society*, 35. Foucault has much to say about the disciplinary power of social expectations on individual behavior. See his *Discipline and Punish*, especially 170-194. Interestingly, with their loyalty oaths, litmus tests and consensus forged from intimidation, the Council and the Commission functioned similarly to today's GOP.

[24] Marrs 77, 79. John Salter, *Jackson Mississippi: An American Chronicle of Struggle and Schism* 102.

[25] Myrlie Evers *For Us the Living*, 267.

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[26] Waldron, 160. Welty declined the invitation

[27] Nossiter, 30

[28] Salter, 57.

[29] Nossiter, 6

[30]Kreyling, 202.

[31] *Conversations*, 83.

[32] For an insightful discussion of the concept of law and political leadership as it pertained to Leonides and the Spartans and Xerxes and the Persians, see James Romm, *Herodotus*, 179-89.

[33] I do not mean to suggest that the Muslim Moors who ruled Spain, without which many of the texts rediscovered during the Enlightenment would have been lost, were Godless pagans, merely that Charlemange and Roland viewed them as such.

[34]For a brilliant examination of the myth of Roland and its parallels in the 20th Century, see Peter Haidu's *The Subject of Violence: The Song of Roland and the Birth of the State*.

[35] In the aftermath of the assassination, Mississippi's leaders were terrified that King would come to Jackson to continue Evers program. Of course, Evers' NAACP and King's SCLC, though nominally allies, often found themselves at cross purposes, a division most liberal and conservatives whites were completely unaware of.

[36] Eudora Welty, *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty,* 603. All subsequent references in-text.

[37] There is also the possibility that Federal Highway Money has trickled into the Black parts of Jackson, but this fails to occur to the assassin.

[38] This is prescient on Welty's part, for the actual assassin, Byron de la Beckwith would find himself shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries with Governor Ross Barnett in court during his trial in a shameless effort by Barnett to influence the jury. See Nossiter, 108-9.

[39] Introduce Foucault's concept of the disciplined society here?

[40] Derrida famously asserts that Western philosophy attempts to privilege the spoken utterance over its written representation [where?] in much the same fashion that the speaker denies the visual over the actual.

[41] As Benedict Anderson claims in *Imagined Communities*, 5.

[42] Meredith and Evers were friends, with Evers defending the eccentric Meredith to the national NAACP, who were doubtful that he was the proper student to desegregate Ole Miss. When Meredith registered for his second semester at the school, Evers was among the party that accompanied him.

[43] The speaker describes an actual protest by Jackson's youth who were arrested but released the next day. See Salter, 66

[44] The Citizens' Council kept detailed notes on anyone even remotely associated with the civil rights movement, so it would be interesting to peruse the Council files (which are supposedly sealed despite the stream of citations from them in recent books about Mississippi) to see if Welty had a file, and if so, what was in it.

[45] *Conversations with Eudora Welty*, 31. The *Times*, I suspect, would have happily matched the *New Yorker's* price for the privilege of publishing her story in their Sunday magazine.

[46] Marrs 80

[47] Marrs, 81

[48] Florence Mars, *Witness in Philadelphia*, 84-7.

[49] Vollers, 220.

[50] *Conversations*, 182.

[51] Mars, 41. Mars, who was 41 when Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman disappeared, (Welty was 54) lived for a time in New Orleans and Atlanta, just as Welty had lived in New York and San Francisco.

[52] The presence of the Citizens' Councils had limited the growth of the Klan in Mississippi for ten years following the *Brown* decision. After the 1963 March on Washington, the Klan experienced a resurgence in Mississippi as it became clear that the rest of the nation admired the civil rights marchers, which called into question the Councils' ability to coerce Blacks without resorting to violence.

[53] Mars 184, 191. According to Mars, Southern custom dictated that a sheriff drive an intoxicated woman home in his cruiser after having her park her car where she could later retrieve it.

[54] Waldron, 275

[55] Waldron, 275. I have not seen a draft of this essay, though I suspect that it is in her archives at Ole Miss.

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[56] Mars, 143, Seth Cagin and Phillip Dray, *We Are Not Afraid*, 436.

[57] Outrage against the South was such that Styron, working on *The Confessions of Nat Turner* at the time, recalls a woman in a Manhattan salon suggesting that the federal government drop napalm on white Southerners rather than the North Vietnamese. James L.W. West III's *William Styron, A Life,* 335.

[58] "Must the Novelist Crusade" in *Eudora Welty: Stories, Essays, & Memoir,* 1998. All following citations in text.

[59] Waldron, 59-60.

[60] Peggy Prenshaw, "Welty's Transformation of the Public, the Private and the Political," 20.

[61] Ibid, 21.

[62] She is wrong in this, of course, for Faulkner's Blackness would have eliminated many things, and it is possible that Welty might never have come to read him. Certainly the New Critics would not have embraced him as the paragon of American writing.

[63] *Conversations*, 337.

[64] Some of Welty's assertions could readily serve as straw men for various schools of criticism. Her valorization of E.M. Forster, for example, or her claim that the novelist "will do anything at all with his material: shape it, strain it to the breaking point, double it up, or use it backward; he will balk at nothing–see *The Sound and the Fury*–to reach that heart and core," which falls apart when modern readers realize that Faulkner in fact balked at narrating the final fourth of *The Sound and the Fury* from Dilsey's point of view (807). Making such anachronistic arguments fails to address how Welty's writing at the time was shaped by the local events of the civil rights movement, which is the point of this chapter.

[65] "Place and Time: The Southern Writer's Inheritance" *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 1997, 545. Originally published in 17 September 1954 *Times Literary Supplement*.

[66] *Conversations*, 261

[67] Marrs, 85.

[68] Marrs, 85. See Robert Hamblin's "Robert Penn Warren at the 1965 Southern Literary Festival: A Personal Recollection", *Southern Literary Journal,*UNC -Chapel Hill, 22.2 Spring 1990.

[69] Kreyling, 204.

[70] See Howard Zinn's *The* New *Abolitionists*, 63 and passim, for a history of Moses' activities in the Mississippi delta region.

[71] Suzan Harrison, "'Racial Content Espied' Modernist Politics, Textuality, and Race in Eudora Welty's "The Demonstrators," 95

[72] John Dittmer, *Local People*, 100

[73] After Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act passed in 1964, several movie theatres, hotels and restaurants closed so they wouldn't have to comply with the law and accept Black patrons, including the Robert E. Lee Hotel in Jackson. See Shirley Tucker, *Mississippi From Within*, 17.

[74] *Conversations*, 260.

[75] Ibid, 259.

Chapter Four

"Negroes, and blood, and horror": William Styron, Existential Freedom and *The Confessions of Nat Turner*

> A novel worthy of the name is not, nor ever has been, valuable because of its opinions; a novel is speculative, composed of paradoxes and riddles; at its best it is magnificently unopinionated
>
> William Styron, "Acceptance Speech for the Howells Medal," 1970.[1]

For those who lived through it, 1968 must have seemed like an apocalyptic year, a year that perhaps portended the end of the American experiment. On Thursday April 3rd of 1968, just four days after Lyndon Johnson announced that he would not seek re-election, Martin Luther King was assassinated. Towards the conclusion of that same April, as urban centers throughout the nation struggled to assess the damage from the riots that followed King's assassination, Students for a Democratic Society began what would become the takeover of Columbia University. Then, on June 5th, as the nation and the media, were attempting to grasp the implications of a suddenly militant student movement, Robert Kennedy was gunned down while campaigning in California. A summer of unrest and uncertainty followed the King and Kennedy assassinations, and in August the Democratic National Convention degenerated into what Norman Mailer aptly described as *The Siege of Chicago*. That same August, Beacon Press published *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*, a collection of essays edited by distinguished historian John Henrik Clark.

The publication of a collection critiquing a literary work seems to pale in comparison to the other events listed above. Yet the controversy that resulted from this response to William Styron's Pulitzer Prize winning novel, the conflict between supporters of *The Confessions of Nat Turner* and those who endorsed the reply from the Ten Black Writers, neatly encapsulates the other problems afflicting the nation. To liberal thinkers and academics, the Ten Black Writers represented the logical end of the more militant strains of the Civil Rights Movement that had infected the student movement: an ideological thought police that restricted artistic and academic freedom by demanding a revisionist history that suited their contemporary needs. For those sympathetic to the Ten Black Writers, Styron's book criminally denied the historical Nat Turner revolutionary agency, diminished the impact of slavery, overlooked the importance of religious thought and language in Black life, and ignored historical evidence in order to support notions central to white supremacy. For the Ten Black Writers and their supporters any celebration of the novel was a celebration of these themes. Styron's guise as a transplanted liberal Southerner who, by virtue of his upbringing, could sympathize with and understand Black people made his novel's failure reprehensible in the eyes of his critics. The overwhelmingly positive reception of the book, which culminated in the Pulitzer, only confirmed the worst fears of the "militant" scholars who were deeply offended by the novel.

The controversy surrounding Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner* has been amply considered, and I will not rehash the old arguments nor declare my allegiance to one side or the other. Many have written in the aftermath of these two texts, a work of fiction that sought to transform America's perception of race, and a work of criticism that,

unfortunately, was in some ways more effective in altering racial perceptions than the novel it sought to refute. Yet, with the exception of Albert Stone's fine *The Return of Nat Turner*, the texts that have followed these two epochal books have been decidedly unbalanced, despite the passage of time. You are either for William Styron, and support the rhetorical strategies he daringly employs in *The Confessions of Nat Turner* or you find him a vastly overrated talent, notable only for the controversial novels he produced, a man of his literary times.

