

FALLING OUT OF HISTORY: GENDER IN REPRESENTATIONS OF POLICE
VIOLENCE IN POST-45 AFRICAN AMERICAN NOVELS

Elias Rodriques

A DISSERTATION

in

English

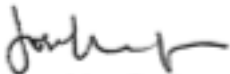
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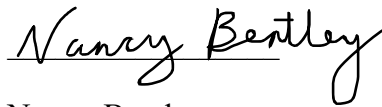
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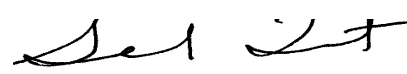
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ABSTRACT

FALLING OUT OF HISTORY: GENDER IN REPRESENTATIONS OF POLICE VIOLENCE IN POST-45 AFRICAN AMERICAN NOVELS

Elias Rodriques

Josephine Park and Salamishah Tillet

This dissertation aims to answer a question implicitly posed by recent scholarship in critical prison studies: How did police violence come to be masculinized? Drawing upon archival work, historical research, and close readings, this dissertation analyzes African American literary history through the lens of recent insights from critical prison studies, Black Feminist literary criticism, and Black Marxist thought to argue that the post-war African American novel was one cause of this masculinization. In the first chapter, I argue that 1950s novelists represented police violence as dispossessing Black men's labor and Black men's labor as a means of abolition. In the second chapter, I argue that 1960s novelists represent police violence as colonizing Black men and solidarity amongst colonized men globally as the means of abolishing state violence. In my third chapter, I argue that 1970s Black Feminist novelists depicted police violence as dispossessing Black women's private-sphere labor and Black women's private-sphere concerns as essential to abolition. In my fourth chapter, I argue that 1980s Black Feminist novelists revise these earlier masculinist cultural scripts to counter the cultural repression of police violence against Black women. These arguments reassert the primacy of gender in constructing history and memory, insist upon the importance of culture in historical repression, and provide a model for ways to counteract that repression, all as a means of providing a theory of the relationship between gender, culture, and history.

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Introduction: Finding Life in the Traces of Destruction

In the summer of 2013, I was interning at *n+1*, a leftist magazine in Brooklyn, when news broke that George Zimmerman was acquitted for the murder of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, a town about an hour-and-a-half drive away from where I grew up. My white coworkers expressed shock, insisting that the case would be appealed and overturned. It had to be. Everyone knew he was guilty. Though I, the only Black employee, had put my foot in my mouth often enough to fear speaking when the editors were talking, I couldn't keep quiet. There was nothing new about Zimmerman's acquittal, I said, and the case would be overturned. Despite lacking the citations to verify this claim, my gut told me that there was a long history to the extrajudicial murder of Black people, that these killings were systemic, and that any acquittal would be an exception, not the rule.

Looking back on that moment now, my conviction about American history surprises me. Like many new college graduates from prestigious universities, I was poorly read and well indoctrinated in the belief that ascending the class ladder granted a uniformity in milieu. Young, naïve, and dumb, I assumed I held the same beliefs as my coworkers. We were, after all, in the midst of the Obama-era. Yet my understanding of American history, like a pair of glasses of an entirely different prescription than the ones coworkers wore, led me to a different analysis of Zimmerman's murder. Some of my understanding derived from different material circumstances: My experiences as a young person in Jamaica, witnessing Jamaica Defense Force tanks on the street, and as a Black immigrant in Florida, learning the extent of my speed by running from the cops. Some of

my analysis also derived from a different culture: My mother's lessons about how to survive encounters with the cops, movies I watched over and over like *The Harder They Come* (1972) and *Boyz n the Hood*, and the music I listened to on repeat, including that of 2pac's, who rapped, "Cops give a damn about a Negro/Pull a trigger, kill a nigga, he's a hero." My personal experiences, lessons imparted by my family, and my leisure consumption of Black cultural products all taught that state and state-sanctioned violence against Black Americans was a long project, one dating back farther than I knew. These lessons on the events of history, exceeding my knowledge of history monographs, led me to see Zimmerman's acquittal as a foregone conclusion.

Yet it was not only that culture and material events shaped my understanding of state and state-sanctioned violence; that violence also made culture. When the conversation in the office reached an impasse, an editor suggested I write about my experiences of antiblack violence in Florida as a means of commenting on Zimmerman's murder for *n+1*. At 6 AM the next morning, before I left for work, I sat down at my desk and thought back on my many run-ins with the law. When the images of those dark nights and shadowy uniformed figures came to mind, the words came rushing, seeming not so much like my current thoughts about long ago incidents so much as memories of my thoughts at the time that real cops stopped me. To paraphrase Chandan Reddy in *Freedom with Violence* (2011), actual and threatened state assaults subtended theses on the kinds of people chained to the state's brutalities (Reddy 38). Their handcuffs, their guns, and the feel of their probing hands on my young body had written the essay for me long before I ever sat down to write. What resulted—my essay, "Fear and Aggression in

Florida” (2014)—was little more than a transcript of their violent lessons. The piece was limited by its form. I had written a first-person essay, so I only discussed what I experienced or had heard about. This structure contributed to a representation of state violence against Black men with no real description of the ways in which state violence might persecute other Black people. Even as state violence generated writing about the ways in which American governance required assaults on Black people, the same formal and aesthetic choices that made the writing emotionally and argumentatively compelling to my editor, ultimately, limited its theorizing.

Today, I find the most glaring limitation to be the piece’s representation of the gender of state violence because a sizable number of scholars and activists writing at the same time as I wrote my piece were advocating for a more serious attention to the gender of state violence. State violence against Black women, trans people and nonbinary people had been discussed before—notably, in the 2006 anthology, *Color of Violence* by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence—but it gained new saliency amongst Black radicals in the 2010s. In February of 2015, two years after #Blacklivesmatter began trending for the first time in response to Zimmerman’s acquittal, #Sayhername began trending on twitter. People tweeted the hashtag along with the names of (mostly Black) women assaulted by the police in an effort to bring new attention to police violence against women. In May of 2015, this campaign culminated in the African American Policy Forum’s report, *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Violence Against Black Women* (2015). In their introduction, they write,

The resurgent racial justice movement in the United States has developed a clear frame to understand the police killings of Black men and boys, theorizing the ways in which they are systematically criminalized and feared across disparate class backgrounds and irrespective of circumstance. Yet Black women who are profiled, beaten, sexually assaulted, and killed by law enforcement officials are conspicuously absent from this frame even when their experiences are identical. When their experiences with police violence are distinct—uniquely informed by race, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation—Black women remain invisible. (AAPF 1)

Even for many critical of police violence, police killings of Black women were a flash in the pan, trending on twitter or appearing on local news segments for a few days before being forgotten in favor of the police murders of Black men. Though anyone paying attention to the news of police assaults had assuredly come across stories of police violence against Black women, those stories were largely repressed from public memory. #Sayhername aimed to change that. In the same decade that critics of police violence attentive to gender tweeted this hashtag, a notable contingent of scholars in critical prison studies, comprised largely of anti-carceral Black Feminists and trans studies scholars, also focused especially on gender. In *Normal Life* (2011), for instance, Dean Spade writes, “Because trans people are frequent targets of criminal punishment systems and face severe violence at the hands of police and in prisons every day, investment in such a system for solving safety issues actually stands to increase harm and violence” (Spade 14-5). Scholars like Eric Stanley echoed Spade’s claim that trans studies scholars and trans activists ought to be abolitionists and that studies of the prison industrial complex required more careful attention to the experiences of trans people. Their work was met with similar calls from Black Feminist scholars, like Julia Oparah (née Sudbury), for more attention to state violence against women of color and trans people. In scholarship,

activism, and public policy work, a sizable contingent (though by no means the majority) of thinkers insisted on the primacy of gender in producing police violence and in regulating the memory of police violence. By and large, anti-carceral Black Feminists, trans scholars, and trans activists agreed that public discourse masculinized police violence in the 2010s.

How, exactly, did police violence come to be masculinized, for whom did it come to be masculinized, and when did this masculinization happen? “How is it,” Beth Richie asks in *Arrested Justice* (2012), “that the representations found in the local or national campaigns against police brutality seldom depict *women* as victims?” (Richie 11). Despite (undercited and underread) scholarship and journalism from anti-carceral Black feminists documenting historical and contemporaneous cases of police violence against Black women, much of this work does not offer a theory of the process that led to this memory repression so much as a diagnosis of it. I find one source of this enforced forgetting, to use Alan Wald’s term in *The American Night* trilogy (2002, 2007, 2012), in the postwar African American novel. In the 1950s and 1960s, as the number of lynchings declined, police violence took on a new salience as the focus of Black radical ire. “Once the classic method of lynching was the rope,” wrote the Civil Rights Congress in their 1951 petition to the U.N., charging the American government with attempting to commit genocide against Black people. “Now it is the policeman’s bullet” (CRC 8). As Black radicals increasingly critiqued police violence, representations of lynching declined and depictions of police violence increased in the African American novel, replacing narratives of state-sanctioned mob violence with ones of uniformed state violence. The

increased visibility of police violence in the midcentury African American novel coincided with its masculinization. These novels represented police violence as only hurting Black men, which contrasted with newspaper accounts of police violence against Black women. In the battle between newspaper and hardcover, the novel won; the riot scene in *Invisible Man* is far better remembered than the historical police harassment of Margie Polite that led to the 1943 Harlem Riot upon which that scene is based. But historical memory is fickle. Midcentury novels also carried forward pre-war, Marxist-influenced economic critiques of police violence that were forgotten, while the novel's masculinization of police violence was canonized. Put differently, postwar African American novels preserved a labor radicalism at the same time that they produced a gendered conservatism. Drawing upon archival work, historical scholarship, and analyses of novels as well as their drafts, this dissertation endeavors to recover both the labor-centric critique of police violence and the African American novel's role in the repression of the history of police violence against women of color as a means of explaining how, exactly, saying her name came to be necessary in the 2010s. In this attention to one kind of cultural repression, this dissertation contributes more broadly to studies of the relationship between memory, history, and fiction.

But the African American novel was not only a tool of gendered repression; it was also the site of the effort to rehabilitate the gendered tropes of the police violence narrative. The recuperation of the masculinization of police violence, if not began, came to something of an early apex in the writing of the Black Feminist boom of the 1970s and 1980s. This much-remarked upon renaissance in Black women's writing coincided with

the revision of earlier masculinist genres, including representations of police violence, in novels as famous as *The Color Purple* (1983) and as little-discussed as Alice Childress' *A Short Walk* (1976). These Black Feminist novels worked to counteract the gendered conservatism underlying representations of police violence in the midcentury that had, simultaneously, preserved a prewar economic radicalism. Part of the Black Feminist project was to develop new understandings of state violence and of the state that worked to counteract the gendered cultural repression of novels in previous decades, while rehabilitating the economic radicalism of the past. Their work kept in the public memory, even if in the far recesses of that memory, a sense that gender constitutes carceral violence, paving the way for more recent accounts of the prison industrial complex. This writing helped make it possible for anti-carceral Black Feminists to insist, as Kimberlé Crenshaw writes, that “an analysis of social control that squarely addresses the various ways that women of color are situated with respect to these dynamics might tell us something more about the conditions of possibility that make such a [carceral] regime realizable” (Crenshaw 2012 1471). Though little has been written about Black Feminist novels' representations of police violence—or about representations of police violence in the African American novel more generally—returning to these depictions and theories of state violence can shed new light on means by which police violence can be demasculinized in the contemporary period. Put differently, 1970s and 1980s efforts to regender police violence can teach scholars how to regender police violence in the present. Their emphasis on the place of culture in repressing history is especially critical at this moment, in which many scholars focus on the ways in which the archive represses history. These novels, I argue, have much to contribute about the ways in which culture

works alongside the archive to structure the epistemological limits of history as well as the ways in which culture can contribute to the effort to recover that which was once lost.

This dissertation, accordingly, is a work of literary history, one which aims to explain how many forgot state violence against women of color and how they might remember it again. The period I study (the 1950s through the 1980s) maps roughly onto the Cold War, but it also follows a crucial period before the videotaped police assault of Rodney King—the first major instance of the recording of state actors by ordinary civilians, as opposed to recordings done by the media or the state itself—in which the word was the premier venue for civilian contestations of state violence that provided the foundations for anti-carceral organizing present. Put differently, this literary history is a genealogy of our contemporary, aiming to demonstrate the ways in which literary representations continue to structure contemporary understandings of police violence in an era in which videos of such violence abound. It is also a history of storytelling that follows many actors (journalists, organizers, experiencers of harm, doers of harm, novelists, critics, theorists, Marxists, anti-Marxists, Black nationalists, pan-Africanists, Black Feminists, and more), all of whom represent police violence differently. In their representations, these actors contribute to the memory and repression of police violence against women of color in different ways, at different times, and under different conditions. The exact question of who remembered, subordinated, and repressed what, when, and where is a complicated one—there exist outliers in each decade, though the outliers are not always whom readers might expect them to be—requiring a granular attention to detail that I leave to my chapters.

Being more interested in public and collective memory than an individual author's, this dissertation turns to the aggregate, discussing myriad novels rather than close-reading exemplary ones at length. I also take this approach to literary history to counter the assumptions scholars might have about an author's literary production. Whenever I have diagnosed the midcentury masculinist representation of police violence in public, scholars have often responded that this could not be the case. "What about Ann Petry?" scholars have asked me more than once. Even Ann Petry masculinized police violence in her 1953 novel, *The Narrows*, I have responded, to which scholars often suggest that there is simply a canonical book that we cannot recall. This dissertation reconstitutes midcentury literary production as well as the Black Feminist boom that diagnosed the midcentury's masculinization in part to suggest that there is no such canonical text. The masculinization of police violence and the Black Feminist subversion of that masculinization was a collective project undertaken by many writers of varying political positions. Alone, each writer could not construct the history of police violence, but together, they could contribute to the constitution and repression of the history of police violence against Black women. Collectives, not individuals, create the cultural conditions that construct and repress—remember and forget—history. Without a collective theory that can conceive of police violence as persecuting Black women, the instances of such violence, be they all over the news or described in secrecy to loved ones, cannot be encoded into historical memory.

No collective operates in a vacuum, and these novels were assuredly not alone in their construction and repression of the history of state violence against Black women.

Having many means and incentives to cover up its abuses, the state is another cause of that repression, and a different dissertation could have discussed the state's means of repression and the historian's means of cutting against the grain of that repression in ways that would be instructive and enlightening. But I turn to African American novels in part because the state did not entirely determine what Black people critical of state violence knew. Black thinkers did not simply regurgitate the state's self-legitimizing alibis. Rather, they circulated accounts of police violence—many of which persisted and thrived in the African American novel—different from the state's, critiquing its violence and offering visions of prison abolition before the term was in vogue. By reading Black radical accounts of police violence alongside the state's self-legitimizing narratives of violence chronicled by historians like Elizabeth Hinton, Naomi Murakawa, and others, I foreground that Black radical critiques of state violence and imaginations of alternative forms of governance exceed the state's attempt to limit what is knowable about its assaults. In so doing, I am guided by the premise that Black people are not entirely determined by antiblackness. To quote Fred Moten in *Black and Blur* (2017), this dissertation partakes in a vision of Black studies that aims “to subordinate ... the critical analysis of anti-blackness to the celebratory analysis of blackness” because, even though antiblackness contributes to the constitution of Blackness, Blackness exceeds antiblackness (Moten viii). By privileging the novels' critiques of state violence and their abolitionist imaginaries over the state's attempt to limit what is knowable and utterable about state violence, this dissertation aims to consider the ways in which African American representations of state violence might pave the way toward the unlinking of Blackness and antiblack vulnerability to state violence.

Dispossession

To understand the trajectory of this postwar African American literary history, as well as its critiques and abolitionist imaginaries, it is necessary to return to the context in which it emerged. The early twentieth century is of particular importance here. At the same time that this period saw widespread antiblack violence, as in the famed bloody summer of 1919, the period also saw radical organizing against lynching, police violence, and other assaults. This political work was both material and ideological, the latter coming to the fore in writings that developed theories of state and state-sanctioned violence and the means of abolishing it. Though these efforts occurred throughout the first half of the twentieth century, they reached something of a fever pitch in the Popular Front, when a variety of groups worked to protect Black people from antiblack violence. The theories developed during this time influenced Black radical thought long after the Popular Front's formal close in 1939. Just as histories of the long Civil Rights Movements have demonstrated the continuities between prewar and postwar Black radical organizing, so too do I argue that prewar Black radical analyses of state violence shaped post-war African American representations of police violence in the novel.

The early twentieth century was the site of much organizing against state and state-sanctioned violence. As Megan Ming Francis writes in *Civil Rights and the Making of the Modern American State* (2014), “[l]ynching and mob violence were at the top of the NAACP’s issue agenda” when the organization was founded in 1909 (Francis 41). This organizational work gave way to grassroots campaigns as the decades wore on. As Charles Payne documents in his canonical Civil Rights history, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom* (1995), the early 1920s were the site of the first sustained anti-lynching

campaign in Mississippi (Payne 18), and as Robin Kelley documents in his canonical history of the CPUSA in Alabama, *Hammer and Hoe* (1990), lynching and other kinds of antiradical violence besieging the CPUSA in the South led them to organize against state and state-sanctioned violence as well (Kelley 1990 57-77). In time, the CPUSA agitated against not only lynching in the South but also police violence nationwide, perhaps in part because the police so often responded to their protests with violence. “Among the most active groups in the fight against police brutality” in the 1940s, writes historian Clarence Taylor, “was the American Communist Party” (Taylor 2013 207). Their role in anti-police-violence organizing left an imprint on the formal organizational structures, on the means of agitating against police violence, and on theories of police violence. The CPUSA’s Marxist analysis as well as their experience organizing against lynching and police violence led to theories of the relationship between political economy and state violence that lingered well into the postwar.¹

Marxist analyses of the relationship between Black people as laborers and as victims of state violence came to the fore in early CPUSA analyses of lynching. These theories were elaborated, among other places, in the CPUSA’s Black Belt thesis. Guided in part by Lenin’s advocacy for self-determination in the 1910s, by Marcus Garvey and other Black radicals’ advocacy for a nation-state, and by Black CPUSA organizers, Black Communist Harry Haywood and others developed the CPUSA argument that Black

¹ For more on the Communist Party’s advocacy against police violence, see Martha Biondi’s *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Post War New York City* (Biondi 2004 70-77), and Marilyn Johnson’s *Street Justice: A History of Police Violence in New York City* (Johnson 2004 149-162). For a historical account of one police assault on a Communist protest, see Melissa Ford’s “Suppose They Are Communists” (2017). For a historical account of the police attacking Communists seeking to prevent evictions, see Mark Solomon’s *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African-Americans, 1917-1936* (Solomon 1998 156-8).

people in majority Black regions in the south constituted an internal colony that ought to be able to self-determine. The first elaboration of the Black Belt thesis, the 1928 Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question in the United States, described the struggle to end Negro oppression as the struggle against “lynching,” among other things (1928 Resolution). In the 1930 Resolution, the authors expand on the place of violence:

Formally, they [Black southerners] are "free" as "tenant farmers" or "contract labourers" on the big plantations of the white landowners, but actually, they are completely in the power of their exploiters; they are not permitted, or else it is made impossible for them to leave their exploiters; if they do leave the plantations, they are brought back and in many cases whipped; many of them are simply taken prisoner under various pretexts and, bound together with long chains, they have to do compulsory labour on the roads ... Not only in the South but throughout the United States, the lynching of Negroes is permitted to go unpunished.

State-sanctioned violence, in this account, coerces Black southerners’ labor, which itself emblemizes Black people’s position in the nation. As a result, the authors argue that Black southerners must form their own nation in which “no armed forces of American imperialism,” including police, “should remain on the territory of the Black Belt” (1930 resolution). In sum, The 1930 resolution argues that state-sanctioned assaults derived from and contributed to economic damage done to Black people, and that a new mode of governance was necessary to abolish the violent coercion of Black labor. This economic analysis of lynching was not restricted to Black Marxists. As Sandy Alexandre reminds in *The Properties of Violence* (2012), African American writers have long considered lynching related to property, possession, and dispossession (Alexandre 2012 3-23). In the 1920s and 1930s, an economic analysis of lynching circulated across political boundaries,

representing physical violence as producing economic structures of violence and the abolition of such violence as an essential step towards uprooting capitalist oppression.²

This understanding of lynching violence came to influence 1930s and 1940s theories of police violence. In this period, CPUSA organizers described police violence as akin to lynching in that both yielded lasting economic damage. Consider the writings of Benjamin Davis. Born in 1903 in Georgia, Davis first gained fame as a radical while serving as a defense attorney for the 19-year-old Communist Angelo Herndon in 1933. After Herndon's conviction, Davis moved to Harlem in 1935, becoming editor of the CPUSA African American periodical *The Negro Liberator* and, eventually, *The Daily Worker*. In 1943, he replaced Adam Clayton Powell Jr. in city council as the representative of Harlem. Four years later, in 1947, his assistant, Horace Marshall, published the pamphlet *Police Brutality: Lynching in the Northern Style*. The pamphlet records a litany of instances of police violence in New York and across the United States before ending with "End Police Brutality," an essay by Davis. "Police brutality in the North," Davis writes, "is the counterpart to lynch terror against Negroes in the semi-feudal South." Davis' account of police violence as analogous to lynching became common among Black Leftists, as did his analysis of the relationship between political economy and police violence.

² For more on Lenin's advocacy for self-determination, see V. I. Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determine" (1916). For more on the ways in which Lenin's advocacy for self-determination was received in America, see Erez Manela's *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Manela 35-62). For more on the African American representations of lynching, see Jacqueline Goldsby's *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (2006), Crystal Feimster's *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (2009), and Karlos K. Hill's *Beyond the Rope: The Impact of Lynching on Black Culture and Memory* (2016).

In Davis' eyes, police violence both has economic causes and effects. According to Davis, police violence plagues Black people for the following reasons:

To keep Negroes 'in their place', and to cynically beat down their militant struggles for decent housing, jobs and civil liberties ... To force down the economic and social status of the Negro workers, that is, to create the impression that Negroes are unworthy of the full citizenship which they rightfully demand such as the demand for their elimination of job-discrimination, residential segregation and the restrictive covenant ... To divide Negro and white ... To make the Negro and other minorities the scapegoat of repeated 'crime wave' slanders against Harlem and other Negro communities.

Note that some of what Davis lists as causes of police violence are also effects, like lowering the "economic and social status of the Negro workers." This slide between motivation and outcome continues to structure his analysis of police violence, as when he writes,

Jim-crowism, discrimination and segregation aggravate police brutality against Negroes; and police brutality, in turn, aggravates all the other ills from which the Negro people suffer. As the Negro people, supported by their trade union and white progressive allies, find it necessary to demonstrate, picket, and fight evictions, the policemen's billet [sic] is there to turn them back. Police brutality increases in direct proportion to the development of economic crisis. (Davis)

Though the police claim to be violent to protect people from crime, Davis argues that police violence instead derives from pre-existing racial, economic, and social structures at the same time that it contributes to them. Police violence, in other words, both targets Black people because of their position in the racial distribution of labor and creates that position, ensuring that their protests for better jobs fail and that they never receive the full citizenship which they demand. This regulation of citizenship, as the writers of the Black Belt thesis might put it, effectively makes them colonized. Here, Davis insists that police violence is distributed on the basis of the racial distribution of labor and simultaneously

produces new structures of economic violence that uphold the general oppression of Black people under racial capitalism.

This theory of the relationship between state violence and economic position also shaped the period's understanding of the means of ending state violence. Unsurprisingly, CPUSA analysis often claimed labor organizing could abolish state violence. Davis himself suggests as much near the end of his essay, when he writes,

Police brutality can be ended in New York. It must be. It requires the energetic and united action of the people, the same kind of unity with which we fought together to defeat fascist brutality abroad. It requires struggle – militant and uncompromising ... It is in the first place, the duty of organized labor, in its own self-interest, to take the lead in combatting this menace. Experience has shown that where one group suffers an invasion of its civil liberties, the invasion quickly extends to all. It is the obligation of all democratic white citizens in New York ... to speak out in no uncertain terms against this cancerous growth of police violence in our city. Above all, Negro and white citizens must work unitedly to combat this evil. (Davis)

In Davis' account, organizing laborers to work against police violence can influence other groups such that all citizens become abolitionists, a project that would reorder society writ large. This broad-scale social change will first limit police violence and finally uproot the conditions that enable it. Just as police violence regulates Black labor organizing, so too can organized labor plant the seed of the end of police violence. Throughout "End Police Brutality," Davis insists that police violence persecutes Black people economically and brings about its own destruction: labor organizing.³

Davis' essay, ultimately, exemplifies the influence of earlier analyses of lynching upon analyses of police violence. This influence led Black radicals from the 1930s to the

³ For more on Benjamin Davis, see Gerald Horne's *Black Liberation/Red Scare: Ben Davis and the Communist Party* (1994).

1950s to understand police violence as producing lasting economic damage, especially to Black people's labor, and to represent labor organizing as a collective with the potential to generate an abolition that would reorder society. These thinkers included Herbert Aptheker, George Crockett Junior, William L. Patterson, and Pettis Perry, among others. These writers lamented police violence's lingering economic effects on Black people and used their combined racial and economic analysis to build common cause with non-CPUSA Black radicals, with the CPUSA, and with other groups in the hopes of developing a broader movement to end police violence, racism, and poverty. In their and other work, the CPUSA's influence contributed to a theory of police violence as a state assault that regulated Black people's labor as a means of reinforcing their colonial or second-class citizenship within the United States, as well as a theory that the very labor which police violence regulated harbored the potential for the abolition of state violence.⁴

Though post-war McCarthyism heavily injured the CPUSA, its economic analysis of police violence and of abolition would come to shape African American literary representations in the postwar period. Here, the career of Benjamin Davis is once more exemplary. After the war, Davis was among the first wave of Communists tried and incarcerated under the Smith Act in 1949. The one-time city council member served three years and four months in federal prison. While he sat in jail for disseminating Communist ideas in non-fiction, the FBI simply surveilled novelists with not-at-all subtle Communist politics like William Gardner Smith, who advocated for revolution and Communism as

⁴ See, for instance, Harry Haywood's *Lynching: A Weapon of National Oppression* (1932), Harry Haywood's *Negro Liberation* (1948), William L. Patterson's *The Communist Position on the Negro Question* (1947), William L. Patterson's *We Demand Freedom* (1951), Pettis Perry's *Negro Representation—A Step Towards Freedom* (1949), and Pettis Perry's *The Party of Negro and White* (1953). For more on William L. Patterson, see Gerald Horne's *Black Revolutionary: William Patterson and the Globalization of the African American Freedom Struggle* (2013).

solutions to police violence. Just as “the novel defined itself against the scandalous libel” and used fictionality to elude prosecution in the eighteenth-century, according to Catherine Gallagher in “The Rise of Fictionality” (Gallagher 2006 340), so too did fictionality provide limited protection from post-war anticommunist repression. Fictionality’s slight freedom made the novel a premier venue for Black Leftist thought in general and critiques of police violence in particular. These affordances were amplified by material conditions. As Mary Helen Washington, Imani Perry, and a host of other literary critics have noted, Communist periodicals and structures continued to produce and promote African American writing in the 1950s. Altogether, fictionality’s limited freedom combined with the lingering influence of the CPUSA on African American literary production to keep Communist thought alive in the African American novel and especially in representations of police violence in those novels. In this way, the 1930s labor-centric critique of police violence and theory of abolition became Marx’s old mole, burrowing underground amidst intense Cold War retrenchment and surviving in the representations of police violence in the African American novel.

This dissertation traces the heretofore undiscussed influence of the labor-centric theory of police violence on postwar African American novels to provide a new perspective on African American literary history that foregrounds its anti-state-violence politics. This literary history focuses especially on the work of African American Leftist novelists. While recent literary critics like Alan Wald have recovered the once forgotten literature of African American Leftists, they have focused primarily on those authors who identified as Communists or who worked in structures supported by the CPUSA. This work was and remains essential. But as Cedric Robinson reminds in the inimitable *Black*

Marxism (1983), Marxist thought was often a waystation, not the destination, for Black intellectuals. Of his principal examples—Du Bois, James, and Wright—he writes that “Marxism became a staging area for their immersion into the [Black Radical] tradition” (Robinson xxxii). The labor-centric critique of police violence was one of these staging areas, providing a necessary analysis that enabled Black thinkers to consider the relationship between the economy and the government’s subjugation of Black people. While these authors may have passed from Black Marxism to the Black Radical Tradition (emblemized by enslaved people’s resistance across the western hemisphere), Marxist thought’s attention to political economy remained influential to the Black Radical Tradition. While Robinson’s account of midcentury Black radicalism chronicles the influence of Marxism by tracking its analysis in the lives of individuals over time, I do so by tracking the ways Marxist thought circulated amongst many individuals, reminding that the Black Radical Tradition is, crucially, a collective project. As I demonstrate by following the labor-centric critique of police violence across many texts, Marxist ideas shaped not only the work of avowed Communists like Lloyd Brown but also the work of their non-Communist contemporaries, like Paule Marshall, and the writers who came after them, like Black Arts and Black Feminist novelists. In other words, Black Leftists whose reputation fell prey to the cultural Cold War lived on, well into the 1980s, in the form of aesthetic and theoretical influence. They were forgotten, but not gone.

By recovering this little remarked upon labor-centric theory of police violence, this dissertation intervenes in contemporary Marxist debates about the relationship between violence and political economy. These conversations have revolved around the term primitive accumulation or dispossession. Marx first defines primitive accumulation

in *Capital, Volume I* as the process that turned some people into capitalists and others into the proletariat. In his account, Marx critiques classic political economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo for claiming that the capitalists became wealthy through frugality, a myth that justifies the uneven distribution of property. “In actual history,” Marx writes, “it is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, play the greatest part ... So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production” (Marx 873-5). For Marx, primitive accumulation is the use of force to transform some into propertied people and others into those who have nothing to sell but their labor. Though Marx used the term primitive accumulation in myriad ways, including in portraits of supposedly pre-capitalist modes of production that he did not entirely denigrate, this particular account of primitive accumulation as the use of force, as well as his insistence that uncovering this use of force could undermine justifications of wealth inequalities, became especially influential to twentieth-century Marxists. Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin famously took up this account of primitive accumulation; while Marx claims the use of force as a means of accumulation only occurred in the past, Luxemburg and Lenin suggest that primitive accumulation continues to happen via imperialism in *The Accumulation of Capital and Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, respectively. More recently, in *The New Imperialism* (2003), David Harvey has dubbed financial extraction occurring in the world market to be a kind of primitive accumulation that he terms dispossession. In *The Golden Gulag* (2008), Ruth Wilson Gilmore demonstrates the ways in which this dispossession worked to erect prisons and raise prison populations across California. While the former focuses on

dispossession via the international transit of finance and the latter focuses on dispossession as producing incarceration, this dissertation aims to reassert the primacy of force and of its effect in accounts of dispossession.

I make the case for this understanding of dispossession by recovering the Black Radical Tradition's uptake of the key Marxist-Leninist insight that force wielded by the state and distributed to Black people yields lasting economic damage. The claim that the police are key wielders of dispossession has some precedent in Marxist thought. In *The Fabrication of Social Order* (2000), for instance, Mark Neocleous argues that, when eighteenth-century police used force to ensure that laborers did not take any of the literal fruits of their labor home (namely, apples from apple orchards), they took part in primitive accumulation by alienating laborers from their labor (Neocleous 72-82). While Neocleous focuses on past police actions, Silvia Federici argues, in *The Caliban and the Witch* (1998), that primitive accumulation is a structural pillar of capitalism that continues in the present and is distributed on the basis of race, gender, and position (Federici 12-3). The Black Radical representation of police violence in the postwar African American novel combines these insights, insisting that ongoing police violence coerces Black people's labor, regulates their relationship to that labor, and produces new structures of economic violence that linger long after police assault ends. But these novelists do more than diagnose dispossession; they also imagine its antidote in the belief that, as Robinson writes, "whatever the forms primitive accumulation assumed, its social harvest would also include acts of resistance, rebellion, and, ultimately, revolution" (Robinson 164). Postwar African American novels not only remind that dispossession occurs in the present via police violence but also begin to imagine the ways in which it

might produce its own undoing: abolition. Returning to this account of dispossession as the use of force to lasting economic effect and of abolition as the antidote to dispossession, ultimately, provides a new way of thinking about the relationship between state violence and political economy.

This methodological insight—emphasizing the economic effect of force—yields the theoretical payoff of finding a route through the recent impasse between Black Marxists and Afropessimists. The seemingly irresolvable debate has, unsurprisingly, concerned itself precisely with the relationship between violence and political economy. Afropessimist thinkers have insisted that police violence is inexplicable via political economy. Jared Sexton and Steve Martinot memorably wrote in “The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy” (2003), for instance, “The impunity of racist police violence is the first implication of its ignorability to white society. The ignorability of police impunity is what renders it inarticulable outside of that hegemonic formation” (Marinot and Sexton 172). Police violence is only explicable in relation to white supremacy, in their account; it is not motivated by, for instance, extraction but by a sadism that constitutes a fundamental antagonism between Black people and American governance. On the basis of this understanding, in *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structures of U.S. Antagonisms* (2010), Frank Wilderson argues that violent anti-Blackness expels Black people from the domain of political economy (Wilderson 2010 38-9). Wilderson reiterates this point in *Afropessimism*, adding that Marxist and other analyses of political economy are “hobbled by a meta-aporia: a contradiction that manifests whenever one looks seriously at the structure of Black suffering in comparison to the presumed universal structure of all sentient beings” (Wilderson 2020 15). Sexton, Wilderson, and a

variety of other Afropessimists have insisted that political economy cannot explain exorbitant state violence against Black people. This line of thinking is not restricted to Afropessimists. As Jennifer Nash notes in *After Intersectionality* (2018), this understanding of the relationship between Blackness, violence, American governance, and political economy has also seeped into the work of Black Feminist thinkers like Simone Brown, Saidiya Hartman, and Cristina Sharpe (Nash 112). In other words, Afropessimist thinkers and their influence have led many scholars to insist that spectacular violence cannot be understood through political economic thinking because these assaults are not motivated by or explainable via profit.⁵

Scholars receptive to both Afropessimist and Marxist thought have conceded that Marxist thought does not explain certain kinds of brutal violence. Consequently, they sometimes employ Afropessimist thought and sometimes employ Black Marxist thought. In *The Broken Heart of America* (2020), for instance, Walter Johnson uses Marxist thinking to analyze how extraction affected Black Missourians but uses Afropessimist analysis to “understand the excessive pleasures of white supremacy,” by which he means those without economic motivation (Johnson 6-7). Jackie Wang utilizes a similar method and justification in *Carceral Capitalism* (2018). There, Wang analyzes the economic incentives underlying extractive police practices like ticketing but turns away from political economy and toward Afropessimist thought to explain police assaults because

⁵ To adherents of Wilderson’s work, the framing of Hartman, for instance, as a Black Feminist influenced by Afropessimism but not as a Afropessimist might seem surprising. After all, Wilderson claims Hartman’s work as an antecedent to his. Yet Hartman does not identify as an Afropessimist herself. Rather than take one to be an Afropessimist based upon Wilderson or other Afropessimist’s identification of them as such, I only identify as Afropessimists those who identify themselves as Afropessimists. This approach also explains why Sylvia Wynter, whose work is immensely influential to Afropessimists, goes unmentioned in this paragraph.

she believes “political economy fails as a lens” to explain such gratuitous violence (Wang 81). It is true that the desire to extract wealth does not explain why the police shot Amadou Diallo 41 times or why Daniel Holtzclaw sexually assaulted Black women. But turning away from political economy at these moments does leave unexplained the full extent of police violence that midcentury Black Leftists lamented, like the difficulty of returning to work with injuries gained from police assault. As Nikil Pal Singh writes in “On Race, Violence, and So-Called Primitive Accumulation” (2016), this method also fails to explain the relationship between excessive violence and economic predation, especially in studies of slavery. “Strictly counterpoising or making a categorical distinction between the worker’s exploitation and slave’s social death,” he writes, “alienates an understanding of slavery tied to the development of capitalism and with it any impulse to overcome the problematic severing of racial domination and class subordination” (Singh 29-30). Though Singh focuses on slavery, this theoretical opposition has significant implications for the twentieth century. It makes unthinkable, for instance, the relationship between antiblack state violence and persecution of the poor, which ought to be particularly striking given that police killings occur with much greater frequency in poorer neighborhoods. Simply conceding that political economy has little to teach about brutal state violence, ultimately, leaves unexplained both the economic excess of that excessive violence and the ways that economic structures collaborate with physical violence itself to prey upon Black people.⁶

⁶ On the relationship between police killings and a neighborhood’s poverty, see Justin Feldman’s “Police Killings in the U.S.: Inequalities by Race/Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Position” (2020).

Rather than use Marxist thought in some cases and Afropessimist in others, I recover a method for resolving the debate between Black Marxists and Afropessimists. By returning to midcentury novels, I suggest that Afropessimist critiques had already been raised by midcentury novelists, but they found a different method for synthesizing the contradiction between the state's economic extraction of Black people and, to paraphrase Wilderson, its genocidal drive to kill them. To account for both violent antiblackness and racial capitalism, midcentury writers turned toward dispossession. Novelists like late-career Richard Wright, for instance, agreed that police violence functioned as a kind of dispossession, but that dispossession was subordinated to the police's violent regulation of Blackness. Returning to this method provides a means of understanding the ways in which the lingering economic effects of police violence, whatever the motive may be, furnished the foundation for lasting structures of violence that afflict the assaulted long after the violence ends. Recovering this representation of police violence as a kind of dispossession, ultimately, provides a means of understanding the ways in which racial capitalism both distributes and worsens state violence. This endeavor also insists on the importance of undoing the economic conditions that enable this dispossession to modern day abolitionists. Inasmuch as recovering an analysis of state violence as a kind of dispossession sheds insight on the problem of police violence, it also sheds new light on the means by which such violence can be abolished.

Abolition and Black Feminist Thought

The transmigration of Marxist analysis from non-fiction to the novel, ultimately, occasioned new changes in the analysis of police violence. In the 1950s and 1960s, as

African American novelists represented police violence as a kind of dispossession that upheld Black people's colonial status in the United States, they increasingly represented the main victims of police violence as men and Black men as the people with the political agency to abolish police violence. While preserving an economic radicalism, the African American novel simultaneously produced and disseminated a gendered conservatism, one that was at odds with actual cases of police violence against Black women that became famous in the period. This masculinization contributed to the repression of the historical memory and theories of police violence against Black women. But this masculinism did not go unchallenged. Rather, as Black Feminist writing boomed in the 1970s and 1980s, Black Feminist novelists inherited and revised masculinist generic tropes, developing new accounts of the ways in which police violence affected Black women and of the ways in which Black women worked toward abolition. In the process, Black Feminist authors developed little discussed theories of the relationship between Black women's labor, police violence, and abolition.

By charting the gendered dissemination of the labor-centric critique of police violence from the 1950s through the 1980s, my dissertation maps onto a critical period in prison expansion in the United States. As Naomi Murakawa argues in *The First Civil Right* (2014), the late 1940s and 1950s saw the federal government increasingly investing the police with the responsibility of ending violence among civilians and insisting that making the police a better functioning bureaucracy would rid the United States of arbitrary and lawless violence. “[T]he race ‘problem’ of the civil rights movement from the 1940s onward,” Murakawa writes, “was answered with pledges of carceral state

development” (Murakawa 3). Liberal law-and-order in the 1940s and 1950s paved the way, Elizabeth Hinton demonstrates in *From the War on Poverty to Mass Incarceration* (2016), for further liberal prison expansion in the 1960s. Under Kennedy and Johnson, the federal government portrayed poverty as leading to crime, expanded the police’s domain over poverty, and legitimated that expansion as preventing future crime.

Even as the equal opportunity efforts of the War on Poverty only feebly attacked the underlying structural and historical factors that caused mass unemployment, deteriorating housing conditions, and failing public schools, federal policymakers supported the influx of more police officers and military-grade weapons on the street as riot prevention measures.

While the already porous border between the police and the military became even more so, the expansion of both the federal government’s investment in the carceral state, Hinton continues, “paved the way for the anticrime policies of the Nixon and Ford administrations to be turned against [Johnson’s] own antipoverty programs” (Hinton 13-4). In this way, Kennedy and Johnson laid the foundations for Nixon and Reagan’s War on Drugs as well as the first uptick in incarceration rates in the 1970s that signaled the beginning of Mass Incarceration. From the 1950s through the 1980s, the prison industrial complex expanded, the bipartisan ideas legitimating its expansion became mainstream, and the PIC became even more deadly. But these ideas did not go unopposed. As historians like Garret Felber and Robert Chase have noted, prison abolitionists and radicals opposed the prison’s expansion at every step of the way. Influenced by and developing in tandem with this documented history of abolitionist organizing, a body of little-discussed radical thought fermented in the African American novel.⁷

⁷ For more on abolitionist organizing in the period, see Heather Ann Thompson’s *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and its Legacy* (2016), Garrett Felber’s *Those Who Know Don’t Say: The*

Due in part to the cultural scripts circulating in these novels, histories about the carceral state's expansion have often focused on men or have appeared not to consider gender explicitly. Only recently have scholars begun to consider the history of the incarceration of women and the place of gender in constructing the prison industrial complex. One might expect that this masculinized history derives from the obscurity of carceral encounters with women in the period, but that is not the case. Famous cases of police and carceral violence against women were covered in newspapers and on television. To name a few examples, the police assault of women on Bloody Sunday was broadcast on television and decried by news anchors, the incarceration of Angela Davis famously captivated the nation, and a correctional officer's attempted sexual assault of Joan Little garnered widespread attention from feminists both within and beyond the nation. Beyond these cases, Black newspapers like *The Chicago Defender* teemed with accounts of police violence against women of color, as did pamphlets and periodicals produced by lesser-known radical organizations, and legal cases like *Mary Beth G. v City of Chicago* contesting carceral assault of women abounded in the period. Scholars like Sarah Haley, Kali Gross, and Marie Gottschalk have directed attention to the historical and contemporary incarceration of women of color, but, as Andrea Ritchie writes in *Invisible No More* (2017), "the police interactions that kick off the chain reactions that land women in court ... have garnered very little attention" (Ritchie 11). Like Ritchie, other scholars have diagnosed the lack of attention to women's experiences with the

Nation of Islam, The Black Freedom Movement, and The Carceral State (2019), and Robert Chase's *We Are Not Slaves: State Violence, Coerced Labor, and Prisoners' Rights in Postwar America* (2019). For more on postwar prison expansion, see chapter 1. For more on the relationship between the military and the police, see chapter 2.

police, but few look to culture to explain why both scholars and the public fail to remember these once famous incidents and the history of the prison industrial complex's supervision of women. This dissertation seeks to remedy that lack of attention by insisting that, in the critical period in which prisons expanded, African American novels masculinized police violence for Black radicals.⁸

From the 1950s to the 1980s, the gender of police violence was the subject of much contestation by African American novelists. In the 1950s, African American novelists represented police violence as regulating Black men's labor, even where that labor-regulation was subordinated to the regulation of Black masculinity. In the 1960s, African American novelists picked up on this economic analysis of police violence, but they expanded to the globe. In war novels in this decade, African American writers represented police and military violence as incidents in an ongoing colonial war of pacification that enforced second-class citizenship for Black people, and they represented Black men as the people with the agency to abolish state violence. This insistent masculinization became the object of Black Feminist revision, while its labor-centric theories laid fertile ground for Black Feminist analyses of the relationship between gender, state violence, and political economy. In the 1970s, Black Feminist novelists represented state violence as dispossessing Black women's (paid and unpaid) care labor as a means of regulating Black women's gender, sexuality, and kinship ties. These

⁸ For more on histories of women's experiences with the PIC, see Kali Gross' *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910* (2006), Cheryl Hicks' *Talk With You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935* (2010), Talitha LeFlouria's *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (2015), and Sarah Haley's *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (2016). See also the special issue of *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, "Black Women and Police and Carceral Violence" (2018).

novelists also represented Black women's care labor as a potential source of abolition and so-called private-sphere concerns, like sexism amongst civilians, as essential subjects of any abolitionist endeavors. In the 1980s, Black Feminist novelists carried forward these critiques and imaginaries, but they added an increased attention to the legacy of earlier masculinist discourses. They turned their attention to the novel as a genre itself, insisting that earlier masculinist critiques of police violence required immanent revision so as to supplant their lingering influence. In their inhabiting and revising of earlier representations of police violence, these Black Feminist writers kept alive the economic radicalism of earlier decades, even if their economic radicalism is little discussed in scholarship, at the same time that they sought to regender police violence.

By recovering the masculinization and then feminization of police violence, this literary history aims to intervene into the literary history of Black Feminism. Much of the canonical literary history has documented the ways in which 1970s and 1980s Black Feminists opposed, in form and content, the work of midcentury masculinist novels in general and social realists in particular. In *Unbought and Unbossed* (2014), Trimiko Melancon, for instance, writes

Characterized by the rise of social realism and protest fiction, and appearing in the sociohistorical context of the Great Depression and Jim Crow politics, canonized African American literature witnessed a dramatic shift and took on different meanings. ... [P]ublished African American fiction during this era was largely dominated by the male protest writers Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and, to a lesser extent, Chester Himes. Their fiction, an indictment of American white racism and its ideological, hegemonic, and violent oppression of African Americans, focused prominently on young male protagonists' struggles against alienation, subordination, and racialized violence. (Melancon 24)

Black Feminists, Melancon goes on to write, positioned themselves against these masculinist writers. This opposition did occur, but it took a peculiar form. Black Feminists did not entirely abandon the forms, subjects, or analysis of midcentury masculinist novels. Rather, they retained their concerns, discussed the same subjects, and inherited some of their analysis while revising their masculinism, but all three were subordinated to the novels' larger projects, appearing in brief scenes and moments in Black Feminist novels. Representations of police violence were one such subordinated site of midcentury masculinist influence. In scenes of police assault against Black women, Black Feminist novelists retained the Black Marxist investment in the labor-centric critique, but they revised it, chronicling the ways in which police violence regulated Black women's labor, and they subordinated it to the novels' overall plots. By attending to this subordinated influence, this dissertation paints a more complicated picture of the relationship between Black Feminist literature and its antecedents as a means of recovering Black Feminist novels' little-discussed theories of state violence. Put differently, reconstituting the field of Black Marxist thought suppressed by the cultural Cold War and then tracking its influence on Black Feminism, ultimately, foregrounds that the Black Feminist novel was one key site in which radical Black Feminist critiques of the police and visions of abolition were elaborated.

This new framing of Black Feminist literature as participating in Marxist abolitionist thought, ultimately, intervenes in recent debates in critical prison studies. In particular, this literary history aims to insist on the importance of labor to abolitionist thinking. As scholars and activists like Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Mariame Kaba, Dorothy Roberts, Beth Richie, and more have argued, abolition is both a process of negation,

inasmuch as it works toward the destruction of prisons, and of production, inasmuch as it works to produce new models of accountability and safety that can crowd out the prison industrial complex. As Angela Davis writes in *Are Prisons Obsolete?*,

A major challenge of this movement is to do the work that will create more humane, habitable environments for people in prison without bolstering the permanence of the prison system. How, then, do we accomplish this balancing act of passionately attending to the needs of prisoners ... and at the same time call for alternatives to sentencing altogether, no more prison construction, and abolitionist strategies that question the place of the prison in our future? (Davis 2003 113-4).

