

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **INSTITUTING VIOLENCE: SPACES OF
EXCEPTION IN TWENTIETH- AND TWENTY-
FIRST CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION**

Nicholas Allen Slaughter, Doctor of Philosophy,
2017

Dissertation directed by: **Professor David Wyatt, Department of English**

Since the War on Terror's onset, American studies have popularized philosopher Giorgio Agamben's argument in the treatises *Homo Sacer* (1995) and *State of Exception* (2003) that modern governments have come to operate in a permanent state of emergency. Agamben terms this phenomenon a "state of exception" in which law may be set aside at any time. Critics have productively applied this theory to post-9/11 U.S. government actions like surveillance programs, torture, and military interventions. Scholarship treats the Guantanamo detention center as the epitome of a localized, perpetual suspension of legal and ethical norms. Yet insufficient attention has been paid to other spaces of a similarly exceptional nature throughout American history. In "Instituting Violence," I examine twentieth- and twenty-first century fictional representations of institutionalized sites home to unregulated violence while also engaging in current critical conversations about political and economic violence. Preceding Agamben's political theory, much American literature depicts this exceptionalism across a wide array of sites. I explore four categories of spaces of exception represented across a range of genres, considering their

interconnections and histories. In each text, a space that appears to operate as an exception to American legal and moral norms proves to reveal the normal but obscured relationships of power between the privileged and exploited. In addition to how these texts explore longer histories of such violent spaces, I consider how American writers self-reflexively examine the efficacy of their art for meaningfully engaging audiences in ethical discourses about history and justice.

INSTITUTING VIOLENCE: SPACES OF EXCEPTION IN TWENTIETH- AND
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION

by

Nicholas Allen Slaughter

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2017

Advisory Committee:
Professor David Wyatt, Chair
Professor Lee Konstantinou
Professor Sharada Balachandran Orihuela
Professor Peter Mallios
Professor Christina B. Hanhardt

© Copyright by
Nicholas Allen Slaughter
2017

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the evidence of my great privilege for having learned and worked alongside great mentors and dedicated colleagues, all with the support of wonderful friends and loving family. First and last, my thanks and adoration go to my wife, Melanie Moomau, whose patience and unwavering abetment has seen me through this endeavor. We will come back to her. My parents, Kathe Kain and Al Slaughter, have enabled me to accomplish all that I have. Their examples have shown that I can achieve almost anything I want.

I feel lucky to have assembled such an amicable, encouraging, and brilliant committee to guide me. David Wyatt has been a tireless mentor throughout my time at Maryland. He has seen me through every phase of my development here, offering earnest counsel through my highest and lowest points. No one else has endured and responded to my writing as much as he has, and I cannot truly imagine completing this project with such personal satisfaction without his criticism and guidance. Lee Konstantinou has served as an endless source of knowledge, always having a suggestion on hand for what to read next and having even more thoughts for how I can expand my ideas. Sharada Balachandran Orihuela is always able to cut to the core of my arguments, challenging me and helping to excavate what I really mean. Peter Mallios may have joined my committee on the eve of my defense, but he has been a constant fixture in my graduate career as teacher, mentor, employer, colleague, and friend. I thank Matthew Kirschenbaum and Linda Kauffman for their service on my exam committee. I am further indebted to Linda: the germ for this dissertation emerged from her graduate seminar, and the rigor she demands from academic prose in both courses and workshops has helped to shape my writing. I am also immensely grateful for what I have learned from Tita Chico, Keguro Macharia, and Edlie Wong, all of whom have played a role in shaping key aspects of this dissertation.

My colleagues in the graduate programs at Maryland are the people who have kept me sane. I am so grateful to have gone through this experience with them. Carolyn Ureña has seen me through the worst and best times of my graduate career, offering a friendship of patience and caring. My officemates Daniel Kason, John Macintosh, and Jonathan Williams have been an endless source of ideas, encouragement, and usually welcome distraction. Others have been a great source of strength and friendship, including but not limited to Elise Auvil, Sarah Bonnie, Tim Bruno, Michael Colson, and Rob Wakeman. I have also drawn much from afar from other longtime friendships beyond graduate school. The ever-cheery Justin Baughman has listened to my stupid jokes and anything else on my mind for over a decade now.

My wife and partner Melanie Moomau deserves the first and last word in my acknowledgements on any subject. She works harder than I do for often times less appreciation. She is my safety net and my greatest fan. I would not have finished this dissertation in the time that I have without her by my side.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Introduction: Instituting Violence.....	1
Chapter 1: Ages of Terror: Extralegal Torture Sites and State Violence in <i>The Parable of the Talents</i> and <i>The Zero</i>	26
Chapter 2: The “Special Existence” of Bigger Thomas in “No Man’s Land”: The Ghetto as Space of Exception in <i>Native Son</i>	84
Chapter 3: “Ain’t the Law”: Migrant Workers and the Exceptional Spaces of Depression-Era California in <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>	133
Chapter 4: Tastes Like Chicken: Disposable Bodies in Corporate Bioscience Spaces in <i>The Space Merchants</i> and <i>Oryx and Crake</i>	181
Coda: Spaces and Beyond.....	233
Bibliography	237

Introduction: Instituting Violence

A Literary History of Violence

As the organizing conceit of this dissertation, “space of exception” refers to a site of institutionalized violence and exploitation. In such zones, the expected norms of law, ethics, or morality of American liberalism are dangerously absent or suppressed. The spaces explored in the novels studied here serve various agendas and contexts, but they are linked by their common nature as sites in which citizenship and human rights are at risk of erasure. Moreover, these spaces are ultimately portrayed as not “exceptional” in the common, non-theoretical meaning of the word. The torture chamber, ghetto, labor camp, and corporate laboratory in these fictions underpin the rest of “normal” American life outside them.

Since the War on Terror’s onset, American studies have popularized Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s argument in the treatises *Homo Sacer* (1995) and *State of Exception* (2003) that modern governments have come to operate in a permanent state of emergency. Agamben terms this phenomenon a “state of exception”—from which I borrow for my own conceit—in which law may be set aside at any time. Critics have productively applied this theory to post-9/11 U.S. government actions like surveillance programs, torture, and military interventions. Scholarship, however, tends to treat the Guantanamo detention center as the epitome of a localized, perpetual suspension of legal and ethical norms. As my dissertation demonstrates, insufficient attention has been paid

to the longer tradition in literary representation of other spaces of a similarly exceptional nature throughout American history.

I examine six novels as case studies that, when read together, challenge many of the paradoxes inherent to contemporary liberalism's vision of progress and the American Dream. In President Barack Obama's farewell address on January 10, 2017, he described "the great gift our Founders gave to us. The freedom to chase our individual dreams through our sweat, and toil, and imagination—and the imperative to strive together as well, to achieve a common good, a greater good" (Blake). He summons the metanarrative of essential American progressive goodness even while the radical right rises in power. The implication at this moment and at large in his address is that any missteps in the practice of democracy, equality, and justice in the past, present, or near future are, in fact, only missteps. From this perspective, the violence and exploitation depicted in texts like Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) appear as aberrations in our national destiny, errors to be corrected. Similarly, the dystopian visions of Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* (1953) and Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Talents* (1998) might be read as extravagantly apocalyptic warnings of what could happen—but which probably will not. Such readings, however, are misguided. The sites around which these narratives are constructed actually portray their spaces of exception as integral to the nation's political and socio-economic fabric. They suggest that our American myths are only sustained through their denial to those who are undeserving.

One reason for the failure of mainstream culture to acknowledge these spaces' centrality to the United States is their lack of legibility. Sites like torture chambers are not

easily accessible to the public's material access, or to their imaginative access. Ghettos and labor camps are bounded by written and unwritten policies of discrimination and well-entrenched discourses of difference. These statements are not innovative in themselves: the lives of marginalized people are often lived at both the physical and discursive margins of our society. What authors like Butler, Wright, Steinbeck, Pohl, Kornbluth, Jess Walter, and Margaret Atwood offer readers are various modes of access to spaces of exception.¹ Their novels reveal the logic of how our American landscape is more broadly organized around the accepted exclusion of certain people and bodies from the normalized privileges of American life. Broadly speaking, these spaces and the bodies contained within have been written out of normal law; in response, these authors write them into literature.

Many other historical and literary examples of spaces of exception exist beyond the scope of this dissertation. In fact, I contend that American literature can offer a pre-history to Agamben's analysis of the Third Reich and other totalitarian States. In the twentieth century, Japanese internment camps are one of the most applicable examples of Agamben's theories of states of exception in the United States. The lesser known Native American concentration camps during American expansion are also part of the nation's legacy of spaces of exception. The camps in Butler's *Talents* are surely influenced by the histories of these sites. But, whereas the historical breadth of Agamben's analysis is largely limited to Nazi Germany and later, the history of race in America abounds with

¹ Although Atwood is a Canadian-born author, her science fiction novels are concerned with trends focused in the United States. Discussing *The Handmaid's Tale* (1984), Atwood says that a Canadian dystopia is inconceivable to her because her country, unlike the U.S., lacks the national qualities that would foster such "extreme" political structures (Atwood, "Using" 223). Her *MaddAddam* trilogy's setting in the U.S. and Atwood's personal and professional relationships with U.S. culture and literature more than qualifies these texts as appropriate to an analysis of representations set in "America."

spaces of exception before 1900. Indeed, the specter of the slave plantation hovers throughout the texts I discuss. Prisons and immigration detention centers, past and present, are an increasingly enormous piece of this legacy. My selection of sites and text does place a limit on my analysis. As is true for any project, however, I treat this limitation not as a weakness but as an implied call for further investigation and critical thought into other like spaces, subjects, and fictions not adequately addressed here.

The topics of the body, political violence, and the sites at which they intersect have become a consistent interest in American literary studies. Part of this dissertation's intervention into literary criticism is to establish the place of novels not frequently considered in contemporary scholarship. Science fiction has become a more common object of literary analysis, but much of its consideration remains a matter of genre and not how these texts productively intersect with those beyond it. In contrast, lauded novels like *Native Son* and *The Grapes of Wrath* have nevertheless fallen out of vogue in criticism. This dissertation calls attention not only to the unwritten literary history of the representation of spaces of exception, but also to the texts that exemplify this inadequately acknowledged tradition.

Theories of Violence

This dissertation borrows much of its critical approach from the work of Giorgio Agamben and other thinkers who analyze the legitimation of violence against marginalized peoples. Building primarily on the theories of Carl Schmitt (1888-1985), Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), and Michel Foucault (1926-1984), the treatises *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception* offer an incisive deconstruction of

the paradoxes that Agamben identifies at the center of the modern State: siting the capacity to suspend law as the very foundation of law. He defines his master critical conceit, “state of exception,” as the legal suspension of law. A state of exception is premised by the State’s declaration of necessity to act beyond the limits of law. This “necessity” is frequently underpinned by the desire to manage particular populations, people who are treated as, using Agamben’s term, “bare life”—life that lacks subjectivity or value beyond its mere existence as life. Concentration camps and the extermination of minority populations in Nazi Germany serve as his chief historical case study; the “camp” is his archetypal space of exception.

Butler, Walter, Wright, Steinbeck, Pohl, Kornbluth, and Atwood similarly position particular spaces of exception as sites in which the unjust workings of social, political, and economic systems are most visible. But these authors of fiction catch sight of the complex lived experience of these spaces that Agamben overlooks in his singular emphasis on an extreme example, representative of the highest possible stakes. Even in its English translation, the phrase “state of exception” communicates a sense of crisis or extremity. It speaks to the scale and temporality of the State rather than the individual lives of its citizens. The American fictions under analysis here approach exceptional violence as a daily, quotidian experience that can be accreted or focused into particular organized, policed zones. In other words, American literary history depicts spaces of exception not as a sign of a fully manifested state of emergency and suspension of law but as part of the ebb and flow of the *potential* or *virtual* state of exception that operates in the United States.

While I have made much use of the vocabulary and methodology that Agamben provides, my study of American fiction calls attention to the incompleteness of his political theories. Whereas Agamben focuses on the desires of the State alone, the seven literary writers I consider each posit strong relations between government institutions and private business interests in their depictions of American spaces of exception. Agamben treats the abandonment of unwanted “bare life” to a state of exception as primarily motivated by the State’s desire to justify its power and to define, by contrast, the life that is proper to the political sphere. This dynamic is evident in American fiction, yet the authors I study also present labor extraction and the accumulation of wealth as a central concern to workings of the torture chamber, ghetto, farm labor camp, and corporate laboratory. *State of Exception* provides a felicitous point of departure for this project, but American fiction reaches beyond Agamben’s methodology and conclusions.

Nevertheless, I situate myself in conversation with this critical tradition. While other legal theorists have worked to understand and legitimize the state of exception as a structurally coherent concept within the ideologies of law and State power, Agamben argues that the state of exception surpasses the inside/outside distinctions of law (23). As such, the state of exception “constitutes [...] an emptiness of law,” and reveals the “essential fracture” between law and the possibility of its application to material reality (6, 31). Claims of “necessity” are central to legitimizing a state of exception. Yet only the State wields the power and authority to declare beginning and end of necessity. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson described the problem of necessity in 1952, writing that “necessity knows no law . . . Such power has no beginning or end” (Pyle 13).

In the end, the exceptional powers of the State are only under obedience to its own desires.

During a state of exception, power fills the vacuum of law. Agamben argues that during law's suspension, the State's agents wield what he "force-of-~~law~~," the power of law without legal regulation (*State* 39).² Essentially, this force-of-~~law~~ acts as a "floating signifier" without a determinate referent (38). The State removes itself from the limits of law without sacrificing law's power. This ability to wield the force-of-~~law~~ under the guise of law enables the "essential fiction" that the State still remains bound by law even during its suspension (86). In other words, once law becomes treated like a floating signifier to be interpreted at will, exceptional violence becomes available.

Agamben titles a section of *Homo Sacer*, "The Camp as the 'Nomos' of the Modern" which he sites the "camp" as the space in which a state of exception is most absolute. He writes, "The camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule" (168-9). Nazi concentration camps are the historical model for his theory: they are sites in which the legal and cultural norms of German life are evacuated and in which "power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation" (171). Nothing stands between State violence and the people in the camps, degraded to a condition of "bare life" in which their humanity comes into question. For Agamben, the camp is the culmination of a state exception. He calls on us to see the camp as an extension of the State's normal order rather than as an aberration. The camp is where the logic of the State becomes most evident; the violence of the camp is only possible through the violent potential already present in the State.

² Agamben uses an "X" to place "law" under erasure in "force-of-law."

Agamben considers the production of “bare life” to be an essential feature of the state of exception and the camp. He places this term under the heading of biopolitics and biopower, concepts formulated by Foucault. Foucault defines biopower as the “nondisciplinary power” that “is applied not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living-being” or “man-as-species,” that, as he and Agamben claim, characterized the politics of the twentieth-century nation-state (Foucault, “*Society*” 242). This shift from classical politics to biopolitics marks a shift in the State’s concern with “subjects” to a concern with “populations.” Agamben goes as far as to claim that “the production of the political body is the original activity of sovereign power” (*Homo* 6).

He argues that the power of the sovereign—the entity who is authorized to ultimately decide law and to wield power over life—originates in the sovereign’s categorization of “life” between its two forms, what Agamben identifies in Greek as *bios* and *zoē* (*State* 35; *Homo* 1). *Bios* “indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group;” this term indicates a “qualified life, a particular way of life,” life that can participate in the political sphere. *Zoē*, in contrast, “expressed the simple fact of living common to all living being,” including “animals, men, or gods,” what Agamben describes as “bare life” (*Homo* 1). Among other things, *bios* signifies subjectivity, both in a political and a metaphysical sense; a body inscribed with *bios* is worthy of a soul and entry into the *oikos*, the family or original political unit (2). A body inscribed with *zoē*, however, is rendered without subjectivity; Agamben links *zoē* to the Roman juridical concept of the *homo sacer*, the body that “can be killed but not sacrificed” (99). Bare life, in the genealogy of *zoē* and *homo sacer*, can be killed without repercussion. Existing outside the juridical and religious order, its death cannot be inscribed with meaning.

Ultimately, the distinction between the bare life of *zoē* and a qualified life of *bios* is the sovereign's decision on "which life may be killed without the commission of homicide," "the point at which life ceases to be politically relevant" (142). Thus modern biopolitics, as the process of deciding upon which lives matter, becomes thanatopolitics, the process of deciding upon death (122). The camp, for Agamben, is the space in which this process is most apparent.

Following *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*, Agamben dedicates the treatise *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1998) to understanding the figure of the *Muselmann*, Jewish prisoners physically and psychically degraded to the threshold between the human and inhuman in the Nazi concentration camp. After closely examining this figure as the extreme result of modern biopolitical production, he writes, "The decisive activity of biopower in our time consists in the production not of life or death, but rather of a mutable and virtually infinite survival. [...] Biopower's supreme ambition is to produce, in a human body, the absolute separation of the living being from the speaking being, *zoē* and *bios*, the inhuman and the human – survival" (155-6). In the camps, the *Muselmann* epitomized survival for they were "walking corpses"; for Agamben, this figure "marks the threshold between the human and the inhuman," the fulfilled ideation of the State's desire for control over biological life (54-5). For the inhuman body, death as an event with any sort of semiotic density does not occur; "In Auschwitz, people did not die; rather, corpses were produced" (72). In the logic of biopower, the transformation of a "walking corpse" into an immobile corpse is no transformation at all; in being trapped in the threshold between life and death, the surviving body is imbricated by neither. As the realization of "the absolute separation of the living being from the speaking being," the

surviving body is no longer recognized as a worthy political subject and is consequently totally exposed to State power.

Unfortunately, overviews of Agamben's theories—and his own vocabulary in translation—tend to invite the perception that a “state of exception” is a binary proposition; the State is entirely lawful or it is entirely lawless. Agamben actually superimposes these two conditions, presenting the suspension of law as a lurking possibility within our legal and political apparatuses. Indeed, as Colin Dayan explains, “It is not an absence of law but an abundance of it that allows government to engage in seemingly illegal practices. We need to explore this hyperlegal negation of civil existence” (*Law* 72). In the context of Guantanamo Bay, Agamben's own twenty-first century example of a space of exception, Nasser Hussain describes the legal status of the detention centers not as a suspension of law but as an intensification of administrative law that enables “an ambiguous and evolving classification of persons,” of those who may be tortured and those who may not, all through a nominally legal process (745). But Hussain's and Agamben's understandings are, in fact, quite in parallel. Agamben argues that the state of exception should be understood not as “a spatiotemporal suspension” or a particular tangible, visible practice or act but as permanent blurring between the normal condition of law and its exceptional state (*Homo* 37). As a result, we should think of the “camp” as a signifier of a broader condition. The modern State blurs the distinction between law and its absence, seeming to reconcile the legal norms of citizenship rights, for example, while enabling the violation of those rights.

Agamben's theories open productive avenues of thought, but they remain further limited by the philosopher's emphasis on abstractions and by his historical scope.

American authors have long been representing the questions he broaches, but their approaches focus on the lived experience of the people who pass through spaces of exception and systemic inequity. To think of exceptional violence and exploitation—actions that ignore legal and moral norms even if they are supposedly enforced—as a matter of an ebb and flow between potential and manifested acts is crucial to considering the links between the representation of spaces of exception from *The Grapes of Wrath* to *The Zero*. Though never too far removed from actualized violence, the looming threat of violence better defines the states of exception in which characters like Tom Joad and Lauren Olamina find themselves. A space such as the torture chamber might be where that threat is fulfilled. In the case of the ghetto or farm labor camp, these are spaces where the threat is most precariously balanced against its fulfillment in order to extract wealth. And as each novel suggests, the constant threat of violence is a form of violence that strongly impacts the lives of those affected by it.

Critics have already indicated that not every space organized along the same principles as Agamben's camp model is invested in the production of bare life to the same degree. The same holds true for the novels I investigate. Though Agamben suggests that the purest space of exception, exemplified by Nazi concentration camps, removes any mediation between power and bodies, the six novels I analyze suggest that exceptional sites can exist with multiple, even competing intents. Critiques, for example, have already been leveled at Agamben's theory for overlooking the historical significance of labor in sites like the Nazi camps and Soviet gulags. In a 2003 article, Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg point out such an oversight by quoting from one of Agamben's chief primary sources for *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Primo Levi's *The Drowned*

and the Saved (1986): “Small and large industrial companies, agricultural combines, agencies, and arms factories drew profits from the practically free labor supplied by the camps” (N. Levi and Rothberg, 34; P. Levi, 15-6). Even in Agamben’s historical examples, economic and political interests are intertwined more than he seems to allow. Such interconnections are not lost in the fictional portrayal of American spaces of exception. As such, in my readings I adopt the methodology of what Michael Rothberg describes as “multidirectional memory,” an ethic of memory that is “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; [...] as productive and not privative” (Rothberg 3). In contrast to philosophy, the heterogeneous discourses of the novel form allow for both a broader and narrower perspective on the material as well as the immaterial aspects of our lives.

Agamben’s treatises help to locate the threads I have identified that link these six novels and others together, but his work alone proves an inadequate cipher for these texts. As a result, I have deployed a tentative critical vocabulary for this project that extends from Agamben’s own while heavily inflected by the terms and methods used by the authors whom I study here. Of course, my writing is also heavily indebted to other scholars and philosophers, more than those I directly cite within my pages. The following paragraphs outline some of the conceits that I use throughout this dissertation; such terms are an accretion of what I have discovered in the language and representation within these texts and the histories they portray.

I focus on the violence in these novels as “extralegal” as opposed to illegal for a number of reasons. For one, much of the violence I discuss in fiction and U.S. history is not always technically illegal; as these novels and broader scholarship indicate, laws and

regulations are unstable, constantly changing through interpretative practices of those who enforce or create law. In fact, the government agents in Walter's *The Zero* (2006) suggest that their torture programs are only illegal "under the old rules" (Walter, *Zero* 258). By emphasizing the term extralegal over illegal, I draw attention to how these texts depict spaces of violence legitimated by the State as not in contradiction to existing law or wider social, legal, political norms but sometimes as *in addition* to law, whether law is present or not.

The word "norm" emerges frequently in these pages, especially attached to the adjectives legal, political, ethical, moral, and cultural. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word as "that which is a model or pattern; a type, a standard" and "a standard or pattern of social behavior that is accepted or expected of a group." I use the word to refer to the constellations of beliefs and practices that supposedly define and guarantee the well-being and liberty of American citizens. As becomes quite apparent, however, to any reader of a novel like *Native Son*, citizens live across striated fields of privilege, often demarcated by space and behavior. To cite the "norms" of American life is to refer both to the standards of law and to the ideologies outlined in our founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, doctrines like Manifest Destiny, and well-rehearsed discourses of the American Dream. Torture, for example, is an exceptional practice that violates the legal norms prohibiting cruel and unusual punishment articulated in the Eight Amendment as well as in the Geneva Conventions. In contrast, other practices like the redlining of Chicago portrayed in *Native Son* or the harassment of roadside migrant camps in *The Grapes of Wrath* are variously legitimated and not always a clear circumvention of law. But these actions nevertheless deny

citizens' ability to undertake their own socio-economic destiny, a right central to our national narratives.

Gathering ideology, culture, and law into the idea of “norms” allows for a clearer view of how spaces of exception are interlinked in the novels I study. Rather than following Agamben's heavy emphasis on the role of the State and the political sovereign, I take a cue from Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Félix Guattari (1930-1992). They argue in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) that power centers in modern states are diffuse yet resonate and reinforce each other. Instead of portraying spaces of exception as the direct and sole product of the State's desires, these fictions depict the organization and operation of such sites as an effort spread across networks of power and wealth that bridge the private and public sector.

In the following chapters I tend to avoid Agamben's term “bare life,” instead favoring the phrase “mimetic of death” that Elaine Scarry uses in her study of torture in *The Body in Pain* (1985). Before elaborating upon my choice of this phrase, I will explain the trouble of “bare life,” the English translation of Agamben's “la vita nuda” in Italian. The English term loses much of the nuance Agamben dedicates to it.

For him, bare life refers to both an ideological formation and a lived condition. On the one hand, bare life is a *fantasy* of biopower. It is the idea that there exists two categories of human and non-human life: that with multivalent value worthy of recognition in the political sphere, and that which holds value only the fact of its organic life—bare life. His core definition for the term is life which may be killed but not murdered, a difference between the degrees of consequences for taking a life. It is a discursive label applied to mark bodies as disposable without repercussions. On the other

hand, Agamben also uses the term to name the fulfilled fantasy of bare life, the abject, degraded existence of those caught up in spaces of exception. When persons are marked discursively as bare life, the violence of the State then works to cause this marker to become reality.

Confusion arises when critics approach this concept as a fact proposed by Agamben rather than as a discursive conceit that he has excavated. In other words, “bare life” is ultimately a matter of perception or labeling. The contrast between the position of non-human animals in some religions and in industrial agriculture is an illustrative example. To a person invested in factory farms and slaughterhouses, an animal’s primary value might be the fact of its living and capacity to be used and commodified. He or she treats the animal as a form of bare life. Yet in some religious beliefs, an animal might hold more value beyond the disposable utility of its body. The question of which bodies are or are not truly bare life is neither relevant to Agamben’s work or this dissertation. Rather, I consider how categories akin to bare life are imagined, deployed, and resisted in the fictions I discuss.

In part as a result of his choice of model space of exception, Agamben treats bare life as an extreme, liminal concept. His emphasis tends to overlook the spectrum of potentiality between the discursive formulation of “bare life” through racism or other forms of bigotry and the transformation of living beings into “walking corpses.” In other words, when systems of inequity work to dehumanize minority populations, extermination is not always a primary goal even if the threat of death always looms over individuals marked as a kind of bare life. Other scholars have made this distinction, including Lauren Berlant. In her essay “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral

Agency),” later included as a chapter in her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011), she contrasts Agamben’s formulation of bare life with “slow death,” a manifestation of power over life that she defines as “the physical wearing out of a population and deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence” (754). We do not have to consider these two concepts as separate or competing. To be marked as less than fully human is not always a prescription for death as it was in Nazi Germany; rather, dehumanization is always an *exposure* to violence and exploitation deemed otherwise unacceptable for people recognized as fully human. It is within spaces of exception that this exposure is maximized, where the consequences of marginalization become most apparent.

In an attempt to encapsulate the effects of spaces of exception upon bodies, I borrow the phrase “mimetic of death” in lieu of “bare life” or other, perhaps more concrete or context-specific signifiers. Scarry uses the phrase in the context of torture, writing that “any experience of great pain” is mimetic of death as subjectivity is stripped from the body (48). I link her analysis of torture to Octavia Butler’s depiction in *Parable of the Talents*. But more broadly, I make use of this phrase to describe and link the conditions of subjects in these six novels who are variously undergoing physical suffering or psychic alienation intended to render them as pliable bodies rather than self-determining subjects. “Mimetic of death” is a productive phrase because it indicates opposition to what it means in each novel to be fully alive and enfranchised as an American citizen or simply as a person. Moreover, this phrase is more capacious and less troublesome than Agamben’s “bare life”; it represents the stakes and intentionality of

spaces of exception to unravel personhood without closing off productive inquiry by emphasizing the most extreme of liminal states.

Through their chosen literary forms, Butler, Walter, Wright, Steinbeck, Pohl, Kornbluth, and Atwood offer insightful diagnoses of the exceptional structures that plague us. Yet they offer little in the way of direct solutions. Interestingly, neither does Agamben. In an earlier treatise, *The Coming Community* (1990), he vaguely advocates for unconditional love as new political ethos for communities as an alternative to the modern State. In *State of Exception*, he refuses to call on law and politics to correct themselves, arguing that we cannot yet think beyond the failures of our social structures. Instead, he declares, “One day humanity will play with law just as children play with disused objects” (*State* 64). He invokes both the ordinary and the post-structuralist notions of “play,” hoping that one day the problems of “law” will be a matter of historical excavation. A number of the novels I study—and many more in the American tradition of seeking remedy to injustice in literary forms—adopt a similar ethos in their endings. They hope for change, propose a few ideas, but like Agamben they avoid the articulation of a praxis. Still, even amid the high stakes of their subject matter, these authors implicitly place value on the play of our imaginations that we can undertake inside the spaces of their texts.

Genre, Reading, Representation, and Violence

Through the nexus of readers’ shared imaginations, literary narratives can link critiques of systematic violence and the lived experience of individuals. The pleasures of reading, however sincere or ironic, draw audiences into the worlds of text. The literary

representation of exceptional spaces use empathy—even the skewed but inevitable empathy for unlikable characters such as Walter’s protagonist Brian Remy and Atwood’s Jimmy—to influence readers’ perspective of the abusive systems in which characters are trapped. Novels can reformulate accepted political or cultural narratives, and the empathy and wonder that authors provoke from readers instills an ethical urgency underneath fictions’ social critiques. With the ability to alter perspective—like slipping into the inner workings of a character such as Bigger Thomas who understands little of his own motivations—or constructing realities in science fiction that mirror our own, prose narrative can shatter the distance and boundaries that have been erected among people, ideas, and histories. Literary representation is not without its ethical challenges, but it remains a form of discourse that reaches audiences in ways that more academic or directly politicized narratives do not.

Each text I study depicts a space of exception, but these novels’ stakes reach far beyond isolated sites. The torture chamber, ghetto, farm labor camp, and corporate laboratory are revealed as intersections of power and violence that are already diffused across our national landscape. These fictions offer the lived experience of spaces of exception, connecting their audiences to parts and people of the nation that are too often obscured and rendered expendable—or not worthy of representation.

Though many more texts and art forms, fictional or otherwise, work to represent spaces of exception across United States history, the six novels under focus here offer particularly productive analysis. Their critical value arrives, in part, from how their styles and genres emplot spaces as part of their larger literary and political projects. In each case, the texts must render these spaces accessible to readers without inadvertently

glorifying them or enabling readerly voyeurism. The challenges in representing torture chambers and concentration camps have received much literary, historical, and philosophical attention,³ but the novels studied here suggest that the ghetto, farm labor camps, and laboratories pose similar problems. This quandary, however, is not new; rather, it is an extension of the existential questions of representation's efficacy, an interrogation as old as or older than Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Yet the representation of exceptional spaces raises the ethical stakes of these questions, especially since—as each novel demonstrates—representation and discourse are crucial to the justification for organizing these sites of violence and casting bodies into them. In response, each author uses different literary forms and conceives of his or her own ethical practices of reading and writing.

Though many more genres and forms are present in the novels under study, satire, naturalism, and dystopian science fiction are the motifs of this dissertation. Satire has a long, though fraught, literary history of engaging socio-political hypocrisies. As examples of particularly dark satire, Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and Walter's *The Zero* expose the hidden logics of oppressive ideologies, more or less turning them inside-out for the reader's benefit. *The Space Merchants* invites readers to laugh at the otherwise unnoticed absurdities of modern life before delivering its incisive critical message against corporate culture and mass consumerism. Satire's process of disrupting established narratives enables readers to imaginatively enter spaces like torture sites and corporate

³ For example, author J. M. Coetzee writes of this problem, stating that “the torture room is a site of extreme human experience, accessible to no one save the participants” (*Doubling* 363). Writer and concentration camp survivor Primo Levi even goes as far as to claim in his memoir *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986) that the only people with total comprehension of what State violence entails are those consumed by it (84).

laboratories that are heavily guarded by their own discourses. This form, however, is not without its shortcomings. American satire in particular seems to be increasingly received for the pleasure of intellectual and moral superiority it evokes rather than for its political exigency. Nevertheless, satire proves a form out of which literary critics can excavate imaginative critiques of spaces of exception because, by definition, this genre is organized toward a purposeful politics.

Along with Butler's *Parables of the Talents*, *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake* also fall into the category of dystopian science fiction. The necessary world building in science fiction facilitates new conceptualizations of our accepted reality. Critic Darko Suvin influentially defines science fiction as the literature of "cognitive estrangement," a function that, as he argues, is not limited to this genre but is best performed by it. The constructions of science fiction, limited by human imagination, are never fully removed from the world as we know it. Thus, this speculative genre always reflects back upon its points of reference in reality, inherently inspiring critical thought through the dissonance between the representation and its reality. In other words, science fiction can materialize metaphor; it attempts to represent the unreal or not quite real, portraying complex ideas that often escape a more traditionally mimetic representation. In part, Butler's, Pohl and Kornbluth's, and Atwood's departures from realism are an effort to circumvent the problem of representing spaces and experiences that are, in some ways, resistant to ethical representation. Readers are encouraged to reconceive spaces and their histories just as the texts have.⁴

⁴ Pohl and Atwood have stated similar positions regarding the genre. Pohl writes, "When you invent a new society, you make a political statement about the one you live in" (*Way* 16). To him, all good science fiction is "to some degree political" because it "gives it readers some new and otherwise unobtainable insights into our world—in fact, into all our possible worlds" ("Politics" 199, 205). In Atwood's 2011

Following some forms of naturalism but not wholly beholden to them, Steinbeck and Wright use this genre to demonstrate how thousands if not millions of other individuals would encounter the same travails as their protagonists do as they suffer through spaces of exception. Some critics categorize *The Grapes of Wrath* as a modernist text, and *Native Son* is certainly an example of protest fiction. But, in a naturalist vein, both novels pose strong cases for the effect of social and physical environment on the choices and development of their characters. Each author, however, emphasizes their African-American and Okie protagonists' responses to the conditions of their lives not as a universal *fate* but rather as a universal *potential* dictated by their racialization as a dangerous yet exploitable population. These two novels use literary techniques to exhibit the socio-political functions of Okie camps and ghettos that are otherwise obscured by naturalized discourses of discrimination. Working through the stylings of naturalism, the texts demonstrate the potency of these spaces to transform citizens into docile, disposable laboring bodies. In the end, these processes are portrayed as wholly *unnatural*.

All of these novels also contain projects of counter-discourse against racist or other dehumanizing narratives deployed against marginalized populations. Spaces of exception operate through a logic that certain bodies belong within them. Politicized bodies, racialized bodies, or bodies deemed of some kind of economic value can become

collection of essays on speculative and science fiction, she comments that one aspect in which science fiction can be more effective than the average realist novel is that "SF narratives can also interrogate social organizations by showing what things might be like if we rearranged them," offering either direct or oblique criticism of present social, political, and economic structures (*In Other* 62, 63). Yet, in sharp contrast to his fellow writers, Kornbluth held a much more pessimistic position in the year before his death. He argues in a 1957 lecture that SF is unimportant as a mode of social criticism (Kornbluth 51). In his conclusion, he does qualify his disappointment with the genre by saying, "I would be delighted to be proved wrong in all this" (75). But he explains, "I believe that in science fiction the symbolism lies too deep for action to result, that the science fiction story does not turn the reader outward to action but inward to contemplation" (55).

the objects of such sites. The abuse that is common within these spaces results in a degradation that is then naturalized and used to justify this treatment in the first place. In Butler's and Walter's novels, torturers assault the individual subjectivity of their victims to then recast them as enemies who justify the constant production of the State's power. African Americans in Richard Wright's texts are excluded from white-dominated society in part to define what it means to be white. Racist discourse naturalizes their containment within ghettos, creating a false sense of necessity for the policing and exploitation of black bodies. The "Okie" migrant workers in *The Grapes of Wrath* are not permitted to join local Californian communities and thus must live in destitute roadside camps or inhumane labor camps. Without the resources to adequately care for their families or permanent residence through which to ground their lives, migrants are interpolated as dangerous, unhygienic outsiders who must be policed. In the science fiction worlds of *The Space Merchants* and Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), the discourse in corporate bioscience laboratories renders bodies into malleable, commoditized flesh, engendering practices and discourses that threaten to discursively transform all bodies, human and non-human, into pure flesh without rights.