Rather than take up either of these positions, I contend that Styron's fourth novel is deeply flawed because Styron contradicts himself, depicting Nat Turner in a fashion that works against the trajectory of his earlier career. *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, despite the disproportionate praise heaped upon it, seems a bad faith effort by Styron. I investigate Styron's body of work, beginning with his novella *The Long March* and concluding with *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, for what each text reveals about Styron's literary intentions, as well as his attempts to engage the Black textual tradition in the face of the rapidly changing status of Black people in the United States by connecting themes of race to the existential ideas that came to preoccupy his writing. Styron is not a reformed apologist for the Southern way of life, like Robert Penn Warren, nor is he ambivalent about the writer's role in the struggle to reform the South, like Eudora Welty. Unlike his friend and rival Mailer, Styron endorsed the mainstream liberal ideals which helped produced the age of consensus during the post-war period, even as the various protest movements of the 1960s attempted to discredit these values. As he matured as a writer, Styron, like Lionel Trilling, saw the importance of offering a "defense of the imagination against the encroachments of political thinking, whether Marxist, populist or

liberal" (*Gates of Eden*, 264). But, Styron's flawed defense of the imagination, joined with an ethical stance based in part on Camus, amounts to a political stance in itself, and it his steadfast refusal to acknowledge this that provided fuel for his detractors, but may also grant some insight into his intentions and why he failed to meet them.

Despite the emergence of the Cold War and McCarthyism, most post-war liberals did not believe in an approaching apocalypse, and Styron is typical in this regard. Influential post-war liberals like Trilling and Hannah Arendt perceived ideology, Marxist ideology specifically, as far more dangerous than the military and political transformation that accompanied the Cold War. This fear of ideological thinking simultaneously justified and critiqued the logic of the Cold War and spawned the age of consensus, a period when, according to Godfrey Hodgson, most people held that "American capitalism was a revolutionary force for social change, that economic growth was supremely good because it obviated the need for redistribution [of wealth] and social conflict, [and] that class had no place in American politics."[2] Liberal thinkers like Trilling and the New York intellectuals that orbited him at Columbia were, in a sense, the final inheritors of the pragmatic tradition that grew out of the detritus of the Civil War in that they mistrusted teleological thinking, yet refused to use this as an excuse to excise the political from their considerations of art and culture.[3] While the New York intellectuals were far more ambivalent about late market capitalism than Hodgson's quote suggests; they certainly felt antipathy towards ideology and social conflict, even if they begrudgingly admitted the occasional need for confrontation.

This tendency to reject ideological thinking often put liberal intellectuals at odds with the means, if not the goals, of Martin Luther King's Civil Rights Movement.[4] For

King and his followers, issues of inequality were best solved by peaceful and direct confrontation that made it impossible for anyone to ignore the presence of inequity. Unfortunately, the nonviolent confrontations that King sponsored often led to bloodshed and death. Thus, as in Arendt's "Reflections on Little Rock," liberal intellectuals could simultaneously admit that segregation was morally indefensible, but still feel it was unwise of the demonstrators to needlessly provoke those seeking to preserve it.[5] This is a bad faith argument, with thinkers like Arendt demanding that the protestors change their tactics because their protests threatened to create a totalitarian backlash that must be avoided at all costs. Styron, although much younger than the New York intellectuals, came to share their views about the dangers of ideology and confrontation. Styron's second major work, the novella *The Long March*, demonstrates his antipathy to ideology and confrontation, and this reluctance develops as a theme throughout his subsequent novels. Unlike Trilling's cohort, Styron's aversion to ideology and confrontation does not derive from first hand encounters with Marxists or Fascists and the real world application of their philosophies in the 1930s, but rather from his rather benign experience in the Marines during World War II and the Korean War and his exposure to existentialism, particularly the thoughts of Albert Camus.

Styron's aversion to bloodshed, his sense of the fundamentally tragic nature of violence, grew out of his experiences in the Marines during WWII, in part because, unlike his contemporaries Mailer and James Jones, Styron never saw combat. Styron joined the Marines in October of 1944 at the age of 19, and during boot camp staff sergeants who had seen combat would regale their charges with grisly stories that shocked the sensitive Styron. After hearing that Japanese soldiers "sizzle like a bunch of

roaches," and seeing a Marine in possession of mummified Japanese testicles that he fondled "like worry beads," Styron was disabused of the adolescent notion that war was a glorious affair (West, 119). After completing boot camp on Parris Island in South Carolina Styron was sent first to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina and then to Platoon Commander School in Quantico outside of Washington D.C. At Quantico, Styron's officers warned his class that "four out of five of you will get your assess shot off" in the war, and he felt certain that he would be one of those who would die. After all, "the class ahead of me in college was virtually wiped out…Beautiful fellows who had won basketball championships and Phi Beta Kappa keys died like ants in the Normandy invasion. Others…stormed ashore at Tarawa and Iwo Jima and met ugly and horrible deaths on the hot coral and sands" (West, 120). The atomic bomb spared Styron combat in the Pacific Theatre; he would not get his ass shot off after all. Still, Styron's sense of impending doom in future combat, his identification with the fallen soldiers, both Japanese and American, contributed to his perspective that all violence must be tragic. Given his experiences it is unsurprising that Styron is possibly the only member of what a prominent newsreader has declared "the Greatest Generation" to refer to World War II as an ignoble conflict.[6]

While World War II taught Styron to abhor violence, it was at the onset of the Korean War that Styron acquired his detestation of ideology. Styron was a military reservist, and in May of 1951 the Marines called him back into active duty to serve in Korea (West, 189). Styron was dismayed to be sent back into the service while his first novel, *Lie Down in Darkness*, was in galleys. The recall order forced Styron to mark the corrections to his novel on a bunk at Camp Lejeune, not the best of conditions for a

fledgling writer to polish his prose. Worse, Styron was slated to fight in a war that he found "futile and pernicious, with no clear moral issues" (West, 195). To Styron, beautiful fellows were again being sent to die, and not to avenge Pearl Harbor or stop Hitler's inexorable march across Europe, but because "the lunatic fringe of both the Republican and Democratic parties" feared the spread of a competing ideology (West, 195). Like the New York intellectuals during the Depression, Styron learned during his second stint in the Marines that ideology was not an abstract thing, that once let loose in society it could destroy the very people it purported to protect.

While completing his second tour of Camp Lejeune, Styron witnessed an unfortunate accident during a mortar training exercise thirty-three miles from the base. A group of Marines were targeting mortars when a leftover WW II shell veered off course and landed amidst another group of soldiers. Nine men died in the incident, and twenty-three were wounded. In the immediate aftermath of the accident, the commander of Styron's regiment decided to march the surviving soldiers back to camp rather than have them take transport. The timing, immediately after the carnage of the botched training exercise, struck Styron as nothing less that sadistic and the logic of the march appalled him. The commander, treating his soldiers as objects to be perfected, hoped to simultaneously whip the reservists into shape while inuring them to the emotional toll that witnessing death takes on soldiers. The march was also a punishment for everyone even tangentially connected to the fatal mistake, including the commanding officer, who marched most of the way next to his troops. Styron dutifully completed the march and his own acquiescence to a pointless and cruel order fascinated him as much as the march's sadism and futility. The commander of his unit, Styron realized, was a man who

unquestioningly believed in the mission and means of military, to the point where he could transform a fatal accident into an object lesson for his men. Styron found his fellow officers' reluctance to confront the commander equally interesting, because by keeping silent in the officers enabled their own abuse. Styron's fictionalized his experiences that day into *The Long March*, perhaps his most compelling and important piece of fiction.

Interestingly, the effects of the Lejeune march seem to have shaped Styron's literary style as well as his sensibility. Styron's debut, *Lie Down in Darkness*, is modernist in subject and narration, as the novel shifts from the direct address of the introductory chapter to a kind of flitting, omniscient narrator similar to the "Hades" chapter of *Ulysses.* Styron's fist novel is also, despite its heavy psychological overtone, a family tragedy similar to Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* with the suicidal Peyton Loftis's narrative resembling the Septimus sections of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. The novel concludes, like Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* with the patriarch emotionally shattered, the matriarch deranged and Peyton and her sibling deceased. As in Faulkner's novel, there is nothing explicitly political about *Lie Down in Darkness*, unless you count the passing references to the Byrd political machine in Virginia that add local color to the narrative. *Lie Down in Darkness* contains, in lieu of political commentary, a strong antipathy to religion. In the novel the venal Carey Carr seems more interested in demonstrating his ability to heal through the judicious use of the Christian Science than actually attempt to understand what troubles his supplicants, while the traveling Black revival preacher Daddy Faith exerts a powerful and mysterious hold on his child-like followers, who seem unable to perceive him as an exploitative charlatan.