Much of the scholarship on these alternatives to prisons have focused on accountability and safety, such as those Ann Russo documents in *Feminist Accountability* (2018). As myriad scholars have noted, the prison industrial complex legitimates itself by suggesting that it produces safety and accountability and that it has a monopoly on producing both of those things. Consequently, scholars have suggested that new structures of producing safety and accountability must be made to crowd out the prison industrial complex, but less attention has been paid to the ways in which 1970s and 1980s Black Feminist literature began to imagine those new structures in such a way that laid the foundation for contemporary anti-carceral Black Feminist writing. Yet returning to Black Feminist literature offers more than just context. Tracking influence and reconstituting literary production, ultimately, provides access to prior collective critiques of the police and imaginings of abolition. This collective imagining is essential because prison abolition is a collective project that derives from collective imaginaries. While Black Feminist literature laid the groundwork for contemporary anti-carceral Black Feminism, not all of its imagined alternatives survived into the present day. 1970s and 1980s Black Feminist

literature, ultimately, still has much to teach in the way of what abolition might be and how people can imagine abolition.

Labor is the key subject of prior collective critiques and imaginings that I discuss in this dissertation. By returning to the labor-centric theory of police violence in Black Feminist novels, I endeavor to insist on the importance of political economy to the abolitionist production of alternatives to prisons. While I agree that both alternative methods of safety and accountability remain essential to any abolitionist endeavor, I also insist that new kinds of labor and labor relations are also essential to such work. Producing safety and accountability, after all, will be labor and, as Mimi Kim's work on sexual violence in transformative justice organizations demonstrates, that labor is and will be susceptible to all of the worst abuses of workplace. This labor can be modeled after care work. In 1970s and 1980s Black Feminist novels, care work is not simply cooking and cleaning; it is the labor that people do without prisons to make others healthy and safe. Such work often requires the distribution of risk amongst a collective as a means of reducing each individual's vulnerability. It is undertaken not because of coercion but because of a personal investment in the safety of others. As valorized by the Black Feminist novels of the 1970s and 1980s, care work is, if not a form of political organizing, a means of producing safety without prisons that is necessary to political organizing and transformation. By modeling abolitionist efforts to produce safety after the care work, abolitionists can learn from the struggles of care workers, like those Premilla Nadsen documents in *Household Workers Unite* (2015), to both uproot their own economic oppression and to work toward the end of economic oppression writ large. This latter work is especially important because the damages of the prison industrial

complex are, in part, economic, and so abolition must attend to the ways in which prisons structure political economy. By recovering the Black Feminist novelists' insistence on the importance of labor to abolition, I insist that labor is both a material practice that will bring about abolition and that labor must be the object of abolitionist organizing if abolitionists hope to fully uproot the prison industrial complex.⁹

This attention to the place of labor in Black Feminist novels' representation of abolition, further, aims to model the ways in which literary criticism can contribute to the project of abolition as described by anti-carceral Black Feminists in particular and critical prison studies scholars more generally. Scholars and organizers have long insisted that abolition requires the production of new structures and have insisted that culture as much as material conditions produce the contemporary prison industrial complex, yet both groups have spent comparatively little time describing the ways in which cultural work might imagine those new structures that can supplant prisons. They have spent even less time on the ways in which cultural objects like literature can teach people how to imagine those alternative structures. This latter methodological teaching, I argue, remains vital because the question is not what the world will look like after abolition—a question so large that it not only inspires silence but also provides ample room for skeptics to insist that such a world could never be constructed—but how does one imagine the process of abolishing. The Black Feminist novel's effort to immanently revise past masculinist representations of police violence, ultimately, sheds light on the ways in which abolitionists might imagine the work of abolishing as a recursive process, one that

⁹ For more on Mimi Kim's work, see "Moving Beyond Critique: Creative Interventions and Reconstructions of Community Accountability" (2011).

requires constant revision over time as a means of charting a course toward a world without prisons. This work must be recursive because, as Mariame Kaba observes, “when we set about trying to transform a society, we must remember that we ourselves will also need to transform ... We are deeply entangled in the systems we are trying to change” (Kaba 2021 4). Just as novelists can and have revised past critiques of the PIC and past imaginings of a world without prisons, so too can scholars interpret those revisions for the light they shed on the means by which prisons might be supplanted. Recovering their return to past harms and successes, ultimately, can model the means by which histories once forgotten might be recovered and by which the potential of past radical movements might yet be redeemed.

History

By attending to the ways in which literary history contributed to the repression of the history of police violence against Black women and the ways in which some novelists sought to counteract this repression, this dissertation aims to shed new light on recent writing on the constitution and repression of history in Black studies. From the 2000s through the 2010s, this subject has often been discussed in studies of the archive, which became essential to both literary criticism and Black studies in this period. Referring to places in which historical documents are housed, the archive was both a material object of critical inquiry, wherein scholars queried the ways in which the archiving of particular documents limited what is knowable about the past, and a metaphor for the relationship between epistemology and history. When scholars have discussed the archive, the all-too-pressing question has been, “What can one know about the past?” As this literary history

of the cultural repression of police violence against Black women endeavors to demonstrate, emphasis on the archive has left underdiscussed the ways in which culture shapes both what is visible in the archive and what is knowable of the past. Culture contributes to historical repression and construction, even as the archive limits that repression and construction.

Although the question of what is knowable about histories of subjugated people is not new—Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s *Silencing the Past* is now more than 20 years old—the question gained renewed importance in the last twenty years in Black Studies. Many of these debates derived from Saidiya Hartman’s work on the place of Black women in the archive of slavery. Though *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) showed signs of what was to come in her chronicling of the conditions under which enslaved Black women became visible in court cases (Hartman 1997 79-114), *Lose Your Mother* (2007) marked the beginning of Hartman’s extended engagement with the archives of slavery. “The account of commercial transactions was as near as I came to the enslaved,” she writes of an archive in Ghana early on.

In every line item, I saw a grave. Commodities, cargo, and things don’t lend themselves to representation, at least not easily. The archive dictates what can be said about the past and the kinds of stories that can be told about the persons cataloged, embalmed, and sealed away in box files and folios. (Hartman 2007 16-7)

Taking as exemplary those commercial transactions that list enslaved people as a monetary sum, Hartman claims the archives of slavery consign enslaved people to an unknowable past. She extends this argument, focusing especially on enslaved women, in “Venus in Two Acts” (2008). Of a woman called Venus, she writes,

There are hundreds of thousands of other girls who share her circumstances and these circumstances have generated few stories. And the stories that exist are not about them, but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives. (Hartman 2008 2)

The archival records of women like Venus foreground primarily violence and its legitimations. “The irreparable violence of the Atlantic slave trade,” Hartman summarizes, “resides precisely in all the stories that we cannot know and that will never be recovered” (Hartman 2008 12). In the years since the publication of both texts, some historians of slavery, like Vincent Brown, have criticized the emphasis on the impossibility of recovery. Yet those critics do not deny that archives limit what is knowable so much as concede this point and still search for means of recovering the lives of the enslaved. This concession even runs through even the work of scholars studying twentieth-century Black literature, like Brent Edwards in “The Taste of the Archive” (2012). From adherents to Hartman’s theorizing of the archive to those critical of it, scholarship on the archive has, by and large, come to insist that the archive makes the history of Black people, and especially Black women, unknowable.¹⁰

This view has led scholars to claim that the archives of police violence are as bare as those of slavery. Scholars are inclined to apply the lessons of the latter to the former because they see the racist distribution of police violence and incarceration as exemplary of slavery’s afterlife. In “The Dead Book Revisited” (2016), for instance, Hartman writes,

¹⁰ Some of the key texts concerned with the limits of the archives of slavery include Simon Gikandi’s *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (2011), Simon Gikandi’s “Rethinking the Archives of Enslavement” (2015), Jennifer Morgan’s “Accounting for ‘The Most Excruciating Torment’: Gender, Slavery, and Trans-Atlantic Slave Passages” (2016), Stephanie Smallwood’s “The Politics of the Archive and History’s Accountability to the Enslaved” (2016), Marisa Fuentes’ *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (2016). For two texts critical of Hartman’s account in “Venus in Two Acts,” see Vincent Brown’s “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery” (2009) and David Kazanjian’s “Freedom’s Surprise: Two Paths Through Slavery’s Archive” (2016).

How do we find life where only the traces of destruction remain? ... The fragments and scraps of the archive do little more than index the violence that extinguished their lives and cast them out of the world. What of their existence can be exhumed from the archive: the ship's manifest, the legal case, the news-paper profile, the death table, the actuarial chart, the autopsy report, the tally of police killings? (Hartman 2016 208).

For Hartman, the state archives of police violence both legitimate such violence and make the lives of those killed by the police unknowable. They also offer little offer little in the way of political change:

In the wake of the recent onslaught of black death at the hands of the police, the murders of black men, women and children have been recorded, documented, widely circulated and witnessed by millions. Yet this ever-growing archive of black death has produced an outcome no different than the decision made in the case of the two girls: no one would ever be convicted or held responsible for these murders either. (Hartman 2016 212).

The recovery of the lives of those affected by police violence and the archives upon which that recovery depends, ultimately, are limited both because they consign Black people undergoing violence to an unknown past and because they do not provide justice. In this claim, Hartman is not alone; Jennifer Morgan, Marisa Fuentes, and more have reiterated this argument. Using the archives of slavery as their means of understanding the archives of police violence, several scholars have argued that police violence's archives limit what is knowable of police violence's victims, legitimate ongoing physical violence, and undermine efforts for justice.¹¹

¹¹ For other scholars discussing the relationship between the archives of slavery and police violence today, see "The Question of Recovery: An Introduction" (Helton et al 2015 11), Jennifer Morgan's "Archives and Histories of Racial Capitalism: An Afterward" (Morgan 2015 153-5), and Marisa Fuentes and Brian Connolly's "Introduction: From Archives of Slavery to Liberated Futures?" (Fuentes and Connolly 2016 115).

While I agree that archives, and especially the archives of slavery, delimit what is knowable in such a way that often consigns much of Black life to an unknowable History and offers little opportunity for redress, I take a different approach to the question of what scholars can know of the past. These scholars use the archives of slavery to understand police violence, but I want to suggest that the reverse—attending to the archives of police violence against Black women to understand the archives of slavery and the archive as an object of study more generally—can shed new light on these debates. As I have noted throughout this introduction, archives teem with cases of police violence against Black women covered in major newspapers, and many of these articles record Black women giving voice to their lives. Further, many survivors of state violence remain alive, and scholars like Beth Richie have learned a great deal about police violence by interviewing currently and formerly incarcerated Black women today. The reason cases of police violence against Black women have been forgotten is not archival absence but instead cultural repression. Culture as much as the archive has limited the recovery of police violence against Black women.

This condition is true of recovery more generally. As Hartman briefly suggests about the unnamed enslaved woman and Venus in *Lose Your Mother*, “Everything else depends upon how you look at things” (Hartman 136). Too much has been made of Hartman’s writing on the archive alone, and too little has been made of her writing on the culture that constitutes the lens through which scholars approach the archive. (Here, I should note that this latter approach defines her 2019 book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, though it has come out so recently that I cannot fault scholars for not citing it.) Of course archives are limited, but the culture and theory through which scholars

approach the archive are at least as important as the archive itself in determining what is knowable of the past. In the same way that I have argued that Afropessimists are correct in their insistence that political economy cannot explain everything about police violence and yet scholars should still consider the economic effects of police violence, so too do I contend that scholars of the archive are correct in their arguments that what is recorded limits what is knowable about the past and yet scholars must still attend to the ways in which culture structures the scholar's ability to access that past. Neither archive nor culture works alone in its limiting of what is recoverable. Rather, the two work together, shaping what is knowable of the past, and as a consequence, scholars must consider the two in tandem.¹²

Returning to the place of culture in constructing history, moreover, provides the opportunity to produce accountability for cultural repression. This method takes its cue from the means by which Black Feminists worked to counter the cultural repression of Black masculinist representations of police violence. In the first half of my dissertation, I undertake this immanent revision by first surfacing the masculinist novels' gender politics and by second foregrounding the ways in which history exceeds this masculinist account. In the second half of my dissertation, I attend to influence as a means of demonstrating the ways in which immanent revision works to supplant the impact of this attempted cultural repression. This combined attention to history's excess of cultural repression as well as to immanent revision, altogether, expands the possibilities for

¹² Although more focused on the materiality of the archives themselves, it is worth noting that Kinohi Nishikawa takes a similar position, at times, in "The Archive on its Own" (2015). For instance, he writes, "What the Path Press Archives reveal in exhaustive detail is that *The Negotiations*' narrative dependence on a specific time and place made it susceptible to obsolescence once those conditions altered in the slightest degree. The novel, in other words, was successful only to the extent that readers had been primed to see its social and political relevance" (Nishikawa 195)

recovery in such a way that can enable pursuing accountability for past harms and that can produce political transformations that do not reproduce past harms. This is not pure utopianism; assaults cannot be undone. But in modeling a means of providing alternative means of accountability and supplanting the structures that enabled this violence in the past, Black Feminist novels do, ultimately, model the means by which similar harms can be prevented in the future and new mechanisms for justice can be pursued. Working against sexist cultural repression is not done solely for the sake of the scholarly endeavor of writing histories, in other words; it is done in the service of abolition.

The first half of my dissertation undertakes this endeavor by describing the means by which police violence was masculinized so as to explain historically how police violence came to be seen as a problem primarily afflicting men and to theorize how gender structures the remembering of some kinds of histories and the repressing of others. My first chapter discusses the African American novel of the 1950s, tracking the last days of what Mary Helen Washington has dubbed the Black Popular Front. In this decade, Black Leftist writers like John Killens and Ann Petry wrote Social Realist novels that valorized Black men as laborers, critiqued police violence for regulating Black men's labor, and represented collectives of Black men laborers as groups that could bring about abolition. Non-leftist novelists like Ralph Ellison and Paule Marshall were influenced by this economic account of police violence and abolition, agreeing that police violence dispossessed Black men, but they subordinated political economy to race and gender. Non-leftist novelists, in turn, valorized Black men for seeking to be masculine, critiqued police violence for emasculating Black men, and represented Black men's pursuit of masculinity as harboring the potential to produce freedom from state violence. Both

groups of writers asserted both that police violence was a man's problem and that the novel as a genre afforded the ability to represent police violence critically in ways that non-fiction could not. In the process, they came to theorize the novel as a useful weapon in the fight for abolition inasmuch as the novel could chronicle the full extent of the police's violence against Black men as a means of compelling men to act in real life. This masculinization of police violence, of the movement to abolish it, and of the novel, ultimately, kept alive the labor-centric critique of police violence in times of intense anticommunism, while repressing the histories of police violence against Black women and of Black women's organizing to end police violence.

My second chapter tracks this masculinized labor-centric critique of police violence across the globe, demonstrating the ways in which global histories of state violence against women were subordinated to men's histories. Intervening in debates on studies of diaspora, this chapter focuses on representations of state violence in general in African American 1960s novels because those novels describe police and military violence as analogous. In tales of Black migrants living within the United States and of African Americans traveling the globe, the lingering influence of Black Marxist thought led African American Social Realist novelists like Sarah Wright and novelists writing in other forms like William Demby to portray police and military violence as dispossessing people of color across the globe in ways that reinforced their metaphorical or literal colonial status. These novelists, in turn, represented global revolution as the means of uprooting state violence, and they insisted that fictionality enabled the novel to capture otherwise unrepresentable violence in ways that would catalyze colonized men to work toward international abolition. While these novels do describe state violence against

women of color, they repeatedly insist that such violence is both less important than state violence against men of color and significant only insofar as that violence catalyzes men to act. In the process, African American novels kept alive an understanding of Black diaspora as defined by vulnerability to state violence at the same time that they repressed histories of both state violence against women and women's resistance to such violence. By chronicling the masculinizing of both victims of state violence and of those with the agency to abolish state violence, my first and second chapters theorize the ways in which culture contributes to archival absence to repress certain histories and the ways in which gender and race structure cultural repression.

While the first two chapters chronicle the preservation of the labor-centric theory of global state violence and its simultaneous cultural repression of women's experience of and resistance to state violence, the latter two chapters consider Black Feminist's effort to counteract this masculinized cultural repression. My third chapter takes up this effort in Black Feminist novels of the 1970s, a decade classically considered to be the beginning of, at least, a boom in Black Feminist writing. Responding to the earlier insistence that police violence only or primarily dispossesses Black men of public waged labor, novelists like Toni Morrison and Gayl Jones represented police violence as dispossessing Black women of private waged and unwaged labor, including sex and care work. These novelists also depicted collectives of Black women laborers working toward simultaneous public-sphere change, like better labor relations, and private-sphere change, like more equitable gender relations in romantic couples, as harboring the potential to bring about abolition. Their increased attention to Black women and to so-called private problems, ultimately, led these novelists to theorize the novel as a tool that could imagine

an abolition that would bring about a whole-scale societal change that included the sexist distribution of household labor as well as the end of racist sexist police violence against Black women. In their revision of earlier masculinist characterizations of police violence, these writers often inhabited the discourses and forms of those earlier novels, repurposing the labor-centric theory of police violence and abolition for Black Feminist aims. In their work to immanently regender both police violence and abolition, these Black Feminist novelists forwarded a little discussed but vital account of the place of labor in anti-carceral Black Feminist organizing, and their novels provide a model for the means by which scholars can work toward undoing the contemporary cultural repression of police violence against Black women today.

Where the first three chapters move through several texts at a time as a means of establishing a tradition, the final chapter turns to close readings of two works as a means of considering how writers attempted to exceed that tradition and the historical conditions that enabled it. My fourth chapter attempts to flesh out the ways in which literature and literary criticism can contribute to efforts to abolish the prison industrial complex by focusing on representations of police violence against Black women and on Black women's efforts to secure safety without relying on the police in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* (1980) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983). Both works insist that the police violence dispossesses Black women of care labor in ways analogous to the extraction of their care labor in the household, and they insist that care labor is essential to abolition both as a material practice that enables abolitionist organizing and as a model for labor in a post-abolition world. Their insistence that the novel has the capacity to give voice to the care laborer in ways that other genres cannot, ultimately, leads both novelists

to theorize the novel as an important tool that can revise prior cultural scripts that repress the histories of care laborers in particular and Black women in general. By alluding to and revising prior cultural scripts, they gesture to an understanding of abolition not as a one-time revolution but as a recursive process that negates prisons and produces alternative modes of providing safety and accountability. As I argue in that chapter, returning to the Black Feminist effort to repair prior cultural repression works not only toward recovering past histories of state violence but also toward modeling cultural work that scholars can do in the effort to abolish prisons.

On the whole, my dissertation aims to answer a historical question—how exactly it was that police violence against Black women came to be forgotten—via literary history to argue that the African American novel contributed both to the repression of police violence against Black women and to the recent theories that have enabled the recovery of such violence. This dissertation tells a prehistory of the current moment, tracking the ways in which midcentury masculinist novelists wrote Black women out of police violence narratives at the same time that they preserved labor-centric critiques, and the ways in which later Black Feminist novelists revised those critiques to reassert the place of Black women and their labor in the history of state violence. This reassertion enabled the contemporary resurgence of abolitionist activism and thought, but the Black Feminist novelists' insistence upon the place of labor was lost in their influence upon the present. Their theories of police violence as dispossessing Black women's labor and of care labor as a model for abolition, I argue, ought to be recovered to reassert the importance of political economy to contemporary prison abolitionist thought. Black Feminist imaginings of the means of abolition, further, can shed new light on the role of

labor in bringing about abolition and their representation of abolition as an ongoing recursive process, as opposed to a one-time revolution, can shed light on the ways in which abolitionists can imagine alternatives that can supplant the prison's material and ideological presence. In pursuing the influence of the labor-centric critique of police violence and the vision of abolition as a kind of labor, I endeavor to recover prior collective thought and imaginings of abolition in part because the Black Radical tradition is best seen through collective knowledge production and in part because contemporary prison abolitionist thought insists that abolition must be collectively imagined.

This project aims to recover both the material failures and the cultural victories of past Black radical movements in the hopes of both informing contemporary abolitionist movements and redeeming the promise of the past. In so doing, this dissertation shines a light on the ways radical ideas and movements can survive counterrevolutionary times. As Michael Denning writes in response to the symposium on his book, *The Cultural Front* (1996),

The time of cultural history is not the same as the time of political or labor movement history. Social movements announce themselves in manifestos; songs, plays, films, novels, and memoirs follow at some distance ... Many of the cultural works sparked by a social movement come to fruition long after the movement has passed; often the most powerful reflections on episodes of social insurrection are composed in moments of defeat ... The issue raised by the *cultural front* is less its political failure than its cultural success, the ways it continued to live *after* the defeat of the social movement. (Denning 335)

Cultural success in the face of political failure, I argue, is persistence, measured by the ability of a discourse or analysis to survive in the face of state repression. Cultural success remains important not only because it shapes later political ideas but also because it harbors the potential to shape later political movements and to produce later political

successes. The labor-centric theory of police violence and the Black Feminist revision of its masculinism, ultimately, remains a cultural success because its persistence in the African American novel enabled the reemergence of abolitionist thought that has taken place over the past thirty years. The cultural success of Black Left Feminist critiques of police violence, through which scholars can begin to approach prior collective knowledge production, still harbors the potential to bring about abolition.

Literary critics are especially well suited to recover this communal knowledge production over time—this literary history—through which Black Radical thought is best visible that still harbor untapped potential. This is not to lambast novelists or the novels that constitute this literary history: The North Star did not provide less guidance toward freedom because it did not constitute the entirety of Ursa Minor. But one does need astronomers to sketch the contours of Ursa Minor, to map out its relationship to other stars and constellations, and to chart its changing position in the sky with the seasons. Astronomers do not act alone; where would the astronomer be without the stars, without all the astronomers who came before them but did not bear the same professional title, and without the unwaged stargazers who spotted the flickering on the horizon that we came to know as stars, planets, and black holes? And yet the astronomers' contributions are vital. Because of their training, literary critics are especially prepared to be those astronomers. In the process, literary critics can contribute to this long abolitionist effort, undertaken by many actors under a variety of circumstances, to undermine the cultural and material presence of the prison industrial complex.

This argument about the place of literary criticism and cultural failure in abolitionist endeavors, I must note, is measured, hedged in potential and possibility. It

presumes the fight for abolition will be a long one. To paraphrase that great thinker so influential to Black radicals, perhaps because he wrote behind bars, this dissertation is guided by a pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will. I wrote it, after all, in counterrevolutionary times—the Trump administration—and about counterrevolutionary times: the anticommunist Cold War and the beginning of Mass Incarceration. These were times when prisons thrived, and it did not seem likely that their flourishing would end overnight. And yet neither real people nor fictional characters saw fit to wait until the far-off days when revolution seemed imminent to provide for the incarcerated, to nurse the beaten, and, yes, to go to work with injury so as to survive. They did not see fit, in other words, to give up on working toward abolition, which is to say, freedom. It is to that work that this dissertation must now turn.

CHAPTER 1: The Cop Would Be His Historian: Representations of Police Violence in Early Cold-War African-American Novels

Early in Chester Himes' autobiographical novel, *Cast the First Stone* (1952), the white protagonist, Jim Monroe, cannot sleep. Lying awake in his prison cell, Jim remembers the incident that led to his incarceration: He tried to purchase a ring from a pawn shop, the broker assumed the money stolen or otherwise illegally procured, and called the police, who arrested and assaulted him. "I had never confessed to anything in my life before," Jim narrates. "Since I was old enough to remember, the beatings I'd gotten from mother and father taught me one lesson: *never confess* ... [A]lways say you didn't do it. Let 'em prove it. But still deny it" (Himes 17). As the memories of police and familial violence bleed into each other, the recollections torment him, keeping him awake long past the time by which he should have gone to sleep. Especially painful is the memory of the police's never-before-experienced brutality forcing him to confess, despite his long experience pleading innocence. In this scene, Himes' attention to the use of violence to coerce confession unlinks both race and action from criminality. For Himes, neither doing certain actions nor being Black makes a person a criminal (his protagonist, after all, is a white man who only confessed because he was tortured); instead, a variety of material processes, including police assault, produce criminalization.

Yet Himes does not only take issue with the processes by which some people become incarcerated and others remain free. He also laments the economic violence that emerges in criminalization's wake. In the next scene, Jim stands in the prison yard as the head guard explains his work: "You got to roll coal. They got to have coal to run the

powerhouse. Got to have electricity for the electric chair” (Himes 22-3). Having been made criminal by police violence, Jim must labor in prison to power the weapon that will kill some of the incarcerated. This scene foregrounds a common representation of police violence in the 1950s in which police violence is depicted as a kind of dispossession. As Marx argues in *Capital*, what he calls primitive accumulation and what many today call dispossession is the use of violence to take land and other holdings so that the people who became wage laborers had nothing to sell but their labor. Dispossession, put differently, is the use of violence to coerce labor under capitalism. In *Cast the First Stone*, Himes circulates a critique of police violence that stemmed from interwar Communist Party analyses, which framed police violence as coercing Black people’s labor. Such a critique drew its aesthetic and emotional valence in part from CPUSA valorizations of laborers as the subjects with the political agency to make history and from Black radical valorizations of Black workers as subjects producing value and thus deserving full citizenship. Police violence, in Himes’ account, is especially heinous because it transforms heroic Black laborers into powerless aids to executioners.¹³

In *Cast the First Stone*, this dispossessed labor is, importantly, masculine. The masculinization of work occurred in part because of the gender-segregated policies of prisons and in part because of the gender norms of the culture industry that is publishing. Though reviewers primarily remarked upon the novel’s depictions of queer life in prisons, the original drafts of the novel contained more extended representations of queer romance as well as a lengthy questioning of gender identity. As Dennis Childs notes in *Slaves of the State* (2015), Himes’ editors excised the majority of both plots throughout

¹³ For more on those interwar CPUSA analyses of police violence, see my introduction.

the drafting process, heterosexualizing and cismasculinizing *Cast the First Stone* because they thought that other kinds of gender and sexual representations would not sell in the midcentury (Childs 165). The editing of the novel, ultimately, aimed to draw on valorizations of masculine laborers to increase its value as a commodity. As a result, Himes' novel is not coincidentally masculinist in its representation of state violence; rather, the prison's material landscape collaborated with publishing's culture industry to represent prisons as persecuting normative masculinity. This normative masculinization, ultimately, produced a critique of police violence in which state assault dispossesses men of the means by which they ought to become arbiters of their own destiny—labor—and consigns them to premature death.¹⁴

These scenes ought to raise a variety of questions for scholars today. What might we learn about police violence and critiques of it if we analyze its representation in African American literature, something scholars have not done, though the word was the premier means for representing state violence for much of the twentieth century? What does fictionality afford the many representations of police violence in early Cold War African American novels? And though state violence has long been understood to be racialized, to what degree was it understood to be gendered? These questions prove all

¹⁴ Reviews remarking upon the queer plotlines in the novel include Gilbert Millstein writing for *The New York Times* on January 18th, 1953, Gertrude Martin writing for *The Chicago Defender* on January 24th, 1953, Pat Patten writing for *The Chicago Daily Tribune* on January 25th, 1953, Paul Sampson writing for *The Washington Post* on February 8th, 1953, and Henry Winslow writing for *The Pittsburgh Courier* on April 18th, 1953. This emphasis on the queer plot of *Cast the First Stone* continues today, as in Lawrence Jackson's account of *Cast the First Stone* in *Indignant Generation* (Jackson 2011 380). For more on the queer plot of *Yesterday Will Make You Cry*, the first draft of *Cast the First Stone*, see Dennis Child's chapter on *Yesterday* in *Slaves of the State* (Childs 2015 162-165) and Thomas Dichter's "'An Extreme Sense of Protest against Everything': Chester Himes's Prison Novel" (2018). For a publication history of *Cast the First Stone* that describes the ways in which Cold War masculinity required the censorship of sections of *Yesterday*, see Clare Rolens' "Write Like a Man: Chester Himes and the Criminal Text Beyond Bars" (Rolens 2014 439-443). See also Marlon Ross' "Some Glances at the Black Flag: Race, Same-Sex Desire, and Cultural Belonging" (2004).

the more pertinent when considering the decade from which Himes' and many similar novels hail: the 1950s. This decade was the site of a prolonged ideological contest over the prison industrial complex in general and the police in particular. As Theodore Martin writes in "Crime Fiction and Black Criminality" (2018), writers in this period aimed "to imagine ways of uncoupling race from crime" (Martin 724). Their attention to the use of violence in producing criminality derived in part from Marxist influence. In the preceding decades, the CPUSA was one of the most prominent agitators against police violence. Their influence lingered long after the end of World War II; in postwar African American novels, conservative characters and police officers derogatorily call critics of police violence Communists, as did conservative people and actual police officers in American history until at least the 1970s (Johnson 203; Doody 63). Despite the CPUSA's lasting anti-state-violence influence, this decade was also the era of the Cold War Consensus, a period of intense anti-communism that sought to undo the leftward turn of the 1930s. It was also, as Naomi Murakawa argues in *The First Civil Right* (2014), the decade in which the ideological foundations for prison expansions in the 1970s and 1980s were laid (Murakawa 3-4). Though representations of police violence in the African American novel circulated radical critiques of state violence from earlier decades, they fought an uphill battle that only grew steeper as the decades wore on.

Many of these critical depictions of police violence have been forgotten because the period's anti-communism gave rise to a cultural Cold War. This ideological front counted many left-leaning writers and thinkers among its casualties. As Alan Wald writes in *American Night: The Literary Left in the Era of the Cold War* (2012),

Between 1945 and the late 1950s, the socialist vision fashioned in the 1930s became the target of a nonstop “culture war” ... The outcome, induced by unprecedented domestic and international changes, was a species of “memory crisis” in respect to the political and cultural inheritance of the 1930s Left. Such “enforced forgetting” produced a hostile transformation in meanings and concepts that disrupted the forward movement of literary radicalism, a mode of politico-cultural activism largely bound up in the tacit identity of writers with the Communist movement. (Wald 1)

This enforced forgetting had especially disastrous effects on the careers of Black radical authors. As Mary Helen Washington writes in *The Other Blacklist: The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950s* (2014),

The Black Popular Front ... has almost always been marginalized in black literary and cultural studies. Though nearly every major black writer of the 1940s and 1950s was in some ways influenced by the Communist Party or other leftist organizations, and although the Left was by all accounts the most racially integrated movement of that period, the terms “U.S. radicalism,” “left wing,” “Old Left,” “New Left,” and “communism” came to signify white history and black absence. (Washington 4)

In African American Literary History, the 1950s became, to a large degree, the decade of James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison, and perhaps of the declining Richard Wright. This literary historiography left unstudied many of the Black leftist authors who sold well and were well-regarded in the period. And because agitation against police violence and critiques of it were long considered to be Communist, many of the critiques of police violence in those novels were forgotten as well.

But the state of literary criticism today is different than the one Washington and Wald faced. On top of their exceptional scholarship, Lawrence Jackson, William Maxwell, Imani Perry, Barbara Foley, and several others have worked in the last decade to undo this “enforced forgetting.” Consequently, scholars looking for Black Leftist authors of the 1950s can easily find them in the work of major scholars published by top

presses. As these and other scholars have noted, McCarthyism's postwar dominance led to the incarceration and persecution of many Communist writers of non-fiction, but slight exceptions were made for novelists, who were often surveilled but rarely incarcerated. The novel's fictionality provided African American authors plausible deniability and, consequently, limited freedom from state intervention. As a result, the novel emerged as a premier venue for preserving those Communist analyses. In scholarship on these authors utilizing their limited freedom, these scholars have changed the landscape of literary history in a very short period of time. Midcentury Black Leftists have been—and I mean this with all the nuance brought to the term in recent scholarship on the archive—recovered. The same is not true of the Leftist representations of police violence.¹⁵

Attending to the circulation of Leftist thought in representations of police violence provides a more complete understanding of Black cultural production in the midcentury. My focus on the transit of ideas differs from the focus of earlier scholars hoping to recover Black Leftists, who often emphasized biography by studying authors identified with or working within the Communist Party and other Leftist structures. Responding to this literary historiography, Vaughn Rasberry argues, in *Race and The Totalitarian Century* (2016), that a number of African American authors were non-aligned: “a stance independent of communism or liberal democracy” (Rasberry 10). Though he is critical of scholarly texts that see African American writers as either Communist or liberal, Rasberry reproduces those texts' understanding of politics as defined by identity. Even critics of scholars emphasizing biography overlook political influence—perhaps the most lasting contribution of the Communist Party, according to

¹⁵ For more on the traditional understanding of fictionality, see the introduction.

Michael Denning in *The Cultural Front* (1996)—and fail to account for the Leftist analyses that circulated amongst the nonaligned, the Communists, and the non-Communists. These analyses were not simply dogma the CPUSA ventriloquized from Black radical writers; instead, they were contested and protean. Black writers adapted Leftist thought to the subjects they discussed and to fit the other political traditions which influenced those writers, yielding new Black Marxist analyses. The circulation of Black Marxist thought across the political divide, and the changes produced in that circulation, yielded new Black Radical analyses. Seen from this vantage, Black Radicalism was not a political position—the hallowed destination of Du Bois near the end of his career—but a communal production best viewed across the body of literary production, hence my readings of many books rather than close-readings of exemplary ones. This collective effort used fictionality not only to preserve Marxist thought amidst intense anticommunism but also to build on it. One premier site for the preservation of Marxist influence and the production of new Black Radical ideas, I argue, was the representation of police violence in African American novels.¹⁶

Analyzing representations of police violence in a panoply of early Cold War African American novels brings to the fore the Black Marxist influence on the lost Black Radical critique of state violence as dispossession. In the 1950s, African American novelists depict police violence as dispossessing Black people and their communities of commodities and capital, and as regulating Black people's labor and relationship to that

¹⁶ For more on what I mean by Black Marxism, see the writing on Cedric Robinson in the introduction. Here and throughout the dissertation, I capitalize Black Radical to refer to those writers that I identify as taking part in the circuit of ideas that define the Black Radical Tradition, as opposed to Black radical writers, who were simply Black and radical.

labor, in such a way that reinforces racial capitalism's hierarchies. In these representations, early Cold War African American novelists represent the process by which phenomenal violence becomes structural, lamenting that police violence continues to damage long after the assault ends. They critique, in sum, both the state's excessive violence and its excesses. While Black Marxist novelists represent police violence as dispossession, non-Communist novelists include and subsume this economic critique under a racial critique of police violence. They agree that police violence dispossesses but describe that dispossession as an epiphenomenon of state racism. In this way, even the non-Communists circulate the Leftist critique of police violence as a kind of dispossession. By tracking the circulation of this labor-centric critique of police violence in canonical and non-canonical works from authors across the political spectrum, this chapter reconstitutes a field of literary production long overshadowed by Baldwin and Ellison. "[M]uch black American fiction produced during this era," writes Aliyah Abdur-Rahman in *Against the Closet* (2014), "grapples with the dual dimensions of racial desire: the desire to have recognized the possibility, the plausibility even, of black individuation and the desire for African Americans as a collective to achieve full inclusion in mainstream national life" (Abdur-Rahman 83). One key obstacle to both Black individuation and inclusion, according to these novelists, was police violence and its dispossession. Abolition was necessary to fulfilling their varied political desires.¹⁷

¹⁷ It may seem here that I am undermining my own argument that these authors shared political positions and my argument that we ought to pay less attention to political identity by continually making reference to their political identity. I do so only to demonstrate that these authors shared political ideologies regardless of so-called opposing political identities. In future chapters, I will make less reference to identity so as to avoid reproducing the divide I aim to undermine.

Foregrounding the economic analysis shared by these avowedly antagonistic authors, importantly, highlights a gendered commonality underlying these writers. In the 1950s, masculinism pervaded African American novels. As Trimiko Melancon argues in *Unbought and Unbossed* (2014), fiction in this era “focused prominently on young male protagonists’ struggles against alienation, subordination, and racialized violence. Most black women in the fiction of these male protest writers are peripheral types lacking dimension” (Melancon 24). While Melancon argues that Black women writers like Ann Petry undermined this masculinism, in this chapter, I foreground that neither Black women writers nor their famously sexist male counterparts did so in their representations of police violence. These novelists depict police violence as a problem amongst men. Where police violence regulates labor, it persecutes men’s labor; where it regulates labor only as a means of regulating Blackness, it regulates men’s Blackness. In this way, Social Realists like William Gardner Smith and famed critics of Social Realism like James Baldwin collaborate to produce a masculinized depiction of police violence. But these novels do not only diagnose the problem of police violence; they also theorize the means of uprooting its enabling conditions, and masculinism structures these imaginings as well. Social Realists often represent Black men’s labor organizing as one means of bringing about abolition. Their critics agree that improving labor conditions are important, but they subordinate labor to the pursuit of Black masculinity as the means of ending police violence. In both accounts, these writers represent the genre of the novel as a tool that can counter the ideologies legitimating the police and, in so doing, work toward their abolition. In theorizing of the genre embedded in the novels themselves, they contend that fictionality enables unique representations of police violence against men that can

undermine the legitimating narratives of the prison industrial complex and can elude the state supervision of non-fictional critics of police violence. In the process, these novelists masculinize the victims of police violence, the means of abolishing it, and the very genre through which they critique and imagine abolition. Black women in these accounts are marginal at best.

These masculine critiques ran counter to accounts of police violence against Black women in other venues. Contemporaneously, journalists captured police violence against Black women in newspapers with large circulation, contributing to the fame (or infamy, depending on the case) surrounding survivors of police violence like Margie Polite. Beyond these records of individual instances of police violence against Black women, contemporaneous writers developed theories of state assault against Black women. In pamphlets, speeches, and other non-fiction venues, Black Left Feminists and other Black women provided analyses of police violence that accounted for the place of Black women's gender and sexuality in the experience of police violence. Neither archival absence nor theoretical absence produced the novel's masculinization. Rather, the novel was uncannily masculine in its representation of police violence as dispossession. This masculinization actively contested theories that understood police violence as something that could persecute Black women at all. In the long run, the feminized accounts and theories of police violence were as forgotten as the Black Marxist theory of police violence as dispossession, but the masculinized representation of police violence remained. Consequently, I argue that this lost concept of masculinized dispossession contributed to the cultural repression of police violence against Black women that has led to the obscuring of state violence against Black women today.

By recovering the circulation of the Black Marxist theory of police violence as dispossessing men, I offer a warning and a path forward for Black Radical scholars today. With regard to the latter, I return to this critique of police violence to offer a path through the impasse between Afropessimists and Black Marxists. As I argue in my introduction, taking Wilderson as the exemplary Afropessimist, Afropessimism argues that the fundamental antagonism in the United States is not between capital and workers but between antiblackness and Blackness; violent antiblackness, consequently, renders Black people unintelligible within the discipline of Marxist political economy. The argument that Blackness and anti-blackness, and not capital and labor, constitutes the world's foundational structure may or may not be true; I am not concerned with it. Instead, I return to these depictions of police violence to foreground that the economy is one terrain on which antiblackness continues to unfold, regardless of the underlying structure. Eschewing political economy in the way that Afropessimists do, ultimately, leaves no account of the economic structures of violence erected in the wake of assault that the novels of this chapter lament. Afropessimism, in other words, diagnoses the wound but not the salt in it. But a salt-laden wound cannot fully heal. Consequently, I contend that Afropessimist critique must take seriously these economic effects of police violence as producing new structures of violence and must, like the non-Communist novelists, critique police violence in a way that incorporates discussions of political economy. Further, the masculinism underlying the critique of these novels offers a warning for Afropessimists and Black Marxists today, wherein analyses of supposedly gender-neutral anti-blackness and gender-neutral racial capitalism threaten to reinscribe sexist understandings of state violence. The work of this chapter, then, is to unravel the threads

of this masculinism in the past, which are naturalized in the present, so that later chapters may begin to consider how to rehabilitate this lost concept of dispossession.

In this chapter, I track the masculinist representation of police violence as dispossession that circulated in the 1950s in three sections. In the first section, I track the ways in which 1950s novelists represented police violence as yielding lasting economic damage and as regulating labor, even where those novelists insist that such labor regulation is simply a means of regulating Black masculinity more generally. In the second section, I chronicle these novelists' account of police violence as giving rise to its abolitionist opposition, represented as collective labor organizing or as movements that guarantee Black men their individual liberties. In the third section, I attend to the novelists' theorizing of the novel as a genre that makes it possible for these writers to render otherwise unspeakable acts of violence, an affordance that makes the novel, in their account, an essential weapon in the cultural fight against the prison industrial complex. As I argue throughout, these novelists' insistence that police violence only persecuted men, that men were the people with the political agency to uproot prisons, and that the stories that novels tell ought to be men's, altogether, contributed to the cultural repression of individual cases of police violence against Black women, of Black women's resistance to police violence, and of theories of police violence that could account for Black women's experience of police violence.

The Persecuted

Unlike shorter forms like the lyric poem, the newspaper article, or the short story, which can dedicate their majority to a single subject, incidents of police violence in early

Cold War African American novels rarely occupy the majority of the novel's pages and rarely form the novel's final scene. Instead, the novel's size and its relationship to temporality require it to describe the effects of police violence. Lamentations of all the indirect damages caused by a cop's blows tend to occupy more space than the violence itself. As a result, the novel is the ideal form for considering police violence as a kind of dispossession in particular—an affordance avowed Leftists like William Gardner Smith made use of—and for considering the ways in which incidents of police violence become structural more generally. Non-Communist novelists like James Baldwin made use of this latter ability in their representations of police violence as persecuting labor as a means of persecuting Black masculinity. In the 1950s, the African American novel represented police assaults in ways that subtended critiques of state violence for its persecution of men.

Let's begin with Ann Petry, whom an informed reader might expect to buck the masculinist 1950s trend. By this decade, she had already published the proto-black feminist classic *The Street* (1946), often described as the Black woman's counterpart to Wright's *Native Son*. But the characterization of relationships between men and women in her 1953 novel, *The Narrows*, better resembles that of masculinist Social Realism than its opposition. Unsurprisingly, early Black feminist criticism, like Barbara Christian's *Black Women Novelists* (1980), tended to overlook *The Narrows*, which sold more than a million copies (Christian 1980 62-7). This may have been because *The Narrows* focuses on the romance between Link, a black man, and Camilla, a white woman. Early in the novel, Link worries that Camilla fears him because she believes "colored men live for the

sole purpose of raping white women” (Petry 78-9). He later learns otherwise, but the opposition between supposedly rapacious black men and supposedly vulnerable white women structures their ensuing romance. Months later, during an argument, Camilla tells him to leave her car and he slaps her. “Love. Hate,” narrates Petry from Link’s perspective. “No one in the USA free-from, warfare, eternal war between the male and the female. Black bastard. White bitch” (Petry 258). Petry reinforces this restrictive definition of gender and race, wherein men are Black and women are white, through allusions to *The Tempest* and to *Othello* (Petry 97, 401). By alluding to these two plays, Petry places her novel in a lineage of texts which oppose men of color and white women.¹⁸

The novel’s depiction of police violence, importantly, represents the assault as masculine. Midway through the novel, a Black character tells a story about Bill Hod, the bar owner in the Black section of town. When Bill was in New York, he saw “a kid being worked over by a couple of cops.” Bill saves the kid and then the storyteller says,

The kid hadn’t had nothin’ to eat since God knows when and he had stole himself something to eat, and these big fat cops caught him at it and Bill said the thing about it that made him sore is that there these cops had worked over this kid for stealin’ a lousy loaf of bread and every brokedown whore on the block is payin’ em off and so are the pimps and

¹⁸ As the reviewer for *The Washington Post* wrote, *The Street* “might have been entitled ‘Black Girl’ as a counterpart to Richard Wright’s ‘Black Boy’” (*The Washington Post* 1946). For scholarship that reinforces this claim, see Barbara Christian’s *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976* (Christian 1980 62-7), Farrah Griffin’s “Hunting Communists and Negroes in Ann Petry’s *The Narrows*” (Griffin 2007 138), and Joy Myree-Manor’s “‘The Story of Race Relations’: Reading Black Nationalism in Ann Petry’s *The Narrows*” (Myree-Manor 2010 176-7). For more on the ways in which *The Narrows* resembles *Native Son*, see Keith Clark’s “A Distaff Dream Deferred? Ann Petry and the Art of Subversion” (Clark 1992 495). For reviews which focus on interracial romance in *The Narrows*, see Gertrude Martin’s review of *The Narrows* for *The Chicago Defender* and Marjorie Jackson McFadden’s review of *The Narrows* for *The Pittsburgh Courier*. For a dissenting discussion of *The Narrows*, see Joyce Pettis’ 1997 article, “Reading Ann Petry’s *The Narrows* Into Black Literary Tradition.”

the boys who are runnin' a game in the back of the pool hall and the ones who are makin' book (Petry 272-3).

In this account, the police attack the unnamed boy for the condition enabling his hunger—poverty—and what frustrates Bill is the classed distribution of safety. This emphasis on poverty, according to Farrah Griffin in “Hunting Communists and Negroes in Ann Petry’s *The Narrows*, runs throughout the novel. “While the love affair forwards much of the novel’s action,” Farrah Griffin writes, “it also offers a stinging critique of class” (Griffin 2007 139). Seen from this vantage, the novel’s account of the classed distribution of safety indicts the police for persecuting the poor and, in particular, poor men. Considering the key conflict and the novel’s representation of police violence together, *The Narrows* levies two key critiques: First, a critique of the violently oppositional construction of Black masculinity and white femininity, and second, a class-centric critique of police violence. The combination of these two accounts in the novels of the period leads to depictions of police violence as persecuting and dispossessing Black men.¹⁹

Such a masculinist Black Marxist representation of police violence arises in William Gardner Smith’s 1954 novel, *South Street*, even though Smith goes attempts to frame police violence in gender-neutral terms. *South Street* is set in Philadelphia, where Smith grew up and protested police brutality as a teenager (Jackson 2011 401).

According to a young activist in the novel, the “worst policemen” are “stationed in the Negroes neighborhoods,” which ensures “brutality” is a “common thing” in Black people’s lives. After describing the distribution of cops as a structure of violence and

¹⁹ For more on class and communism in the novel, see Alan Wald’s writing on *The Narrows* in “Marxist Literary Resistance to the Cold War” (Wald 1995 107).

brutality as its epiphenomenon, Smith writes that the violence intensifies after a white grocer is killed in a Black neighborhood. In response, one hundred policemen throw “three hundred black citizens ...roughly into jail” and assault them “to make them talk.” The large number of arrested individuals and the term “citizen” implies a seemingly gender-neutral critique: The police transgress the rights which citizenship is supposed to grant black people. Yet a subsequent depiction in a litany of descriptions of the police assaulting men restricts the critique to men’s labor:

A delivery boy, eleven years old, had allegedly run off one Saturday with the groceries of the wife of a policeman; the policeman, charging angrily to the store, seized the first delivery boy he saw and beat him (Smith 92-3).