My first chapter opens with the subject of State-sponsored torture, the exceptional practice that currently receives the most attention in American studies. The depiction of torture chambers in Butler's *Parable of the Talents* and Walter's *The Zero* reveal distinct intersections of race and socio-economic status. The bodies the State and its agents deem appropriate for the torture chamber in these two novels are racialized and lack significant wealth. Without the privilege of whiteness and property, the working class and people of color are more at risk to the State's exceptional violence.

I then explicitly explore the thread of race through Wright's representation of the Chicago ghetto in *Native Son*. Yet already Wright accounts for the investment of private economic interest alongside the State's desire to maintain its power by exercising it upon black bodies. The African-American population of Chicago is contained by public policy and the threat of violence to the ghetto where their disenfranchisement is most extreme. In this space they become salient targets for both violence and economic exploitation.

My next chapter explores the abuse of migrant workers in the roadside camps and farm labor camps of Depression-era California in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. This dispossessed population is a ripe for the exploitation of their labor, a fact Steinbeck renders most visible in the spaces of exception dotting the Californian countryside. Yet the "Okies," too, find themselves classified as non-white, subhuman foreigners whose primary value is their cheap labor; this model of behavior toward migrant labor, the novel clearly articulates, has been well-practiced against people of color before the influx of white migrants during the Dust Bowl.

I then take a speculative turn through Pohl and Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* and Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. Though separated by five decades, both texts explore the implications of commercialized advances in bioscience and the resulting spaces of exception. Whereas the previous authors emphasize the function of spaces of exception as the inscription of ideology on the bodies of "enemies" of the State and the extraction of labor value, my final chapter considers the laboratories in these two science fiction novels transform living beings, human and non-human, into malleable and commodifiable flesh.

Again, these fictions and their forms are only examples—exemplary ones—of literary interrogations of American spaces of exception. These texts, however, are particularly useful for beginning to excavate this strand of literary history because they are so intentionally didactic. In fact, their shared subject matter seems to demand a guiding moral hand precisely because moral norms are so actively purged from spaces of exception. Each author works to counter the narratives that enable the abuse of marginalized populations, teaching readers in the process how to recognize and rebuke those same narratives. Such guidance is crucial: since spaces of exception and their representations prove difficult to ethically access, writers must educate their audiences in methods of access, representation, empathy, and—ultimately—resistance. In one sense, each text works to unveil a secret history, and these revelations become a form of moral education. Although the politics of writers can be notoriously uncertain, the political project of each novel is quite apparent: to call attention to systems of inequity, thus undermining them, through the portrayal of their most intense manifestation in spaces of exception. Still, from *The Grapes of Wrath* to *The Zero*, these texts avoid the perils of other, narrowly conceived didactic literature by avoiding the articulation of a dogmatic praxis. Instead, they use the act of reading to promote a more conscientious recognition of the worlds in which we live.

I write of these novels as powerful ciphers for the moral and legal paradoxes of American life. These texts have the capacity to affect readers in manners that may only be possible through literary forms. Yet literary fiction, of course, does not replace other avenues of action. Each author, however, propose that the work of fiction can crucially augment other political work. According to *The Washington Post*, with the election of

Donald Trump and the intensifying of radical right rhetoric in favor of concentration camps and torture for undocumented immigrants and religious minorities, great numbers of readers have turned to dystopian fictions that similarly depict states and spaces of exception (Andrews). It remains to be seen whether this renewed readership of classics like George Orwell's *Nineteen Eight-Four* (1949) and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) will provide escapism or inspiration to action. Though the public might call on authors to use their insight and art to offer us explicit directives, Butler, Walter, Wright, Steinbeck, Pohl, Kornbluth, and Atwood ultimately leave responsibility in readers' hands, for better or worse.

Chapter 1: Ages of Terror: Extralegal Torture Sites and State Violence in *The Parable of the Talents* and *The Zero*

Introduction

In 1998, Octavia Butler published the science fiction dystopian novel *Parable of the Talents*, the sequel to her 1993 novel *Parables of the Sower*. The first-person epistolary-style narrative follows the life of an adult Lauren Olamina, the same young adult protagonist from *Sower*, as she and her family build a new religious community in a near-future United States wracked by wars, economic collapse, and racialized religious terror. Afflicted with hyperempathy, a condition that causes her to neurologically experience the pain of others, Olamina founds and advocates for her new religion called Earthseed. This faith stresses that “God is Change,” calling for non-hierarchical cooperation and betterment among its members. The novel’s plot begins in Acorn, a small Earthseed village that continues to grow until a terrorist group of “Crusaders,” religious fanatics tacitly legitimated by the new U.S. President, captures and enslaves Olamina’s community. The camp operates as a space of exception in which persons are abused until their subjectivity evaporates and they remain nearly mindless bodies. Though set in a fictional near-future, Butler’s novel evokes the United States’ long legacy of terror and torture legitimated by the State, indicating how national narratives of security and prosperity are built on the backs of racialized others.

In 2007, Jess Walter’s darkly satirical novel *The Zero* was published and marketed as a “9/12” fiction. This third-person narrative offers a carefully layered

critique of the nation's, the State's, and the police agent's response to the attacks on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent declaration of the Global War on Terror. The novel's third-person narrative follows Brian Remy, a New York City police officer recruited into a new government counter-terrorism intelligence agency, the "Office of Liberty and Recovery." But Remy's narrative is severely disjointed: he experiences black outs and temporal shifts during which an alter ego overtakes him and participates in investigations that include the torture of innocent suspects. The novel's plot follows Remy's attempts to understand the uncontrolled trajectory of his life and new profession in which he discovers that his agency, the FBI, and CIA largely manufacture the threats to national security that they are tasked to pursue. Whereas Butler's novel focuses on the victims' experiences of State-sponsored violence, *The Zero* targets the national and individual complicity with regimes of extralegal State violence that proliferate spaces of exception.

Together these two novels offer productive perspective on our contemporary crises of American State power. While Walter's novel offers insight into the War on Terror and its excesses, Butler's earlier novel offers a recent though broader context of sites of torture that is not eclipsed by the spectacles of our present. Indeed, American law and American literature have long been concerned with questions of acceptable and unacceptable forms of State violence. Through its speculative future setting, *Parable of the Talents* contemplates how extralegal, State-sponsored violence and terror are centuries-old American mechanisms to assert racial and class dominance. Butler's fictional setting, evocations, and allusions present this phenomenon not as limited to specific historical circumstances but rather as ready for mobilization in any time or space.

In contrast, via its formal conceit Walter's *The Zero* represents the eclipse of extralegal State violence in national memory and consciousness. By posing the protagonist Brian Remy as a representative American citizen and an allegorical figure for the nation, the author uses Remy's severely disjointed narrative to evoke the wider dissonance in our national consciousness when addressing reinvigorated extralegal State violence. The satirical depiction of his inability to meaningfully intervene in unethical violence, despite his position at its center, points to the wider failure of Americans' ethical comprehension and intervention.

Like those spaces depicted in other texts discussed in this dissertation, the fictional torture sites in these novels are not cordoned zones of aberrant violence. The scenes of torture in concentration camp in *Parable of the Talents* and the cargo ship in *The Zero* act as important fulcrums for not only the development of each novel's plot and characters but also their allegorical work. Though exceptional in the sense that these sites operate beyond the bounds of normal law, each text suggests that these kinds of spaces are all too normal and near the foundations of American political structures. Yet, despite the comparable representations of torture sites, the camp and the ship in these novels are not interchangeable. Their immediate purposes are different: torture within the camp is quasi-penal and disciplinary, while the torture on the ship is nominally part of an interrogation. But the victims in these fictions are nevertheless interlinked by their similar exceptional positions beyond the normal protection of law, a kind of existence that Colin Dayan describes as being "held in limbo in the no-man's lands sustained by state power" (*Law* 12). Butler's and Walter's texts reveal the dynamic of this relationship between State power and particular categories of bodies by representing this limbo into the

physical space of exception of the torture site. By focusing on particular historical circumstances through the medium of fiction, these narratives are able to both specify different tactics for perpetrating extralegal State violence and evoke longer, wider legacies of more varied violence that fills the American past and present.

Dominating Difference through Torture

Butler's *Parable of the Sower* takes the narrative perspective of those who suffer extralegal violence authorized by the State. The text portrays torture as a part of will to dominance disguised by efforts to discipline persons into acceptable, docile subjects. Those targeted in Butler's speculative future are "the poor and the different," used as scapegoats to satisfy social and economic insecurities (Butler, *Talents* 289). With this end in mind, the Crusaders' torture program at "Camp Christian" operates under a state of exception to transform minority citizens into passive bodies nearly devoid of subjectivity.

Butler's protagonist Lauren Olamina learns as much amid the terror and violence she suffers in her village-turned-concentration camp. She writes, "They will break us down, reshape us, teach us what it means to love their country and fear their God" (184). Captives are told that they "must be reeducated" to "forsake our sinful ways," and they are required to refer to their jailers as "Teachers" (208, 212). These men, while not direct agents of the State, nevertheless invoke the nation-state as their source of authority. But after her escape, Olamina explains the camp's violent hypocrisy to her brother, saying, "They never let anyone go. They killed quite a few of us, but they never released anyone. . . . I don't see how they could have dared to let us go after what they'd done to us" (314). The Crusaders' justification for their extensive physical and mental abuse of their

prisoners proves only superficial. Instead, Camp Christian is a space of focused abuse aimed not at the remaking of subjects but into their psychic annihilation.

Olamina's remark to her brother reveals the irony in her earlier statement about the camp's true nature. The words "what it means" inject an ambiguous fulcrum into her sentence. Her diction and grammar before this clause clearly indicate the power dynamics: the torturers are in the position of subjects undertaking actions on objects, their victims. But the phrase "what it means" muddles the grammatical location of actors and objects. On initial reading, the language of reshaping and teaching suggests that the captors intend to discipline their captives into citizens, appropriately patriotic and religious. Rather than elevating the captives to equal status, however, this education through violence renders them as bodies stripped of personhood. "What it means" to love and fear the camp's version of God and country proves to be the process of violently dominating bodies marked as other who are perceived as threats to orders of political, social, and economic power.

Violence is a central feature of Butler's fictions, but the kinds of violence depicted in the two *Parable* novels are markedly different. While *Parable of the Talents* continues its prequel's themes of non-dogmatic, non-hierarchical ethics and community building, *Sower* does not linger on scenes of torture as does *Talents*. For example, while in search of her missing father in the wild, lawless areas outside their suburb, a younger Olamina and her companions hear only the screams of victims being tortured by roaming gangs. Butler writes, "It was a man's voice . . . We couldn't locate the source. The echoes bounced around the canyon, confusing us, sending us first in one direction, then in another. . . . The screaming stopped, then began again as a kind of horrible, bubbling

noise” (*Sower* 132). The group would later find corpses but not witness the violence firsthand. Here the author offers only the description of sound as a signifier for this extended moment of torture. Though strongly evocative, especially in the transition from a “man’s voice” into an inhuman “bubbling noise,” these screams are a very loose signifier. They have no clearly determined referent; Olamina cannot be certain from whom the screams originated, or even their physical origin as the sound “echoes,” dislocating this signifier of pain from its source. Much of the violence of *Sower* is represented in a similarly removed manner.

Moreover, in contrast to the organized torture in the sequel, *Sower* portrays largely wild, chaotic violence in the wake of nationwide catastrophe. Government at any level is practically absent from *Sower*. In the opening pages of *Talents* Olamina’s husband, Bankole, relates how people in her world have come to call the period in which *Sower* takes place as the “the Apocalypse” or “the Pox” (Butler, *Talents* 7-8). He describes this period as “caused by accidentally coinciding climatic, economic, and sociological crises . . . caused by our own refusal to deal with obvious problems in those areas” (8). The resulting collapse of the economy and infrastructure creates a state of nature environment through which Olamina and her soon-to-be Earthseed followers navigate as “homeless wanderers” (9). *Sower* depicts three main categories of violence that become excessively visible in this world. Some individuals prey upon others for survival. Other communities and corporations that still maintain a power base are shown to exploit and even enslave destitute persons who have limited resources for survival. But Olamina also recognizes the destructive violence generated by “frustrated, angry, hopeless” people. She writes, “They have no power to improve their lives, but they have

the power to make others even more miserable. And the only way to prove to yourself that you have power is to use it” (*Sower* 143). Ultimately, *Sower*’s narrative is a heroic journey that eschews the trope’s traditional assertions of male power through violence, replaced by Olamina’s empathy and new religious ethic.

By the time of *Talents* the apocalyptic chaos has lessened. A version of government has returned to the U.S., but lawlessness persists across the majority of the nation. As Bankole notes, the worst of the Pox has passed, but “[i]t has not ended” (Butler, *Talents* 8). He claims that the United States of America “did not survive the Pox. . . . What is left of it now, what it has become, I do not know” (8). Still, the shift in setting between these novels also marks a shift in predominant kinds of violence to which Olamina and her followers are exposed. The torture and violence of *Sower* is a manifestation of “war of all against all” in Thomas Hobbes’s concept of a state of nature. In contrast, Butler’s representation of extreme abuse at “Camp Christian” and elsewhere in *Talents* indicates a highly organized and institutionalized violence that originates in part from the reinvigorated State.

Butler invites the reader to begin recognizing this difference as Olamina observes the Crusaders transforming her village into Camp Christian. Olamina writes, “Our captors were keeping our land, then. Until that moment, this had not occurred to me. They were not just out to steal or burn, enslave or kill. That was what thugs had always done before. . . . But these were staying, building a fence. Why?” (Butler, *Talents* 199). The author calls the reader’s attention to this paradigm shift between the two novels with the fence. The fence creates the space of the camp, establishing a visible zone that is rendered distinct from all space around it. What occurs within the camp is forcefully set

apart from the world outside both physically and symbolically, creating a space of exception.

Butler incorporates the fence and the power dynamics it symbolizes into this passage that calls attention to the change in setting from one novel to the next. The author's further description of Camp Christian shows that these fences function only to demarcate space, not to actually restrict the captives. The devices that control and inflict pain on the camp victims is Butler's science fiction invention of electronic shock collars. These collars are placed on prisoners' necks and enact their own perimeter, inflicting horrendous pain on those who move outside a defined radius from the control unit (Butler, *Talents* 199, 195). Importantly, these collars do no permanent damage to their wearers (130). As a result, the fence is mostly a signifier that differentiates space in which certain kinds of bodies and behaviors belong. These camps are decidedly exceptional; the violence inflicted upon Olamina and others marked as outcasts is only permissible if it is out of sight, away from population centers and those citizens not directly employed in this torture regime. But, as long as they meet these criteria, the camps prove acceptable.

Butler writes at great length to inform her readers that the experience of torture is not limited to physical pain. The violence targeted at Olamina's body serves as a conduit to the destruction of her individual subjectivity. From the beginning of her captivity, the experience of direct torture of lashings and rape alongside the psychological torture of the constant threat of violence works to transform Olamina and her peers into almost subjectless bodies. The camp's exceptional function ignores the protections of American

legal and moral norms for individuals, inflicting psychic death while preserving useful biological bodies.

The text portrays the first step of this alienating process as a traumatic break with language. After the village is captured, Olamina writes, “I could hear people around me moaning, crying, cursing, talking, but their words made no sense to me. They might as well have been in a foreign language. I couldn’t think of anything except that I wanted to die” (Butler, *Talents* 197). Her suffering begins to break down her status as a subject, temporarily ejecting her from language’s system of knowing and communicating. This scene reflects a common scholarly understanding of the relationship between pain and language, established by Elaine Scarry in the monumentally influential study *The Body in Pain* (1985). Scarry argues that, “Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4). In Butler’s text, however, not only does Olamina seem unable to speak, but she is also estranged from her peers’ voices. This torture dissolves relationships and communities alongside subjectivity. The camp as a space of exception works to produce bodies that are only appropriate to exist within them.

Olamina’s struggle with language continues throughout her captivity, only intensifying. Hard labor, food and water deprivation, jolts of electricity akin to an analog lashing of a whip leave Olamina feeling “so bad in every possible way, so horrible, so scared” (203). She further writes, “After a while, all I could think of was water, pain, and where was my baby? I lost track of everything else” (203). While her imprisonment in this space of exception already separates Olamina from the wider world, the physical pain

and mental anguish over the loss of her family inflicted upon her works to further unseat her psyche from reality at large.

In many scenes Butler presents Olamina's suffering and its effects on her "voice." Scarry describes the destruction of voice as the central process of torture. She writes,

For what the process of torture does is to split the human being into two The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it. It is in part this combination that makes torture, like any experience of great physical pain, mimetic of death[.] (48)

Scarry writes of what is now a well-established understanding of torture by scholars and practitioners as a mean for the "rapid destruction of personal identity" (Todorov 37).

From this perspective, Olamina's experience is representative of institutionalized torture. This experience, however, is not hers alone. Other women are lashed electronically for expressing grief, "for talking, screaming, crying, cursing, and demanding answers" (Butler, *Talents* 205). This list of verbs emphasizes how the torturers assault every aspect of voice, encompassing mundane, fearful, mournful, and angry expression of one's self.

Throughout her time in the camp, Olamina's testimonial account is a form of resistance to the Crusaders' efforts to totally objectify her body without a voice or subjectivity. Much of the novel's narration arrives from Olamina's secret journal. She claims to write in order to "make a record of all this . . . so that, someday, Earthseed will know what Earthseed has survived" (185). But Olamina also writes for herself, withstanding the camp's function of breaking her away from systems of meaning beyond pain. She expresses, "Now I must find a way to write about the past few weeks, to tell

what has happened to us—just to tell it as though it were sane and rational. I'll do that, if for no other reason than to give some order to my scattered thoughts" (208). Her writing works to counter the effects of torture which causes her to "lose track of everything." Writing, though a flawed medium for representing extreme violence, nevertheless serves as a tactical imposition of "order" on her experiences, a temporary epistemological lens for both Olamina and her readers to grasp something of the camp's torture.

Despite her resistance, Olamina's ongoing torture proves tactically successful, transforming much of her existence into a condition as a subjectless body or, as Scarry writes, "mimetic of death." Olamina later writes about other episodes of abuse that, "The worst was the way I felt afterward, I don't mean the physical pain. This place is a university of pain. . . . I was a zombie for several days after the lashing" (Butler, *Talents* 227). She is rendered into a state comparable to the fantastical figures of the living dead, a condition at the limits of life. This condition is analogous to Agamben's term "bare life," the biopolitical conception of a purely organic existence improper to political community. Olamina expresses this thought directly, bypassing simile and perhaps even metaphor. In this speculative science fiction text, the reader is invited to wonder if torture has carried Olamina past a figurative zombie-like state into a literal condition like that of the creatures portrayed in such films as the *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). As Butler writes, "A collar . . . makes you turn traitor against your kind, against your freedom, against yourself" (131). Torture and its threat alienate a victim from everything, including oneself, turning a person into an embodied phantasm of her former self.

While Butler offers the extreme figure of the zombie to suggest the full implications of life conditioned by the physical and mental abuse in the camps, she also

provides the reader with a sense of how pain's infliction is a *process* that varies in intensity. Olamina further reflects on the attacks against her subjectivity, writing, "But somehow, it had not occurred to me that . . . that *bits of my own mind* could be snatched away too. I knew I could be killed. I've never had any illusions about that. I knew I could be disabled. I knew that too. But I had not thought that another person, just by pushing a small button, then smiling and pushing it again and again . . . [sic]" (Butler, *Talents* 228). The unfolding of Olamina's revelation here draws the reader's attention to torture's process, again reinforcing the non-visible psychic stakes of this violence. The reference to her "*bits of my own mind*" implies how the desired zombification of her person occurs in a piecemeal process, one "bit" at a time that builds into the inexpressible ellipsis at the end of this quote. Butler's use of the ellipsis evokes an endless cycle that escapes the possibilities of representation. Moreover, the contrast of "small button" to one's entire mind creates a spectrum or scale for violent acts that work to unseat subjectivity. Olamina suggests that if even the innocuous act of pushing a small button can split minds from bodies, then so could every other action that contains the same or more intense degrees of violence.

The novel suggests that the Crusader camps are not only invested in violently dominating subjects marked as different but also in converting these people into docile labor or other objects of economic utility. Wealth production proves to mediate the camps' violence. Though Olamina "was a zombie," she also remarks that, "During the week, we are machines—or domestic animals" (*Talents* 223). While Olamina and her peers are reduced to a state that is mimetic of death, their bodies prove functional like obedient machines. The phrase "domestic animals" strongly inflects her statement. At

first the word “animals” calls the reader’s attention to how the prisoners are treated as less than equal humans, invoking histories of chattel slavery and different varieties of indentured labor. But this reference evokes associations with livestock or similar non-human organisms, the bodies of which provide commodities or labor for their human masters. Through torture, the Crusaders change their victims into subhuman labor. Olamina learns later that the Crusaders also coerce prisoners to offer blood and organs with the suggestion that they are sometimes taken by force (230). As a result, the description of captives as domestic animals takes on a more literal meaning: they too may be butchered.

While Olamina’s writing of her experience in Camp Christian focuses on the violent domination of her body as a means to annihilate her subjectivity, she points to these other factors that influence the function of this exceptional space. Once she escapes, she has the opportunity to reflect on the wider implications of the camps and the political and economic networks in which they are situated. Ultimately, Butler’s imagining of the camp links the desire for violent domination with the exploitative production of wealth. In *Parable of the Talents*, the focused violence of the camps proves to not occur as an isolated aberration in the political order but as the most direct expression of power in a national landscape enveloped within a space of exception.

Beyond the Camps: Exposing Bodies to Systemic Violence

Torture camps are not isolated, anomalous locations of sadism in *Talents* but one kind of nexus in social, economic, political networks that are continually doing the same kind of work as the camps but in less spectacular, more insidious ways. By including

Camp Christian in the novel, Butler offers a highly visible frame through which the reader can better understand how the rest of her speculative American landscape is not divorced from the camps but functions as a wider space of exception in which violence and exploitation are less concentrated and visible. Butler's novel and her other works do much of the same theoretical work about spaces of violence through fiction that critical theory undertakes. *Talents* suggests the same view as Agamben does when he declares, "the birth of the camp in our time appears as an event that decisively signals the political space of modernity itself" (*Homo* 174). In Butler's world she concretizes Agamben's call on his readers "to regard the camp not as a historical fact and an anomaly belonging to the past . . . but in some way as the hidden matrix and *nomos* of the political space in which we are still living" (166). Butler further evokes a perspective of the American State akin to how social and legal critic Kristian Williams argues that, in the United States, torture "is not incidental to state power; it is characteristic of that power. Torture doesn't represent system failure; it *is* the system" (3).⁵ The space within and beyond the novel's camps cannot be disconnected because violent production of docile bodies in the camps is intended to directly serve the interests of those beyond the camps.

Once the reader better understands the networks of which Camp Christian is a part, the symbolic fence that the Crusaders erect proves further meaningless to their victims. The camp fences pretend to contain violence and bodies deemed inappropriate for the national landscape, but they ultimately operate as an extension of rather than a

⁵ Contrary to Elaine Scarry's argument that the act of torture, by extension of its destruction of one's voice, destroys "civilization" and "the world," Idelber Avelar claims that torture is part of civilization's and even democracy's foundations (Avelar 259). Instead, torture reinforces the boundaries of civilization even as it is nominally categorized as outside civilized life. Extralegal, exceptional torture exhibits the power of the civilized State and the uncivilized lengths to which it will go in order to maintain a way of life. In this manner, torture's consistent realpolitik slippage between the inside and outside of law nearly perfectly epitomizes Agamben's state of exception.

digression from the political and economic structures of the nation-state at large. The camps work to disguise the slower, more insidious violence and exploitation that people face outside the fence. Butler's depiction of life both inside and outside the camps demonstrates how such spatial distinctions are only performative when, in fact, these spaces are inseparably intertwined.

Butler imagines the torture camps as reserved for people who do not submit to the exploitation of their bodies and labor. She includes the example of a vagrant falsely convicted for robbery and sentenced to indentured labor for the Church of Christian America. Along with his daily labor, he is "required to donate blood twice," and the Church promises to free him if he were to "donate a kidney or a cornea" (Butler, *Talents* 230). When he refuses out of fear of endless demands for his organic material, he is sent "to Camp Christian for reeducation" (230). Even outside the camps, citizens are at continuous risk to a spectrum of exploitation and violence, with death and the camps serving as this spectrum's most extreme possibility.

Despite Olamina's escape from Camp Christian, she and her followers are not free from violent risk to their bodies and minds. In the sense of trauma, Olamina and her friends never entirely escape the camps. She writes, "We were together at last, comforting one another, and yet I think each of us was alone, straining towards the others, some part of ourselves still trapped back in the uncertainty and fear, the pain and desolation of Camp Christian" (269). The author emphasizes the continuous damage that spreads beyond the camp's fences, writing, "Remembering wasn't safe. You could lose your mind, remembering" (270). But while memories and trauma cause survivors to carry

the camp with themselves into the present, Butler also depicts how freedom from the camps does not free survivors from more extralegal violence.

Though the camps become the clearest expression of a space of exception, the potential for State-sponsored exploitation and abuses begins outside the camps. Contemplating how her village had been at risk to the Crusaders' torture program, Olamina writes, "We were nobodies, and our anonymity, far from protecting us, had made us vulnerable" (214). This sentence captures the macro-dynamic of the exceptional landscape that Butler imagines for this future United States. Earlier in the narrative she does note that in the still near-apocalyptic state of the world that anyone can still "vanish," but Butler develops the text to depict how people on the bottom of stratum of power are the most systematically violated and exploited (168). Once Olamina discovers that the camps have no basis in written law, she still reaffirms that, "We are, as we have always been, on our own" (290). Without significant social, economic, or political status in the American hierarchy, the lives of Olamina's followers and other groups are cast in a constant virtual space of exception.

To describe the United States at large as a space of exception in *Talents* is not to say that law is absent. Laws remain that call for the protection of persons and rights, but as Olamina's daughter comments, "The problem was, no one was enforcing such laws" (Butler, *Talents* 24). Instead of a binary transition from the application of law to its suspension, these two conditions of law lose their distinction. In imagining Olamina's world of rampant extralegal violence, Butler also portrays how the apparatus of law enables the exceptional treatment of persons rather than preventing it. Seemingly foundational American legal concepts fall by the wayside across the nation. For example,

Olamina discusses how frequently authorities ignore “the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments—the ones abolishing slavery and guaranteeing citizenship rights.” She notes how “even the police would either sell [children] or indenture them illegally,” enabled “by custom, by Congress and the various state legislatures, and by recent Supreme Court decisions” (40). Olamina comments that those in power justify this revitalized form of slavery for the politically and economically dispossessed is, in fact, a kind of welfare. But she claims that “it’s just one more way of getting people to work for nothing or almost nothing,” enabling people to “be coerced into being quick docile, disposable labor” (40). Such extralegal tactics prove to be parallel in purpose to those inside the camps: to dominate persons deemed different for economic exploitation.

Though the novel emphasizes the experiences of Olamina’s religious minority, Butler includes details on the suffering of others marked as different and exposed to abuse without consequence. The author speculates that creation of certain categories of persons to whom legal and moral norms do not apply leads to the proliferation these categories. Similarly, Colin Dayan suggests in her study of Anglo-American law that the existence of exceptional classes like slaves and felons in our real world “place the citizen who is both non-slave and non-felon in a fearful zone of legal ambiguity” (*Law* 42). More and more persons are opened to the risk of State-sponsored violence as its limitations blur.

Butler uses the neo-fascist President Jarret as the central figure to depict and explain the national space of exception. Olamina claims that “you can’t separate [President] Jarret from the ‘religious nonsense.’ You take Jarret and you get beatings, burnings, tarrings and featherings” (25). She records some quotes from Jarret’s

inauguration speech, notably including a verse from the biblical book of Isaiah: “Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate as overthrown by strangers” (47). Butler also inserts in Jarret’s mouth the essential paradox of the American republic’s history; she writes, “In almost the same breath, he spoke of both ‘the generosity and the love that we must show to one another, to all of our fellow Christian Americans,’ and ‘the destruction we must visit upon traitors and sinner, those destroyers in our midst’” (147). Jarret asserts simultaneously inclusive and exclusive ethos, creating porous, ambiguous categories of stranger and citizen into which any person can fall. His words mirror how Agamben describes the state of exception as akin to a civil war that pits some citizens against others, using law as a tool of domination rather than equal protection (*State 2*). Butler imagines the America of *Talents* to fall into such an insidious civil war, in which legal power is used as a weapon rather than an equitable shield.

Of course, the exceptional, extralegal violence that proliferates in Olamina’s world is not directly administered by the State. Instead, the State’s institutions permit abuse and exploitation. Olamina notes that, while the Crusaders from Christian America churches “believe God is on their side,” “they have no government-sanctioned authority” (95). But, like her mother and others later in the narrative, Olamina’s daughter directly associates the Crusaders with Jarret’s government even though they do not function as official agents of the State. She writes, “During Jarret’s first year in office, the worst of his followers ran amok. Filled with righteous superiority and popular among the many frightened, ordinary citizens who only wanted order and stability, the fanatics set up the camps” (243). Jarret is perceived as a savior figure for the poor and as figure of order.

But the order he and his regime create is predicated on the ordering of bodies, offering security to some through the operation of violent order on others. Though Olamina's daughter states, "What was done to my mother and to many other interned people of her time was illegal in almost every way," Olamina and other characters indirectly attribute the Crusaders' camps to Jarret's political program (242, 280).

Butler does not, however, attribute the national space of exception to Jarret and his followers alone. She speculates about the public's relationship to this regime of terror. Though Olamina doubts that President Jarret has authorized the Crusaders' camps under the official color of law, she realizes that "no one has noticed" the camps (214). A recent arrival at Camp Christian confirms to Olamina that, "Most people don't know about the camps" (231). Butler ultimately paints this ignorance as complicity through the confrontation between Olamina and her brother. Olamina's brother, now a member of mainstream Christian America Church, defends the Church's policies and actions beyond the camps by declaiming the Crusaders as an unauthorized "splinter group" (322). By applying this label, he also abdicates his responsibility as belonging to an institution that is, according to Olamina, inescapably tied to the Crusaders. He is the novel's chief figure of being complicit by treating extralegal violence as an aberration rather than the new norm of the political order from which he benefits.

Even within the Crusaders Butler imagines mostly normal people who have come to condone exceptional violence. To Olamina's mind, there are two groups of Crusaders. Irredeemable sadists comprise the first: she writes that some men "lash us until they have orgasms," and that, "These men feast on our pain." To discuss the second group, Olamina focuses on the sexual abuse she and other women experience. She writes that, "Rape is

done with a pretense of secrecy,” because this violence cannot be officially sanctioned just as the camps as a whole cannot be sanctioned. But Olamina imagines that many of the men who assault her “must go home to their wives and kids.” A schism exists between this functionally extralegal rape and the conservative Christian “family values” that this regime espouses. Olamina writes, “They rape, but they pretend they don’t. They say they’re religious, but power has corrupted even the best of them. I don’t like to admit it, but some of them are, in a strange way, decent, ordinary men. I mean that they believe in what they are doing.” These men are representative of the greater schism that engulfs Butler’s United States. The moral dissonance of this less than secret regime of rape mirrors how President Jarret calls for the defense of one’s country and fellow citizens while still ostracizing and enabling mass violence against people marked as “enemies of the country” (*Talents* 233). In this sense, the novel casts everyone who is not a victim of the camp as in some part complicit, some part a Crusader.

Olamina’s daughter offers a retrospective summary for her mother’s theories about the unhinged violence sweeping the country. She blames human “competitiveness and territoriality” and writes,

We human beings seem always to have found it comforting to have someone to look down on—a bottom level of fellow creatures who are very vulnerable, but who can somehow be blamed and punished for all or any troubles. We need this lowest class as much as we need equals to team with and to compete against and superiors to look to for direction and help. (*Talents* 80-1)

The text attributes the desire to dominate and exploit persons marked as different not only to those with political or economic power but also to every human being. Olamina suspects that well-to-do people with “legal residences” would be happy to see the church seizing the scattered population of the homeless and squatters, removing them to contained and productive labor.

By emphasizing the role of average people in the production of a national space of exception, Butler raises the question for her readers of whether or not we share similar responsibilities. In the novel, while the camps themselves undoubtedly would raise moral hackles if enough public light were cast on them, Olamina wonders, “How many people . . . can be penned up and tormented—reeducated—before it begins to matter to the majority of Americans?” (231). This question represents an immediate quandary for Olamina and her world since the camps and pseudo-religious violence are active concerns. But for the novel’s readers, this question becomes rhetorical, asking us to take responsibility for the answer to this query. Twenty-first century readers face the onus of confronting the excesses of the Global War on Terror and the promises of the Trump administration that mirror much of what occurs in Butler’s fictional America. Yet *Parable of the Talents* evokes far more than the present and possible futures, invoking multiple histories to suggest that the United States has long been a national space of exception.

The Point of Parables, or Multidirectional Memory

Reading Butler’s novel in the twenty-first century pressingly reminds us that the abhorrent practices at Guantanamo Bay, Abu-Ghraib, and countless other sites are not

hasty, anomalous, and extemporaneous tactics. Instead, alongside our present moment of State torture *Parable of the Talents* invokes a social, legal, and political legacy of extralegal violence that enfolds the United States' history. Although in the last few decades the American reading public has lauded texts exposing the evils of State torture, this novel marks a departure from the texts in this trend. Diverse acclaimed books like George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973), J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), and Lawrence Thornton's *Imagining Argentina* (1987) all directly focus on State violence beyond American borders. Of course, each text points to the problems of government abuse and exploitation in more places than the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, for example. But the emphasis in these texts' reception is undoubtedly on the misdeeds done abroad. *Parable of the Talents* asks readers to return the concerns that have echoed in public writing since the Second World War to the American landscape.

As Olamina's husband writes early in *Talents*, the period of the Pox is not a contained event of chaos and predation. Instead, the Pox has a long, ongoing history that reaches outside Butler's fiction into the structural crises of the twentieth and now the twenty-first centuries. While *Parable of the Talents* is set in a speculative, nearly apocalyptic future, this fiction brings into focus multiple aspects of the American past, present, and possible futures. Despite naming her series after famous biblical parables, the ethos of Butler's narratives accomplishes much more complex work than their eponymous form.