The Long March, which the usually laborious Styron completed in just six weeks while visiting Paris in 1952, breaks in almost every way from his debut. Rather than the shifts in tone and perspective that marked *Lie Down in Darkness*, Styron "filtered all action through the mind of a peripheral character, a Jamesian vessel of consciousness," Lt. Tom Culver (West, 225). Lt. Culver marks the first appearance of Styron's "silent first person narrator," the passive witness who seems slightly out of synch with the society he lives in and the company he keeps (Kelvin, 212). All of the novels that follow *The Long March* feature a similar character —from Peter Leverett in *Set This House On Fire,* to Thomas Gray in *the Confessions of Nat Turner* to Stingo in *Sophie's Choice* —an indifferent yet implicated Virginian, a participant-observer who bears witness to the violence and self-destruction that afflicts the protagonist. Each of Styron's Virginian narrators resemble him in some fashion, yet also recall the non-committal mid-westerner Nick Carraway from *The Great Gatsby* because, like Nick, Styron's participant-observers becomes embroiled in conflicts only tangentially related to them, conflicts that reveal the shape of the society in which they live. Interestingly, (with the possible exception of Stingo) despite every novel but his first containing a narrator that resembles him, Styron most often filters his views through the protagonists of his stories, and through an examination of these characters we begin to understand the evolution of Styron's ideas.[7]

In *The Long March*, Styron constructs the military as an alternate society, a world parallel to the social structure of the civilian world abandoned by Culver and the other reservists. Abruptly thrust back into military life, Culver chooses to conform to the mores of military society rather than challenging rules that he now recognizes as perverse. Lt. Culver is prepared to endure whatever the military demands of him in order

to return to the real world, but this resignation seems at odds with his civilian profession. Culver is a lawyer, a calling that presupposes a willingness to confront differences of interpretation and encourage conflict so that these differences can be resolved. Culver, like Styron's other lawyer-narrators, seems unaware of the crusading aspect of the law, as emblematized by Thurgood Marshall. The practice of the law, as depicted here, serves chiefly to enable its practitioner to live a comfortable life. Indeed, Culver's vague description of himself as "one of the brightest juniors in a good New York law firm" calls to mind a prosperous young man at a civil law firm that collects astronomical fees from its corporate clients.[8] Styron's portrayal of Culver suggests that lawyers serve as secular mediators that skillfully negotiate competing claims of commerce in a community, producing minor adjustments in the way business is run and exerting little influence on the society as a whole.

Colonel Templeton, the unit's commanding officer, appalls Culver when he orders his troops to march immediately following the botched training exercise. Captain Al Mannix, the protagonist of the novella, is equally upset, and registers his displeasure immediately. The dispassionate Culver is drawn to the earthy Mannix, whom Culver reports is "a dark heavy-set Jew from Brooklyn," because he "seemed to bring a spark of relief…to Culver's feelings of futility and isolation" (17). Mannix despises the Marines, but in this he is a typical reservist. What distinguishes Mannix from his compatriots is his willingness to protest openly, a daring posture that kept Culver "in a constant state of mild suspense—half amusement, half horror" (19). While Culver remains faceless in his role as narrator, Mannix is particular—the noble ethnic other (in this case a Jew) willing to challenge the value system of society. As with the lawyer/narrator represented here by

Lt. Culver, Mannix's heroic ethnic outsider will reappear in Styron's later fiction, and it is important to view Mannix's failed rebellion in *The Long March* in light of the other failed rebellions that Styron would later compose.

While Mannix is willing to challenge Templeton's order to march, he functions in the story as a reforming rather than a revolutionary figure. Mannix never attempts to shatter the logic of the military, he instead appeals to Templeton to delay the march until the reservists have had adequate time to adjust to the Marines. Yet even as Mannix engages the Colonel, Culver remains committed to silently following orders. "Born into a generation of conformists" Culver rationalizes "even Mannix was aware that his gestures were not symbolic, but individual, therefore hopeless, maybe even absurd, and that he was trapped like all of them in a predicament which one personal insurrection could, if anything, only make worse" (55). Culver becomes, in this passage, a stand-in for conformist McCarthyite society, and his insistence of the futility of protest condemns Mannix to attempt reform alone. Culver's defeatist assertion that Mannix can never transform the brutalizing ideology of the military isolates Mannix, even though the other officers also disapprove of the march. Culver fatalistically recognizes that, although this march might be put off if he and others join in protest, the Colonel would eventually exact punishment from his soldiers. Given this reality, Culver submits, despite his lack of sleep and lingering after-effects from the morning's traumatic accident. In such an environment, Mannix's gestures of protest indeed appear hopeless.

Futile and absurd persistence seems to be a dominant theme of the novella. Mannix, who completes the march despite having a nail lodged in his boot, only spites himself with his perverse display of heroism. Culver marches stoically alongside Mannix

in solidarity, but this solidarity rings false given Culver's refusal to actively support him despite his affection for Mannix. Culver completes the march with his dignity intact, but the preservation of dignity seems meaningless when confronted with the injustice of the march. The story ends with the revelation that Mannix will be reprimanded for his insubordination during and after the march, and then sent to the front in Korea. Culver notes that Mannix appears "sullen and beaten" at the prospect of being sent into combat, yet Culver has taken no action to prevent this from happening (112). Gavin Cologne-Brookes perceives in Styron's fiction an attempt "to harmonize various voices into an apparently unitary whole" (10), yet, at conclusion of *The Long March*, Styron's attempt at establishing harmony fails. Authority, represented by Colonel Templeton, successfully displaces the competing voice of Capt. Mannix, banishing his dissent while the other soldiers remain at risk, coerced by their sense of futility and isolation into fighting a war of questionable morality.

Mannix is the Christ-figure of the story: the heroic Jew with a nail through his foot who suffers, not just for his own sins but also for the sins of his companions who refuse to acknowledge his truth. Sacrificed to militaristic expectations of quietude and loyalty, Mannix leaves behind followers hesitant to make protests of their own. Unfortunately, Mannix's impending death promises no salvation or redemption. Indeed, as resisting subjects like Mannix are banished from military society, people like Templeton assume a higher degree of control over those left behind. With Mannix gone there is no one who will say "*Fuck* you" to Colonel Templeton, and the logic he represents (112), no one inside the military who will fondly recall his futile but noble

protest, including his friend Culver. Styron, writing from Paris, seems to fear the rising tide of conformity he perceives in his countrymen across the Atlantic.

Despite the suffering Culver and Mannix endure during the march and Templeton's promise to send Mannix into combat as soon as possible, Culver finds himself "unable to hate" the Colonel. Instead Culver pities "Old Al….with the back unbreakable" (117). Like a good liberal thinker, Culver rejects an overt identification with or participation in Mannix's attempts at reforming society, even though he approves of the gesture. An aspirational person like Culver cannot afford to become ensnared in an ideological dispute, and Culver has a bright career ahead of him in the real world. By steadfastly refusing to take sides, Culver preserves himself from risking a loss of standing by refusing to confront the vagaries of military culture. While he has performed admirably as a narrative device until this point, his discourse here seems false and out of character. Culver claims, after the march, that "he had hardly ever known a time in his life when he was not… sick with loneliness or afraid" (117), despite his earlier report that Mannix was one of the few people able to break through his isolation. This false observation by Culver demonstrates the dangers coercive conformity poses even to memory.

In *The Long March*, Styron articulates ideas through Mannix, relying perhaps in part upon a clichéd tradition of Jewish working class protagonists willing to confront social injustice. None of Mannix's compatriots share his need for reform because they have been thoroughly normalized by the Military. In fact, Culver calls the officers who uncritically accept Templeton's order "regulars" (16, and elsewhere) a generic military term given new meaning here. Indeed, the only character that seems responsive to

Mannix's act of protest is an unnamed Black maid who confronts Mannix and Culver at the end of the novella. The maid surprises Mannix as he painfully limps toward the bathroom clad in nothing but a towel. Startled, Mannix drops his towel and is unable to bend to pick it up due to his injury. Instead of being taken aback by Mannix's nudity, the nameless maid sympathizes with him immediately, looking at his bloody and swollen foot and asking him "Do it hurt?" before answering her own question "Deed it does." (119). Styron's introduction of the Black maid suggests that, in the post-War United States, only another oppressed minority can truly appreciate Mannix's gesture. Exhausted and broken, yet redeemed by his communion with the maid, Mannix repeats her statement in a curious affirmation of her perception: "Deed it does" (120). Mannix, the subjugated minority within the military, communicates wordlessly with another subjugated minority, a figure who, despite her subservient position to Mannix, instantly understands him. This can be the only explanation for her presence in the narrative and her immediate and sympathetic response to Mannix, since a maid in a military hospital would have encountered much worse than a badly swollen ankle.

With this concluding exchange, Styron tries to establish a parallel between the oppression that Mannix and the maid endure in life, but their positions in military and civil society are by no means equivalent. It seems ridiculous for Styron to try to equate *Captain* Mannix, who has attained status and power within military and civilian society, with a Black maid, who in 1952 remains by virtue of her color and sex outside of any system of power in either society. There is a profound difference between Mannix's oppression by the military and the oppression endured by a Black maid who cleans toilets on a military base in North Carolina. To claim otherwise, as Styron does with his

denouement, is to obviate both experiences of oppression. As Norman Kelvin observes, Styron wants Mannix "to declare kinship with those who must resist [racial subjugation,] an uncontained, objective social evil," (215). Styron can only accomplish this sentimental declaration by adopting "an analytic view of the spectrum of pain. All manifestations and experiences of pain are as a result seen as equal, and whatever depth there is beneath any one of them is never fully explored" (Kelvin, 209). Styron's unwillingness to explore the depths of particularized kinds of pain, his refusal to create a moral hierarchy whereby actions might take on more or less significance, allows his critics to accuse him of being facile and uncaring about the true nature of atrocity.[9] Soon, Styron's would draw from existentialism to support his refusal to categorize evil, but lacking this grounding the ending of *The Long March* seems both odd and hollow.

Styron's ending also attempts to indict Culver for his passive conformity by contrasting his reluctance with the maid's instantaneous identification with Mannix. Unfortunately for Styron, Culver's position seems the only rational one for a person of his social standing. Military conscription was a temporary inconvenience for the men selected, one that could be endured or evaded, and Styron only calls attention to the transitory nature of military servility by introducing the Black maid, whose social condition is static. This contrast undermines the effectiveness of the novella's ending, disrupting Styron's attempt to link Jews and Blacks as exemplary noble sufferers. The endurance of Mannix and the maid in the face of injustice, his bounded and particular, hers endemic and routine, simultaneously inspires Culver, the liberal witness, while remaining ultimately unthreatening to the power structure that subjects each of them to abuse.