One delivery boy refuses to do the labor for which he was paid and instead takes the fruits of that labor, as if refusing its alienation. Rather than assault that laborer, the policeman lashes out at the profession writ large. Given Neocleous’ argument that the police historically worked to prevent laborers from taking the goods which they produced, Smith’s representation offers a further critique: The transgression of rights and racist sanctioning of police violence regulates an entire class of black laborers (Neocleous 2000 72-6). Those laborers are, importantly, “delivery boy[s].” The “citizens” and “Negroes” whose labor the police regulates, ultimately, are black men.²⁰

This Black Marxist depiction of police violence as structuring Black men’s labor is not limited to *South Street*. This representation of police violence as dispossessing Black men also appears across Smith’s oeuvre and in a variety of other novels. Time and

²⁰ For a critique of the model in which physical violence is merely an epiphenomenon of underlying structure, see Cristina Rojas, *Civilization and Violence: Regimes of Representation in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (2001).

again, one finds in these works the valorization of Black men as heroes because they produce value through labor in public and a Marxist critique of the state's use of violence to regulate Black men's value-producing labor. Even in the few contemporaneous African American novels about white characters who commit crime, like Willard Motley's *Let No Man Write My Epitaph* (1958), African American authors insistently masculinize police violence and lament its long-lasting effects on men's labor. These texts subvert the association between Blackness and criminality, in other words, but they reinforce the association between police violence and men's labor. Situated amongst the general trend of African American novels representing police violence as structuring Black men's labor, these novels as a whole circulated a Black Marxist critique of police violence as dispossession. The violence is an end in itself, of course, but it's also a means of controlling men's labor.

This Marxist critique and its emphasis on labor crossed political borders. Consider Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959). A novel set in early twentieth-century Brooklyn that formally privileges interiority over protesting the exterior world, the first section of Marshall's novel follows the conflict between a Barbadian couple, Deighton and Silla, from the perspective of their daughter, Selina. Though the novel discusses much more than this familial plot, the early segment of the novel heavily influenced its reception. In his review, celebrated novelist J. Saunders Redding described one of the central conflicts of the novel as "woman's inhumanity to man—as in the central case of Selina's mother, Silla, and her father, Deighton" (Redding 1959). While many scholars have foregrounded the novel's proto-Black Feminist thought and representation, Redding's diagnosis of its gender politics is correct with regard to its portrait of police

violence. In *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, police violence reproduces the Black Marxist critique of police violence as regulating men's labor, but neither political economy more generally nor dispossession more specifically encapsulate all of police violence's damages.

In the novel, the labor-centric critique of police violence is described and encapsulated under the larger rubric of the police structuring the Black family. After her parents separate, Selina visits her father in his new apartment and washes his socks. Unbeknownst to Selina, Silla tells a police officer there is a warrant out for Deighton's arrest and arrives downstairs with the cop, at which point Selina rushes downstairs. "The authority of his [the cop's] white face and uniform, of his big hand on her father's arm, choked her cry." Upon seeing the cop grabbing her father without his consent, Selina notices "that the socks were cold and dripping and somehow confused in her mind with blood." This potential for violence reappears shortly: "She [Selina] did not see the policeman grab Deighton's injured arm and, as he felt its limpness, drop it." After returning once more to quotidian policing's coercive, painful hold on Deighton's injured arm, Marshall's novel turns to Silla and Deighton's relationship. The cop says, "This woman's sworn out a warrant for your arrest and deportation for illegal entry into the United States" (Marshall 1959 151). According to the police officer, Silla attempts to produce Deighton as a criminal and deportable subject, to paraphrase Patricia Saunders' argument about the novel in "Woman Overboard" (Saunders 2009 212-3). In so doing,

the cop frames himself as an intermediary for the family conflict, begrudgingly using violence and residency rights to intrude upon the Black private sphere.²¹

This depiction of police violence as trespassing upon the private family is depicted as including and exceeding the critique that police violence regulates black men's economic activity because Silla enlists the police to solve a conflict about property ownership. Early in the novel, Silla forges Deighton's signature to sell his land in Barbados, and he spends the profit against her wishes, which leads to their separation. The problem of who manages wealth also arises in the aforementioned scene:

The policeman shook him and this time something touched Deighton's face ... He studied the policeman's face and in his shattered mind it became the white faces in the stores of Bridgetown long ago. Those faces, stippled red by the tropic sun, that had always refused his request for a clerk's job ... that had utterly unmanned him before he was yet a man; that had stripped him of any possibility of self and then hustled him out (Marshall 1959 151-2).

Note the succession of critiques: The police are analogous to those who regulate labor, which is subsumed under the critique that the police emasculate, which is subsumed under the critique that they destroy selfhood, abjecting and ejecting the colonized. Marshall moves from labor to subjecthood to frame economics as an insufficient lens to understand all of police violence's damage, but she does not abandon labor. This is the often the form in which the Black Marxist critique crossed political boundaries: The non-

²¹ Much of the scholarship on the novel focuses on Selina's interiority, framing it as the central object of the novel. See, for instance, Simon Gikandi's *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Culture* (Gikandi 1992 169-183), Gavin Jones's "'The Sea Ain't Got No Back Door': The Problems of Black Consciousness in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*" (Jones 1998 597), Martha Jane Nadell's "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn: Writing Caribbean New York" (Nadell 2013 26), and Elda Maria Román's "Mortgaged Status: Literary Representations of Black Home Ownership and Social Mobility" (Román 2014 738). The primary dissenting text, which focuses more on the novel's political praxis, is Patricia J. Saunders' 2009 article, "Women Overboard: The Perils of Sailing the Black Atlantic, Deportation with Prejudice" (Saunders 2009 210).

Leftists suggested that economic damage had to be attended to in critiques of state violence, but this damage was simply part of the state project of regulating Black subjecthood.

In the novel, Marshall purposefully masculinizes the police's use of dispossession as a means of abjecting Black people from the category of the subject. The white employers and the police alike "unman" Deighton, destroying men's subjecthood. This scene's gendering is made even more conspicuous by Marshall's autobiography. In the novel, the father inherits the money and the mother wants to spend it wisely, but in Marshall's own life, it was the opposite: Her mother inherited money and her father wanted to spend it wisely (Pettis and Marshall 1991 118). By changing who inherits, Marshall transforms the gendered conflict over wealth to portray the state as regulating Black men's economic activity. In Elda Maria Román's analysis, this change from biography to fiction "foregrounds how status seeking is tied to the constrained possibilities that women had outside of the home and why black women in particular would be trying to improve their status" in Marshall's novel (Román 2014 743). Consequently, this discrepancy portrays the market as determining Black women's possibilities and the state as determining Black men's economic activity to destroy their subjecthood. In Marshall's novel, the police use violence to control Black men's economic activity only as a means of abjecting them from the category of the subject.²²

²² This account is not to suggest that this particular scene is necessarily anti-feminist; as Román and Saunders correctly note, the attention to the market may have accorded with then contemporaneous black feminist analyses. And I, of course, am not arguing that Marshall's novel is anti-feminist in general. I mean only, here, to signal the unintended consequence of this particular depiction of police violence: Its masculinization.

Where Marshall frames everyday policing's violence as regulating Black masculinity in a way that encapsulates its economic destruction, James Baldwin hones in on Black men's sexuality in his account of the police's persecution of Black men. This is touched upon in *Giovanni's Room* (1956) but arises more fully in Baldwin's next novel, *Another Country* (1960). When Rufus, a Black man, and Leona, a white woman, have sex for the first time, the threat of violence lurks. "And, shortly, nothing could have stopped him," writes Baldwin, "not the white God himself nor a lynch mob arriving on wings." After introducing the threat of the mob who would kill Rufus for sleeping with a white woman, Baldwin continues to describe their consensual sex in violent terms. Then, post-coitus, Leona asks what Rufus' friends will think. "Well, one thing, Leona," he says, "they ain't going to call the law" (Baldwin 1960 21-3). Moving from the private citizens massified into the extralegal lynch mob to the cop as personification of the law, Baldwin simultaneously moves from state-sanctioned violence to state violence, equating the two because both would, in Rufus' eyes, kill him for sleeping with Leona. Interracial romance, here, is both imbued with violence and regulated by (the threat of) police violence. But why is Rufus concerned with a "white God?" One reason is Baldwin's long investment in critiquing forms of Christianity. But another is the scale that referring to God invokes. In Baldwin's account, God, lynch mobs, and the police structure everything under the heavens, including both the economy and what happens in a Black man's bedroom. Even in *Another Country*, where there is seemingly no representation of the effect of police violence upon the traditional objects of the economy—in a scene where there are no diegetic police—the critique of police violence as a kind of dispossession

structures Baldwin's own critical depiction of police violence as a state assault that persecutes Black men to structure their sexuality.

Baldwin's insistent focus on the ways in which the police persecute Black men's sexuality, ultimately, marginalizes Black women's relationship to state violence. Though Black women face many vulnerabilities from civilians in *Another Country*, the police do not threaten physical violence to them in Baldwin's novel. Here, the portrait of Rufus' sister, Ida, is essential. After Rufus has gone missing, Ida goes to the police, hoping that they'll track him down. "They said it happens all the time—colored men running off from their families ... They don't care what happens—to a black man!" (Baldwin 101). The police are only important to Black women, here, in their lack of protection of Black men. Even in scenes that might seem to threaten physical violence to Black women, Baldwin once more represents the police as not endangering Black women via physical violence. Early in the book, when Rufus is in Harlem with his sister, he "looked out of the window ... and thought of the whores on Seventh Avenue. He thought of the white policemen and the money they made on black flesh" (Baldwin 7). This framing of the police as procurers of sex work and Black women as sex workers recurs later in the novel, in an argument between Ida and Vivaldo, Rufus' white friend and Ida's lover. When Ida yells at Vivaldo, he responds, "Will you shut up? You're going to have the police down here in a minute." Ida replies, "Yes, and when they come, I'm going to tell them you dragged me in off the streets and refused to pay me, yes I am. You think I'm a whore, well, you treat me like a whore" (Baldwin 280). Like Rufus earlier in the novel, Ida frames the police as procurers extracting wealth from Black women, but Ida, even in her sardonic barb at Vivaldo, does not portray the police as dangerous to her. Rather, she

suggests they will ensure that she receives the payment she is due, protecting the exchange of money for sex work. In Baldwin's account, the police do regulate Black women's sexuality, but they do not do so via violence. Police violence, ultimately, regulates Black men's sexuality. Here, Baldwin is exemplary of non-Leftist representations of police violence. In his, Marshall's, and a variety of other novels, African American novelists circulate the critique of police violence as dispossessing Black men, even when they claim it is not sufficient to understanding police violence. Their insistent focus on police violence as regulating Black masculinity, ultimately, frames state violence as an issue that does not affect Black women.

This representation of police violence as a man's problem contrasted with the history unfolding at the time. Throughout the 1950s, newspapers with large circulations both covered incidents of police violence against Black women and published their critiques of the violence that they experienced. In *The Chicago Defender* in 1959, for instance, the police raid on a party in a private home and the arrest of 8 women and 41 men provided an occasion for Jessie Mae Robinson to espouse her critical depiction of police violence. After the arrest, the officers made sexually suggestive remarks to the Black women whom they arrested. Then one officer called Robinson "black ni..er whore." He attacked her, and then, according to Robinson, "I was laying on the floor when I told him that I was no tramp and neither a prostitute and that he would hear about this again" (Slaughter April 4th 1959 3). In this account, Robinson acknowledges both that police violence is motivated by sexuality, as Baldwin does, but subverts his masculinist narrative by testifying to her experience. Robinson's interview was not exceptional; there were a number of available critical police violence narratives about

Black women and there may have been far more than were recorded. African American novelists actively contested these accounts in their representation of police violence as persecuting Black men's labor and masculinity. Their insistent characterization of police violence as a man's problem, ultimately, contributed to the cultural repression of police violence against Black women.²³

As an aggregate, these early Cold War novels mount a powerful argument—one both epistemic and emotional—for looking beyond incidents of state violence to their effects and to the structures they create. The lingering influence of Marxism upon African American literary production gave rise to a powerful critique of police violence as a kind of dispossession, in which these assaults structure Black men's economic activity as an end in itself and as a means of further persecuting those men and the communities in which they live. Other novelists agreed that the economy was one means by which police violence continued to persecute Black people, even if they did not think that the discipline of political economy was the prime mover of state violence. This transit in ideas that did not abandon the economy gave rise to a unique Black Radical understanding of police violence best understood not in an individual novel but in the body of novelistic representations of police violence. But these authors shared more than just a concern for labor and capital. They collaborated on the shared project of describing

²³ For more on this case, see “Quiz Brutality Victim in Bed” in the March 31st, 1959 issue of *Daily Defender*; Adolph Slaughter’s “Cop on Carpet for Race Slur” in the April 4th, 1959 issue of *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)*; Adolph Slaughter’s “Mother Balks in Brutality Case” in the April 11th, 1959 issue of *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)*; “Six Found Not Guilty of Charges by Police” in the May 18th, 1959 issue of *Daily Defender*. See also “Where the Girls At? Invisibility and Police Violence” on the *Prison Culture* blog. For similar cases in which black women espouse critical police violence narratives of their experience of police violence, see the coverage of the 1958 police killings in the Perry Homes in *The Atlanta Daily World* and the 1959 coverage of the police killing of Delight Crawford in *The New York Amsterdam News*

Black men as the state's primary victims. This led to analyses of police violence as producing a gendered distribution of labor, as structuring Black men's relationship to that labor, and as doing so to structure the gender or sexuality that, in some accounts, included and exceeded the economic analysis. In other words, these authors produced materialist theories in which labor played a central part of police persecution and regulation of Black men's gender and sexuality. Because they aided in forming ideologies of the Black left, they contributed to its masculinism, sewing the seeds of critiques of police violence as persecuting men that would be drawn upon and reactivated for decades.

The Resistance

Early Cold War African American novels did not only represent police violence as giving rise to structural violence that persecuted men. They also represented police violence as producing its opposition. This occurred in part because these novels were rarely pure tragedy. Instead, these novelists combined a lament for the excess of excessive violence with a portrayal of Black people's reactions to police violence, ones described sometimes as small coping mechanisms, sometimes as resistance, and sometimes as potential routes to the abolition of state violence. The lingering influence of Marxism resulted in a representation of labor organizing as one means of ending both police violence and its resultant violent structures. Some depicted labor as one important front on which to combat state violence that was, ultimately, encapsulated in a larger project of undoing the relationship between race and state violence. Here, too, novelists across the political spectrum collaborated to masculinize the opposition to police violence.

The exemplary Marxist depiction of the opposition to state violence comes from the first novel of Lloyd Brown, who became a Communist labor organizer at the age of 16 in 1929 and went on to edit the Communist publications *New Masses* and *Masses & Mainstreams*. Described by Stacy Morgan as “the African-American authored novel most openly sympathetic in its portrayal of the Communist Party,” Brown’s 1951 novel *Iron City* tells the story of people incarcerated in a prison in a fictionalized Pittsburgh, focusing especially on the framing of the protagonist, Lonnie, for a crime he did not commit and the organizing by Communists to free him (Morgan 2004 21). In its attention to the relationship between police violence, incarceration, and labor, the novel provides a critique of the police’s violent labor extraction similar to Chester Himes’, but its attention to Communist organizers aiming to free Lonnie takes Himes’ critique a step further, imagining the ways in which labor can be mobilized to end prisons. Due in part to formal choices and in part to the gender-segregated policies of prisons, the novel paints male labor organizers as the people with political agency to abolish prisons.

Lloyd Brown’s *Iron City* portrays the police as colluding with the local economy to violently incarcerate laborers. Early in the novel, an inmate named Tuxedo complains that the police beat him and threatened him with a long sentence to force him to plead guilty for a crime he did not commit. Having been framed, according to Tuxedo, hurt “worse than the working over they gave me” (Brown 107-8). The protagonist, Lonnie, similarly laments the use of violence to produce false criminality, but he focuses more on the police veiling their own violence.

For sixteen days—yes, and sixteen nights, they worked on me. And every day they took me to a different police station. It was bad. So bad I can’t even tell you how it was. They beat me. Sure, they beat me—bad. But that

wasn't the worst part—the beatings. No. It was the way they hammered at me all the time. Never let me rest. After a while I didn't know what day it was, or if it was night or day. All I knew was that they were after me.

The length and consistency of the police's unceasing assault-as-work structures Lonnie's life as a condition of constant persecution at the same time that they accuse him of having committed unsolved crimes. When Lonnie finally signs a confession for a crime he did not commit, the police falsify his arrest record, hiding that they detained him for sixteen days (Brown 126-8). In this depiction, Brown portrays police violence as labor that transforms innocent people into criminals as a means of obscuring the police's assaults. The use of police violence to produce criminality takes on an even darker hue when one of the prisoners notices that their cell bars are made of McGregor steel. He says, "Half the guys in here, including me and Zach, have made McGregor steel. That's a fact, we made this here jail for them to put us in" (Brown 103). In Brown's novel, the prison, the police, and the steel mills are all part of a Carnegie-esque, nightmarish fantasy of vertical integration, in which all sectors collaborate to produce incarcerated criminals. Police violence, as a corollary, is essential to transforming the Black laborer who produces the prison into the incarcerated person trapped inside it.

While the police work to hurt Black people in such a way that criminalizes and incarcerates them, the Communist Party works to expose police work as unjust violence. After Lonnie tells one CPUSA organizer his story, they begin a defense campaign. Using their visits with their wives, the incarcerated and free Communists organize across prison walls to expose the framing of Lonnie by spreading information, producing documents to garner press about Lonnie's case, and organizing rallies, among other things. When asked why they undertake this work, one of the organizers, Paul, explains that advocating for

Lonnie helps Communists because it shows “the people” that the CPUSA is trying to stop “third degree beatings” and “legal lynching.” He continues,

Reminds them of how we always have done that, Scottsboro and all the rest, leading the fight against the Coal and Iron Police terror and the company thugs in the steel and mining towns around here. Now it’s against the law for McGregor Steel to have all the shotguns and tear-gas and clubs they used to use against the men, and people will remember how we fought for that law to be passed.

After insisting that a democratized collective memory exceeds the anti-Communist history being written then, Paul continues,

When you boil it all down and whatever the Court decides about Lonnie or us or anything else—that won’t be the end. The final say comes from the people and you can’t fool them all the time.

In Paul’s account, the people’s memory exceeds both history and the criminal justice system’s claims to truth. He continues, “No matter if they fill up all the jails ... somebody is always going to stand up and holler out the truth” (Brown 245-6). This somebody could be the novelist—an understandable interpretation, given that *Iron City* is based on the historical framing of William Jones—but it also includes organizers, pamphleteers, and a host of other figures. Although their campaign fails, the novel, in Maria Diedrich’s account, privileges their labor over state persecution (Diedrich 320-1). This privileging, according to Lawrence Jackson, envisages “a new land of interracial solidarity and effective communists who could lobby, protest, and fight long enough to turn the tide in the direction of democratic justice” (Jackson 2011 347-8). In so doing, *Iron City* portrays Communist interracial organizing as the premier means of producing alternative models of justice that honor the promise of American democracy. Put differently, Brown frames labor-organizing against state violence as paving the way toward abolition.

But for Brown, this counterhegemonic formation is definitively masculine. Just before Paul's speech, Lonnie frames the laboring opposition as a structure born from and yet exceeding the prison industrial complex:

Funny, when you come to think of it. If I hadn't been all alone maybe they would never have framed me. But if it wasn't for that I wouldn't have so many friends now. Carl here, Paul and the others downstairs on D, the white guys on Block Three, and all those people out there fighting for me (Brown 235).

The organizers on the outside are subsumed under the nameless, deindividuated category of "people" because rules around prison visitations prohibit whom Lonnie can meet. This phrasing effaces several women who organize on the outside because the novel remains within the prison. All readers know of their work comes through the whisper network. From this perspective, as J. Saunders Redding notes in his review of the novel, the women's political labor appears subordinated to the incarcerated men's plan. This leads Redding to masculinize the opposition writ large:

The theme of this novel is the brotherhood of man; the ideological line of this novel is that brotherhood can be achieved through Communism, or something very like it; and the story of this novel is the operation of brotherhood toward the end of winning Lonnie's liberation (Redding).

Redding's masculinization of the opposition derives from the formal limitations of the close third person (a common perspective for the Social Realist novel), and it derives from the gender segregated policies of prisons. Together, the prison, the lingering influence of Marxism, and the novel as a genre collaborate to represent men's labor organizing as a means of abolishing state violence.

This representation of labor and labor organizing as one means of abolishing state violence is included and exceeded by black maturation in Richard Wright's depiction of

police violence as a kind of castration in *The Long Dream* (1958). The last novel published by Wright while he was alive, *The Long Dream* tells the story of Rex “Fishbelly” Tucker’s childhood and maturation in the South and eventual flight to France. Influenced by late-career Wright’s turn to psychoanalytic thought, the novel explicitly and implicitly represents Fish’s maturation in psychoanalytic terms, which led reviewers like Peabody Award Winning journalist Roi Ottley to read the novel as an argumentative treatise. Especially central, here, is the novel’s representation of police violence as castration and of the police as structuring the Black family. In his turn to individual maturation and the Black family, Wright reminds that any collective effort to end state violence must, simultaneously, provide Black people with the individual liberties that he worried contemporaneous Marxists could not guarantee. Although such private-sphere concerns might seem ungendered, *The Long Dream* concerns itself primarily with Black masculinity.²⁴

For Wright in this last novel, police violence stemmed from a sadistic desire to emasculate Black men. The police first enter the novel when teenage boys participate in a mud fight (perhaps a revision of the cinder fights of Wright’s 1938 essay, “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow”). Charging the boys with trespassing, the police apprehend the 15-year-old protagonist, Rex “Fishbelly” Tucker. “The white folks were now treating him

²⁴ The psychoanalytic influence of the novel was documented and disdained by longtime Communist and novelist Philip Bonosky in his review of the novel for *Mainstream* (Bonosky 1959). This Communist rejection of psychoanalysis was not abnormal for the period, given Lloyd Brown’s argument that the theory was racist and justified capitalist exploitation in his 1951 article, “Psychoanalysis vs. the Negro People.” For reviews that regard to the novel as argumentative more generally, see also Peabody Award winning journalist Roi Ottley’s review in *The Chicago Daily Tribune* (Ottley 1958), Nick Ford’s review in *College Language Association Journal* (Ford 1958 144), and Albert Anderson’s review in *The Philadelphia Tribune* (Anderson 1958). For scholarship on Wright’s complicated relationship to Marxism, see Cedric Robinson’s chapter on Wright in *Black Marxism* and Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (Gilroy 1995 151).

like a man,” Wright narrates, “but inside he was crying and quaking like a child.” After the cops place him in the back of their car, Fish is nervous when they stop at a store and order Cokes from a white waitress whom Fish finds attractive (Wright 1958 109-111). The cops notice him looking at her, and one pulls out a knife and says, “I’m going to fix you so you won’t *never* look at another white gal ... Nigger, I’m going to *castrate* you!” (Wright 1958 111 emphasis in text). Fish faints. When he awakes, his “hysterical imagination” leads him to picture the cops lynching him. Rapt with feminized anxiety, the cops take Fish to the station, where the officers spread tales of him fainting to their colleagues. Wanting to see it for themselves, they goad the arresting officer to make Fish faint, who does so by threatening to castrate him again. When he comes to, the officer speaks to him in a “soft, sensual” voice, as though the officer finds the performance arousing (Wright 111-3). As Robert Reid-Pharr notes in *Once You Go Black* (2007), the scene of threatened castration bears erotic, queer undertones: Fish hides his heterosexual attraction to white women and becomes feminized through his fainting, while the police soothe Fish in a way that suggests sexual attraction (Reid-Pharr 63-4). As a consequence, in Wright’s depiction, police violence not only regulates Black masculinity and sexuality; it also pleasures the police.

The result of violent police sadism is a compromised Black masculinity and family structure. At the station, after Fish refuses to faint, one says, “They made a man out of you today, didn’t they, boy?” (Wright 1958 113). In the parlance of psychoanalysis, when Fish overcomes his castration anxiety, he matures; yet because of his race, he cannot escape his interpellation as an immature subject. This plot of maturation continues later in the novel’s portrait of Fish’s family. As R. Abdul Jan-

Mohammed writes about the novel in *The Death-Bound-Subject* (2005), “the nuclear family is the crucial site that mediates, but that is also potentially capable of resisting, the incorporation of children into a racist hegemony by the threat of death” (Jan-Mohammed 233-4). The conditions for this mediation are determined by police violence. After this incident, Fish learns that his father runs brothels in town without interference because he bribes the Police Chief. When his father threatens to reveal that the Chief has been accepting bribes, the Chief arranges for Fish’s father, Tyree, to be shot. After Tyree dies, the Chief tells Fish how to survive, by which he means that he will kill Fish if he reveals the bribery. About this conversation, a woman at the scene of the crime, says “Fish, he’s talking to you like a father” (Wright 1958 300). By murdering Fish’s father and asserting themselves as the true patriarch, the police themselves reveal that their violence determines the black family structure. Read in the context of Wright’s earlier emphasis on sadism, *The Long Dream* critiques the police for using violence to structure Black families out of a kind of incestuous fantasy, in which the adopted son as Black boy becomes mature only for police pleasure.

Far from passive and determined entirely by the whims of the state, Wright’s novel depicts several oppositional black subject formations. Given Reid-Pharr’s claims that the novel is concerned primarily “with the never quite realized dream of an American subjectivity,” I read the succession of oppositional positions as dramatizing the process of subject formation in opposition to state violence and racism (Reid-Pharr 2007 42). Of these oppositional formations, the first relevant one, here, is Fish’s discovery of sex as a means of ameliorating the pain of racist violence. After Tyree picks Fish up from the station, he takes him to a brothel; there, “all the raging tension, the burning shame, the

fear, and the hate left him” such that he feels “that he had been absent from the workaday world for a million years” (Wright 1958 154). Sex here is a salve for the weight of labor—a hint at lingering Marxist influence—and the pain of other violence. It offers a temporary reprieve that subordinates women to men’s opposition, but it does not satisfy him. The novel then provides profit as a coping mechanism. This is succeeded, after a fire places Tyree in legal trouble, by legal subversion: Tyree threatens to expose the Chief of Police’s accepting of bribes. Whether in the use of sex to ease work’s injuries, the use of work’s profits to cope with state violence, or the use of the law to expose illegal workplace relations, labor looms large in the means by which Fish reacts to and aims to end his exposure to state violence, all of which is ultimately encapsulated by a psychoanalytic plot of maturation.

Yet Wright, like Baldwin, moves to a larger scale to include and exceed this Marxist labor-centric representation of the means of ending state violence within his own. This arises later in the novel, when the police kill Tyree and incarcerate Fish. In prison, Fish receives a letter from Zeke, a childhood friend stationed in France in the army. “What he read,” Wright writes, “was like a voice from another world” (Wright 360). In the second letter, Zeke tells him to move to France:

France ain’t no heaven, but folks don’t kill you for crazy things. These white folks just more like real human beings than them crackers back there in Mississippi (Wright 372).

Here, the expansion to the globe enables the imagination of places free from racist state violence. Wright continues,

It was to France he [Fish] would go, to Paris. The moment he was free, he would be off. He hungered for freedom so badly that he trembled when he thought of it (Wright 372).

Freedom, here, remains both epistemically large and vague enough to include freedom from the use of police violence to regulate and extract labor. In the context of this post-1939 world and Wright's late-career anti-communism and anti-Stalinism, I read this emphasis on freedom as exceeding the brotherhood of man that Brown's novel suggests labor organizing promises. The sociality of the people in a communist collective, Wright's novel implies, will only provide new unfreedoms if it does not also guarantee individual freedom. In a world in which collective radical action remained so heavily associated with Communism and Stalinism, Wright emphasizes the private and individual as a means of insisting that any effort to abolish state violence must, simultaneously, guarantee Black men their freedom.

This liberty is, importantly, depicted as masculine in Wright's novel. This begins with the critique of police violence, in which these assaults are represented as castration. It continues through the novel's middle in which sex with Black women and the pursuit of profit at a brothel ameliorates the pains of state violence and of work. And it remains present at the novel's end, where the evidence of Fish's newfound freedom is his ability to look at and long for a white woman on the flight to France, though he ultimately realizes he does not long for her (Wright 1958 378-9). This latter emphasis on interracial love was not uncommon for novels in the period. As Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman writes of the relationship between interracial love and the Civil Rights movement, "[f]or black men the power of sexual choice entails an expansion of sexual entitlement. Black masculinity is thereby buffered by right of access to sexual partners with various racial affiliations" (Abdur-Rahman 84). In *The Long Dream*, Fish's freedom to stare at a white woman,

ultimately, is evidence of his masculinity. This masculinity, Wright insists throughout the novel, must be prioritized by any collective movement to end state violence. Combined with the limitations of the close third person and his depiction of masculine subject formation, Wright's insistence on guaranteeing Black men's individual freedom and masculinity, ultimately, worked toward the masculinization of the effort to end state violence.

This masculinization was at odds with the actual history of the era. As Danielle McGuire in *At the Dark End of the Street* (2011) and Andrea Ritchie in *Invisible No More* (2017) have both noted, Black women actively participated in resistance to and movements to end state violence in the early Cold War. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, for instance, Daisy Bates chronicled police violence, and especially police sexual violence, against Black women in the *Arkansas State Press*, a newspaper she owned with her husband. When Black people came to Bates with stories of police assault, she published them alongside calls to end police violence against Black women in particular and against Black people more generally. "Banner headlines between 1941 and 1955," McGuire writes, "made the crime public, helped to mobilize the black community, and alerted white officials that crimes against black women would not go unnoticed." Occasionally, these efforts even led to the indictment of police officers (McGuire 137-9; Ritchie 210-11). While I do not think that indictment and incarceration ought to be the measure of justice, what I want to foreground, here, is that Bates, among many other Black women, actively worked against state violence in the very era in which writers like Wright and Brown masculinized state violence's opposition. Their masculinization did not reflect historical realities nor did it arise happenstance; rather, it actively countered

the historical efforts of Black women to abolish state violence. In the process, these novels worked toward the cultural repression of Black women's resistance to state violence.

While I have only discussed *Iron City* and *The Long Dream* here, they exemplify a trend in early Cold War African American novels, which, more generally, represent police violence as producing the mechanism for its undoing. The Marxist influence on novelists like Brown leads to the depiction of the opposition to dispossession as the organizing of laborers. Authors like Wright agree that the amelioration of labor concerns is essential to undoing state violence, but they represent organizing laborers as insufficient because police violence produces damage in realms aside from labor as well. Private-sphere concerns lead them to turn away from laborers as a collective to the individual. All collaborate in their depictions of black men as the primary means of resistance to such violence, whether it be through their position as laborers or through their position in a sexual economy. In this way, the novelists built upon the critique of police violence as persecuting black men's gender and sexuality by describing their gender and sexuality as positioning black men as the primary agents in abolishing state violence.

The Novel

Beyond organizing laborers or encouraging individuals to pursue their own liberation, these novelists also represented the novel itself as one key means of abolishing state violence. They insist on its uses in theorizing within their novels and in other venues like newspaper interviews and essays, and they embed its affordances in the forms of

their novels. These theories were taken up and amplified by reviewers of the time. The combination led to theories emphasizing, on the one hand, the novel's ability to persuade laborers to organize and, on the other hand, the unique possibilities of fictionality. Authors like Ellison depicted the novel's work of convincing people to organize amongst laborers as encapsulated by the larger project of chronicling race made possible by fictionality. Altogether, both bodies of work insisted the novel contributes to an ideological war against police violence, generating an undiscussed body of novel theory. These theories, ultimately, insisted on the centrality of Black men's experience of state violence.

To return briefly to two novels from the previous section, these theories of the novel often valorized two particular aspects of the novel: Its ability to memorialize (another word for which might be archive) and its ability to say what cannot be said in other forms due to its fictionality. With regard to the former, Lloyd Brown's *Iron City*, as I suggest above, valorizes not just the CPUSA's actions but also the novel for its ability to record an archive counter to the state's anti-communist history of the CPUSA. The novel's ability to archive radical movements, in Brown's account, is made uniquely possible by fictionality. The latter's importance arises in Wright's *The Long Dream* just after the former Police Chief, Cantley, has Fish's father killed. Worried that Fish is plotting his downfall, Cantley says, "If you hated me, could you tell me to my face?" Fish says nothing, Cantley continues complaining, and then Fish asserts that Cantley can trust him.

"I wish to hell I could *believe* you!" Cantley screamed. "But you *can't* tell me the truth!" Cantley gasped for breath, then screamed again. "Hell, no!

You can't speak what you feel!" Cantley's anger turned against himself. "I swear to God, I don't know what we can do with you niggers ... We make you scared of us, and then ask you to tell us the truth. And you *can't!* Goddamit, you *can't!*" (Wright 1958 342-3 ellipses and emphases his).

Cantley's insistence that Black subjects cannot express their hatred for the state which assaults them is undermined, in the novel, by long passages focalized by Fish, which describe his antipathy toward Cantley and the state. That which Cantley suggests is impossible in the real world is only possible, the scene implies, in the novel. Fictionality, in Wright's account, enables Black novelists to express Black men's hatred for the sadistic police and for racist governance more generally. Altogether, the theories of the novel in the period are caught between these two poles: That of valorizing the novel's ability to archive and that of valorizing the novel's fictionality. In these theories, the novel as archive and the novel as fictional combine to repress Black women from historical memory.

In John Killens' 1954 novel *Youngblood*, the novel as a genre subordinates black women to conflicts among men and their labor. A veteran of World War II, Killens returned from service in the South Pacific in 1945 with three novel ideas in mind. While he worked on completing *Youngblood*, the first to be published, he helped found and organize the Harlem Writer's Guild, a group whose members included Black Arts novelist Rosa Guy, Social Realist Sarah Wright, the poet Maya Angelou, and many more luminaries of African American arts and letters. While the members of the Guild held diverse political leanings, Killens' own Leftist commitments were steadfast. He had served as a union representative and was a member of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. As Alan Wald points out in "Marxist Literary Resistance to the Cold War"

(1995), Killens' "complete endorsement of the communist perspective in his 13 page essay 'For National Freedom', in the summer 1949 issue of the communist journal *New Foundations*, ought to make his politics unambiguous for all" (Wald 1995 106). These Leftist politics influenced his first published novel, *Youngblood*, a tale of a Black family forced to labor under horrific conditions in the South and of Robby Youngblood, who resists those conditions by working to organize a bellboy union. The Leftist influence leads to the usual association between dispossession, police violence, and labor organizing, but Killens' attention to realism and fictionality gives rise to a new theory of the place of the novel in working toward abolition.

In *Youngblood*, violence suffuses labor relations, coercing some into laboring in such a way that only further endangers them. According to Laurie Lee, wife of Joe Youngblood, working at a mill beats Joe "down like a man beating a horse with a buggy whip." This makes him "a stranger to her and the children" (Killens 64). Described in physically violent terms, Killens depicts labor as dispossessing him of familial attachments, a figurative assault which resurfaces in Killens' later depiction of police violence. After her son, Robby, protects his sister from a group of white boys, the police arrest him. Laurie goes to the station and the cop hands her "something resembling a buggy whip," the very object Killens claims Joe's work beats him with. Hoping to save Robby from the reformatory, Laurie accepts the whip and beats her son. The look on Robby's face feels like "a knife being stabbed in her own heart." She then sees "Joe at the mill wrestling with a barrel of turpentine" and grows angry. He was "[j]ust lifting those heavy drums, while she lashed their son" (Killens 165-172). Here, Laurie analogizes his working at the mill for money to her whipping her son to keep him safe. This association

results from police violence, which perverts her perspective such that she sees punishment as care labor—an interpretation without precedence in *Youngblood*—and as equivalent with Joe’s waged labor. And in this instance, her responsibility for doing the labor of caring transforms her into an instrument of state violence.

In Killens’ account, violent care labor is productive. The fruits of this violence become apparent when Laurie finally returns home and dresses Robby’s wounds. Killens narrates,

A feeling of anger rising again inside of her towards him and Jenny Lee [her daughter], as he stood there with his head down, accusing her, his mother, as if she hadn’t sacrificed for them every single hour since they came into the world ... But now she stood there almost hating him, wanting somehow to beat him into understanding. God-Almighty damn the white folks! They’re not satisfied with treating you like it’s still slavery time, they turn your own children against you.

Having become an instrument of the police, their violence produces an alienation of Laurie from her children and vice versa. After dinner, Robby lies face down on her bed, “[w]eeping for the love and respect and devotion that she had beaten out of him” (Killens 178-9). This violent discipline, in other words, dispossesses Robby of love, offering perhaps the most paranoid depiction of police violence in the Social Realist novel: By weaponizing the responsibility for care labor, police violence destroys its immaterial and supposedly unconditional products like love.

But this critique ultimately subordinates Black women to the conflicts between men and the state such that Black men appear at the foreground of police violence. Just as white private citizens attempted to sexually assault Laurie at a young age, Jenny Lee is subject to the attempted sexual assault of white boys, not the state (Killens 4-5). In the scene of police violence, Laurie feels *like* she is physically assaulted but remains

untouched. She becomes a tool used to discipline her son in such a way that subordinates her to the male police officer and the boy, for whom she is only a medium. This role, according to Lawrence Jackson, provides Robby “an adult maturity” (Jackson 2011 406). Given the rest of the novel’s emphasis on Robby’s union organizing, Laurie’s violence helps Robby to mature in such a way that leads him into anti-racist political labor. Even while focalized from Laurie’s perspective, the objects and terms of Killens’ critique focus on its effects upon black men.²⁵

This exclusion is part of *Youngblood’s* relationship to realism. In his review for *The Baltimore Afro-American*, J. Saunders Redding disparagingly wrote that the novel aimed towards a “documentary” status (Redding); Granville Hicks, in his review for *The New York Times*, goes a step further and argues that the novel aims to represent and protest “the discrimination from which Negroes suffer” (Hicks). Killens himself agreed in a conversation with James Silberman published in *The Philadelphia Tribune*:

I knew if I preached in my novel, I would never get anyone to read it, and so I tried to fill it with the most exciting kind of scene—when Robby is arrested for fighting a gang of white boys and his mother is called to the police station to punish the boy with her own hands (Silberman).

The vehicle of excitement in the scene is Black women’s role in Black men’s victimization, which places a masculinity at the heart of Killens’ formal theory of the novel. This also arises in the argument of the novel’s sermon. Paule Cooke, writing for *The Journal of Negro Education*, argues that this section “develops the thesis that the Negro must unify his individual forces” and “that the liberation of the Negro is best

²⁵ This interpretation of Killens’ novel as focused primarily upon the victimization of black men undergirds Carlyle Van Thompson’s “Miscegenation as Sexual Consumption: The Enduring Legacy of America’s White Supremacist Culture of Violence in John Oliver Killens’ ‘Youngblood’” (Van Thompson 2006 174-6).

accomplished through the labor union” (Cooke 469). This interpretation of the novel continues in scholarship today; in Lawrence Jackson’s account, the novel transmutes “into character and scene the principles of left-wing ideology” (Jackson 2011 406). According to Keith Gilyard in *John Oliver Killens* (2010), this argument for left-wing ideology is part and parcel of Killens’ longer career: “Killens never shied away,” he writes, “from an expressly political purpose for his prose and consciously worked against the notions of art for art’s sake” (Gilyard 2010 100). *Youngblood*, in this account, represents the real for the sake of politics centered around bellboy unions. This theory of the novel argues for the genre’s importance in convincing men to involve themselves in labor politics. This investment in men’s labor politics is representative of the Social Realist novel more generally. Given Stacy Morgan’s compelling argument that African American Social Realist artists and writers “shared a profound faith in the capacity of *cultural* work to leverage transformations in the social and political sphere” (Morgan 2004 1-2), the Social Realist novel as a form subordinates its realism to masculinized political transformations. Its critique of police violence aimed to mobilize men to organize laborers to end the police victimization of black men. Consequently, the lingering influence of Marxism emphasized labor in such a way that led both to novels and to theories of novels that place black men at the foreground.²⁶

²⁶ In *Invented Lives*, Mary Helen Washington similarly describes the Social Protest genre as framing men as the primary opposition to the society it critiques. She writes, “What is hidden beneath the surface of deterministic fiction is an ideology that is mainly concerned with men. Identified with nature as one of the forces men must contend against, women have mysterious sexual power, capable of destroying men, turning them from their ideals. The revolt in this fiction is against racism, not sexism; its deep ideological conflict is between black men and white men. With its emphasis on a hostile physical environment, on crime, on suppressed aggression, on white exploitation of black life, deterministic fiction ignores many of the deeply felt realities of women’s lives: their relationships with their families, their own suppressed creativity, and their conflicts with black men and patriarchy” (Washington 1987 298).

This emphasis on men recurs in the theories of the novel that include the importance of the representation of the real for political transformation within a larger project of using fictionality to represent that which remains unrepresentable in non-fictional utterance. This investment in fictionality as enabling the novel to exceed other forms and genres finds its largest scale theorization in Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), in which the novel is counterposed to history. There, police violence is tied to two of the novel's most devastating ironies, the first of which begins when the invisible man arrives in Harlem and sees a Black cop direct traffic. "This really was Harlem," narrates the invisible man, and "a new world of possibility suggested itself to me" (Ellison 1952 159). Where the cop being Black leads the invisible man to believe Black people can do anything in Harlem, his later organizing with the Brotherhood, Ellison's stand-in for the CPUSA, similarly inflates his sense of possibilities. At his first speech, the invisible man describes himself as feeling what Fred Moten terms "autoexcessive feel:" the feeling of being more and more than human (Moten 2017 217-8). The Brotherhood eventually undermines this feeling when they neglect Harlem and when Tod Clifton disappears. This ironic trajectory culminates in the invisible man witnessing the police murder of Tod Clifton. In its wake, the invisible man organizes a funeral and a rally, at which he tells the story of the police shooting of Clifton: "He thought he was a man and that men were not meant to be pushed around," the invisible man says in one retelling. "But this cop had an itching finger and an eager ear for a word that rhymed with 'trigger'" (Ellison 1952 457). Moving from the gendered dignity accorded men to race, the invisible man frames the

police as agents of racist dehumanization, ironizing the belief that anything is possible for Black people in the North.²⁷

In *Invisible Man*, this critique of police violence opposes the State's conservative legitimization for police violence. Just after Clifton's death, the invisible man walks away from the scene and considers history, in which the historian records only that which they consider important. "But the cop would be Clifton's historian," he narrates, "his judge, his witness, and his executioner" (Ellison 1952 439). By retelling the story of Clifton's killing no fewer than seven times and by gesturing toward various retellings from those attending the rally, the invisible man valorizes the novel as an archive counter to the state's hegemonic police violence narratives, which he claims form the archive that delimits written history. In the wake of the police murder of Tod Clifton, Ellison theorizes the novel's fictionality as enabling the genre to exceed what he describes as necessarily conservative and self-legitimizing histories of state violence. The novel, ultimately, makes possible a history that captures Black people's experience of violence without condemning them and that captures the ways in which they endure.²⁸

²⁷ For more on Ellison's racialized humanism, see Mollie Godfrey's article "Sheep, Rats, and Jungle Beasts: Black Humanisms and the Protest Fiction Debate" (Godfrey 2018 54-5) and Anders Walker's chapter on Ellison's analyses of integration in *The Burning House: Jim Crow and the Making of Modern America* (Walker 2018 54-66). For more on the scene of police violence, see Frederick Griffiths' "Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and the Case of Angelo Herndon" (Griffiths 2001 632). For more on the funeral scene, see Lesley Larkin's "Close-Reading, Ellison, and 'You'" (Larkin 2008 287-9). For an analysis of Ellison's writing on the police more generally, see Nicole Waligora-Davis' "Riotous Discontent: Ellison's 'Birth of a Nation'" (Waligora-Davis 2004 392).

²⁸ The seven tellings in the speech to which I refer are as follows. In the first, the invisible man says, "His name was Clifton, Tod Clifton, and, like any man, he was born of a woman to live awhile and fall and die. So that's his tale to the minute. His name was Clifton and for a while he lived among us and aroused a few hopes in the young manhood of man, and we who knew him loved him and he died." In the second, the invisible man says, "His name was Clifton and he was young and he was a leader and when he fell there was a hole in the heel of his sock and when he stretched forward he seemed not as tall as when he stood. So he died." In the third, Ellison writes, "His name was Clifton and he was black and they shot him." In the fourth, the invisible man says, "His name was Clifton and they shot him, and I was there to see him fall." In

This theory of the novel opposes not just the state's but also radical accounts of police violence. When the Brotherhood question him for organizing a rally for a traitor, the invisible man says that the policeman "didn't care about Clifton's ideas. He was shot because he was black and because he resisted. Mainly because he was black." To this, Brotherhood members respond that he is overemphasizing race and so is himself racist (Ellison 1952 462-9). By satirizing the Brotherhood's response, Ellison depicts his stand-in for the Communist Party as either misunderstanding the ways in which or refusing to consider that race motivates police violence. And by depicting the invisible man's analysis of police violence as counter to both the police and the Brotherhood, Ellison advocates for what Vaughn Rasberry has recently termed the "novelistic theory of race:" the theory that a black person's "self-narration" of their individual experience should "supersede Soviet" and other political "narrative[s] of racial exploitation" (Rasberry 2018 363-4). By advancing the novelistic theory of race over other political narratives, Ellison insists that the critique that police violence dehumanizes Black men includes and exceeds the class-centric analyses of the CPUSA. Similarly, the novel's chronicling of history from the position of a witness for Black people includes and exceeds the Social Realist's theory of the novel as a tool for labor organizing. Consequently, the novel proves

the fifth, he writes, "Here are the facts. He was standing and he fell. He fell and he kneeled. He kneeled and he bled. He bled and he died ... They cut him down and he died ... That's the story and that's how it ended." In the sixth, he says, "Let me tell it as it truly was ... He was shot for a simple mistake of judgment and he bled and his blood dried and shortly the crowd trampled out the stains. It was a normal mistake of which many are guilty: He thought he was a man and that men were not meant to be pushed around ... But this cop had an itching finger and an eager ear for a word that rhymed with 'trigger,' and when Clifton fell he had found it." In the seventh, he says, "Cause of death (be specific): resisting reality in the form of a .38 caliber revolver in the hands of the arresting officer, on Forty-second between the library and the subway in the heat of the afternoon, of gunshot wounds received from three bullets, fired at three paces, one bullet entering the right ventricle of the heart, and lodging there, the other severing the spinal ganglia traveling downward to lodge in the pelvis, the other breaking through the back and traveling God knows where." In the seventh, he says, "His name was Tod Clifton, he believed in Brotherhood, he aroused our hopes and he died" (Ellison 454-9).

important for its ability to capture the psychic damage of racial exploitation upon Black interiority and for demonstrating that that interiority endures. Given Ellison's emphasis on the novel's ability to capture what historians cannot and Wright's emphasis on the novel's ability to say what Black subjects facing material constraints prevent real black people from saying, fictionality in their theorization facilitates and enables the novelistic theory of race's simultaneous inclusion and excess of the political narrative of racial exploitation.²⁹

The invisible man's repeated insistence that he understands police violence better than others and Ellison's implicit insistence that the novel offers a better account of police violence than those of his political opponents, ultimately, contributed to the repression of the historical incident of police violence against a Black woman in the Harlem Riot of 1943. Widely covered in major newspapers, that riot began after a police officer harassed a Black woman named Margie Polite and then shot a veteran named Robert Bandy. Ellison's account excises both Bandy and Polite in favor of ironizing the invisible man. This occurs when the invisible man asks other Black participants how the riot started. Several speakers provide mutually exclusive accounts. "Don't nobody know how it started," insists one of them. Against this general confusion, the invisible man confidently posits an explanation: "Clifton," he narrates. "A night for Clifton" (Ellison 1952 540-1). The invisible man's certainty looks naïve when measured against the other speakers' general confusion and the historical incident that would have been well known

²⁹ For more on the anticommunism of *Invisible Man*, see Carol Polsgrove's *Divided Minds: Intellectuals and the Civil Rights Movement* (Polsgrove 2001 69), Nicole Waligora-Davis' "Riotous Discontent: Ellison's 'Birth of a Nation'" (Waligora-Davis 2004 388) and Barbara Foley's *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man* (Foley 2010).

by readers at the time of publication. Somewhat surprisingly, ironizing the invisible man brings the reader closer to him, by foregrounding his naivete, and farther from Polite, who never appears on the page. This distance from history was registered by reviewers of the novel, who frame the text as operating not on a referential register (by which Polite might have become apparent) but on a symbolic or an interiorized one. This formal investment in a symbolic and interior-focused narrative, ultimately, masculinizes the critique of police violence, which privileges ironizing the Brotherhood and the invisible man over depicting the riot's inciting incident. Consequently, the novel form which Ellison valorizes for its ability to capture police violence and to exceed history simultaneously contributed to the repression of police violence against black women.³⁰

And what of the history which Ellison disparages? Looking at journalism of the day, one kind of source in the archive of police violence that would be consulted by historians aiming to document such violence in the period, can provide a better understanding of the novel's claim to exceeding history. As I have already suggested, contemporaneous newspapers with large circulation covered a variety of incidents of police violence against Black women, including the aforementioned police attacks on Jessie Mae Robinson and Margie Polite. And in these venues, Black women often did express their critiques of police violence. That neither these cases nor these Black

³⁰ For descriptions of the incident inciting the riot, see Jessie Parkhurst Guzman, Vera Chandler Foster, and William Hardin Hughes' *Negro Year Book* (Guzman et al 1947 242-5), Dominic Capeci's *The Harlem Riot of 1943* (Capeci 1977 100-1), Cheryl Greenberg's *Or Does it Explode? Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (Greenberg 1997 211), and Thomas Sugrue's *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (Sugrue 2008 69). For an account attentive to fictional representations of Margie Polite, see Laurie Leach's 2007 article, "Margie Polite, the Riot Starter: Harlem 1943." For reviews that describe the novel as operating on a symbolic register, see, for instance, Orville Prescott's review for *The New York Times* (Prescott 1952), Wright Morris' review for *The New York Times* (Morris 1952), and Gertrude Martin's review for *The Chicago Defender* (Martin 1952).

women's critiques are easily remembered is due in part to the state obscuring its violence, but as I have been suggesting, the obscuring of this particular case is also due to the novel. After all, radicals critical of police violence seem less likely to turn to the state's self-legitimizing narrative than to look to ones critical of it. The novel constituted a large body of this criticism—one which mounted a labor-focused analysis of the damages of police violence on Black men's masculinity and sexuality and of Black men's ability to undo the means of that violence—but it so thoroughly masculinized the terms of the critique that it left little place for Black women.