Butler projects a self-reflective discussion of parables and story-telling into Olamina's tale. The narrator recalls how her father, a preacher, "loved parables—stories that taught, stories that presented ideas and morals in ways that made pictures in people's minds." He told stories from every venue because "he believed stories were so important as teaching tools" (14). This early reference to the text's title creates an ethical frame for readers; Butler suggests that we are to learn something from experiencing her story. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "parable" as "A (usually realistic) story or narrative told to convey a moral or spiritual lesson or insight; [especially] one told by Jesus in the Gospels." The *OED* emphasizes the New Testament's influence on the parable form in English, and Butler implements it in both novels in her series. If we were to read *Talents* through the form of a biblical parable, then the moral lesson would be the central tenets of Olamina's Earthseed religion: radical personal adaptability, survival, empathy, and growth. These character and community traits that the novel promotes are quite familiar to readers of Butler's works. The author's first novel *Kindred* (1979) and her *Xenogenesis Trilogy* (1987-1989) produce the same moral lesson if we were to read them in this manner. Indeed, to ignore the traditional parable narrative function of *Talents* would be a disingenuous interpretation, but an interpretation limited to this scope would be similarly inadequate.

While the novel does indeed operate on this level, its complexity evokes much more than the direct signification of plot and lesson. As a fiction set in a speculative though historically generated landscape, *Parable of the Talents* evokes more than a singular experience. The novel conjures multiple avenues of association, gathering together different aspects of past, present, and future Americas in the world of the Pox to

teach readers through storytelling about the too often unremembered past and too often unthought potential futures. Although set in a fictional history, *Talents* remains eerily plausible, lying in close proximity to particular historical moments. The novel performs what Michael Rothberg describes as “multidirectional memory,” an ethic of memory that is “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; [...] as productive and not privative” (3). Butler comingles divergent experiences like U.S. slavery and the Holocaust to produce a critical perspective for readers to recognize the ongoing histories of violence that are so often understated or overlooked.

The exceptional nature of modern law and State violence in the Americas is older than the United States itself. Robert Pallitto’s edited documentary history, *Torture and State Violence in the United States* (2011), presents a nearly four hundred year-old history of the State simultaneously generating legal norms intended to unilaterally protect citizens while also instituting exceptions, leaving bodies exposed to the State’s violence as it determines necessary. Pallitto first provides excerpts from the Massachusetts Bodies of Liberties (1641) which includes “the rights of the accused” while “torture is explicitly permitted in certain cases, as long as such torture is not “barbarous or cruel” (19). Though Butler does not likely have this specific document in mind as a referent in her novels, the specific historical allusions in the *Parable* series do not close off the reader’s further associations.

The camps themselves are one of the novel’s most immediately recognizable historical referent. Readers are likely to associate Camp Christian with concentration camps in Nazi Germany, the widest recognized form of “the camp” in popular culture. Like Nazi camps, Butler’s camps are used to police and destroy difference. Yet Butler’s

camps do not speculate about what would happen if concentration camps came to American shores; in fact, they have long existed here.

Beginning with the internment of Native Americans in the early republic, the United States has used camps and similar spaces to abuse and exploit persons under its power. Such is the thesis of James L. Dickerson's study *Inside America's Concentration Camps* (2010) (ix, x). Dickerson points to corporate economic expansion in the American colonies as the driving force behind the racial and ethnic cleansing that culminated in the 1830 Indian Removal Act (15, 23). He describes the law as the first federal law "to establish a legal basis for restrictive concentration camps" (23). While personnel at Indian internment camps were ordered to treat their captive humanely by the standards of the day, the exceptional nature of these spaces fostered abuse (30). These camps that led to the Native American reservation system laid the foundation for their modern variants.

The other most prominent association Butler's camps provoke with American history is Japanese internment camps during the Second World War. In 1942 President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, authorizing the deportation of Japanese, Italian, and German Americans to concentration camps. In particular, internment's proponents alleged that Japanese Americans were responsible for disrupting the American war effort, but present intelligence and decades of historical studies have discounted that argument (Dickerson 66). Instead, Dickerson and a litany of other historians point to the "longstanding racism prevalent on the West Coast" (67). Along with the Executive Order, legislatures passed predatory actions that dispossessed many internees and others of longstanding property. What Butler imagines to happen in the

early twenty-first century on the West Coast has essentially already occurred in the mid-twentieth.

Still, the presence of “the camp” as a paradigm in *Parable of the Talents* is more than summoning the past into the present. Indeed, camps for concentrating persons have become a banal practice for the American State. In 1986 the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was authorized by Congress to detain “illegal immigrants” in detention camps that have “attracted little public scrutiny” (Dickerson 239). Like all State facilities in which one group of people is empowered over a socio-political minority, abuse and exploitation occurs, even to the point of torture (241). A large portion of detainees are undocumented Hispanic immigrants, but the detention camp system put in place in the 1980s was activated after the September 11 terrorist attacks to persecute Arab and Muslim persons. Kristian Williams reports,

In the four months following the September 11 attacks, the US secretly jailed about 1,200 people, mostly Arabs or Muslims from other countries. Of these, only one was charged with terror-related crimes, while 600 were charged instead with immigration violations. An unknown number of ‘material witnesses’ were also jailed. . . . Of those who were held without charges, many were transferred cross-country, and some completely incommunicado and denied legal representation and family contact.
(Williams 169)

He summarizes, “Immigration status commonly serves as a convenient proxy for race” (169). But, by reading history through *Parable of the Talents*, however, we can expand Dickerson’s, Williams’s, and other scholars’ understanding of American camps. We can

recognize how this exceptional technique of statecraft can be and has been turned against any group of people deemed different, under whatever criteria.

Race still plays a central factor among the historical referents of *Talents*. Butler focuses most directly on the religious fascism at the center of Christian America as an extension of the United States' history of zealously abusive politics and populist violence. Yet she also points to a thread of racist prejudice still present in Olamina's world. Another prisoner tells Olamina how since a church robber was identified as black, he and a dozen other homeless people were arrested and indentured for being black men in the vicinity of a crime (*Talents* 229). Olamina and a majority of her fellow Earthseed followers are people of color. Other narrative choices and Butler's further engagement with African-American history in her other fictions raises the violent specter of extralegal violence against black peoples in the United States.

While Camp Christian evokes twentieth-century concentration camps, it also summons the historical memory of chattel slavery. Olamina contemplates the parallels between past and present slavery in both *Sower* and *Talents*. She compares the conditions of indentured laborers during the Pox and of black slaves: both groups are refused personal freedom, education, privacy, and even safety. One character suggests the risk of sexual abuse behind the closed doors of an employer's home (Butler, *Sower* 218-9). With the advent of "slave collar" technology—a clear allusion—Olamina imagines it "could initiate a whole new level of slavery" (*Talents* 84). This inclusion of slavery's memory in Butler's novels points to the persistent potential for the same sort exceptional exploitation of slavery to be visited upon others in the present. Whereas slaves were written into the U.S. Constitution as exceptions by way of the three-fifths compromise, as Olamina's

daughter notes, those who wield the power of law ignore the Amendments that worked to undo the exceptional status of blacks and others.

The camps themselves also perform similar functions to slave plantations. Slaves lived in a condition not unlike how Olamina describes the camp captives: “machines—or domestic animals.” Indeed, the state of life that Butler imagines in the camp is not far removed from the “wretched, degraded and abject” existence of black slaves (Walker 2). Even Olamina’s use of metaphor to describe life in the camp is in close parallel to the language of slavery. She describes herself as a zombie, a fantastical figure that originated, according to Colin Dayan, in Haitian slavery. As “a soulless husk deprived of freedom,” the zombie is “the most powerful emblem of apathy, anonymity, and loss” (J. Dayan 37). In Haitian vodou tradition, a zombie is a figure of ultimate spiritual dispossession, a body under the control of another in a condition mimetic to death. In both circumstances, historical and fictional, people are exposed to violence so that their labor may be exploited. And, in both cases, religion is frequently used as false justification. Though Butler may not have intended this specific historical connection, the narrative’s nature and her imagination of the camp foster these connections, inviting the reader to recognize how the past is not past.

Talents is even more particularly reminiscent of the lynching era of American history. Olamina makes an early association of lynching and church burning with President Jarret (26). The Crusaders themselves, with their name’s association with knighthood and chivalry, resemble in part a revitalized Ku Klux Klan, and their relationship to the State mirrors in part the Klan and other vigilantes’. While the Crusaders and historical perpetrators of racist mob violence are not direct agents of the

State, their relationship to the State is much closer than characters like Olamina's brother and many of Butler's readers would like to admit.

Mob violence and vigilantism condoned by the State has a long American legacy. In the nineteenth century, various court decisions, law enforcement policies, legislation, and executive orders permitted the exercise of mob violence. Mob violence was commonly justified as a phenomenon that was, to quote Judge Luke Lawless in a 1836 jury charge, "beyond the reach of human law" (Pallitto 62). As Pallitto writes, "In many number of cases, state officials licensed the lynchers to act and refused to prosecute them afterward" (73). One lynching apologist in 1899 "conceded that lynching was an expression of the 'people's wisdom,' suggesting that although in a lynching 'the law is violated in form,' it is vindicated in substance'" (Dray 149). As part of the federal attempts to pass anti-lynching legislation, in 1922 Senator T. H. Caraway argued that lynching's regulation or lack thereof was a matter of a state's right. He was one among many who presented similar arguments for decades (Pallitto 107). Though, in the context of lynching culture, the State-permitted vigilante violence in *Parable of the Talents* more closely resembles the mid-twentieth-century secretive, terroristic violence against blacks and civil rights workers, the scale of the camps and widespread complicity in Olamina's world harkens to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in which a lynching was a public and publicized spectacle.

Although lynching is depicted in popular culture as a Southern phenomenon, far away from the West Coast where Butler stages her fiction, sanctioned mob violence was not limited by geography. For example, California Governor James Rolph promised to pardon anyone convicted of lynching in a 1933 incident (Pallitto 115). In a historical

study of American lynching, Philip Dray claims argues that “the idea that lynchers were simply following nature’s laws” was accepted on a national scale (72-3). In an exceptional position not adequately protected by law, African Americans faced the constant threat of racist mob violence across the country, leaving them exposed to exploitation and other injustices without recourse, in fear of lynching. As Dray writes, “Hovering just beyond all the other daily indignities of life in the region was lynching, and even where a lynching never occurred it sat, a brooding possibility, over all aspirations” (223). Butler’s novel makes her own case for the persistent spirit of lynching in the United States, while historians like Dray point to the biased justice system and unequal application of law to blacks and other minorities (Dray 459).

Remarkably, since the publication of *Talents* even some of Butler’s futuristic science fiction elements have become historical referents. The electronically controlled slave collars anticipate the real invention of the “stun belt” now used by police forces and correctional facilities. Williams describes it: “This device fastens around a prisoner’s waist and can be activated by remote control, sending a 50,000-volt shock through her body for eight seconds. The shock causes the victim’s muscles to spasm, often causing her to fall . . . The shock is also fiercely painful, totally incapacitating, and undeniably humiliating” (Williams 207). In the novel collar technology enables continuous “clean torture” from which “you never have any marks to mess you up and drive down your price” (Butler, *Talents* 130). It prevents bodies from losing value as well as physical evidence that might be used to prosecute torturers. With the invention of the stun belt used by corrections departments, readers may now see critical associations between the

extralegal violence of the camps and the invisible, unaccountable “clean torture” that occurs in contemporary police and prison systems.

The practice of clean torture in *Talents* proves to be a prescient imagining of the now widespread “enhanced interrogation techniques” used by agents of the U.S. government. Chris Pyle reports that the CIA has advised foreign police agencies to use “scarless torture” to foreign police agencies because, with a lack of physical marks as evidence, “it was easy to deny or cover up.” Pyle suggests that this same motivation was present when the Bush administration implemented these same techniques with prisoners in the War on Terror beginning in 2001 (Pyle 57). The now well-publicized practices of waterboarding and sleep deprivation, for example, may not leave physical marks, but they still accomplish what Todorov describes as “rapid destruction of personal identity,” the same destruction Olamina experiences under the Crusaders’ thumb.

Famously, the Bush administration’s head of counterterrorism testified before Congress that after the September 11 attacks “the gloves come off” and these “enhanced techniques” were necessary (Pyle 7). This testimony and its pervasive spirit among torture apologists accomplish two rhetorical feats. It suggests that both the geopolitical circumstances and the violent, exceptional practices used in response are novel to the twenty-first century. But, as *Parable of the Talents* suggests to readers, the techniques and justifications for the excesses of the Global War on Terror have a long list of precedents that are well within the normal practices of the American State, even if they prove an exception to the apparent spirit of its laws.

Terror and Interrogation

In sharp contrast to the numerous scenes of explicit torture in Butler's novel, violence mostly occurs on the periphery of the narrative in Jess Walter's *The Zero*. Once the focalizer Brian Remy, the brain-damaged police officer, inadvertently participates in an abusive interrogation, extralegal State violence becomes an absent presence in the remainder of the text. The torture in this central scene becomes the haunting stakes of his split personality. His alter ego actively participates in State violence while the Remy whom the reader knows can only passively and intermittently object to it.

While *Parable of the Talents* focuses on victims' experience of extralegal violence in a broad historical perspective, *The Zero* satirizes the participation and complicity of individuals and the nation in the excess of the Global War on Terror. To this end, Remy's representative function shifts in scale throughout the text. As the espionage and romance portions of the plot progress, Remy is mostly an individual character living a bizarre existence. Yet at many points Remy stands in for the American people as a whole. But Walter first introduces him as a weird archetype of the State agent.

This characterization occurs almost immediately after Remy's suicide attempt. Alerted by the gunshot, his neighbor says she wants to "call the police," Remy replies, "I am the police" (Walter, *Zero* 4). This statement is not simply a practical utterance in this scene. Remy's self-identification to his neighbor is also his first moment of identification to the reader. Though he parrots his neighbor's commonplace idiom "the police" back to her, his words nevertheless cast his character as a representative of this collective entity, "the police," rather than a single agent, a police officer. Without further detail as to his particular role or jurisdiction as a police agent, Remy fleetingly aligns himself with the

entirety of the police apparatus. Still, this statement is simultaneously a passing idiomatic response and a central act of symbolic development of Remy's function in the novel, despite the dissonances between these two readings. In fact, the ambivalence of meaning in this statement foreshadows the ambivalence of the narrative's larger allegory. Much like the question of Remy's own agency and responsibility as his brain vacillates between his consciousness and his alter ego's, the novel's symbolic content remains largely in a zone of ambiguity, caught between representing the travails of one man and the country's without offering a clear means for deciding between the two.

The stakes for all of Remy's representative functions remains the State's extralegal torture. He only briefly visits a site of torture, a ship in international waters, but this short section becomes a fulcrum for the novel. This episode begins as Remy finds himself taken to the ship without any explanation. His boat pilot celebrates their boundary crossing away from U. S. territory with three Cuban cigars, casting an indulgent, luxurious but only mildly prurient atmosphere over the beginning of this part of the text, as if the soon to be revealed torture is a similarly arbitrarily regulated vice. Walter describes the torture chamber, writing,

Remy followed and they entered a long, narrow compartment, with chipped paint on the walls and a low, flaking ceiling, all of it illuminated by a bright, bare bulb in the center. There was no furniture, just a metal pole parallel to the ground, like a banister, or a high ballet bar, stretching the width of the room, about five feet off the ground. Remy gasped.

There, on the bar, a man was perched like a trophy, hanging forward, his arms tied behind his back and slung on the bar so that it held

him by the armpits, his feet against the wall dangling a few inches from the floor. The man was wearing nothing but a pair of tight red briefs and one white sock. It was cold and clammy in the room and his thick chest hair was wet and matted. A bucket of water sat below his feet. His shoulders and clavicles rose to points well above his head, which hung limply, bushy black hair dripping wet. Two other men were leaning against the opposite wall, bored-looking young men in jeans and plain sweatshirts, with short haircuts, standing guard, laughing at a private joke.

“Hey, fellas. You takin’ a break?”

“We thought we should save you some. Guy’s an hour from being jerky.” One of the big guys walked over, got a tin cup out of the bucket, and threw water on the man’s face. His head rose slowly. Remy could see cuts on his cheeks and forehead and lips, and guessed it was salt water they’d thrown on him. The man looked around wildly, his eyes finally settling on Remy, who had to look down at the ground. (133)

Later, Walter writes, “The man stunk like urine and sweat” (136). This extended passage signifies both the sinister and casual nature of this interrogation. The dark, spartan, and industrial aesthetic of the chamber meets readers’ expectations for the secretive practices of government violence. Remy’s gasp is an almost unnecessary prelude to the revelation about the prisoner Assan’s treatment. Even without descriptions of directly violent acts, the scene reveals a number of “enhanced interrogation techniques,” including the use of “stress positions” and forced exposure to “cold weather environments.” Remy’s gasp

invites the reader to share in his surprised repulsion at the scene, to react to what the text treats as a sudden but strangely banal spectacle.

Like the novel's overall treatment of Remy's undercover intrigues and terrorist plots, the tension in this scene arrives not from a revelation that justifies unconstitutional treatment of a prisoner but from Remy's discomfort and bewilderment that are then projected on to the reader. The guards' blasé attitude in this scene reflects Markham's and other characters' casual approach to the violent aspects of their duties. Once Markham takes over the interrogation with Remy silently in tow, he proceeds to threaten and intimidate Assan with a number of absurd clichés. He refers to himself and Remy as the "closers" and the "varsity" (134). Markham's frequent use of sports euphemisms and metaphors throughout the novel casts him in a juvenile light, as if detainment and torture were a competitive game with comparable stakes.

The simile comparing Assan to "a trophy" evokes a number of disquieting associations. The man most immediately resembles a hunting trophy, a dead animal acquired through a so-called sporting process, put on display as a boastful commemoration of the hunt. The guard's ambiguous comment that Assan is almost "jerky" associates him with processed meat. The word "trophy" also implies a broader sense of competitive victory, as if Assan's torture is not simply part of the means to victory in the War on Terror but a perverse artifact of a victory already accomplished through the violent assertion of U.S. imperialism and State power. This "wild," dehumanized trophy commemorates the victory over limitations to State violence.

Walter's quick portrayal of Assan's torture reflects the widely accepted critical understanding of torture. He is "an hour from being jerky," no longer in control of his

body's responses to stimuli. Like in *Parable of the Talents*, the torture reduces Assan into a condition, as Scarry writes, "mimetic to death." The violence unhinges his subjectivity so that he may become a pliable object for the State. The motivation behind Assan's torture, however, differs from that behind Olamina's. Though the reader later learns that Assan is innocent of wrongdoing, Markham's agency extralegally detains him in order to interrogate him. Assan's detention is part of a cycle of the State's will to power; as Pyle claims, for a significant number of detainees in the War on Terror, "The cruelties and degradations were meant to extract confessions, true or false, in order to justify continued detentions" (xi). In *Intimate Violence* (1994), Laura Tanner describes torture and other violence as using a victim's body "as a blank text on which an insecure individual's worldview maybe be written" (4). In a novel about one individual's search for meaning embedded in the government's endless search and overwrought interpretation for information, the critical analogy of a body functioning as a text to be written on or interpreted gains new stakes. Tanner describes the body as a material epistemological "anchor," not unlike text, in a world of contingent, ever-shifting meanings (35). The greater implication is at what point does the interpretative practice of torture become one of constructing rather than discovering meaning? Tanner, Scarry, Williams, and others argue that the imposition of meaning on bodies through force works reflexively to justify that force. The absurdly useless investigations in *The Zero* that rely on speculative reading and torture practices also suggests as much.

The additional subtle irony here is the parallelism between Assan's torture and Christ's crucifixion. The prisoner is adorned not unlike the traditional crucifix figure, except for the mildly absurd single sock that inevitably evokes commonplace, mundane

displeasure at nearly every person's experience of misplacing that second sock. A Middle Eastern man like Christ, Assan is tortured by government agents—part of neo-imperialist national policy. But, while Christ's torture was a public spectacle, Assan's suffering is private and hidden from both the public and the text itself. Remy enters the torture chamber during a "break," avoiding a scene of more active torture only suggested by the text's reference to cuts on Assan's face. Christ's torture became part of a powerful narrative of redemption, but Assan's torture provides nothing but his flesh as fuel for the violent, unchecked bureaucracy running the War on Terror.

Like Olamina, however, Assan is not a conveniently pliable object, despite his torture. In resistance to Markham's interrogation, Assan asks him and Remy, "Are you some kind of police?" Markham replies, "No. We're no kind of police" (134). Markham's reply carries a sense of negativity or absence. By coyly saying that they are "no kind of police" to further unnerve his captive, the agent also implies the nature of his power and authority. The phrase "no kind of police" negates their status as "police," but for this phrase to generate this meaning it still requires the invocation of policing as an absent presence. Moreover, the phrase more concretely signifies that Markham and Remy do not belong to a particular category or "kind" of police. Their agency has clearly taken on police powers in a broad sense, using State-sanctioned force to detain and interrogate prisoners, but Markham and Remy's roles supersede any common American definition of police as well as traditional notions of police powers' regulation and limitations. They are indeed not police but the police's violent specter, revising Remy's first line of dialogue in the novel, "I am the police." At this point, Remy's alter ego and his colleagues have

become part of a State apparatus evolved *beyond* Remy's first colloquial usage of the word "police," not in opposition to it.

When Assan invokes his legal rights to Markham, the agent's reply also evokes the spectral though absent presence of law. Assan declares, "There are laws!", but Markham replies, "True enough. . . . Two hundred yards west of here, anyway. But out here—" (135). Markham means to suggest that no court hold legal jurisdiction over international waters. The agent's sudden silence suggests that to even speak of "law" in this locale is not appropriate. Of course, this suggestion is not quite accurate; a number of American and international laws pertain to Markham and Assan's situation, even in the jurisdiction of international waters. But Markham's truncated statement elides the fact that a panoply of laws exist to regulate his actions. In fact, the 1984 U.N. Convention against Torture requires that signatories must prosecute torture undertaken in any territory or by any person under the State's jurisdiction (Pallitto 172). As the reader continues to learn, Markham and Remy's agency operates with little oversight. As a space of exception, the ship and its current location, Markham declares, are beyond any enforcing entity.

The episode on the ship results in the novel's most profound moment of Remy's inadvertent complicity with the State's torture regime. He begins to protest and then decides to escape with Assan. Yet he discovers that he has only been playing a role to gain Assan's confidence as part of a feigned rescue attempted planned by his alter ego. Although Remy tries to resist the violent machinations around him, both his actions and words of protest are coopted into the very structures that he is weakly struggling against. When Remy protests what has been happening, Markham replies, "Yeah, yeah. I know.

It's sloppy. My apologies" (136). Markham converts Remy's words from their meaning of ethical protest to a critique of their torture program's efficiency, interpreting Remy's sentiment as a call for *better* torture rather than *no* torture.

Assan's fictional experience proves fairly representative of much of what has been occurring during the War on Terror. Like many detainees, he is uninvolved in terrorist activities and his violent interrogation is entirely useless for producing information. Williams claims that

not only is the US running an extra-legal, offshore concentration camp where it beats, starves, rapes, and otherwise tortures people it has kidnapped from around the world—but a great many of the people being so mistreated have no connection to terrorism. Some substantial portion of the prisoners—perhaps 'only' one-tenth, perhaps more than two-thirds—have done nothing at all to offend the US government or harm its citizens.
(64)

Numerous reports from government agencies and other sources indicate that torture sites are not effective at producing accurate intelligence (53, 245).

Torture's inefficacy is not new knowledge. In fact, as Tzvetan Todorov writes, "Philosophers throughout Western history, including Aristotle, Beccaria, Montaigne and Hobbes, have noted that confessions (of the lack thereof) tell us much about the resistance capabilities of the torture individual but that the information thus obtained is not very dependable" (51). Even in a 1983 CIA manual, "use of force" is described as "a poor technique" that "yields unreliable results" (Pallitto 166). Of course, "force" is relative here, but even torture's expert practitioners recognize the inefficacy of an

extreme degree of coercion and violence. The 2014 U.S. Senate Torture Report cites the CIA's own knowledge of torture's inefficacy (vi). Williams further reports that detainees at Guantanamo Bay "are rewarded for confessing—to crimes, terrorist attacks, politics activities, religious beliefs, both factual and fanciful" (57). Such practices, Williams notes, are expressly forbidden in international law. He writes, "The [Geneva] Conventions do allow for the questioning of prisoners, but prohibit granting privileges to those who cooperate, or punishing those who refuse" (58). These ultimately exceptional tactics, parodied in Walter's novel, proves ineffective for producing actual information in response to the declared necessity of torture and coercion. Instead, these practices seem to operate to create submissive bodies for the purpose of their submissiveness, not their information. The torture regimes of both Walter's fiction and our reality function as the demonstration and maintenance of State power rather than the search for truth.

A number of factors enable the consistent practice of this kind of torture and State violence during the War on Terror and other moments of American history. As in the novel and reality, occlusion from public scrutiny is a powerful tactic. But much of *The Zero* emphasizes how easily these exceptional tactics and spaces are authorized when the State declares them a necessity, whether facilely or not.

Exceptional Actors: State Agents and Spectral Necessity

Due to Remy's status in the narrative as an agent of the State, readers encounter other, less naïve agents. The text provides a satirical window upon the nature of intelligence operations in the War on Terror. While Walter ultimately places more emphasis in the novel on managers like Markham and Remy who authorize torture rather

than on torturers and their victims, torture and other violence remains the stakes of *The Zero*. At the center of Walter's critique are the logic and discourse of "necessity" that the State and its agents use to justify its exceptional tactics.

The character that most clearly represents an executive statesman figure in the novel is the Boss. He remains unnamed, but he is without a doubt a stand-in for Rudy Giuliani, Mayor of New York City in the years around the September 11th attacks. He is responsible for assigning Remy to the Office of Liberty and Recovery and assigning its priorities. But more importantly, the text clearly aligns the Boss with President George W. Bush, acting as a representative of sovereign State authority. In the following passage, the Boss even suggests that he has the ear of the "Decider-in-Chief," as Bush once styled himself. The Boss's dialogue even mimics the rhetoric of the Bush administration.

In the face of Remy's confusion and doubts about the ethics of his intelligence work, the Boss declares "necessity" as the rationale for extralegal tactics. Walter writes,

Remy leaned in close to the Boss. "I may have done some . . . really bad things, sir."

The Boss pointed his finger at Remy's face. "Look, don't you for a minute doubt yourself, Brian. I know for a fact you haven't done anything that wasn't necessary. In fact, I've heard"—he paused—"*unofficially* . . . very good things . . . from the top." (117)

Knowing "for a fact," the Boss alludes to authoritative knowledge without actually divulging it. He may indeed possess intelligence and rationales for this statement. But he expects Remy to accept the credibility of his facts based on his authority alone.

By referring to the necessity of extralegal violence, the Boss continues a pattern in twentieth- and twenty-first century government in which States declare the suspension of law to be an uncontested necessity prescribed by circumstances. As Agamben's close attention to this concept shows, State necessity is central to legitimizing a state of exception. The problem in this dynamic is that only the State wields the power and authority to declare the end of an official state of emergency's necessity. Just as the Boss remains unaccountable to Remy, so has the Executive Branch remained largely unaccountable to the American people in deciding what actions are truly necessary or not. Instead, like Remy we are offered spectral reassurances that "facts," which cannot be shared, indicate what is necessary.

The rhetoric of necessity has been a potent discursive tool for justifying torture in the War on Terror. Popularized by the television show *24* (2001-10) and other media, the so-called "ticking time bomb" scenario remains the crux of arguments in support of torturing detainees. In such a case, a detainee has crucial information that could prevent immediate violence, thus the ethical transgression of torture proves less egregious than allowing innocents to suffer. Numerous critics, however, have reasoned that this kind of scenario is not, in fact, a common real world situation (Todorov 43). Moreover, as even CIA materials explain, only in fiction does torture prove a consistently reliable source of information.

Of course, a plethora of legislation, court decisions, and Congressional and Executive authorization have given the color of law to U.S. practices in the War on Terror. As I argue in the context of Butler's novel, according to Agamben a state of exception blurs the distinction between law and its absence, seeming to reconcile the

legal norms of citizenship rights, for example, while enabling the violation of those rights, particularly those against cruel and unusual punishment, enumerated in the Eight Amendment. Such is apparent in the treatment of prisoners in *The Zero* and hundreds of documented cases of alleged prisoner abuse at the hands of military and intelligence agencies in the years after 2001 (Pyle 2).

As Walter demonstrates through his portrayal of the Boss, the manipulation of language proves central to the continued justification for a state of exception. Early in the novel Remy finds himself in a meeting with the Boss about his new assignment to the Office of Liberty and Recovery. Near the end of this scene, Walter writes, “[The Boss] rubbed his mouth and launched into a version of his inspiring speech again, but after a while it seemed to devolve into random words. ‘. . . courage . . . liberty . . . reconstruction . . . resilience . . . faith . . . spending . . .’” (55). The text’s irony here is that the reader can easily reconstruct what appears to be the Boss’s jumbled meaning through these buzzwords that appear repeatedly in neoconservative narratives in support of the War on Terror and its violent excesses. The Boss’s words work like floating signifiers, capaciously empty utterances that operate without a determinate referent but nevertheless absorb meaning. His words generate an abstract narrative in his audience’s minds, creating non-specific conceptual justification for concrete action.

These kind of nonsensical utterances that still manage to generate meaning are immediately reminiscent of President Bush’s own style of speaking. Walter includes the following quotes, famous Bush-isms, as motivational posters around the Office of Liberty and Recovery: “Our enemies should know this about the American people, which will not rest until Evil is defeated,” and “draw your strength from the collective courage and

resilientness” (157, 294). The author reminds readers that this kind of empty verbiage is directly connected to the violence that Remy, Markham, and other U.S. agents undertake outside legal norms.

Indeed, the excess of meaning in the Boss’s rhetoric parallels the dynamic of excessive violence in the U.S. government’s spaces of exception like the torture chamber on the cargo ship. The meaning of his words escape the structure of signification in a manner similar to how the actions of Markham and his cronies exist beyond the formal structure of law. Agamben argues that during a state of exception when law is suspended, the State’s agents wield what Agamben terms “force-of-law,” the power of law without legal regulation (*State* 39). Assan’s interrogation on the ship is an example of this concept. Essentially, this force-of-law acts as a “floating signifier” without a determinate referent (38). Thus the State removes itself from the limits of law without sacrificing law’s power. The State’s ability to wield the force-of-law under the guise of law enables the “essential fiction” that the State still remains bound inside the order of law even during its suspension (86). In other words, once law becomes treated like a floating signifier to be interpreted at will, exceptional violence becomes readily available.

The Bush administration’s approach to the meaning of the word “torture” epitomizes the dangerous flexibility of language and law in the hands of the State. The infamous “Torture Memo” by the Department of Justice epitomizes how the Bush administration capitalized on the shifting meanings of words. Todorov reports that, in response to public pressure and the possibility of interrogators’ prosecution, the document works to redefine the legal definition of torture to exclude those “enhanced interrogation techniques” practiced at Guantanamo and elsewhere (26). As Pyle points

out, President Bush transformed laws about the treatment of prisoners into a matter of flexible policy when he declared that “the U.S. Armed Forces shall continue to treat detainees humanely” “to the extent appropriate and consistent with military necessity” (30). One tactic used by the Bush administration was “claiming that only the most severe actions—such as inflicting pain equivalent to ‘organ failure’—constituted torture,” thus excluding from this definition acts like waterboarding that have been described as torture since the fifteenth century and outlawed by the Mississippi Supreme Court, of all states (Pallitto 9; Pyle 87; Dickerson 247). Studying Defense Department policy, Williams concludes that “people at the highest levels of government deliberately rewrote the definition of torture and reconceived the restraints that it would imply for the sole purpose of allowing harsher methods” (69). In 2002 President Bush declared that he would not suspend the Geneva Conventions, though captives would not be considered prisoners of wars under the letter of the law; instead the “principles of Geneva” would be applied, another floating signifier that has legitimated abuse (64). The Supreme Court and White House legally restricted the definition of torture and other cruel or unusual violence so that for acts to be considered within these categories, “harm had to be traceable to some intentional act, a linkage that, in nearly all cases, would be impossible to prove in court,” a precedent established in *Louisiana ex rel. Francis v. Resweber* (1947) reinforced by the U.S. Senate’s 1990 Reservations to the U.N. Convention against Torture (C. Dayan 186, 192; Pyle 88; Pallitto 130, 173).

Ultimately, the Bush administration’s torture policies creates a paradox of American legal norms, creating justification through “necessity” in some circumstances for what the law has deemed unjustifiable in any circumstances. Tom Malinowski

captures this dissonance in his essay within collection *Torture* (2005) by Human Rights Watch in which he creates an extensive list of practices of State violence titled, “Torture Techniques Approved by the United States while Condemned in Other Countries” (142). In this section I have emphasized the figure of the State as the perpetrator of these exceptional practices. But as Walter claims of his novel, “It’s not about our leaders or our government or the NSA . . . It’s about us” (Walter, “Q&A”). *The Zero* reminds readers that, despite increasing executive authority over the last several decades, the American State and its excesses remain licensed by the American people, whom Walter does not refrain from viciously satirizing alongside government agents.

Satirizing Cultures of Complicity

Despite focusing on characters involved in the counterintelligence for the War on Terror, Jess Walter repeatedly describes *The Zero* as a “satire about us” in interviews (Walter, “Zero”). The author constructs a broader allegory around Remy’s bumbling escapades and dissociations from reality. In the figure of Remy and his odd mental condition, Walter is able to suture representations of both an agent of the State and an American everyman. He acknowledges his creation of Remy as an “archetypal figure for all Americans” (Walter, “Q&A”). As a result, *The Zero*’s critique does not simply condemn the excesses and ethical violations of the Bush administration. Instead, by directly connecting a sense of the nation with extralegal State violence through Remy’s character, Walter demonstrates how readers are similarly complicit alongside Remy in U.S. regimes of terror and torture.

From the first paragraph, the novel links Remy's personal physical and psychic trauma with the attack on the World Trade Center. The opening imagery is a long paragraph description of "[b]urning scraps of paper" (3) falling to the earth that certainly evokes debris falling from the Twin Towers when beginning a novel marketed on the rear book jacket as "A NOVEL OF SEPTEMBER 12." Through only a paragraph break, the text then transitions into the scene of Remy's apartment after his attempted suicide. The description of falling, burning paper is enough to prompt readers' associations with World Trade Center, but the text does not include geographical or temporal details in this passage. As a result, this first paragraph's imagery about communal trauma and its proximity in the text to Remy's personal trauma intimately link his narrative with the city's and the nation's. His narrative about his loss of agency and identity alongside the machinations of his alter ego becomes a disjointed allegory for the nation's same losses and confusion in the early twenty-first century.