After completing *The Long March*, Styron spent the year in Rome as winner of the Prix de Rome of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. During his fellowship in Rome, Styron first read the French existentialists, and he must have marveled at how their notions of absurdity and the dangers of a soulless ideology conformed to his recent experience in the military and his childhood distaste of evangelical religion. During his immersion into contemporary French thought, Styron's biographer reports, "Camus spoke with special urgency to him; he never forgot the experience of reading *The Plague, The Rebel* and *the Myth of Sisyphus* that fall and winter" (West, 253). Camus's notion of an existential man in despair, seeking justification for his action in the absence of any external value system exerted a powerful influence on Styron.[10] These ideas helped him understand the submerged themes of Mannix's absurdity and Culver's despair contained in *The Long Mach.* Camus contention, expressed in the Rebel, that the rebel slave must create for himself an ideology that endows him with a "confused conviction of an absolute right" would shape Styron's depictions of his protagonists in his next two novels *Set This House on Fire* and *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (Camus, 13).

Set This House on Fire is a sprawling mess of a book, difficult to summarize, yet vital to understanding the choices that Styron makes in *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. Peter Leverett, the narrator of the novel, is a lawyer working in Rome with a United States relief agency. While Lt. Culver used the law chiefly as a means to achieve a middle-class lifestyle, Peter holds the law in slightly higher esteem. Although Peter practices in a "drab province" of the law, "where only torts, wills, and contracts are at stake" (5), he prefers it to composing music, his first calling. "In America," Peter claims "no one listens to composers, while the law, in a way that is at once subtle and majestic

and fascinating, still works it own music upon the minds of men" (5). This seems an oblique reference to the litigation of the NAACP; by 1960, when the novel was published, the lawsuits filed by the civil rights group had begun to transform U.S. society. Indeed, Peter's father Alfred condemns the decision of the Warren court to enforce school desegregation, claiming that the South will "suffer and suffer because of it," but ruefully admits that Southerners "don't realize that the nigro has *got* to get his just payment, for all those years of bondage" (14). Alfred recognizes that the law has been unsuccessful at counteracting the oppressive ideology of the South and the violence that springs from it, failings that signal the breakdown of society. Civil law, the law of Peter Leverett and Thurgood Marshall, demands adjustment rather than confrontation in order to perfect society but Alfred understands that adjustments will prove insufficient.

Styron set his third novel in Sambuco, a fictionalized version of the resort town Ravello, in a post-war Italy struggling to come to terms with its embrace of fascism. Despite the setting of this novel, *Set This House on Fire* is as concerned with contemporary American ideals as Mailer's "The White Negro." Indeed, parts of *Set This House on Fire* address and refute notions advanced by Mailer's essay three years earlier, with Styron's novel attempting to articulate a different way to find meaning in a crass materialist post-war United States than through a naïve embrace of hipster nihilism. While the protagonist of the novel, Cass Kinsolving, is not quite an ethnic other like Mannix, the antagonist, Mason Flagg, like Colonel Templeton before him, qualifies as a cruel "regular" in the world of show-business, perhaps the only subculture of the United States as influential as the military during the 1950s. Like Templeton, Mason treats the people around him as means, and not ends in themselves.[11] Mason and Cass represent

two important vectors in contemporary life in the United States: the amoral Northern hipster-hedonist and the conflicted Southern idealist, and *Set This House on Fire* forces Peter to choose between their antithetical values. Peter seems reluctant to commit himself to either path, but a closer examination reveals that he, and Styron, has made his choice from the beginning.

Mason Flagg, the epitome of the wealthy, puerile hedonist-hipster, functions in part as a stand-in for Norman Mailer, allowing Styron some measure of revenge for the criticisms Mailer leveled against him in *Advertisements for Myself*. Mason is something of a straw-man for Styron, simplistic to the point of parody: "a wealthy, egocentric…sexual pervert who lives in an elegant Italian villa and goes through the motions of being a patron of the arts" (Finkelstein, 218). The dilettante Mason is narcissistic, oedipal, manipulative, "a hipster. A juvenile delinquent. A potty-mouthed little boy" (116). Styron presents Hipster-ism as another pernicious ideology that modern ethical men like Peter and Cass must confront and then reject. Still, despite the fact that Peter was "alienated from Mason and all that he stands for," (5) Mason is a childhood friend, and despite his many outrages Peter seems reluctant to reject his boyhood companion out of hand. Yet, when Peter learns that Cass has murdered Mason, Peter reassures Cass that Mason deserved death, telling Cass he "could have done away with five hundred Masons for what he did" (246). Mason's actions in the novel support Peter's assertions: Mason physically and mentally abuses his lovers, rapes a peasant servant for having the temerity to resist his advances, is fascinated with sex and pornography, and takes revenge on the alcoholic Cass for not being the enigmatic painter Mason originally mistook him for.

Cass, a WWII veteran from the working classes of North Carolina, struggles in Europe to achieve his vision as an artist, taking his wife Poppy and their four children along for the journey. Cass's search for an artistic method frustrates him because he is inauthentic: he seeks the means to play the role of artist rather than letting art become the thing that defines his life. When Cass encounters Mason, Cass is discouraged by his inability to achieve anything meaningful as an artist and terrified at the thought of returning to the United States. Mason seems to aid Cass by paying his rent, thus extending Cass's stay in Europe; commissioning (pornographic) artwork from him; and supplying him with an endless supply of spirits to salve Cass's dissatisfaction at his artistic failure. Cass, in Italy in part because he rejects the exclusively mercantile values of the United States, allows Mason to purchase him as long as this forestalls his return to the US. While in service to Mason, Cass introduces him to Francesca, an Italian peasant girl in desperate need of gainful employment. When Mason rapes Francesca, an assault that leads directly to her death, Cass becomes unhinged and murders Mason. For Cass, the assault on Francesca represents "an intrusion that is considered intolerable" an intrusion that transforms him into Camus's "rebel slave" (Camus, 13).

Ultimately, the novel suggests that Cass must murder Mason in order to obtain his own freedom and avenge Francesca, yet this act threatens to derange him.[12] After he commits the murder, Cass confesses to Peter that "[t]hese limbs are plumb wore out. Look at them…What was they made for, I ast you….To make monuments?….Nossir! They was made to destroy and now they are plumb wore out, and my head aches, and I yearn for a long spell of darkness" (238). Cass achieves a measure of existential freedom through what he felt was justifiable murder, but the experience has so traumatized him

that he contemplates suicide. Cass ultimately resists the urge to take his own life, but Peter reports that "in the space of a day, [he] had aged a dozen years" (241). Cass recognizes that he has acted in bad faith, that Mason was not a monster and that the self-indulgent and self-justifying choice to kill Mason only serves to further undermine his sense of self, which leaves Cass completely out to sea.

Peter visits Cass in South Carolina the following summer, hoping to understand the events in Italy that compelled Cass to murder Mason. Once he arrives, Peter discovers that Cass has transcended the self-destructive urges that bedeviled him in the aftermath of Mason's death and "is alive and flourishing." Cass has achieved a life of humility, order and meaning, symbolized in the novel by his contentment with his job teaching art classes, his embrace of patriarchal domesticity and his happily pregnant wife. Cass's transcendence explains why Peter considers Cass "a hero…I suppose" (4). Cass has murdered Mason, but despite committing that horrific act, has wrestled meaning from the world by learning to cherish small triumphs instead of retreating into a meaningless quest for artistic transcendence that will only lead back into the bottle. As Peter interrogates Cass, determined to understand how Cass has arrived at such a felicitous ending, Cass reveals that his pattern of violence predates Mason Flagg, and something more that artistic frustration brought about his descent into alcoholism.

Even before he met Mason and Peter, Cass imagined himself "a way out liberal, for a southerner anyway," in part because he has lived in the North and married a Northerner (369). In order to maintain this deception, Cass must repress memories of actions that contradict his sense of self. When Cass arrives in Europe and gains distance from the problems of the United States, his self-deception starts to crumble. Cass's first

awareness of the discrepancy in his identity comes from the dreams he is having, first in Paris and then in Sambuco. In these dreams there are "Jigaboos everywhere! Ever since I'd been in Europe about half of whatever nightmares I'd had —the ones I remembered anyway—had been tied up with Negroes… replete with Negroes, and blood, and horror" (369). Though resistant to psychoanalysis, Cass admits that "It really doesn't take any supreme genius to know that these various horrors and sweats you have when you are asleep add up to something, even if these horrors are masked and these sweats are symbols" (369). Cass dreams about gassing himself in a gas chamber aboard a flying airplane, followed by two Black men asking him "Man, why did you kill him…Man why did you let him die?" (368), and he awakens with the recollection of "something wretched and horrible that I had done when I was about fifteen years old—something really dreadful and wicked that I must have kept way in the back of my mind all these years" (370). This dream, a collision of the dehumanizing ideologies of white supremacy and Nazi fascism, reminds Cass of his complicity in a racially charged episode in Virginia.