The African American novel's theories also worked to enforce the forgetting of radical thought focused on Black women's experience of state and other kinds of violence. Several historians (including Carole Boyce Davies, Dayo Gore, and others) have chronicled the proto-Black feminism of Black women associated with the International Left in Harlem, Chicago, Birmingham, the USSR, Spain, and other locales. Far from operating in a vacuum, they resisted the masculinization of the Left publicly and actively. As Erik McDuffie writes in *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (2011), "black left feminists countered prevailing assumptions within the CPUSA and the black Left that constructed the 'worker' as a white male factory laborer, the 'working woman' as white, and the shop floor as the determinant of class consciousness." They articulated a theory of "triple oppression" akin to the Combahee River Collective's interlocking oppression and simultaneously depicted themselves as "the vanguard for transformative change globally" (McDuffie 2011 4). While they faced state persecution in the United States in the early Cold War years, "their work during the red scare marked the highest stage of black left

feminist praxis during the entire Old Left period,” a praxis which included agitation against state violence (McDuffie 2011 161). Given the high volume of Black Left feminists’ work, the African American novel was not coincidentally ignorant of critiques of state violence that considered its effects upon black women. Rather, it repressed those critiques in its generic tropes and in the masculinism underlying the terms of its critique.

Given the novel’s contribution to this repression and its simultaneous staging of a debate akin to the one unfolding between Black Marxists and Afropessimists today, this analysis of the lingering influence of Marxism on the Early Cold War African American novel offers a model for resolving the debate between these two groups of scholars and a warning for both. To return to the example of *Invisible Man*, Ellison’s race-centric theory of the novel and emphasis on fictionality is not detached from material constraints but produced by them. The theory only arises after the invisible man chronicles factory work and labor organizing. Further, the police killing of Tod Clifton and the failures of labor organizers provide the occasion for theorizing about the ways in which the novel supersedes the CPUSA’s and other material theories of race. Consequently, Ellison opposes material theories of race as defined by exploitation not by dismissing them but by first plumbing their depths before moving to the foundational antagonism which structures those theories. Ellison may have abandoned the Left for humanistic liberalism in the drafting of *Invisible Man* and in his essays, but the theory of the novel he presents has the potential to exceed that departure. Attending to the lingering influence of Marxist thought in *Invisible Man* and in other Cold War African American novels, ultimately, provides a model for Afropessimist critique that takes seriously the structural violence done to Black people via the economy. At the same time, the masculinism that I

document here reminds that both contemporary Afropessimists and Black Marxists reinscribe the 1950s' masculinism when they analyze race in gender-neutral terms. This masculinization works against the contemporary work on gender in critical prison studies and has the potential to contribute to the repression contemporary accounts and analyses of violence against Black women, trans and nonbinary people in the way that these novelists did almost seventy years ago. Put simply, the opposition between gender-neutral labor and Blackness, ultimately, threatens to repress current efforts to regender state violence. At the same time that the Afropessimist and Black Marxist debate must lead to a Black Radical resolution in which scholars interrogate antiblack violence's lasting economic effects, this analysis of the relationship between race, the economy, and state violence must crucially consider the ways in which that relationship is gendered, lest they fall prey to the same pitfalls of midcentury accounts of state violence.

As I have argued in this chapter, midcentury novels of a variety of forms by authors of a variety of political positions thoroughly masculinized the relationship between antiblack violence and political economy. Where the Leftist novelists suggests the police regulate public economic activity, the non-Leftists suggest the police regulate private sphere concerns. Where the Leftists depict labor organizing as a means of abolishing the state's violent dispossession, the non-Leftists remind that Black men's private-sphere concerns must be prioritized in any effort to abolish state violence. And where the Leftists theorize novels as offering the voice of men's political organizations opposed to the state, the non-Leftists theorize novels as demonstrating men's complex interiority opposed to the state. The two remain so thoroughly invested in describing the effects of police assault upon men that they contributed to enforcing forgetting historical

cases of police violence and to unimagining that black women could be victims of police violence. By forwarding the novel in particular and cultural repression as one source of the contemporary obscuring of state violence against Black ciswomen, trans and nonbinary people, I have laid the groundwork for the coming chapters, in which I will explore how Black Feminist novelists revised these tropes to reimagine the gendering of the state's violent dispossession, which can provide a model for resolving the Afropessimist-Black Marxist debate that avoids the pitfalls of 1950s masculinism. But before such a revision is possible, we must turn toward that other pillar of state violence—the military—that midcentury African American novelists represented as analogous to, if not the same as, police violence. Doing so will provide a better understanding of the ways in which this local theory turned global.

CHAPTER 2: The Accidents of North American Geography: Police and Military Violence in 1960s African-American Novels

I would be remiss, in this chapter on the relationship between police and military violence in the African American novel, if I did not mention the sounds of occupation: The droning tuk-tuk-tuk of the helicopters overhead, the pops of flashbangs and tear gas guns, the phone alarms announcing curfews, the sirens. Then there were rumors: That undercover agents were torching cop cars, that there's a riot in the city jails, that the city was reopening to quell the rebellion. And finally sights: The desert camouflage of the National Guard Hummer blocking traffic on Spring Garden but outfitted for war overseas, the phalanx of armed officers in front of Rizzo's statue, the riot cops' transparent shields reflecting the sun, the batons, the guns. The military occupying force was in Philadelphia for ten long days as I worked on this chapter, arriving after the George Floyd and Breona Taylor protests turned into an uprising.

Their omnipresence turned protestors into theorists. On the streets, people described the linkages between Black Lives Matter, *Justice Pour Adama Traoré*, the uprisings in Hong Kong, and colonialism's lingering hold. They hinted at the uncanny mirroring of the helicopter bombing MOVE and the helicopter dropping tear gas on 676, and at the consonance between policing at home and the unending U.S. military occupation of foreign soil. Recent theories of the archive might lead us to believe that only the protestor's recorded utterances are recoverable. But I want to remind that scholars see archives through a lens already shaped by history and culture. That mediation, as much as what is archived, determines our ability to recover histories of

state violence as waged by militarized police and the military's global policing operations.

Much of the historical recovery of these objects of study has focused on the 1960s. As many historians have argued, the 1960s became the principle object of study because of historical changes in policing that took place in that decade. In *Race and America's Long War* (2017), Nikil Pal Singh writes,

In the wake of Vietnam and black urban unrest, U.S. policy makers not only reasserted the value of force and violence over rule and consent in foreign policy but also recast the use of force in the pursuit of domestic order. When U.S. army forces were sent in alongside the National guard and state police to quell the 1967 riots in Detroit, it became clear that war on the home front was not a metaphor. This too was war (Singh 7).

In the 1960s, distinctions between the military and the police, between wartime and peacetime, and between the domestic sphere and the international sphere collapsed. The material events that foregrounded the police and the military's imbrication were disseminated by media outlets. The 1960s were, after all, the decade of televised police violence—Bloody Sunday, the Detroit Rebellion, and more—and of the first televised war: Vietnam. The wide-spread records of state violence foregrounded the collaborations between the police and the military as they were happening, laying the foundation for later recovery.³¹

While scholars have argued that the events themselves laid bare continuities between the military and the police, they have also insisted that Black radical thought in the 1960s made those continuities visible. These theories were influenced in part by decades of Black Marxist organizing. In the interwar period, the CPUSA developed the

³¹ For more on the ways in which state violence produces theories of itself, see Chandan Reddy's *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the U.S. State* (2011).

Black Belt Thesis: The theory that the Black Belt was akin to a colonized country that ought to self-determine. Activists like “Queen Mother” Audley Moore and thinkers like Harry Haywood carried this theory through to the mid-century, where it influenced a variety of black nationalists, including Malcolm X, the New Afrika Independence Movement, and more. Many 1960s Black nationalists, as a result, allied with global Third World Liberationists.³² In their accounts of the ways that Black radical thought unearthed the relationship between police and military violence, scholars like Singh, Micol Seigel, Jordan Camp and others have turned primarily to so-called political genres (speeches, pamphlets, and essays) and thinkers (including ones as famous as Martin Luther King Jr. and ones as obscure as Jack O’Dell). Historians more generally have chronicled the relationship between global radicalism and Black Radical thought by focusing primarily on Bandung and on the effects of the Cold War on the Civil Rights Movement. This scholarship was and remains vital. But as I will endeavor to demonstrate, these ideas were far more influential than has previously been suggested. The 1960s African American novel, and its representations of police and military violence, also constitutes an archive of transnational African American anti-state-violence thought, but its body of theories has not yet been recovered.³³

³² Harry Haywood’s *Negro Liberation* (1948), C. L. R. James’ “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the U.S.” (1948), Harry Haywood’s “For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question” (1957) Harold Cruse’s “Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American” (1962), and Malcolm X’s “Message to the Grassroots” (1963) all touch upon or show clear traces of the black belt thesis. For more on Moore’s role in carrying the Black Belt thesis forward, see the first chapter of Edward Onaci’s *Free the Land*. For the influence of the 1960s on contemporary understandings of the relationship between the police and the military, see Jordan Camp’s “The Bombs Explode at Home” (2017), Nikhil Pal Singh’s *Race and America’s Long War* (2017), and Micol Seigel’s *Violence Work* (2018).

³³ Some other scholars and memoirists who document the relationship between the Black Power movement, Black Leftists and international affairs are Penny von Eschen’s *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (1997), Mary Dudziak’s *Cold War Civil Rights* (2000), Jacquelyn Dowd Hall’s “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past” (2005), Nikil

In this chapter, I recover the forgotten influence of Marxism on these novels' theories of the relationship between the police and the military as a means of recovering their theories of the relationship between African American and global anti-colonial radicalism. I do so by tracking both the influence of the theory of dispossession and the influence of the theory of internal colonialism, which was shaped in part, but not entirely, by Marxism. In their representations of police violence against Black migrants within the United States, military police violence against African American soldiers transnationally, and military and police violence against colonized people on other soils, these novelists represent the military and the police as taking part in colonial warfare. To paraphrase Micol Seigel in *Violence Work* (2018), these novels represent the police and the military as operating in reciprocal exchange in their colonial pacifying efforts (Seigel 13-18). Laying bare the continuities between both armed forces, I argue, led the 1960s African American novel to represent Black Americans as colonized, and the police and the military as colonial pacifying forces. These novels critique state violence as being part of an unjust war of colonial repression that produces lasting economic damages. They theorize global anti-state-violence revolutions as a means of abolishing that violence, and they theorize the novel's ability to archive and represent otherwise unrepresentable violence—its fictionality—as enabling the formation of an alliance that can produce an

Pal Singh's *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (2005), Waldo Martin and Joshua Bloom's *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (2012), Quincy Mills' *Cutting Along the Color Line: Black Barbers and Barber Shops in America* (2013), and Elaine Mokhtefi's *Algiers, Third World Capital* (2018).

abolitionist revolution. These novelists theorize, I argue, the novel as a technology that can produce a Black internationalism that can abolish state violence.³⁴

By providing a literary history of representations of police violence as colonial warfare as a means of recovering theories of global Black radicalism, I provide a new method for studying Black internationalism and diaspora, two terms around which a field of scholarship has arisen since the 1993 publication of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*. Given much of this scholarship's emphasis on African American cosmopolitanism, the field has been accused of ignoring the state at various times. "One of the problematics haunting much of the scholarship on the African diaspora," writes Deborah Thomas, "has to do with how, when, and why questions regarding the state often seem to drop out of our analytic frames" (Thomas 2009 83). While other scholars (notably Michelle Stephens and Laila Amine) have worked to reintroduce the state to the field, I offer a new method for doing so: Charting the Marxist-influenced representations of global state violence and of the means for abolishing it in the African American novel. Where Brent Edwards famously argues in *The Practice of Diaspora* (2003) that Black internationalism can only be understood in translation, I argue that war is the premier term through which black

³⁴ For more on the relationship between the police and the military, see Ethan Nadelmann's *Cops Across Borders: The Internationalization of U.S. Criminal Law Enforcement* (1993), Martha Huggins' *Political Policing: The United States and Latin America* (1998), Catherine Lutz's "Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis" (2002), James Holmes' *Theodore Roosevelt and World Order: Police Power in International Relations* (2006), Joy James' introduction to *Warfare in the American Homeland: Policing and Prison in a Penal Democracy* (2007), Alfred McCoy's *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (2009), Ruth Gilmore's "Race, Prisons, and War: Scenes from the Gilmore History of US Violence" (2009), Julilly Kohler-Hausmann's "Militarizing the Police: Officer Jon Burge, Torture, and War in the Urban Jungle" (2011), Lesley Wood's *Crisis and Control: The Militarization of Protest Policing* (2014), Anna Feigenbaum's *Tear Gas: From the Battlefields of World War I to the Streets of Today* (2017), Jordan Camp's "The Bombs Explode at Home: Policing, Prisons, and Permanent War" (2018), and Stuart Schrader's *Badges Without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (2019)

internationalism is translated in the 1960s (Edwards 7). By charting the Marxist influence on this translation, which comes to the surface in representations of police violence as a kind of colonial warfare, I recover a literary history of theories of Black internationalism as a political practice opposed to state violence.

The Black internationalist vision forged through representations of police violence as part of a colonial war was gendered. The war and the military have long been masculinized, and African American war literature is no different. In the only monograph on African American war literature, *A Freedom Bought with Blood* (2007), Jennifer James argues that this dates back to the Civil War.

Black Americans' efforts to correct those portrayals of black men at war used to service a supremacist agenda gave rise to a genre of fictional war writing specific to African Americans: the black masculinist war novel ... Its main concern, of course, is to present the black soldier-citizen as the epitome of manliness—honorable, ethical, powerful, and virile (James 19).

Black masculinist war novelists aimed to demonstrate that black men were worthy of liberation and citizenship. This emphasis on masculinity, if not on inclusion into the American polity, runs through the 1960s African American war novel, where wartime racism emasculates and achieving masculinity is represented as the means for ending state violence. While these novels expand geographically, the 1960s African American war novel continues the 1950s novel's project of imagining state violence as a problem afflicting only men and adds to it an emphasis that only men can abolish state violence.

This masculinizing of global state violence, ultimately, repressed contemporaneous historical accounts of state violence against women of color. The 1960s African American novel did not only repress journalistic and oral accounts; it also repressed discourses in the African American novel itself. In the 1960s, the Black

masculinist war novel often represents state violence against women, but those assaults are subordinated to men's experience of and resistance to state violence. In other words, state violence against women is represented both as less important than state violence against men and as significant only insofar as it catalyzes men to act. One effect of these representations was that these novels contributed to the repression of women of color's experience of and resistance to state violence.

As I demonstrate in a discussion of the Algerian War's representations in African American literature, this repression was not coincidental or predestined. There were other cultural scripts circulating contemporaneously about who could experience and resist state violence. Yet in the same way that the 1950s African American novel relied upon and valorized the figure of the Black male laborer to masculinize representations of police violence, so too did the 1960s African American war novels rely upon and valorize the Black male soldier in such a way that masculinized the experiencers of and resisters to state violence. The aesthetic and narrative appeal of the Black male soldier contributed to characterizing state violence as a problem that only men could solve and, consequently, to repressing women of color's resistance to state violence.

By attending to the gendered repression at work in the African American novel, I aim to provide a more robust theoretical account of the place of gender in constructing historical memory. Late in the chapter, I argue that these novels feminize the memory of state violence but masculinize recalling such violence when those memories catalyze violent revolutionary action. These 1960s novelists write historical war fiction as a means of using fiction to provide new visions of history to energize men's action in the present. This strategy is similar to the one that historians of slave rebellions would employ

decades later. These historians and their histories are the very ones that scholars like Saidiya Hartman and Marisa Fuentes critique in their theorizing of the absences of the archives of slavery. By returning to the ways in which 1960s novelists repressed histories of state violence against women of color, I aim, implicitly, to shed light on the ways in which historians of slavery repressed the experiences and agency of enslaved women. I aim, in other words, to theorize the place of gender in constructing the cultural, as opposed to archival, repression of history.

In this chapter, I attend to this cultural repression in African American war novels of the 1960s in four sections. In the first section, I track the ways in which these novels represented state violence as enforcing Black men's second-class citizenship and colonial position. In the second section, I chronicle these novelists' account of global, violent revolution as the means of abolishing state violence worldwide. In the third section, I attend to these novelists' theories of the novel as the genre that enables them to render state violence in ways that historians and journalists could not, which ultimately, in their account, makes the novel a critical tool in the effort to abolish state violence. Their insistence on men as the primary victims of state violence, as the people with the agency to abolish state violence, and as the main subjects of those novels, ultimately, contributed to the cultural repression of state violence against women of color. In a concluding section on Black Feminist representations of state violence in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, I gesture toward means other than critical fabulation for counteracting the gendered repression of history.

The Accidents of North American Geography

As I wrote in the previous chapter, the lingering influence of Marxism on 1950s novels led to a representation of state violence as dispossession. The 1960s novels retain those concerns but largely agree that economic regulation is part of the larger project of regulating Black masculinity. Further, state violence occurs more often and occupies more pages in the 1960s novels than in those of the previous decade, resulting in an increased attention to state violence against the global Black diaspora. These novels are, in other words, pessimistic about the possibility of escape: Against the representation of wartime service, as in Junius Edwards' *If We Must Die* (1961), or expatriotism, as in Richard Wright's *The Long Dream* (1958), as providing Black men freedom from American racism, these novels suggest state violence persecutes Black and other colonized men globally.

This is not to say that the 1960s novels do not attend to violent police dispossession within the United States. Consider Ernest Gaines' second novel, *Of Love and Dust* (1967). Set in 1940s rural Louisiana, the novel tells the story of the friendship between Jim and Marcus. Early on, Marcus gambles with a man named Hotwater, wins Hotwater's money, and then tries to sleep with the woman Hotwater "owned." When Hotwater attacks Marcus, Marcus kills him, at which point the police arrive and begin "dragging" Marcus to the car (Gaines 52-3). The quotidian violence of policing leads to Marcus's incarceration. Rather than spend years at the notorious Angola work farm, his grandmother has him bonded out to a local work farm. This representation of police violence as coercing Black men's labor gives rise to a vision of the state. When the farm owner tries to force Marcus to kill the overseer, Bonbon, Jim narrates,

Bonbon was nothing but a poor white man, and sometimes you could go to the rich white man for help. But where did you go when it was the rich white man? You couldn't even go to the law, because he was the law. He was police, he was judge, he was jury (Gaines 197-8).

In Gaines's account, race, class, and gender determine position within local racial capitalism. As Thadious Davis writes in *Southscapes* (2011), this economy dates back to slavery: "The linkages between prison and plantation are discernible in all of Gaines's novels because each one is never far from the reality of Louisiana's plantations and prisons, specifically Angola State Prison, which signified the fate of Black men in his Louisiana as much as the literal plantation" (Davis 294). The prison coerces Black men's labor as the plantation does, such that police violence is a key method of dispossession.

Yet even in Gaines's rural Louisiana, international state violence is inescapable.

Midway through the novel, Jim visits two characters, narrating,

They were talking about the war when I came into the yard. They talked about the war every time they got together, and that was every day God send. The war had been over for three years already, but they talked about it like everybody was still shooting at everybody else (Gaines 136).

From their home on a plantation so seemingly anachronistic that the characters could be living in the nineteenth-century, war is omnipresent, even though which war it is—World War II or Korea—does not matter. Written at the tail end of the decade, I read this passage as commenting on contemporaneous African American novels: These novels represent wars in plots seemingly distant from the frontlines, suggesting warfare of any kind is omnipresent. Accordingly, these novels blur the difference between police and military violence.

As Sarah Wright demonstrates in social realism's swansong, her 1969 novel *This Child's Gonna Live*, this representation of military and police violence is transnational

and gendered. Wright began writing the novel in 1957, around the same time that she published in Paul Robeson's Black Marxist journal *Freedomways*. In the following years, she workshopped chapters at the Harlem Writers Guild, founded by Rosa Guy, John Killens, and John Henrik Clarke (Higashida 52-3). Given Killens' influence, it's unsurprising that the novel resembles 1950s Black Social Realism. "She carries on in Richard Wright's tradition," writes Thulani Davis in the novel's foreword, "and in that of Steinbeck and particularly Ann Petry" (Davis viii). The novel's tale of Mariah Upshur's struggles against sexism and poverty in Depression-era Maryland, accordingly, represents police violence as dispossessing Black diasporic men.

Consider an early representation of police violence in the novel, when Mariah's husband, Jacob, walks in their village. Another resident, Tillie, accuses Jacob of disliking her husband. Jacob disagrees, responding that he intervened when the police attacked her husband. Frustrated, he warns that the next time her husband is drunk and "ranting" about white people, the police will attack him again. He continues,

We ain't never had nothing around here like that drinking mess 'til them migrant workers come along. Place had a respectable name. Can't even borrow money from the bank. First thing the bank man'll tell you is colored's too trifling (Wright 59-60).

The reference to the banks' economic regulation should not be surprising, but the reference to "migrants" might be. Migrants from where? They are likely Black, given that most of the novel's characters are. They could be taking part in the Great Migration, but they could also be from Barbados, like Mariah's father, or any other country. Police violence may be local, but its victims are not.

As Sarah Wright documents and critiques, Black men use tales of police violence's transnational effects to subordinate Black women's concerns to their own. Early on, Mariah considers moving to the city for better opportunities and encounters her father. "They lynching colored men every day by the wholesale lot just south of this swamp," her father tells her, "and up there in them cities, too. But in a different sort of way" (Wright 8). After alluding to police violence—one "different sort of way" of lynching—Mariah responds, "But what about the colored woman?" Her father responds, "See my scars! Colored woman's always been more privileged than the man." He bares the scars and continues,

White men up there to Baltimore Harbor liked to beat my ass off when I landed in this 'land of the free.' They said to me, 'Horace, you come here all the way from Barbados hid down in the hold of our ship. You ain't paid a cent for the passage. You ain't worked for us, you ain't done nothing.' ... See my scars (Wright 8-9).

Writing about Horace's scars and other textual "fragments," Patricia Yeager claims novelists like Wright focus "on the return of the dispossessed, on remnants of people who, in an era of possessive individualism, lack property ... and can only return as a remnant or fragment that needs to be made an integer" (Yeager 2005 102). Importantly, Yeager foregrounds that the novel represents dispossession as defined not solely by the traditional objects of economics (Horace's labor) but also by citizenship (Horace being undocumented). Given that Horace bares his scars to prove that Black women are "more privileged than the man," Wright's novel insists that the representation of police violence as dispossession is used, as it was in the 1950s novels, to silence Black women's concerns. This repression is not done simply by absence—Horace does not deny that Black women experience violence—but by subordinated presence. In this way, Sarah

Wright's novel critiques the masculinization of midcentury representations of transnational state violence against Black diasporic men.

The subordination that Wright critiques prominently arises in James Baldwin's 1968 novel, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*. A tale of fraternal love, Baldwin's novel is as concerned with police violence as with Black Power and the Black diaspora. Given Michelle Wright's claim, in *Physics of Blackness* (2015), that "James Baldwin is an exemplar of a multidimensional Blackness" such that "'Black Baldwin' is not distinct from but intersects with 'American' and 'European' and (among other collective identities) 'queer Baldwin'" (Wright 2015 109), it should come as no surprise that Baldwin provides a multidimensional account of the relationship between state violence and Black diasporic men that critiques the former for persecuting the latter via dispossession.

Critically panned upon its release, Baldwin's novel represents police violence early on. After the police stop the child protagonist, Leo, and his teenaged brother, Caleb, the cops pat them down. "[E]very touch humiliating," Baldwin writes, "every touch obscene." After this sexually violating incident, Caleb curses in their father's Caribbean accent, suggesting that that the police persecute the Black diaspora even when patting down a Black person born in America (Baldwin 58-60). This representation is complicated when they tell their father what happened and says,

You know as well as me they beating on black ass all the time, all the time, man, they get us in that precinct house and make us confess to all kinds of things and sometimes even kill us and don't nobody give a damn. Don't nobody care what happens to a black man. If they didn't need us for work, they'd have killed us all off a long time ago (Baldwin 64).

In Caleb's account, the police are violent because they are genocidal, held in check only by the racial distribution of labor. Given that the Americans subject to that violence are both American and Caribbean by descent, the novel reframes African Americans as constituted not only by prior transatlantic slavery but also by ongoing global migrations of Black people. As a result, police violence against African Americans in America is not a local problem but a global one, regulating Black diasporic men within the limits imposed by racial capitalism.

Though the police do not discriminate by national origin in Baldwin's novel, they do discriminate by gender. After Caleb is accused of robbing a store and stabbing a man, the police beat him and, when Leo tries to intervene, Leo as well. They take Caleb to jail (Baldwin 125-6). When Caleb returns from prison, he tells Leo that they sent him to a work farm, where "[t]hey just fed us so we could work, you know—like you feed a mule. And they beat us like that too" (Baldwin 206). When working in the fields, an overseer sexually harasses Caleb, making him feel as powerless as he imagined his enslaved grandmother would have been to white men (Baldwin 232). The overseer then changes Caleb's work duty and attempts to sexually assault him. Caleb defends himself and is put in solitary. After a final beating, the overseer tells Caleb, "you ain't worth shit," to which Caleb responds, "You right, Mr. Howell. I ain't worth shit" (Baldwin 232-9). Having once seen himself as a Black man, state violence leads Caleb to see himself as being as valuable as a mule and, finally, as worth nothing. This prolonged state sexual violence is, importantly, the inverse of Caleb and Leo commiserating by masturbating together when Caleb returns from jail. In *Dilution Anxiety* (2008), Margo Crawford reads this and other queer intraracial sex as foregrounding the "black male homoeroticism in the black male

cultural nationalism of the Black Arts movement” (Crawford 2008 89). Considering interracial state rape in opposition to black male homoeroticism, then, foregrounds that state violence regulates labor only as a means of dehumanizing Black men and destroying their fraternity in *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone*. A crude Marxist reading would suggest that state violence uproots fraternity so that the state can continue to profit from Black diasporic men’s labor without fearing collective action. Yet the violence is sexual; state violence is not only utilitarian but also sadistic. In Baldwin’s account, American state violence sadistically pleasures state actors and simultaneously yields a lasting dispossession in the form of regulating Black diasporic men’s relationship to their labor and other laborers.

This violence may be American in nature, but it persecutes African American men beyond the nation’s borders. Later in the novel, Leo sleeps with a white woman, after which the police frisk him. “Cops love frisking black boys,” Baldwin reminds, “they want to find out if what they’ve heard is true.” They then handcuff him and take him to the station. Leo narrates,

It was in vain that I told myself, Leo, this isn’t the South. I knew better than to place any hope in the accidents of North American geography. This was America, America, America, and those people out there, my countrymen, had been tearing me limb from limb, like dogs, for centuries.

Eventually, the police let him off with the warning that he should not sleep with white women, reminding once more that their sexual violence regulates black men’s heterosexuality (Baldwin 249-253). Here, Baldwin frames police violence as part of a quintessentially American project of violently regulating black men’s sexuality that confounds the borders of the so-called racist south and the so-called liberal North. Later,

it even transcends the nation's borders. When Caleb serves in the army in Italy during World War II, a white soldier persecutes Caleb's white, Italian girlfriend "to give her a taste of what life would be like if she stayed with" Caleb. In other words, he exports the violent American regulation of Black men's sexual relations with white women, a fact which Caleb eventually realizes:

I'm five thousand miles from home, in this man's uniform, protecting him, and he brings his poison all the way over here with him to spoil my girl and ruin my life ... I might as well have been in chains (Baldwin 393-400).

The "uniform" reminds that the state sanctions such violence; the violence may be home grown, but it spans the globe. In his article on the novel, Aaron Oforlea writes, "Art, for Baldwin, should ... illustrate the complexity of black subjectivity formation" (Oforlea 2009 77). In this scene, the American state shapes that subjectivity formation beyond its borders. For Baldwin in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, state violence regulates Black men's subjectivity transnationally through American imperialism, immigration and warfare.

But what role do Black women play in this critique of police violence? When Caleb and Leo tell their parents about the police harassing them, their mother says she is happy that "the boys got home safe tonight," offers to cook them dinner, and finally says "I sure am surrounded by some pretty men" (Baldwin 64-5). Here, Caleb and Leo transform from boys to men, but the mother remains an unchanged care laborer. Similarly, when the police arrest Caleb, Black women prove important only in relation to black men. When Leo tries to protect his brother, the women in the room attempt to hold him back; he hits one to get free and pursues the cops to no avail (Baldwin 126). They

are, in other words, obstacles to Leo and Caleb's fraternity. This emphasis on fraternity continues when Caleb returns from jail. Caleb argues with his father, at which point his mother intervenes, saying, "don't try to hurt your father. We did the best we could" (Baldwin 202). After the mother defends her father, the men bond over their all being persecuted, from which their mother is absented. And after Caleb recounts his ordeals on the prison work farm, the next day, their mother is silent as Caleb tells Leo that he is leaving. In all the scenes of police violence, Black women's concerns are subordinated to black men's persecution. Consequently, the critiques of police violence in Baldwin's *Tell Me How Long the Train Been Gone* assert men's primacy in racist state oppression.

The most thorough critique of police violence frames global state violence as regulating black diasporic men's economic position within the world's racial capitalist system. These novels repeatedly represent state violence as coercing black men's labor, but they do not simply translate the 1950s representations to new circumstances. Rather, the changing conception of America's porosity, the intensification of global warfare, and the representation of Americans traveling abroad led to new ways of considering state violence, its relationship to the economy, and its relationship to race. This critical purview as well as accounts of state violence that resulted from these changes, I argue, were used to subordinate Black women's oppression to Black men's experiences of state violence. As we will see in the next section, this also entailed a transformation in the representation of who could end police violence.

Brothers in Arms

Building on their critiques of state violence's victimization of Black diasporic men, the 1960s African American novel represented their efforts to resist that violence globally. They most frequently depicted men using armed violence as a means for ending state violence. One might imagine that these conditions lead the novels to advocate for revolution toward the formation of a nation, an intellectual trend that has been common since the publication of David Scott's *Conscripts of Modernity* in 2004 and Michelle Stephens' *Black Empire* in 2005. To avoid the dead end of the nation, which we know does not abolish state violence, I turn to two novels—John Oliver Killens' *And Then We Heard the Thunder* (1963) and John A. Williams' *The Man Who Cried I Am* (1968)—that capture other political formations, including global anti-state-violence coalitions and anarchist rebel collectives. In these texts, the abolition of state violence requires a global transformation, a vision more like Huey Newton's and Mao's than the New Afrika Independence Movement's and Lenin's. While their vision of the political formation that could abolish state violence differed, these novelists united behind a gendered vision of political agency. As we will see, these novelists imagined men as the agents of change by subordinating state violence against women of color to men's political agency.

Given the importance of labor organizing to *Youngblood*, it may come as no surprise that John Killens' *And Then We Heard the Thunder* (1963) proffers a labor-centric vision of the relationship between police and military violence. The story of a black battalion in World War II told from the perspective of Solomon "Solly" Saunders, Killens began the autobiographical novel in the late 1940s. Yet geopolitical and personal changes that occurred as he wrote, ultimately, pushed Killens to critique of state

violence's effects on labor globally. In his 2010 biography of Killens, Keith Gilyard writes:

[N]ot until the 1960s, with the growing national independence movements in Africa and his engagement with minds such as Oliver Tambo's, did he [Killens] articulate the tangible benefits decolonization efforts would provide for African Americans. *And Then We Heard the Thunder*, in fact, though definitely a World War II story, is also about several other wars—the U.S. Civil War, the Cold War, and Third World anti-imperialist revolutions (Gilyard 2010 164-5).

Killens' increasing interest in anti-colonial revolutions transformed his representation of state violence in this war novel, leading him to represent such violence as dispossessing African Americans and imperial subjects worldwide. Chronicling the global, racial distribution of state violence, ultimately, provides Killens the occasion to represent a transnational collective of people of color as the formation capable of ending state violence.³⁵

And Then We Heard the Thunder represents police violence as regulating Black men's labor in such a way that, effectively, colonizes Black men. Early on, a soldier named Bookworm recounts a story about white MPs harassing and then beating him; in Solly's account, this and other assaults regulate Black men's postwar labor aspirations (Killens 57-61). After sleeping with Fannie Mae, a woman who works at the Post Exchange, Solly walks back to base at night when a car approaches. Fearing potential violence, Solly sees America as "the foreign country of his birth" and himself as an "alien" who lives "as a boy" but cannot become "a man" (Killens 117-8). This

³⁵ Here it is worth noting that Gilyard argues that Killens' novels always held multiple ideologies. He writes, in his 2003 book on Killens, *Liberation Memories*, "Killens's early novels reflect several ideologies. There are Marxist leanings and civil integrationist gestures, as well as heavy overtones of Black nationalism" (Gilyard 2003 39).

representation of state and state-sanctioned violence as transforming Georgia into foreign soil and as unmaking Black citizenship accords with Killens' political development through the 1960s. As Alan Wald demonstrates in *Trinity of Passion* (2007), Killens' non-fiction sympathized with Harry Haywood's argument that black people in the south formed an internal colony (Wald 2007 54-7). In *And Then We Heard the Thunder*, Killens transforms this political theory into fiction. From the MP attack on Bookworm to Solly's fear of violence, state and state-sanctioned violence regulate Black men's labor in such a way that colonizes them.

In the novel's remainder, Killens represents attaining masculinity as a means of attaining citizenship. After Solly arrives at the bus depot, a cop takes him to the station and they beat him, focusing especially on his groin. "At the moment he feared for his manhood," Solly narrates, "and he had forgotten to fear for his life." (Killens 124-32). While the police persecute Black masculinity, Killens represents attaining it as the means of resisting the state. After Solly recovers, Fannie Mae, whom Solly occasionally blames for the assault, tells him,

Manhood is more important than money or promotions. Please remember. Never sacrifice your manhood—never sacrifice your manhood. The one thing they will not stand is for a black man to be a man. And everything else is worthless if a man can't be a man (Killens 180).

Attaining (and retaining) his "manhood" does not prove easy. From boot camp in California to the Pacific front, commanding officers, medical officials, and military police enforce segregation and attack the black battalion, reminding them that American emasculation exceeds the country's geographic borders (Killens 200-2; 209-12; 215-21; Killens 272-4). After these incidents, Solly often realizes that the army does not, as he

puts it, “make a man out of your darling boy.” Instead, it “takes a human being and makes him into an animal” (Killens 340-1). Accordingly, much of the novel describes Black men’s attempts to become masculine and the state’s emasculation to the point of dehumanization. Black men attempting to become men, in the face of seemingly unending state assaults, is a means for ending state violence. This project is global; Black men, in Killens’ account, must struggle for their masculinity wherever the pale of American imperialism casts its shadow.

Later in the novel, deployment in the Philippines gives rise to a labor-oriented means of attaining masculinity and, as such, undoing state violence. When Japanese planes attack the American base, they kill a young Filipino girl whom Solly calls Madonna. This violence against a civilian girl becomes an occasion to remark upon masculinity. Solly tells his friend,

I’m a man, Jimmy, goddammit. I mean I hate this shit with all my heart! What are we doing in these people’s country? No-damn-body sent for us. I mean the United States and the Japanese Empire didn’t ask these people.

After subordinating Madonna’s death to his position as a man who opposes unjust imperial bloodshed, the newly disenchanted Solly tells his Captain,

The war is over for me ... I’m the worst man in the company you could get to do the job. If you order me to do it, I have no alternative but to go through the motions.

In other words, Solly is enacting a work slowdown. “He had burst out of his breeches,” Killens continues, “because they were meant for boys to wear. And Solly Saunders was a man” (Killens 331-4). Here, Solly uses what he sees as his work, though there is good reason to think of labor as different from military violence, to achieve his masculinity and thereby end his involvement in the war. This continued emphasis on labor was due in part

to Killens' past as a socialist; as Wald writes, in the 1960s, Killens' embrace of revolutionary Black nationalism was "informed by his long-held vision of socialism" (Wald 49-50). One means for ending imperialist warfare and its distribution of state violence, in Killens' novel, is withdrawing labor from imperialists.

Yet the work slowdown is not enough. In the end, Killens represents armed revolt as the only means for ending state violence. Just after the planes attack their base, the Americans are ambushed and Solly sustains critical injuries (Killens 347-9). He recovers in Australia, where American MPs enforce racist policies and arrest and beat other black soldiers (Killens 417, 429-31). Tensions boil over, culminating in a fictionalized version of the Battle of Brisbane. While Solly is with his new, white girlfriend, his battalion decides to free a comrade from military jail. When they inform Solly, he decides to join "his buddies" to take part "in the profoundest battle for democracy that any Yankee Army fought on all the far-flung battlefronts of World War II" (Killens 438). The army retaliates and the Black soldiers find themselves firing upon their supposed allies. In the end, many of the Black soldiers die and they lose the battle, but Solly survives and wonders if they have become victorious in another way. As Solly dreams of a new world being made to prevent further atrocities, he narrates, "Perhaps the New World *would* come raging out of Africa and Asia, with a new and different dialogue that was people-oriented." When another soldier approaches, Solly tells him, "This is the place where the New World is" (Killens 485). Of this scene, literary critic Martyn Bone writes,

if this brave New World refers to a group of battle-scarred African Americans reimagining themselves in relation to a global revolution "raging out of Africa and Asia," then it mediates in more optimistic fashion the embrace of postcolonial and black internationalist struggle by

African American activists during the period in which the novel was published (Bone 2018 631).

Violence occasions a transformation in Solly's political beliefs, wherein he now sees himself as anti-colonialist. In the end, the novel suggests that labor struggles—that struggling in the workplace even when that workplace is a battlefield and even when the indignities of that violent work compel resistance—is not enough. Black Americans can only end state violence, Killens contends, by joining in collective violent struggle against the state which persecutes them in ways colonizers oppress colonized people globally.

But the means for forging this new world is thoroughly masculinized. Earlier in the novel, Solly's labor slowdown is occasioned by the murder of a Filipino woman. Her death, narratively, is only important insofar as it forces Solly to act. After that scene subordinates state violence against women of color to Solly's achieving of his masculinity, the Battle of Brisbane again reinforces the importance of masculinity. After the battle, Solly narrates,

[T]hey were ten thousand miles away from home, fighting for their country and Democracy and Freedom and Manhood, and they were dead and dead and dead ... And there was no Freedom—no Democracy.

There is still, however, manhood. Solly continues,

Never compromise your manhood, Fannie Mae had told him. Never sacrifice your manhood. He was a Negro and only with Worm and Jimmy and Baby-Face Banks [with whom he fought a battle against the army] could he achieve anything of lasting value.

After representing becoming a man through fraternal warfare as producing lasting change, another soldier suggests there may be peace now. Solly responds, "There is no peace till freedom. You can't make a man a slave and have him live with you" (Killens 483-4). Importantly, his words allude to Frederick Douglass' famed preface to his fight

with his master: “You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man” (Douglass). The allusion here does not simply reproduce Douglass’ valorization of his own violence; it also insists upon the centrality of masculinity, upon a larger geographic framing, and upon collective violence. In Killens’ novel, the war against state racism is necessarily a fraternal, global war for masculinity such that the people with political agency are all men.

As I have tried to demonstrate in a reading of Killens’ novel, 1960s novels disseminated a familiar cultural script, in which the lead roles are given to men, the conflict is state violence, and the happy ending is global revolution. This masculinization did not always entail the absence of representing state violence against women of color. Rather, this repression often worked through subordination. In the remainder of the section, I argue that Black women’s political agency was also subordinated to Black men’s political agency through a reading of John A. Williams’ novel, *Sons of Darkness*, *Sons of Light: A Novel of Some Probability*.

Begun in 1968 and published in 1969, *Sons of Darkness* bears all the pessimism of the late 1960s. Accordingly, *Sons of Darkness* represents state violence as persecuting all Black people. Just before the novel begins, Sergeant Carrigan shoots and kills a sixteen-year-old Black boy in New York. According to the protagonist, Civil Rights Organizer Eugene Browning, “it had been open season on Negroes and if it hadn’t been the boy, it might have been one of those old black ladies with bad feet that you see waiting for the Fifth Avenue bus” (Williams 1969 11). Though Eugene admits the possibility of police violence against black women, this violence is subsumed under an indiscriminate relationship: Carrigan is hunter and Black people are his prey. Similarly,

when Eugene travels the rural South, Williams writes that cops attacked black people and sexually assaulted black women “[f]or the hell of it” (Williams 1969 63). Difference in gender, here, gives rise to different forms of police violence, but this too is subsumed under an indiscriminate relation. Anti-blackness as a foundational structure, in other words, causes police violence. In *Sons of Darkness*, police violence regulates gender-neutral blackness even as it genders violence.

The means for abolishing state violence, Williams suggests, is violent retaliation. Disillusioned with Movement organizing, Browning hires an assassin to kill Carrigan because, as Williams narrates,

Browning wanted people to know that if they were willing to take black lives the way they had been, then they also ought to know that they had to forfeit their own. Once everyone understood that, things would improve (Williams 1969 23).

Though Browning hopes for deterrence, Carrigan’s assassination has unexpected results: the police descend on Black neighborhoods and assault their inhabitants. Black people retaliate, and a rebellion breaks out. Several Black organizers try to leverage the violence to push the state to acquiesce to their demands, many of which are aimed at ending police violence. While the novel ends before the rebellion does, Williams’ attention to both Eugene’s theory of deterrence and to the organizer’s using the rebellion to push for state transformation represents violent revolution as a means of ending state violence.

But what political formation is the end of such a revolution? The organizers push for changes in the state that might seem to preserve the nation, but the Black rebels offer a different vision of politics. When the police form a “paramilitary” organization to attack Black communities, Williams writes that Black people

reacted as any people would who were faced with the reality of the degree of their repression, now equally balanced with living death, and chose the one avenue open to them ... Old men and old women, children, youths, adults of middle age. Zip guns, rifles, shotguns, automatics, revolvers. Lye rained down along with pots, pans, pieces of furniture, dishes, glasses, lengths of iron, lead and zinc pipe; bricks from tottering chimneys, pots of boiling hot water, pans of cold war, knives, ice picks, broken lamps; more than one number-10 cast iron skillet sung down from the darkened windows and into the milling cops (Browning 233-4).

Black people, here, defend themselves without organization. They are not so much an anti-colonial army following orders as they are anarchists using whatever is at hand.

There is no guarantee that the organizers will be able to wrestle these fighters into a nation. This extemporaneous rebellion, in other words, may lead to anarchism.

This anarchist rebellion is already shaped by transnational currents and, consequently, may well sweep the globe. Early in the novel, Browning hires the professional killer from a Mafia member named the Don, who grew up in a Sicily that Williams portrays as porous to nations and people: the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Arabs, the Germans, the French, and the Spanish (Williams 34-40). The Don then hires the Jewish assassin Itzhak Hod, whom violence had forced to migrate through several nations: Russia, Poland, British occupied Palestine, Israel, Africa, and the United States (Williams 47-53). Violence moves the characters internationally, in other words, and their relationship to violence enables solidarity across national and racial identities. As critics like a young Nikki Giovanni in her review of the novel, Adam Meyer in "Occupying the Middle," and Matthew Calihman in "Black Power Beyond Black Nationalism" argue, the novel represents European immigrants subverting assimilation into American whiteness and allying with Black people through violence (Giovanni; Meyer 2018 60-1; Calihmann 2009 147-8). Given that violence compelled the Don and

Hod's migration across borders and alliances across race, there is no reason to assume the rebellion that follows Hod's assassination of Carrigan will be bounded by national geography. This violent revolution aimed at abolishing state violence, ultimately, may transform the globe.