The reader is left to assume that Remy's alter ego channels feelings of personal and national loss into Remy's participation in the Office of Liberty and Recovery. The episode on the ship results in the novel's most profound moment of Remy's inadvertent complicity with the government's self-declared mandate for violence. Just as on the ship when Remy protests Assan's torture, Markham and others repeatedly reverse the polarity of Remy's half-formed statements into expressions of approval. They also treat his ignorance—the result of his temporal "skips"—as an ironically stylized performance of his knowledge and authority. In fact, the text suggests that the effectiveness of the Remy's unintentional ruse as he helps Assan escape is due to his real empathy for the abused man. His conscious empathy appears to paradoxically aid his unconscious

malevolence. Another character remarks, “This guy is good . . . Scary good. He had me convinced,” as if this particular interrogation technique would not have worked as well without the schism in Remy’s character (140).

The scene on the ship marks the end of Part One, setting the tone for the rest of the novel as Remy makes a final protest to Markham, “I’m serious. You need to let him go” (140). The text provides no qualifying description of this line of dialogue to indicate a sense of tone, force, or affect, leaving the impression that Remy’s protest is, in fact, quite weak and indicative of his half-hearted, futile resistance. Regardless of Remy’s intentions in his words—unrevealed in the text—Markham completely deflates this last attempt when he responds facetiously, “Of course,” with a smile. Of Remy’s response to the whole ruse, Walter writes, “He would have liked to be more surprised” (140). A hidden part of Remy’s self—thanks to the plot device of his apparent brain damage—insists on participating in the narrative that torture is an essential practice, and this narrative is so influential or even overwhelming that it absorbs Remy’s every act of counter-narrative to break free from this role into which his jingoistic side continues to draw him. As Walter writes just before the ship episode, “Remy knew that if he waited long enough . . . whatever was going to happen would happen” (129). According to the pattern of the novel thus far, this statement seems self-evident to both Remy and the reader. His choices have little to no impact on the course of the narrative.

The most chilling moment in the text arrives when Remy tries to directly influence the behavior of his alter ego. He writes a note to himself on the back of a card and keeps it in his pocket: “Don’t hurt anyone” (181). A few pages later Remy finds a response written to himself: “Grow up” (190). Not only does Remy fail to influence the

action of people who are his subordinates, but he also is incapable of mastering his own penchant for violence.

Remy increasingly discovers that he and his alter ego might be involved in supporting real terrorist attacks on American soil, adding a new layer to his complicity. Remy's actions do indeed culminate in the killing of several innocent informants and a subway bombing instigated almost entirely by Remy's agency, the FBI, and CIA to justify the War on Terror. Late in the novel before these final incidents, Remy expresses his concerns to the Boss. This dialogue echoes Remy's earlier sentiment that events will occur regardless of his intervention. Remy worries,

“That I'm causing something bad to happen.”

The Boss laughed. “That you're *causing* it? That's a little grandiose, isn't it? . . . Whatever is happening now was going to happen whether we were involved or not. We've always known that another attack was inevitable.” (298)

Like the Boss's rhetoric of necessity, his statement about inevitability works to justify the violence he has authorized Remy and others to undertake. But, importantly, Remy does not need an authority figure to reassure him that events are out of his control. He has already adopted this same kind of language earlier in the novel, and he repeatedly acknowledges how events seem to unfold in one direction despite his willing participation or active protests.

Walter uses this episode and Remy's narrative throughout the novel to satirize the scattered cultural moments in which Americans speak out against their own government's violent practices. The absurdity of others' reactions to Remy's protests and

ignorance draws the reader's to a larger, more mundane problem in our democratic republic. This fact of the text suggests that the moments when Americans collectively protest publicized incidents of torture do not disrupt regimes of violence but rather reinforce them. Metaphorically trying to save one man, as Remy tries to do on the ship, pushes these structures that authorize violence to, as Markham puts it, be less "sloppy," to finagle further political and legal nuances to legitimate their practices, however abhorrent they be to the average citizen witnessing them for the first time. Incidental protest does not eliminate torture; instead, it prompts "clean torture." Williams points to a number of surveys from 2004 and 2005 to show that somewhere between thirty-two and forty-six percent of Americans believe that "torture" in the abstract is "acceptable in the context of the War on Terror" (Williams 21). But when the idea of torture is parsed into actual practices like sleep deprivation and "threatening prisoners with dogs," a majority of respondents found these inhumane tactics—labeled as torture by critics—acceptable and not considered "torture" of a constitutionally or otherwise prohibited kind (21).

Near the beginning of the novel's second part after the torture episode on the ship, the text offers a reflection on his condition and situation, contemplating the possibility that Remy's circumstances are not exceptional but quite normal. Walter writes,

Maybe that was the answer. To float in this life, like paper on a current. Just lie back and let himself be . . . Maybe this was not some condition he had, but a life, and maybe every life is lived moment to moment. Doesn't everyone react to the world as it presents itself? Who really knows more than the moment he's in? What do you trust? Memory? History? No, these are just stories, and whichever ones we choose to tell ourselves—the one

about our marriage, the one about the Berlin Wall—there are always gaps. There must be countless men all over the country crouched in front of barbeques, just like him, wondering how their lives got to that point. (160)

This moment of reflection in the novel clearly works to reassure Remy, converting his inability to take real action on the ship into a placating philosophy of life. When he fails to intervene in his new agency's institutional violence, he reimagines his failure as the natural course of events. Remy's situation and this rationalization of it are a satirical intensification of the political and ethical agency of "every life" and "countless men all over the country."

This particular passage highlights the novel's allegorical work, asking the reader to associate Remy's experience in some way to the fragmented narratives through which so many Americans live during the War on Terror. Walter further implicates the reader, ambiguously using the second-person pronoun "you" in the rhetorical question "What do you trust?" This pronoun slippage out of the novel's otherwise consistent third-person narration continues as the narrator uses the words "we," "ourselves," and "our." While this usage is not uncommon in such moments of abstract reflection, this momentary shift in discourse nevertheless implicates the reader in Remy's contemplations. His disorientation stands in for our national disorientation in which "memory" and "history" lose context and relationships between cause and effect.

Walter connects this national problem to the more mundane nature of our lives in the juxtaposed examples of "our marriage" and the "Berlin Wall." At best, the text suggests, we generate insufficient narratives for linking the events of personal lives and our national life. By invoking the Berlin Wall, Walter also conjures the specter of the

Cold War, further suggesting that the “stories” we individually and collectively tell ourselves do not adequately explain the historical progression from that twentieth-century global conflict to our current one. While, for Remy, this passages works to abdicate his own responsibility for his and his alter ego’s actions, the text has the reverse effect on the reader since every American is not, in fact, afflicted with the satirical device of this character’s neurological disorder.

Throughout Part Two, Remy continues to justify his complicity. He suggests that the disconnection between his own will and the events in which he participates is, in fact, the normal state of American life. Walter writes,

[P]erhaps life *had returned to normal*, and that normal was a string of single moments disconnected from one another . . . All over the city, all over the country, people rose from bed and scurried and fought and returned at night to sleep, independent of any meaning except the rising, scurrying, fighting, and sleeping. . . .

This is a life, he thought, smooth skipping stones bounding across the surfaces of time, with brief moments of deepened consciousness as you hit the water before going airborne again. (163)

As Walter says, Remy is “the only one aware of his own condition, which he comes to believe the rest of the world shares but just doesn’t recognize” (Walter, “Conversation” 106). He imagines that all the mundane activity of the human race proceeds in the same manner as Remy’s involvement with State violence. This passage suggests, again, that Remy is not culpable for his involvement in extralegal violence. But it also further suggests that torture and fabricating terrorist plots are just as banal as the daily

“scurrying” of the average person. Remy diffuses his own responsibility for his participation in torture by spreading it across an entire culture, claiming a naturalized ignorance of cause and effect.

Upon the close ethical scrutiny that *The Zero* invites, readers must reject these kinds of assertions from Remy. Readers are prompted to dissociate from Remy, to resist accepting his condition as their own. Walter cites the moral necessity for confronting torture and other post-9/11 actions as part of his motivation for writing the novel. He says, “We need to wake up” after being “anesthetized,” calling his readers to refuse to acquiesce to Remy’s kin of passivity (Walter, “Q&A”). This ethical awakening is the work of so many texts, fictional and non-fictional, about State violence, but the question remains, how effective is the science fiction and satire of *Parable of the Talents* and *The Zero* in accomplishing this goal?

Conclusion: Text and Torture

Without question these two novels work toward a social or political effect upon their readers. On one level, the fictional representation of violence always encounters an ethical quandary. Laura Tanner argues that a reader’s relationship to a victim of violence in text risks reproducing the relationship between violator and victim, taking the position of a voyeur finding degrees of pleasure in suffering (9-10). Writers and readers of *both* fictional and non-fictional accounts of State violence are inevitably at a remove, unable to gain full ethical understanding of torture’s experience. Concentration camp survivor Primo Levi even goes as far as to claim in *The Drowned and the Saved* that the only

people with total comprehension of what State violence entails are the ones who do not survive its totality. Butler's and Walter's novels approach this quandary differently.

In *Talents*, Butler depicts writing as a form of resistance to the Crusaders' attempts to render her into a condition mimetic of death. Throughout Olamina's captivity at Camp Christian she declares multiple times in her text the necessity of keeping a record of what is happening to her and her peers (185, 208, 223, 232, 238). Yet Butler, through Olamina, recognizes the challenge of adequately representing the full, complex reality of the extreme abuses occurring there in the comparatively flat medium of text. Olamina desires that "there ought to be a different way to write about these things—a way that at least begins to express the insanity and the terrible, terrible pain of it all" (190). This trouble of representation becomes an even larger concern for the novel; while within the text Olamina attempts to authentically document her real experiences, Butler is working to engage with real practices and histories of torture through this fictionalized account. But by presenting such meditations on the efficacy of text, the author raises her readers' awareness of this problem of representation. The novel invites readers to become active, somewhat skeptical participants while engaging scenes of torture rather than positioning readers as passive voyeurs.

Jess Walter, in contrast, almost completely subverts this same problem by representing very little of torture itself. In fact, the text nearly simulates the average reader's relationship to torture as something in the background, barely seen. Unlike Butler's novel and others, *The Zero* bypasses representation of torture to focus on the social and political structures that enable it. Despite their different approaches to

moments of violence, however, both Butler's and Walter's texts use narrative strategies to engage readers in the dismantling in systems of torture.

Butler uses the model of Olamina's Earthseed religion to explore the possibility of reshaping communities and even nations away from patterns of exploitative violence. For Butler, of course, the process of reshaping communities is intertwined with the shaping of oneself. She writes that being part of a community is a process of "reshaping ourselves" (*Talents* 66). Through this assertion, she calls for readers to assert their individual agency in addressing problems of violence in which they may even be a participant.

Butler makes this problem one of the human condition but also offers an appeal to the human condition to solve it (*Talents* 80). Near the novel's end, Butler contemplates human nature and historical cycles of violence like the situations in which she deposits her characters. Focusing on war as apex of humanity's cycles of destructive potential, she writes, "We go on having stupid wars . . . all they do is kill huge numbers of people, maim others, impoverish still more, spread disease and hunger, and set the stage for the next war." She suggests that, "There seems to be solid biological reasons why we are the way we are. If there weren't, the cycles wouldn't keep replaying" (358). While the "human species is a kind of animal," Butler asserts that humans have a choice for "reshaping" themselves and their worlds. Ultimately, storytelling and writing prove to be Olamina's method to reshape human communities as they begin a utopian interstellar colonization plan far removed from the conditions of the Pox.

Butler asserts as much throughout *Talents*. Its and its prequel's titles invoke the potency of storytelling as a form of moral teaching, something that Olamina also recollects from her father's days as a teacher and minister. Butler further includes a self-

reflexive moment as Olamina considers the social and political significance of books in her world, indicating the significance of these objects in our reality as well. The author writes, “People are still impressed, even intimidated, by bound, official-looking books. . . . Even people who can’t read are impressed by books. The idea seems to be, ‘If it’s in a book, maybe it’s true,’ or even, ‘If it’s in a book, it must be true’” (*Talents* 75-6). With the advent of mobile Internet-capable devices, the power of books as textual objects does seem somewhat diminished in the twenty-first century. But even in the world of the Pox and Crusaders, Butler still places faith in books and narratives to foment ethical changes in individuals and communities. The success of Olamina’s text in uniting a fractured society points to Butler’s own optimism in the power of real books and other like narrative media.

The methods of the satirical project of *The Zero*, however, are more ambiguous. Satire itself often offers critique of political and social systems without offering generative alternatives, a problem further addressed regarding the satirical science fiction discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. Walter acknowledges the ambiguity of ethical change’s possibility in the novel, commenting that *The Zero* holds forth a Kafka-esque hope, quoting Kafka to say, “There is infinite hope. But not for us” (Walter, “Q&A”). The author certainly imagines little hope for Brian Remy.

At the conclusion of *The Zero*, Walter depicts Remy as further distanced from the reality of unethical State violence. While in a delirious state, Remy recovers from his injuries from his failed attempt to stop the subway bombing at the novel’s climax. His mind fails to separate dreams, hallucinations, and reality as he goes in and out of consciousness while receiving medical treatment. He dreams that he receives a hospital

roommate and that the staff “put a television on for them both, a television that turned its own channels—slipping insanely from one reality to another,” tending “away from anything unpleasant” (325). Remy’s perception of the television mirrors his own condition of “skips” that carry him through time and keep him divorced from the full gritty reality of his role in government torture. By creating this parallelism between television and Remy’s life, Walter further suggests that mainstream, popular American culture is predisposed to shying “away from anything unpleasant” to an extent as nearly as irrevocable as Remy’s brain damage. Moreover, Walter adds that the television “could jump from channel to channel, from site to site, from wrenching tragedy to absurd comedy, with only the laugh track to differentiate them” (325). The mention of “site to site” incorporates the Internet into this metaphor, further elaborating the implication of American society in Remy’s condition.

More importantly, however, the author suggests a loss of orientation for the already passive audiences of this television metaphor. Like Remy, we can no longer distinguish between tragedy and comedy except when we are offered facile cues like the tired “laugh track” of network programming. This metaphor continues the satirical work of the novel, linking Remy’s life with the wider phenomenon of complicity with regimes of State violence. As the novel’s last metaphor, however, it reinforces Remy’s failures and his incapacity to be an agent of his own fate or others’. Despite his heroic efforts a few pages earlier, he “clung to sleep” hoping that he will wake from his weird life as if it “had all been a kind of fever dream” (326). He retreats back into passivity after his attempts to escape from his life as a State agent have failed.

One can hope that the author's choice to refuse redemption for his character is an effort to pressure his audience to resist a real, non-absurd version of Remy's passive complicity. Yet the text does not offer alternatives. On the one hand, by leaving out a redemptive political program from the novel, Walter avoids the need to generate a schema that may prove inadequate or even possibly repeat the patterns that allow for unregulated State violence. On the other hand, without even experimenting with a cognitive, cultural, or philosophical method for breaking the patterns of "skips," forgetfulness, and passive acceptance characteristic of much American culture, *The Zero* risks becoming a parody of itself. It, too, moves "from wrenching tragedy to absurd comedy," functioning like one of Remy's righteous but impotent outbursts of criticism. The text may nearly perfectly characterize America during the early years of the Global War on Terror, but unless readers seize their own initiative reaching beyond what they read, the text may only serve as a tool of observation rather than intervention. Perhaps the text's assumption that readers are not condemned to Remy's state is actually empowering, refusing to condescend to readers as Markham inadvertently does to Remy. Walter believes that "our complicity" in the violence and mistakes of the last two decades "begins with our country's reaction" to the attacks on September 11 (Walter, "Zero"). In turn, we can understand the work his novel does as another test of "reaction."

Chapter 2: The “Special Existence” of Bigger Thomas in “No Man’s Land”: The Ghetto as Space of Exception in *Native Son*

Introduction

In 1940, Richard Wright’s protest novel *Native Son* offered a window into the marginalized lives of African Americans in Northern cities. Through a narrative deploying free indirect discourse, Wright imagines the character Bigger Thomas, a young black man living in redlined, de facto segregated Chicago. The text presents Bigger as tragically affected by his environment of violence, exploitation, and despair. Boiling with fear and hate, he takes a job through an economic relief agency to work as a chauffeur for the wealthy white Dalton family. Despite the family’s espoused racial sympathies, the friction between the white and black worlds of Chicago drives Bigger to—more or less—accidentally murder the young Mary Dalton. The “more or less” here is crucial, since the search for Bigger’s motive in the text has gone largely unrequited. Bigger temporarily covers up his crime, but a city-wide manhunt begins when he is discovered. In the course of his attempt to evade the police, Bigger also kills his girlfriend, a young African American woman named Bessie. The novel’s third part focuses on Bigger’s trial upon his capture by a racist prosecutor and a prejudiced court.

The spaces inhabited by black lives are at the center of *Native Son* from the first page and onward. Wright offers the novel’s opening scene in the “narrow space” of the Thomas family’s apartment as a foreshadowing allegory for Bigger’s narrative (*Native* 3). Kadeshia Matthews recognizes the scene as one of “improper domesticity” filled with

strained relationships in an environment of disrepair that allegorizes the larger Black Belt (281). When a “huge black rat” violates the family’s living space, Bigger’s mother commands him as the oldest boy to kill the invader. At one moment in the combat, Wright writes, “The rat’s belly pulsed with fear. Bigger advanced a step and the rat emitted a long thin song of defiance” (*Native* 6). The rat in this scene closely parallels how his character is cast in the public eye once he kills Mary Dalton. In both contexts, the “huge black rat” and the black man are treated as out of place vermin, rather than as living beings caught up in uneven systems of life. Wright describes the rat’s sound as a “song,” offering it a poetic, melodious quality, something with intentional, possibly complex signification—a narrative like Bigger’s that its persecutors fail to grasp but that is left to readers to interpret.

Wright introduces a master metaphor to conceptualize the relationship between Bigger and the spaces of his life. Three times in *Native Son* does Richard Wright invoke the fraught metaphor of “No Man’s Land” to describe Bigger’s state of mind as he lives in the Chicago ghetto, utilizing it again in the essay “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born” (1940) and his later novel, *The Outsider* (1953). He explains the metaphor as representing how Bigger “was hovering unwanted between two worlds—between powerful America and his own stunted place in life” (“How” 451). By defining the term as a space between two groups, Wright evokes the connotation of “No Man’s Land” from the First World War, that dangerous contested ground between opposing trench lines, machine guns, and artillery guarded by barbed wire. By definition the literal, real space from the war was under no government’s authority or law and was thus where soldiers found themselves most exposed. Choosing this model of violent lawlessness and translating it into Bigger’s

conception of himself and his daily life in the Black Belt, Wright casts Bigger's inner life as existing in a kind of perpetual state of war. This martial metaphor of space establishes a dynamic of power and alienation in both the ghetto and the interior space of Bigger's mind.

Wright presents Bigger Thomas as one example of a "special existence" under the marker of his race. Early in *Native Son*, Wright describes Bigger's vertiginous reaction as he feels his blackness beneath white gazes, even those of Jan and Mary Dalton who profess their sympathies for black lives. The author describes how Bigger "felt he had no physical existence at all right then; he was something he hated, the badge of shame which he knew was attached to a black skin. It was a shadowy region, a No Man's Land, the ground that separated the white world from the black that he stood upon. He felt naked, transparent . . ." (67). In Bigger's experience, the feeling of being recognized for his black skin is a sense of erasure of any identity beyond his race—feeling "naked" or "transparent." Wright later describes him as "a dispossessed and disinherited man" with nothing to claim except shame or violence ("How" 446-7). He is conditioned to feel that his existence is evacuated of everything except his racial status—something less than human. The author's choice of words is direct: Bigger feels that "he was something he hated, the badge of shame" of his skin color. He does not wear or represent a "badge of shame" in the text; he "was," slipping into an existence as a marker of shame, the feeling of having done wrong in the eyes of others.

By reading the novel through the lens of space, I also address the longstanding debate over the text's form and its problematic protagonist, whether to read Bigger as an individual or universal figure. Instead of accepting a conflict between these two

perspectives, I argue that readers can recognize that *Bigger* is not posed as a universal figure but rather a person—albeit fictional—caught in vast structures of iniquity and violence. Epitomized by the ghetto as space of exception, those overwhelming, powerful systems that profit from *Bigger*'s degradation take on a universal aspect. To suggest that many individuals, fictional or real, might react to circumstances like *Bigger*'s in a similar manner should not detract our attention to those individuals as individuals. And yet, though Richard Wright presents readers with a specific context of *Bigger*'s life in segregated Chicago, part of the novel's so-called universal aspect hinges on how *Bigger*'s circumstances are not unique to 1930s and '40s Chicagoans or even black peoples in the U.S. The conflicts and language that overflows within the novel is part of a long and wide American literary and historical pattern.

Representing the “special” conditions under which African Americans lived, Wright's conceit of No Man's Land closely mirrors other spatial metaphors and depictions of space in American literature—what I call “spaces of exception.” This chapter takes *Native Son* as a case study in the American literary representation of sites intended to contain and control racialized bodies. Focusing on contemporary events, American studies has emphasized Giorgio Agamben's model for a “state of exception” and the spaces in which this model of political power is most evident: sites like death camps and torture chambers. Yet sites like urban ghettos, reservations, internment camps, and deportation camps throughout U.S. history have functioned in a similar pattern in which legal and moral norms are suspended for a racist purpose coded as necessity. Space organized in order to contain or police racialized bodies are spaces of exception. By reading a novel somewhat distanced from our current political moment, my

purpose is to connect the contemporary scholarly focus on states of exception with established criticism of systematic American racism. Drone strikes, shadow courts, warrantless detention, and undeclared wars have drawn attention to the exceptional operations of the American State in recent scholarship. But by reading past canonical texts through a similar tact, we can discover how U.S. writers have long been concerned with these ethical and political problems, though in different terms and contexts.

The novel presents these living conditions as a breeding ground in which people of color are simultaneously alienated from dominant society and from their own sense of being or value. In a 1937 essay titled “Blueprint for Negro Writing,” Wright describes the existence of African Americans under segregation and mass racism as a “special way of life.” He writes, “This special existence was forced upon them from without by lynch rope, bayonet and mob rule. They accepted these negative conditions with the inevitability of a tree which must live or perish in whatever soil it finds itself” (100). Wright uses the word “special” in ways that parallel the use of contemporary scholarship of the word “exceptional.” The African American “special way of life” is special because its enforced differentiation from a normalized ordinary—white—way of life becomes a norm inside the structures of power and law.

Across his body of work, Wright reveals how black lives inhabit physical, political, economic, and even existential spaces of exception because they are excluded from the “idealism” of American nation. Wright assesses the spirit of our nation, writing, “We live by an idealism that makes us believe that the Constitution is a good document of government, that the Bill of Rights is a good legal and humane principle to safeguard our civil liberties, that every man and woman should have the opportunity to realize

himself, to seek his own individual fate and goal, his own peculiar and untranslatable destiny” (“How” 451). Bigger, however, is displaced from the possibility of this idealism, and the author undertakes to demonstrate how and why to the reader. And as the author emphasizes, this “special existence” is characterized by the looming threat of violence and “mob rule” that violates the democratic ideals articulated in the nation’s founding documents.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Octavia Butler’s *Parable* series evokes the American legacy of spaces of exception, including the various means to discipline people of color. Reading the Chicago Black Belt as a kind of exceptional space offers contemporary readers multiple insights into ongoing American history and literary representation. On the one hand, reading the novel through this critical lens connects past and present abuses of law and power. On the other hand, thinking through Wright’s representation of the ghetto as a space of exception also expands and adds layers of complexity to Agamben’s and others’ theories that focus on the more spectacular, obviously abnormal spaces of “camps.” Moreover, Wright’s emphasis on the exceptional or “special” nature of racially segregated spaces encompasses more than the State’s desires, implicating wider networks of power and influence in the degradation and exploitation of people of color. In parallel to the novel’s representation of the Black Belt, sociologist Loïc Wacquant claims that the two primary though conflicting goals of all ghettos is both “labor extraction and social ostracization” (Wacquant, “Deadly” 99). Wright’s Chicago Black Belt offers a model of how private and public sector interests can be cooperatively engaged in maintaining the status of black life in its social and psychic No Man’s Land.

By juxtaposing this chapter and the previous one about torture sites, I approach the conceit of a “state of exception” as a spectrum that includes both spectacular and quotidian suspensions of legal and moral norms. Narratives like Wright’s demonstrate this connection between what Saidiya Hartman describes as “the terror of the mundane and the quotidian” of everyday racialized oppression and its culmination in “the shocking and the terrible” (Hartman 4). *Native Son* and similar texts remind readers in the age of social media and instant video that spectacular violence and its haunting, oppressive specter have a long entwined history.

Wright displays this “special way of life” in *Native Son* by allowing uninitiated readers into not only the cordoned space of the ghetto but also the otherwise opaque space of Bigger’s mind. Granting access into these spaces, even in fictional form, proves crucial to the author’s project. Wright uses what he describes as the “potential cunning” of his art to “steal into the inmost recesses of the human heart” to portray the inner life of a young man so powerfully influenced by his oppressive environment (“Blueprint” 102). In fact, the space of the ghetto becomes a model for Bigger Thomas’s sense of self. Critical race studies have familiarized scholars with the kind of self-alienation that racial containment and discrimination are apt to breed. But, using numerous spatial metaphors, Wright goes further to represent Bigger’s inner life as seemingly structured like the very space of exception in which he lives—the No Man’s Land he experiences in his own mind.

Blackness as an Exceptional Status

Throughout *Native Son*, Richard Wright represents the internal life of a young black man cast outside the bounds of a fulfilled life of rights and freedoms. Late in the novel, the author succinctly expresses the nature of being black, even in a northern city like Chicago, in the first half of the twentieth century. Bigger goes through the motions of his arrest and trial, and Wright writes, “Had he not taken fully upon himself the crime of being black?” (*Native* 296). Bigger understands blackness as an illicit status within the structures of American life. Being black is not a literal crime, but by using this conceit Wright expresses the idea that African Americans are cast as living in opposition to the social, legal, and economic systems under which they live. Importantly, however, though a crime is defined as illicit activity, something marked as outside law’s bounds, crime is nevertheless defined by law. Crime, by definition, does not exist without law or other norms. Extending Saidiya Hartman’s nineteenth-century scholarship about slavery, Matthews declares that Bigger’s only available form of “agency recognized by law” is “criminality” (295). Wright’s more abstract conceit, “the crime of being black,” represents very real relationships for African Americans. He reiterates this claim during Bigger’s trial when his lawyer argues, “His very existence is a crime against the state!” (*Native* 400). Like antebellum blacks, Bigger and his peers are continue to be marginalized but held close by structures of power—placed in spaces of exception.

Critical race studies have established that throughout U.S. history the marginalization of people of color has served the economic and political gain of others. Whether in earlier centuries of Native American genocide, Japanese internment and property seizures, or during slavery and Jim Crow, or in the present moment of

militarized police forces excessively targeting non-white populations, people of color in the United States have encountered violent exploitation or its threat. To consider race in the United States as category of exception in political theory is not a long stretch of the critical imagination. In fact, aside from using a separate critical vocabulary, Charles Mills does just this in his influential monograph *The Racial Contract* (1997). Fallacious doctrines in American history like “separate but equal” can be easily translated into the terms “norm” and “exception.”

These dynamics were apparent to Wright. Later in life, he would call for the equal “enforcement of the Constitution,” implying that the suspension of Constitutional ideas is the foundation for the “special existence” of African Americans (Clapp). This special existence is the subject of much of his fiction, and he elaborates upon the exceptional status of people of color through his own experience in his memoir *Black Boy* (1946). Late in his memoir after offering numerous examples of discrimination and the threat of violence, he writes, “Culturally the Negro represents a paradox: Though he is an organic part of the nation, he is excluded by the entire tide and direction of American culture” (320). While Amendments to the U.S. Constitution unraveled the three-fifths compromise, Wright illuminates how race remained a marker of exclusion and exploitation well through the Jim Crow Era.

Into the present, whiteness continues to function as a zone of normalcy in which persons are generally provided social and legal rights, while people of color are exposed to exploitation and oppression. Parallel to how Agamben argues that the potential suspension of law creates the foundation for law’s normal operation, the socio-economic and political exclusion of non-whites from full access to American life enables the

primacy of whiteness in the first place. Hartman argues as much, writing that in the nineteenth century, “The slave is the object or the ground that makes possible the existence of the bourgeois subject and, by negation or contradistinction, defines liberty, citizenship, and the enclosures of the social body” (62). Through the twentieth and even twenty-first century, black bodies and other people of color remain the objects of this dynamic. In his study of Richard Wright’s body of work, Abdul JanMohamed asserts similar claims (8). Thus, to identify a person as non-white in the U.S. variably places him or her beneath the shadow of an exceptional status not experienced by majority of people perceived as white, in order to sustain the privilege of whiteness. An emphasis on the lived experience of African-Americans in particular spaces like the pre-Civil Rights era South Side of Chicago in *Native Son* attunes readers to these dynamics, both the visible ones and those that are less so.

In *Native Son*, Wright points to reports and newspapers as a medium of white supremacist discourse used to maintain the notion of savage, animalistic black criminality. He claims to have merely rewritten reports from the *Chicago Tribune* and other sources (Wright, “How” 455). Before Bigger is suspected as Mary’s killer, a reporter remarks to a peer, “Say, I’m slanting this to the primitive Negro who doesn’t want to be disturbed by white civilization” (*Native* 214). He plans to pander to the expectations of his racist white audience, framing it as a matter of black people’s agency to remove themselves from “white civilization.” He reverses the agency in the exclusion of blacks from “civilization,” presenting a well-worn paternalist stereotype that African Americans naturally desire the exclusion that white society offers them. The article

presents a casual, naturalized notion of black exclusion despite the political power generated by racism and wealth created through segregation.

In the novel Wright most directly captures the attitudes of the racist American public and State in the dialogue of State's Attorney Buckley. As the prosecutor of Bigger's trial, he takes on the mantle as spokesperson for both the State's institutions and the clamoring mob outside the courthouse. He more aggressively applies the dehumanizing language that Wright includes in newspaper reports, referring to Bigger as "some half-human black ape," a "bestial monstrosity," and a "black lizard" (408-9). Contradicting Bigger's lawyer, Boris Max, Buckley argues that Bigger is subhuman because he does not acquiesce to what he calls the "sacred law" and "sacred customs" of "American civilization." He declares, "I say that the law is holy because it makes us human!," claiming that Bigger's violation of law demonstrates his lack of humanity (408). Ira Wells summarizes Buckley's argument, writing, "Civilization may behave barbarically . . . when barbarism is necessary to conserve civilization itself," an argument that "unleashes a logic whereby the law is provoked into undoing itself" (891). In such statements Wright depicts the white supremacist ideology that masks the actual relationship between law and people of color. Whereas Buckley posits that Bigger and other "black apes" are less than human because they do not abide by the State's laws, the previous four hundred pages have prepared readers to recognize how the prosecutor distorts the ways in which law and unwritten policies actively oppress African Americans in the Chicago Black Belt. Moreover, the author is rehearsing the socio-political fiction of the "savage" which Charles Mills would later describe as a figure of negative self-definition crucial to Western polities (Mills 43). Mills argues that the notion of primitive,

uncivilized savages was invented to justify Western ideas of civilization. By insisting that Bigger and other blacks exist in a lawless state of nature, Buckley maintains the fiction that dominant white society is a bastion of order and justice by its opposition to fictional “savagery.”

This state of exception under which blacks and other people of color live and have lived is a foundation for the “normal” situation of American society since its inception. And black writers have recognized this relationship. For example, in his 1828 pamphlet *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, David Walker calls to African Americans, both free and enslaved, to recognize the common inhumanity imposed upon them. A black used-clothes dealer in Boston, he lambasts the failed application to people of color of American democratic, egalitarian ideals articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Throughout his pages, he describes how whites justify the treatment of slaves by declaring that blacks are “not of the *human family*” (original emphasis, 12). He even references the claims of one of the nation’s architects, Thomas Jefferson, from *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785) that blacks have “descend[ed] originally from the tribes of *Monkeys* or *Orang-Outangs*” (original emphasis, Walker 12). By casting people of color as subhuman or inhuman, Walker claims, the nation justifies its exceptional relationship to them; “human” standards do not apply.

In *Native Son*, Bigger’s lawyer offers a leftist theory for the dehumanization of African Americans and other workers. He explains that people of wealth and power view all people who labor as “inferior,” and this label creates a fictional justification for the exploitation and violent control of blacks and others (428). Though Max paints with too broad a brush—as I discuss in this chapter’s later sections—Wright uses his words and

other elements of his novel to draw readers' attention to the economic dynamics inherent to American racism. Closer to the present, Black studies and political science scholar Cedric Robinson argues in *Black Marxism* (1983) that since the Early Modern period ethnoracial differentiation has been used as a tool in the oppression and exploitation of laboring classes. He writes that “. . . the rationale and cultural mechanisms of domination . . . Race was its epistemology, its ordering principle, its organizing structure, its moral authority, its economy of justice, commerce, and power” (xxxix). He sites race at the center of modern capitalism since its inception. During European feudalism, Robinson claims that, “Race became largely the rationalization for the domination, exploitation and/or extermination of non-‘Europeans’ (including Slavs and Jews)” (27). The marker of difference or foreignness is used to justify separate treatment, creating the grounds for a state exception directed at racialized bodies, creating antagonisms among laboring classes. The racialized forms of domination and exploitation in twentieth-century America, Robinson claims, are an extension of this historical pattern.

More recently, in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2001), the two political theorists trace the structures of violent exploitation throughout modern history. In their critical turn to the United States, they address the exceptional status of African Americans, writing that “black labor was an essential support of the new United States: African Americans had to be included in the Constitution but could not be included equally” (170-1). Hardt and Negri point to the three-fifths compromise as the inscription of this separate status into the foundation of U.S. law. Though legislation, practices, and policies have evolved since the first years of the republic, critics point to daily news items

in the twenty-first century as evidence that what Wright describes as the “special” status of black citizens and other people of color continues to loom over the nation.

To connect racist American culture and law to the critical concept of the “exception” is not a difficult task. Yet, in fact, a text like *Native Son* seriously complicates the present conception of a “state of exception” in Agamben’s work and its scholarly reception. On the one hand, Agamben emphasizes the current and last centuries as the period in which modern governments begin a rapid shift into functionally permanent states of exception—i.e. the Global War on Terror. On the other hand, attention to the experiences of people of color represented in literature, art, and history suggests that racist nations operate in a mode of exception by merit of their racism. Richard Wright’s depiction of an urban ghetto reinforces this idea.