Cass, a native Carolinian, lived with a relative in Colfax, Virginia during the summer of his fifteenth year, and worked part-time at a Western Auto store with a twenty-one year old man named Lonnie. Lonnie, Cass reports, "was somewhat unlettered, a Baptist, and only half a cut removed from trash" but remains, despite these handicaps, "the fairest flower of southern manhood" (371). Lonnie brings Cass with him to collect the debt of a Black sharecropper named Crawfoot because he was late on his monthly payment for a radio. Cass's inclusion implicates him for the first time in the maintenance of white supremacy. At the time, Cass never questioned the logic of Lonnie

requiring the assistance of a fifteen-year-old boy to complete this errand, and as they drive towards Crawfoot's home, Lonnie attempts to educate young Cass, informing him that while he could entrust some Blacks "with every nickel you got," Crawfoot is "a crook, criminal type….uppity" with "a son lives up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania" (374). Crawfoot's reluctance to pay his installments in a timely fashion, and his progressive choice to send his son North where he could escape the dehumanizing effects of Southern racism, threatens Lonnie, and he responds to that threat by striking out against Crawfoot.

After breaking into Crawfoot's empty shanty, Cass and Lonnie search for the radio, which they find hidden under a floorboard. Infuriated, ostensibly at finding the plastic casing of the radio cracked, Lonnie begins demolishing Crawfoot's cottage, including a picture of Crawfoot's family that struck Cass as a "sweetly gentle, calm-visaged mood of solidarity and pride and love" (376).[13] This picture demonstrates to Cass the falsity of Lonnie's earlier claims about Crawfoot's perfidy, and Cass's first instinct is to stop Lonnie, to preserve the photograph as well as the other artifacts in the room that suggest an oppressed people's sense of community and hope. Repulsed by Lonnie's senseless violence, yet unwilling, in part because of his age, to challenge him, Cass instead tries to leave, but Lonnie coerces him into participating in the destruction of Crawfoot's home. Cass's refusal remains "unspoken at the back of his throat" and his failure to resist Lonnie's coercion produces feelings of guilt derived from "his ponderous share of the blame" (377).

Despite the guilt he now feels about this incident, Cass remains in awe of "What we did!" (375). Cass recalls that, despite his initial reluctance, as he began to help Lonnie demolish Crawfoot's home, a feeling came over him,

> almost a feeling of anger, too, as if I'd picked up some of this young lout of a maniac's fury and was set on teaching the niggers, too. By God, this feeling, you know, I remember it—it was in my loins, hot flowing, sexual. I knew it was wrong, I knew it, I knew it—bestial, horrible, abominable. I knew all this, understand, but it was as if once I'd lost my courage anyway, once I'd given in—like some virgin, you see, who's finally stopped struggling and said to hell with it—then I could actually do what I was doing even with a sense of righteousness. All the clichés and shibboleths I'd been brought up with came rolling back—a nigger wasn't much more than an animal anyway, specially field niggers, crooked niggers like this Crawfoot—so I heaved and pushed there with Lonnie…" (377-8).

Cass compares himself to a rape victim here in an attempt to absolve himself of blame. Yet Cass ignores the impulse to stop Lonnie prior to joining in his terroristic act, choosing in the moment to embrace the stereotypes of Black inferiority promulgated by racist Southerners. This capitulation is tied to Cass's emerging sexuality, linking violence both to the maintenance of white supremacy and patriarchy. The ideology of white supremacy silences Cass and forces him to conform, just as the ideology of the military silenced Culver, but since Cass is a boy who cannot imagine another dispensation, this coercion leads him into despair.

Cass carries these conflicted memories, these feelings of guilt and sexual power and racial violence, repressed inside of him until he arrives in Europe. As Cass and Peter try to make sense of what happened in Sambuco, Cass admits that his feelings over this episode with Lonnie "figured in with what happened to me in" Italy (370). After Cass

arrives in Sambuco and recalls this event, even though he recognizes that "there are no amends or atonements for a thing like that," he tries to expiate his sin because if Cass were "shown one more dirty face, one more foul and unclean image of [him]self, [he] would not be able to support it" (379). Cass flounders in his guilt, wasting his life by getting into meaningless philosophical debates with an Italian policeman named Luigi and becoming Mason's sycophant in exchange for liquor and spending money, until he encounters the peasant Michele and his daughter Francesca.

Michele is afflicted, with typical Styronic understatement, with tuberculosis and a shattered leg, and his penniless daughter is powerless to help him. As he sits in their cottage, Cass makes an uncomfortable connection to his past: "Lord God I know [the smell inside the peasant hut] as well as my own name…it is niggers. The same thing, by God. It is the smell of a black sharecropper's cabin in Sussex County, Virginia. It is the bleeding stink of wretchedness" (416). Standing again in an impoverished shanty, Cass becomes filled with a sense of purpose, the "need to do something [overcame him] like a panic" (417). Unable to create art that is meaningful or embrace his role as patriarch due to his participation in a sadistic and ritualistic act of violence, Cass believes helping Francesca will assuage the feelings of guilt associated with that act and emancipate him. This hope would prove futile, for Styron portrays Cass's impulse is nothing but a noble form of being-for-others, with Cass hoping to emerge from his charitable mission with his innocence restored.[14]

Cass convinces Mason to hire the beauteous Francesca as his maid, and encourages her to steal money and food from Mason in order to help her father. Meanwhile, Cass has Mason purchase various medicines that can heal Michele,

exploiting his position as "house-boy" to acquire the means for Michele's salvation. While Cass helps Francesca and Michele, he slowly pulls his life together, drinking less and plotting to escape Mason's psychological domination,

> Because for more time than I care to think about I had allowed him to own me—out of spinelessness at first, out of whiskey-freed and desolation of the spirit, but at last out of necessity. And the paradox is that this slavish contact with Mason that I had to preserve in order to save Michele freed me to come into that knowledge of selflessness I had thirsted for like a dying man, and into a state where such a thing as dependence on the likes of Mason would be unheard-of, an impossibility (443)

Existentially speaking, the knowledge that Cass attains through his self-less devotion to Francesca, a devotion that forces him to further neglect his wife and children, is not authentic, for Cass aids her in part to realize his own freedom. Indeed, on the night that Cass kills Mason, he was willing to "repudiate this new independence of mine" in order to pilfer Mason's medicine chest and take pills to Michele (444). Because Cass has not yet grasped his existential freedom, his attempt to aid the Italian peasants in order to somehow negate his earlier abuse of a Black peasant ends in a repetition of the violence that he seeks to redeem.

In the end, it is an act of willful acceptance that rescues Cass. Cass's act of violence makes his self-rationalizations impossible, and he faces despair. Luigi provides him with an alibi for the murder and declares the case closed. Cass, freed from his master yet missing the pathos and companionship of his fellow servants faces the abyss and there is no transcendence there: "I suppose I should tell you that through some sort

of suffering I had reached grace…but this would not be true" (500). "To choose between" being and nothingness Cass continues, is "simply to choose being, not for the sake of being, or even the love of being…but in hope of being what I could be for a time" (500-1). By killing Mason, Cass thought that he would simultaneously avenge Francesca, symbolically exorcise Lonnie and emancipate himself from feelings of doubt and guilt. Instead, Cass can only achieve freedom by "simply choos[ing] being" an existential epiphany that grounds him and allows him to return to his family and to the South. Cass may still be at odds with the values of his society, but he now possesses a self-contained, self-justifying system that will sustain him.

Cass decides to embrace life, he will not lie down in darkness like the suicidal Peyton Loftis in Styron's debut. Instead, Cass learns to accept the contingent nature of his existence and embrace moderation after learning how fundamentally the urge to create and the urge to murder lies in his own being. Despite his denunciation of the values imported in Mailer's essay, Cass serves as Styron's version of the white Negro. Cass's reduction to slavery teaches him an important ethic, he understands that the problem of race colors everything for Americans, even our experience with the remnants of European fascism. Where Mailer's white Negro acts in the face of the external abyss of nuclear annihilation, Cass embraces life after learning that the urge to create and the urge to destroy are intertwined within his nature. Mason's murder is not a metaphorical consideration, but an actual act, and one with serious consequences for Cass. Cass must experience all of this in order to come to an understanding of the power of his freedom.

Styron avoids the problems with proportion that bedeviled *The Long March* because it is easier to accept a parallel between a Black sharecropper in the American

South and a landless peasant in post-War Italy than between Mannix and the Black maid. Cass rejects Lonnie and refuses to base his freedom and identity on the subjugation of a people, but the nightmares that afflict Cass reveal that, having made this gesture, he is adrift, unable to come to terms with his existence. Cass's assault on Mason leaves him in the same place rhetorically as his demolition of Crawford's shanty, but it is easier for Cass to transcend the former event because it is truly a solitary incident. Violence perpetrated by white Southerners against Blacks has a larger social context and symbolic meaning that the isolated violence of a man searching for the meaning of life lacks. Indeed Cass' comment that, if the Federal government tries to enforce the Brown decision, "guys [like Lonnie are] going to make the blood flow in the streets," (378) demonstrates that he understands this. By comparison, Luigi, Styron's deus ex machina, permits Cass's freedom because he is convinced that Cass will not repeat his destructive act. While the ravings of an individual man searching for meaning remains a poignant story, the sub-plot involving Lonnie does more to illuminate Styron's self serving use of the tropes of the Black textual tradition than Cass's adventure in Europe.

Still, Styron's depiction of Cass Masterson in *Set This House on Fire* provide an interesting point of comparison for his choices in *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. Cass, like Mannix before him, represents a particular kind of existential man, and there is no reason why Styron could not have extended this theme by transforming Nat Turner into an existential hero. Indeed, Cass and Nat Turner resemble each other in many ways. Both reject the Southern logic that subjugates Blacks, both endeavor to rescue landless serfs from their downtrodden condition, both embrace violence as a solution to their problems, both have delusions of grandeur and both are guided by visions.[15] Styron

could have transformed the "heroic" Cass into Nat Turner with little effort, demonstrating, a la Richard Wright, the true "universal quality" of existentialism, but he would make different choices for his infamous novel. I do not mean to suggest that *The Confessions of Nat Turner* lacks existential overtones, but that the existentialism present in the text is incomplete and thus incoherent. While existentialism ultimately preserves Cass, it serves to undo the fictional Nat Turner.