But who, in Williams' account, has the political agency to end this racist distribution of state violence? Writing on this and other texts that represent a violent revolution in the future, Kali Tal argues that this genre—"the black militant near-future novel"—inherited the "masculinist tendencies of the civil rights movement and the hyper-masculinist attitudes and self-presentation of the black power movement" (Tal 2002 69). In *Sons of Darkness*, this hypermasculinism subordinates women's roles in anarchist rebellion to their domestic position in the political polity to come from the novel's very outset. The novel begins with Eugene waking up anxious because of Carrigan's murder. He tries to have sex with his wife, Val, to calm his nerves (Williams 4). She rebuffs his advances. Then Val describes her troubles in their marriage, complaining that her husband's involvement in politics "was wrecking the family" (Williams 4-5). Following this depiction of Val as a counterrevolutionary domestic force, Val exits the novel, being sent by Eugene to Long Island for a vacation. After the war begins, Eugene joins her and discovers that she has cheated on him because, according to her, his organizing strained their marriage (Williams 276-7). In the novel's final scene, they resolve their conflict and have sex, foreshadowing a future in which Val understands and supports Eugene's organizing. In the political system to come, in other words, women belong in the home. Just as *And Then We Heard the Thunder* subordinates state

violence against women of color to men's political action, so too does *Sons of Darkness* subordinate women's political agency to men's political agency.³⁶

As I have tried to argue in this section, the 1960s novels imagined men engaging in collective violence as a means of ending state violence against the Black diaspora and colonized people. They often did so by subordinating women of color's experience of and resistance to state violence to men's political agency. Subordination is a representational problem: The violence is represented only to catalyze the men to action and to enable men to govern. Yet it retains military connotations: Men ought to lead and women ought to follow. As we will see in the following section, subordination came to structure the theories of the novels themselves.³⁷

The Novel

These authors also represented the genre of the novel as key to catalyzing men's action. As in the 1950s novels, the 1960s novels theorized both their genre as producing counter-archives and fictionality as enabling the novels to represent that which was otherwise unrepresentable. But the turn to the global yielded new affordances, including, most notably, capturing incidents that local censorship aimed to hide. Consequently,

³⁶ It is worth noting that Kali Tal's article proved immensely helpful to my argument and remains significant, in part because it discusses an underdiscussed genre (the term for which she coins), in part because its analyses of gender are so astute, and in part because her analyses of *Sons of Darkness* are similarly precise and illuminating. Tal's argument is relatively restricted in scope, which is understandable given that it is only an article. It leaves to be considered, as I have done in this chapter, the larger set of texts that set the context within which texts like John Williams' *Sons of Darkness* emerged. It also leaves to be considered what kind of political formation Williams' novel represents as the culmination of the revolution. Consequently, it is on these two topics that my analyses of Williams' novel focus.

³⁷ This bears many implications for conceptions of political agency in the period. In *The Terms of Order* (1980), Cedric Robinson argues that black political organization is only legible as being led by a leader. Erica Edwards builds on Robinson's foundation in *Charisma* (2012) to argue that such leadership is imagined to be masculine. But it is not purely leaders that are masculinized. Indeed, this body of literature subordinates women of color's roles in political movements to black men's agency such that political agency, be it that of leaders or of followers, is represented as masculine

novelists valorized both the writer as a laborer and the novel itself as the premier form through which that labor could uncover global state violence's distribution along racial and economic axes. In short, these authors framed novels as important because their critiques of state violence could push men to participate in the global struggle against imperial violence. This conception of novelists and novels, ultimately, led to a representation of the novel as a genre that enabled colonized men across the globe to act in solidarity.

Where John A. Williams' *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light* foregrounds the globe's penetration of America, his most famous novel, *The Man Who Cried I Am* (1967), follows African Americans in their travels across the globe. A novel nostalgic for a bygone black internationalism and paranoid about state persecution of Black radicals (Rasberry 357), *The Man Who Cried I Am* foregrounds the fungibility of position for Black people, such that Black people find themselves wielders and recipients of state violence. In its portrait of global state violence, the novel tells the story of the African American journalist and novelist Max Reddick. Early in his career, Max visits a man in jail for a news story, during which time he describes the police and the prison industrial complex as persecuting Black "boys" with both libidinal and naturalized fervor (Williams 1967 54). Later in the novel, Williams insists that racial capitalism structures such violence. When Max has a conversation with a famously brutal Black police Sergeant, Jenkins, Max tells Jenkins he is writing a story about police brutality. Jenkins replies that he is "hard" on black people so that he can return home safely to his family and provide for them financially (Williams 1967 172-3). In both cases, Max's labor as a journalist foregrounds the libidinal and economic drive behind state violence against black people.

Importantly, Max's position as a writer enables him to expose state violence's transnational currents. While deployed as a soldier in Europe during World War II, he faces Axis gunfire. After returning to the U.S., he covers Southern lynching and segregation, among other things. "Oppression was oppression," writes Williams, "and there was a relationship between the oppressed Negroes of America, the oppressed Spaniards, the oppressed brown peoples of Asia and the oppressed black people of Africa" (Williams 1967 193). That relationship is defined partially by the distribution of state violence. Shortly thereafter, he recounts experiencing Jim Crow in the military and then writes that "the extensions of national policies [were] foisted upon the shoulders of a poor pfc ... War II wasn't quite five years dead and they were at it again, the French, the poor, stupid, losing French. *Now* they were in Vietnam" (Williams 1967 195). The culmination of national policies distributing violence internationally is the King Alfred Plan. Shortly after Max returns to Europe, a fictionalized Malcolm X sends him the KAP: the United States government's secret plan to kill first radical Black Americans and then, should rebellion ever seem impending, all Black Americans. The Minister shares the plans in the hopes that Max will write about it. U.S. agents then pursue and kill Max. Although parodic, in Williams' account, U.S. imperialism enables the U.S. to extend its violence across borders such that it pursues Black Americans globally in the way that other imperial countries persecute their colonized globally. Though preempted by state murder, the journalist's labor is admirable, in Williams' account, for its ability to expose this transnational state violence.

Williams' valorization of writers, ultimately, leads him to represent the novel as a genre as liberatory. Around the same time that Max discovers the King Alfred Plan, the

novel turns to the perspective of another Black writer, a friend of Max's. Williams reveals that this writer is, in fact, a double agent working for the U.S. government. When that writer discovers the plan, the white U.S. agents kill him as they did Max. While the diegetic writers die because they might expose the plan—in other words, because they might write non-fiction—the novel survives, capturing and eluding state violent censorship while warning Black people of the U.S.'s genocidal drive. In this counterposing of non-fiction and fiction, William valorizes fictionality because it enables novelists to capture state violence in ways that contribute to an effort to make Black people safe that non-fiction writers cannot.

This valorization of fictionality accords with Vaughn Rasberry's insistence, in *Race and the Totalitarian Century* (2016), on the place of language in the text. After noting that much of the novel takes place over the course of three days but follows the protagonist's memories, Rasberry writes, "In this respect, the novel is far more concerned with memorializing black agency in the twentieth century's grand projects than with prognosticating a future marked by new racial genocides" (Rasberry 359). As Rasberry suggests, Max sees one key source for such agency as "language" and, in particular, "a certain vocabulary of modern inexperience" that would enable him "to reshape via writing the society that called the language of generalized barbarism into being" (Rasberry 365). By valorizing this representation of the real in a novel that aims to reshape society, Williams represents his own novel as key to uprooting the conditions that enable state violence.

This valorization is furthered by the novel's fictionalization of history. Earlier in the novel, Williams represents Max, the novelist who is an intelligence agent, and several

other characters living in France as part of a cosmopolitan milieu that fictionalizes the community of midcentury Black expats including Richard Wright, James Baldwin, William Gardner Smith, and others. One of these writers being a double agent, in Williams' novel, satirizes the contemporaneous belief that Wright's cosmopolitan milieu was infiltrated by U.S. government agents. This rumor has, to some degree, been substantiated: At the very least, Richard Wright informed the State Department of African leaders influenced by Communism (Maxwell 2015 176-7; Spahr 2018 3-4). Given that the F.B.I. and other files were confidential at that time, the novel's parodic representation of a black writer as a U.S. intelligence agent is, in fact, closer to reality than could have been written and fact-checked for non-fiction at the time of publication. In other words, fictionality enables *The Man Who Cried I Am* to render history more accurately than non-fiction writers could have captured their present and to capture the United States' imperial project in a way that other genres and medium cannot.

According to the 1960s masculinist novels, this fictional truth-telling about the international distribution of state and state-sanctioned violence is, ultimately, a weapon against such violence. Fiction's revolutionary affordance arises quite prominently in William Denby's second novel, *The Catacombs* (1965). A work of auto-fiction, *The Catacombs* follows the extra-marital love triangle between Bill Denby, Doris, and the Count. The character Bill Denby is writing a novel about Doris, which comprises the text we read. The novel also quotes the many texts Bill reads, including newspapers. As famed author George Schuyler wrote of the novel in his review for *The Pittsburgh Courier*, the constant moving between "the sophisticated amoral Roman world" and "the current events of the 1961-64" covered in newspapers yields "a kaleidoscopic quality"

that “keeps the reader aware that this semi-fictional world is just a speck in the universal macrocosm” (Schuyler). Here, Schuyler does not suggest the political is absent so much as foreground that it’s filtered through Bill’s perspective. This is the form the novel takes: World historical events are subordinated to the narrator’s experience.

Because global politics often enter the narrator’s life through reading, wars cross their temporal and spatial boundaries. From Bill’s apartment in Rome, he reads of revolts in Argentina and Syria and of a potential war between the U.S. and Cuba (the Cuban Missile Crisis), among other armed conflicts (Denby 27; 103). Especially central is the Algerian War. Though the novel takes place after the Algerian War’s formal end, its violence continues: Both the “European Secret Army” and the OAS, a right-wing French paramilitary group, continue to attack Algerians and those who advocate for them (Denby 29; 57; 60). Denby’s insistence that wars continue after their conclusion structures Bill’s narration.

This formal structure leads Denby to represent state and state-sanctioned violence as implicating the world. This representation of state violence arises when Bill reads the diary of a journalist who covered the Algerian war, in which the journalist lies in bed and hears explosions all around him. The diary so transports Bill that he comes to feel the text’s “anxiety and anguish.” He then reads Whitman’s Civil War Diary. “I put the book down,” he narrates. “I seem to float, backward and forward in time. The American Civil War, the Algerian war.” Bill then decries the European Secret Army and its use of plastic bombs, and finally remarks upon contemporary warfare:

For plastic bombs are cheap, are as available to all as the installment purchase of a television set ... suddenly all of us can be terrorists ...

anarchy, guerilla warfare spread floodlike from the fields of battle to the urban center; no one is safe (Denby 8-11).

In Denby's account, war collapses distinctions between enemies and comrades, civilians and soldiers, and so on. This imbrication, coupled with the ability to read about wars, makes violence extend temporally and spatially such that even Bill feels implicated and threatened by colonial and imperialist forces like the OAS. While Bill suggests this is a new phenomenon, the reference to the Civil War suggests otherwise. As a result, *The Catacombs* suggests that state and state-sponsored violence, by nature, are imperial projects that endanger the globe. The particular wars he discusses, however, foreground that these imperial, violent endeavors do not distribute violence evenly; rather, the increased destructive ability of weapons endangers the subjects of imperialism far more than the imperialists.³⁸

Writing and writers, in Denby's account, participate in and combat imperialist state violence intellectually. After the aforementioned passage, in which Bill worries that "no one is safe," Bill has the desire to "take to the forest" and to "let history rest in peace, let history remain unwritten and unrecorded" (Denby 12). That he does not and continues writing the novel, instead, frames the novel as recording history. He later depicts such writing as a kind of war. Midway through *The Catacombs*, he describes an editorial in *Il Giornale d'Italia* that represents writers, among others, as "engaged in warfare, the new warfare of ideas." He then writes that the typewriter "has always given me the feeling of power of sitting at the controls of some advanced model of a Sherman tank ... [W]e are

³⁸ For arguments about the ways in which wars elude their formal boundaries, see Paul Saint Amour's *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (2015) and Kathleen Belew's *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (2018).

at war. And, uniforms or not, we must fight (Denby 96-7). The novel, like the typewriter, is a weapon with which one can fight right-wing paramilitaries. In other words, *The Catacombs* frames the novel as a weapon in an ideological battle that is as essential to stamping out imperialism as the tank.

Importantly, this weaponized novel is masculine in form. Early in the novel, Bill describes “writing a novel about Doris” as a means of taking “possession of her soul” (Denby 46). Later, Doris herself confirms Bill’s supposition: “Ever since Bill Denby told me he was writing a novel about me ... it’s as if somehow he’s taken possession of my mind” (Denby 105). This possession is formal; midway through the text, Doris describes the kind of novel she would write and the novel later includes a letter which Doris never sends (Denby 89; 99-107). In other words, Doris’ writing is included in, but subordinated to, Denby’s postmodern experiment. As a result, the novel itself possesses Doris’ writing just as Bill’s writing possesses her mind. In *The Catacombs*, William Denby valorizes novels that subordinate women’s writing and thinking to men’s writing for their ability to fight states’ racist distributions of violence.

This valorization of masculinist novels for their ability to critique state violence is not limited to the 1960s novels themselves. Literary critics have also valorized these internationalist novels and their representations of state violence precisely for their ability to elude state censorship. This is most obvious in the reception of William Gardner Smith’s 1963 novel *The Stone Face*. Though out of print now, the novel was well-read by and in conversation with canonical African American novelists. Baldwin, for instance, critiqued the novel’s representation of the means for progress for African American politics in *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone* (Baldwin 331). Smith’s novel itself

represents police violence against its African American male protagonist, Simeon, in ways that resemble both the violence against Fish in Wright's *The Long Memory* (Smith and Wright were friends while living in Paris) and in ways that resemble the violence against Solly in *And Then We Heard the Thunder* (Smith 39-42). *The Stone Face*, in other words, is enmeshed in the midcentury African American novel as a tradition.

In Smith's novel, police violence regulates colonized men's economic position across the globe. Early in the novel, Simeon, an African American expat living in France, recalls his own experience of police violence in America and then inadvertently causes the Parisian police to attack an Algerian man for harassing a white woman (Smith 52). The next day, an Algerian man who witnessed the incident asks Simeon,

How does it feel to have the roles reversed, eh? How does it feel to be the white man for a change? ... We're the niggers here! Know what the French call us--*bicot, melon, raton, nor'af*. That means *nigger* in French (Smith 56-7).

Here, Smith portrays Algerians in France and African Americans in America as analogous in that they occupy the same position with respect to the countries in which they reside. Though transit makes their positions fungible—Simeon in France receives the benefits of being an expat, and the Algerian man relates that in America he was treated as though he were white—the analogy suggests each ought to understand the other's predicament. Later in the novel, Ahmed tells Simeon,

Half of these [Algerian] men are out of jobs. The lucky ones who work are laborers; they dig ditches and do other things the French don't want to do. Cheap labor.

Many Algerians in Algeria, Smith continues, live on the small amounts of money that Algerians living in France send home (Smith 89). Following the analogy's logic, African

Americans and Algerians are similar in that both constitute a marginalized group of laborers. This position is, importantly, gendered. As Simeon emphasizes time and again, there are no Algerian women in Paris because, as Ahmed puts it, “They’d be an expense here” (Simeon 89). Consequently, in Smith’s novel, police violence dispossesses Algerian and African American men.³⁹

This violence, in *The Stone Face*, is an extension of ongoing wars. When Simeon first witnesses the police attacking an Algerian man, a friend says, “There’s a war on in Algeria, remember?” (Smith 37-8). This characterization of France as another front on which the Algerian war is waged becomes particularly clear when Smith represents the 1961 Paris Massacre of Algerians. The incident occurred on October 1st, 1961, when Algerians in Paris protested the war and the curfew for Algerians in France, and Parisian police attacked them for protesting. In Smith’s novel, Simeon watches the assaults as they unfold: The police operate like a military force, separated into “combat groups” that divide and conquer, while the rearguards maintain formation to flank the Algerians. Considered in the context of Smith’s earlier economic description, the police appear to be a military unit deployed in Paris, as part of the ongoing Algerian War, to regulate Algerians’ economic position. For Shu-Mei Shih in “Race and Relation” (2016), Simeon’s choice to observe the massacre enables his participation in the world-historical event that was decolonization. Shih writes,

the Algerian experience of French colonialism becomes a trigger for Simeon to view the situation of blacks in the United States as an internal form of colonialism. In this way, the novel brings the U.S. into the global decolonial arc of the 1960s. Simeon exemplifies the meaning of relational

³⁹ As Tyler Stovall writes, William Gardner Smith upheld this position in his journalism as well (Stovall 2004 305).

comparison: a kind of horizontal relationality that strives for ethical proximity with and among others (Shih 143).

The military, colonial warfare Simeon witnesses in the streets of Paris, ultimately, recasts violence in the United States as a counterrevolutionary response to American decolonization. In this way, Smith's novel represents relating to global decolonization in such a way that implicates America as a key step in ending state violence against African Americans

After this revelation, Simeon comes to see local violent rebellion as the means for ending global state violence. In the process, Simeon instrumentalizes military violence against women of color to compel men into action. During the massacre, Simeon witnesses a policeman attacking a mother and her baby. "Simeon stared realizing that he was weeping," writes Smith, "feeling those blows against his own body" (Smith 201-3). Here, Smith transforms police violence against an unnamed woman and her child into a depiction of Simeon's empathy, a focalization that continues when Simeon looks at the police officer's face and sees the face of the police officer who attacked him in America. Then Simeon intervenes and fights the cop to protect the woman. After the officers arrest Simeon, he realizes that he struck "at the face."

the face of the French cop, the face of Chris, of Mike [the police officer who beat Simeon in an unnamed town], of the sailor, the face of the Nazi torturer at Buchenwald and Dachau, the face of the hysterical mob at Little Rock, the face of the Afrikaner bigot and the Portuguese butcher in Angola, and, yes, the black faces of Lumumba's murderers--they were all the same face. Wherever this face was found, it was his enemy; and whoever feared, or suffered from, or fought against this face was his brother. (Smith 205-6)

As William Maxwell writes of the scene in *F B Eyes* (2015), "The modern Gorgon of the 'Stone Face,' Smith's master icon of racism everywhere, must be resisted in a specific,

familiar somewhere” (Maxwell 253). Consequently, Simeon decides to return to the United States because “America’s Algerians were back there, fighting a battle” (Smith 210). The only hope of undoing state violence for African Americans, Smith’s novel seems to suggest, is to take part in an anti-colonial battle in the same way that the Algerians do. In *Against Race*, Paul Gilroy reads Simeon’s choice to return to America to fight with African Americans as a repudiation of diaspora (Gilroy 2000 323-4). Yet this interpretation overlooks that African Americans are described as always already diasporic throughout the 1960s novels in general and in *The Stone Face* in particular. African-Americans are, to paraphrase Toni Cade Bambara in “Working at it in Five Parts, always already cosmopolitan (Bambara 44). Consequently, when Simeon decides to ally with America’s Algerians to end state violence in anti-colonial battle on American soil, Smith is representing a diasporic and global violent struggle, waged locally, as the means for ending state violence.

The novel as a genre plays a key role in enabling such solidarity. The French government censored any representation of the Paris massacre of Algerians in 1961, such that it was rarely covered by journalism of the day and, indeed, little covered in French until the 1991 publication of Jean-Luc Einaudi’s *La Bataille de Paris*. Fictionality, as I note in the introduction, evolved to evade such censorship, and the French state’s censorship did not extend to American publishers, both of which enabled Smith to write an English-language representation of the massacre in fiction. Accordingly, scholars writing on black internationalism have valorized *The Stone Face* for its ability to capture that which state censorship sought to repress. Consider the writings of one of the first writers to return to African American diasporic writing: Tyler Stovall. In his preface to

the novel, Stovall notes that Smith observed the day's events and, as a result, the novel represents the massacre with near journalistic precision, though of course journalists could not represent the events at all (Stovall 2004 307). In other words, fictionality enabled the novel to be more like non-fiction than non-fiction could. In "The Fire This Time" (2000), Stovall elaborates,

Given the silence that has until recently surrounded this massacre, it is interesting to note that two of the best accounts of it are presented by novelists [Smith and Didier Daenickx] ... It is a prime example of an event repressed from the national consciousness as history returning as alternative narrative. (Stovall 2000 196)

Following Stovall's lead, several critics in a variety of fields (including Gilroy, Kristin Ross, Michael Rothberg and, more recently, Lia Brozgal and Celeste Moore) insist that *The Stone Face* is important because it is one of the first representations of the October massacre. Given the incident's centrality to Simeon's embracing of global anti-colonial solidarity enacted on local grounds, these critics simultaneously valorize the novel's fictionality for enabling anti-colonial solidarity and action.⁴⁰

Yet *The Stone Face* repeatedly reminds that the stories novels ought tell are men's and the people with political agency are colonized men. This is the case even where the novel represents state violence against women. Earlier in the novel, when Simeon first meets two Algerian women who fought in the war, Ahmed urges one to tell Simeon about the torture she experienced. She refuses, the two women leave the room, and then Ahmed

⁴⁰ For more on the censorship surrounding the incident, see Jean-Luc Einaudi's *La Bataille de Paris* (1991), Daniel A. Gordon's "World Reactions to the 1961 Paris Pogrom" (2001), Jim House and Neil Macmaster's *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror and Memory* (2006), and Jean-Paul Brunet's "Police Violence in Paris, October 1961: Historical Sources, Methods, and Conclusions" (2008). For more on the art that has represented the incident, see Lia Brozgal's "In the Absence of the Archive" (2014), Katelyn Knox's "Rapping Postmemory, Sampling the Archive: Reimaginign 17 October 1961" (2014), and Celeste Day Moore's "Ray Charles in Paris: Race, Protest, and the Soundscape of the Algerian War."

recounts in graphic detail the sexual torture they experienced (Smith 194-6). Their departure while a man explains their experience is paradigmatic for the novel as theorized by Smith: The novel ought to describe state violence against women because it compels men to action. Michael Rothberg, in *Multidirectional Memory* (2009), picks up on Smith's masculinism; he writes, "the novel also retreats into a gendered vision of memory that strips its own memory work of its political valences: it risks feminizing recall of the past while associating political action with a masculinist transcendence of oppression" (Rothberg 263). Rothberg's interpretation has important implications for understanding how *The Stone Face* positions the genre: The recall of memory alone is feminine and thus useless, but the writing down of memory so as to compel men to act is valorized. In other words, the very kind of novel that Smith valorizes subordinates women's experience and resistance of state violence with the effect of repressing both.

Further, *The Stone Face*, and the masculinist war novel writ large, repressed actual historical violence against and the resistance of colonized women. The Algerian War, for instance, was famously a war in which women fought the French. The Djamilia whose story Ahmed tells Simeon is likely an allusion to one of a number of famed FLN fighters named Djamilia (Djamilia Boupacha, Djamilia Bouherid, and Djamilia Bouazza). Bouherid and Bouazza were both tried and imprisoned for bombing a café, while Boupacha was tortured, the details of which were covered in Gisele Halimi and Simone de Beauvoir's 1962 book *Djamilia Boupacha: The Study of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl which Shocked Liberal French Opinion*. At the very moment in which Smith's novel brings into view the history of persecution and resistance of Algerian women—a novel which literary critics valorize for its ability to capture that which

journalists and historians could not represent for twenty years—it simultaneously obscures that history by subordinating the famous Djamilas to men’s speech and action. This is paradigmatic of the 1960s masculinist African-American war novels, be they domestic or international wars, writ large: The genre that these novelists claim yields the ability to represent state violence, ultimately, worked toward the repression of the history of women’s experience of and resistance to state violence.

As I have tried to argue in this section, the 1960s novelists represented the novel as a weapon in the war against international state violence in such a way that repressed state violence against women. They valorized fictionality for its ability to capture that which could not be depicted in other genres (like history) or mediums (like newspapers). Some claimed the novel took part in an ideological battle that ran parallel to physical confrontations, while others represented the novel as recruiting more soldiers to armed struggle. In both cases, these novelists collaborated in their insistence that novels ought to subordinate women’s experience of and struggles against state violence to men’s novel writing. As I argued in my reading of *The Stone Face*, they did so by gendering memory and history itself. By feminizing memory and storytelling for the sake of recall and talking, and masculinizing memory and storytelling in the cases that it led to action, these novels denigrated memory and valorized action. In the process, these novels reveal that gender is not simply a product of history but constitutes it; gender mediates the historian’s ability to see that which is in front of them. It is not only the case that what is in the archive that structures knowledge; though there are vast archival absences, gender’s mediation can hide the historian’s object of study even when the archive teems with that object, as these novels teem with representations of women of color

experiencing and resisting state violence at the very same time that they repress that history.

The premier 1960s means of mediating in such a way that repressed this history was, as I have argued, subordination. To borrow Jameson's language, subordination was an imagined solution to a contradiction between women's experience of or agency in fighting state violence and black men's experience, political agency or novel writing. Whereas women in history did both experience and resist global state violence, the 1960s African American novel insisted that men's experience of and resistance to global state violence was the prime mover in the conflict. But subordination could not fully resolve that contradiction. Those scenes representing women's experience of, resistance to, and theorization of state violence remain in these masculinist novels. They can be read against the grain. As we will see in the next section, this lack of resolution opened new horizons for novelistic representations of state violence.

The Soldier's Stare

As I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, the turn to the global and to war led the novelists to represent state violence against colonized women and their resistance to such violence. The masculinist 1960s novels tried to subordinate accounts of this violence and resistance in ways that privileged men's experience of, agency to resist, and writing about state violence. Yet these masculinist novels did not only work toward repressing historical events and subplots in their own novels. They also aimed to subordinate other novels' accounts of state violence. In the very same decade, novelists like Paule Marshall, Amiri Baraka, and Rosa Guy began to offer more complicated

accounts of the relationship between gender and state violence than the 1950s novels had offered. Against the masculinist 1950s and 1960s novels, these novelists began to represent state violence as producing gender-specific brutalities, like sexual violence. The contest in traditions—between the masculinist representations of police violence and the incipient Black Feminist traditions—would have a long-lasting impact on the Black Feminist novel writ large.

I will leave the discussion of those transitional texts that contested the masculinist tradition—Amiri Baraka’s *The System of Dante’s Hell* (1965), Rosa Guy’s *Bird at my Window* (1965), and Paule Marshall’s *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969)—for the following chapter, where I begin the investigation of Black Feminism’s effort to counter the masculinist novel’s repression that will sustain the rest of this dissertation. But I do want to note, here, that though the Black masculinist novels lost the contest for aesthetic clout, they did win the contest for the gendering of police violence. They were not alone in their effort, and their victory was pyrrhic; not only did their aesthetic forms fall out of favor but also their critiques of state violence were, for many years, forgotten in much the same way that their novels were. I have returned to these texts, however, to recover not only their critiques but also their influence upon Black feminism. For the remainder of the chapter, I want to provide one brief example of the payoff of returning to these masculinist war novels by foregrounding the ways that they influenced representations of the Black soldier—the central victim of police violence and resister of state violence in 1960s African American Social Realism—in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*.

Though the novel’s plot begins with Shadrack’s experience of World War I, and though its temporal setting revolves around two World Wars, few scholars consider the

influence of African American war novels on *Sula*. Yet if one looks closer, wars in general and the black masculinist war novels of the preceding decade structure the text and the relationship around which the text revolves: Nel and Sula's friendship. As a child, Nel rides Jim Crow on a train with her mother, Helene, at which point a train conductor harasses Helene for being on the wrong car. Helene looks away from the conductor and sees two soldiers watching. Helene explains that she made a mistake, the conductor chastises her, and Helene smiles in deference to the conductor, hoping to diffuse the situation.

The two black soldiers, who had been watching the scene with what appeared to be indifference, now looked stricken. Behind Nel was the bright and blazing light of her mother's smile; before her the midnight eyes of the soldiers.

When the conductor leaves, Helene looks "to see whether any of the men would help her put the suitcases in the overhead rack. Not a man moved." After they sit down opposite the soldiers, Nel looks away. "She felt both pleased and ashamed to sense that these men," Morrison writes, "were bubbling with a hatred for her mother that had not been there in the beginning ... She wanted to make certain that no man ever looked at her that way" (Morrison 20-2). Here, Morrison refuses to explain what the soldiers feel, but the critically and popularly acclaimed African American novels of the past decade have already contributed to and circulated the cultural script of what the soldiers think such their thoughts are is interpretable. The soldiers view such racist harassment of a black woman as their own emasculation, and witnessing Helene defer to the conductor reinforces their belief that they have political agency, not Helene. Instead of valorizing them, Morrison criticizes the soldiers, not only for their inaction in the face of Jim Crow

but also for their petty contempt, which leads them to leave Helene to stow her luggage herself. Morrison may not characterize state violence as a problem that afflicts women and that women can abolish—the key object of study in my dissertation so far—but she, much like Sarah Wright, does critique the ways that the masculinist characterization of state violence for legitimating men’s sexism at the very same time that she privileges Nel’s subjectivity. Further, by leaving their thoughts undescribed, Morrison creates one of the absences that structure the text according to Deborah McDowell in her foundational argument about *Sula* in *The Changing Same* (1995). “The gaps in the text,” McDowell writes, “allow for the readers participation in the creation of the meaning of the text.” These gaps are not all equal in importance; by lingering with Nel’s perspective, Morrison subordinates the soldier’s self-valorization to Nel and Helene’s subjugation. In so doing, she subordinates the legacy of the black masculinist war novels to the burgeoning Black Feminist novel.

The subordination of the black masculinist novel goes on to structure Nel and Sula’s friendship. From reviews of the novel through McDowell’s description of Nel and Sula as doubles in *The Changing Same* (1995) up to Quashie’s argument that the two self-fashion together in opposition to the world in *The Sovereignty of Quiet* (2014), much has been written about the ways in which Nel and Sula co-constitute each other and the text. This attention is assuredly deserved, but I want to suggest that we can better understand their relationship by considering the subordinated influence of the black masculinist novel, which arises when Nel returns to Ohio and thinks of the trip. “It had been an exhilarating trip but a fearful one,” Morrison writes. “She had been frightened of the soldiers’ eyes on the train,” among other things, “[b]ut she had gone on a real trip and

now she was different.” Prompted by this realization, Nel looks in the mirror—the scene of interpellation *par excellence*—inspects her appearance, and whispers, “I’m me.”

Morrison continues

But that was before she met Sula, the girl she had seen for five years at Garfield Primary but never played with, never knew, because her mother said that Sula’s mother was sooty. The trip, perhaps, or her new found me-ness gave her the strength to cultivate a friend in spite of her mother (Morrison 29).

Key to the trip and her “new found me-ness,” of course, is Nel’s encounter with and fear of the “soldiers’ eyes.” Nel’s experience of being watched by the soldiers influences her relationship with Sula, just as the black masculinist war novel influences Morrison’s.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the famous scene in which Nel walks in on Sula having sex with her husband, Jude. Nel narrates,

And if only you [Jude] had not looked at me the way the soldiers did on the train ... And even when you began to talk, I couldn’t hear because I was worried about you not knowing that your fly was open and scared too because your eyes looked like the soldiers’ that time on the train when my mother turned to custard (Morrison 105-6).

At the very moment that Nel and Sula’s relationship schisms, Nel thinks Jude looks at her with the same contempt that the soldiers did when they watched Helene defer to a Jim Crow conductor to protect herself and her daughter. While that earlier scene foregrounds that the tragedy of black men’s masculinism is that it leads black men to disdain black women, this scene foregrounds the ways in which such masculinism sews conflict amongst women. By refusing to present Jude’s perspective, Morrison subordinates Jude’s thoughts to black masculinism’s injuring of Nel and the influence of the black masculinist novel to the structure of her own. “*Sula* is a novel of interiority,” as Quashie argues (Quashie 124), but it is so because it is defined in opposition to the social realist

novel's emphasis on (state or anti-state) action. This opposition, I am arguing, structures the relationship at the center of the novel and the structure of *Sula* itself.

Sula is thoroughly influenced by war novels, but its Black Feminist sensibilities are articulated through a refusal of the generic conventions of the prior decade's African American war novels, a refusal that I recover and term influence. Its chapters revolve around World Wars: The first titled chapter is dated 1919, the end of World War I, and the first chapter of part II is dated 1937, the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War that led into World War II. Given the importance of military conflict to the novel's chapter titles, and given the insistent representation of African Americans as colonized in 1960s African American literature and political thought, I read the final chapter's title—1965—as representing that year in which the Voting Rights Act was passed as a key battle in an anti-colonial war and the Civil Rights Movement as a front in that war. “We was girls together,” Nel says near the end of the chapter, in one of the most famous lines in African American literature. Why was? The reason given in the plot is that now she is older and Sula is dead. Yet the past-tense framing of their immaturity reminds, as Jed Esty documents at length in *Unseasonable Youth* (2011), that colonial powers often represented colonized people and their countries as not yet grown. Nel and Sula were girls both because of their age and because of their being colonized subjects according to the 1960s African American novels. Nel was a girl but is now a woman; African Americans were immature but now, at the climax of the abbreviated Civil Rights Movement, are mature. Even though Morrison subordinates the influence of the African American war novel, Nel's famous final lines, about which much has been written, and

the novel itself could not have been written without the influence of the 1960s African American war novel.

Inattention to the midcentury Black masculinist novel's account of state violence has led to repeated misreadings of *Sula* and, I will suggest in the next chapter, Black Feminism writ large. These misunderstandings have arisen most obviously in interpretations of Plum's death. After returning from the war, Plum becomes addicted to drugs. Of his postwar state, his mother, Eva, later says, "I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he wouldn't ... so I just thought of a way he could die like a man" (Morrison 71-2). In other words, Plum returns from the war emasculated, so Eva kills him. The importance of the relationship between Plum's military service and his inability to "be a man" becomes clearer when considered in the context of the many novels of the preceding decade. In those novels, war is where Black adult males, long emasculated and infantilized in America, expect to become men but instead become further emasculated and infantilized. This, we can infer, is Plum's experience, which led him to addiction and led Eva to kill him.

Yet scholarly interpretations of this scene do not account for the influence of black masculinist novel. In "A Black Man's Place in Black Feminist Criticism" (1996), Michael Awkward interprets Eva's murder as proof that Eva has capitulated "to hegemonic male power" (Awkward 378). Against Awkward, David Ikard argues, in *Breaking the Silence* (2007), that Eva murders Plum because "he fails to recognize and appreciate the value of her self-sacrifice," a valuation of herself that demonstrates that she has internalized the patriarchal view and function of black women (Ikard 20-1). Disagreeing with both interpretations, Valerie Smith and Amanda Putnam, respectively,

describe Eva's act as a means by which Eva "can rescue him" and as "rebellion and a form of resistance" (Smith 2012 35; Putnam 2011 36-7). From what does Eva rescue Plum? Against what does Eva revolt? The state, whose emasculation and infantilization is so thoroughly chronicled in the 1960s Black masculinist novel that Morrison need not ever describe Plum's wartime devastation. Accounting for the influence of the midcentury Black masculinist novel, here, makes clear that Eva's murder is not a deferral to patriarchy, as Awkward and Ikard suggest, and clarifies the scope and object of the rebellion to which Smith and Putnam refer. And by describing Eva's revolt rather than the men's, Morrison rebels against the strictures of the previous decade's novels, providing a new vision of what a war novel could be.

Importantly, Morrison herself has obscured the influence of midcentury Black Leftists, forgotten due to the cultural Cold War, on her own work. In her 2004 foreword to the novel, Morrison writes,

In the fifties, when I was a student, the embarrassment of being called a politically minded writer was so acute, the fear of critical derision for channeling one's creativity toward the state of social affairs so profound, it made me wonder: Why the panic? ... Conventional wisdom agrees that political fiction is not art; that such work is less likely to have aesthetic value because politics—all politics—is agenda and therefore its presence taints aesthetic production ... in 1969 it [conventional wisdom] placed an inordinate burden on African American writers (Morrison xi).

Which writers, in Morrison's account, faced this burden? In the foreword, she refers to Jean Toomer, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and Zora Neale Hurston, but no other African American writers. Aside from Richard Wright, she mentions none of the African American Social Realists whose careers the label of propagandistic political writing, and the Communist Party with which it was associated, did destroy: William

Gardner Smith, Lloyd Brown, John Killens, and so on. In her preface, Morrison herself obscures the influence of social realism and of Marxism on this canonical Black Feminist text. But as I have endeavored to demonstrate, here, *Sula* as a text could not have existed without the midcentury African American war novel. By returning to those texts, scholars can better understand Morrison's 1970s novels.

The same is true of 1970s and 1980s Black Feminist novels writ large. These texts were formed in an opposition that is encoded into the form and content of the novels themselves. Returning to midcentury African-American novels' representations of state violence is not only significant for foregrounding the ways that it worked to repress historical accounts of colonized women's experience of, resistance to, and theorization about state violence; it is also significant for better understanding the place of the state in Black Feminism. As we will see in the following chapters, the anti-colonial and labor-centric critiques of police violence from the 1950s and 1960s—Marx's old mole, I have called those critiques elsewhere—lived on in the 1970s and 1980s Black Feminist novels. Consequently, reading these Black Feminist novels in the context of the midcentury masculinist state violence representations, ultimately, brings to the fore the little discussed account of economics in and influence of Marxism on Black Feminist novels. It is to these novels that we will now turn.

CHAPTER 3: They Want Me To Tell It Over and Over Again: The Feminization of Representations of Police Violence in 1970s Black Feminist Novels

For people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking ... It is this language, and the grace and pleasure with which they played with it, that I find celebrated, refined, critiqued in the works of writers like Morrison and Walker.

- Barbara Christian, “The Race for Theory” (1987), 2

Fairly soon after the boom in Black Feminist writing in the 1970s, scholars understood Black Feminist literature to be both aesthetic and theoretical. This reception gave rise to a body of critical texts so foundational that they need not be cited; their influence suffuses the field like the air in a room. But some found this scholarship lacking. In her 1999 book *Shadowboxing*, which begins with the oft-cited Barbara Christian passage that constitutes this chapter’s epigraph, Joy James argued that the critical and popular dissemination of Black Feminist literature had watered down its radicalism. In the 1980s, she writes, “black feminisms became best known, and taught, through memoir, fiction and film that examined gender conflict and community relations, but often in abstraction to political radicalism that confronted state or corporate systems.” Even where those works harbored radical politics, she continued, “racial sexual fetish in a mass-market” undermined their radicalism (James 10). The anti-state and anti-corporate politics of Black Feminism had to be sought elsewhere to become visible. In 1999 when she published *Shadowboxing*, James contended that Black Feminism’s radical theorizing could best—or, perhaps, only—be seen in the autobiographies of militants.

Yet we are no longer living at the tail end of the Clinton years. Rather than a budget surplus, we live in the midst of rising unemployment and debt. Instead of racially coded denigrations of welfare queens and calls for so-called race-neutral tough-on-crime policies, interrupted by commercial breaks of multicultural United Colors of Benneton Ads, the right in the country has embraced explicit and overt racism and xenophobia, even as some conservative politicians decry the storming of the Capitol and seek to distance themselves from violent right-wing organizations like the Proud Boys. Despite the rise of mass movements calling for the defunding of the police, police departments and unions in major cities across the country have lobbied for budget increases. Rather than neoliberalism, in short, we live in a time of neofascism, in which the racism on the right is buttressed by carceral racism from liberals, the latter having become so much of an open secret that even the Trump campaign sent out mailers advertising Joe Biden's support for the 1994 Crime Bill. In these different times, how might scholars and readers be able to see the politics of 1970s Black Feminist literature differently than they could in the 1990s?

Consider the decade that began the Black Feminist boom in writing: the 1970s. That decade lay at the nexus of the countervailing currents of abolitionist organizing and an expanding prison industrial complex. The 1970s saw the continuation of Nixon's War on Crime, the intensification of the Republican backlash to *Brown* in the courts, and the first uptick in incarceration rates that signaled the beginning of mass incarceration. "During the 1970s," Elizabeth Hinton summarizes in *From the War on Poverty to Mass Incarceration* (2016), "the diffusion of crime control techniques into the everyday lives of low-income African Americans intensified as all urban social programs were

increasingly integrated into the bureaucracies, institutions, and industries at the heart of the carceral state” (Hinton 16). Left with a sparse social safety net and increasingly persecuted by the state, Black radicals organized against prisons with even greater force. Their activities included the New Afrika Independence Movement’s rallies for political prisoners, the 1971 rebellion at Attica in response to the killing of George Jackson at San Quentin, and the publication of the Prison Research Education Action Project’s *Instead of Prisons: An Abolitionist Handbook* in 1976, among many other things. While prison expansion and the federal government’s persecution of Black Power activists led to the dismantling of much anti-carceral organizing by the 1990s, recent historical scholarship on the 1970s has reminded that the conflict was far from predetermined during that decade.⁴¹

This undetermined struggle coincided with and influenced the Black Feminist literary boom. As Brittney Cooper writes in *Beyond Respectability* (2017), 1970 saw the publication of a number of famed Black women’s texts, constituting “a veritable Black women’s literary renaissance ... At the same time, the placing of Angela Davis on the

⁴¹ For more on the New Afrika Independence Movement, see Edward Onaci’s *Free the Land: The Republic of New Afrika and the Pursuit of a Black Nation-State* (2020). For more on the Attica Rebellion, see Heather Ann Thompson’s *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and its Legacy*. For more on anti-carceral organizing in the period, see Angela Davis’ *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (1974), Assata Shakur’s *Assata: An Autobiography* (1988), Dylan Rodriguez’s *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (2005), Donna Murch’s *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (2010), Joshua Martin and Waldo Bloom’s *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (2012), Dan Berger’s *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (2014), Lisa Corrigan’s *Prison Power: How Prison Influenced the Movement for Black Liberation* (2016), Robyn Spencer’s *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (2016), Ashley Farmer’s *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (2017). For more on carceral expansion in the 1970s, see also Joao Costa Vargas’ *Catching Hell in the City of Angels: Life and Meanings of Blackness in South Central Los Angeles* (2006), Kristin Bumiller’s *In An Abusive State: How Neoliberalism Appropriated the Movement Against Sexual Violence* (2008), Donna Murch’s “Crack in Los Angeles: Crisis, Militarization, and Black Response to the Late Twentieth-Century War on Drugs” (2015), Andrea Ritchie’s *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color* (2017), Laurence Ralph’s *The Torture Letters: Reckoning with Police Violence* (2020).

FBI's Ten Most Wanted List made clear the violent material conditions that Black women faced and the consequences of having Black radical politics" (Cooper 130). That same famed abolitionist, Angela Davis, would garner both widespread support for her trial and critical acclaim for her autobiography, edited by Toni Morrison and published in 1974. Morrison's publication of this early prison abolitionist text was not an aberration. In the same period, Morrison purchased, edited, and published the manuscripts of several anti-carceral Black thinkers, including George Jackson's *Blood in my Eye* (1971), Huey Newton's *To Die for the People* (1972), and June Jordan's *Things That I Do in the Dark* (1977), an anthology that includes a poem valorizing the Attica rebellion, "Poem Against the State (Of Things)." Beyond these writers, Morrison published several others persecuted by the prison industrial complex: Muhammad Ali, whom authorities attempted to incarcerate for draft dodging, Wole Soyinka, who was incarcerated for political organizing in Nigeria, and Henry Dumas, whose work Morrison published after the police killed him. While Morrison's publication of Dumas seems like an obvious rebuke of police violence, her championing of Ali is especially illuminating: When Ali was worried about his safety at a reading of *The Greatest: My Own Story* (1975), Morrison did not call the police for a security detail; rather, she hired the Nation of Islam to protect him. An abolitionist lens guided Morrison's work in publishing and seeped into her novels. At this historical distance from the mass marketing of Black Feminist literature and with the aid of recent innovations in both literary criticism and critical prison studies, the anti-carceral efforts of Morrison's work in particular and 1970s Black Feminist literature generally are more visible to scholars now than ever before.⁴²

⁴² For more on Morrison's editing, see Hilton Als' "Toni Morrison and Ghosts in the House" (2003),

By returning to the representations of police violence in 1970s Black Feminist novels, I aim to recover the anti-carceral critiques and abolitionist imaginary of 1970s Black Feminism. As throughout the dissertation, I attend to the long-lasting mid-century Marxist influence to unearth Black Feminism's economic and state politics. The classical accounts of the rise of Black Feminism claim that Black Feminists emerged in opposition to sexism from Black radicals and racism from white feminists. Yet Black Feminism also bore a careful economic critique of both groups. As Benita Roth writes in *Separate Roads to Feminism* (2003), "Black feminists attributed the limitations of both movements in large part to their failure to maintain consistent class critiques of injustice" (Roth 76). According to Roth, Black Feminists believed a careful attention to class would have required a more careful interrogation of the position of Black women. Class was both a vehicle to arrive at Black Feminism and a contribution of Black Feminist thought to 1970s Black Radicalism. This careful attention to political economy, one which remains little discussed in literary histories of 1970s Black Feminism, came to impact 1970s Black Feminist novels' representations of state violence and the means of abolishing it.⁴³

As I will argue in this chapter, 1970s Black Feminist novels came to reconsider the relationship between state violence, gender, and political economy in their representations of police violence against Black women. These novels built upon changes that had begun as early as the 1960s in novels like Amiri Baraka's *The System of Dante's*

Cheryl Wall's "Toni Morrison, Editor and Teacher" (2007), Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah's "The Radical Vision of Toni Morrison" (2015), and Joy James' "The Other Toni Morrison" (2019).

⁴³ For another canonical account of the rise of Black Feminism, see Kimberly Springer's *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (2005). For an account of the rise of Black Feminist literary criticism, see Farah Griffin's "That the Mothers May Soar and the Daughters May Know Their Names: A Retrospective of Black Feminist Literary Criticism" (2007). For more recent accounts, see Brittney Cooper's *Beyond Respectability* (Cooper 116-132) and Keisha Blain's *Set the World on Fire* (2019).

Hell (1965) and Paule Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1968), which represented police violence as sexual violence. Building on these depictions, 1970s Black Feminist novels represented sexual police violence as producing lasting damages to Black women's labor, though that labor regulation was only a means of structuring Black women's femininity, sexuality, and subjecthood. Their attention to so-called private concerns like sexuality led these novelists to represent abolition as a process that transforms both the public and the private spheres, such that abolition required not only the destruction of prisons but also the uprooting of civilian sexism. And, according to these authors, the novel was a premier genre for working toward this change because fictionality enabled them to represent the interiority of women assaulted by the police—an interiority, these authors suggest, that testified to the lasting damage of the prison industrial complex and thereby critique prisons—and because fictionality enabled the imagining of non-carceral structures of governance that could supplant the prison industrial complex. These affordances led 1970s Black Feminist novelists, I argue, to represent the novel as a technology that could transform the public's ideas about prisons in such a way that would bring about abolition.

Attending to these novels' representation of state violence provides new insights into Black Feminism's much-discussed theories of the public-private divide. As Robin Kelley writes in *Freedom Dreams* (2002), the work of Black Feminism “exposes the false wall erected between public and private” (Kelley 138). For Candice Jenkins in *Private Lives, Proper Relations: Regulating Black Intimacy* (2007), this attention to Black women's porous public-private lives led to new considerations of intimacy. 1970s Black Feminist Literature, in particular, exposed Black women's intimate life as a means of

“highlighting the structures of vulnerability” that earlier Black literature concealed; this display of private vulnerabilities insisted that the “opposition between politics and the racial intimate” is false (Jenkins 23; 32). More recently, Trimiko Melancon has expanded on Jenkins’ and Kelley’s arguments in *Unbought and Unbossed* (2014), arguing that 1970s and 1980s Black Feminist writers represent Black women “transgress[ing] racial/gender/sexual boundaries” in ways that both expose the racist sexist distribution of vulnerability to Black women and imagine new models of sexuality that might instantiate new political systems (Melancon 2; 5-11). As I argue in this chapter, the relationship between politics and intimacy rose to the fore especially in 1970s Black Feminist representations of police violence, in which the police not only sexually harassed Black women but their attacks also yielded lasting damages to Black women’s private lives. Where earlier scholars have insisted that Black Feminist writing exposed the falseness of the binary between the public and the private, I argue that the premier means through which they did so was in their accounts of state violence.