Wright’s Chicago Ghetto as Space of Exception

Wright quickly establishes for his novel’s readers that space is racialized even in a northern city like Chicago, a place supposedly less severely racist than the South. Bigger and a friend decide to “play white” on the street, a game in which they mock what they understand as the attitudes and idioms of white people. Afterwards, Wright writes, “Then they guffawed, partly at themselves and partly at the vast white world that sprawled and towered in the sun before them” (*Native* 18). Even in this scene of adolescent play, the realities of racial containment are evident, casting a background for the entirety of Wright’s narrative. The imagery in this sentence presents Bigger’s black world enclosed by an endless “white world” that even towers over their heads. The verb “sprawling” in its present progressive form connotes a continuous action. Instead of defined segregated

boundaries that isolate whites and blacks from one another, “sprawling” implies that in Bigger’s perception the white world is actively reaching into the Black Belt to entrap and threaten him. In contrast to specific geographical details, this cognitive mapping immerses readers into Bigger’s living experience of the city.

Wright continues to represent the Black Belt of Chicago as a technology of containment. Assigned to a particular space bounded by specific written and unwritten rules that apply only to black bodies, the city’s African Americans are exposed to potential violence and exploitation. While black lives are always at a higher risk for exceptional abuse in nearly any American space, the concentration of people in sites like ghettos proves particularly productive for the maintenance and profitability of the nation’s racist hierarchies. Alongside active abuses and exploitation, the Black Belt was an unsafe and unhealthy environment, unsupported by the city’s infrastructure. Historian Allan H. Spear reports that “the core of the black belt was a festering slum” in which a majority of buildings were in disrepair even in the early part of the century (24). In addition, Charles Scruggs writes that Wright understood how Chicago was spatially configured to sustain the exceptional position of non-whites. He summarizes,

What Bigger doesn’t know, but Wright does, is that Chicago’s grid, laid out in accordance with the Land Ordinance of 1785, is not neutral but contains within its apparent rationality a secret record of money, power, and racial prejudice. As Mario Gandelsonas has shown, an invisible wall separates ‘north Chicago from south Chicago, white Chicago from black Chicago. This wall [is] implied from the fact that the monumental north-south axes seem to come to an abrupt end at the point where the streets

change their name from north to south, marking a significant shift in the social geography of the city.’ Even though Bigger finds his way around some of Chicago’s walls, others equally invisible will effectively exclude him. (Scruggs 151)

Scruggs reminds us that Wright presents Chicago not as a space of democracy and freedom perverted by racism, but as a city founded on this principle of exclusion.

Though Bigger is not fully aware of the city’s history, he understands through his own experience how the Black Belt contributes to the “special existence.” Indeed, the reader learns that, “It maddened [Bigger] to think that he did not have a wider choice of action” in his simultaneously socially, economically, and spatially constricted life (Wright, *Native* 12). A few pages later, Bigger declares, “Every time I think about it I feel like somebody’s poking a red-hot iron down my throat. Goddammit, look! We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we ain’t. They do things and we can’t. It’s just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I’m on the outside of the world peeping in through a knothole in the fence. . . .” (20). Life in the Black Belt is “like living in a jail,” a sentiment closely connected to his later acceptance of the “crime of being black.” The Black Belt functions like a jail, detaining African Americans and limiting their freedoms, operating in response, as Matthews and Hartman argue, to the political and social criminalization of blackness. Historical Chicago municipal policies exacerbated this dynamic before 1912 when prostitution and other illicit ventures were permitted in “vice districts” located near or in black neighborhoods. Despite the end to legal prostitution in 1912, “vice continued to be centered in the black belt” (Spear 25). The black Chicago ghetto was arranged as a space of illicit lives and livelihood.

The socio-political technology of the ghetto has a long history inside and outside the United States. The word itself is first used in U.S. for in reference to the housing segregation for European immigrants who fell outside the cultural ideal of an Anglo-American race. But, as Wacquant argues, American ghettos have always functioned as a method of ethnoracial exclusion. The sociologist elaborates that “a ghetto is not simply a conglomeration of poor families or a spatial accumulation of undesirable social conditions – income deprivation, housing blight, or endemic crime and other disruptive behaviors – but an institutional form. It is [a form of power] . . . whereby a population deemed disreputable and dangerous is at once secluded and controlled” (“Black” 2). The Chicago ghetto is no exception: Spear reports, “The development of a physical ghetto in Chicago, then, was not the result chiefly of poverty; nor did Negroes cluster out of choice. The ghetto was primarily the product of white hostility” (26). Citing historian Sam Warner, Jr., Scruggs highlights the idea of the “slum” in nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural consciousness. He writes,

As poor people became more and more segregated, and hence isolated from what was seen to be only the authentic way of life (that is, middle-class life), the word *slum* took on a metaphoric and exotic character. A ‘slum’ was like a foreign country that could be visited, as by tourists; it was also a place set apart, having no connection to ‘normal’ life: ‘No one went slumming when the poor lived on the alley behind her or his house.’ Moreover, the word *slum* tended to hide the possibility that there might be an economic cause for such a place: ‘Slums were just there, facts of life, found objects.’ (158)

As Wright illuminates, the imagined need for the control of “disreputable and dangerous” populations frequently exceeds the bounds of normal law. Bigger reflects that housing restrictions and the like “keep us bottled up here like wild animals” (Wright, *Native* 249). He recognizes how the dehumanizing operations of the ghetto and broader structural racism project a quality of danger on to people of color.

Ideologies of white supremacy present this racist containment of dangerous black bodies as a matter of necessity. Mills points to the racist circular logic that sustains this narrative. Under the auspices of Western racism, Mills argues that “spacing” becomes a “circular indictment”: “You are what you are in part because you originate from a certain kind of space, and that space has those properties in part because it is inhabited by creatures like yourself” (42). He elaborates, “that certain spaces [are marked as] intrinsically doomed to welfare dependency, high street crime, underclass status, because of the characteristics of its inhabitants, so that the larger economic system has no role in creating these problems” (50-1). The ghetto becomes viewed as a symptom of some other problem rather than as an engine of disparity.

With such a framing of necessity, the State and other apparatuses justify exceptional police powers and the unequal application of law’s force in the ghetto, mirroring the more formal states of exception declared in wartime. Without question, the perceived necessity of containing bodies of color overrides the Constitutional and other rights of black citizens in the novel. As Wright’s chief example of this dynamic, the manhunt for Bigger throws the ghetto into a spectacular state of exception comparable to more formal martial law and totalitarian governance. But, alongside the spectacle, Wright’s narrative also depicts the lives of African Americans as always outside the

accepted norms of law within this space. By thinking through the ghetto as a constant space of exception in which power and violence ebb and flow on a spectrum, we can recognize the work it does as a technology for containing and disciplining bodies in parallel to other spaces of exception like Agamben's paradigm of the "camp" or the torture sites, work camps, and laboratories discussed in other chapters of this dissertation.

The Black Belt of the novel, however, is maintained by more than direct government action. Wright reiterates that white folks live "Over across the 'line'" where African Americans are barred from buying or renting homes (*Native* 21). These unwritten policies became central to the city's organization as black migration from the South increased. Scruggs writes, "The *Chicago Defender*, which for all its criticism of conditions for blacks in the south had never advocated immigration, changed its editorial policy in 1916: the new word was 'Come on up'"; nearly seventy thousand black southerners transplanted to Chicago in the following few years (147). Wacquant reports that "by 1940 over nine-tenths of Chicago's 337, 000 Negroes were 'packed solidly' in a 'narrow tongue of land, seven miles in length and one and one-half mile in width,' and were becoming ever more concentrated in it" ("A Black City"). This practice of redlining enforces segregation through business policy in Chicago where Jim Crow laws accomplish the same in the South.

During Bigger's inquest, his lawyer Boris Max questions Mr. Dalton about his relationship to Bigger's family as their landlord. The lawyer asks, "Isn't it true you *refuse* to rent houses to Negroes if those houses are in other sections of the city?" (327). Max's emphasis on the active verb "refuse" focuses readers' attention on the constantly active work of de facto segregation, disrupting apologetic narratives that explain segregation as

a passive or natural social formation. The policies of redlining were so effective in Chicago that people in the Black Belt “held a mock-election of the ‘Mayor of Bronzeville,’” implying the severe separateness between the ghetto and the rest of the city’s polity (Wacquant, “A Black City”). *Native Son* points to how practices of segregation are not limited to law or the State. In a city without strict segregation laws, this economic segregation lays a significant foundation for creating spaces across the city that exist under the unequal application of law and power.

While *Native Son* offers readers insight into the organization of the city around the exceptional space of the ghetto, Wright provides a spectacular illustration in the form of the police manhunt after Bigger. Police and vigilantes search, seize, and brutalize black citizens as a racist hysteria overtakes the city (*Native* 225). Jeffrey Clapp claims that the author’s “stories are consistently preoccupied with the most intensive and widely distributed form of State power, the police” and “transgressions of constitutional principle.” The text imagines how the isolation of African Americans in a space marked as criminal and degenerate leaves them open to widespread exploitation and violence. A newspaper article in the novel justifies this unrestrained police authority through a “blanket warrant from the Mayor,” but this decree is immediately suspect if not outright unconstitutional (*Native* 225). Readers are left with the impression that the Fourth Amendment—the prohibition against unreasonable searches and seizures—is being roundly ignored. Indeed, the phrase “blanket warrant” should be anathema to due process in the United States. Twenty-first century readers will recognize this kind of loosely-justified tactic as a predecessor to the surveillance and detainment policies of the Global War on Terror that cite vague necessity rather than concrete evidence as just cause. While

scholarship and popular critique views our current era as one of increasing governmental lawlessness, *Native Son* offers a representative example of all too commonplace suspension of law and its principles throughout American history.

The racist reasoning implied in the mayor's "blanket warrant" reveals much about the Chicago ghetto's status in the city's political structure. In spaces not set aside for criminalized blackness, the police require just cause in a warrant to treat citizens as criminals. The mayor's "blanket warrant," however, naturalizes the criminalized status of African Americans, taking for its just cause simply the existence of black citizens. Though only Bigger's girlfriend, Bessie, is actually implicated in his crimes, the city's racist logic holds all other blacks responsible by merit of their blackness.

Once armed with the authority of this blanket warrant, the Chicago police act like an invading army asserting martial law. The author writes, "Immediately a cordon of five thousand police, augmented by more than three thousand volunteers, was thrown about the Black Belt" (*Native* 243). Wright invites readers to see through the racist rationale for this siege of the South Side, suggesting that the state of exception declared by the city's power structure is not an incidental but a spectacular demonstration of the regular treatment of black citizens. Indeed, Mills notes, "There is a well-known perception in the black community that the police—particularly in the jim crow days of segregation and largely white police forces—were basically an 'army of occupation'" (85). In the novel, as a result of the white hysteria and unmediated police authority over the space of the ghetto, Wright describes how, "Every street car, bus, el train and auto leaving the South Side is being stopped and searched. Police and vigilantes, armed with rifles, tear gas, flashlights, and photos of the killer." He continues to detail how, "Several hundred

Negroes resembling Bigger Thomas were rounded up from South Side ‘hot spots’; they are being held for investigation.” The newspaper also records how “several Negro men were beaten” across the city (*Native* 244). The racist logic behind these detainments is obvious, but the power to detain black men without true legal justification is demonstrably exceptional. Not available to the people of the Black Belt under many regular, mundane circumstances, personal security and due process under the law are non-existent under the auspices of the necessity conjured around Bigger’s crime.

Wright further uses the example of “organized vigilante” groups to showcase exceptional nature of the spaces in which black citizens live. In the newspaper article, the author writes, “[The Chief of Police] said this morning that the aid of [organized vigilante] groups would be accepted. He stated that a woefully undermanned police force together with recurring waves of Negro crime made such a procedure necessary” (*Native* 244). As discussed in my previous chapter in the context of Butler’s *Parable of the Talents*, vigilante groups that operate beyond all bounds of law, often claiming mandates of a nebulous, racist “higher law” or justice were frequently endorsed by local and state governments as well as many national politicians. Operating by definition outside the law, the free reign of vigilantism is another exceptional form of violent power alongside unchecked police power. While the text suggests a broader vigilante practice and tradition across the United States, what is more sinister in this particular fictional instance is how Wright imagines the established agents of the State—the police—resorting to vigilante manpower. In fact, the State endorses the need for this deployment of unregulated power and potential violence; it is a “necessary” procedure that places what should be normal rights of black citizens under erasure.

Clapp suggests that *Native Son* demonstrates a shift of interest in Wright's works from the "extralegal, summary violence" of "mob violence and lynching" toward the oppressive power of law in its totality. But this transition does not leave behind the history of racist vigilantism. Bigger's capture does not preclude and set aside the mob outside the courtroom whose "rumbling voice" he hears (Wright, *Native* 406). In fact, Buckley threatens Bigger with the mob if he does not collaborate with the prosecution. Historian Michael Pfeifer argues that mob violence across the nation declines in the early twentieth century as the State normalizes the death penalty, formalizing the values of vigilante justice in a form more palatable to middle- and upper-class society (7). He even points to *Native Son* as an illustration of the close connection between vigilante justice and the courtroom. Pfeifer argues that Buckley's claim to uphold what he calls "sacred law" directly echoes the theories of not clearly defined but nevertheless ideologically "higher law" used to justify lynching in the past one hundred years (150). Wells claims that Wright implies "that the justice system has in this case simply imbued a semblance of legitimacy and legality to what was in effect a lynching" (890). Ultimately, the text presents the obviously exceptional quality of vigilantism at not ending as the court's steps but as infusing the entire legal process for Wright's protagonist.

The technology of the ghetto functions to concentrate the intimidation, violence, and exploitation wielded against African Americans, politically constructed in such a way as to enable narratives of necessity for the extralegal of its residents. In addition, the isolating mechanism of the ghetto that casts the great "sprawling" white world around Bigger and other black citizens works to cast such spaces as mere blemishes on an otherwise ideal republic—attributing responsibility for these flaws in the nation's

landscape to the people policed within them. Wright again addresses this phenomenon in *The Outsider*: his character District Attorney Houston says, “You call this *civilization*? I don’t. This is a jungle. We pretend that we have law and order. But we don’t, really. We have imposed a visible order, but hidden under that veneer of order the jungle still seethes” (135). *Native Son* illustrates Wright’s theory: the organization of space in Chicago provides a “visible order” and the impression of “law and order,” but these structures only increase the efficiency of maintaining the precarious nature of African American lives.

The “No Man’s Land” of the Mind

While Wright uses Chicago to illustrate the physical and economic constraints on African Americans in the Jim Crow U.S.A., the majority of *Native Son* emphasizes the very real psychic impact on Bigger’s inner life. In fact, the author depicts his protagonist as absorbing the exceptional nature of the ghetto around him into a model for his own sense of being. The ghetto’s space of exception becomes a kind of living metaphor for his mental space. As mentioned in this chapter’s introduction, Wright uses metaphor of “No Man’s Land” to express Bigger’s sense of alienation and exposure to the world around him. The phrase carries multiple meanings, the most immediate as a space of total war without governance or security. *Native Son* demonstrates that the exceptional nature of the ghetto is, in fact, the product of government policies and less formal racist social compacts. But this organization of life in the Black Belt engenders, as the author suggests, a potent feeling of socio-political and spiritual abandonment among its

residents. Again, in this space of exception emerges a condition that is “mimetic of death.”

The “No Man’s Land” metaphor emerges twice in Bigger’s thoughts when he is speaking to whites. In the first instance, Wright writes, “He felt he had no physical existence at all right then . . . It was a shadowy region, a No Man’s Land, the ground that separate the white world from the black that he stood upon. He felt naked, transparent.” For Bigger, No Man’s Land does not simply represent a position of not belonging, but a position of annihilation. Reading this passage, Gregory Phipps describes Bigger’s subjectivity as “a formless domain of raw vitality and energy—an inescapable negation within preexisting models of American white consciousness” (339). This effect is so powerfully cultivated in Bigger’s mind that he experiences it even in the presence of whites who he begins to perceive as allies. The author writes, “[Bigger] felt that he should have been able to meet Max halfway; but, as always, when a white man talked to him, he was caught out in No Man’s Land” (*Native* 347). Bigger’s feeling of disappearance echoes another, older sense of this key phrase. One of the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definitions for no man’s land is “a piece of waste or unowned land; an uninhabited or desolate area,” with citations as old as 1350. Like this meaning, Bigger’s consciousness enters a zone of desolation in which he feels lifeless, formless, or that his body no longer belongs to him.

Wright’s portrayal of Bigger’s exclusion from white society is not necessarily notable in the context of other fictional black characters, but this metaphor and other moments emphasize how Bigger also cannot locate his sense of self in an African

American community.⁶ While this “No Man’s Land” mental space becomes evident to Bigger in moments when he speaks to whites, the novel leaves the impression that Bigger and other characters are continually caught up in this interior space of exception, just as they are contained in the ghetto’s physical space.⁷

The author’s own experience of American racism informs his depiction of Bigger as a disenfranchised young black man. After being harassed by whites out of a job, Wright recounts, “For weeks after that I could not believe in my feelings. My personality was numb, reduced to a lumpish, loose, dissolved state. I was a non-man, something that knew vaguely that it was human but felt that it was not. . . . And because I knew of no way to grapple with this thing, I felt doubly cast out” (Wright, *Black* 229). On top of his racist exclusion from the world of whites, Wright struggles to comprehend this injustice and how to retrieve his agency. He describes his experience as being “doubly cast out,”

⁶ Wright returns to this topic in *The Outsider* in which the author describes his protagonist, Cross, as having “no party, no myths, no tradition, no race, no soil, no culture, and no ideas—except perhaps the idea that ideas in themselves were, at best, dubious!” (377). He already lives in state that another character, District Attorney Houston, later describes as “a kind of No Man’s Land.” Wright presents Cross as not living in a secondary, subordinate, or oppressed culture, but rather as wholly ejected from any culture, in a kind of exceptional void. But while he possesses no ideology or culture of his own, the dominate culture founds itself on the demonization and exploitation of his body. In the full quote, Houston says to Cross, not knowing his true identity initially, “Negroes, as they enter our culture, are going to inherit the problems we have, but with a difference. They are outsiders and they are going to *know* that they have these problems. They are going to be self-conscious; they are going to be gifted with a double vision, for, being Negroes, they are going to be both *inside* and *outside* of our culture at the same time. . . . But their getting those elementary things [the right to jobs and living space] is so long and drawn out that they must, while they wait, adjust themselves to living in a kind of No Man’s Land” (129). The DA’s assessment of the position of African-Americans in American life mirrors what Wright has expressed elsewhere. But his words remain clinical and incrementalist, divorced from the visceral experiences of Wright’s black characters like Cross and Bigger who do not respond to their constricted lives with the patience that Houston implies. Houston’s example suggests for Wright’s readers that the ability to recognize the exceptional position of blacks in American life must be combined with an empathetic approach to the individual experiences of those living in this condition.

⁷ In contrast to my reading of the metaphor, Kadeshia Matthews reads “No Man’s Land” as a space of blackness in her article arguing that Bigger’s actions are oriented around escaping the feminized status of his race. She writes, “In attempting to escape the supposed No Man’s Land of blackness, Bigger has seized on a version of manhood premised on whiteness and therefore on the very othering and rejection that have been practiced against him” (294). She interprets Bigger’s violence as reenacting that with which whites threaten him. This is a compelling reading that does not necessarily conflict with mine. This nebulous “shadowy region” that Wright imagines is not clearly explicated in the novel, and the very nature of an ungoverned No Man’s Land in the mind allows for the proliferation of paradoxes and layered meanings.

and expression that further exemplifies the No Man's Land of the mind that the author explores in his fiction. The deprivation historically experienced by African Americans is not only material but psychic or spiritual. The word "doubly" communicates a crucial parity between the material aspects of being fired for being black and the entailing dehumanization.

While outside a ghetto Wright finds himself exposed to what he would come to describe in fiction as a No Man's Land of the mind, he presents the strict, violent spatial containment of African Americans as exacerbating the abuse suffered by Bigger Thomas's psyche. Critiques have been levelled at Wright, however, for his emphasis on his naturalistic portrayal of an environment's inevitable influence upon a character. The author would later comment in "How Bigger Was Born" that he does not

think that environment *makes* consciousness . . . but I do say that I felt and still feel that the environment supplies the instrumentalities through which the organism expresses itself, and if that environment is warped or tranquil, the mode and manner of behavior will be affected toward deadlocking tensions or orderly fulfillment and satisfaction. (442)

In fact, Wright insists that on the parallel importance of understanding the individual experience of African Americans and the material constraints on their lives or else the reader will be left with the impression that they were essentially and organically bad" (437). Ralph Ellison provides an early defense in his review of *Native Son*; he writes,

Some reviewers are calling Bigger Thomas a neurotic, but it is a mistake to dismiss him as such. He is not crazy, he is the product of the restrictions placed upon 15,000,000 American citizens, in the narrow sense, and upon

one-third of the nation in the broader sense. . . . Deprived of education and forced by the reality of Jim-crow to reject the common American assumptions that all men are created equal and endowed with the right of health and the pursuit of happiness, Bigger reacted as life had taught him: violently. (44)

The novel emphasizes Bigger's response to the conditions of his life not as a universal *fate* but rather as a universal *potential* dictated by the discursive marking of his body as black and the socio-political technologies arrayed against him.

Despite the potential philosophical or political flaws in his presentation, Wright continues to emphasize the conditioning force of the Chicago's ghetto space throughout the novel. Expanding on Bigger's impression of a "sprawling white world" around him, the author writes,

To Bigger and his kind white people were not really people; they were sort of a great natural force, like a stormy sky looming overhead, or like a deep swirling river stretching suddenly at one's feet in the dark. As long as he and his black folks did not go beyond certain limits, there was no need to fear that white force. But whether they feared it or not, each and every day of their lives they lived with it; even when words did not sound its name, they acknowledged its reality. As long as they lived here in this prescribed corner of the city, they paid mute tribute to it. (*Native* 114)

Like the active sprawling of the white world, the "force" of whites that has established the ghetto's space of exception continuously encloses the African Americans who live there. The present continuous verbs "looming" and "swirling" describe an active effect of

the Black Belt, indicating the ever-present threat of “force”—through physical violence or other terroristic means. Although Bigger imagines that there are zones of safety within certain “limits” of blacks’ behavior, Wright complicates this notion with the later manhunt. Bigger alone has violated these “limits,” but every resident suffers on account of him during the police and vigilante raids, arrests, and firings. At the very least, the ghetto’s inhabitants are treated as always accountable for their peers’ violations of the limit, rather than receiving individual Constitutional treatment as citizens with rights.

In congruence with Wright’s framing No Man’s Land metaphor, here Bigger also provides a metaphor of a position outside the bounds of community or law—in fact, the lack of a stable position at all in a “deep swirling river.” This metaphor implies the risk of both drowning or being washed away by white “force,” all while being contained in the literal space of the Black Belt. By using naturalizing metaphors of a “river” and a “stormy sky,” Wright highlights the victim’s perspective on vigilante violence, so often as appealing to a higher, natural law over the laws of the State. Importantly, however, this naturalized enmity that seems to exist outside the artifice of law is always present; as Bigger feels, “even when words did not sound its name, they acknowledged its reality.” African American lives in this space are always a “mute tribute” to the exceptional relationship in which the ghetto exists with the rest of the city. In other words, the nature of the space appears to infect the mentalities of its residents; race is naturalized and felt as a “force.”

The novel further depicts how these enclosed spaces of exception contribute to the alienation of living under a racialized marker of exception. Though Wright focuses on Bigger, he indicates that other black characters share his condition; Bigger’s girlfriend

Bessie, whom he later murders, also describes herself as “lost,” disoriented and disconnected from any sense of meaning while she lives in the Black Belt and labors as a domestic servant at the whims of whites (*Native* 184). Bigger’s life is little different; Wright explains, “never had he felt a sense of wholeness” (240). Though the starkness of the desolate, alienated space of his mental No Man’s Land appears during confrontations with whiteness, the nature of this metaphor permeates his entire racialized and segregated life.

Wright continues to emphasize the strangle hold that the structures of power have over Bigger’s black body and mind. He writes, “. . . but even after obeying, after killing, they still ruled him. He was their property, heart and soul, body and blood; what they did claimed every atom of him, sleeping and waking; it colored life and dictated the terms of death” (*Native* 331-2). Though not a slave, Bigger still feels that he is the property of whites in body and soul. Rather than being personal property to a single white person, he now lives a disenfranchised life nebulously under a kind of ownership by all whites. Wright also deflates here any apologetic notion of a congenial balance between white authority and black servitude. The passage presents Bigger’s domination as surpassing every conceivable limit. He imagines that neither his obedience nor his certain death ends this relationship. In fact, the text presents Bigger’s existence as entirely lacking protective limits; not even his “heart and soul” are guarded against violent intrusion. Marked by the exceptional status of his race, Bigger is exposed in both body and being to unmitigated violence and exploitation.

Black Lives Matter (insofar as They Facilitate Profit)

The Chicago Black Belt in *Native Son* clearly works to keep people of color contained, both socially and literally in their racist-prescribed place. But, while the novel depicts how these kinds of spaces of exception are a response to the “danger” of racialized bodies, the novel also shows how such spaces render people of color available to exploitation. The social and legal inequality evident in these spaces permits not only different forms of State violence that would not be acceptable elsewhere but also unfair labor practices. Wacquant reminds us that ghettos have always worked in this way, paradoxically accomplishing both “labor extraction and social ostracization.” Using Bigger and Wright’s other characters even as anecdotal examples, *Native Son* portrays the policies of the ghetto and its alienating effect as exposing African Americans to economic exploitation. Ultimately, since people in the ghetto are generally at risk to the State and its social, legal structures, they also have no reliable recourse to law or other institutions. The psychological alienation that the author depicts through Bigger’s No Man’s Land of the mind further suggests the ghetto’s work in convincing its inhabitants that they are not fit for a coeval economic relationship with the dominant white majority. Wright demonstrates to his readers how leaving racialized people in these unprotected zones renders them available to exploitation.

Wright points to the same paradox that Wacquant identifies in his scholarship between the simultaneous exclusion of black bodies from white society and inclusion of their exploited labor and wealth. In one of Boris Max’s statements to the court he describes the racist majority’s desire to exclude and even annihilate people of color. But by articulating this seemingly barbaric desire he hopes to appeal to each individual’s

empathy. Max says, “But if we say that we must kill [Bigger], then let us have the courage and honesty to say: ‘Let us kill them all. They are not human. There’s no room for them.’ Then let us do it” (Wright, *Native* 405). He identifies the genocidal teleology of racist ideology and calls attention to its gross inhumanity. But in this case Max misses one of the ghetto’s primary goals. As Wacquant explains, the racist systems used to control black people from slavery to the present “have, each in its own manner, served two joined yet discordant purposes: to recruit, organize, and extract labor out of African Americans, on the one hand; and to demarcate and ultimately seclude them so that they would not ‘contaminate’ the surrounding white society that viewed them [as] irrevocably inferior and vile.” The violence condoned in the ghetto’s space of exception, as Wacquant argues, enables the temporary resolution of the tension that arises from these two conflicting purposes. He writes,

When the tension between these two purposes, exploitation and ostracization, mounts to the point where it threatens to undermine either of them, its excess is drained, so to speak, and the institution restabilized, by resort to *physical violence*: the customary use of the lash and ferocious suppression of slave insurrections on the plantation, terroristic vigilantism and mob lynchings in the post-bellum South, and periodic bombings of Negro homes and pogroms against ghetto residents (such as the six-day riot that shook up Chicago in 1919) ensured that blacks kept to their appointed place at each epoch. (“Deadly” 99)

Thus, flying in the face of Max’s line of argument, the deployment of violence against people of color in systems and spaces of exception is mediated by a profit motive. Such

has been evident in Octavia Butler's thinking and will also be so in John Steinbeck's representation of Californian farm camps in the next chapter.

In *Native Son*, the constant economic pressure of the ghetto is referenced from its earliest pages. The redlining of the Black Belt is one of the novel's more obvious example of such constriction. For example, Bigger and his friend say to each other, "Yeah; them old white landlords sure don't give much heat," followed by, "And they always knocking at your door for money" (Wright, *Native* 16). White property owners provide few services for outrageously inflated prices. The exploitation of African Americans remains a constant backdrop in this novel about Bigger's violent reaction to his oppression, Bigger offers his own theory of socio-economic race relationships when Wright writes, "And rich people were not so hard on Negroes; it was the poor whites who hated Negroes. They hated Negroes because they didn't have their share of the money" (33). Yet, by providing insight into the economic relationship between the Thomas and Dalton families, the novel upends the premise of Bigger's theory. Wright suggests that in particular the wealthy white stratum of city is implicated in Bigger's crimes by offering him an existence in which his only choices are a death-in-life existence or an embrace of the criminality that racist ideology has already thrust upon him.

Mary's father, Mr. Dalton, is the novel's illustrative figure of the wealthy white elite in the city who benefit from the conditions of black people's lives. Dalton is an interesting figure, however, because Wright portrays him not as a kind of outright villainous robber baron, instead giving his character something of a beneficent nature. Dalton supports the NAACP and offers Bigger relatively lucrative employment as his family's chauffeur (*Native* 53). But later in the novel, Wright contemplates through

Bigger the dissonance between Dalton's philanthropy and his real estate businesses. He, in fact, owns the Thomas family apartment that Wright presents as a brief allegorical model of the Black Belt. The author writes,

He had never seen Mr. Dalton until he had to come work for him; his mother always took the rent to the real estate office. Mr. Dalton was somewhere far away, high up, distant, like a god. He owned property all over the Black Belt, and he owned property where white folks lived, too. . . . Even though Mr. Dalton gave millions of dollars for Negro education, he would rent houses to Negroes only in this prescribed area, this corner of the city tumbling down from rot. (*Native* 174)

Mr. Dalton is part of the "white world," the "force" that looms over him and swirls at his feet that Bigger feels is bearing down on him at the beginning of *Native Son*. Whereas Bigger thinks of African Americans treated as "wild animals" by being redlined into the Black Belt, Dalton seems like a "god." Despite his distance "far away, high up" from the ghetto, the knowledge is common that his wealth is intimately bound up in the South Side's unfair practices. Noting that Dalton owns property where whites live as well, Wright suggests that Dalton's allegiance is not to race but to money. Dalton both gives money to "Negro education," he earns a portion of that money from black subjugation in substandard housing "tumbling down from rot."

Like Wright's complex protagonist who incites both sympathy and antipathy, Mr. Dalton is not a two-dimensional villain. The text's narrative strategy approaches Dalton with relative kid gloves, slowly dissolving the character's naiveté, perhaps anticipating reactions from similarly charitable yet exploitation-perpetuating readers. For example, in

a dialogue between Bigger's lawyer and Mr. Dalton, he deflects responsibility for the city's housing practices:

"I don't fix the rent scales," Mr. Dalton said.

"Who does?"

"Why, the law of supply and demand regulates the price of houses."

". . . Why is it that you exact an exorbitant rent of eight dollars per week from the Thomas family for one unventilated, rat-infested room in which four people eat and sleep?" (*Native* 326)

Dalton ascribes the responsibility of setting prices to market forces, suggesting that as a businessman he has no choice in the matter but to charge "exorbitant" prices for "rat-infested" rooms. Dalton references a naturalized notion of the "law of supply and demand" to explain the high prices for the limited amount of housing for blacks. His explanation imitates the form of other naturalized justifications for racist practices, implying that his and others' business practices are acting in response to the constructed necessity of "supply and demand." Yet Max's further questions reveal to readers how whites and property owners have created the conditions for this "law." But Max's line of questions begins to demand that Dalton recognize his personal role in the conditions of Bigger's life that have culminated in his two murders. Max asks, "Isn't it true you *refuse* to rent houses to Negroes if those houses are in other sections of the city?" (327). Dalton again shares responsibility with other real estate owners, but both he and the reader are drawn toward an awareness of how Dalton is implicated in the cycles of oppression that, as Wright portrays, generates figures like Bigger.

Near the novel's end Bigger opines on the relationship between white ownership and black subjugation. The text connects property and oppression when he says, "Well, they own everything. They choke you off the face of the earth. They like God. . . . They kill you before you die" (*Native* 353). Bigger links both ownership and violence—through the image of choking—to abject condition mimetic to death in which you feel that you are killed "before you die." Wright reminds readers that this state of social death is not limited to socio-political arrangements of power. Economic power proves inseparable in the nation's relationship to African Americans.

In another speech that does not sit quite well with the attentive reader, Boris Max offers a broad perspective to Bigger about the city's socio-economic structures. Many critics have noted, however, in the context of the following passage how Max is less a Marxist messiah figure than another color-blind white character.⁸ Such a move on the author's part is not surprising; Wright's break with mainstream American Communism is well documented, including by himself in *Black Boy*. Regardless, Wright uses Max to deploy slanted, unfinished truths about his racist capitalist society. Max says to Bigger,

[The rich and powerful] want the things of life, just as you did, and they're not particular about how they get them. They hire people and they don't pay them enough; they take what people own and build up power. They rule and regulate life. They have things arranged so that they can do those things and the people can't fight back. They do that to black people more

⁸ James Miller and others have also pointed out the flaws in Max's representation of Bigger. While Miller argues that Max fails to demonstrate that he fully understands Bigger in the way that Wright invites his readers to, the critic also indicates that Max's legal arguments are incongruous with the standard leftist strategies of his day, a fact with which Wright himself would likely be familiar (Miller 123). Though Max works to be Bigger's ally, many critics have called attention to how this character's oversights subtly mirror the author's criticisms of the American Communist Party's relationship to its African-American members and people of color generally.

than others because they say that black people are inferior. But, Bigger, they say that *all* people who work are inferior. And the rich people don't want to change things; they'll lose too much. (*Native* 428)

Max's opening presents the rich and powerful as figures of sovereignty not far removed from the figure of the political sovereign outlined in the theories of Schmitt and Agamben. In fact, the statement that the rich "rule and regulate life" places the capitalist elite in the position of the modern biopolitical sovereign, whom Agamben describes as the decider of "life," separating organisms into categories of lives that variously matter or do not matter in the political sphere.⁹ Max's broad, abstract terms about citizens' shared desires, wanting "the things of life," recalls the novel's opening allegory. The lawyer suggests that, like Bigger and his rodent foe, the rich desire a fulfilled life, unthreatened by competition. Max claims that the oppression experienced by blacks is a universal feature of capitalist labor exploitation. Wright's inclusion of Max's voice reminds readers that black people are not alone as targets of discourses of "inferiority," that the present state of capitalism is a problem—inseparable—from the disgraces of racism. But the lawyer occludes the difference in policy and practice used to extract value from the labor

⁹ In his 2005 monograph *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death*, Abdul JanMohamed declares, "Though critics have commented on the ubiquitousness of violence in Wright's work, it is curious that no one has yet fully articulated the fundamental ideological and political functions of death in his work and life" (1). Like this dissertation, JanMohamed analyzes Wright's texts through a theoretical lens greatly informed by the political philosophy of Giorgio Agamben. JanMohamed insightfully proposes that we think through the power over black bodies in the Jim Crow era in Agamben's terms of "bare life" and sovereignty (8). Yet in following pages of his study he emphasizes how an abstract, existential conceit of a binary of death and life inhabit Wright's works rather than ever-present threat of real violence and physical, final death for many of Wright's characters and himself. Wright offers many figures, Bigger Thomas among them, who are caught up in apparent vacuum of life and death, a death-in-life that complicates any binary presentation. Though JanMohamed places Wright in compelling conversation with many schools of critical theory, this approach elides the lived experiences of African Americans that Wright works to represent. In fact, JanMohamed asserts, "*Native Son*, in short, is structured like a dream and has to be read as such" (77). While I do not discount the validity or critical productivity of comparing the novel to a dream, JanMohamed's particular approach sets aside the ethical need to imagine the novel also as directly representative of a reality.

of various working class groups. The oppression experienced by African Americans and other people of color frequently exceeds that applied to working-class whites. Still, the entirety of *Native Son* urges readers to not so casually agree with Max's quick dismissal of race in the exploitation of African American workers. But this moment does not license Americans to white-wash the particular experiences of people of color. Wright presents the "special existence" of black people as demanding an equally special or particular understanding and response.