I will not attempt to elaborate all of the deviations from fact or defend the virtues of *The Confessions of Nat Turner*; I would only be retracing the steps of dozens of scholars before me. Instead, I assert that Styron's reluctance to establish a moral hierarchy that might in some way endorse emancipatory violence is the fatal flaw of the book, the flaw that prevents Styron from creating a Nat Turner palatable to the Black intelligentsia of the 1960s or to contemporary critics attempting to reassess his work.[16] Styron's reluctance to treat the fictional Nat Turner as he does the fictional Cass does not represent overt racism on his part. Indeed, with *Confessions* Styron attempts to extend the themes of the Black textual tradition he has consistently engaged in his work. As the black maid from *The Long March* and Crawfoot from *Set This House on Fire* demonstrate, the moralistic Styron sought to use Black characters to "ignite critical moments of discovery or change or emphasis" in his white protagonists (Morrison, iv). These moments of discovery push Styron's protagonists away from their society even as it empowers them. Yet, Styron proved unwilling to extend the logic of existentialism to its logical end when confronted with a Black protagonist, reverting instead to shallow psychological interpretation.

With *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, Styron has the opportunity to reverse the binary that he has used in his last two works. This novel promises to focus on a primogenitor of Crawfoot and the nameless maid, and counteract the logic of Lonnie's narrative by presenting an existential Black hero determined to wrest meaning from his absurd enslavement. Most felicitously, Thomas Gray, a Virginia lawyer, recorded the original *Confessions of Nat Turner* so Styron could have structured his *Confessions of Nat Turner* as he had *The Long March* and *Set This House on Fire*. To his credit Styron recognized that the lawyers in *The Long March* and *Set This House on Fire* serve as secular priests, observing and interpreting the sins of their companions, and Southern society in 1831 and Gray's own racism make any attempt by Styron's to portray Gray in a similar fashion untenable. So, while Styron does mimic *Set This House on Fire* by opening the novel after the climatic events have occurred rather than telling the story chronologically, Gray does not occupy the same place in the *Confessions* as Lt. Culver or Peter Leverett. Styron's choice to begin his novel with Turner in jail after the rebellion allowed him to

> introduce Mr. Gray, who took down the original confessions, and to have a kind of ironic counterpoint between these confessions—which had a lot of white man's hokum in them—and Nat's own story. The major reason, however, was that I wanted to get Nat after the insurrection, when he was questioning the entire relationship he had with God, with the God who had been his guide and mentor and light throughout his life as a preacher. I wanted to discover what was going on in his mind, now that he had instigated and committed murder, and now that he is bereft of God ("Interview", 71-2).[17]

Styron assumes that Nat Turner's reaction to committing murder would resemble Cass Kinsolving's. For Styron, anyone who murdered must face the existential angst that arises with that act. Styron cannot imagine a mind that is perfectly certain about the morality of his action, and would later be flabbergasted at his Black contemporaries who insist on this interpretation, despite his youthful interaction with self-satisfied Marines at Camp Lejeune.[18]

Styron's protagonists typically evince his views (eventually), and since the spiritual Turner was the secular Styron's protagonist, we should expect something similar here, no matter how jarring this may be to historical accuracy, and yet this does not seem to occur. Nat Turner's religiosity presented Styron with problems, since he had exhibited mistrust for teleological thinking from his earliest writing. Despite the rapid transformations caused by King's faith based activism in Montgomery and beyond, despite King's repeated assurances of absolute faith in God's approval of his actions in the face of the staunchest opposition, as in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" in 1963 which expanded on his philosophy of direct confrontation, Styron could not bring himself to depict Turner as possessing such character. Nor could Styron portray Turner as an antebellum Malcolm X, an ascetic exploiting an aporia in the American creed for to compel his followers into an adversarial position. Rejecting these possible contemporary models, Styron chose to portray Turner in the throes of a profound doubt.

Turner's existential angst is evident from the beginning of the novel. Incarcerated, sitting chained in a damp jail six weeks after the insurrection, Turner admits that he "had never known it possible to feel so far removed from God—a separation that had nothing to do with faith or desire…but with a forsaken solitary apartness so beyond

hope that I could not have felt more sundered from the divine spirit had I been cast alive…beneath the largest rock on earth" (10). Like Cass, once Nat has committed an act of violence, he finds no succor from the beliefs that had once sustained him. It is possible, of course, that Turner might have lost his faith during the six weeks he hid in the country after his rebellion was defeated, for white reprisals against the enslaved and free Blacks of Virginia were severe. Styron, however, presents Turner as shrinking from the violence that he incites from the beginning, musing, after witnessing the revolt's the first deaths, "Ah, my God…Hast thou truly called me to this?" (391). The Old Testament fervor that the historical Turner (and contemporary Civil Rights leaders) so ably stoked in his followers seems entirely absent here, as is any sense of a "confused conviction of absolute right." Turner has nothing to sustain him once his faith has dissipated, sinking into a despair that would only subside when Turner faced the gallows.

Later, while discussing his confession with Thomas Gray, Turner silently attributes the reluctance of enslaved Blacks to escaping bondage by committing suicide to a lack of willpower, rather than the presence of an intense religious faith. Previously, Turner believed that "a Negro's Christian faith, his understanding of a kind of righteousness at the heart of suffering…swerved him away from the idea of self-destruction" (27). This statement suggests that enslaved Blacks have taken a Kierkegaardian leap of faith, that religion helps them to cope with the absurdity of their situation.[19] Yet if this is Turner's initial understanding of "Negro forbearance," upon further reflection he concludes "black shit-eating people were surely like flies…lacking even that will to destroy by their own hand their unending anguish" (27). For an existentialist to claim that people lack will is akin to claiming that those people are sub-

human, which transforms Turner's realization into something that sounds suspiciously like a pro-slavery position. Turner's comment also undermines the ending of *The Long March*. Presumably it was the maid's own "righteousness at the heart of suffering" that enabled her to recognize Mannix's heroic gesture. Yet if religion serves to rob Black people of their will, as Turner asserts here, then the maid's sympathy with Mannix's suffering is meaningless.

While Turner sits in prison awaiting trail, the feeling of the Lord's absence continues to haunt him. When Turner attempts to calm his nerves by reciting a Psalm, "the same feeling of apartness from God which I had felt early that morning… washed over me in a chill desolate gush of anguish" (78). Turner's feelings of isolation evolve into more than simply a lack, instead they now convey "a sense of repudiation…of denial, as if He had turned His back on me one and for all" (78). The visionary Turner now doubts that the Lord ordained his rebellion as he once thought, and suspects that God demands that he repudiate such violence. Turner's faith, and thus his sense of self, has been so shaken that, while he was willing to risk death in pursuit of his freedom, he now possesses "a sudden fear of death" caused by "my own failure in praying to Him" (79). This is a revealing passage, for we learn, almost by accident, that Turner's sense of abandonment is not in fact caused by God's rejection of him but by Turner's subconscious refusal to connect with his Divinity. In other words, Turner seems to be in denial about something.

Despite his psychological apostasy, Turner continues to present himself to the world as a devout believer. When Gray confronts Turner's faith with some recent discoveries of modern science, Turner quietly responds that "by the Lord's grace all

things can be believed" (111). This assertion, which replaces the phrase "are possible" with the more ambiguous "can be believed" seems to attribute moral relativism to Turner's Christianity, robbing it of its teleological inflection, and transforming Turner's apocalyptic religion into one that embraces uncertain ends. Yet this is not enough for Gray who, after Turner's rote response exclaims: "Hogwash!…Christianity is finished and done with….Don't you realize further that it was the message contained in Holy Scripture that was the cause, the *prime mover*, of this entire miserable catastrophe? Don't you see the plain ordinary *evil* of your dad-burned Bible?" (111). Turner finds himself unable to answer this attack, and Gray continues his tirade by observing that Turner's brand of "Christianity accomplished the mob. The *mob*" (113). Gray's vituperation leaves Turner badly shaken, but it is uncertain which mob Gray refers to, Turner's or the mob of whites who sought retribution for Turner's killings. Left alone in his cell Turner wonders if "God is dead…otherwise why should God not heed me" (115). Christianity, Gray asserts here, replaces man's individual ethical choice with a false sense of certitude derived from an uncritical belief in a non-existent savior. Turner seems half-convinced by this discussion, silently questioning the morality of the rebellion while adopting Nietzschean doubts about God's existence.

Styron's interpretation of the Southampton Rebellion allows Margaret Whitehead, the only person killed by Turner, to serve the same role as Francesca did for Cass. Whitehead's death sends Turner into despair, and he loses his connection with God. It is not until Turner admits to himself on his way to the gallows that he would have "done it all again. I would have destroyed them all. Yet I would have spared [Margaret Whitehead]" that he hears the commingled voices of God and Whitehead welcoming him

to heaven (428). This admission is troubling, for if Turner's desire for Whitehead plays a decisive role in fomenting the rebellion, Turner's decision to spare her may destroy his ability to revolt. Worse, in a novel that seeks to portray the futility of violence, Turner's ascension suggest that selective violence, an ideologically free violence that admits little passion, is somehow permissible. And yet, Kelvin observes, "For Nat Turner to yearn for a transcendent union with Margaret is…for him to yearn also for a union with that part of her…that denies him his identity" (Kelvin, 225). Turner's devotion to Whitehead in the novel cheapens his rebellion, turning it into a physical uprising that leaves the presuppositions of white supremacy untouched and unquestioned.