Returning to these accounts of state violence corrects earlier literary histories that overlooked the lingering influence of Marxism and midcentury Black Leftist novels on 1970s Black Feminist literary production. It’s worth noting that this overlooking was once warranted. In “That the Mothers May Soar and the Daughters May Know Their Names” (2007), Farah Griffin summarizes the project of early Black Feminist critics as follows:

The first of these tasks was archaeological: In order to construct a tradition that led to contemporary writers such as Morrison and Walker, critics charged themselves with locating, teaching, and writing about earlier “lost” works by African American women. Second, they created a critical vocabulary and framework for discussing works by African American

women. Third, they theorized that body of work as well as the critical practices of black feminist critics. (Griffin 488)

Because sexism had so long marginalized Black women's literature, early Black feminist critics worked on recovering Black women's writing as a means of counteracting its prior effacement. This work was necessary at the time, when chronicling men's influence risked only further marginalizing Black women's literature. Yet this recovering of Black women's writing as a standalone tradition had the unintended consequence of obscuring the influence of masculinized midcentury Black Leftist literature. Beyond early Black Feminist critics, more recent scholars have also overlooked the influence of midcentury novelists on 1970s literature. In *Imagine the Sound* (2015), for instance, Carter Mathes argues that writers of the long Black Arts Movement (1965-1980) departed from midcentury social realism (Mathes 10-11). I agree that the 1970s saw a departure from Social Realist writing—one that was explicitly oppositional—but rebellion does not require absence. As GerShun Avilez writes in *Radical Aesthetics and Modern Black Nationalism* (2016), Black Nationalist “artists and activists took the communist philosophical principles and mobilizing strategies that they had helped develop to groups committed to the Black Freedom struggle, supplying some of the political frameworks for radical organizations that would emerge in the 1960s” (Avilez 6). Just as CPUSA ideas influenced the Black Nationalists he discusses, so too did they come to influence 1970s Black Feminist novelists and especially their representations of state violence. 1970s Black Feminist novelists incorporated these earlier analyses of state violence through a method akin to Avilez's “disruptive inhabiting:” the inhabiting of a discourse to foreground its potential at the same time as shoring up its limits (Avilez 12). As I will

argue in this chapter, 1970s Black Feminists inhabited 1950s and 1960s representations of police violence not only to foreground their sexism but also to revise their theories to account for the ways in which police violence also dispossessed Black women and regulated their colonial status.

This practice of revision sheds new light on the means by which scholars can work toward the effacement of state violence against Black women. As I note in my introduction, police violence has largely come to be considered a problem that afflicts only Black men. In the previous two chapters, I have chronicled the ways in which midcentury Black novelists contributed to this masculinization and thereby repressed the historical memory of once famous cases of police violence against Black women. The repression of historical and contemporary accounts of police violence against Black women is not only archival, in other words; it is also cultural. By revising the masculinized police violence narrative, 1970s Black Feminist novelists work against this cultural repression from within the masculinized form itself. Returning to these revisions, consequently, both works against the contemporaneous cultural repression and models a practice which scholars can adopt in their efforts to reconsider the gender of police violence. With regard to the latter, the modeled scholarly practice is immanent revision: The inhabiting of discourses and analyses so as to revise their sexism or their other deficiencies. Doing so provides a means of producing radical theories of state violence that undermine sexism while simultaneously keeping alive still useful analyses of political economy, but it does more than retaining the baby while discarding the bathwater. It aims to transform radical culture, ideas, and scholarship from within, rather than hoping for a utopian radical break through which one can transcend all our

contemporary limitations, because such transcendence is impossible. Instead, this immanent revision of prior radical thought instantiates an abolitionist scholarly practice that recurs as a means of producing new analyses and abolitionist imaginaries to fit contemporary exigencies. This work is especially suited for literary critics because critics can attend to the communal knowledge production over time—to literary history—that both makes these revisions visible and that, as I argued in the introduction, is the site of the Black Radical Tradition. By inhabiting the discourses of prior radical traditions and revising them in the way that these novelists do, literary critics can, similarly, contribute to the effort to undermine the culture that upholds the prison industrial complex and, ultimately, to uproot them.

In this chapter, I chronicle the influence of midcentury representations of police violence on Black Feminism and Black Feminism's revision of midcentury representations of police violence in four sections. In the first, I track the ways in which 1970s Black Feminists revise earlier accounts of police violence as a kind of dispossession, representing the ways in which state violence comes to regulate Black women's labor as a means of regulating Black women's subjecthood more generally. In the second section, I chronicle the revision of earlier accounts of abolition; abolition in these accounts, is a total reordering of social relations, from the public-sphere destruction of prisons to the production of new private-sphere relations like romance. In the third section, I track the ways in which these Black Feminist novelists theorize the novel as the premier genre for articulating the interiority of Black women hurt by the prison industrial complex and for imagining abolitionist alternatives to the prison industrial complex. Finally, I end with a brief coda on James Baldwin's 1974 novel, *If Beale Street Could*

Talk to demonstrate the ways in which these Black Feminist novels provide a means of reinterpreting even explicitly masculinist accounts of state violence.

The Weight of Caring

The previous chapters chronicled a midcentury representation of police violence as giving rise to structural economic violence prevalent in Social Realist novels. In these accounts, dispossession targeted men in two ways: First, it provided lasting economic damage, and second, it reinforced colonial status and governance. These critiques of state violence did not disappear with the demise of the Social Realist novel and its masculinism. Rather, they came to influence critiques of police violence that considered its effects on women. This influence, ultimately, led a multitude of 1960s and 1970s novelists, not just self-identified Black Feminists, to represent police violence as dispossessing Black women of labor traditionally understood to be the province of Black women, including sex and domestic work. Because Black Feminism emerged in opposition to midcentury masculinism, these novels were formally opposed to the Social Realist emphasis on plot and action; consequently, the economic analyses appear in brief scenes. Returning to those moments provides both a better sense of their theories of the relationship between state violence, political economy, and gender as well as a better sense of the midcentury Social Realism's influence on the writing of the Black Feminist boom.

This expanded understanding of the relationship between gender and state violence began to creep through in the 1960s. This account of police violence's dispossession of Black women was elaborated within a global frame, as in Rosa Guy's

1965 novel, *Bird at my Window*. Though often considered a Black Arts writer, Guy was also a member of the Harlem Writer's Guild, where she learned alongside two preeminent Social Realists: John Oliver Killens and Sarah Wright. Her novel's tale of a Black G.I., Wade Williams, came out in the 1960s, in the midst of the boom in African American war writing described in the last chapter. Both her biography and her subject matter might suggest a return to midcentury masculinism. The novel's plot reinforces this inkling. In its representation of the police threatening to attack the young protagonist, Wade, for shining shoes in a white neighborhood, Guy's novel disseminates the 1950s critique that police violence regulates men's labor (Guy 47). And in its representation of white American soldiers attacking Wade for dating a white woman in France as a means of expanding "U.S. territory" and of Wade killing a superior officer in such a way that makes him feel "unshackled" (Guy 167; 173), Guy's novel reproduces both the 1960s critique that state violence assaults Black people globally and the representation of violent rebellion as the means for Black men to produce freedom. In *Bird at my Window*, Guy appears to critique state violence in ways that are consistent with the masculinist Social Realist critiques of police violence. Cheryl Higashida, in *Black Internationalist Feminism* (2011), has even argued that *Bird at my Window* reproduces the logic of the Moynihan Report in particular, writing that the report's "heteropatriarchal assessment of racial adversity" and demonization of Black mothers "permeates Guy's first novel" (Higashida 123). Yet a careful attention to her representation of state violence provides a more complicated picture.

Though a seemingly archetypal Black masculinist war novel, *Bird at my Window* does subtly suggest the state persecutes both Black women and men. Early in the

novel, Wade's sister, Faith, tells him she's dating a detective. To this, Wade responds, "She put faith in anybody. She better hope that faith don't kill her *as dead as she's gonna die*" (Guy 20 italics mine). Guy frames the violence to which Faith is exposed via romance as analogous to the violence Wade experiences. Midway through the novel, Wade and Faith attempt to deintegrate his school; when Wade approaches his Mom about his efforts, she warns, "when white folks get it in their heads that they don't want a black man to do something, ain't no use bucking them ... They'll kill you *as dead as you going to die*, and ain't nobody gonna touch them" (Guy 99). While his mother suggests state and state-sanctioned violence persecutes Black men, Guy's repetition of her phrase in Wade's language frames state violence as persecuting Black men and women. In this way, their mother's insinuation that police violence regulates Black people's agency extends to both Wade and Faith. Their subsequent incarceration in a juvenile facility corroborates this suggestion, while their gender-specific "rehabilitation" frames that violence as gendered but analogous. In this light, the soldiers persecuting Wade for dating a white woman is akin to the violence Wade worries that Faith will experience at the hands of the detective. Just as the soldiers' use of violence regulates Black men's sexuality, so too would the detective's potential violence against Faith, the novel suggests, regulate Black women's sexuality. Such analogic thinking within a global frame was a hallmark of African American war novels' representations of Black people as colonized and state violence as producing colonial governance. Read in this light, the police's violent regulation of Faith's sexuality is part of the broader global distribution of violence to colonized people. This, Guy suggests, includes and exceeds the use of police violence as dispossession that she describes earlier in the novel. As a result, *Bird at my*

Window ultimately provides a vision of state violence as regulating Black women's labor as part of the global effort of maintaining colonial and imperial hierarchies.

But 1960s Black writers did not only describe police violent dispossession of Black women as analogous to the harms that men experienced. They also suggested state violence against Black women was uniquely sexual. Consider the early Black Arts novel, *The System of Dante's Hell* (1965) by Amiri Baraka, a writer not known for progressive gender politics. A novel about a young Black man from New Jersey growing up and eventually serving in the Army, *The System of Dante's Hell* transposes Dante's *Inferno* onto Black modern life. This literary influence leads Wai Chee Dimock, in "Genre as World System: Epic and Novel on Four Continents" (2006), to claim Baraka's novel is exemplary of the ways that genres cross national boundaries, a transit that itself is evidence that literature ought to be analyzed as part of a world system (Dimock 97). This internationalist orientation is part and parcel of the 1960s African American war novel, a genre to which *The System of Dante's Hell* belongs. Yet where those novels circulated masculinist cultural scripts about state violence, Baraka offers a different analysis.

The System of Dante's Hell represents the police as using Black women's labor to justify their sexual violence. This depiction occurs in Circle 9, Bolgia 1 (in Dante's *Inferno*, where those who are treacherous to kin are punished). The narrator and several other black men are in a car with a dark-skinned woman in a wealthy neighborhood in New Jersey, where "some car full of negroes up there wd be spotted by the police." The narrator's fears that the police persecute Black men takes a turn when one of the narrator's friends tries to take off the unnamed woman's stockings. She rebuffs his advances, saying, "You boys don't know. How life is. How it takes you down. You don't

know ... Those ties and shirts ... Shit ... how hard a woman's life can be." After foregrounding their wealth, she reveals that she has an STI. One of the men pretends to be a police officer, reads her sores as proof that she is a sex worker, and threatens to arrest her as a means of coercing her into having sex. She yells for them to let her go, "and we all knew Montclair was like a beautifully furnished room and someone would hear and we would die in jail" (Baraka 113-20 ellipses in text). Bookended by two representations of the police attacking Black men, the scene's middle, in which the narrator's friend pantomimes being a police officer and tries to sexually assault this unnamed woman, represents police violence against Black women as sexual violence. At the same time, the novel depicts the police as legitimating their sexual assault by persecuting illegal and canonically feminized labor: Sex work. This scene, importantly, stands apart from the rest of the book not only in content but also in form. In his review of Baraka's novel for *The New York Times*, Emile Capouya describes the novel as eschewing novelistic conventions, with the exception of this scene, which resembles "conventional narrative" (Capouya). *The System of Dante's Hell* bears the influence of midcentury novels both in its economic analysis of police violence against Black women and in its formal similarity to those conventional Social Realist novels, but this influence is subordinated, cordoned off into its relatively small word count by its formal difference. By returning to that influence, the novel's critique of police violence as persecuting Black women sexually and justifying that sexual violence by reinforcing the stereotypical associations between Black femininity and sex work comes to the fore.

While Baraka's novel provides little insight into police violence's lasting damage to this woman, 1970s Black Feminist novels chronicle that lasting economic damage at

length. Such a consideration of state violence arises in Alice Walker's first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), a tale of a family of sharecroppers. In Walker's novel, the men of the family experience violence while working, which leads them to attack their wives to compel them to do care labor at home, such that the external racial distribution of labor structures the home. Their world, as Stéphane Robolin writes in *Grounds of Engagement: Apartheid-Era African-American and South African Writing* (2017), is "the 1920s rural landscape of racial dispossession," in which "land and architecture are not just signs of abstract social power, but also its brutal, material instruments" (Robolin 123). While these ingredients might have all the makings of a classic midcentury masculinist state violence narrative, in which men are victims of labor-related violence in public and women are victims of intimate partner violence in private, the novel's representation of police violence makes space for a reconsideration of the relationship between gender, labor, and state violence.

Grange's final representation of police violence provides the occasion for thinking about the relationship between state violence and labor gendered as feminine. After the titular Grange has renounced his violent ways by fostering his granddaughter, Ruth, Grange is dismayed to find that his son and Ruth's father, Brownfield, has become quite brutal. Grange wants custody over her to protect her from Brownfield, whereas Brownfield wants custody to wound Grange. During a courtroom fight for parental rights, Grange fears he will lose his Ruth, shoots him, and runs. When the police surround his home, he leaves Ruth in the house, presumably to protect her from any gunfire, and flees to the woods. The police follow and kill him. After Grange is shot, he says, "Oh, you poor thing, you poor thing" (Walker 1988 311). Who is Grange referring to here?

Walker's 1987 afterword suggests the "poor thing" is Ruth. Writing of the family who inspired the incident on which the novel is based, Walker describes going to school with the surviving daughter and offering her condolences. The daughter "barely responded."

The weight of caring for the household and for numerous siblings now rested on her. She was, like me, thirteen years old. She wondered aloud if they, the white prison authorities, the only kind there were and probably still are, in Eatonton, would let her father out of prison soon. He was the only means of support the family had. (Walker 1988 316)

Having lost her mother and father, the daughter becomes both the unpaid care laborer in the home and the public wage earner. The violence that occasioned this transformation, ultimately, structures her labor and her relationship to that labor. This, we can imagine, is the fate that awaits the fictionalized daughter, Ruth, in *Grange*. The "poor thing" Grange refers to is Ruth not just because the police have killed her guardian but also because that murder produces lasting economic damage. In *Grange*, Walker critiques police violence for compelling Black women not only to do private unwaged work but also public waged work, such that their wounds last long after the assault has ended.

In these novels, police violence's economic regulation is subordinated to its regulation of Black women's subjectivity, as seen most clearly in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Because the novel is primarily understood as an incest narrative, *The Bluest Eye* has, justifiably, given rise to many psychoanalytic readings of kinship and Black femininity. But *The Bluest Eye* is also a carceral story and the family unit at the novel's center is also structured by the state. Attending to state violence in the novel foregrounds that Morrison's work contained careful critiques of the prison industrial complex long before her late work, which scholars like Donald Pease and Yumi Lee have argued exemplify Morrison's anti-state-violence politics. Returning to the influence of

masculinist novels on her works, ultimately, provides the ability to recover the novel's account of the ways that state violence dispossesses Black women.⁴⁴

The prison industrial complex, in *The Bluest Eye*, regulates Black women's labor as part of its broader project of regulating the Black family. Its representation of police violence as dispossession arises midway through the novel, years before Pauline gives birth to Pecola, when she is working as a domestic for a white woman. One day, Cholly

comes there drunk wanting some money. When that white woman see him, she turned red. She tried to act strong-like, but she was scared bad. Anyway, she told Cholly to get out or she would call the police. He cussed her and started pulling on me. I would of gone upside his head, but I don't want no dealings with the police.

Why doesn't Pauline want to deal with the police? The answer may seem simple enough—the police may harm one of the Black people present—but whom does she fear they will harm? The 1950s novels would suggest that police presence would endanger Cholly, but Morrison does not say as much, leaving open the potential for police violence against Pauline. What is more, the threat of police intervention comes to structure not Cholly's labor but Pauline's. After the incident, her employer fires Polly and refuses to pay the eleven dollars that she owed Pauline. The potential of police violence dispossesses Pauline both of her labor and of her wages (Morrison 120-1). This dispossession takes on an even darker hue when considered in relation to the historical place of the domestic worker. Domestic workers were and continue to be excluded from the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, which guaranteed employees the right to unionize and to take part in other forms of labor-constituted collective action. As a domestic

⁴⁴ See, for instance, A. J. Yumi Lee's "Repairing Police Action After the Korean War in Toni Morrison's *Home*" (2020) and Donald Pease's "The Uncanny Return of Settler-Colonial Capitalism in Toni Morrison's *Home*" (2020).

worker, Pauline's labor is at the whims of her employer, of police violence, and of federal law. State violence regulates Black women's labor in *The Bluest Eye*, but it does so as part of disempowering them as laborers.

The prison industrial complex's persecution of Black women comes to affect even those who are too young to work, like Pecola. Within the first few chapters, Cholly commits a crime and is incarcerated. As a result, the county, presumably through some version of Child Protective Services, places Pecola temporarily in the Macteer household. Of Pecola and the rest of the family's condition, Morrison writes,

There is a difference between being put *out* and being put *outdoors*. If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go. The distinction was subtle but final. Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition. (Morrison 1970 16-8)

Pecola is put outdoors not only by Cholly, whom the narrator blames most, but also by the state's child welfare institutions. As Dorothy Roberts argues in *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare* (2001), the intervention of child welfare institutions into Black families is often a means of dispossessing Black mothers of their children; consequently, those institutions ought to be thought of as akin to, if not part of, the prison industrial complex. Viewed in this light, Pecola's relocation to the Macteer household foregrounds that state intervention contributes to the "metaphysical condition," to use Morrison's words, of Black womanhood, which for Pecola is a position of isolation. While I note in the next chapter's reading of *The Color Purple* that the state's participation in Black women's isolation also occurs through the coercion and regulation of unwaged care labor, here I want to foreground the relationship between the state intervention into Pecola's life and the threatened state intervention into Pauline's. Read in conjunction

with the prior scene, police violence does not simply regulate Black women's labor; rather, it does so as part of the state's larger project of isolating Black women from other Black women laborers and from their family.

Taking seriously the place of state violent regulation of Black women's labor and isolation sheds new light on the relationship between Pecola and Pauline, about which much has been written. Both Susan Willis, in "Eruptions of Funk" (1993), and Michael Awkward, in "The Evil of Fulfillment" (1993), contend that Pauline occupies, at times, a position similar to Pecola's. More recently, Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, in *Against the Closet: Black Political Longing and the Erotics of Race* (2011) has extended this argument through a psychoanalytic framework, describing Pecola's rape as "an inverted re-enactment of her birth" in which doctors physically violate Pauline (Abdur-Rahman 129-30). These scholars are correct in looking to Pecola's experience of incest to consider the similarity between Pecola and Pauline, and the position of Black women more broadly. Yet they have overlooked the ways in which state intervention also constitutes their gender. In Morrison's representation both of Pecola's relocation and the police's regulation of Pauline's labor, she foregrounds that the state persecutes and structures Black women's relation to their kin and to their gender, even though this state persecution is included in and exceeded by familial violence in the novel. By reading *The Bluest Eye* in the context of the earlier masculinist representations of police violence, I argue that Morrison's novel revises earlier masculinist accounts of police violence as dispossession to insist that that police violence regulates Black women's labor as a means of regulating Black women's gender.

These novels' increased attention to the distribution of sexualized state violence against Black women emerged amidst increased public attention to state sexual violence against Black women. Consider the case of Joan Little, who became a cause célèbre of the Feminist movement. Born in 1953, Little was arrested several times for crimes of poverty, (most notably, theft) in 1973 and 1974. While incarcerated, a correctional officer offered her freedom in exchange for sex and then tried to sexually assault her. She, in turn, killed him. While on trial for murder, the Joan Little Defense Committee formed and raised \$350,000 to support her trial. As Angela Davis noted in "Joan Little: The Dialectics of Rape" (1975), after a journalistic rendering of the incident that led to Little's trial, Little's persecution derived in part from her class and labor position. Though Little was indigent, the courts refused to cover the cost of her expert witnesses, and though she had turned herself in and therefore did not constitute a flight risk, the courts set her bail at \$115,000. During her trial, she was accused of being a sex worker and therefore already consented to sex with the correctional officer who attempted to assault her. And sexual violence itself yielded lasting economic ramifications; "[a]s long as women are oppressed," Davis wrote, "enormous benefits accrue to the ruling class. Female labor can be even more flagrantly exploited than male labor" (Davis 1975). Though Little was eventually acquitted, it's worth noting the attention to the economic conditions that produced her vulnerability and the ways in which sexual violence was understood to furnish lasting dispossession, an analysis that was not restricted to Davis' Black Marxist interpretation. While Davis' journalistic narration of the sexual assault on Joan Little and her subsequent Marxist analysis of it lacked the lengthy stretches of interior rendering for which Black Feminist novels are famed, her economic analysis was

part of a broader shift in thinking in the 1970s, one which saw increased attention to the ways in which sexual police violence against Black women produced lasting economic damage to them. This analysis was made possible, in part, by midcentury novels' accounts of state violence, which kept alive the labor-centric critique of police violence amidst rabid anticommunism, and in part by Black Feminist novels' return to those critiques, which circulated revisions of them in ways that made them accessible to a new public. By returning to the midcentury novels' influence on Black Feminist novels, scholars are able to recover not only the labor-centric critiques within those novels but also new models of approaching histories of state violence, such that the economic analyses of cases like Joan Little's can once more become visible.⁴⁵

Tracking the influence of the midcentury representation of state violence on Black Feminist representations of state violence brings to the fore the little discussed Black Feminist analysis of the relationship between the state and political economy. As I have suggested, these novelists represented state violence as producing lasting dispossession. This dispossession was part of the broader project of regulating the intersection of Black women's race, gender, and sexuality, and it took part in a global system of producing colonial governance. These representations of state violence often resembled, in terms of form and style, the midcentury representations and are also, usually, quite short. They are, altogether, subordinated in form and content to the novel's broader form and content,

⁴⁵ It's worth noting that Joan Little's case became so widely known that it had broad-reaching national and international ramifications. Little's poem, "I Am Somebody," was used as part of the Royal Chicano Air Force's mural in San Diego's Chicano Park, and the attention to her trial spawned *Joan-søstrene* (the Joan sisters), a women's rights group in Denmark. For more on Little's case, see Danielle McGuire's chapter "Power to the Ice Pick" in *At the Dark End of the Street* (McGuire 2010 246-278) and Christina Greene's "'She Ain't no Rosa Parks': The Joan Little Rape-Murder Case and Jim Crow Justice in the Post-Civil Rights South" (2015).

a gear in a machine rather than the machine itself. But subordinated influence is still presence. Just as Black Marxist thought persisted amidst intense anticommunism in the midcentury African American novel's representation of state violence, that analysis found an afterlife in early Black Feminist novels' representation of state violence. As we will see in the section, so too did the midcentury accounts of the means of abolishing state violence.

My Nationalism is in this Room

As I argued in earlier chapters, the 1950s and 1960s novels masculinized the means of abolishing state violence. 1960s and 1970s Black Power activists, additionally, often represented politics as men's public-sphere concern. This alignment of political agency, men, and the public sphere formed the context against which 1970s Black Feminists reacted in their portraits of the means of abolishing state violence. They considered the place of labor in abolishing state violence's enabling conditions, but their increased attention to the ways that Black women's work confounded traditional distinctions between public waged labor and private unwaged labor led to new accounts of the means of undoing police violence. In other words, Black Feminist novels positioned themselves against the masculinism of prior accounts of the means of abolishing state violence, but this opposition did not entail absence so much as subordinated influence. To counter the sexism inherent to earlier analyses of state violence, these texts inhabited and revised the discourses of those accounts as a means of providing new understandings of the ways in which Black women and collectives consisting of them could work toward the abolition of state violence.

Perhaps nowhere was this influence more on display than in Alice Childress' understudied 1979 novel, *A Short Walk*. Born in 1916, Childress' career as an actress and writer spanned five decades. In the midcentury, Childress contributed to a number of Leftist organizations, including the Marxist journal *Masses and Mainstreams*, Paul Robeson's Black Marxist newspaper *Freedom*, and more (Washington 2007 154). She had lived through the Civil Rights and Black Power movements by the time she published *A Short Walk*, and the Pulitzer Prize nominated novel, which fell out of print shortly after its publication, provides a sweeping Black Left Feminist perspective on twentieth-century Black history. "In this novel," Mary Helen Washington writes in her review of its 2006 reissue, "[Childress] throws into question suppositions about femininity and masculinity, about class, about social progress and political movements, and about the possibilities of racial uplift as a ticket to full national citizenship" (Washington 2007 159-60). Accordingly, her representation of police violence undermines prior masculinist accounts while eking out new understandings of women's role in abolition.

As in John Killens' *Youngblood*, police violence in *A Short Walk* aims to weaponize care labor. Early in the novel, when the protagonist, Cora, is a child, she passes a segregated park with her adoptive father, Bill. She persuades him to enter the park, where a policeman sees chastises them. Cora "broke loose from me and ran to look at flowers," her father explains. "I come to fetch her out." While spinning his baton, the cop responds, "Spare the rod and they'll think they white ... [Y]ou teach that gal that she's a niggera, the same as a boy and she got no privilege to break law and enter city property." The policeman jumps at her to scare her. When Cora asks why the police hurt

Black people, Bill says, “Some people’s bread and butter taste better if they know somebody else is goin hungry” (Childress 1979 27-9). While no actual violence occurs here, the officer threatens assault, and his insistence that her parents beat her aims to transform familial care laborers into discipliners. By his own account, the cop aims to regulate race, but Bill suggests his violence is also extractive and sadistic. In other words, police violence dispossesses for the officer’s pleasure at the same time that it regulates Blackness and structures the family. Yet Cora’s gender—the assumed desire of young girls to see flowers—provides Bill the opportunity to play trickster and secure their safety. In this way, *A Short Walk* departs from earlier masculinist accounts, like that of *Youngblood*, to represent Black femininity not as something to be defended but as an asset in the fight for safety from state violence.

The rest of the picaresque novel provides an exploration of the ways in which various efforts to secure safety fail Black women. These include marriage, paid illegal labor, paid legal labor, Communist Party organizing, and Garvey’s Black diasporic nationalism (in a section which both John Killens and Alice Walker applauded). One such account—that of Cora’s encounter with labor organizing—is especially enlightening. Late in the novel, Cora attends the Harlem Labor Union’s protest of the city’s refusal to hire Black bus drivers. People chant, demanding jobs. The cops attack, kettle, and arrest them. Cora escapes, but Cecil, her child’s father, is incarcerated (Childress 1979 301-2). As in the 1950s novels, Childress represents labor organizing as an opposition aimed at the abolition of state violence, and yet that labor organizing provides little for Cora herself. This radical organization fails in large part because it, like all the other means by which Cora aims to secure safety, is rife with sexism. Childress’

critique is not only directed at the past but also at the present, as Cheryl Higashida notes in *Black Internationalist Feminism*. As Higashida writes, Childress rejects Garvey's "heteropatriarchal bourgeois propriety" and "insisted that these ideological bounds be broken within the revival of interest in Garveyism that the post-World War II Black Left promoted and debated," which influenced 1960s and 1970s Black Power movements (Higashida 88; 110). This critique of Garvey both applies to the means through which Cora seeks to secure safety and foregrounds that the novel's critique of past Black radical movements applies to their influence on the present as well. Viewed in this light, labor organizing fails Cora in the past and Black women in the present in large part because it fails to account for the sexism in its midst.⁴⁶

While formal labor organizing does not secure safety for Black women, labor itself does remain one means through which Cora finds physical safety. After Mister Simeon pays Cecil's bail, he finances Cora's gambling parlor and, later, hits on Cora. Cora narrates,

[Simeon] has been good to me. And yet, I fight back at the sight of bloody fish-hooks, dirty words comin at me, *policeman chasin my papa out the park*, the minstrel show fight, theater manager—the line is very long ... Tear drops on Simeon's hand—it means something to me ... I don't preach on the street corner, but my nationalism is right here in this room. (Childress 1979 311 italics mine)

After this litany of racist incidents, including the childhood memory of threatened police assault, Cora's description of her room as the site of nationalism might seem confounding. On the one hand, her room, and Simeon's rebuffed sexual advances, might

⁴⁶ For Walker's review of Childress' novel, see Alice Walker's "A Walk through 20th-Century Black America" (1979) and for Killens' review, see John Killens' "The Literary Genius of Alice Childress" (1984).

represent the private sphere. Yet on the other hand, Simeon's sexual advances in her room brought to mind public issues such as state violence. Further, her homes have been the site of work. As Elizabeth Brown-Guillory notes in "Race, Gender and Social Politics in Alice Childress's *A Short Walk*" (2007), the home in the novel is the site of Black women collaborating through labor to survive financial precarity in the Depression (Brown-Guillory 125). This laboring collective lingers in the subtext of Cora's reclamation of nationalism as located in the home, in which Childress suggests Black women collectives can achieve Black nationalism's goals. This representation of Black women as the premier political agents, ultimately, produces an alternative understanding of Black nationalism itself that departs from masculinist Black nationalism. Instead, Childress allies with the Black nationalism kept alive by Black women activists in the early Cold War that Keisha Blain documents in *Set the World on Fire* (2018). Against those who describe Black nationalism as men's public effort to achieve autonomy, after which private-sphere concerns like sexuality and women's unwaged work can be considered, *A Short Walk* reasserts the primacy of the private sphere, portraying Black women private sphere laborers as the collective that can revolutionize the public and private at the same time in such a way that ushers in abolition.

While Childress' turn to the private sphere remains invested in visions of collective action, repoliticizing the private sphere also brought about representations of the efforts to abolish state violence as personal projects. Such a depiction is especially on display in Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976). A tale of Civil Rights and its long denouement, Walker's second novel follows the titular Meridian from her rearing on dispossessed Native land through her collegiate involvement with the Movement and

beyond. After the mass protests have ended, Meridian remains in the South, hoping to better Black people's lives. Though Meridian "lives in a society that domesticates conformity, that censures individual expression, especially for women," as Deborah McDowell wrote five years after the novel's publication, "she flourishes notwithstanding and evolves into a prototype for psychic wholeness and individual autonomy" (McDowell 1981 263). As we will see, this autonomy—perhaps the concept most associated with Black nationalism—is forged through struggle with the state in general and police violence in particular.

In *Meridian*, police violence represses the effort to end Jim Crow, but that violence simultaneously forms a collective aiming to abolish it. Meridian joins such a collective in part because of her early life experiences. When she is young, her father learns that the land he owns has a Native American burial mound. Realizing that the land was dispossessed from Native Americans, he returns the land to one Native American for half the year, and he occupies that land for the other half of the year. As Tiya Miles and Kiara Vigil write in "At the Crossroads of Red/Black Literature" (2014), Meridian's father's and the Native American man's property rights are dissolved when faced with "the ultimate power of the federal government and white society," both of which license the burial mound's bulldozing (Miles and Vigil 7). From her father, Meridian acquires a moral compass and at the same time learns the weakness of individual efforts. Unsurprisingly, when she is in college, she joins Movement demonstrators in a protest of her town's segregated hospital and the incarceration of Movement organizers. When Meridian and the demonstrators march, the police surround them and release the incarcerated, all of whom are bruised (Walker 2003 80-81). The newly freed leave, and

the police attack the remaining protestors, incarcerate them, and beat the newly incarcerated, including Meridian.

Meridian did not even scream, except very intensely in her own mind, and the scream of Truman's name. And what she meant by it was not even that she was in love with him: What she meant by it was that they were at a time and a place in History that forced the trivial to fall away—and they were absolutely together. (Walker 2003 81)

Who, exactly, are “they?” One might assume “they” refers to Meridian and Truman, an interpretation reinforced by their later romantic involvement, but “they” can also be read as those involved in the demonstration and now experiencing police violence. This discursive ambiguity foregrounds that police violence entangles the personal and the political while bringing about its own entangled opposition: A Black collective formed through exposure to state violence, dedication to the labor of undoing that violence, and personal sphere concerns like romance.

This sustained portrait of the ways in which state violence entangles the personal and the political, ultimately, gives rise to a vision of abolition as necessarily transforming both. Shortly after the police assault the protestors, Walker notes that Meridian and her fellow organizers have “battle fatigue.” For Meridian, this fatigue puts her “in a state of constant tears, so that she could do whatever she was doing—canvassing, talking at rallies, tying her sneakers, laughing—while tears rolled slowly and ceaselessly down her cheeks.” Exhaustion also leads Meridian to hear shots and imagine she has been hit (Walker 2003 82). Walker continues this portrayal of the interplay between state violence, political labor, and private life later, when she notes that Meridian's mother disapproves of her political life and then writes,

Only during a crisis could she forget. While other students dreaded confrontation with police, she welcomed it, and was capable of an inner gaiety, a sense of freedom, as she saw the clubs slashing down on her from above. Only once was she beaten into unconsciousness, and it was not the damage done to her body that she remembered when she woke up, but her feeling of yearning, of heartsick longing for forgiveness, as she saw the bright lights explode behind the red blood that curtained her face, and her feeling of hope as the harsh light of consciousness began to fade. (Walker 2003 97)

Among other things, Meridian yearns for her mother's forgiveness at the very time that the police are assaulting her, such that state violence throws kin relations into relief. Yet it does more than simply expose familial ties; it also transforms them, simultaneously providing Meridian with a gleeful sense of freedom and a newfound yearning for reconciliation. Like Childress, Walker suggests that the personal cannot be left behind for the sake of pursuing the political, and not only because the repressed private sphere will always return. Instead, in this scene, Walker frames those who work toward abolishing state violence as necessarily having to work toward rewriting their interpersonal relations.

While this scene brings to the fore the relationship between kin relations and the effort to end state violence, critics have long noted that the novel as a whole considers the relationship between political change and other personal changes. As Thadious Davis writes in "History's Place Markers in Memory" (2006) *Meridian* carefully documents both histories of state structural violence to Black women and patriarchal abuses of power undertaken by Movement organizers (Davis 195-7). After making similar conclusions, Guy Mark Foster suggests that the novel's representation of political transformation after the Movement requires a transformation in gender and sexual relations. As he writes in "Looking Good" (2004), *Meridian* and Truman both experience violence in such a way that un genders them and undoes the romantic desire

between the two, all of which positions “them at an originary state, perhaps a beginning from which to start anew” (Foster 133). This originary state is, among other things, the beginning of abolition. By critiquing sexism among both Black radicals opposed to the state and the violent state itself, *Meridian* insists that individuals working in collectives to end state violence must transform their repressive gender and sexual norms in order to bring about abolition. These private-sphere transformations, in Walker’s account, have political and far-reaching consequences that are essential to abolitionist endeavors. Uprooting the conditions that enable state violence, *Meridian* insists, cannot only happen in public; it must also happen in private.

Black Feminist novels’ emphasis on the private sphere and on individuals in their visions of the means of abolition, altogether, arise in large part because of the historical context in which these novels emerged. On the one hand, the potential of Black collective organizing in the 1970s may have seemed limited, given the intense carceral repression facing many Black radicals in the 1970s. On the other hand, *Meridian* and *A Short Walk* were published in a context in which public collective action had long been masculinized. As Meina Yates-Richard writes in “What is Your Mother’s Name?” (2017), contemporaneous Black nationalist notions of freedom were constituted by an “abandonment of black women” such that freedom became “*freedom from* black mothers” (Yates-Richard 2017 504). The reassertion of the place of individual Black women in novels like *Meridian* and *A Short Walk*, ultimately, pushes against both the combined governmental repression of and Black radical masculinizing of collective action. In so doing, both novels reconsider the individual and the private as harboring untapped radical potential for collective transformation.

This insistence on the importance of the private sphere took part in the larger project of Black women radicals in the 1970s. As Robyn Spencer documents in *The Revolution Has Come* (2016) and as Ashley Farmer documents in *Remaking Black Power* (2017), the 1970s were also the decade in which women in the Black Panthers in particular and Black Power activists more generally oversaw local efforts toward community autonomy (Spencer 143-176; Farmer 93-126). This political organizing included electoral political projects as well as education, food security, and more. Their efforts were indicative of the ways in which Black radicals in the 1970s had begun to insist that those public-sphere objects long-considered to be political, like prisons and representative politics, were inseparable from private-sphere efforts like providing food and care. In this light, the 1970s Black Feminist novels contributed to the larger 1970s Black Radical effort of not only uprooting the state's violence but also producing new solutions to issues traditionally considered the domain of the private sphere.

1970s Black Feminist novels as a whole represented the means of abolition with an emphasis on the private sphere and on the individual to blur the distinction between the public and the private, as well as between the collective and the individual. Some represented abolition as a process that could only occur once individuals worked toward undoing their own sexist ideologies, which buttressed state and interpersonal violence. Others represented abolition as a process that both emanated from the potential of private sphere laborers. In both cases, the rewriting of the relationship between gender and state violence, in which Black Feminist novelists reconsidered the ways in which state violence structured Black women's labor, led to transformations in theories of the

relationship between the abolition of state violence and gender. As we will see in the next section, these changes ultimately led to new theories of the novel.

Fugitivity and the Mug Shot

Representations of police violence often led Black Feminist novelists to consider the ways in which fictionality enabled the novel to record Black women's experience of and efforts to abolish state violence. These theories gave rise to visions of the novel as a genre which could better capture Black women's experience of state violence as sexualized than non-fiction could, a claim that might seem unsurprising given novel theory's emphasis on the novel arising as a technology to present interiority. Yet these Black Feminists did not only think that the novel enabled a longer chronicle of police violence's damages; they also insisted that fictionality afforded the imagination of alternative systems of governance that could crowd out the prison industrial complex. By producing these ruminations on theories in immanent revisions of earlier masculinist theories of the novels, these Black Feminist novelists came to theorize that their novels' account of state violence and its abolition could counter the sexism inherent in prior Black radical representations of state violence and in the cultural narratives that legitimate the prison industrial complex. Importantly, these novelists departed from earlier theories of the relationship between police violence and the novel in their insistence that readers could participate in this cultural war. In so doing, these novels provide a model for interpretation that scholars can learn from today to work against sexist modes of cultural repression.

These theories of the novel began to arise in the 1960s, as in Paule Marshall's second novel, *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), which represents state sexual violence in the global frame. In the fictional Bournehills in the Caribbean, American military officers are stationed at a missile-tracking station. At a party early in the novel, the officers grope and harass the Black women working at the club. Shortly thereafter, everyone begins dancing. "The locked, writhing bodies," Marshall writes, "appeared caught up in violent combat, with the room, divided as it was between great areas of shadow and light, serving as an arena the size of the world" (Marshall 1969 87-92). In this scene, the narrator represents the dance floor as a global racialized conflict, foregrounding that American imperialism enables sexual harassment against Black women laborers with impunity. In this way, Marshall takes up the 1950s critiques of state violence as dispossessive but goes a step further, critiquing imperialism for brutalities distributed on the basis of the global, racial and gendered distribution of labor.

For Marshall, novel writing becomes a means of critiquing the conditions that enable state violence. Marshall's commentary on the novel arises in her representation of Merle, a woman from the island, describing the people sexually harassing and being sexually harassed at the club. "She might have been condemned to tell the tale," Marshall narrates. "She, too, might have been witness to, victim of, some unspeakably inhuman act and been condemned to wander the world telling every stranger she met about it" (Marshall 1969 89). State violence compels narration, but how exactly does Merle tell the tale and how might that differ from official records? Because the island is fictional, there is no official record of American intervention, but it's not hard to imagine how American records of state violence in Bournehills might render the sexual harassment: They would

either not chronicle the military sexual harassment or they would render it as exceptional as a means of legitimating America's imperial presence in the region. The tale Merle and Marshall tell, however, differs. As Hortense Spillers and Kamau Brathwaite have argued, the violence in this scene at the club and throughout the novel are represented as synecdochic in their representation of the relationship between Bournehills and the imperialist metropole (Spillers 1985 154-5; Brathwaite 226-237). Military sexual harassment, in other words, reflects the broader relationship between Bournehills and the United States. Merle's tale, like Marshall's, represents this sexualized state dispossession as structural and defining the relationship between Bournehills and America. In this way, fiction comes to constitute a counter-archive of state violence and fictionality enables Marshall and Merle to critique American state violence in particular and American imperialism more generally.

Much of the scholarship on *Chosen Place* has rightly pointed out that fictionality does not only enable critique. It also provides the ability, in Marshall's account, to imagine abolitionist futures. In her description of Merle in *Sucking Salt* (2006), Meredith Gadsby notes that Merle's exhaustion derives from the seemingly unending nature of the conflicts of colonialism that, paradoxically, only further her desire to advocate for the oppressed (Gadsby 153). In other words, Merle's knowledge of history—the long, brutal history of colonialism—pushes her to tell the story in the same way that it does Marshall. "*Chosen Place, Timeless People* acknowledges that history is not so much repressed as woven," writes Candace Ward in her article on the novel, "into the fabric of Bournehill life" (Ward 374). She continues,

In the novel's conclusion, then, Marshall collapses the gaps between past and present, "fact" and "fiction," by positing a future "one day" that, in 1969, in the Caribbean, did not seem so far away.

The future the novel posits, Ward continues, is one in which shared work and participatory governance enable archipelagic unity and sovereignty (Ward 376). The work of the novel, in this light, is not just recording history in a way that critiques state violence but also imagining alternatives to the conditions that enable that violence. The same violent history that compels Merle and Marshall to narrate this violence as structural also compels them to imagine the structures that can supplant these violent institutions and pave the way to a future free from state violence. According to Marshall's theorization in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, the novel as a genre proves central to abolition because history drives novelists to use the novel's imaginative capacities to imagine new political systems that do not distribute sexual violence to women of color across the globe.

Marshall's emphasis on the imagination, ultimately, provides a model for abolition in which abolition is not only negation but also the imagining and production of new means of responding to harm. This latter depiction of abolition arises most clearly in recent writing from prison abolitionists, who argue that imagining new possibilities is central to the abolition of the prison industrial complex. "Abolishing the prison industrial complex is not just about ending prisons," writes famed prison abolitionist Mariame Kaba in her preface to *As Black as Resistance: Finding the Conditions for Liberation* (2018), "but also about creating an alternative system of governance that is not based on domination, hierarchy, and control" (Kaba xviii). Similarly, Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Angela Davis, among others, have insisted that abolition requires the imagination and

creation of new modes of accountability and governance. This imaginative endeavor need not be limited to political organizers. Rather, African American literature can and has contributed to the abolitionist imaginary. The political vision at the end of Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, ultimately provides a vision of abolition that counters sexism and Marshall's abolitionist imaginary, in her own account, depends on fictionality. Consequently, *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* represents the novel as the premier genre in working toward abolition not only because fictionality enables critiques of state violence's effects on Black women but also because fictionality enables the imagining of alternatives to prisons.

These ruminations on the uses of fiction in combating state violence against Black women were passed down to the Black Feminist novelists of the 1970s. Consider Gayl Jones' 1977 novel, *Eva's Man*. Published after *Corregidora* (1975), which Toni Morrison edited, *Eva's Man* tells the story of Eva Medina, a Black woman who experiences violence from family and from romantic partners throughout her life. The similarity between the protagonists and the voice of Jones' first two novels led reviewers to claim they were identical. "To all outward appearances," writes Larry McMurty for *The Washington Post*, "the books are virtual twins ... The theme, in both cases, is the degradation of black women" (McMurty 1976). Yet *Eva's Man* departs from Jones' first novel in its attention to the prison industrial complex. The novel begins with the arrival of the police, and the rest of this trauma narrative, in which what is not presented speaks as loudly as what is, juxtaposes Eva's incarceration with flashbacks to scenes of violence in Eva's early life. Best remembered by scholars for its depiction of castration and

interpersonal violence, the carceral plot of *Eva's Man* positions fictionality as granting Black women supervised by the state the freedom to narrate their stories.

In *Eva's Man*, Jones represents state violence as a constant in the lives of the incarcerated. Because of the trauma narrative form, violence is hinted at but rarely described. Late in the novel, when Eva is talking to the prison psychiatrist, Jones writes,

You thought you were a bad woman, so you went out and got you a bad man.
Don't explain me.
And then you ... Matron? Matron! Hold her! Hold her! (Jones 1977 174)

Jones does not depict the correctional officer's violence—only what the psychiatrist says—but this omission does not render the assault any less present. Rather, it suffuses the text, begging questions of what happens in the blank spaces between scenes, of who hurts whom in the ellipses, and of what actions occur as the book presents dialogue. This atmospheric state violence casts even offhand descriptions in a dark hue. When Eva is sitting in the home where she has just killed Davis, Jones writes, “One of the cops came over and pulled me up. I didn't even know what he looked like. I just saw red hair growing on the back of his hand” (Jones 1977 63). The attention to the police officer's hands, belatedly, reinforces the physicality of what has just happened to Eva—an officer grabbed her and pulled her to her feet—rendering the quotidian acts of policing even more violent, but the initial narration of that violence glides swiftly over the assault. Here as elsewhere, Jones often shies away from representing state violence at much length, though the novel's form does suggest that it follows the accused at every step. This description of Jones as turning away from state assault may seem counterintuitive to readers who remember the novel as a record of brutal violence. In an unfavorable review

for *The New York Times*, the poet June Jordan, for instance, claims the novel overemphasizes the brutality Eva experiences and afflicts; consequently, it will disappoint those “who wonder about black women, our consciousness, capacities, and wants” (Jordan 1976). While Jordan claims the novel only chronicles plot and provides no vision of interiority, the book’s avoidance of representing state violence reminds that the fragmentary form in which Jones presents plot constitutes the recollection of events that we might call interiority. By subordinating state violence to Eva’s attempts to piece together the violent fragments of her own life via narration, *Eva’s Man* privileges Black women’s interiority over the violence that structures that interiority.

Violence’s structuring of Eva’s narration foregrounds the way in which state assaults structure her position as a subject. This violence is, importantly, sexualized. Early in the novel, when Eva has just returned from the bathroom in prison, another prisoner, Elvira, remarks, “It don’t take you that long to pee.” Eva responds, “When you tensed up and nervous it does.” Elvira replies, “I seen the guard get a feel.” The novel then jumps to another scene: “Davis turned me around and put his tongue in my mouth” (Jones 1977 50). By juxtaposing the two, Jones hints that guard’s sexual harassment is akin to the way Eva’s controlling ex treated her. State sexual violence, in other words, is part of a broader American project of coercing Black women into sexual acts. Importantly, this sexualized violence has lasting effects. In this scene, constant sexual violence makes Eva’s body so clenched that she struggles to urinate. As Anna Ziering argues in “They Are Busy With This Woman” (2020), Eva’s experience of violence throughout her life leads to a remapping of her experience of pleasure (Ziering 60-1). And as Bethany Jacobs points out, in “Woman Like You” (2014), violence in romantic

and state relations lead Eva to distrust sexuality more generally. Altogether, state sexual violence collaborates with interpersonal violence to produce lasting physical, interpersonal, and psychic damages to Eva, the latter being emblemized by the novel's fragmentary form.