Failures of Sympathy

Alongside the tragedies and violence within its pages, *Native Son* depicts responses and forms of resistances to the city's racist structures and institutions. The author represents two methods that are particularly inadequate: uncritical sympathy and selfish violence. Critics have discussed the latter at length: scholarship has cast Bigger as a failed revolutionary or a man driven mad by the circumstances of his life.¹⁰ But the novel's more central object is the problem of sympathy. The Dalton family serves as Wright's figures for the failure of sympathy. He portrays their naïve benevolence and paternalism as central in the chain of events leading to Mary's and then Bessie's murder—though the novel does not clearly explicate a full opinion on the family's responsibility. Ultimately, Wright implies that this kind of sympathy generates more harm than good for the afflicted people in the Black Belt.

¹⁰ Matthews discusses famous praises of Bigger Thomas as a kind of black revolutionary, including Frantz Fanon's and Eldridge Cleaver's (288). But she points out that Bigger cannot be a revolutionary in the model of Fanon's political theory because "there is no such thing as a revolution of one" (291). Similarly, Wells discredits readings of Bigger as a "freedom fighter" or "revolutionary warrior," instead arguing that his violence has no agenda and is an "automatic response to Bigger's desperation" (893).

Near the novel's conclusion, Wright offers the stakes of his narrative. Bigger finally explains the schism of consciousness between white and blacks that results in his killing of Mary Dalton. He says simply, "White folks and black folks is strangers. We don't know what each other is thinking" (351). Wright's fictional creation of Bigger's interior world and the inability of so many other characters to access it clearly work to address this problem. Wright would later declare in *Black Boy* the equitable meeting of racialized strangers as a particular goal of his artistic project. After working in close proximity with whites in a restaurant, he recounts,

It was in the psychological distance that separated the races that the deepest meaning of the problem of the Negro lay for me. For these poor, ignorant white girls to have understood my life would have meant nothing short of a vast revolution in theirs. And I was convinced that what they needed to make them complete and grown-up in their living was the inclusion in their personalities of a knowledge of lives such as I lived and suffered containedly. (320)

For Wright, both the socio-politically dominant and subordinate groups suffer—with obvious differences—from systemic racism. The task for his literary work is to offer "knowledge" to readers toward their maturation into a kind of existential or moral completeness. *Native Son* provides a particularly powerful challenge for readers—past, present, and future—not critically initiated into the problems of race in the United States.

Wright further argues that the problem of race affects every American. He writes, "I felt that the Negro could not live a full, human life under the conditions imposed upon him by America; and I felt, too, that America, for different reasons, could not live a full,

human life. It seemed to me, then, that if the Negro solved his problem, he would be solving infinitely more than his problem alone” (*Black* 350). As the author suggests in his memoir, Bigger’s statement about whites and blacks existing as strangers is not a matter of changing the circumstances of one group of people but a political project of commingling, to not set apart people into normalized and marginalized categories of thought, language, political, social, or economic structures. The novel’s implication of changing whites and blacks from strangers into another kind of relation points to a kind of community building, ending the destructive, violent, and exploitative strangeness too long cultivated by American systems of power. And as Wright more directly states in his memoir, the incongruence between the lives of whites and people of color is a shared problem—a problem that can explode in figures like Bigger Thomas.

While Wright desires to erode the estrangement among American peoples, in *Native Son* the Daltons’ brand of sympathy—even Mary’s more radicalized version—proves inadequate as an ethical response to the strangeness of Bigger’s life. Wright does not provide a simple portrait of the family for his readers to easily judge the quality of their intent, but their limitations and failures are quite evident in the text. Despite Mr. Dalton’s charity and employment offer to Bigger, his wealth, influence, and skin color leaves him like a “god” in relationship to Bigger and other African Americans in Chicago. What sympathy or understanding the Dalton patriarch exhibits is directly enabled by the city’s inequity of race, labor, and property. Charity reinforces rather than allays the established socio-political power dynamics. This exploitative paternalism is the brand of sympathy that receives the most direct criticism in the text, primarily through Dalton’s courtroom scenes with Max.

Mr. Dalton's wife is another figure of failed sympathy. Scholars have long agreed upon the symbolism underlying Mrs. Dalton's blindness. Such is apparent to some of the novel's earliest literary criticism. In his 1958 monograph *The Negro Novel in America*, Richard Bone writes that *Native Son* contains "a constant play on blindness, focused around the figure of Mrs. Dalton but aimed ultimately at the reader, who is expected to grope his way to an understanding of Bigger's life" (147). Following after Bone's argument, Ian Afflerbach offers an extensive reading of what he describes as the "rhetoric of blindness" throughout the novel. He argues that sight and the ability to see the world clearly permeate the text from its opening to its conclusion. This dynamic itself is most apparent in scenes with the blind Mrs. Dalton (94). His wife's literal blindness ultimately reflects Mr. Dalton's own blind eye to his city's and industry's racist injustice.

Ultimately, however, Mary Dalton proves a more dissonant example of inadequate sympathy than either of her parents. Her well-meaning words while Bigger drives her and Jan around Chicago speak to a failure of developing effective empathy. She says, "We want one of those places where colored people eat, not one of those show places. . . . I've long wanted to . . . just *see* how your people live. . . . We know so *little* about each other. I just want to *see*. I want to *know* these people. . . . Yet they *must* live like we live" (original emphasis, Wright, *Native* 69-70). Rather than creating a space of inclusive dialogue between her and Bigger in which they might develop grounds for mutual empathy, Mary's words cast her as a spectator looking upon the lives of black people. Though she recognizes the differences between her and Bigger's socio-political positions, she does not realize how their positions regulate their dialogue, preventing a mutual equitable interchange. She appears ignorant to the very real risks he courts by

engaging her, a wealthy white woman, as a peer. Moreover, like her father, she takes for granted the privilege that allows her to offer her inadequate sympathy to her black chauffeur as she rides in relative luxury back and forth across Chicago's color line. Her freedom and mobility to attempt sympathy for Bigger arrives directly from her whiteness and wealth, both of which are founded upon the oppression and exploitation of black bodies. This aspect of Mary's failure is not a blindness to lives in the Black Belt but to the circumstances of her own.

Even Mary's words reenact the differences that she wishes to ameliorate. Her words portray her as a spectator or even a tourist of the Black Belt, casting African Americans as the objects of her gaze. But her attention remains on the surface level, only on what she can see. She fails to perceive Bigger's own feelings in the moment despite her depicted benevolence. Though she states that she does not want to visit a "show place" but an eatery patronized by average African Americans, she nevertheless emphasizes only seeing the external features of black people's lives. Scruggs insightfully describes the conflict she incites; he writes, "Because Bigger knows the misery of his own world so intimately, he perceives the obscene element in Mary's wish. Bigger's inarticulate rage represents a felt knowledge of existence that Mary is not privy to, hence his reject of the kind of sympathy Mary has to offer: she only wants to *see*" (157). Scruggs qualifies the power of Bigger's reaction, writing "that he remembers Mary's precise words on four separate occasions in the novel, and Wright seems to link his killing of her to those words. His anger represents a long history of enforced separateness which Mary's 'innocent' remarks cannot begin to broach" (158). The novel points to the varying failures of the Daltons' sympathies, challenging Wright's readers who perhaps

identify more with Mary or Jan than with Bigger to become cognizant of the blind spots in their own positions. In particular, the text's challenge for white readers is to engage Bigger Thomas *not* in the ways that the privileged and powerful in *Native Son* do, through exploitation, spectacles of violence, and Mary's voyeurism. The author instead invites us to imaginatively enter the internal life of Bigger Thomas, to empathetically conceive of how he experiences the world on his own terms.

Bigger's lawyer Boris Max represents a departure from the Daltons' blindness. He demonstrates a stronger grasp on the social, political, and economic structures that create the landscape of Bigger's life. Yet critics are divided on his ethical or ideological role in the novel. In a 1940 review of the novel, Malcolm Cowley writes that Max's "long courtroom speech . . . sums up the argument of the novel" (38). More contemporary critics have agreed with this assessment; for example, Yoshinobu Hakutani claims, "Through Max, Wright speaks for and to the nation, thereby creating a narrative voice, a point of view that is indeed sympathetic to Bigger but entirely impersonal in shaping racial discourse" (183). In contrast, Afflerbach argues, "Bigger lacks the education or the disposition to join in Max's New Deal values" (100). On the one hand, Max's relation to Bigger mirrors the uneven dynamics between Bigger and Mary earlier in the novel. On the other hand, Afflerbach points to Max's final "failure to read" Bigger at the novel's end when Bigger embraces his crimes (Afflerbach 101; Wright, *Native* 429). James Miller takes a similar position, writing that "the concluding scene of the novel clearly belongs to Bigger and his recovery of his voice at this crucial moment in *Native Son* not only undermines the argument that Max functions as a spokesman for Wright's political views" (119). This debate, however, remains to be settled.

More so than the Daltons', Max's struggle to comprehend Bigger's experience is perhaps the most poignant site of exigence for Wright's choice of medium. Despite the lawyer's sophisticated vision of race and class relations in America, he remains an outsider to the lives of Bigger and other African Americans. As many have noted, Max's inadequacy reflects in part Wright's own falling out with the Communist Party. But this problem is more closely tied to the ethos in *Native Son*'s production. In specific context of the Marxism of his era but touching on all intellectualizing of life, Wright once claimed, "No theory of life can take the place of life" ("Blueprint" 102). Max's structural analysis of Bigger's circumstances does indeed provide some insight into Bigger's world. But he fails to imaginatively inhabit Bigger's life with the simultaneous empathy and judgment that Wright invites from his readers. This latent critique of Max-like figures in the novel also highlights the shortcomings of all such theoretical analysis, including, of course, Agamben's political theory that informs much of this dissertation. What Wrights reminds critics and lay readers alike is the enormous material and social complexity surrounding the lives of disenfranchised, exploited people that is so readily obscured by spectacle or further degraded by uncritical voyeurism. The novel form provides one kind of tool for grasping that complexity, creating both sweeping visions of our social, political, and material landscapes along with what Wright describes as the penetrating "cunning" into the lives of others.

Conclusion: From Where and When to Read Native Son

Keneth Kinnamon reports, "Irving Howe once wrote that 'the day *Native Son* appeared, American culture was changed forever.' The change was not basic or profound,

but it was real. The several hundred thousand readers of the work could no longer see racial issues in quite the same way” (5). Hundreds of reviews agree (2). To accomplish this change of perspective, Wright uses fiction to enable the reader’s access not only to an insider’s perspective on the space of the ghetto but also to the internal life of Bigger Thomas. Through other characters’ inability to perceive Bigger’s state of mind, the novel suggests that the exceptional structures define the ghetto and the lives of its inhabitants are difficult to enter and adequately comprehend. But with the “cunning” of fiction, Wright works to acquaint readers with Bigger and the Black Belt. This representation points toward a larger practice of politicized empathy, encouraging readers to act against such political and economic arrangements of violent iniquity.

For the past, present, and future readers of *Native Son*, how one understands the stakes of the novel is tied to how one reads the character Bigger Thomas. Critics will likely continue to stake new claims on this question, usually declaring Bigger as either a localized individual subject or a symbolic, universal figure. In what Kinnamon qualifies as “one of the very best early essays” on the novel, Donald B. Gibson “emphasizes Bigger as an individual person rather than a social symbol” (Kinnamon 8). More contemporary critics seem to lean in the opposite direction. JanMohamed categorizes many figures in Wright’s works as “composite characters” who “must also be understood as ‘collective,’ as opposed to idiosyncratically individuals, subjects” (33). Similarly, Ira Wells looks to Wright’s essay “How Bigger was Born” to support her argument that Bigger Thomas isn’t a specific contextualized figure but a universal one (892). In most cases, critics present valid cases for their differing conclusions. The most productive yet

difficult answer, however, is one that accounts for both of these seemingly divergent poles of Bigger's representative status.

To not acknowledge Bigger's presentation as an individual rather than a type would be to repeat the failures of Mary and Max. Yet, he is a fictional character who does representative work. Indeed, as Wright declares in "How Bigger was Born," he has recognized the violent anger with which he infused in Bigger Thomas in whites as well (441). Instead of accepting a conflict between these two perspectives, readers can recognize that Bigger is not posed as a universal figure but rather a person—albeit fictional—caught in vast structures of iniquity and violence. Those overwhelming, powerful systems that profit from Bigger's degradation take on a universal aspect. To suggest that many individuals, fictional or real, might react to circumstances like Bigger's in a similar manner should not detract our attention to those individuals as individuals. And yet, though Richard Wright presents readers with a specific context of Bigger's life in segregated Chicago, part of the novel's so-called universal aspect hinges on how Bigger circumstances are not unique to 1930s and '40s Chicagoans or even black peoples in the U.S. The conflicts and language that overflows within the novel is part of a long and wide American literary pattern.

Through Boris Max, Wright invokes a major metaphor of the twentieth century: the living dead, the dead-in-life, zombies, life that is mimetic of death. In the previous chapter, I discussed how Octavia Butler summoned this image during Olamina's time in the camps. In the next chapters, similar representations will become apparent. In Max's statements during Bigger's trial he refers to the young black man as a kind of risen "corpse" (Wright, *Native* 392). Of course, as numerous critics have argued, Max is not

necessarily either a reliable observer of black lives or an unmediated mouthpiece for the author's own ideas. But Max's words nevertheless leave an impression on the reader even if the text invites doubt over his legitimacy as a social critic. The metaphor of a "corpse" to describe Bigger's existence presents an image of his life as a body without animating force. A walking corpse is a figure of abjection, a human automaton without agency. Max earns criticism for implying that Bigger entirely lacks control of his choices, but his argument that the ghetto works to render Bigger and other black citizens as walking corpses as part of its exceptional function is not out of line.

The corpse metaphor is a recurring feature in black diasporic writing and American literature more broadly. Octavia Butler portrays her speculative concentration and torture camps as producing walking corpses and "zombies" in part as a reference to how people of color and other minorities have often been cast into this position in American history. Orlando Patterson influentially termed the status of slaves as one of social death, and scholars have argued that this condition, in different forms, extends to other disenfranchised groups after the Civil War as well. Even in David Walker's 1828 *Appeal* he casts conditions of slave life that engender apathy and abjection in the same light. He writes that the African American slave exists in a state of both "death-like apathy" and "death-like ignorance" outside the civil and legal life of the nation (65, 68). To be excluded from the full life of the nation, the *Appeal* suggests, is to live under the shadow of death—an existence mimetic of death. Walker captures the conditions of blacks as a group set outside the bounds of citizenship and humanity in order for their labor and difference to be exploited by economic and political power.

Bigger Thomas's relationship to this recurrent American, indeed global metaphor of the living dead and its violent, exploitative context is the chief inspiration for critics to identify him as a universal representative figure. Bigger's experience is more immediately similar to that of other people of color in the United States than to victims of Nazi Germany, torture victims in the fiction of Butler and Walter, migrant laborers in Steinbeck's, or monstrous organisms in science fiction. But reading these texts as examples in a larger pattern of representations of American bare life and spaces of exception allows each example to inform the other, generating a stronger understanding of each author's political project and the realities in which each is engaged. Yet texts like *Native Son* carry their exigency into the present, for the contexts may have changed but the stakes of exceptional power and zombified black bodies persist.

The pattern of violence depicted in the novel has parallels across centuries of African-American writing, reaching to the present day. I have cited David Walker's nineteenth-century *Appeal* throughout this chapter, but contemporary author Ta-Nehisi Coates writes about the same problems in his 2015 book *Between the World and Me*. Of his childhood in West Baltimore ghetto, Coates writes to his son, "Fear ruled everything around me, and I knew, as all black people do, that this fear was connected to the [American] Dream out there, to the unworried boys, to pie and pot roast, to the white fences and green lawns nightly beamed into our television sets" (29). Like Bigger Thomas, Coates feels a world of whiteness sprawling around him, constricting him. To Coates, this arrangement of life in the United States is strongly enforced by the police, just as in Wright's Chicago. He tells his son in the context of Michael Brown's killing in Ferguson, Missouri,

And you know now, if you did not before, that the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body. It does not matter if the destruction originates in a misunderstanding. It does not matter if the destruction springs from a foolish policy. . . . The destroyers will rarely be held accountable. Mostly they will receive pensions. (9)

Coates's twice-used phrase "it does not matter" signals what he sees as the continued exceptional nature of American police forces and the systems in which they operate.

The violence and exploitation of Wright's Chicago may have changed form and tactics into the present, but its nature persists within and without American cities. The deaths of black people at the hands of police continue, as does the damaging effects on black communities. Among many others, a text such as *Native Son* helps twenty-first century audiences to penetrate the endless repeated spectacle of cellphone footage and better imagine and empathize with the lives of people like Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, and Laquan McDonald. Though the novel has fallen from the spotlights of literary criticism, the work that *Native Son* seeks to accomplish—unmasking systems of violent exploitation and challenging readers to break cycles of failed empathy—similarly remains pertinent and illuminating.

Chapter 3: “Ain’t the Law”: Migrant Workers and the Exceptional Spaces of Depression-Era California in *The Grapes of Wrath*

Introduction

In 1939, John Steinbeck’s epic novel *The Grapes of Wrath* rolled over American literary culture with its soulful depiction of dehumanized migrant workers in Depression-era California. The text alternates between the narrative of Tom Joad and his family and “intercalary” chapters or “interchapters” that offer a grander, almost Grecian chorus-like vision of the forces shaping Oklahoma’s and California’s communities. Amid the Dust Bowl and Great Depression, the Joads and countless others are first literally dispossessed from their homes by banks and then gradually from their collective personhood as they migrate to pursue false promises of sustaining labor to the west. Despite the Joads’ status as American citizens, Californian corporations, police, and local communities actively degrade and abuse migrants—through tactics already refined over decades against laborers of color. Death and despair splinters the Joad family during their search for work, climaxing in fugitive status for Tom after he fights back against anti-migrant vigilantes and the stillbirth of his sister’s child. Yet Steinbeck injects a strain of hope with his closing scene in which the grieving mother offers her breast to a starving stranger.

The greatest challenge for the Joads and their peers is the exposure to unregulated violence on the road and in corporate farm camps. These characters are cast both legally and in the public’s mind as dangerous outsiders. In fact, halfway through the narrative, Tom remarks about sheriff’s deputies, “. . . if it was the law they was workin’ with, why,

we could take it. But it *ain't* the law. They're a-workin' away at our spirits. They're a-tryin' to make us cringe an' crawl like a whipped bitch. They tryin' to break us" (*Grapes* 278-9). The notion of "breaking" as a loss of one's sanity or will to life occurs repeatedly through the novel, including as one of its opening motifs. Despite the hardships of imminent eviction, the narrator declares in the first interchapter that tenant families will not yet "break" so easily (3, 4). The forces that do threaten to "break" migrants, however, are police, vigilantes, local government, and corporate policies. Tom's claim that "it *ain't* the law" is not an argument about the nuances of legislation and court rulings. Rather, he means that the treatment of migrant workers is a violation of a greater ideal of justice and moral norms in which Steinbeck compels his readers to believe as well. Even without the vocabulary of political theory, the Joads and other migrants in the novel recognize the irregularities around them setting them apart from the hopes and fairness promised in our national imagination.

The Grapes of Wrath is deeply invested in portraying the nature of the spaces and communities that the Joads and their peers traverse. The representation of these spaces binds together the individual stories of migrant families. The desolate stretches of highway, road camps, and corporate farms are among the spaces that Steinbeck reveals as hostile to migrants' humanity. Importantly, the more concrete, localized spaces of camps and farms are only half the story. The "road" itself becomes a space of exception in the text, where local government, police, and vigilantes can act against migrants at will. While Steinbeck is also concerned with the representation of real, bounded sites of Oklahoma and California, the stretches of space between proper locations congeal into this seemingly endless road-space that is not unlike the trial-filled deserts of biblical tales.

The corporate growers' camps, where migrants can find starvation-level wages, emerge as the novel's symbiotic counterpart to the hazards of the road. These farms capitalize upon the migrants' suffering, using the threat of violence and expulsion back to the starvation on road as a means of labor management. Steinbeck saw as much in his own experience as an erstwhile journalist and researcher. Corporate growers' profit motive, so Steinbeck's narrator argues, is responsible for the treatment of migrants that so closely mirrors the conditions of State torture victims and ghettoized minority groups in my previous two chapters.

In many venues, the author links the organization and use of power in California's agricultural regions with mid-century European fascism. A letter to his editor declares as much (Steinbeck, *Letters* 158). One of Steinbeck's characters in *In Dubious Battle* (1936) remarks during an agricultural labor strike, "They've got this valley organized like Italy," in reference to Benito Mussolini's government (115). Whereas Giorgio Agamben finds the model for his theories in Nazi Germany, Steinbeck already locates a landscape marked by spaces of exception in the United States. Indeed, social scientist Nelson Pichardo describes the nature of the key organization behind migrants' abuse,

The [Associated Farmers of California] was perhaps the most virulent and notorious right-wing American group, with the possible exception of the Ku Klux Klan. . . . the power elite created and mobilized vigilante groups, organized under the auspices of the [Associated Farmers], that engaged in a reign of terror and intimidation targeted against the efforts of the farmworkers to agitate and organize. (25)

Though the power of the Associated Farmers is most intensely organized around their members' labor camps, this group ultimately transforms the entire countryside into a space of exception for migrants. Yet these sites and the violence exercised on the road are not motivated by the immediate desires of the State but by private interests' of the wealthy elite. As a result, this history and Steinbeck's representation of it productively complicates European political theorists emphasis on the power and violence conjured solely by the State.

The novel itself and the author's letters bely how some critics have characterized his work over the decades. For example, F. W. Watt wrote in 1962 that "Steinbeck wrote neither to inspire, nor to provoke, nor to condemn, but to understand and portray honestly an aspect of life he found fascinating and perhaps bewildering" (52). Contrary to this claim, the choice to portray the lives of migrants at all in such a vast, epic narrative implies a need or responsibility—perhaps ethically, perhaps morally, perhaps politically—to *see*, at least in one's imagination the people driven to the roads and placeless spaces of California. I characterize *The Grapes of Wrath* as an epic narrative following Eric Carlson's claim that the novel is "epic in form as well as theme, mainly through the skillful interweaving of the interchapters and the narrative chapters" (755). As Peter Lisca claims, interchapters offer a picture of "social background" and "amplify the pattern of action created by the Joad family" alongside the function of "providing such historical information as the development of land ownership in California" (731). This intertwining allows readers to engage in the very personal experiences represented among the Joad family without losing sight of hundreds of thousands others caught up in the same spaces and circumstances.

Steinbeck's formal choices work to show how these many individual tragedies constitute a crisis in our democratic institutions. The novel's split form bridges the scales of its two concerns, the individual experiences of the Joads as part of a tapestry of thousands of migrants. By using the Joads as an example alongside the more expository narration in the interchapters, Steinbeck creates a sense of a general development, adaptation, and perseverance of the "Okie" population that mirrors the Joads' own growth. Importantly, through the Joads *The Grapes of Wrath* personifies the sign of "dispossessed migrant" and "Okie," undoing the discursive work of Californian institutions that casts these people as unwanted, dangerous outsiders.

The Road and a People in Flight

Before offering access to the specifically bounded spaces of corporate farm camps, Steinbeck introduces readers to the space of the "road." Highways first pose natural challenges for families without money piled into unreliable vehicles. Much of the novel's information about violence against migrants arrives from minor characters or disembodied speakers in interchapters. This relative distance of the Joads from violence, at least until later chapters, creates a sense of looming danger. This suspense and limited depiction prevents the abuse of migrants from becoming quotidian for the reader. In fact, the reader joins the Joads' transition from ignorance to experience of the terror and violence on the roads of California.

Not until they enter California do they encounter more human threats. But eventually the Joads and readers learn that the open spaces of road operate as a zone in

which migrants are abandoned to destitution and violence, especially those whose labor has been exhausted or those who refuse to remain docile workers.

At first, Steinbeck links migrants and the road in a naturalist mode: they find themselves in competition with a harsh, naturalized environment. The Joads start out on what almost seems like a heroic journey or a biblical exodus to a promised land. Though these choices bely the man-made systems that are the true threat to Okies, the author's choices in the first half of the text depict the migrants in a noble light, as would-be conquerors of their own travails. But underlying even this early representation of the road is the fact that Okies have been expelled from established communities. Without the protection of rights and bonds generated through organized communities, migrant workers are dangerously exposed to both the natural and human threats on the road.

As the Joads join the masses of migrants traveling west they enter a state of placelessness. Steinbeck describes the travel of whom he names "a people in flight." He writes,

66 is the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership, from the desert's slow northward invasion, from the twisting winds that howl up out of Texas, from the floods that bring no richness to the land and steal what little richness is there. From all of these the people are in flight, and they come into 66 from the tributary side roads, from the wagon tracks and the rutted country roads. 66 is the mother road, the road of flight. (*Grapes* 118)

Importantly, Steinbeck describes the migrants in this passage as a “people in flight” rather than using a verbal phrase such as “people fleeing.” The Joads and their peers are not a group undertaking an action; they are described as a group defined by this process, as if perennially caught up in “flight” and its consequences of not belonging to any locality or community.

Though Steinbeck offers a noble naturalism in this interchapter passage, he has already foreshadowed the Okies’ tribulations through the rebellious character Muley Graves. Refusing to decamp from his Oklahoma community, Muley promises to fight a guerrilla campaign against “bank men.” To Casy and Tom, he declares,

God knows the lan’ ain’t no good. Nobody been able to make a crop for years. But them sons-a-bitches at their desks, they jus’ chopped folks in two for their margin a profit. They jus’ cut ‘em in two. Place where folks live is them folks. They ain’t whole, out lonely on the road in a piled-up car. They ain’t alive no more. Them sons-a-bitches killed ‘em. (*Grapes* 52)

Muley’s characterization and dialogue seem to strike both Tom and Casy as overwrought, an impression the reader is invited to share. Yet his prophecy proves accurate. Strikingly, however, Muley does not suggest that the steady degradation of migrants’ on the road will begin there. Through this character, the author suggests that the displacement of communities and families is already a deadly blow to their identities as whole, enfranchised people. For the first significant moment in the text, Steinbeck suggests—though readers are left to be credulous or skeptical of their own accord—that this population of migrants is automatically entered into a kind of exceptional death-in-life

when their bonds to family farms is severed. And already from the outset of the Joads' journey, Muley identifies "margin a profit" as the chief cause behind the Okies marginalization and exploitation.

Even without the police oppression and threat of vigilantism they find in California, existence on the road without proper shelter, food, or work takes a toll on migrants. At the end of the interchapter Chapter 21, Steinbeck writes of how the road transforms them: "And the roads were crowded with men ravenous for work, murderous for work" (284). Evicted from communities through which they might collectively manage resources, migrants are thrown into competition against each other for artificially scarce wages. They are driven to the extreme states of "murderous" and "ravenous," but Steinbeck nevertheless centers the desire for productive, fulfilling labor at the heart of their corrupted desires. They are caught up in a condition that becomes mimetic of death, but they retain a form of human dignity in the desire to work. John Reed writes astutely, "Steinbeck is not romanticizing the passions of the Okies, as the constant animal imagery indicates; he is simply demonstrating that they retain a sensuous and vital force that has gone out of the business and managerial class" (Reed 829). He elaborates, "The Okies are not strangers to violence. . . . Steinbeck carefully shows that the Okies live in a climate of toughness and violence and are prepared to respond violently to protect themselves" (836-7). On the one hand, this description marks the oppressed Okies as dangerous. On the other hand, it also hints at their power, if it could be harnessed.

The Grapes of Wrath emphatically depicts the inherent risks for migrants caught up in the placeless spaces of the road. But this exceptional existence entails a further danger of violence from people and institutions invested in, even profiting from enforcing

the Okies' status as outsiders. The police are one such threat, as one character explains to the Joads. He says, "Deputy sheriff comes on by in the night. Might make it tough for ya. . . . Got a law about vagrants" (186). Such vagrancy laws and others of the kind give the color of law to the actions of police, deputies, and vigilantes that Steinbeck highlights in the novel.

Without protections from local communities or State institutions, *The Grapes of Wrath* emphatically insists that violence is near at hand for migrants on the road. At a roadside camp, an unnamed young man explains to Tom and Ma Joad while alluding to police and vigilantes, "They'll pick you right off. You got no name, no property. They'll find you in a ditch, with the blood dried on your mouth an' your nose. Be one little line in the paper—know what it'll say? 'Vagrant foun' dead.' An' that's all. You'll see a lot of them little lines, 'Vagrant foun' dead'" (Steinbeck, *Grapes* 247). Though this character's claim is about the vulnerability of migrants in particular, the text also implies a lack of "name" and property can leave anyone exposed to potential violence. The young man implies that the corpses of agitating migrants will be unceremoniously forgotten for resisting the active enforcement of their outsider, dispossessed status.

The Grapes of Wrath offers multiple accounts of police powers used to prevent dangerous, unwanted Okies from contaminating towns and cities. One of the earliest moments occurs in Chapter 12 in one of the text's many abstract dialogues without quotation marks between unidentified speakers. Steinbeck writes,

This is a free country. Fella can go where he wants.

That's what *you* think! Ever hear of the border patrol on the California line? Police from Los Angeles—stopped you bastards, turned

you back. Says, if you can't buy no real estate we don't want you. Says, got a driver's license? Le's see it. Tore it up. Says you can't come in without no driver's license. (120)

These L. A. police tactics, loaded with the implied threat of force, are portrayed as exceptional, demanding unlawful proof of a right to free passage. The text's representation is based on historical reality. Susan Shillinglaw states, "For a few weeks in early 1936, the Los Angeles Police Department, on its own initiative, threw up a blockade across the California-Arizona border, the 'bum-blockade,' which prevented migrants from crossing into California," lasting for two months (111-2). The criterion for becoming part of the Los Angeles polity is clear: property, which migrants lack by definition. These policies work to contain migrants on the road, a space in which Americans' idealized right to pursue their own socio-economic destiny is actively subverted.

In both *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle* Steinbeck depicts deputies and vigilantes—technically illegitimate but partnered with local police and economic interests—using violence and its threat in order to maintain an oppressive order over migrant bodies. One character says,

"People gonna have a look in their eye . . . Gonna be deputy sheriffs, an' they'll push you aroun'. You camp on the roadside, and they'll move you on. You gonna see in people's face they're scairt. They know a hungry fella gonna get food even if he got to take it. They know that fallow lan's a sin an' somebody' gonna take it. What the hell! You never been called 'Okie' yet." (Steinbeck, *Grapes* 205)

The speaker acknowledges the rationale behind such oppressive tactics, implicating the “people” of these counties not in a fear charged by ignorance but rather in open knowledge of the economic injustice and the entailed suffering when he says, “They know that fallow lan’s a sin.” The text suggests that these particular results of how agricultural production is organized in the state are not arcane or hidden but quite obvious and well-established.

Experienced residents of the federally-funded Weedpatch Camp, a relief camp for migrants, demonstrate a closer knowledge of police tactics than most. As the character Huston says, “You know a vagrant is anybody a cop don’t like. An’ that’s why they hate this here camp. No cops can get in. This here’s United States, not California” (*Grapes* 334). While such vagrancy laws carry the color and form of law, Huston points to their exceptional intent—not to manage vagrancy itself, but to use the sign of “vagrancy” as a tool to constrain undesirable bodies without legitimate cause. The government camp’s saving grace is that it falls under federal jurisdiction, whereas the efforts to oppress and exploit migrant workers arise from local and state-level actors and institutions. Fascinatingly, in this passage Huston marks a firm distinction between California and the United States. Given the context of the previous sentence, he means to note the fact of separate jurisdictions. But his words create a dissonance, suggesting that California—at least the portion in which the characters are living and trying to work—is literally separate from the rest of the country. This comment, like so many others in the novel, heightens the impression that California’s public and private institutions are acting outside the scope of national moral ideals and legal norms.

Steinbeck depicts many deputies as deliberately instigating trouble in migrant camps in order to brutalize and exert power. In an interchapter, his unnamed narrator impersonates a deputy to say, “Talking in the camps, the deputies, fat-assed men with guns slung on fat hips, swaggering through the camps: Give ‘em somepin to think about. Got to keep ‘em in line or Christ only knows what they’ll do. Why, Jesus, they’re as dangerous as niggers in the South! If they ever get together there ain’t nothin’ that’ll stop them” (*Grapes* 236). This action of “keep ‘em in line” with implied violence is the most explicit connection the author will make between the systematic oppression of Okies and other minority labor groups. This passage suggests that the tactics deployed against migrants are not an isolated aberration. By linking Southern blacks and Okies, the author highlights the longer history and refined practice of American economic interests spreading ideologies of dangerous difference.

Indeed, the xenophobic assertion of power is not the only motivation for police and their agents in the novel. Steinbeck suggests another motivation for police to brutalize migrants. The text notes at one point, albeit through the hearsay, that police forces are offered financial incentives for their abuse of the Okies. A character claims, “Sheriff gets seventy-five cents a day for each prisoner, an’ he feeds ‘em for a quarter. If he ain’t got prisoners, he don’t make no profit. This fella says he didn’t pick up nobody for a week, an’ the sheriff tol’ ‘im he better bring in guys or give up his button” (*Grapes* 271). The novel speculates that police are not simply politically aligned with the Associated Farmers, but they have immediate financial incentives as well. In other words, widespread profit motives lay beneath the fear mobilized against migrants to justify the transformation of the road into an active and massive space of exception.