The Confessions of Nat Turner reveals Styron's embrace of existentialism as incomplete. For Camus, the only foundation for humane values is an embrace of freedom in the face of the absurd. Yet, in the case of Nat Turner, Styron refuses to see the denial of freedom as a justification for violence and confrontation. Indeed, Styron never presents the "intrusion" that Turner finds "intolerable," the reader never sees the epiphany that transforms Nat Turner into a rebel. In *The Confessions of Nat Turner* violence disrupts, even when it is intended to redress a systemic wrong, a system that Styron claims to find abominable. By comparison, Cass is permitted the luxury of transcending several acts of violence to achieve peace and tranquility, while Turner is only granted the uncertain comfort of the grave.

Styron has doggedly defended himself from claims that *The Confessions of Nat Turner* is in any way prejudiced, and I sincerely believe that Styron did not need to engage the Black textual tradition simply to craft a racist text. Styron has issued many defenses of his approach in creating *Nat Turner*, one of the most recent appended to the

twenty-fifth anniversary of the text. In it Styron claims "when I began writing the book the Civil Rights movement still had the quality of conciliation…[and] was dreamed in a spirit of amity, concord, and the hope of a mutual understanding" ("Nat Turner Revisited," 434). According to Styron this spirit of conciliation shaped his production of *Nat Turner*, but Styron undermined his intentions by imposing twentieth century philosophical values on a mind that was the product of eighteenth century religious thought. Given the amount of back-peddling by Styron and his surrogates after the publication of *Ten Black Writers Respond*, of which "Nat Turner Revisited" is merely the latest, the reviews and essays he published and interviews he granted **before** the publication of *Ten Black Writers Respond* offer an opportunity to divine Styron's unvarnished intentions for the text. Despite the many post-facto rationalizations for the choices he made, a careful examination of these sources reveals that the logic Styron employed crafting *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, a logic that demanded he temper his presentation of existentialism, was not as benign as he imagined.

Of course, it is incumbent on critics to take what I call Styron's non-fictional *Nat Turner* writings with a grain of salt. In *Advertisements for Myself* Mailer complained that Styron "has spent years oiling every literary lever and power which could help him on his way, and there are more medals waiting for him in the mass-media" (464). While Mailer disparaged this behavior he understood the impulse behind it well, for "it is not easy to work many years on a novel which has something hard and new to say without trying to shape the reception of it" (465). If, as Mailer contended, Styron was trying to instruct his audience how to receive his forthcoming novel, a careful perusal of these sources should reveal what exactly Styron had in mind. There is, of course, a self-serving quality to

theses pieces, but they are more useful and revealing than anything Styron issued after the controversy over *The Confessions of Nat Turner* erupted.

Styron's earliest public mention of Nat Turner comes in an exchange with James Jones in the July 1963 *Esquire*. The two authors discuss their current projects and Styron asserts that Nat Turner's rebellion "*was* one the practical cause of the Civil War which very few people know" ("Two Writers," 44). Despite the circumstances of his life, Styron finds Turner "an extraordinary man….a man of *heroic* proportions" ("Two Writers," 45). This bodes well for Nat Turner, but the character we finally see is, for most of the novel, not a man of heroic proportions. Styron follows this interview with "This Quiet Dust," an essay published by Willie Morris in April of 1965 in a special issue of *Harper's Magazine* focused on the South. This essay, which was reprinted later that year in the collection *The South Today: 100 Years After Appomattox*, has become Styron's most important piece of non-fiction writing.[20]

Commissioned by Morris in November of 1963 and composed in three parts, "This Quiet Dust" treats Styron's childhood fascination with Nat Turner; Styron's scholarly research into his revolt; and finally his search for some trace of Nat Turner's Rebellion in contemporary Southampton.[21] In this essay Styron testifies that segregation during his Virginia childhood was so effective that it "tended almost totally to preclude any contact between black and white" (12). Given the prescribed social distance between whites and Blacks, Styron contends, "the entire sexual myth needs to be re-examined" for Styron suspects that "theories involving sexual tension have been badly inflated" (12). Styron notes here that Faulkner was unwilling to portray Dilsey, the black maid in *The*

Sound and the Fury, "from that intensely "inner" vantage point, the interior monologue" (13). This, he reports, he will attempt to do in his forthcoming novel.

Styron provides a list of the sources he has consulted to assist him in constructing his narrative, including Thomas Gray's original *Confessions* and Erik Erikson's psychoanalytic *Young Man Luther*, which Styron praises as "a brilliant study of the development of the revolutionary impulse in a young man, and the relationship of this impulse to the father figure" (16). Incredibly, Styron claims that, in the course of his research, "the evidence does not appear to be that Nat was ill-treated" (17), but later concedes, without seeming to notice the contradiction, that Turner's "bold and desperate bid for liberty" (21) was "so wild and daring that it could only have been the product of the most wretched desperation and frustrate (sic) misery of soul" (19). Styron acknowledges Turner's "gifts for preaching, for prophecy, and his own magnetism seem to have been so extraordinary that he grew into a rather celebrated figure among the Negroes of the county" (18). Styron reports here that during the insurrection Turner spared poor whites, visiting destruction only on those families that participated in the slave system. In the aftermath of the revolt, Styron reveals that "it has never been determined…how many black people, not connected with the rebellion, were slain at the hands of rampaging bands of white men who swarmed all over Southampton in the week following the uprising…. A contemporary report…put the number at close to two hundred Negroes, many of them free" (20). Although Turner "brought cold, paralyzing fear to the South, a fear that never departed….He went to his death with great dignity and courage" (21). Turner, as Styron describes him here, seems a man of heroic proportions,

a man ethical in his own fashion, who spares the lives of innocents and refuses to permit his men to rape or torture.

In the last section of "This Quiet Dust," Styron engages in speculation about Nat Turner's motivations for revolt as he drives through the Virginia countryside searching for a surviving sign of him. Styron wonders why Turner only killed one person, Margaret Whitehead, and why after committing this act Nat seems "dispirited, listless, as if all life and juice had been drained from him" (29). Styron speculates that Turner's sole murder forced him to face what he was doing: "Did he discover his humanity here, or did he lose it?" (29). This is an existential question in keeping with those that plagued Cass, a question the readers of "This Quiet Dust" must have assumed Styron would answer with his novel. The final pages of "This Quiet Dust" move from reportage to lyric, with Styron at last finding the remains of a house that Turner visited during his insurrection. Styron finds himself transported back to 1831, "that day and this day seem[ing] to meet and melt together, becoming almost one" (30). Styron presents himself as uniquely qualified to travel back to ante-bellum Virginia and tell Nat Turner's story, and I suspect this article had quite an influence on the reviews of *The Confessions of Nat Turner* that were published two years later.

Styron next mentions his current project during a January 14th 1965 conversation with a literary magazine at the University of Pennsylvania.[22] Here, Styron admits that "I don't think you can really define what evil is. [The] use of the word 'misunderstanding' is interesting, because somehow the idea of misunderstanding is at the center of all human relationships which go awry" ("Conversation," 60). Styron then discloses that he "tend[s] to regard evil in a totally abstract way, simply because I believe that every

human being is capable of it" ("Conversation" 61). The diminution of evil to mere misunderstanding confirms Kelvin's complaint that Styron sees "[a]ll manifestations and experiences of pain…as equal, and whatever depth there is beneath any one of them is never fully explored" (209).[23] Styron seemingly forgets the themes he invested into *The Long March*, refusing to acknowledge that broad historical traumas, like the Holocaust, (which he would later be accused of not treating with enough regard in *Sophie's Choice*), chattel slavery, and racial segregation derive from far more than just simple misunderstanding, and rely on more than continual misunderstanding to perpetuate themselves.

The reverent tone that Styron uses to describe Nat Turner in "This Quiet Dust" is totally missing from an expansive interview he granted in September of 1965 to Robert Canzoneri and Page Stegner.[24] Styron summarizes his novel here, which he had just completed, and it is perhaps the most inflammatory of Styron's non-fictional *Nat Turner* writings. In this interview Styron reveals that he has honed in on "the relationship with God" as "the central thing in my own conception of the man" ("An Interview with William Styron," 72). Styron later describes Turner's only victim, Margaret Whitehead, as "an eighteen-year-old nubile, **religious nut** very similar to" Nat (75 emphasis added). Somehow, during the composition of the novel, Styron has shifted his consideration of the questions that surround Nat Turner from the existential to the psychological. Turner is described repeatedly here as a demented and delusional zealot, as is his young victim. Styron also downplays the centrality of Turner's rebellion to the story he is composing, since his book "not just a story about a revolt. I hope that it deals…responsibly with the problem of responsibility itself, or moral choice, [or the] use of violence" (69). *The*

Confessions of Nat Turner, Styron asserts here, presents as equivalent the violence of slavery and the violence of an act of resistance to slavery. Styron, like Lt. Culver, seems to diminish both ideological abuse and the attempt to resist that ideology by treating them as equivalents.