For Jones, the novel is a venue that provides Black women a means of narrating this violence's effects free from the state's and the private market's attempts to control narratives of Black women's violence in a way that legitimates state intervention. She suggests as much in her attention to all the people who ask Eva to retell the incident.

Early on, Eva narrates,

They want me to tell it over and over again. I don't mean just the psychiatrists, but people from newspapers and things. They read about it or hear about it someplace and just want to keep it living. At first I wouldn't talk to anybody. All during the trial I wouldn't talk to anybody ... They say they're helping me. I'm forty-three years old, and I ain't seen none of their help yet. (Jones 4-5)

Psychiatrists, lawyers, and journalists, among others, beckon Eva to tell her story, claiming to help her, though some of their jobs profit from her telling her story and others' jobs depend upon making Eva criminal. Against their self-professed humanitarian desires, Eva claims instead that they hope to keep the crime "living," which depends on criminalizing her. As Hershini Young notes in "Inheriting the Criminalized Black Body" (2005), Eva inherits Black women's relationship to the law under slavery, in which Black women are only recognized as agents when criminal; rather than speak in such a way that reaffirms their preexisting beliefs, Eva remains silent (Young 379-381). Her silence, as E. Patrick Johnson and Megan Sweeney have argued, withholds the explanation for why she kills her partner (Johnson 1994 37; Sweeney 2004 457-8). While the diegetic frame

provides Eva no opportunity to speak without colluding with her own criminalization, the novel does. *Eva's Man* provides an alternate narration of her story, one free from the constraints of the newspapers, psychiatrists, and lawyers. Fictionality, in other words, provides limited freedom to represent Eva's history of state and interpersonal violence in such a way that is subordinated to Eva's effort to become well.

But what kind of novel does Jones use fictionality to write and to what ends? For Jones, *Eva's Man* combines a number of generic forms as a means of undermining the ideologies supporting the prison industrial complex. This generic play arises in the very first sentence: "The police came and found arsenic in the glass" (Jones 3). The police arrival after the crime frames *Eva's Man* as a detective novel, but where that genre famously provides a narration of why and how a person commits an unsolved crime, Jones' novel subverts these expectations. Similarly, in that very same first paragraph, Jones positions *Eva's Man* as an inheritor of and counter to tabloids. Jones writes in the first sentence when Eva narrates that they wrote "an article about" the crime in a "police magazine" (Jones 3). In the first draft, Jones specifies that this magazine is the National Police Gazette, a tabloid newspaper that ran from 1845 to 1977 and that covered everything from violence to the sex lives of the rich and famous. The pieces dedicated to crime sensationalized each incident by focusing on the violence of each crime and by providing context that made the crime seem even more deplorable. Were *Eva's Man* based on a real article, it's easy to imagine the article's contours: It would begin with the castration, emphasize that Eva killed a man married to someone else, and finally end with Eva's past arrests to make the crime seem as though it were a personal fault. Jones, however, takes a different approach. In an email to her sister from 1999, Jones claims that

Eva's Man combined the form of “tabloid journalism” with the “literary novel” (Correspondence). Where tabloids and detective novels provide biography only to criminalize and justify punishment, Jones’ novel plunges into Eva’s history as she remembers it in prison, juxtaposing past trauma with present incarceration. In the process, Jones renders Eva’s interiority and suggests that the novel supersedes the tabloid for its ability to capture the ways that even a person who does harm experiences state violence and still attempts to heal from that violence’s psychic and physical wounds. In other words, the novel provides the opportunity to render subjectivity beyond the perfect victim and evil criminal binary in such a way that not only critiques this binary but provides new means of understanding harm itself. In this way, fictionality offers the ability to undermine the ideological yoking of Blackness, women, intimate partner violence, and crime, which ultimately provides the novel the ability to work against the cultural constructs that buttress the prison industrial complex.⁴⁷

Yet it is not only the novel as a technology that Jones portrays as liberatory. She also suggests that readers can interact with the conservative culture industry buttressing prisons in such a way that undermines that industry’s effects. The position of the reader comes into view in her descriptions of tabloid photographs, about which Eva comments, “Elvira said they had my picture in there and my hair was all uncombed and they had me looking like a wild woman” (Jones 4). Here, the tabloid uses her “wild” appearance to emphasize her mental instability, a naturalized explanation for Eva’s crime that critics

⁴⁷ On the early history of the National Police Gazette, see Guy Reel’s *The National Police Gazette and the Making of the Modern American Man* (2006). It is unclear to me, at the moment, if *Eva's Man* is indeed based upon a real, historical incident described in the National Police Gazette. I have yet to find such an article that matches the case, but it is possible that such an article exists in the years at which I have not looked.

from John Tagg to Paul Lashmar have suggested is consistent with the uses of crime photographs (Tagg 1988 64-5; Lashmar 2014 85). While this might seem like a small moment in the text, Eva's appearance was subject to significant changes over the course of the novel's drafts. Between the early drafts and the final draft, Jones repeatedly emphasizes that the police interpret her uncombed hair as evidence that she is crazy and hence committed the crime. Yet Jones' novel emphasizes that Eva's ex-partner would not let her comb her hair for fear that she would attract other men and cheat on him. The very "wild" hair captured in her mugshot, republished in the tabloid, and used as proof that Eva is insane, ultimately, testifies to Davis' control of Eva. Against the police and the media, Eva frames her hair not as proof of her criminality but as evidence of intimate partner violence. In so doing, the novel's final draft provides a new mode of interpretation of crime photographs. Rather than criminality, *Eva's Man* suggests that mug shots in fact display the contempt the law and civilians have had for so-called criminals. In the process, Jones insists that viewers attentive to images and readers attentive to conditions that enable violence—including, but not limited to, history—can read photographs, narratives, and other objects legitimating prisons against the grain. In short, Jones insists that a careful attention to Black women's histories can provide a viewer and a reader a means of reading even the most conservative texts radically.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ In the first draft, Jones presents the scene in which the detectives hold Eva at the precinct in one straightforward scene. At the beginning of the scene, Eva sees her landlady at the station. "Look at her sitting there," the landlady says. "Looking like she ain't committed a sin in the world" (Orthographic Manuscript). For the final draft, Jones cuts the landlady's description of Eva's appearance, leaving the police as the only figures who explicitly connect her appearance to her so-called sins: "Look at those eyes," one of the detectives says. "A woman got to be crazy to do something like that" (Jones 65). When the captain finally comes in to review the case, he also stereotypes Eva based upon appearance and what he has been told. Then one of the cops offers Eva a comb. While this is presented in one straightforward scene in the first draft, in the final draft, just after one of the cops offers Eva a comb, Jones inserts a flashback to a

This method of engaging with the histories exceeding conservative texts and images, ultimately, enables a cultural subversion of the terms by which people are criminalized. As Jones points out, the arrest photograph gesture to, but does not represent, state and civilian violence to Black people; interpreting these images as such, ultimately, undermines the arrest photographs attempt to hail subjects as criminal. As Tina Campt reminds in *Listening to Images* (2014), this kind of interpretation of arrest photographs has radical potential. In a chapter on convict photographs in late nineteenth-century South Africa and arrest photographs of Freedom Riders in 1960s America, Campt argues that analyzing arrest photographs “helps us unpack the logic of capture and the modes of knowledge these images authorize” (Campt 96). Engaging with these images in these ways, ultimately, “makes audible the quotidian practices of fugitivity they also capture” (Campt 96). This fugitivity

is a refusal of those cataloged in their pages to be completely captured or reduced to the archival grammar of criminality or the seriality of type. What emerges through an engagement with the lower frequencies of these quiet photos is the fact that they are at once inseparable from, yet always exceed, the archival and affective technology of criminal photography. (Campt 98)

For Campt, interpreting arrest photographs as solely producing criminality, ultimately, acquiesces to the terms of criminalization; instead, her method provides a means of refusing the terms of this debate in such a way that undermines the cultural production of criminality and, in so doing, the prison industrial complex more generally. Advocating for a similar method, *Eva's Man* similarly proves significant for its modeling of the ways

scene with Davis. “He wouldn’t let me comb my hair after we made love,” the first line reads. In offering her a comb, the police aim to erase Davis’ control of her appearance. In response to Davis forbidding Eva from combing her hair, Eva asks “What if we go out?” Davis replies, “We ain’t going out” (Jones 66).

in which publics can refuse that legitimation and, in the process, work toward undermining the culture that supports prisons. In her subordination of these objects and of state violence to Eva's quest to become well, Jones goes one step further, insisting on the importance to abolition of providing people who struggle with the psychic wounds of doing and receiving harm a means of being well. Put differently, Jones reminds that the futurity of abolition depends upon a number of actors—writers, readers, harm doers, and so on—working toward the undoing of not only material but also psychic structures of violence erected in the wake of state violence.

Black Feminist novelists represented the novel as a key technology for working toward abolition, and the reader as one of the essential users of this technology. They did so by theorizing the novel as a genre that could represent state violence to Black women in ways that were not possible in other genres and that could imagine new alternatives to prisons. These theories revised earlier, masculinist theories of the novel in such a way that aimed to counter their sexism. Further, the novel and the revision of earlier sexist accounts of state violence, Black Feminist novelists argued, had the capacity to change readers; the novel as a genre provided a means of transforming readers' ideas about harm as well as about the ways that society's aim to guarantee safety. In so doing, they provided readers with new models of interpretation that could counter sexism from both the state and from Black radicals. This interpretive lens provides the occasion to reconsider even explicitly masculinist accounts of state violence.

More Real Than Prison

Scholars can build on Jones' emphasis on the potential of readers to re-envision both those who do harm and the means of producing safety. Following the lead of *Eva's Man*, I want to suggest that Jones' and other Black Feminist novels provide a model for how scholars can re-approach masculinist accounts of state violence to work against the cultural construction of state violence as a problem that primarily afflicts men. In its account of both the masculinist representation of the state violence and the Black Feminist effort to undo that representation, James Baldwin's 1970s novel, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, provides a model for the scholarly reinterpretation of state violence in such a way that counters the sexism present in those very texts.

Published in 1974, *If Beale Street Could Talk* looks, in many ways, like Baldwin's reckoning with the beginning of the Black Feminist boom. The novel was published after Nikki Giovanni and Baldwin took part in a dialogue on the PBS show *Soul* in 1974. Early in that conversation, Baldwin decries the debasement Black men experience at work and in public, which makes their returning to children they cannot afford to feed all the more difficult. As a result, Baldwin continues, Black men struggle with intimacy with their children and their wives. To these points, Giovanni later responds,

We [Black women] have tried to make you able to pay your rent or our rent. We have found that there are not enough jobs, there's not enough money, for you to do that. Now, why can't we try it my way? And I'm not interested in who pays the rent. I am interested in you. (Giovanni and Baldwin 60)

For Giovanni, Baldwin's emphasis on Black men's struggles fails to understand that Black women—as family members, as lovers, and as friends—know that racism limits Black men's ability to provide and yet still remain invested in their relationships and in those men. And Baldwin, eventually, agrees. His learning from and with Giovanni in this

conversation came to shape his next novel, *Beale Street*. The first Baldwin novel in which a Black woman, Harlem's Clementine "Tish" Rivers, is the primary focalizer, *Beale Street* follows Tish's romance with Alonzo "Fonny" Hunt through one police officer's persecution and eventual incarceration of Fonny. *Beale Street* focuses especially on the lengths through which Tish goes to free Fonny and to provide a safe life for their child, with which she is pregnant. While the narrator primarily represents police violence as a problem that persecutes men, the novel as a whole subverts this gendering of state violence and gestures towards a theory of abolition modeled on the care labor traditionally assigned to Black women.

From this latter perspective, *Beale Street* provides an account of state violence as dispossessing not Black men but Black women. This representation arises early in the novel. Chronologically, the novel begins after police officer Bell sexually harasses Tish, hassles Fonny, and arrests him. In the first scene, Tish visits Fonny in jail and tells him she is pregnant. Fonny retreats into his thoughts. "And for those few seconds while he was out there by himself, away from me," Tish narrates, "the baby was the only real thing in the world, more real than prison, more real than me" (Baldwin 5). The prison not only isolates her; it also foregrounds her coming child. Here and throughout the book, Tish's concern for her child is partially economic. She worries that, if Fonny remains in prison, she won't be able to provide for her child. The police persecution and eventual incarceration of Fonny dispossesses Tish of another wage, leaving her with more bills and fewer ways of paying them. Her means of freeing Fonny—hiring a lawyer—only provides more expenses. On top of these monetary concerns, Fonny's incarceration deprives Tish of whatever care labor Fonny might provide to care for the baby to come

and to her. From lost wages and labor to isolation, police violence and incarceration furnish damages that last long beyond each instance of violence. In its portrait of police dispossession of Tish, the novel throws into crisis the traditional understanding of dispossession as persecuting public labor and instead foregrounds the ways in which police violence regulates care labor and the Black family more generally.

This violent dispossession attempts to limit the means by which Black women imagine freedom from state violence. Essential, here, is a police assault that occurs before Fonny's incarceration. Bell approaches Tish when she is alone. Tish drops her groceries, Bell offers to help carry them, and Tish declines. Looking into Bell's eyes, Tish narrates,

was seduction which contained the promise of rape. It was rape which promised debasement and revenge: on both sides. I wanted to get close to him, to enter into him, to open up that face and change it and destroy it, descend into the slime with him. Then we would both be free.

As Tish considers the sexual threat his gaze poses and considers her own ability to destroy him (and perhaps the state racism he peddles), Bell says that he wishes he could help with the groceries and then presses his genitals against Tish (Baldwin 186-7). The detail with which Baldwin paints this instance of state sexual harassment, as well as the way the prose elongates the happening of a few seconds to several paragraphs, suggests that this scene holds more importance than Tish herself may recognize as narrator. This sexual harassment portrays police violence as motivated by sadistic desire, providing a glimpse of a theory of state violence in which the police are sexually violent to Black people, including Black men, out of a sadistic desire for Black women. At the same time, this scene foregrounds the ways in which state violence teaches the assaulted that violence is the means of acquiring their desires, such that Tish comes to imagine that her

only prospect of liberation is a murder that she represents as penetrative and hence sexualized. Put differently, sadistic, sexualized state violence prompts Tish to imagine sexualized violence as the means of abolition.

Yet the novel turns away from this representation of violent revolution and toward care as a model for abolition. In his chronicling of the efforts to undo state violence, Baldwin suggests that the novel as a genre is the premier medium by which the efforts to free the incarcerated can be made visible. Baldwin's ruminations on fictionality arise midway through the novel, when Tish and Fonny's parents are trying to earn money to pay for his bail and for his lawyer fees:

Joseph is coldly, systematically, stealing from the docks, and Frank is stealing from the garment center and they sell hot goods in Harlem, or in Brooklyn. They don't tell us this, but we know it. They don't tell us because, if things go wrong, we can't be accused of being accomplices (Baldwin 139).

If these events happened in history, Joseph and Frank could not tell Tish of their theft because she might be arrested as an accomplice. But in the novel, Baldwin calls attention to the ways the state limits what people can say and know—to the impossibility of Tish knowing the very events that she narrates—as a means of foregrounding the text's fictionality. Fictionality enables Tish to represent theft, an act risking incarceration for both parents, as the means of freeing the incarcerated and, hence, as the antidote to the economic dispossession that Tish and her family face. Here, the novel gestures to a theory of abolition as an anti-capitalist project that necessitates the sharing of risk, which Christina Sharpe has termed care (Sharpe 131). Against the violence that Bell's sadistic sexual harassment beckons, *Beale Street* posits care as a model for abolition and the

novel as the premier genre that can subvert the risks associated with care to chronicle it as the exemplary means of abolition.

The novel's ability to represent care as a means of freeing the incarcerated, Baldwin suggests in *Beale Street*, can counter the ideologies buttressing the prison industrial complex. Midway through the novel, in an italicized passage—perhaps a police blotter or a newspaper snippet—Baldwin writes,

Mrs. Victoria Rogers, nee Victoria Maria San Felipe Sanchez, declares that on the evening of March 5, between the hours of eleven and twelve, in the vestibule of her home, she was criminally assaulted by a man she knows now to have been Alonzo Hunt [Fonny] (Baldwin 126).

This narrative legitimates both this particular instance of incarceration as making Victoria safe from sexual assault and the prison industrial complex more broadly as protecting women from supposedly rapacious Black men. Yet this account is undermined by the novel's portrait of Fonny's innocence and by its portrait of Black women's efforts to free the incarcerated. Foremost, here, is Tish's mother's travels to Puerto Rico to meet Victoria Rogers and to ask her to retract her statement. Beyond the money spent on travel, which may not lead to their desired outcome, Tish's mother risks physical harm to save Fonny. In comparison with Baldwin's portrait of cops as producers of brutal and sadistic violence, Tish and her mother's efforts to care for Fonny and for each other appear to be the only actual means of reducing harm in the novel, a practice made more difficult by the police. Further, Baldwin portrays their endeavor as more noble than the prison's. Throughout, Baldwin wields the practical and emotional appeal of the ways in which families secure safety to counter the narratives which legitimate prisons as structures which produce safety. And this narrative would never be represented in police

blotters or legal records but is represented in *Beale Street*. For Baldwin, fictionality enables the representation of non-carceral means by which Black women seek to make Black people safe in such a way that delegitimizes the prison industrial complex and works toward its abolition.

What is more, the novel emerges as a central genre through which Baldwin can reconsider the place of gender in abolitionist endeavors in large part because the genre is enmeshed in, not separate from, the masculinist tradition chronicled in the prior two chapters. This tradition also arises in Baldwin's portrait of Puerto Rico. When Sharon, Tish's mother, arrives on the island, she plays the role of a tourist, relying on the information of a local to guide her to Victoria Rogers. Once she finds Victoria, she asks her to retract her statement, but Victoria refuses because doing so would require her to return to the continent. Sharon wants to free Fonny, but that desire requires forced migration. As Brian Norman writes in "James Baldwin's Confrontation with US Imperialism in *If Beale Street Could Talk*" (2007), in this scene, Baldwin refuses "easy gestures toward diasporic unity" and "a sense of ethnic solidarity that can bridge the gulf between African-American blacks and Latina/os" (Norman 124; 126-7). By rejecting a happy ending in which freedom from incarceration comes at the expense of an American colonial subject, Baldwin suggests prison abolition requires the abolition of imperialism, staging a scene that recalls the 1960s war novels. Yet unlike those novels, he articulates global state violence's damages to women of color and represents those same women as those who have the political agency to abolish it. By placing his novel firmly within the global state violence narrative of the 1960s and revising its sexism, Baldwin works against the kinds of cultural repression of women of color's experience and resistance of

state violence that those novels instantiated. Because this mode of repression was cultural, driven by narrative, and dependent on fictionality, Baldwin theorizes the novel as the genre that can undo that cultural repression and work toward anti-sexist abolitionist movements. Read in this light, *Beale Street* ultimately gives rise to a vision of police violence as sadistic and sexual assault that dispossesses Black women, sketches the contours of the collective taking on of risk as an abolitionist alternative to prisons for producing safety, and uses the novel's fictionality to dramatize Black families' efforts to free the incarcerated in such a way that undermines the ideologies that legitimate prisons.

This interpretation of *Beale Street* cuts against the grain of Tish's representation of police violence. Throughout the novel, Tish depicts police violence as a problem that primarily persecutes men and Officer Bell as primarily persecuting Fonny. In the scene that incites Bell's revenge, in which Bell attempts to arrest Fonny, Tish fears "the cop intended to kill Fonny." Although the conflict is eventually deescalated, as Bell leaves, he tells Fonny, "be seeing you around," leading them to believe that the cop will persecute him (Baldwin 146-154). Tish reinforces the masculinization of this scene when they bump into Bell and Bell stares at Fonny's genitals "with the unanswerable cruelty of lust" (Baldwin 186). Here, Baldwin suggests that Bell persecutes Fonny out of a sadistic queer desire for him, a desire which another character claims motivates all cops to assault Black people (Baldwin 117). This emphasis that the police persecute men has filtered into the scant scholarship on the novel. As Melinda Plastas and Eve Raimon write in "Brutality and Brotherhood" (2013), "To Baldwin, Fonny's release from prison, which evokes a dream of the abolition of prison altogether, rests on the ability of men to constitute new forms of manhood and togetherness" (Plastas and Raimon 690). In this account, both

police violence and abolition revolve around men. When readers take Tish's perspective to be the only or definitive account of police violence, *Beale Street* appears to reproduce earlier masculinist accounts of police violence.

Yet the novel provides other understandings of state violence and, in the process, provides a model for how scholars and readers might reinterpret masculinist representations of state violence. Both the novel's allusion to the 1960s masculinist war novels and Tish's representation of police violence as a problem that persecutes men within a novel that repeatedly suggests otherwise, ultimately, stage an encounter between masculinist theories of state violence and Black Feminist efforts to subvert that masculinism. As the novel reminds, because those masculinist theories persist, people aiming to subvert them cannot simply transcend them; instead, they must immanently provide different understandings of the gender of state violence as a means of supplanting them. This representation of the Black Feminist understanding of state violence as attempting to crowd out the masculinist representation of state violence has important implications for scholars and readers. Rather than take on face value a text's, and its tradition's, insistence that state violence persecutes Black men, scholars and readers can look for those moments in the text and in the tradition in which the police's subordinated persecution of Black women and the subordinated efforts of Black women to abolish state violence arises. They can use the subordinated fictional narratives and histories of state violence against Black women and of Black women's resistance as a lens through which to reread the text not only to surface its masculinist construction but also to reconsider the ways in which its analyses might apply, and change, when the police attack Black women. These scenes, I argue, can form the foundation for a theory through

which to reconsider the effects of state violence on Black women and the process of abolition. This endeavor proves fruitful, as I suggested in my reading of *Eva's Man*, even where it does not lead to written scholarship. Each reader's refusal of both the masculinized and criminalized terms of the debate, ultimately, is one less conscript into masculinism and carceral thought. Such a victory may seem minor, but en masse, these refusals can contribute to undermining the ideologies that license the prison industrial complex and, ultimately, to abolishing prisons themselves.

As I have endeavored to demonstrate, the 1970s Black Feminist novels did not only revise earlier masculinist representations of police violence; they also provided a method for reinterpreting those accounts in such a way that could work to undermine their sexism. Such a method, ultimately, contests both the ideologies that legitimate the prison industrial complex and the sexism of Black radicalisms past, while retaining an analysis of the economic damages of state violence. This method also provides a model for undermining the sexist representation of police violence as only persecuting Black men in contemporary anti-carceral thought and of abolition as primarily being undertaken by men. Though literature is little discussed in critical prison studies, the method that *Eva's Man* and *Beale Street* model for countering those who insist upon the primacy of men can guide future scholarship working against the effacement of Black women's experience of and work toward the abolition of police violence.

These 1970s novels also laid the ground for 1980s anti-carceral Black Feminist novels. While novels from both decades provide their own abolitionist imaginaries and can yield much insight for contemporary abolitionist thinkers, it is worth noting that the 1970s novels marked something of a transition. *Beale Street* highlights the means of

abolition and the community that can make that abolition possible, but the novel does not provide the comedic ending of *The Color Purple*, for instance; as a result, it gestures toward but does not sketch the fruits of abolition. *Eva's Man* makes reference to and revises media and state narratives but does not turn inward toward the Black Radical Tradition in the way that *The Salt Eaters* does. As an aggregate, the 1970s novels provide a means of reaccessing the collective thought that enabled their production, but they ultimately do not provide as self-conscious or as dramatic a representation of the means of abolition as the 1980s chapters do. Put differently, the 1970s chapters begin to surface an abolitionist thought and method that had been percolating since the 1950s but that required a change in collective thought for its gendered revision, and the 1980s chapters elaborate upon and provide the most realized depiction of that thought and method. It is to to that work that we must now turn.

CHAPTER 4: The Incessant War: Revising Theories of Abolition in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

Gloria Naylor's 1982 novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, begins with a story of violent dispossession. Midway through the first story, "Mattie Michael," Mattie's son, Basil, gets into a fight at a bar. The police arrest and assault him. In jail, he tells her via the phone, "is a hellhole ... It's filthy and smelly, and I even heard rats under my bed last night." The toilets are broken, bedbugs swarm, and the food makes him vomit. Suffering from the assault's injuries as well as the conditions of incarceration, Basil implores his mother to post his bail. The only way she can afford to do so is to put up her house, which she describes as containing "a lifetime of work," as security. Mattie does not want to lose the one thing she has to show for years of labor, but she does not want her son to suffer either. Eventually, her fears for her son overwhelm her, and she posts her son's bail. Fearing conviction and further incarceration, her son flees. Mattie loses her home and, with it, all the congealed labor of her life (Naylor 46-53 italics in text). What begins as a story of police violence against Black men ends as a dramatization of the ways that state violence dispossesses Black women of their property and, in the process, their work.

This dramatization revises the earlier depiction of police violence as dispossessing Black men of labor. In Naylor's account, even where the police assault Black men, the state dispossesses Black women and especially those Black women who do the labor of caring for Black men. As Dorothy Roberts reminds in *Shattered Bonds* (2001), society "places all responsibility on parents" and none on the structures that determine a parent's ability to provide for their children (Roberts 89). The individualization of parental

responsibility, Dorothy Roberts demonstrates, leads to the criminalization of Black mothers. Naylor's "Mattie Michael" dramatizes the results of this individuation unto criminality, insisting that it is one means through which state violence dispossesses Black mothers, the representation of which she suggests is only possible in fiction. "*No one had beat up her son,*" Naylor writes, conveying the police's claims about Basil's arrest. "*He had resisted arrest, and the officers involved had used due force to restrain the suspect*" (Naylor 46, italics in text). Where the official record contends that no violence occurred, fiction can chronicle not only the violence but also its ramifications upon the mother of the assaulted—the latter being beyond the purview of police reports—and the life damaged by, but exceeding, that violence. The short story's expanded attention to Mattie's life and labor enables Naylor to reframe that which the county's bail office would only record as an economic transaction in monetary terms—the value of the house put up as security for bail—as a single mother's concern for her child's safety and as countless hours of work undertaken in the hopes of a better future for herself and for her son. Fictionality, in other words, affords the ability to document that which both the state and masculinized accounts of police violence attempt to repress: Its dispossession of Black women and its regulation of race, gender, and kinship.

This scene in *The Women of Brewster Place* models the novelistic Black Feminist representation of police violence that circulated in the 1980s. To some degree, the novel is exemplary because of Naylor's biography. Naylor was influenced by contemporaneous Black Feminists—she once said that reading *The Bluest Eye* enabled her to become a writer—and the novel bears the marks of that influence: The titular neighborhood that comprises the novel's setting is described in terms similar to the ones Morrison uses to

describe The Bottoms in *Sula* and to the ones Petry uses to describe the titular neighborhood of *The Narrows* (Naylor 2004 11). Naylor self-consciously positions *The Women of Brewster Place* as a Black Feminist novel—a position marked especially by an attention to state violence—and yet the novel’s theorization of state violence is little discussed in scholarship. The same is true of Black Feminist novels more generally. Even in the most famous 1980s Black Feminist novels, where police violence is pivotal to their plots, scholars have rarely discussed their representations of state violence as central to their Black Feminism. As I endeavor to show in this chapter, these novels draw on the 1950s valorization of Black men laborers and their denigration of the police for violently regulating those heroic subjects, but they revise the gendered logics underlying these representations. They also draw upon the 1960s novels’ representation of incidents of police violence as local battles in imperial states’ transnational pacifying wars, but they represent Black women as soldiers in this war as a means of valorizing Black women’s anti-state struggles and critiquing the state’s persecution of them. In their tales of the ways in which state violence dispossesses Black women of their waged public labor and their unwaged care labor to reinforce their colonial status globally, these novels work to counteract both the state’s and earlier masculinist Black radicals’ repression of state violence against Black women from public memory.

This increased attention to the place of Black women’s labor in relation to police violence derived from and commented upon contemporaneous historical transformations. During the 1980s, prison expansion reached a fever pitch under Reagan’s War on Drugs, culminating in the largest increase in national prison populations in any decade in the twentieth century. The federal and local punitive policies driving incarceration preyed on

the economic inequality that had risen in the wake of the late 1970s global economic crisis and increased deindustrialization in the United States. In 1979, interstate transportation of commodities manufactured in prisons became legal, turning the 1980s prison into a profit-center. In that same decade, federal and state governments increasingly criminalized poverty and homelessness, while defunding the government's social safety net. In time, the police became the supervisors of poverty, a position they legitimated through the rhetoric of policing drugs and violent crime. As Kali Gross documents in "African American Women, Mass Incarceration, and the Politics of Protection" (2015), Black women especially suffered from the prison industrial complex's expansion, and their prison population increased more than any other group in the 1980s and 1990s (Gross 15). These encounters with the PIC stretched far beyond incarceration. According to Andrea Ritchie in *Invisible No More* (2017), policing Black women during the War on Drugs often took the form of street strip and cavity searches.

[T]he war on drugs also drives gendered forms of police violence, such as extortion of sexual favors under the threat of a drug arrest that could lead to the loss of a job, a home, or children to child-welfare authorities, or to a long mandatory-minimum sentence, or to policing of pregnancy and motherhood. (Ritchie 51)

Seen from this vantage, prison expansion legitimated by the War on Drugs took the form of the increased violent policing of Black, and especially poor Black, women. Given the intensification of state assaults legitimated through the policing of illegal work, it's unsurprising that the 1980s Black Feminist novels represented state violence as persecuting Black women's labor.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ For more on prison expansion during the 1980s, see Joy James' *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender, and Race in U.S. Culture* (1996), the Justice Policy Institute's "The Punishing Decade: Prison and

Yet their representations of state violence also foregrounded Black women's isolation, which derived in part from the political position of Black Feminists in the 1980s. Beyond the ever-expanding persecution from the prison industrial complex, Black Feminists found themselves marginalized by other political activists. As Nikol Alexander-Floyd writes in *Gender, Race, and Nationalism in Contemporary Black Politics* (2007), Black nationalists in the 1980s increasingly focused on the family and especially on displacing "Black female strength and self-sufficiency taken to be represented by female-headed, single-parent households" (Floyd 61). And as has been remarked upon in a number of texts, white Feminists also marginalized Black Feminists. Loretta Ross, co-creator of the theory of Reproductive Justice, summarizes the position of Black Feminists best in her preface to *Revolutionary Mothering* (2016):

Imagine feminists of color in 1981 seeking to explain the complex matrix of domination and oppression we faced unto Reagan's cowboy capitalism, yet feeling invalidated in our communities of color because our militant feminism called attention to sexism, homophobia, and violence. Simultaneously, we were devalued in majority-white feminist circles because we confronted racism, xenophobia, and colonialism in feminist thought and practice. (Ross xiii).

This marginalization in anti-racist and anti-sexist organizations, which led Kimberlé Crenshaw to coin the term intersectionality in 1989, isolated Black Radical women in the 1980s. Consider the difference between Angela Davis' 1974 autobiography and Assata

Jail Estimates at the Millennium" (2000), Joy James' introduction to *The New Abolitionists: (Neo)Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings* (2005), Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007), Donna Murch's "Crack in Los Angeles: Crisis, Militarization, and Black Response to the Late Twentieth-Century War on Drugs" (2015), Carol Anderson's *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (2016), Elizabeth Hinton's *From the War on Poverty to Mass Incarceration* (2017), and GerShun Avilez's "Uneven Vulnerability: Hypervisibility and Spaces of Imprisonment" in *Black Queer Freedom* (2020). For more on the ways in which prison expansion was gendered, see Kristin Bumiller's *In An Abusive State: How Neoliberalism Appropriated the Feminist Movement Against Sexual Violence* (2008) and Andrea Ritchie's *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color* (2017).

Shakur's 1988 *Assata*. While both books were positively received, widespread public support helped turn the tide in Davis' trial to win her freedom from incarceration, while Shakur penned her autobiography from asylum in Cuba, where she remains today. As exemplified by *Assata*, Black Feminists' political and material marginalization came to impact Black Feminist cultural production. Black Feminist texts, in turn, increasingly represented the work Black women had done and could do alone—care labor—as a means of securing better lives, including a life free from state violence.⁵⁰

This marginalization of Black women and attention to care labor shaped the Black Feminist novels' representation of the means of abolishing state violence. In the midst of the long counterrevolution, the novelists could not convincingly represent Black women as being in a position to seize the state; consequently, Black Feminist novels turned away from the midcentury's revolutionary zeal and toward incremental visions of progress. For the latter, care labor proved essential both as a mechanism for ushering in abolition and as a symbol of the new abolitionists, who sought a future free from state violence as well as from sexist violence from Black civilians. These gestures toward abolition were subtle, necessitating close-reading and sustained attention. As a result, this chapter focuses on two novels: Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* (1980) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). By attending to these canonical novels, I endeavor not only to demonstrate that the Marxist influence hid in plain sight—in this case, in representations of state violence's effect on care labor—but also to insist that the prison abolitionist spirit

⁵⁰ Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” in “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989) and expanded upon the term's relevance to responses to intimate partner violence in “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” (1990). She has also recently applied the term to responses to incarceration and police violence in “From Private Violence to Mass Incarceration: Thinking Intersectionally about Women, Race, and Social Control” (2011).

did too. By returning to this literature with the insights of recent scholarship in critical prison studies and African American literary criticism, I aim to recover 1980s Black Feminist literature's little-discussed theories of abolition and the ways those texts kept theories of abolition alive amidst intense counterrevolution, paving the way for 1990s prison abolitionists like Joy James and INCITE as well as for contemporary critical prison studies.

By recovering the carceral critiques and abolitionist imaginary in some of the most famous Black Feminist texts, I aim to contribute to scholarship in literary criticism on both the 1980s and on Black Feminist literature. While scholars like Barbara Christian, Deborah McDowell, and Hazel Carby, among other giants in the field, contributed early studies of this period's Black Feminist literature, there has been a marked decrease in publishing on this all-too famous era. As Trimiko Melancon writes in *Unbought and Unbossed* (2014), there is "a paucity of scholarship in African American and black feminist literary cultural studies, which have given little critical attention to the interesting *interregnum* period between black nationalism and multiculturalism" (Melancon 7-8 italics in text). While recent works by scholars on the long Black Arts movement, including Margo Crawford and Carter Mathes, have provided a better sense of the 1970s, there still remains little recent scholarly writing on Black Feminist literature of the 1980s, even less on their representations of police violence and the prison industrial complex, and next-to-nothing on Marxism's influence on these representations. This chapter endeavors to fill that void, providing a more complete understanding of the influences that gave birth to the novels of this decade and of the anti-state-violence politics of these novels.

Upon returning to 1980s Black Feminist novels to consider their representations of carceral violence and of abolition, the place of the future rises to the fore. Recent turns toward 1970s and 1980s Black Feminist writing have focused especially on their visions of futures other than the contemporary in which we live, which might yet still inform a better future to come. Foremost among those scholars is Alexis Pauline Gumbs in her introduction to *Revolutionary Mothering* (2017). After noting that the federal government demonized Black mothers and supported the sterilization of women of color throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Gumbs writes,

In the face of this genocidal attack, Black feminists from the 1970s to the 1990s appropriated motherhood as a challenge and a refusal to the violence that these discourses of stabilization and welfare would naturalize ... Black feminists audaciously centered an entire literary movement around the invocation of this criminal act of Black maternity, demanding not only the rights of Black women to reproductive autonomy in the biological sense, but also the imperative to create narratives, theories, contexts, collectives, publications, political ideology, and more.

Their literary production aimed to generate “an alternative destiny,” one not defined by premature death but by continued, and different, life (Gumbs 20-1). Gumbs’ figuration of Black Feminism’s futurity accords with GerShun Avilez’s recent writings on the relationship between violence and Black queer futurity in *Black Queer Freedom* (2020). “Injury is a perpetual reality,” he writes, “but desire creates space for movement and possibility within it ... [T]he only path to freedom is paved with injury, but desire points the way forward” (Avilez 17). While Avilez focuses on Black queer writers within and beyond the 1980s, his insistent coupling of the relationship between material violence and a future without it, particularly in his writing on the carceral state in Cheryl Clarke’s poetry and Black queer men’s prison writing, influences my work. This chapter builds on

Avilez's and Gumbs' attention to Black writers' gestures to the coupling of a present suffused with violence and a future free from violence, but it departs from both in a focus on care labor as chronicled by Black Feminist writers. While care labor was important to the 1970s Black Feminist novels, care labor occupies an even more central position in the 1980s novels and, as a result, a more fruitful opportunity to consider the place of care labor in producing future abolition. By recovering the long Marxist influence on Black radical representations of police violence, I foreground that care labor, in 1980s Black Feminist novels, is the site in which writers theorize abolition.

As I argue in this chapter, contemporary scholars in critical prison studies still have much to learn from these analyses of the place of labor in producing abolition, and scholars of African American literature still have much to learn about the place of both Marxism and the carceral state's influence on Black Feminist literature. Where the previous chapters were oriented toward the past and to the repression of history from the memory of all but a few scholars, chronicling Marxism's influence to account for the ways in which Black novels provided analyses of the relationship between state violent dispossession and gender, this chapter turns to the future. Here, I consider at the most length the ways in which labor can contribute to abolition and the ways in which literature can contribute to the scholarly projects of critical prison studies. The revision of earlier cultural scripts in *The Salt Eaters* and *The Color Purple* expands upon the place of labor and upon the theory of abolition as a process of both negating the prison industrial complex and producing new modes of governance. Against the theory of abolition as a one-time revolution, these novels represent this abolitionist process as recursive in two ways: First, in that it turns both inward to the harms of the novel as a genre itself, and

second, in that this process attempts to heal past harms to produce a future in which the conditions that enabled those harms could not exist, but because time continues and because harms continue to happen, that return to the past must continue to happen in the same way that care labor needs constant repetition; just as the care laborer must cook new meals each day, so too does the abolitionist need to return to new harms with each sunrise. This recursive abolition, gestured toward in the 1970s Black Feminist novels but more fully realized in the 1980s Black Feminist novels, is the transformation of the state's dispossession of Black women's care labor into the production of care as a means for responding to harm. By uncovering earlier theories of abolition in African American literature, I endeavor to show that literature does not only contribute to critical prison studies by helping to answer the question of how state violence against Black women came to be repressed from public memory; literature can also help to model abolition and, in so doing, imagine other futures for Black people.

By recovering this vision, I aim to shed new light on the ways in which literary critics can contribute to the project of critical prison studies. As abolitionist scholars repeatedly emphasize, the culture that legitimates the prison industrial complex must be dismantled at the same time that physical prisons must be torn down; the material and cultural efforts depend upon each other. Literary critics can join other scholars in this endeavor by recovering critiques and abolitionist imaginaries in literature. Especially important to the recovery of these critiques is an attention to gendering of state violence, and especially important to the abolitionist imaginaries is the gendering of labor. Just as *The Color Purple* and *The Salt Eaters* foreground that Black women constitute the subordinated or repressed excess of earlier representations of police violence, so too can

scholars foreground gender in American literature's representation of the relationship between state violence and race. Yet literary critics can do more than point to that which was already written. In the tracking of influence across literary history, literary critics can approach the collective knowledge production that, I argue in my introduction, is the defining feature of the Black Radical Tradition. In so doing, literary critics can begin to consider collective critiques of state violence and models of abolition that individual novels, through no fault of their own, gesture toward but do not encompass. Because both recorded and non-recorded thought influenced these texts, this attempt to recover this prior collective knowledge production via influence can provide a method for approaching, even if not fully recovering, that which was not recorded.

Working toward the recovery of this collective knowledge is essential because imagining abolition is a collective, not individual, endeavor. As Mariame Kaba has recently said in an interview, the goal of prison abolitionists is not now and has never been to institute Ruth Wilson Gilmore, or any other valued anti-carceral thinker, as a top-down leader (Kaba 2021). Rather, because abolitionists believe that abolition is a collective endeavor and requires the rewriting of social relations, the goal is and has been to collectively imagine a new set of social relations and models of governance centered around responding to harm that work toward ending prisons and their enabling condition. Consequently, the work of the abolitionist literary critic is not to recover an individual writer or text's imagining of abolition so much as prior collective imaginings, ones which I have endeavored to resurface through a tracking of influence. While I worked to foreground this influence in the 1970s novels in the prior chapter, the 1980s novels are especially productive in this endeavor to gesture toward collective knowledge production

in that they self-consciously foreground influence in their allusion to past radical movements, as in Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*, and in their allusion to past Black Left Feminist literary texts, as in Walker's *The Color Purple*. In other words, their attention to influence and to revising the past sheds light, for scholars, on the role that collective imaginaries play in producing their own novels. By returning to those prior collective abolitionist imaginaries, literary critics can recover further sources for contemporary collective abolitionist imaginings.

Under Siege, In the Throes, and On the Verge

The 1950s and 1960s Black radical novels kept alive Marxist accounts of the relationship between state violence, labor, and global imperialism, but they did so by thoroughly masculinizing state violence. 1970s Black Feminists began to undermine this gendering. In novels like Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Alice Walker's *Meridian*, Black Feminists regendered labor, chronicling Black women's care and political labor as well as state violence's effect on labor. But the masculinism against which they reacted had not disappeared at the stroke of midnight on January 1st, 1980. These intertwined strands of masculinist Black radicalism, state violence, and Black Feminist writing laid the foundation for Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eater* (1980) and especially for its representation of state violence. Although the novel does not represent police violence at much length—a quality, I have suggested elsewhere, that testifies to subordinated influence—its representations of police violence draw upon that history of masculinist Black radical accounts of police violence and upon Black Feminist revisions of those depictions. More to the purpose of this chapter, *The Salt Eaters* carries that history and its

effects on the present in its turn toward the future, leading to a chronicling of the place of Black women's political and care labor, as well as the place of literature and culture, in abolition. Put differently, Bambara continues this Black Feminist project of revising the masculinist Marxist-influenced theory of police violence as regulating labor in part of an ongoing war to account for Black women, but she does so especially in her representation of the cultural changes that are necessary to lay the ground for an anti-sexist abolitionist movement. Taking seriously the insistence in critical prison studies that the cultural and material structures of the prison industrial complex buttress each other, Bambara's work to delegitimize the cultures supporting prisons and her work to counter the sexism of some strands of Black radicalism, altogether, work toward bringing about abolition.

Toni Cade Bambara was already an accomplished Black cultural worker by the time of the publication of *The Salt Eaters* in 1980. She had taught at City College, working especially with a Black theatre troupe and striving to make the college more accessible for Black students. She had already edited the famed anthology *The Black Woman* (1970). And she published several short stories throughout the 1970s, including two collections—*Gorilla, My Love* in 1972 and *The Sea Birds Are Alive* in 1977—which provided a portrait of the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and anti-Vietnam-War activism from a Black Feminist perspective. Her experience as a contributor to various kinds of Civil Rights and Black Power organizing, as well as her commitment to educating Black people about their culture, came to shape her most famous novel.

The Salt Eaters, Bambara's tale of Black women's experience of the long denouement of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, marked something of a

departure. The book is formally experimental, shuttling across time and space while introducing readers to a panoply of named characters, discourses of varying origins, and subjects as diverse as nuclear power and housework. *The Salt Eaters* combines this expansive perspective with a preoccupation with healing. “Are you sure,” the novel famously begins, “that you want to be well?” (Bambara 3). Shortly after publication, reviewers focused on its maximalist form and recuperative plot. In a review for *The New York Times*, John Edgar Wideman wrote that Bambara’s fiction and lectures before *The Salt Eaters* had long emphasized “the necessity for black people to maintain their best traditions, to remain healthy and whole as they struggle for political power.” *The Salt Eaters*, he continues, contends that “[g]etting well entails risk, honesty, a commitment to struggle, a collective effort” (Wideman 1980). Several others, including Doris Grumbach of *The Chicago Tribune* and Anne Siddons of *The Atlanta Constitution*, largely concur with Wideman’s claims: *The Salt Eaters* represents the affliction facing Black people as being as much metaphysical as material, and its antidote is collective action towards Black autonomy. These early interpretations have largely been upheld by recent scholars. Esther L. Jones in *Medicine and Ethics in Black Women’s Speculative Fiction* (2015), for instance, insists that *The Salt Eaters* ties “personal illness to social disease and disorder,” all of which derive from material trauma and an inability to create a coherent narrative of one’s place in relation to history (Jones 3-4). One significant source of this affliction, in Bambara’s account, is state violence, and labor paves the road to its recovery.

Much of the novel contends that labor is essential to political radicalism’s ability to endure police violence. This insistence arises in Bambara’s representation of the Civil

Rights Movement, in which Black women's care labor made political action possible.

Early in the novel, Velma recalls a protest at which she recalls that women had

trudged through dust, through rain, through mud ... They'd marched all morning, all afternoon, and most of early evening to get there. Shot at, spit on, nearly run down by a cement mixer, murder mouthed, lobbed with everything from stones to egg, they'd kept the group intact and suffered no casualties or arrests.

They survive assaults from civilians and police alike that include sexual and other kinds of violence, finally arriving at the rally's location only to find that the event has not yet been set up. Standing on swollen feet, the women do their best to arrange the rally while caring for children and feeding the attendees. Eventually, limousines arrive, out of which expensively dressed men pour. The leader, a man, gives a speech and then disappears (Bambara 34-6). In Bambara's account, Black women bear the brunt of the state's violence, which produces lasting physical damage, and this violence only makes their labor—the political organizing and care labor that makes the Movement possible—more difficult. In this account, Black women's care labor works toward ending state racism, for which they receive neither gratitude nor material support from Black men and for which the state assaults them. Here, *The Salt Eaters* recovers the earlier Marxist labor-centric theory of police violence, but reconsiders the relationship between gender, state violence, and political labor, revising the theory to account for the effects of state violence upon Black women's political work.

For Bambara, state violence's effect upon Black women's political labor collaborates with masculinist Black radicals' marginalization of Black women to undermine efforts toward ending state violence. In *The Salt Eaters*, the aforementioned sexist distribution of political labor continues long after the movement. In the late 1970s,

Velma and a group of other women attend a political event at which a Black male representative of a trade union speaks. As he remarks on labor organizing, the women calculate “money to be raised, mailing lists to be culled, halls to be booked, flyers to be printed up, hours away from school, home, work, sleep to be snatched.” The men in the audience smoke, the speaker continues speaking, and the women keep writing to-do lists of tasks that include everything from finding caterers for receptions to determining which billboard to commandeer (Bambara 27-8). This gendered labor distribution, Bambara suggests, also structures their homes. One of the women says that her husband “makes up lists, see, of all the things he wants done” as though “there were little kitchen fairies and yard elves and other magic creatures” (Bambara 31). The novel’s men direct care labor and expropriate its value both in the home and in the political realm. Even worse, the men do so for their own individual gains (government contracts, professorships, and pay), which grant no collective benefit (Bambara 36). This structure has led to several organizations being, as Bambara narrates, “sacrificed on the altar of male ego” (Bambara 26-7). It’s no wonder that Velma and her ilk find themselves organizing against the same violence during the Carter administration that they had been during the Kennedy administration; their political work is constantly being undermined by men’s dispossession of their labor, men’s pursuit of individual gains, and men’s hunt for masculinity. Yet this gendered distribution of labor need not determine their future. After the speech, the women eject one of the men seeking to use their labor for his campaign for city commissioner and decide to form their own organization. The structure to come, the novel suggests, is one in which the women are no longer alienated from their political labor in that its gains will be distributed to all of them. While the novel gives little

glimpse of what results from their organizing, *The Salt Eaters* suggests that this structure has the potential to undo both Black radical men's labor expropriation and the state's violent dispossession. Returning the value of care and political labor to the Black women laborers, in Bambara's account, yields the potential to abolish state violence.