Still, police and sheriffs are not the only institutions involved in the exercise of power over migrants on the road. The California Department of Health, contrary to the sense its title might evoke, used its ordinances to disrupt migrant camps, preventing their permanence and the risk of community organizing. *The Grapes of Wrath* mentions at several points what was a key plot element in the farm laborers' strike battles at the center of *In Dubious Battle*: the role of the Department of Health in ruling what kind of assemblies are a threat to "public health." For example, the author writes, "And then the raids—the swoop of armed deputies on the squatters' camps. Get out. Department of Health orders. This camp is a menace to health" (237). On this subject Shillinglaw reports, "A health official in Fresno declared that migrants were 'incapable of being absorbed into our civilization.' He continued his speech: 'You cannot legislate these people out of California . . . but you can make it difficult for them when they are here'" (122). Like the police, the Department of Health uses facile cause to justify the disruption of the camps of migrants and strikers alike. In Priscilla Wald's monograph *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (2008), she examines how American discourses of public health have been repeatedly used to marginalize and contain minority populations throughout the twentieth-century. What Steinbeck alludes to here shares this legacy. Most significantly, however, this connection to state government implies the existence of a much broader network in the management of these spaces of exception in collusion with the brutish police and corporate farms.

While the novel criticizes the police and other institutions, vigilante activity is the exceptional factor that leads to Jim Casy's death and Tom's flight from the family. The vigilante armies in *The Grapes of Wrath* are grounded in reality. Moreover, vigilantes

and legitimate police forces often worked hand in hand. Pichardo, for example, claims, “The police were often conspicuously absent until after a vigilante raid, and later arrested workers rather than the vigilantes” (36). The space of exception that the roads of California become proves fertile for the embrace of vigilantism and other lawlessness. Describing this phenomenon, Steinbeck writes, “The local people whipped themselves into a mold of cruelty. Then they formed units, squads, and armed them—with clubs, with gas, with guns. We own the country. We can’t let these Okies get out of hand. And the men who were armed did not own the land, but they thought they did” (*Grapes* 283). Here Steinbeck offers his insight into the wedge driven between the non-elite classes of California and the migrant workers coming from the east. The “local people” think of themselves as “owners” of land and thus part of a local hierarchy and community, part of the lowest common denominator of the privilege erected by excluding others. Steinbeck portrays the communities of California as fiercely founded on a negative definition and hostility to otherness despite the inequities already present within them.

A passage from Steinbeck’s earlier *In Dubious Battle* offers a broader, more historical insight into how the author understood the vigilantes that also appear in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Jim, one of two main characters, asks the other, Mac, a committed Communist Party labor organizer, “Mac, who in hell are these vigilantes, anyway? What kind of guys are they?” Mac responds,

“Why, they’re the dirtiest guys in any town. They’re the same ones that burned the houses of old German people during the war. They’re the same ones that lynch Negroes. They like to be cruel. They like to hurt people, and they always give it a nice name, patriotism or protecting the

constitution. But they're just the old nigger torturers working. The owners use 'em, tell 'em we have to protect the people against the reds. Y' see that let's 'em burn houses and torture and beat people with no danger. And that's all they want to do, anyway." (Steinbeck, *Dubious* 131)

Though less explicit in *The Grapes of Wrath*, in this novel he connects the vigilantes organized against agricultural union efforts to the violence used against other exploited or vulnerable groups. Importantly, Mac's explanation captures the construction of difference by the "owners" at the foundation of these predations. His examples of vigilante targets include African Americans who suffered at the hands of "the old nigger torturers." Again, but more directly, Steinbeck links the exceptional structures deployed to manage the labor and bodies of black people with those being used against white migrant workers. Both Steinbeck and many critics have argued that the characters' sentiments in *In Dubious Battle* are not exactly the author's own, so Mac's assessment that vigilantes "like to be cruel" cannot be casually accepted as author's point of view. But whatever vigilantes' motivations are, Steinbeck acknowledges the long tradition of police and private interests acting in capacities that, as Tom Joad says, "ain't the law." On the road, beyond the bounds of established civil communities, police and vigilante power has little to no restriction.

The vigilantism in the novel is reflective of a well-documented history. Carey McWilliams reported in 1942 that "The Associated Farmers were to raise an army of 600 men; the business interests in Modesto were to raise and to drill a similar force. Both groups were organized in such a way that they could be mobilized on two hours' notice" (668). Pichardo states that the Associated Farmers formed and mobilized vigilantes due

to “the threat of farmworker militancy” and “the inability of normal institutional power to combat farmworker unionization efforts” (30).¹¹ He continues to write that the Associated Farmers organization “was responsible for engineering vigilante attacks upon striking farmworkers. It also sought to pass antipicketing ordinances, withhold relief payments to farmworkers, and prosecute union leaders under the Criminal Syndicalism Act” (30). The Associated Farmers’ rationale arises from the threats that unions posed to its members’ profits and power, in not only the agricultural sector but also other industries. A *Fortune* magazine writer in 1939 explained the situation:

[A union’s] mere existence as a strike threat fill California’s growers with panic. Harvesting can’t wait on negotiation. Crops must be picked within a few days of ripening or not at all; and if not at all, the result may be financial ruin. This has created a situation of which thoughtful Californians are far from proud. Vigilante activity against strikers and organizers since 1932 has been bloody and direct. Scores of workers have been injured and so have a number of strikebreakers and deputized townspeople and farmers. California’s industrialized farming can exhibit all the customary weapons of industrial warfare including tear gas, finks, goon squads, propaganda, bribery, and espionage. (“I Wonder” 635)

¹¹ Historian David Selvin writes that the surge in California’s Depression-era vigilantism was a new kind of violence organized specifically against the threat of unions (51). Though the organization and sponsorship of vigilante groups by corporate interests like the Associated Farmers is relatively novel by the 1930s, we see in my first chapter how vigilantism has a deeply ingrained and symbiotic history with the economic and legal institutions in the United States. The representation of vigilantism in texts like *The Parable of the Talents*, *Native Son*, and *The Grapes of Wrath* forms an image of American vigilantes as an exceptional mechanism to maintain power over disenfranchised groups, including those racialized as dangerous others and those dominated for their labor value. Indeed, as each of these texts have suggested, these two categories are far from mutually exclusive.

In contrast to these accounts, Steinbeck's portrayal of vigilantes seems quite subdued. But he nevertheless points to the role of these private citizens in enforcing the exceptional nature of the spaces in which migrants were allowed.

The flood at the novel's conclusion symbolizes the cumulative effect of life on the road upon migrants. Just as Steinbeck earlier presented the road in a naturalistic mode, he returns to a naturalist metaphor with this biblical flood. This kind of choice again obscures the man-made suffering that the flood exacerbates, but the power and devastation of this catastrophe further reveals the absolute exposure of migrants living on the road. In the same vein, a return to this style infuses a sense of the heroic rather than a tragedy of marginalized figures. Steinbeck writes,

Then from the tents, from the crowded barns, groups of sodden men went out, their clothes slopping rags, their shoes muddy pulp. They splashed out through the water, to the towns, to the country stores, to the relief offices, to beg for food, to cringe and beg for food, to beg for relief, to try to steal, to lie. And under the begging, and under the cringing, a hopeless anger began to smolder. And in the little towns pity for the sodden men changed to anger, and anger at the hungry people changed to fear of them. Then sheriffs swore in deputies in droves, and orders were rushed for rifles, for tear gas, for ammunition. Then the hungry men crowded the alleys behind the stores to beg for bread, to beg for rotting vegetables, to steal when they could. (433-4)

The word "to beg" appear six times along with verbs like "to cringe," "to steal," and "to lie." Steinbeck presents migrants, these "sodden men" in a liminal state, mimetic of

death. Along with the literal connotation of wetness, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “sodden” as “rendered dull, stupid, or expressionless” and “characterized by heaviness, dullness, or want of vivacity.” The natural and artificial forces arrayed against Okies on the road makes real the dehumanizing discourses deployed against them. Here Steinbeck indicates a cycle of migrants’ exclusion from proper communities: they are categorized as unwanted and dangerous, and the result of this labeling leads to the smoldering of “a hopeless anger.” Even this great natural catastrophe further feeds into the dynamics established within the road’s zone of exception.

Camps and Corporate Farms

Filled with the terrors of scarcity and violence, the open, seemingly unbounded spaces on the roads of California are nevertheless not the only spaces of exception represented in *The Grapes of Wrath*. The peach orchard that the Joads arrive at late in the novel is one of the few corporate growers’ camps depicted or mentioned in detail in the text. These farms are organized like labor camps, intentionally exploiting an abject population and maintaining order among them through the threat of violence and expulsion. Moreover, these farms are the nexuses around which the treatment of Okies is organized. Yet, before the Joads reach the peach orchard, Steinbeck delivers them to Weedpatch Camp, a federally-funded relief camp. He juxtaposes his representation of these two spaces in order to, through their contrast, demonstrate the nature and motivations of the forces invested in the exceptional treatment of migrant workers.

The federal camp provides migrants with basic sanitary necessities alongside recognition of migrants’ rights in opposition to the unchecked power of local police and

vigilantes on the road. Residence in such camps, however, is not free: the Joads are told that a site costs “a dollar a week” or matching labor (*Grapes* 287). Weedpatch, a camp watchman explains, is governed by an elected Central Committee that sets rules and keeps order among the migrants. In fact, in Steinbeck’s writing journal he kept while composing *The Grapes of Wrath*, he notes Weedpatch camp as a crucial experience of “democratic procedure” for the migrants (*Working* 64). This kind of existence is in stark contrast to the status of Okies as virtual non-citizens, even non-people while they live out on the road.

As a result, however, these camps serve as a great source of animus in the novel. The Central Committee member Thomas explains to Tom Joad, “Well, the Association don’t like the government camps. Can’t get a deputy in there. The people make their own laws, I hear, and you can’t arrest a man without a warrant. Now if there was a big fight and maybe shooting—a bunch of deputies could go in and clean out the camp” (296). Federal jurisdiction protects these camps from the casual abuse of power by local law enforcement, requiring that police respect the constitutional requirement of a warrant before arresting a citizens. But, as Thomas suggests, police are prepared to act in the necessity of an emergency—which would justify the suspension of law—to break up the camp. This comment strongly implies the police’s desire to manufacture such necessity. Even though the government camp’s status works as impediment to the Association-sponsored police activity, Steinbeck implies a continual effort to undermine migrants’ ability to organize themselves into enfranchised communities.

Steinbeck is explicit upon this point. Another character from the government camp explains to Tom the nature of this conflict—also, of course, for the reader’s benefit.

He says of the police and Associated Farmers, “They’re scairt we’ll organize, I guess. An’ maybe they’re right. This here camp is a organization. People there look out for theirselves. . . . We ain’t never had no trouble with the law. I guess the big farmers is scairt of that. Can’t throw us in jail—why, it scares ‘em. Figger maybe if we can gove’n ourselves, maybe we’ll do other things” (297). The lack of specific details in favor of abstract concepts in this speech is perhaps representative of the young speaker’s lack of education and worldliness. He suggests that migrants could “do other things,” as if he cannot imagine the possibilities of an organized community of thousands. Yet this moment of vague abstraction serves a larger purpose in the text; Steinbeck’s choice of less specificity here creates a great open moment of speculation about the potential for what a migrant organization could become—grounded in the “democratic experience” of Weedpatch Camp. But this sense of possibility is exactly what the local Californian interests wish to suppress; the potential to imagine a different existence—and specifically one of resistance to their dispossession—makes Okies dangerous.

In truth, Weedpatch Camp is only a stop-gap, New Deal-style, moderate liberal solution to migrants’ plight. The camp offers limited housing and no opportunities for sustained employment. The communists from *In Dubious Battle*, for example, would certainly demand more. But Steinbeck emphasizes what he portrays as the core value of the camp: its status as a space of law and respect for human dignity. Thus, Weedpatch Camp exists in the narrative not as an idealized goal but as a stark contrast to the treatment of migrants in corporate farm camps.

Earlier in the novel, Steinbeck foreshadows the ill-intent behind large agricultural labor camps. A man on the road explains to the Joad family the exploitative labor

recruitment and management tactics. He describes how corporate farmers mass advertise a limited number of jobs to thousands desperate for work as a strategy to keep labor readily available and wages depressed. He states, “The more fellas he can get, an’ the hungrier, less he’s gonna pay” (190). Corporate farmers’ logic is that when workers become more pressed for survival, they will be more amenable to worse labor conditions and wages. The same “ragged man” further explains how this system affected him and his family. He says,

“I tried to tell you fellas,” he said, “Somepin it took me a year to find out. Took two kids dead, took my wife dead to show me. But I can’t tell you. I should of knew that. Nobody couldn’t tell me, neither. I can’t tell ya about them little fellas layin’ in the tent with their bellies puffed out an’ jus’ skin on their bones, an’ shiverin’ an’ whinin’ like pups, an’ me runnin’ aroun’ tryin’ to get work. . . . ‘Them children died a heart failure.’” (190)

At first caught up in the desperation to feed his family, this man could not see the futility of his labor. Though he tries to warn the Joads of the trap of survival that they will enter in the corporate farming system, he admits that nobody can “tell you” the truth to an extent that migrant workers might escape this double-bind. Even conjuring the images of his dead wife and children as an example are not enough to sway migrants away from the perils of California. With little resources, the Joads and other migrants cannot risk turning back east. Of course, this moment in the text serves two purposes: to highlight the awful choices facing migrants in these growers’ camps and to call readers’ attention to the stakes of migrants’ lives.

More secondhand details of life in farm camps emerges throughout the text before the Joads arrive at one themselves. Two characters in the government relief camp discuss that conditions they endured while working at a cattle company compound. One “sad boy” says, “Honest to God, they got a cop for ever’ ten people. Got one water faucet for ‘bout two hundred people.” This comparison between the number of cops and faucets highlights the priorities of such sites: armed labor management over hygiene and health. The other man replies, “You ain’t got to tell me. I was there. They got a block of shacks—thirty-five of ‘em in a row, an’ fifteen deep. An’ they got ten crappers for the whole shebang. An’, Christ, you could smell ‘em a mile.” Though this description is only one example, the novel clearly suggests that it is representative of a number of corporate camps. Then the second speaker continues, “One of them deputies give me the lowdown. . . . He says, ‘Give people hot water, an’ they gonna want hot water. Give ‘em flush toilets, an’ they gonna want ‘em.’ He says, ‘You give them goddamn Okies stuff like that an’ they’ll want ‘em’” (333). Again, the author leaves a comparison to the community and protections of the federal camp and the near complete lack of these qualities in other spaces where migrants, according to local authorities, properly belong.

The Joads eventually learn firsthand about corporate growers’ camps after they have to leave Weedpatch Camp in order to find more sustainable work. The account in Chapter 26 is one of the most detailed accounts of a specific location since the first one hundred pages set in Oklahoma. They find themselves ominously escorted by police to a “Hoopers Ranches, Incorporated” peach orchard. At the compound “high wire gate” guarded by two men with shotguns awaits them. Steinbeck writes that “Tom saw a line of men standing in the ditch beside the road, saw their mouths open as though they were

yelling, saw their shaking fists and their furious faces” (368). As another deputy checks the Joads into the new camp, he warns, “Now you look here. We don’t want no trouble with you. Jes’ do your work and mind your own business and you’ll be alright” (369). In these few pages the text already creates an atmosphere of hostility in this camp. The police gather migrants on the road and lead them directly to the orchard, as if to prevent migrants from lingering around the local town on other private and public lands. The security and apparent unrest around the compound points to the risk of violent conflict without yet elaborating upon its factors. The purpose of armed guards is initially ambiguous: whether to keep trespassers out or to keep laborers in line within the camp.

The family’s assigned living quarters prove barely fit for human habitation. Steinbeck writes, “Ma opened the door of the house and stepped inside. The floor was splashed with grease. In the one room stood a rusty tin stove and nothing more. The tin stove rested on four bricks and its rusty stovepipe went up through the roof. The room smelled of sweat and grease” (369). The shack more resembles an animal den than a human domicile. The text’s emphasis on “sweat and grease” characterizes this space as one of bodily residues, an amalgam of both human sweat and non-human animal grease, suggesting a loss of distinction between human and animal in this space. Just as the excess grease stains the room after the consumption of animal products, Steinbeck leaves readers’ with the impression that human laborers, too, have been bodily consumed here. Even though Ma tries to put the shack in a good light for her family, Steinbeck writes, “A fear had fallen on them” to capture the rising though still subdued tension the Joads are discovering here (369). This decidedly untidy space without sufficient hygienic facilities is a sharp, intentional contrast to what the Joads encountered at the Weedpatch camp.

Here Okies are laboring, unruly bodies, while in the government camp they were treated as dignified citizens deserving of mutual respect.

Steinbeck communicates much of the orchard camp's nature through his description of its atmosphere. Though this method of representation effectively shares the Joads' experience with readers, the novel still does not offer quite a full picture of these sites. Offering more historical detail, Shillinglaw summarizes, "Shacks were often substandard. A toilet might be shared by fifty workers, and separate male and female facilities did not exist. Communal cooking facilities were scarce. Families were crowded into one room hovels" (121). *Fortune* magazine further reports,

They live under physical conditions ranging from the fairly tolerable to the terribly bad. Most of California's growers supply either tent space or permanent shelter on their own land . . . Some growers' camps are well built and equipped, but the average is poor. The last reports of the state Division of Immigration and Housing, which since 1933 has had only three full-time inspectors for the job of examining over 8,000 public and private camps, rate almost a third of them as "bad"—i.e., either poorly equipped or poorly policed. A typical big grower's camp, not a "bad" one, consists of frame cabins arranged in rows, with a water line between every two rows. There would be communal bathhouses, perhaps flush toilets or perhaps a few earth-pit privies. The cabins rent for from \$1 to \$10 a month, and are furnished typically with a wood- or gas-burning stove, cots or pallets, and a water pail. But not even the big growers provide housing for more than part of their peak labor

load. Many of the migrants live in dirty roadside tourist camps, labor contractors' camps, privately run tenting grounds, where the rents may be as high or higher but the equipment is more primitive. Some live in squatters camps. ("I Wonder" 624)

This article indicates that there was far more variance than Steinbeck depicts among the kinds of camps that large farms used to accommodate their labor force. Yet the author's choice to focus on the Joads' particular experience in the orchard camp is crucial for enabling readers' imaginative access to these sites. He offers an affective experience that the audience is invited to join as a participant.

In the orchard Steinbeck initially depicts the Joads' labor as exuberant and hopeful, but the camp takes on a pallor as the narration continues. Their interaction with the peaches themselves is nearly joyful (*Grapes* 370). Yet, exhausted by their meticulous work, they discover the disappointment that their untrained labor earns them a despicably low wage (371). At the end of the day's work, Steinbeck writes of the Joads, "They emerged from the orchard into the dusty street between the red shacks. The low yellow light of kerosene lanterns shone from some of the doorways, and inside, in the half-gloom, the black shapes of people moved about. At the end of the street a guard still sat, his shotgun resting against his knee" (377). This twilight scene echoes an image of the underworld or a connection to Plato's allegory of the cave. The expression "half-gloom" characterizes this passage, implying that even after only a day working at the corporate farm, the Joads slipped into a state in which they can only partially perceive the world around them. The low light and "black shapes of people" suggests that the family is entering a space of ephemeral, not-quite-real people in which the shadows and silhouettes

of other laborers are perhaps indistinguishable. At this moment they cannot see the other workers as they see themselves; this metaphor suggests a dehumanizing compartmentalization of the laborers in the farm where they are not fully realized human beings and fellow citizens but interchangeable, wraith-like entities. Not only does this passage suggest that the Joads are being cut off from the other migrants around them, but it also foretells how the Joads themselves could become only the “black shapes of people.” Yet, of course, the only identifiable figure in this passage is the armed guard at the end of the street. The security apparatus remains distinct even when the population of workers becomes a hazy amalgam.

A later moment reveals the true purpose for the camp’s security. In the evening as Tom takes a walk through the compound, he overhears a conversation between two guards about tactics for managing the camp’s laborers. Steinbeck writes,

“We won’t have no job if it comes too easy,” Mack said.

“We’ll have a job, all right. These goddamn Okies! You got to watch ‘em all the time. Things get a little quiet, we can always stir ‘em up a little.” (*Grapes* 378)

The first speakers’ words suggest that the guards are actually in a similarly precarious situation as the migrant workers. He offers a glimpse into how the agricultural economy benefits from his relative vulnerability as a laborer as well. But ultimately Mack serves as Steinbeck’s straw man from the ensuing tirade. The second speaker reveals a seemingly contradictory prejudice against “these goddamn Okies” and acknowledgement that the necessity of surveillance and control of migrants is partly manufactured by guards and

their corporate managers. In other words, migrant workers are only a threat when they are made so.

The peach orchard and other growers' camps are not sites as extreme as torture chambers and concentration camps. Steinbeck seems to limit his depiction, as if he were hesitant to portray his characters "breaking" rather than emphasizing their deep strength. But all of these spaces retain an exceptional character organized around the management of unruly or supposedly unwanted bodies with the underlying intent of exploiting their labor.

The Making of "Okies"

The stakes of *The Grapes of Wrath* is the violence and suffering visited upon the migrant population. The road and corporate camps are sites of violence, both promised and delivered. The author, however, does not naturalize this violence but depicts how it is mobilized via a range of discourses practiced in the novel. The displaced people of *The Grapes of Wrath* are a tough and hardy lot. But, as the novel demonstrates, their literal dispossession along with the disregard for their humanity is bound to their very categorization and treatment as "migrants" and "Okies" who by definition lack proper homes and communities.

Several dialogues and expositions highlight the legal and political function of migrants' placelessness on the road. By keeping migrants in this kind of perpetual suspension without belonging to a specific polity, they are kept from either falling under the umbrella of a town, county's, or state's responsibility or democratic franchise. As one character explains to the other,

“But you jus’ camp in one place a little while, an’ you see how quick a deputy sheriff shoves you along.” . . .

“But what the hell for?”

“I tell ya I don’ know. Some says they don’ want us to vote; keeps us movin’ so we can’t vote. An’ some says so we can’t get on relief. An’ some says if we set in one place we’d get organized.” (Steinbeck, *Grapes* 244)

Here Steinbeck uses the one speaker’s professed ignorance as a foil for the reader’s own naiveté. He claims to not know the answer to “what the hell for?”, yet proffers three interlinked explanations for readers’ benefit. Local institutions are invested in denying migrant workers the political influence of the vote or community organization while also abrogating any obligation for the basic well-being for non-residents. In truth, the text implies speaker does “know” the facts on the ground. His statement does not reflect a lack of knowledge but an incredulity toward the inhumanity offered to migrant workers.

The word “migrant” itself is a slippery term. Shillinglaw points to its two conflicting connotations as bodies in either perpetual or temporary movement, looking for a place in which to settle and make residence (Shillinglaw 114). She suggests that the migration of whites to California from the east prompted a particular crisis for the established system of temporary, vulnerable labor in the state’s agricultural sector. The prevailing logic at the time was that, “The Joads are part of a *migration*—they were in California to stay, while the Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican field-workers were *migratory* and thus deportable” (original emphasis, 115). The influx of white migrants creates a crisis within this category of exploitable laborers, which was once primarily

populated by people of color. The inappropriate inclusion of whiteness in this category both threatens the privileges of whiteness and the accepted mistreatment of laborers of color. Furthermore, the westward movement of displaced farmers marked an influx of *families* over the easier to manage labor pool of lone males (“I Wonder” 627). These facts perhaps in part precipitated Steinbeck’s own interest as a fairly moderate liberal who in his writing career does not display the same deep, sustained empathy for people of color as he does for the Okies.

In the interchapter Chapter 21, Steinbeck offers insight into the discourses among Californian communities that work to legitimize the exceptional treatment of migrant workers. In this abstract, disembodied exchange, he writes,

They said, These goddamned Okies are thieves. They’ll steal anything.

They’ve got no sense of property rights.

And the latter was true, for how can a man without property know the ache of ownership? And the defending people said, They bring disease, they’re filthy. We can’t have them in the schools. They’re strangers. (283)

In this passage, Steinbeck undermines the discriminatory logic utilized against Okies and other migrant workers. He explicitly calls out the fallacy of expecting dispossessed people ejected from the normal sphere of capitalist American life to continue upholding those norms. In this commentary Okies are actively excluded from communities in which values like property rights are upheld, yet the reason articulated for this exclusion is that migrants do not conform to the communities which they are not permitted to join. Moreover, Steinbeck’s reference to the “ache of ownership” is partially ironic when this

affect and the stakes of migrants' lives are juxtaposed: from the novel's moral perception, fear for one's property and fear of starvation are not comparable. Yet this "ache" is also an earnest expression; despite the moral failures it entails.

The text further highlights the dehumanizing of Okie migrants in the novel when two disembodied speakers realize they are less valuable to land owners than their horses. One speaker says, "Fella had a team of horses, had to use 'em to plow an' cultivate an' mow, wouldn' think of turnin' 'em out to starve when they wasn't workin'." The other replies, "Them's horses—we're men" (434). The text offers no further explanation; the juxtaposition alone of well-kept livestock and neglected human beings makes Steinbeck's case about the circumstances in California. The comparison here links migrants and horses for their shared capacity for labor. But the text implies that horses are valuable property that must be privately maintained, whereas migrants are treated as responsible for their own survival. Furthermore, at this moment in the novel there is a surplus of migrant labor that requires little to no private investment to maintain its usefulness for corporate growers. In other words, a few migrant deaths would not lead to a labor shortage.

Steinbeck introduces both the reader and the Joads to the semantics of the slur "Okies" once they cross into California. A character explains, "Well, Okie us' ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you're a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you're scum. Don't mean nothing itself, it's the way they say it" (205-6). This moment is interesting in how Steinbeck and his character feel the need to elucidate the meaning of this epithet. Such charged discriminatory language is not an unfamiliar feature of writing by minority authors like Richard Wright in *Native Son*. But the idea of an ethnic slur that

applies so forcefully and categorically to white American citizens is perhaps alien to these characters and many of Steinbeck's white readers. In fact, the strategies and discourses applied to Okie migrant workers parallel those used against migrants and other laborers of color.

In contrast to what Steinbeck intends as the naturalistic comparison of migrant workers to the noble survival of animal life, Californians cast Okies as animalized humans. One man declares, "Well, you and me got sense. Them goddamn Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain't human. A human being wouldn't live like they do. A human being couldn't stand it to be so dirty and miserable. They ain't a hell of a lot better than gorillas" (221). Here Steinbeck slyly incorporates "gorilla" as a discriminatory metaphor, linking the same kind of images and discourse used to degrade African Americans as those used against Okies. These lines are also some of the most explicit articulation of the animus directed at Okies, directly articulating the attitudes that Steinbeck observed in Californian locals. Yet, though these sentiments capture how migrants are cast as subhuman, the speaker here overlooks how Okies are, in fact, compelled to live in the conditions that he finds so deplorable.

Ultimately, the migrant Okies are rendered into similarly racialized categories as past populations of non-white migrant workers. Like the alien workers before, concurrent, and after them, the Okies are treated as unwanted, dangerous "foreigners." Again Steinbeck explores the kind of language used to dehumanize the Joads and their peers through abstract, generalized interchapter dialogue. He writes,

We got to keep these here people down or they'll take the country. They'll take the country.

Outlanders, foreigners.

Sure, they talk the same language, but they ain't the same. Look
how they live. Think of us folks'd live like that? Hell, no! (236)

Here the author offers another example of the kind of discourse and categories Californians used to dehumanize and disenfranchise migrants. The speakers establish a binary opposition between “we” and “they” in the first sentence here. In order to erase the obvious affinities between white American citizens from Oklahoma and California and diminish possible sympathy, the speakers use the labels “outlanders” and “foreigners” to suggest an insurmountable difference between the two populations outlined in the novel. Even the admission that both groups speak English is quickly put aside in favor of a naturalized perception of Okies as a spectacle of subhuman filth that overlooks their material and historical circumstances that Steinbeck outlines in the text.

Also present in this passage is the apocalyptic fear that migrants will “take the country,” that their presence, were it to become empowered, would culminate in a kind of revolution. This sentiment clearly draws on anti-communist fears that the Associated Farmers and others stoke as a means to undercut organized farm labor that did, on occasion, call for revolutionary goals. Ironically, however, migrant workers were by and large not involved with labor organizations during this period. Local unions were not organized for the unskilled labor that migrants largely found. While “Mexicans and Filipino workers had their private organizations and occasionally caused the growers trouble,” these groups were not open to white workers (“I Wonder” 633). Thus, this rhetoric of opposition and spectacle works as a preemption, an effort to maintain and

justify the vulnerability of migrant workers in order to reduce their capacity to organize effectively.

This discourse of hyperbolic spectacle obscures the simple fact, as Steinbeck would have readers believe, that Okies are primarily interested in a sustainable income and basic security for their families. Alongside the illumination of how such hateful rhetoric is deployed, this passage slyly suggests links between the treatment of Okie migrants and other disenfranchised groups. In fact, Californians know exactly what it means to treat people as “outlanders” and “foreigners” because of the systematic exclusion of people of color and immigrant labor from these same communities. Even the fear of losing one’s “country” is closely tied to discourses of racial contamination used for centuries to exclude African Americans, Native Americans, and other minority groups from the fullness of American life.

On the one hand, the dehumanization of Okies enables the more efficient exploitation of their labor. On the other hand, Steinbeck’s characters suggest that Californian business interests do have something to fear from the dispossessed migrants living on roadsides. In Steinbeck’s earlier novel *In Dubious Battle*, the Communist strike organizer Mac says, “There aren’t any rules a hungry man has to follow” (223). His statement is both a natural and political observation. He observes the fact of life already so well modelled in literary figures like Victor Hugo’s Jean Valjean that the will to survive, when threatened, is an overriding motivation. A hungry man, however, is also a potential threat to legal and social norms precisely because, disenfranchised by the world ruled by these norms, he loses the obligation to honor them.

An Economy of Exploitation

Despite the vitriol and violence turned upon migrants in the novel, their presence is utterly necessary to the profits of corporate farmers. As Steinbeck explains in a 1938 letter, “The states and counties will give them nothing because they are outsiders. But the crops of any part of this state could not be harvested without these outsiders” (*Letters* 158). The novel depicts how migrants are simultaneously caught between their status as abused outsiders and the necessity of their labor’s exploitation in California’s system of agricultural capitalism. But the hordes of hungry, agitating migrants—nearly three hundred thousand through the decade—also created circumstances in which “Men of property were terrified for their property” (“I Wonder” 632; Steinbeck, *Grapes* 282). Steinbeck’s depiction of California centers labor and profit near to the heart of the novel’s spaces of exception.

In the novel’s opening act, Steinbeck is initially ambiguous in his portrayal of the West’s agricultural economy. Interchapter characters debate the role of human responsibility in the “monstrous” Depression economy. A bank man claims, “[Banks] breathe profits; they eat the interest on money. If they don’t get it, they die the way you die without air, without side-meat. It is a sad thing, but it is so. It is just so,” continuing to explain, “When the monster stops growing, it dies. It can’t stay one size” (32). When the unidentified tenant farmer does not yet submit to the bank man’s argument, the dialogue continues,

“It’s not us, it’s the bank. A bank isn’t like a man. Or an owner with fifty thousand acres, he isn’t like a man either. That’s the monster.”

“Yes, but the bank is only made of men.

“No you’re wrong there—quite wrong there. The bank is something else than men. . . . The bank is something more than men, I tell you. It’s the monster. Men made it, but they can’t control it.” (33)

This moment in the text remains ambiguous about the true nature of “banks” for several chapters until the narrator’s tone becomes more stringent in describing the wealthy elite of California. The banks’ defender attempts to naturalize the evictions and exploitation of workers in a manner strikingly similar to Steinbeck’s naturalistic descriptions of the migrants. The matter-of-fact explanation presents a world incapable of change even though the monstrous nature of banks and great landowners is acknowledged. Although the tenant farmer quibbles with the bank-man, Steinbeck leaves the latter with the final word. As the novel continues, Tom Joad and Jim Casy discover the necessity of overturning this illusion of the “monster’s” control along with the reader. But the motif of the wealthy elite’s monstrosity remains, not as an inevitable force but a writhing antagonist.

The problems of the farming economy’s inequity become more stark as the Joads enter California. They meet two travelers on the road and strike up a conversation. One speaker explains to them about the nature of the land around them: “She’s a nice country. But she was stole a long time ago. . . . you never seen such purty country . . . But you can’t have none of that lan’. That’s a Lan’ and Cattle Company. An’ if they don’t want ta work her, she ain’t gonna git worked. You go in there an’ plant you a little corn, an’ you’ll go to jail!” (205). Throughout the novel, the land of the West is depicted as something stolen from human livelihood and dignity for the sake of profits. Land belongs

to agricultural corporations, and indigenous right and even the ideals of Manifest Destiny are replaced with mass legal institutions dedicated to protecting corporate profits.

Surplus labor and manufactured wage scarcity are at the center of the crises in *The Grapes Wrath* once the Joads cross into California. The narrator describes how large growers have advertised for far more labor than their fields and orchards require: “And this was good, for wages went down and prices stayed up. The great owners were glad and they sent out more handbills to bring more people in. And wages went down and prices stayed up. And pretty soon now we’ll have serfs again” (283). This scheme exploits what Steinbeck represents as the good faith of Okies’ desire to work. And as another minor character remarks, “There’s always red agitators just before a pay cut. Always. Goddamn it, they got me trapped” (295). This man’s one-word sentence of “Always” implies that he has caught on to the ruse and is sharing his revelation with the Joads and the reader: the shadow of labor unrest is used as an excuse to further depress wages.

The environment of scarcity then disrupts the potential for solidarity among migrants and other labor organizers. And as Shillinglaw notes, the dangers posed by these deflated wages are quite real to the Okies: “the average yearly wage for a migrant worker in California was \$450. The minimum cost for an adequate diet for a family of four, according to the Department of Agriculture was \$475” (172-3). Historian David Selvin summarizes how this treatment of Okies was, in fact, the dominant model of Californian agriculture for decades. He writes, “As centralization increased, demands for large quantities of seasonal labor mounted. Growers joined forces in area and commodity associations to recruit and direct armies of farm workers. Through such labor pools, they

were able to control competition for labor. They set and maintained wage rates, shared expenses of recruiting, transportation, housing” (61). With such levels of control, companies had the ability to increase the quality of life for their work force, but they instead turned toward further profit.

Steinbeck assigns much responsibility for the moral failings of California in this moment on large land property-holders’ lack of community and disconnect from the land. In the sweeping voice of his interchapter narrator, Steinbeck explicates, “And it came about that owners no longer worked on their farms. They farmed on paper; and they forgot the land, the smell, the feel of it, and remembered only that they owned it, remember only what they gained and lost by it” (*Grapes* 232). The author depicts this transformation of land in owners’ minds into primarily a source of profit as part and parcel of the crimes committed against migrants and the other poor in the novel. The landscape becomes a matter of accounts and commodities rather than a source of life and livelihood. The text implies that a more visceral connection to land would be an antidote to these owners’ moral failings.