Styron's earlier supposition that the young Nat Turner was not ill treated by the Turners has grown here into the speculation that the Turners, "were enlightened masters like so many Virginia planters of the time, opposed to slavery but trying to find a way out" (72). Styron draws this conclusion "because it seemed to me that there could be only one way to justify the fact that Nat *had* been educated, *could* read the Bible and knew it by heart" and that was through the beneficence of the Turner family (72). Although Nat Tuner, who was born in 1800, would have, by the time he was twenty-five, seen abuse, families separated, entire plantation communities uprooted and sold down the river to Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama, Styron insists he experienced "a kind of slave life in which—as a child, as a boy, as a young man and so on—he once was happy by anybody's standards" (73). According to Styron, it is only when the Turner family, forced to adjust to the depressed economy that pertained in Virginia throughout the 1820s, sold Nat Turner rather than freeing him that Turner experienced the desire to rebel. Styron now finds Turner's longing to lead his people out of bondage unexceptional, not a proper moment for existential rebellion, for anyone might have acted as Nat did, "if you had a measure of **madness** in your head, anyway" (74, emphasis added). Styron contends here that people don't revolt when they are oppressed: "If you oppress people, you've got them under your heel. It's when you've given them the smell of something grand" that they are apt to rebel (74). Thus, Nat Turner's Rebellion was set

in motion not by the intolerable conditions of slavery, but by "kindly, educated people influenced by the University of Virginia and Thomas Jefferson" who allowed Nat Turner to envision a better life before snatching it away (74-5). Psychological consideration have completely eclipsed the existential here.

In this interview, Styron begins to explicate Nat Turner's relationship with Margaret Whitehead. Turner, Styron admits, is exceptional, "an educated slave, and a man even of some refinement in a curious way. A man of that sort I think in a deep part of his heart would scorn the average, illiterate, pathetic colored woman—slave woman" (76). Even if we grant Styron this assertion, he seems to conveniently forget that, as he mentioned in "This Quiet Dust" there was a sizable population of free Blacks in Southampton from which Turner might have taken a lover or a wife. Styron dismisses this out of hand, as he does the idea that Turner might successfully choose celibacy because of his religious calling. Instead Styron assumes that Turner desires the virginal Whitehead, but the social barrier between them seems "impermeable" and Turner could only destroy this obstruction by attacking it "in the most apocalyptic way that is possible for a human being. You break through it by killing" (76).[25] These, then are the twin motivations for Turner's rebellion: his outrage at the insufficient kindness paid to him by his master, who taught him to read and write and gave him the liberty to preach the Gospel, but would not free him; and his lust for a white eighteen year old "religious fanatic" (76). Styron submits this as an explanation as to why Turner would lead a rebellion but kill only once, and why his one victim was "the only nubile girl, so far as I can find out, killed" during the entire insurrection (76). So much for Styron's re-examination of the sexual myth of the Black man.[26]

The final interview that will be considered here is a transcript of a conversation that took place between Styron, C. Vann Woodward, and Richard W.B. Lewis on November 5th 1967, about three months after the novel's release, on "Yale Reports, a weekly broadcast review program presented by Yale University and WTIC" (Yale, 83).[27] Styron was a colleague of Woodward and Lewis's at Yale, teaching informally in the English department there, so it comes as no surprise when, early in their conversation, Woodward pronounces *The Confessions of Nat Turner* "a very valid and authentic use of history for the purposes of fiction" (85), and soon after declares the novel "above criticism" (86). Although *Confessions* had received overwhelmingly positive notice, there were two prominent negative reviews, Wilfrid Sheed's, which appeared on the front cover of *The New York Times Books Review,* and Martin Duberman's, in *The Village Voice*. Woodward's comment here seemed designed to reassure Styron that he is among friends who properly venerate his efforts.

Moving into a discussion of the novel itself, Styron again links the existential angst that Turner experiences in the novel to "his failure to have achieved anything in the rebellion [which] is more or less connected to his failure to make contact with God, who ordered his life and with whom he carried on a very close relationship" (Yale, 87). Styron consistently attributes a loss of faith to Turner, but fails to attributes this to an existential confrontation with his being, but rather a kind of psychological depression. Again he claims that

> given decency on the part of a solicitous master, and given an intelligent and impressionable young Negro like Nat, life was and could have been, as I portrayed it, tolerable. Even more than tolerable. Yet [the] insecurity that one

> lived with during slave times was such that I think Nat snapped into a kind of obsessive fanaticism (90-1).

In this interview, as in the novel, Styron depicts Turner as a fanatic bent on destroying as many whites as possible. This is at odds with what Styron reports in "This Quiet Dust," yet Styron must create a psychological justification for Turner and his company's ability to murder whites, and he concludes that only by holding all whites in contempt these few enslaved men must have held such as to desire to indiscriminately exterminate them.[28] Styron discusses Turner and his rebellion here, as in the novel, in almost exclusively psychological terms. By placing such a strong emphasis on Turner's supposed tolerable circumstances, Styron supports the same individualistic ethos he took such pains to denounce in *Set This House on Fire.* It seems not to occur to Styron that, as a preacher to say nothing of a member of an enslaved community, selfish individualism must have been anathema to Turner.[29]

Styron claims "it is impossible to live in America these days without giving the racial problem a great deal of thought" and indeed *The Confessions of Nat Turner* represents the culmination of years of serious thought about race by Styron (Yale, 81). It is, however, telling that as Styron thought about Nat Turner, he moved away from presenting him as an existentialist and instead choose to portray him as a seething collection of contradictory psychological urges. Styron claims that "the efforts I made to recreate Nat Turner, to bring him back to life, represented at least partially the accomplishment of an imperious moral duty: to get to know the blacks" (Yale, 81). Unfortunately, try as he might, Styron is unable to truly reproduce a Black consciousness in Nat Turner that seems consistent with the values of his earlier work, let alone the

Christian ethic of "General" Nat Turner. While Turner remains unknown, a review of Styron's body of work makes his predilections all too clear.

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[1] This speech is found in *Critical Essays on William Styron* .

[2] Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, 89-90.

[3] See Louis Menand's *Metaphysical Club* for a detailed analysis of pragmatism influence on Columbia and New York City intellectual life.

[4] I make this distinction to distinguish King's program of direct action and confrontation from the juridical efforts of the NAACP and the rhetorical efforts of forbearers of the modern Civil Rights Movement.

[5] See *The Portable Arendt Reader* for the essay in question.

[6] "The Red Badge of Literature," *This Quiet Dust*, 203.

[7] Again, with the exception of Stingo, Styron's narrators often seem to perform as his imagined or ideal reader.

[8] *The Long March,* 7. All subsequent references will be made in the body of the text.

[9] Styron faced this criticism with *Sophie's Choice* as well as *The Confessions of Nat Turner.* See, for example, Morris Dickstein, "The World in a Mirror: Problems of Distance in Recent American Fiction" *Sewanee Review,* 1981

[10] Camus expresses these ideas most fully in *The Rebel (*1951*)* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942).

[11] Utilitarianism, the philosophy that existentialism refutes most directly, contends that ethical people may use others as means to their end, so long as that use does them no harm. See *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill.

[12] When Cass murders Mason, he is under the false impression that Mason has not only raped Francesca but also beaten her to death. Eventually, Styron reveals that a retarded field hand killed Francesca as she fled from Mason in a panic, making him culpable in

her death. For the sake of simplicity, I refer solely to Mason's rape rather than alluding to the chain of events that result in her death.

[13] Lonnie's reference to plastic here seems anachronistic.

[14] For a thorough discussion of existential states of being, one could examine part one of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, though I don't recommend it.

[15]The dreams that Cass has, in addition to confronting him with his suppressed racist behavior, compelled him to leave Paris: "I can't help but believe that something *forced* me to go to Sambuco. These nightmares I had" (248).

[16] That Styron is unable to do so is unsurprising; Sartre broke with Camus over the same issue

[17] It is interesting that in various interviews Styron refers to Thomas Gray by his last name and to Nat Turner as "Nat."

[18] See Louis Menand's *Metaphysical Club* for a discussion of how the Civil Rights Movement and the Cold War revived attitudes of certitude that prior to the Civil War.

[19] See *Either/Or* for an elaboration of Kierkegaard's Christian philosophy

[20] The title of the essay is drawn from an Emily Dickinson poem. When Styron published a collection of essays and other non-fiction in 1982, he entitled it *This Quiet Dust and Other Writings*.

[21] The essay bears more than a passing resemblance to Alice Walker's recounting of her search for Zora Neale Hurston

[22] Although this interview predates the publication of "This Quiet Dust" the essay was likely finished before Styron granted this interview.

[23] Mailer noted this tendency in 1957, years before *Lie Down in Darkness* or *The Confessions of Nat Turner* demonstrated it to the world. See his "Evaluations: Quick and Expensive Comments on the Talent in the Room" in *Advertisements for Myself*.

[24] This interview was not published until the summer of 1966 in *Per/Se*, a short-lived quarterly that ceased publication in 1969.

[25] In a later interview Styron claims that Turner "desired her; he wanted her…I believe this must have been true. I cannot prove it. I think that if there is any psychological truth in these insights, it partially lies in the fact that one often wishes to destroy what one most earnestly desires" (Yale, 90).

[26] Styron's statements here suggest he made an authorial choice to depict Turner in this fashion, if only because this seems the only sensible way for him to present Turner. After the controversy erupted, when pressured to explain why Nat Turner lacked a wife when at least one contemporary newspaper mentions her presence, Styron's asserts that the historical record did not decisively indicate that she had existed.

[27] This interview is entitled "The Confessions of William Styron" in *Conversations with William Styron*. In order to avoid the confusion of referring to yet another set of confessions, I refer to this interview as the Yale interview.

[28] One wonders if the rise of H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael influenced Styron's shift in attitude.

[29] Styron's novel also omits an episode from Gray's *Confessions* where Turner reports that he had escaped for several months but returned to the community and thus back into servitude in order to lead everyone to freedom, perhaps because this account would make depictions of Turner's isolation and individualism unbelievable.

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