Yet an all-Black women's organization within a sexist world is not enough. Rather, Bambara insists that the cultures that enable Black radical men and the state to dispossess Black women of their labor must be undermined for abolition to take place. *The Salt Eaters* counters these sexist cultures in her revision of earlier masculinist accounts of state violence in a subplot to Velma's medical and spiritual recovery from her attempted suicide. When Sophie Haywood, Velma's godmother, visits Velma in the hospital, Sophie thinks of her son, Smitty. The following paragraph begins with Smitty "climbing the leg of the statue" at an anti-draft rally, where the police besiege him "like a tank." The paragraph ends, "The blow that caught him in the shins," and the next begins, "Sophie face down in the jailhouse bed springs." The assonance intertwines two scenes of police violence—one in which the police assault Smitty and one in which the police coerce Sophie's neighbor, Portland Edgers, to beat her—enabling Bambara to jump across time and space. In the following paragraphs, Bambara alternates between the two state assaults until Sophie recalls Smitty being pulled down from the statue. "A flagpole buckling at the knees," Bambara writes, presumably describing Smitty. "And a tall building tottering," begins the next paragraph, "trembling falling down inside her face down in the jailhouse bed springs teeth splintering and soul groaning. Smitty. Edgers" (Bambara 14-5). Here, Bambara revives the earlier masculinist depictions of police violence as repressing political protest and labor in her depiction of their assault on her

son, but the police's violent regulation of Black men's labor is not simply akin to the one Sophie experiences. Rather, state violence against Black men enables and compounds the victimization of Black women: The police's assault and incarceration of Portland enables them to coerce him into beating Sophie, which she recalls as especially harrowing because they weaponized her friend, and their assault on her son still plagues Sophie's memory, returning to her in traumatic flashbacks as she visits Velma. The form of the novel, ultimately, enables Bambara to represent the past dispossession of Sophie's political labor as regulating her care labor for Velma in the present, long after the formation of the all-Black-women's political organization. This violence has lingering effects just as prior discourses in the African American novel continue to influence Bambara's own representation of state violence. Rather than seek to transcend this influence by developing a new mode of representation, Bambara revises that theory's gendering. In so doing, Bambara suggests that transcendence is either not possible or not worthwhile. Instead, these masculinist discourses continue to influence the novel, just as the masculinism of earlier decades continue to harm Sophie and Velma, and so these cultures of sexism need immanent transformation in the same way that the wounds still afflicting Sophie and Velma do. For Bambara, the form of *The Salt Eaters*—the temporal jumping that is the hallmark of its form—enables her to chronicle the ongoing effects of violence in the past as a means of insisting that prior wounds cannot be transcended so much as revised.⁵¹

⁵¹ Importantly, this feminized portrait of the state's violent dispossession alludes, as Carter Mathes has demonstrated, to the famous incident in which the police coerced Black inmates to assault Fannie Lou Hamer (Mathes 143). Hamer attested to her experience in speeches across the nation, including a speech delivered on August 22, 1964 to the Credentials Committee at the DNC that was broadcast on major news

Bambara does not only revise the representation of police violence as regulating men's labor. She also revises the 1960s representation of police violence as part of an ongoing colonial war. In the same scene, just after Sophie finishes recalling the incident of police assault, Bambara writes,

Sophie Heywood closed the door of the treatment room. And there was something in the click of it that made many of the old-timers, veterans of the incessant war—Garveyites, Southern Tenant Associates, trade unionists, Party members, Pan-Africanists—remembering night riders and day traitors and the cocking of guns, shudder. (Bambara 14-5)

Bambara frames the aforementioned violent dispossession as part of an “incessant war,” a claim that hearkens back to the 1960s representation of police violence as part of a global war and Black Americans in America as an internal colony that must take part in a global anti-colonial struggle to eradicate state violence. This theory, it's worth remembering, descended from the “Garveyites” and CPUSA “Party members,” who Bambara explicitly mentions in this scene. Yet the person whose experience of violence makes the simple closing of a door “shudder” is Sophie, once more reminding that Black women can and did participate in those movements and that the state's repression of them lingers far beyond the last blow. That Bambara revises prior masculinist accounts of state violence when Sophie visits Velma at the hospital, importantly, suggests that Sophie's recollections are related to Velma's injury. Velma, Bambara repeatedly suggests, suffers from a malady related to years of state assault as well as prolonged marginalization by masculinist Black radicals. This marginalization was in part material and in part cultural. By framing antiblack state violence as part of a war, Bambara surfaces this latter cultural

networks. For a transcript of Hamer's speech, see the American Radio Works website, *Say it Plain: A Century of Great African American Speeches*: <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/flhamer.html>.

masculinization within the discourse of the novel itself at the same time that she revises its gendering. Put differently, Bambara's novel works to undo the discourses of masculinist Black radicalism that contributes to Velma's injury. "[P]rison is not a building 'over there'," famed prison abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes in *Golden Gulag* (2007), "but a set of relationships that undermine rather than stabilize everyday lives everywhere" (Gilmore 242). Those carceral relationships include the masculinism among Black radicals that expropriates Black women's labor and that represses the police's violent dispossession of those women. Given the repeated insistence in critical prison studies that the cultures that legitimate prisons enable and reinforce their material presence, Bambara's revision of these masculinist discourses works to counter the culture that led Velma to the hospital. For Bambara, anti-sexist Black radical discourses can contribute to the abolitionist project, but the production of these anti-sexist Black radical discourses requires the immanent revision of these cultural scripts. *The Salt Eaters* is not just a story about healing; it is healing itself.

Yet *The Salt Eaters* does not participate in healing alone nor does it conceive of this kind of healing as individual. That much is clear in this very scene. In her reference to the Garveyites trade unionists, and other groups of people, Bambara reminds that both the organizing against antiblack state violence and the representation of police assault as an instance of dispossession within an ongoing colonial war was, ultimately, a collective project. So too were the abolitionist imaginaries of the past sketched by collectives. In surfacing the collective knowledge production that influenced her own representations of state violence at the same time that she revises its masculinism, Bambara reminds that her own novel descended from a tradition at the same time that it was part of a different one:

Black Feminism. *The Salt Eaters*, among many other texts, took part in a larger Black Feminist project of countering both the cultural legitimations for the prison industrial complex and the masculinism underlying some Black radical critiques of prisons. This cultural project is collective because its vision of abolition, as well as the means of bringing abolition about, is as well. By gesturing to prior Black radical collectives and revising their masculinism, the novel reminds that no single text or person can bring about the processes of negating the cultures of prisons, of countering the masculinism of Black radicalisms past, and of imagining abolition. Attending to influence, ultimately, is one means of recovering the cultural effort of these larger collectives and of gesturing toward the collective cultural productions that these projects took part in: namely, healing the long-lasting wounds of masculinist Black radicalism and of state violence.

Returning to the place of state violence in healing the wounds inflicted by masculinism, ultimately, sheds new light on scholarly questions about and accounts of *The Salt Eaters*. Much of this criticism has focused on the relationship between the book's alternative temporality and Velma's illness. In "Toni's Obligato" (2008), Cheryl Wall argues that the book is structured like a jazz fugue in its movement across time and space. In its linking of the past and the present, "*The Salt Eaters* identifies the spiritual as the missing element in the progressive political movements of the 1960s. It argues that to achieve the goals of sixties' idealism and to respond to new challenges of the last quarter century ... people of color need to recuperate the subjugated knowledge of their foremothers" (Wall 30-1). Reinforcing Wall's insistence on the recovery of historical knowledge, Thabiti Lewis' *Black People Are My Business: Toni Cade Bambara's Practices of Liberation* (2020) foregrounds that the route to healing involves the

communal recovery of prior Black spiritual practice and knowledge to produce new futures for Black people. Lewis writes,

freedom requires memory and forward movement with the help of the past. For the characters in this novel, spiritual whole-ness mandates a healing process that begins with knowing and using one's own history and mythology, followed by an understanding of how Black identity connects to that history. *The Salt Eaters* suggests that healing requires a conflation of history and mythology with female self- definition, spirituality, and commitment to community. (Lewis 154)

For Carter Mathes in *Imagine the Sound* (2015), the recovery of this past—or, as he might put it, the actualization of a non-linear relationship between the past and the present—provides the opportunity to create “new political space for the consideration of the unimaginable” (Mathes 155). In “Feminist Breathing” (2017), Jean-Thomas Tremblay similarly emphasizes the future orientation of this recovery. After noting that *The Salt Eaters* chronicles the malaise of the Civil Rights Movement's denouement and the maladies that arose in that period, Jean-Thomas Tremblay writes, “The novel communicates a vision for reestablishing conditions wherein activists can once again bear the thought of revolution. The novel, like the healing it recounts, prepares ... for a return to activism” (Tremblay 109). Central to all of these scholars is a foregrounding of the alternative temporality of *The Salt Eaters*, the question of the relationship between the past and a revolutionary future, and the process of healing that the novel represents and is a part of. Put differently, scholars have long understood *The Salt Eaters* to be participating in healing the culture that gave rise to Velma's malady and to be a text that frames itself as participating in the preparation of the conditions that enable large-scale political change.

But what change, exactly, does Bambara's novel prepare for? What challenges, according to *The Salt Eaters*, pursue Black people, what knowledge does it insist Black people must recover, and what is the unimaginable that Bambara hopes this recovery will enable people to imagine? As I have endeavored to suggest here, among all the other answers to these questions, *The Salt Eaters* insists that one challenge continuing to face people is the lingering hold of prior state violence and its increasing intensity amidst prison expansion. Essential to this violence's lasting wounds are the sexist cultures of some strands of Black radicalism, which prevent these wounds from healing. The combination of masculinism and state assault, ultimately, yields disastrous results for Black people persecuted by the state. Yet the novel does not only chronicle the challenges facing those people. It also begins to imagine solutions. *The Salt Eaters* insists that recovering prior analyses of police violence, including those of the Marxist-influenced midcentury representations, can help imagine the unimaginable world beyond the pale of abolition. In its alternative temporality, wherein Sophie in the present recalls two intertwined assaults in the past, the novel itself stages such a recovery. Its form reminds that the past—of prisons, of abolitionists—lives on in and creates the conditions for the present; consequently, this endeavor to recover what is useful must, simultaneously, revise and supplant the harms of the past. In the process, *The Salt Eaters* gestures toward new understandings of state violence—ones which can account for both Black women and Black men's victimization—that yield the potential to heal wounds inflicted by both the state and Black radicals. Returning to the place of police violence in *The Salt Eaters*, ultimately, sheds new light on prior scholarly interpretations of the novel not simply for the sake of producing new arguments. Rather, returning to this most

famous Black Feminist novel produces new understandings of the ways in which fiction, and scholarship on fiction, can contribute to the abolitionist effort to uproot the conditions that enable state violence.

Perhaps no one was clearer on the ways in which *The Salt Eaters* insisted on the importance of fiction in anti-state-violence efforts than Bambara herself. In her little-discussed essay “Working at it in Five Parts,” written in 1980 but recently republished by the CUNY Poetics Document Initiative in 2018, she suggests that literature functions as a medicine. She begins the essay by recounting an incident in her childhood in which she saw a sign in her neighborhood: “God is Omnipotent, Omnipresent, and Omniscient.” She knew then what she wanted to be. “Omnipotence,” she continues, “meant a powerful arm for knocking out of the way snarling dogs, nasty boys, flashers, do ugly cops, and anything else that turned a stroll around the block into an ordeal ... They got hurt. I didn’t want to get hurt” (Bambara 12). Her response to interpersonal and state violence, as well as to the sense that her life could be free from violence, was to yearn for the ability to attain that other, better life. While as a child this desire led her to hope for the ability to hurt others, her dreams changed as she got older, and they came to inform her work.

What underlies my work as I read it—and I suspect it is what keeps my ‘children’s’ stories from being insufferably coy, cute, and sentimental—are the basic givens from which I proceed. One, we are at war. Two, the natural response to oppression is resistance. Three, the natural response to stress and crisis is not breakdown and capitulation, but transformation and renewal. (Bambara 36)

Capitulation includes mimicking the state in its violence. The elder Bambara believed in something else—“transformation and renewal”—and that structured her fiction. It also led her to believe that literature could free Black people from violence.

Stories keep us alive. In the ships, in the camps, in the prisons, on the run, underground, undersiege, in the throes, on the verge—they snatch us back from the edge and replay the past and present in which we are the heroes of the tales. They whet our appetite for the future, the next chapter, the next generation of listeners to pass the document on. How it was. How it be. Preserved. That’s what I want to do. To write stories that save our lives. (Bambara 42-3)

Stories not only remind Black people in the throes of state and other assaults that they have political agency; fiction also carries historical knowledge in such a way that has the capacity to instruct Black people in the ways of making a survivable future. *The Salt Eaters* is a part of this project. “I argue in that work,” she ends the essay, “that immunity to ‘the serpent’s sting’ can be found in our own traditions ... Increasingly the issue is salvation. I want to create works that save our lives” (Bambara 49-50). Bambara insists on revising earlier sexist Black radical representations of police violence because she believes they still carry “immunity to ‘the serpent’s sting.’” The Black Feminist recuperation of the Marxist influence on midcentury representations of state violence, I have been suggesting, is one such cure still worth recovering. The Black Feminist account of the ways in which state violence structures a racial and gendered distribution of labor as well as its forms of dispossession has long gone undiscussed, as has the Black Feminist account of the place of Black women’s labor in abolishing such violence, but they still have much to teach in the ways of abolition.

Bambara’s representation of Black Feminist literature as an antidote to state and other assaults does not stand alone. It is part of a broader set of representations in 1970s and 1980s Black Feminist literature. In these authors’ accounts, Black Feminist literature contains vital critiques of state violence as a kind of dispossession distributed to Black women. These texts also thoroughly critique the ways in which Black men reinforce

Black women's vulnerabilities and worsen the wounds inflicted by the state. Yet these texts insist that Black Feminist literature can recover and rehabilitate past theories of both state violence and abolition in such a way that can contribute to the effort to produce an abolition to both the state's and civilians' distribution of violence on the basis of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Key, here, has been their recovery and recuperation of the Marxist analysis of state violence's effect on labor and on the place of labor in abolishing state violence. In her insistent attention to the ways that the state dispossesses Black women of their political labor as part of an ongoing war, and to the ways that masculinist Black radicals' exacerbate that dispossession, Bambara revises the gendering of the prior labor-centric theory of state violence to consider the ways in which police assaults regulate Black women's labor and the ways in which Black women's labor can bring about an end to police assaults. As we will see in the following section, *The Color Purple* provides the most sustained vision of the role of labor, as well as the role of revising prior cultural scripts, in abolition.

Like One of the Family

Thanks in no small part to the outcry from Black men critics shortly after its release and then again after its film adaptation, *The Color Purple* (1982) is most closely associated with intimate partner violence, not state violence. In considering the novel a document of domestic violence, scholars have foregrounded Celie's plot of experience of violence at the hands of Albert (elsewhere referred to as Mr. ____), her romance with Shug, and her eventual reconciliation with both. Yet such a reading limns the novel's tale of imperialism in Africa and, more to my purposes, its long portrait of Sofia's experience

of incarceration. Returning to *The Color Purple* with the contemporary urgency of thinking about prisons and the police, as well as with the knowledge of the three prior decades' depictions of police violence, foregrounds the place of care labor in Walker's portrait of the prison industrial complex. In particular, Walker represents the prison industrial complex as dispossessing Black women of care labor in such a way that ultimately comes to structure their kinship relations. The antidote to this racial gendered dispossession, in Walker's account, is a redistribution of care not only to people but also to literature.

Consider a letter Walker wrote to Adreinne Rich approximately two years after beginning *The Color Purple*. Walker writes,

I remember how horrified + mad I felt reading, in Of Woman Born, about your sense of “unconditional love” from your black maid. Talk about expropriation! I thought where are that women's children? What time for “unconditional love” does she have for them? ... It is a very touchy subject with me—as the daughter of a maid. (Walker 1981)

The confession of a white child's love for a Black caretaker is not, as Kimberly Wallace-Sanders reminds in *Mammy*, uncommon, but Walker's usage of the term expropriation is (Wallace-Sanders 2009 xiii-xiv). By 1981, expropriation assuredly bore Marxist connotations. A term associated with the men whom she characterizes as sexist lechers in *Meridian* in 1976, expropriation for Marxists most commonly refers to the taking of land. This violent theft, for Marx, produced wealth for those who became bourgeois and the need to work those who became proletarian. Here, Walker advances Marx's writing on expropriation by applying the term to domestic workers: The need to work as caretakers takes away the time necessary for the labor of love. This understanding of domestic work as a violent dispossession of love shapes Walker's portrait of the carceral plot in *The*

Color Purple, wherein the police assault of Sofia leads to her incarceration and subsequent paroling out as a domestic laborer.⁵²

From early in the novel on, Black women labor in violence's midst. After all, Albert marries Celie in part because he wants free labor and uses violence to coerce her into doing so (Walker 7-12; 26-7). While drafting, Walker reinforced violence's role in coercing Black women's labor: In the first draft, when seeing Shug distresses Albert, Walker wrote and then crossed out, "~~He never beat me again.~~" In its stead, the published novel reads, "Then he say, You better git on back to the field" (Walker MSS 1061, Box 50, Folder 8). Substituting reconciliation for work, Walker's novel portrays physical violence as a means for reinforcing a gendered distribution of labor and the labor extractors' dominance over the laborers. As Evelyn Nakano Glenn writes in her 2010 book on care and domestic work, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America*, "Recruitment into caring has historically relied on coercion, either direct or indirect" (Glenn 183). But the means of coercion—violence—is also the means of evading this labor elsewhere in the novel. Shortly after Harpo tries to control Sofia's work as a means of dominating her, he attempts to use violence to force her to obey, at which point Celie sees them "fighting like two mens" (Walker 35-7). Through this masculinized resistance, Sofia refuses work, evades the household economy, and temporarily avoids Harpo's domination. In *The Color Purple*, violence is an essential ingredient in the gendered

⁵² For more on expropriation, primitive accumulation, and dispossession, see Part VIII of Marx's *Capital*, Volume 1, Section III of Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital*, and Lenin's *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. For more on the love of white children reared by Black caretakers, see also Kimberly Wallace-Sanders' *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory* (Wallace-Sanders 2009 13-31) and Micki McElya's *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (McElya 160-206 2009).

distribution of care labor, both for its ability to coerce and for its ability to grant freedom from that labor.

Refusing violent labor coercion at home, however, exposes Sofia to state violence in public. Shortly after she leaves Harpo, she encounters the mayor and his wife, who compliment her children's cleanliness. Interpreting their appearance as testament to Sofia's proficiency as a care laborer, the mayor's wife asks Sofia to be her maid. When Sofia declines, the mayor slaps her, Sofia hits back, and then the police attack Sofia and her children. Catalyzed by a labor dispute, the police assault Sofia in part for refusing to submit the labor that she gives freely as an expression of love to the market, upholding the very racialized and gendered distribution of labor that Sofia resists at home (Walker 84-6). But they also punish her for using her means of resisting labor at home in public. This is a kind of "gender entrapment," which Beth Richie defines, in *Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Black Women* (1996), as the criminalization of Black women for the practices they use to survive intimate partner violence (Richie 4). In Walker's novel, Harpo and the police collaborate to punish Sofia for trying to escape the violent, racialized and gendered distribution of private and public labor. What the home and private citizens cannot regulate, the state and its actors can and will in *The Color Purple*.

The police regulation of Sofia's resistance to the violent coercion of care labor in the home, ultimately, coerces Sofia into doing the same kind of labor under different conditions. In prison, Sofia works in the laundry "[a]ll day long." The guards strip Sofia for talking back and make her sleep on the floor to keep her and other inmates from "say[ing] anything." And they accomplish their goal: "Every time they ast me to do

something, Miss Celie,” Sofia says, “I act like I’m you. I jump right up and do just what they say” (Walker 88). In the end, the state transforms her into the novel’s premier example of a passive, dominated person. In her history of incarcerated Black women’s labor in the late nineteenth-century, “Like I Was a Man: Chain Gangs, Gender, and the Domestic Carceral Sphere” (2013), Sarah Haley reinforces this description of prisons as producing new forms of “subjection” (Haley 53). There, she writes, “Widespread understandings of racialized gender roles set the terms for acceptable and unacceptable imprisonment, yet prisons were not merely outgrowths of such ideas. The prison functions as a productive regime” (Haley 56). Given that police violence catalyzes Sofia’s entry into the prison in Walker’s novel, it too produces this subjection that regulates black women’s labor as an end in itself and as a means for making black women obedient more generally. By attending to this labor coercion, Walker revises the Marxist labor-centric critique of police violence, returning to history to foreground the ways in which state violence has long regulated Black women’s labor and their relationship to that labor.

This mode of subjection, in Walker’s account, estranges Black women from their families. After they visit Sofia in the cell, Celie and Sofia’s families get her paroled out as a domestic servant to the very woman for whom she refused to work (Walker 101-3). Of her conditions, Sofia says,

They got me in a little storeroom up under the house, hardly bigger than Odessa’s porch, and just about as warm in the winter time. I’m at they beck and call all night and all day. They won’t let me see my children. They won’t let me see no mens. Well, after five years they let me see you once a year. I’m a slave. (Walker 103)

Their control over her hours produces a kind of anti-sociality, which estranges her from both romantic partners and her family. This alienation is far from temporary. After eleven and a half years on parole,

Her bigger children married and gone, and her littlest children mat at her, don't know who she is. Think she act funny, look old and dote on that little white girl she raise. (Walker 198)

Misinterpreting coercion as free will and love, her children frame Sofia as a mammy, a figure who is said to love, and love working for, her enslavers or employers. As Christina Sharpe writes of the mammy in Kara Walker silhouettes in *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (2009), the figure “shores up racial divides and intimate intra and interracial familial dynamics” (Sharpe 25) Following Sharpe’s analysis, the children abject Sofia from the family, rejecting their powerlessness in the face of the state and, to use Sharpe’s words, securing “their positions in the social fabric” (Sharpe 25).

The end result, for Sofia, is seemingly permanent estrangement. At dinner,

Sofia sit down at the big table like there's no room for her. Children reach cross her like she not there ... Children call Odessa mama. Call Squeak little mama. Call Sofia “Miss.” (Walker 200)

This alienation is particularly brutal—though, as Evelyn Glenn argues, common (Glenn 37)—because Sofia’s attempts to defend herself from Harpo were an attempt to prevent her labor of love from becoming coerced and because her attempt to refuse laboring for the mayor’s wife was an attempt to separate the market’s labor from the love that she showed her children through freely given care. Instead of preserving her family, Sofia’s care labor alienates her from it such that the carceral apparatus structures her family permanently. In this account, Walker represents police violence as regulating Black women’s care labor as a means of regulating their gender and their kinship ties.

To repair the estrangement catalyzed by state assault, the family redefines kinship. Scholars looking to consider the family's production of new familial relations might look to the much-discussed ending, in which, according to Lauren Berlant, the comedy of romantic reconciliation converges with familial reunion and national unification (Berlant 1988 854-9). Being more invested in process and in Sofia, however, I want to focus instead on a pivotal scene in which the family begins to undo violence's enabling conditions: The gathering just after Sofia is incarcerated, when the family brainstorms a means of making Sofia safe. In the first draft of this scene, Walker wrote and then crossed out, "For the first time in my life he [Mr. _____] reach for my hand" (MSS 1061 Box 50 Folder 8). By refusing Celie his comfort and Albert the gesture of support, Walker prolongs his violence, placing their response to police assault in danger's midst. Here, they also begin to rewrite the preexisting kin relations. Reaching beyond blood and marital ties to include Squeak, Shug, and the prizefighter, the group focuses on getting Sofia out of prison and so avoid redirecting their frustrations to each other (Walker 90-2). The effort to reduce the harm of state violence and to secure Sofia and her children, in other words, does not rely on a pre-existing family but begins to make a newer, safer one. Where Celie's family was already structured by violence, her biological father having been lynched and her stepfather having assaulted her, the novel suggests that redefining kinship in such a way that structures the family unit around safety can pave the way toward abolition.⁵³

⁵³ The book editor provides a similar parsing of the characters' interdependency in his account of Celie. He wrote, in a letter to Walker on September 9th, 1981, "As far as I can see, this is a novel about black women as victims of their own men; and about one black woman, submissive, defeated, who learns how to fight

Care is one key means through which the family rewrites their own relations in the hopes of becoming safer. In particular, the new family unit redistributes the responsibility for Sofia's care labor as well as the violent conditions which enable its violent coercion. The former occurs when the police attack the children, and the prizefighter, at Sofia's insistence, takes the children home (86). After Sofia's incarceration, both Odessa, her sister, and Squeak, her husband's new girlfriend, take care of her children (Walker 89). In these scenes, a wide-reaching kinship network not defined by blood, religious, or legal ties secure the children. This expansion of childcare to non-traditional laborers, however, is not enough; the family also takes on the risk of violence. After they discover that Squeak is the warden's niece, they persuade her to convince him to parole Sofia out to the mayor's wife (Walker 91-2). Although Squeak worries about doing so, she goes anyway, and the warden in turn sexually assaults her (95-6). In knowing and accepting risk, Squeak provides care for Sofia in the way that Christina Sharpe memorably describes care in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016): "shared risk between and among the Black trans*asterisked" (Sharpe 131). This scene is a gruesome example of care, but Squeak's taking on of the carceral danger facing Sofia does change Sofia's position and lead to Sofia and Squeak attacking each other less. By transforming interpersonal relations, care creates a new family in such a way that undoes the potential for violence in the family while chipping away at the conditions which enable violent labor coercion. Care, in other words, can be a method that can

back with the help of Sophia's strength, Shug's sensuousness (sexuality/sophistication), and Nettie's mind and heart" (MSS 1061 Box 9 Folder 3).

transform the family and, in the process, can work toward producing safety without reliance on the prison industrial complex.

This material change, in Walker's novel, is facilitated by representation. The depiction of police violence is not represented directly—as directly as an event can be represented in an epistolary text—wherein Celie describes the assault itself. Instead, the novel records Celie *telling* Squeak a tale that she heard from Sofia's sisters about the police assaulting Sofia, which ultimately leads the group to act (Walker 84). In her repeated attention to the transit of stories, in which the novel's recorded assault is at three removes from the event itself, Walker foregrounds that the representation of violence is as critical to the family's change as the material event itself. Representation again plays a pivotal part when Squeak returns from being sexually assaulted. After Harpo attempts to speak for her, Squeak interrupts and tells her story (Walker 95). When she finishes explaining, she "turn her face up to Harpo. Harpo, she say, do you really love me, or just my color?" Harpo tells her he loves her, kneels, and tries to embrace her. "She stand up. My name Mary Agnes, she say" (Walker 97). Telling her experience of sexual assault enables her to reclaim her birth name while forcing Harpo, whose primary desire to this point has been to dominate his romantic partners, to kneel and readdress her. This transformation in Harpo's treatment of Squeak is essential to the family restructuring that makes the family safer, and this transformation is only made possible by Squeak's representation of violence. By depicting storytelling as contributing to rewriting kinship

ties in these two scenes, Walker's novel dramatizes the importance of representation in reducing harm and undoing violence's enabling conditions.⁵⁴

The importance of storytelling is amplified by the novel's fictionality. Walker's ruminations on fictionality arise in her insistence that her novel can make claims that real people subject to carceral supervision cannot. This occurs when Sofia's employer and parole supervisor asks Sofia if she loves the son for whom she must care. Sofia replies,

I do not love Reynolds Stanley Earl. That's what you been trying to find out ever since he was born. And now you know ... He can't even walk and already he in my house messing it up. Did I ast him to come? Do I care whether he sweet or not? Will it make any difference in the way he grow up to treat me what I think? ... I don't feel nothing about him at all. I don't love him, I don't hate him. I just wish he couldn't run loose all the time messing up folks stuff. (Walker 263-4)

In response, Eleanor Jane says, "All the other colored women I know love children."

Then Sofia says,

I love children ... But all the colored women that say they love yours is lying. They don't love Reynolds Stanley any more than I do. But if you so badly raise as to ast 'em, what you expect them to say? Some colored people so scared of whitefolks they claim to love the cotton gin. (Walker 265)

By Sofia's own account, labor relations and fear should prevent her from telling the truth, to say nothing of the potential for jeopardizing her parole and being incarcerated. Yet Sofia does tell the truth anyway, foregrounding the impossibility of her speech, its fictionality. Given that this conversation leads Eleanor Jane to ask Sofia to work less,

⁵⁴ In her letters, Walker gives good reason to suggest that representation matters at the small-scale level of the sentence. In a letter to John Ferrone, her editor, on August 8th, 1981, she writes, "I worried (a little) that the language, another instance of a color purple, would be an impediment. Though obviously I didn't feel that it should. Your feeling of wanting to rush through Nettie's letters to get back to Celie is what I want the reader to feel ... only by feeling that will s/he understand how beautiful Celie's language can be, and how entirely suitable for her expression of her experience. That the teacherly language of Nettie is no improvement. Our struggle as a people (one of many) is not to be swallowed up and erased by the bland majority. And in this struggle language is crucial" (MSS 1061 Box 9 Folder 3).

Walker ties the novel's fictionality to Sofia's freedom from coerced care labor and the early twentieth century carceral state. In this scene, *The Color Purple* dramatizes that the novel as a genre is free to say that which people under the gun of the prison industrial complex cannot for fear of repercussions. In taking advantage of its limited freedom, the novel also enables readers to imagine alternate social relations not structured by incarceration, thereby paving the way for the march to the horizon of abolition.

Importantly, for Walker, the novel is not purely liberatory; rather, it must rehabilitate its own tainted history, taking part in a process as recursive as the family working to end violence. *The Color Purple* stages this process when Sofia confronts her boss and Walker alludes to a scene from *Like One of the Family* (1956) by Alice Childress, the same author whose novel, *A Short Walk*, Walker had reviewed five years prior. Originally published as a column in Paul Robeson's Black Marxist newspaper, *Freedom*, *Like One of the Family* unfolds through conversations between two domestic workers who are friends: Mildred, the protagonist, and Marge, the oft-silent speaker. (Here, it should be noted that the diction as well as the form of dialogue resembles both Celie's diction and the epistolary form of *The Color Purple*.) In the first chapter, Mildred speaks of overhearing her employer saying, "We just love her [Mildred]! She's like one of the family and she just adores our little Carol!" (Childress 1). Later, Mildred tells her employer that her statements are false and then says,

I do not just adore your little Carol. I think she is a likable child, but she is also fresh and sassy. I know you call it 'uninhibited' and that is the way you want your child to be, but luckily my mother taught me some inhibitions or else I would smack little Carol once in a while when she's talkin' to you like you're a dog, but as it is I just laugh it off the way you do because she is your child and I am not like one of the family. (Childress 2)

As in *The Color Purple*, an employer claims the domestic worker loves the child for whom she is forced to care, and the domestic worker denies this claim and provides a frank account of her feelings about the child. Yet Walker also revises Childress' novel. Where Mildred is coerced by the wage, Sofia is coerced by police violence, incarceration, and then parole. And where Mildred uses her confrontation to request a wage increase, Sofia works toward a more complete change in her labor relations and the conditions enabling coercion. This revision, it must be said, is not solely a revision of Childress' novel; it is also a revision of the traditions that gave birth to *Like One of the Family*. Childress, after all, was an avowed Leftist and pan-Africanist at the time of the novel's publication and *Like One of the Family* circulates thought from a variety of these traditions. In her revision of Childress' novel by foregrounding the role of state violence in coercing labor and kin relations, Walker works toward revising the collective knowledge production that framed state violence as only dispossessing Black men of their labor. But *The Color Purple* also does something else. Walker's revision of Childress' novel dramatizes the necessity of rehabilitating the medium through which carceral harm is undone, sketching a recursive process that critiques and aims to replace violence's enabling conditions. This allusion provides a model of reforming the past, and especially past literature, for its utility to our present and ultimately our future.

In this allusion and revision, Walker dramatizes a sense that the medium through which one advocates for change, ultimately, structures that change. The masculinist theories of police violence and of abolition within earlier African American novels that I chronicle in chapter one, ultimately, risk reinstating gendered inequalities. A call for

abolition that only considers police violence as a problem that persecutes men and that represents men as the people with the political agency to bring about abolition through violent revolution, I have suggested in chapter two, will produce political systems that continue to subjugate Black women. These sexist discourses, in Walker's account, linger in the form of the novel itself, hence the necessity of alluding, returning, and revising immanently. By aiming to recuperate the medium in which she writes, Walker aims, in *The Color Purple*, to make the novel a better tool for abolitionist endeavors and to bring about an abolitionist future that does not reproduce the sexism of her present.

The Color Purple revises earlier understandings of the relationship between Black women's labor and state violence to provide new analyses of the ways police violence dispossesses Black women of care labor and of the ways in which care can be marshalled in the struggle to end prisons. This revision is not a wholesale abandonment of past ideas but rather an immanent inhabiting of earlier discourses as a means of salvaging what remains useful about their analyses while adapting them to undermine their prior sexism. This model, I have endeavored to suggest, was the predominant one for Black Feminists returning to midcentury literature. They did not entirely abandon the masculinism against which they reacted; rather, they subordinated their influence at the same time that they revised their masculinism. The payoff of returning to this revision, ultimately, is a recovery of a theory of the role of labor and care in abolition, a more expansive theory of abolition, and a sense of both the role of literature and the literary critic in critical prison studies today.

Not a Prelude, But the Practice Itself

In its implicit critique of the prison industrial complex and in her model of the means for uprooting violence's enabling conditions, *The Color Purple* prefigures the work of abolitionist Black feminists. While they predominantly look at actual responses to police violence, I have analyzed literature, and its imagined responses to violence, for the limited freedom it provides from carceral repercussions. In the remaining pages, I turn to the work of abolitionist black feminists to elaborate the uses of analyzing police violence in literature as I have done thus far. In particular, studying literary representations of the gender-specific forms of carceral violence provides a model for abolition that bypasses the imaginative impasse created when confronted with the question of how people will keep each other safe in a world without prisons. Rather than describe a world beyond the radical break of abolition, these scholars analyze responses to violence in the present as a means of prophesying the future. Interpreting literary and actual practices for creating safety in this way provides a model for abolition that synthesizes the models of social change created by reformists and revolutionary abolitionists.

The general consensus amongst contemporary prison abolitionists is that abolition is simultaneously negative and productive, requiring an uprooting of prisons as well as producing new structures to fill its vacuum. Imagining this alternative system is, however, difficult. In *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Angela Davis writes,

Prison abolitionists are dismissed as utopians and idealists whose ideas are at best unrealistic and impracticable, and, at worst, mystifying and foolish. This is a measure of how difficult it is to envision a social order that does not rely on the threat of sequestering people in dreadful places designed to separate them from their communities and families. The prison is considered so 'natural' that it is extremely hard to imagine life without it. (Davis 9-10)

The dismissal of prison abolition as utopian, like the dismissal of the abolition of slavery before it, is a deceptive shorthand. The statement appears to describe our world (prisons could never not exist), but it actually describes the speaker's imagination (I cannot imagine a world in which prisons do not exist). But the speaker's inability to imagine a post-abolition world does not capture all the imaginative failures one confronts when imagining prison abolition. There is also the difficulty of imagining the process of abolishing prisons: I cannot imagine the steps necessary to build a world in which prisons do not exist. In other words, the speaker can see neither the horizon nor the road to it. The comparatively little amount written about abolitionist responses to harm in critical prison studies (as opposed to critiques or histories of the prison) can appear to reinforce this imaginative impasse. As a result, it is clear that abolition requires producing new systems but not always clear what those systems will be or how they will be produced.

Abolitionist Black feminists bypass this failure to imagine a world without prisons in their method, looking to processes in the present to reimagine the future. In the way that I have turned to Walker to imagine means of producing safety that simultaneously crowd out the prison industrial complex, abolitionist Black feminists analyze non-carceral responses to violence to imagine the means of abolishing the prison industrial complex. In "Prisons and Class Warfare," for instance, Ruth Wilson Gilmore says,

But the failure of imagination rests in missing the fact that abolition isn't just absence; as W.E.B. Du Bois showed in *Black Reconstruction in America* abolition is a fleshly and material presence of social life lived differently. Of course, that means many who are abolition-friendly falter at what the practice is. All the organizing I've described in our conversation is abolition—not a prelude, but the practice itself. (Gilmore)

Abolition, in Gilmore's account, is an ongoing practice that creates a different kind of social life. Similarly, in "Democratizing Criminal Law as an Abolitionist Project" (2017),

Dorothy Roberts writes,

In the domestic violence context, black feminists have begun to think through what abolition means ... they have proposed community-based responses that address the social underpinnings of violence and that hold community members accountable without subjecting them to state violence. (Roberts 1605-6)

For Roberts, Gilmore, and related thinkers, these non-carceral responses to harm and scholarship on them subverts the criminal justice system's attempted monopoly on safety and on the meaning of violence. By analyzing them and projecting toward a future without the PIC, these thinkers read these actors proleptically, wherein abolitionists acting in the present pave the way to the post-carceral world.

Such a revisionist turn to the past in the present, as I argue in my interpretation of Walker's revision of *Childress*, undoes the conditions which enable violence. Consider, for instance, recent writing on one much discussed abolitionist response to harm: transformative justice. In "Alternative U.S. Responses to Intimate Partner Violence" (2015), Donna Coker and Ahjane Macquoid argue that transformative justice aims to hold accountable individuals and communities in ways that undo the conditions that enabled and continue to enable harm (Coker and Macquoid 175). Similarly, Ruth Morris writes in *Stories of Transformative Justice* (2000), "I saw the power of transformative justice in taking crime as an opportunity, as a symptom of deeper ills, and including all directly affected by the crime in building creative solutions" (Morris 19). The expansive turn towards those who produce harm and those who react to it that typifies writing on

transformative justice practice is common in abolitionist Black feminist writing on non-carceral responses to violence. In “From Private Violence to Mass Incarceration,” for instance, Kimberlé Crenshaw analyzes harms to Black women that anti-carceral movements and scholarship produce and reproduce (Crenshaw 2012 1422-4). This expansive turn is also typical of the practices Ann Russo discusses in *Feminist Accountability: Disrupting Violence and Transforming Power* (2018). According to Russo, scholars and activists utilizing feminist accountability practices do not locate “the problem outside of ourselves and the movements with which we affiliate;” instead, they see the conditions enabling violence as interior and external (Russo 2). Turning inward and outward, looking to the past as well as the present, the scholars describe abolitionist practices as near endlessly recursive.

For abolitionist Black feminists, such a process that both negates and produces is material and ideological. In *Are Prisons Obsolete*, Angela Davis writes, “The creation of new institutions that lay claim to the space now occupied by the prison can eventually start to crowd out the prison so that it would inhabit increasingly smaller areas of our social and psychic landscape” (Davis 107-8). These new structures undermine and will undermine the PIC by providing material alternatives to the PIC. The successes of those material practices will provide evidence contradicting the ideological premises justifying its existence. The material and ideological processes will, in Davis’ account, reinforce each other in such a way that eventually crowds out the PIC. Like Walker depicting Mary Agnes removing Sofia from prison and rewriting kin relations while claiming her own name, these scholars describe abolition as a process that braids together negation and

production of material and ideological elements to produce a new justice system that provides safety.

This recursive model of abolition, ultimately, synthesizes the schism between reformists and revolutionaries, which can otherwise be described as a synthesis between those seeking immanent change and those seeking transcendent change. Reformists like Alex Vitale in *The End of Policing* (2017) and James Forman Jr. in *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (2017) argue that prison populations must be reduced but that prisons and the police must still exist to secure victims. In so doing, they insist that the current conditions cannot be overcome and that all change must be immanent to the prison industrial complex. Posed as the antidote to reformism, revolutionary abolitionists deny the possibility that the prison industrial complex could make black people safe. Revolutionary abolitionists have seen a resurgence, in part, because of Frank Wilderson's *Red, White, and Black* (2009); there, Wilderson argues that anti-blackness is a permanent structure of this world and insists that ending this world is the only means for undoing this structure. Afropessimists influenced by Wilderson like Samudzi and Anderson in *As Black as Resistance* (2018) and The Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement in *Burn Down the American Plantation: Call for a Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement* (2017) have insisted that revolution is the only means for abolition. In so doing, they advocate for transcendent change, wherein abolition takes place beyond a radical break from the present world. The abolitionist Black feminists I discuss in this section offer a synthesis of the two views, seeing immanent change in the present as prophesying a future without prisons. In this way, they characterize abolition as a recursive process which looks inward and outward so as not to preserve those

structures which produce harm for Black women and so as not to forestall the question of safety in the present for abolition in the future.⁵⁵

To return to Walker once more, this recursive, immanent process is one that Walker elaborates at most length in her descriptions of quilting. Shortly after Celie gifts newly married Sofia, Celie encourages Harpo to beat Sofia, after which they fight and tear the curtains (37). When Sofia and Celie resolve their conflict, the two “make quilt pieces out of these messed up curtains” (42). This collaboration through feminized household labor is a material process that braids together representation and the real in such a way that forms new modes of sociality amongst the characters. Additionally, quilting is a useful metaphor for understanding abolitionist black feminism because it does not transcend destruction but works with its results. Walker makes this clear in a 1981 letter to her book editor requesting that the book cover include an image of the same quilt pattern that Celie, Sofia, and company quilt: “Sister’s Choice.” Walker attaches a description of the pattern from an unidentified book on quilting:

Quilting, like other sewing has long been Women’s Work, part of the ‘domestic’ side of life. The image of the Little Lady, head bent, silent, busily piecing scraps in the corner while the Man of the Family expounds to his cronies on the Free Trade Issue or the War Between the States

⁵⁵ Wilderson writes, “I have argued that anti-Blackness is the genome of this horticultural template for Human renewal. Given the structural violence that it takes to produce and reproduce a Slave—violence as the structure of Black life, as opposed to violence as one of many lived Black experiences— a concluding consideration of Lenin’s question [What is to be done?] would ring hollow.” Quoting Fanon and Césaire, he then urges us to start not with how we might rejuvenate the world but with how we might end it, seeing anti-blackness as the structure of the world. This, he calls, “a shift from horticulture [growing a new world] to pyrotechnics [destroying the present world]. Rather than mime the restoration and reorganization dreams which conclusions often fall prey to, however unwittingly, Fanon dreams of an undoing, however implausible, for its own sake.” Hoping to extend Fanon’s various questions and lines of thinking, Wilderson writes, “I know better than to underrate their gravitas by offering—or even hinting at—a roadmap to freedom so extensive it would free us from the epistemic air we breathe. To say we must be free of air, while admitting to knowing no other source of breath, is what I have tried to do here” (Wilderson 2009 337-8). I take his call to end the world to be a call for revolution from his desire to return to what he sees as the now gone “revolutionary zeitgeist” and “revolution-as-ethic” (Wilderson 3-4).

seems both sad and abhorrent to us now. But women, no matter how stifled by what was ‘seemly’ (a high toned word for ‘permitted’) found ways to express their opinions on the important issues of the day ... Today we stand in (potentially) full control of our lives ~ we are not limited to Women’s Work, and yet ... for some, for me to make a quilt is a fine thing, a right way to live my life. The pattern above originated in Ohio during the 1850’s, has become a symbol to me of the conscious choice to be both a quiltmaker and a free woman. It is “Sister’s Choice.” (Walker MSS 1061 Box 8 Folder 9)

The writer both refuses the imagined patriarch’s view of quilting as the rightful and hence valueless occupation of women and refuses an imagined contemporaneous view of quilting as tarnished by its association with a sexist history of coerced women’s labor. Instead, the writer provides a third interpretation: “the conscious choice to be both a quiltmaker and a free woman.” By occupying both positions, the writer adapts the remnants of a history of coerced gendered labor into a new political position. This description of quilting as a process that transforms “the sad and abhorrent” into “a fine thing” and “a right way to live my life,” ultimately, foregrounds that quilting in Walker’s novel represents immanent responses to violence that use its effects to undo the conditions which enabled that violence. As a referent that becomes a symbol, quilting comes to represent the recursive, simultaneously material and representational process by which the diegetic characters aim to care for each other and by which Walker aims to care for the novel as a genre in such a way that aims to make a world without violence.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ “I suggest a round patchwork quilt design, and am enclosing two. Early in the novel Celie and Sofia are making a quilt called “Southern Cross.” That has now been changed to “Sister’s Choice,” a design I was delighted to find in a book I have in the country, and which looks something like the drawing below. When I go to the country this week-end, I’ll get it – and, if you like, send it on to you. This is the quilt design I’d prefer. But roundness, complexity, something made by women, please ... The other thing about a circular quilt pattern design is that it would intimate the Indian influence there is in all my novels” (Walker MSS 1061 Box 8 Folder 9).

Interpreting quilting as a metaphor for the model of abolition sketched by the above Black feminists, ultimately, clarifies their thought while reintroducing the importance of literature. Like abolitionist Black feminists, the quiltmaker does not hope to transcend violence, in which case its resultant scraps simply become trash. Instead, the quiltmaker creates from violence's effects something useful, producing while negating. Quilting is, importantly, labor that is both aesthetic and practical, and so the process is material and ideological, concerned with the present but guided by the future such that the relationship between the two is dynamic and reciprocal. Integrating the literary into the real in abolitionist Black feminism, as the quiltmaker combines aesthetics and material practices, only provides further food for abolitionist thought and practice. The effect of such a return to the literary is not purely additive; as Walker herself foregrounds, the novel's limited freedom provides the opportunity to imagine in ways that those facing repercussions from the PIC cannot. To analyze literature in conjunction with real historical responses to harm yields the possibility of reinvigorating literary critical studies as a field essential to current political, anti-carceral aims.

This is a model of literary criticism as a kind of care labor and of care labor as the work that is done to ensure that people can live healthily. As in *The Color Purple* and *The Salt Eaters*, care labor's burden is both coerced responsibility and the need to undo that coercion. This latter practice is done in accordance with "a right way to live my life" that transforms it into "a fine thing." Like Odessa caring for Sofia's children, like Squeak taking on Sofia's risk, like Velma arranging a rally in the wake of police violence, and like Sophie caring for her goddaughter in the hospital while she still bears the wounds of police assault, those who bear an investment in the person carrying the burden distribute

its weight amongst themselves. This is not an ethical claim, in Walker and Bambara's accounts, but a descriptive one. Those invested in the people burdened by care's weight take it on because no one else will. But literature does offer, as Walker dramatizes in describing the impact of telling the story of the police assault of Sofia and as the long influence of *The Salt Eaters* on scholars and writers alike reminds, the possibility to compel others to care and to do the labor of caring. This ultimately redistributes risk and imagines new ways of undoing its violence. Returning to literary and real violence in this endlessly recursive process is not pretty, as 1980s Black Feminist novels insist, but it offers the opportunity to undo the need to return at all.

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