Though *The Grapes of Wrath* does indict local police and corporate farms without reservation, the remainder of the novel’s political and economic critique becomes somewhat vague, overlooking the networks of power and wealth that also benefited from the exceptional treatment of migrant workers. In this context, Shillinglaw is correct when she claims, “While Steinbeck etches the faces of migrants in readers’ minds, he blurs the bodies of the opposition—power is sinister, nameless, faceless, dangerous, and hard to identify” (84). The author implicates “owners,” police, and local citizens in crimes against migrants, but he lays ultimate responsibility on abstractions like “the monster” or

“the crime” or even on to the elusive “we,” that inclusive pronoun that seems to really only include the middle-class and elites in the words of Steinbeck’s narrator.

In truth, the Associated Farmers that Steinbeck loosely centers as the cause of migrants’ misfortune was not an entity limited to corporate farm-owners. The network out of which arose the Associated Farmers was spread throughout California. Pichardo states that the Associated Farmers’ contributors and membership included state and local officials (26-7). Moreover, he claims, “Support for the [Associated Farmers] was not limited to the agricultural elite. In California many other industries were economically and ideologically linked to agriculture. These included packing companies, ginning combines, transportation, power and finance companies” (28). Pichardo lists two dozen other major industry and banking corporations to then summarize that “The industrial supporters of the [Associated Farmers] were among the largest corporations in California” (28). McWilliams reports in further depth,

The Associated Farmers had organized in Stanislaus County in 1936. Most of the money for the organization had come from the banks, hotels, oil companies, farm implement houses, and the canneries. . . . they decided to stage a ‘mobilization’ [in response to threat of further strikes]. Three thousand people assembled in the football stadium at the junior college and at the conclusion of the meeting rose and repeated the following pledge: “We pledge ourselves for law and order and the right to work.” The speakers at the meeting included the sheriff, the city attorney, an official of the Associated Farmers, the president of the Retail Merchants Association, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the

president of one of the canneries, and representing “the farmers,” Roy Pike, manager of the El Solyo Ranch—one of the largest farm-factories in California. But no one spoke on behalf of labor; no one spoke on behalf of the Okies, although the meeting was being held for their benefit. . . . The leading citizens had mobilized; the little people were put in their place.

(667-8)

Corporate growers frequently turned to local and state government apparatuses to pursue its interests. McWilliams notes one example of this dynamic in a strike of apricot pickers in Yolo and Solano counties. On behalf of growers’ interest, the strike was broken, and McWilliams reports that the county expended \$2,036.09 compared to the “niggardly pittance of \$185.36” spent by the Associated Farmers. He summarizes that “otherwise the entire cost of the action fell upon the general taxpayers of the community. But if the nickel an hour increase had been granted, it would have cost the growers, for the season, about \$66,600” (664-5). *The Grapes of Wrath* creates an impression that the Associated Farmers is a somewhat limited, localized organization that has corrupted the police. But in reality this group was deeply embedded with the economic and political elites of California.

Overall, the novel implies that the state’s economy is structured around the exceptional, extralegal, and inhuman treatment of migrant laborers. Not every industry directly participates in the exploitation of Okies and others, but the wealthy and powerful of California benefit from preventing workers in all sectors from organizing and accessing political and economic empowerment. Steinbeck aligns his readers with the

Joads, leaving them with an embedded call to action—albeit, liberal democratic actions like funding Weedpatch—to counter-act these predatory behaviors.

Conclusion: *The Hope of Wrath*

Although hope is shadowy and ultimately unfilled within the text, Steinbeck maintains an optimism for his characters and his homeland alongside the cynicism of his social critiques. The novel's ending cannot be interpreted otherwise: Rose of Sharon gives her breast to a starving man after delivering her stillborn child to the floodwaters as a testimonial to migrants' ordeals. The author's letters clearly present his intent in this closing scene. To his editor in early 1939 he writes, "The fact that the Joads don't know him, don't care about him, have no ties to him—that is the emphasis" (Steinbeck, *Letters* 178). Lisca describes this moment as the culmination of the novel's action, claiming, "Although the primitive family unit is breaking up, the fragments are going to make up a larger group. The sense of a communal unit grows steadily through the narrative—the Wilsons, the Wainwrights—and is pointed to again and again in the interchapters" (Lisca, "*Grapes*" 743). The cruel forces of the modern world—the "monsters" of finance and classification of masses of people as subhuman are fracturing the familiar lives of tenant farmers and other laborers. But the author finds hope rising from those who have been metaphorically and literally thrown out on the road.

The characterization of migrants is one of the novel's central aesthetic tasks: Steinbeck must find an ethical solution to representing the lives of hundreds of thousands people in his few dozen characters. In a journal entry during the novel's composition, Steinbeck writes, "But my people must be more than people. They must be an over-

essence of people” (*Working* 39). He admits to himself that his characters are indeed representations, an effort to capture in text the experiences and personalities he himself observed. His declaration that his characters “must be more than people” and an “over-essence of people” points to his literary style and much of the novel’s larger ethic. The author does not think of his text as a break from lived reality in favor of some grander aestheticized truth; his characters are both “people” and “more than people.” The Joads portray both a daily, mundane scope of life while also being representative of our national tribulations. This is not an artistic innovation in itself, but what Steinbeck does work toward is to thwart the separation of the purely real and purely representative. While in different manners critics have sought to distinguish moments of realistic depictions of migrant worker normalcy from Steinbeck’s epic vision and social commentaries, the text resists such compartmentalization. *The Grapes of Wrath* presents each individual struggle with the inequities and suffering thrust upon this people in flight as individually epic and significant in their importance.

Steinbeck only offers the silhouette of an answer to the tragedies and injustice done to migrants. But, as Robert DeMott comments, “Like most significant American novels, *The Grapes of Wrath* does not offer codified solutions, but instead enacts the process of belief and embodies the shape of faith” (xxiv). This sense of faith that the text conjures has consistently been linked by critics to Judeo-Christian theology. Yet the biblical parallels and influences do not ultimately emerge as the dominating ethic or theme of the text. By the text’s closing, Steinbeck’s characters emerge from the failings of their church upbringings and their capitalist system to begin viewing the world through the same lens as Steinbeck would have his readers, what Carlson describes as “the

primary symbolic structure, as well as its meaning, is naturalistic and humanistic, not Christian” (749). By the novel’s conclusion, Steinbeck places faith in the adaptability and resilience of the “Okies” to form communities and resist the degradation turned against them.

Though generally lauded in the present by critics as Steinbeck’s greatest text, the initial reception of *The Grapes of Wrath* was far more contentious. On the one hand, “*The Grapes of Wrath* topped best-seller lists in 1939. Readers devoured it. Critics lauded and lambasted it. Everyone in America, it seemed, knew about it” (Shillinglaw 158). On the other hand, some reviewers criticized it as inaccurate propaganda; a few libraries and schools banned the text altogether (Shockley 680). Yet, according to the author, these varied reactions emerge from the intentional design of his narrative. To his editor Pat Covici, Steinbeck writes in a letter, “Through I’ve tried to make the reader participate in the actuality, what he takes from it will be scaled entirely on his own depth or hollowness.” He then explains, “I am not writing a satisfying story. I’ve done my damndest to rip a reader’s nerves to rags, I don’t want him satisfied” (*Letters* 178). Through the novel’s form, he works to affect a reader by entwining his grand historical observations and the very personal tragedies of the Joad family, pressuring his audience into a revealing response.

In the earlier novel *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck suggests a by-now cliché notion that a creature is most dangerous when trapped in a corner. As noted earlier, Mac the communist organizer declares, “There aren’t any rules a hungry man has to follow” (223). This declaration arrives after a scene where striking farm laborers march peacefully on the local town; the narrator states, “The guards were frightened, riots they

could stop, fighting they could stop; but this slow, silent movement of men with the wide eyes of sleep-walkers terrified them. They held to their places, but the sheriff started his car. The motorcycle police moved imperceptibly toward their parked machines” (128). The strikers appear like “sleep-walkers,” an image that today we might compare to the many instances of the walking dead in our contemporary popular culture. Like the Okies, these striking farm laborers have been pressed into a state mimetic of death. But without property or dignity left to lose in this liminal state of personhood, the strikers become all the more dangerous.

The same sentiment emerges multiple times in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Worried over her son’s demeanor toward “bank men,” Ma Joad says to Tom early in the text, “Tommy, don’t you go fightin’ ‘em alone. They’ll hunt you down like a coyote. Tommy, I got to thinkin’ an’ dreamin’ an’ wonderin’. They say there’s a hun’erd thousand of us shoved out. If we was all mad the same way, Tommy—they wouldn’t hunt nobody down—” (77). Ma herself is a step removed from most of the labor organizing figures in the novel, but this moment arrives well before the Joads encounter issues of unions and communists in California. She presages what another character will claim to Tom at Weedpatch Camp: “It’s ‘cause we’re all a-workin’ together. Depity can’t pick on one fella in this camp. He’s pickin’ on the whole darn camp. An’ he don’t dare. All we got to do is give a yell an’ they’s two hundred men out” (357). Ma’s and this character’s words lie in contrast to Muley’s plan in the novel’s opening chapters to wage a solo guerilla harassment campaign against the bank men evicting local tenant farmers. Though Ma’s idea of migrants becoming “all mad the same way” seems to emerge as a kind of momentary fantasy, this is the idea toward which Steinbeck directs the rest of the novel.

The novel's form facilitates the presentation of this idea. While *The Grapes of Wrath* continues to move toward this political ideal of oppressed populations forming communities of organized resistance, Steinbeck also coaxes readers into identifying with this population and recognizing the humanity, in the text, that so many Californians refuse. The novel's interchapters continually magnify the specific, identifiable and empathy-provoking suffering of the Joads to the scales of thousands of other displaced people. The following passage demonstrates this narrative strategy as Steinbeck writes in an interchapter,

I lost my land, a single tractor took my land. I am alone and I am bewildered. And in the night one family camps in a ditch and another family pulls in and the tents come out. The two men squat on their hams and the women and children listen. Here is the node, you who hate change and fear revolution. Keep these two squatting men apart; make them hate, fear suspect each other. Here is the anlage of thing you fear. This is the zygote. For here 'I lost my land' is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate—'We lost *our* land.' The danger is here, for two men are not as lonely as perplexed as one." (151)

Steinbeck uses the words "node," "anlage," and "zygote" to heavily emphasize the positive potential of individuals who have been similarly dispossessed forming new communities. The biological metaphors of "anlage" and "zygote" imply an organic, nearly inevitable nature to the transformation of "perplexed" individuals into larger units. Lisca highlights how these individuals are also the remnants of breaking "primitive family units," marking the transition from family structures like the Joads' (Lisca,

“*Grapes*” 743). Sentiments like these in *The Grapes of Wrath* have been frequently connected to Steinbeck’s personal naturalistic philosophy from the 1930s. For example, in his letters he writes, “For man is lonely when he is cut off. He dies. From the phalanx he takes a fluid necessary to his life” (*Letters* 81). The “phalanx” is an organically formed collective that contrasts notions of rugged American individualism. In other words, the necessity of community is not limited to the dispossessed working class of his novels but required for the healthy survival of all humans—in Steinbeck’s view.

In the first sentence, the disembodied first person voice echoes the story of the Joads and so many other migrants. The source of this voice remains vague, allowing its attribution to be ambiguous and contradictory: this is the voice of the Joads, of the Wilsons, of the Okies—one and all. Even the reader momentarily inhabits the “I.” Ma shares this notion as she encounters the coldness from the clerk at the peach orchard’s company store, succinctly summarizing, “‘I’m learnin’ one good thing,’ she said. ‘Learnin’ it all a time, ever’ day. If you’re in trouble or hurt or need—go to poor people. They’re the only ones that’ll help—the only ones’” (376). Throughout *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck offers collective action and identity as the most effective method to counter organized degradation.

While *The Grapes of Wrath* offers many scenes and images of abjection, the author also litters the text with just as many examples of migrant workers practicing community-formation on different scales. The infrastructure and legal privileges of the federal Weedpatch Camp is one such example: Okies govern themselves and seek to cooperate as much as possible. But Steinbeck suggests even more potently that life on the

road, despite its dangers, is a daily exercise in creating and defending community bonds.

He writes of the ad hoc migrant camps,

Every night a world created, complete with furniture—friends made and enemies established . . . Every night relationships that make a world, established; and every morning the world town down like a circus. . . .

The families learned what rights must be observed. . . .

And the families learned, although no one told them, what rights are monstrous and must be destroyed. (194)

Migrants become practiced in this form of “world-building,” an apt metaphor for the work of transforming roadside camps from hostile spaces of exception into places of community. The language here suggests that, in order to survive, Okies are challenged to rebuild these microcosms of community after they have been outcast from the world they once knew. David Wyatt describes one aspect of this challenge to migrants, writing, “*The Grapes of Wrath* is not just a book about the difficult ‘way’ to California; its subtle rhetoric generalizes the project into the problem of learning to live in existential time” (“Steinbeck’s” 149). Arguing that Steinbeck seeks to make something noble out of the Okies transient communities, Wyatt states, “For what *The Grapes of Wrath* imagines is a world without origins or ends” (148). Critics have repeatedly turned to the turtle from Chapter 3 as the novel’s implied model for migrant survival. The creature carries its home on its back, and even when it is almost crushed by a truck, it is not defeated in its drive to survive (Steinbeck, *Grapes* 15). Steinbeck seems to suggest that Okies must remain equally resilient and adaptive, finding and forming communities wherever their lives take them.

Steinbeck's vision in *The Grapes of Wrath* for the positive potential for a politics of adaptable, just community formations is deeply rooted in naturalistic, organic metaphors. The narrator of the novel's interchapters indicates the flawed bank men and "machine men" as antithetical to the dignity of both the land and other people. In one example, Steinbeck writes, "But the machine man, driving a dead tractor on land he does not know and love, understands only chemistry; and he is contemptuous of the land and of himself" (*Grapes* 116). The tractor driver views the world in uninspired empirical terms on behalf of the financial interests of owners who are even more severely separated from the natural spaces that, in the novel's perspective, nurture just communities.

This idea is crucial to the novel's vision. Throughout the text Steinbeck calls, albeit vaguely and metaphorically, for displaced tenant farmers and corporate growers of California alike—as Shillinglaw points out—to reconceive of how a reverence for the landscape around them is intertwined with a politics and economy of respect for human beings (111). Robert Searway declares that "Steinbeck reveals that individuals who come to uphold regional values that protect the environment against economic exploitation serve as the antidote to encroaching global forces and exemplify a potential way to navigate conflicting economic perspectives" (175). Ultimately, however, Steinbeck's political vision is not for the Okies, certainly not alone. His narrative calls upon his audience altogether to find just relationships with each other and the world around them.

The Grapes of Wrath alone did not particularly alter the real lives of the migrants across California or the American political landscape. In fact, the economic stimulation of the Second World War changed Okies' circumstances more than anything else. Selvin reports that war industries absorbed much of the white migrant workforce, and "before

long, the Mexican worker return to California's fields" (Selvin 67). Shillinglaw states that its impact had not "changed wages substantially, or caused more government camps to be built, or eased labor/management tensions" (Shillinglaw 174). But, as the intertwining of the novel's narrative and expository chapters demonstrate, Steinbeck's text is not simply a directed attempt at political intervention. Though the Joad family journey functions as the lynchpin of the novel's form, through the grand social critique of the interchapters the author attempts to interweave the particular historical circumstances of the Okies into the broader narratives of California and the United States. On the one hand, the text models the empathy for migrants and laborers so lacking within Depression-era Californian communities. Indeed, Steinbeck demands that his readers refuse the dehumanization of his characters. On the other hand, he also calls upon readers to consider how the dramas of the human lives and spaces around them—especially those socially cast as unwanted or disreputable—are bound up in the larger destiny of our nation.

Chapter 4: Tastes Like Chicken: Disposable Bodies in Corporate Bioscience Spaces in *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake*

Introduction

In 1953, Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth published their serial novel *Gravy Planet* as *The Space Merchants*.¹² This piece of satirical science fiction tells the story of an advertising executive, Mitch Courtenay, who works for the preeminent advertising agency in a future dystopian version of the United States. In this future, a corporate oligarchy has stratified society into two sectors, the corporate elite and the exploited laboring masses of “consumers.” The plot of a radical underground movement casts Courtenay unwillingly into the underclass; through his experience among consumers, his eyes are opened to the injustices of his world. The novel begins from Courtenay’s privileged perspective of the world as a corporate utopia, but after he is kidnapped to work in a biotech plantation, the exploitation of consumers becomes self-evident to both him and the reader. Through hyperbolic satire, *The Space Merchants* raises questions about the nature of real corporate America and its bioscience.

In 2003, Margaret Atwood published *Oryx and Crake*, the first novel of her darkly satirical science fiction *MaddAddam* trilogy (2009, 2013). Her protagonist, Jimmy,

¹² The edition I use as my primary text for *The Space Merchants* is the 1984 *Venus, Inc.* Doubleday edition that includes an original version of the novel and Pohl’s sequel *The Merchants’ War* (1984), written after Kornbluth’s death. A revised “21st Century” edition was released in 2011 which includes a number of changes. In the Preface to the revised edition of *The Space Merchants*, Pohl writes that “there are a few minor scientific or logical mistakes in [the original text], which I have tried to repair for this edition” (xii). While Pohl has also added a few new passages to the text and updated references from corporations in the 1950s to their contemporary successors, the major details and the plot remain the same. A post by Pohl’s staff to his personal blog also states as much (“More”). From my reading of these editions, these alterations do not affect the spirit of the text, but the original edition remains the focus of my literary analysis.

navigates a post-apocalyptic landscape after a global pandemic engineered by his best friend, Crake, has killed the majority of the human population. The focalizer in this non-linear third-person narrative, Jimmy mournfully reflects on the loss of human culture as he lives among the “Crakers,” his friend’s genetically engineered humans designed to be cooperative, non-wasteful, and non-violent so as to replace the doomed human species. Through Jimmy’s laments the reader learns that his former world is a socio-economically striated dystopia. Before Crake’s plague, bioscience corporations dominate society and exploit the underclass living in the squalid “pleeblands,” the overpopulated urban sprawl of the former U.S. The linear post-apocalyptic and non-linear dystopian memories are intertwined in the narrative to reveal both Crake’s motivation for purging the cruel and irrational human race from the world and how the practices of the unregulated corporate bioscience laboratory enables his genocidal rationale.

A revolution in bioscience began in the period of *The Space Merchants*’s publication and rapidly expanded in the fifty years between this novel and Atwood’s. The 1950s saw the discovery of DNA structure, and in 1972 the first recombinant DNA molecules were created, heralding new possibilities for designing life forms in the laboratory. In 1997, Dolly the sheep was the first mammal cloned from adult cells. Following this breakthrough, in 2014 human cells have been successfully cloned from adult cells. The first lab “grown” hamburger was cooked and eaten at a London news conference in 2013. The capacity to manipulate and create life has reached radical new levels and continues to be explored. Under the auspices of such new technologies, these novels imagine how commercial laboratories transform complex life forms into new kinds of objectified flesh that has no protection under the law or social norms.

While modern labs are regulated by laws and experimental ethics, the texts' fictional sites of corporate bioscience have circumvented such legal and ethical norms. These labs operate as spaces of exception, mediated only by the desire for wealth and power. Experimental subjects become exposed to the unmediated power of techno-science; corporate agents in these dystopias interact with other human and non-human bodies not as "people" or even "animals" but as fleshly commodities to which anything may be done without consequence. This approach to bodies as flesh is a practice that relies on both linguistic and material practices. Unlike the fictional torture chambers, ghettos, and work camps analyzed in previous chapters, these sites of corporate bioscience not only seize and abuse bodies but also manufacture flesh, which is marked by its very nature as exploitable. The category of "flesh" becomes mimetic of death.

Pohl, Kornbluth, and Atwood figure these exceptional lab spaces as the nexus out of which emerges an exploitative paradigm that the corporate elite apply to their broader dystopian worlds. Once Pohl and Kornbluth's protagonist witnesses how a corporation grows monstrous chicken flesh on a biotech plantation, the text reveals how the corporate oligarchy similarly manages the population of workers and consumers as an objectified mass of flesh. Just as plantation workers carefully manage the growth of the lab-created creature "Chicken Little's" flesh, so do the corporate elite use modern scientific techniques of population management on consumers.

Within *Oryx and Crake*, the absence of ethical regulation allows corporate bioscience to treat the world populace as non-consenting subjects in markets of illness and treatments. This dynamic culminates in Crake's apocalypse, in which distinctions between the "lab" and the "world" collapse to the point at which Jimmy reflects, "The

whole world is now one vast uncontrolled experiment” (228). While the phrase “uncontrolled experiment” suggests a laboratory run amok out of scientists’ control, the notion of an experiment without control is oxymoronic. By definition, experiments require a control element and an observer; thus, the word “uncontrolled” both plays into a science fiction conceit of the danger of unintended consequences and a sense of unregulated, unchecked scientific power. The experiment is “uncontrolled” because without some kind of ethical oversight, Crake has enacted his murderous vision and will on the world. Thus, Atwood suggests that the lab as a space of exception operates as a concentrated model to be imitated and exported across the globe.

These paradigm shifts in modern bioscience and American fiction’s depiction of corporate labs as potential spaces of exception requires a critical approach not yet adequately present in Americanist literary criticism and science studies. Science studies scholars like Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour pay heed to the ways through which laboratory spaces and scientific discourses can be used to excuse violence and exploitation. Yet, unlike the novelists under focus here, these fields—by their nature as academic disciplines—lack the social and historical vision that these science fictions offer. Both *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake* connect the operations of corporate labs to a wider network of exploited bodies and spaces of exception. The spectacles of monstrous creatures of engineered chicken flesh in *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake* depict the laboratory fantasy for passive, docile fleshly bodies available to be used and abused. Such spectacles, however, ultimately draw attention to the simultaneous risk to both humans and non-humans in proximity to such laboratory sites. In addition, by taking up a satirical mode, the novels use irony and hyperbole to

intervene in the otherwise totalizing language structures of corporate bioscience that have the potential to open up such exceptional spaces. These novels invoke competing complex networks of language, history, and agencies to point out the negative potential of unchecked corporate bioscience.

Post-Poultry: Monstrous Chicken Flesh

Though published fifty years apart, both *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake* depict monstrous, biologically engineered chicken creatures to illustrate how corporate labs can transform bodies into malleable flesh, ready to be commodified. In the early 1950s, during the “Second Agricultural Revolution” in the United States, Pohl and Kornbluth imagined the creature “Chicken Little” as the literal and symbolic center of their protagonist’s awful experience as a consumer-laborer in a high-tech corporate plantation. Courtenay describes “her” body and nest in the facility: “It was a great concrete dome, concrete-floored. Chicken Little filled most of it. She was a gray-brown, rubbery hemisphere some fifteen yards in diameter. Dozens of pipes ran into her pulsating flesh” (*Venus 77*). This creature is the plantation’s purpose: workers feed, maintain, and harvest this being of pure chicken flesh to be sold to the “consumer” underclass. In the novel, she is an incarnation of the corporate fantasy for a completely docile and usable body. The text assigns “her” a feminine gender, using the stereotype of feminine passivity to further highlight her role in the plantation. Though this creature shares the name “Chicken Little” with the hysterical folk-tale character who declares the “sky is falling!” and leads others to disaster, this monstrous version is a voiceless, passive object that simply waits to be devoured. The grotesque, monstrous figure is an

extrapolation from the ways through which bioscience reoriented consumer relationships with agricultural animals, changing their status from beings who live in the world with humans to objectified flesh that has no purpose except growth and consumption.

Though not apparently influenced by the earlier novel, Atwood makes a similar figurative move in her twenty-first century novel with the creation of “ChickieNobs.” They are genetically modified chickens that lack heads, neurological function, and the sensation of pain that enable the production of chicken flesh at a much more efficient rate than previous methods (*Oryx* 202-3). Though ChickieNobs are created in the university setting of the fictional Watson-Crick Institute, the science here is long since fully commercialized (203). Atwood describes Jimmy’s first sight of the ChickieNobs: “What they were looking at was a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing” (202). The creatures are barely recognizable as animal life, much less as chickens. The cute, ubiquitous name for this creation is clearly Atwood’s play on the introduction in 1983 of the Chicken McNugget and similar products that carry the name “chicken.” Yet the “chicken” label on these products only loosely signifies the original animal body after the harvesting and reassembling of its flesh into a commodity unrecognizable as chickens proper. These novels offer hyperbolic chicken monsters that embody how industrial meat processing already conceives of bodies as useable flesh. But by speculating about the future of scientific techniques for more efficiently producing animal flesh, the texts also imagine how further advances in bioscience could allow corporations to not simply process bodies into flesh but to fundamentally recreate bodies as only flesh without subjectivity.

While the spaces of exception considered in previous chapters have also focused on fictional portrayals of how bodies are treated or changed within normalized sites of violence, the corporate bioscience lab operates in a manner separately from torture chambers, ghettos, and work camps. In Pohl and Kornbluth's and Atwood's fictions, bodies that enter sites of bioscience are recognized primarily as amalgams of organic material—flesh. The descriptions of both creatures emphasize their fleshiness, the fact that they are not bodies but masses of indistinct tissue in roughly spheroid shapes. Engineered as they are, neither Chicken Little nor ChickieNobs have natural forms or structures. They are more or less formless because flesh itself has no shape. They epitomize flesh. The word “flesh” is not defined by a particular scale, and it is only loosely signifies bodily material without any specific referent to kinds of cells or tissues. By targeting flesh as its object, corporate bioscience in these novels places the body in a secondary, occluded category as the source of flesh. The body becomes disposable.

Both human and non-human flesh becomes a new kind of currency in these fictions, a fluid commodity to be managed and exploited beyond the limits of individual bodies when not part of a politically recognizable body. Even in our present, flesh itself, even when living, has no rights, but others can have property rights to it. The 1980 U.S. Supreme Court Case *Diamond v. Chakrabarty* permitted the assertion of intellectual property rights to “fabricated entities” as opposed to natural ones (Waldby and Mitchell 24). In consequence, the bodies and parts of bodies that pass through laboratories as flesh can become property. Biological information also becomes a commodity once abstracted from biological material (Rajan 42-3). Under the auspices of this new scientific paradigm, Haraway reports, “Any objects or person can be reasonably thought of in terms

of disassembly and reassembly; no ‘natural’ architectures constrain system design” (*Simians* 212). In other words, as sociologist Nikolas Rose writes, “In principle, it seems, any element of a living organism—any element of life—can be isolated, its properties identified, mobilized, manipulated, and recombined with anything else” (83). Advances in genetic sciences break down individual bodies into systems defined by their newly understood biological properties. Once conceived as predictable systems of flesh, bodies are exposed to new techniques of coercive management and use.

With their monstrous chicken creations as chief examples, both *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake* critically imagine corporate bioscience’s negative biopolitics—the trend in modern political structures away from recognizing citizen-subjects toward the management and instrumentalization of biological populations. The novels imagine how new scientific technologies and discourses, without ethical regulations, could lead to a new mode of biopolitical economic exploitation and violence. While Foucault initially sites the “body” as “what is most important” in capitalist biopolitics (qtd. in Hardt and Negri 27), the novels present a biopolitics that takes flesh—the body disassembled—as its object. Similarly, in *Before the Law* (2012), literature and animal studies scholar Carey Wolfe revises Foucault’s theory, writing “that biopolitics acts fundamentally not on the ‘person’ or the ‘individual,’ nor even, finally, on ‘the body,’ but rather at the even more elemental level called ‘flesh’” (50). Both *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake* have already taken up this thinking to show how, in their cautionary versions of corporate bioscience, bodies become the vehicles for profitable flesh.

Despite the spectacles of their fleshy, fictional chicken monsters, Pohl and Kornbluth and Atwood are primarily concerned with the treatment of human bodies as disposable flesh. But the comparison of human and non-human bodies under corporate bioscience proves crucial to understanding the results of reducing humans *en masse* from political subjects to commodifiable and exploitable biological objects. Animals have already existed in this second category for centuries, and in many instances they have been engineered into near-perfect biological objects. Wolfe assesses the “eugenics, artificial insemination, and selective breeding, pharmaceutical enhancement, inoculation . . . in the modern factory farm” as the most intense practice of the biopolitical management of flesh in history (46). In the collection of essays *Industrializing Organisms* (2004), historian Edmund Russell calls for the reframing animals as the biological precursors to machine technology and as the original forms of both alienated labor and biotechnology (1-2, 9-10). Non-human animals are also models for systems of control that may be applied to human bodies.¹³ Furthermore, Haraway calls for the critical reconsideration of non-human animals not only as contested sites of rights and property but also labor (*When* 71). These perspectives enable critical anticipation of the exploitative consequences of corporate bioscience to human bodies by considering how

¹³ Affirming this position, Haraway states that in the last century within the biosocial sciences “animal societies have been extensively employed in rationalization and naturalization of the oppressive orders of domination in the human body politic. They have provided the point of union of the physiological and political for modern liberal theorists” (*When* 11). Haraway endorses Jacques Derrida’s writing on a fundamental political distinction between humans and non-humans; only humans have the capacity to be murdered, whereas animals can only be killed (78). The importance in this distinction—what Giorgio Agamben describes as human history’s violent “anthropological machine”—is not the active differentiation among the types of beings but that these categories are produced at all (*Open* 37). For a humanist, the trouble here lies in the historically demonstrated potential for discursively and physically transferring human beings into the naturalized category of “animals,” bodies that are killable, disposable, and exploitable. As long as non-human bodies are used to continually sustain the distinction between which bodies may be murdered or killed, human bodies can be more or less easily dehumanized. Global histories of slavery, genocide, imprisonment, to mention only a few phenomena, bear out the reality of this problem, which is readily represented in the novels as well.

some non-human bodies have already been affected. By looking to how biocapital manages non-human labor and flesh, critics may better understand such systems can be applied to humans. The depiction of human bodies alongside animals in *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake* reveal how unregulated corporate bioscience, beginning in the laboratory, can work to transform all bodies into exploitable flesh.

Chicken Little is the purest manifestation of the relationship between flesh and corporations in *The Space Merchants*. All the plantation's tasks are oriented around the production of her flesh. The narrator, Courtenay, explains how the minor character Herrera and other "artisans" harvest Chicken Little: "He swung a sort of two-handed sword that carved off great slices of the tissue, leaving it to the lesser packers and trimmers and their faceless helpers to weigh it, shape it, freeze it, cook it, flavor it, package it, and ship it off to the area on quota for the day" (*Venus* 70). The text elaborates that Herrera also acts as "safety valve," a steward who carefully husbands Chicken Little's indiscriminate growth because, "As long as she got nutrient, she grew" (71). During Courtenay's first visit to Chicken Little's chamber, he asks, "Doesn't she grow at night?" Herrera replies, "No. They turn down the nutrient just enough; they let the waste accumulate in her just right. Each night she almost dies. Each morning she comes to life like San Lázaro" (78). Pohl and Kornbluth imagine a tightly controlled method for producing animal protein that reduces life into a passive commodity in an abject middle-ground between life and death. This fleshy creature is the ideal resident and product of the laboratory space of exception.

While the plantation chapters in *The Space Merchants* provide a broad critical perspective of corporate bioscience, the novel does so by satirizing the biotech

innovations in modern factory farming. Literary critic John Brennan is partly correct when he describes *Chicken Little* as “a delightfully absurd burlesque of industrial food processing” that emerged in the 1950s (105). But the creature’s depiction uses the history of chicken farming as the basis for the novel’s wider critique of corporate exploitation.

During the “Second Agricultural Revolution,” agricultural labor and management of livestock radically changed. The novel implies what Edmund Russell argues for when he casts animal husbandry as, “in the root meaning of the word, biotechnology,” because the practice requires the technical manipulation of animal biology, either at the level of its earliest forms, breeding and behavior modification, or its latest variant, genetics (1). Historian Mark Finlay summarizes that during this “revolution”

farmers and industrialists . . . sought to reshape and redesign organisms in ways that they deemed appropriate for an industrial society. Innovations with medical feeds, manufactured housing, and redesigned landscapes spurred farmers to increase the size and capital investment of their livestock operations, to manipulate the natural rhythms of animals’ breeding, birth, weaning, rebreeding, and slaughter, and to conduct the business in ever more confined, streamlined, and centralized operations. (237)

While all of these innovations affected chickens most, turkeys, cattle, and pigs were also impacted (237). Their bodies became the object of a scientifically-charged transformation of animals into ubiquitous flesh.

The turning point in the production of chicken products was in 1948 (Horowitz 215). Before World War Two, chicken was considered a luxury food item, but after

changes in marketing and the industrialization of chicken production, it became “the center of three or four meals each week” (216). Chickens, at this time, “were the first farm animals to be permanently confined indoors and made to labor in automated systems” (Haraway, *When* 267). Haraway describes the new approach to producing chicken flesh as “the daily immolation of forced maturation and disproportionate tissue development that produces tasty (enough) young birds who are often enough unable to walk, flap their wings, or even stand up” (267). Ultimately, the common American conception of chicken was transformed from a kind of poultry, an animal being with breed-specifics and individual characteristics, to the more ambiguous category of meat that matters only in terms of its economic value (Horowitz 223). Chicken Little represents the next logical step in these new technologies that change bodies into flesh—rather than change bodies, reconceive them *as* flesh.

In *Oryx and Crake*, the depiction of manipulations to non-human flesh lays the ground for Crake’s global genocide. Critic Ashley Theissen points out that Jimmy’s earliest childhood recollection is a “bonfire of animal carcasses” tainted in some way; the moment “perhaps reveals the significant roles” of non-humans in the text (24).¹⁴ While comical and terrifying examples of genetic engineering abound in the novel, the particularly monstrous ChickieNobs epitomize the control exercised over biological

¹⁴ In her 2013 article, Theissen considers how the capacity to manipulate the structures of life changes the perception “of all forms of life” (24). The thrust of her analysis parallels that of this chapter, but Theissen focuses narrowly on genetically engineered non-human species while I look to how the novel portrays the profitable management of all life, both human and non-human. Theissen also argues against “reading the transgenic species as performing one overarching function” and that “different animals . . . perform different functions in Atwood’s literary world” (24). Her claim is both literally and figuratively true to some degree: different animals are created for different purposes within the *MaddAddam* world, and Atwood’s depiction of each type of creature registers with different signification. But while these genetically engineered species are indeed different, they are all subsumed under a structure of corporate bioscience and created for the purposes of profit. Thus, a more productive reading engages the novel’s non-human figures in both their particularities and their relationships to the entangled structures out of which they emerge.

bodies. The creatures are barely recognizable as animal life, much less as chickens. The post-war factory farming industry has already recast chickens in the ubiquitous, objectified category of “meat.” With ChickieNobs, Atwood imagines the fulfilled fantasy of this industry and corporate bioscience more broadly: pure flesh that resists any identification as a living being that may deserve ethical treatment. Like Pohl and Kornbluth’s Chicken Little, ChickieNobs are only recognized as a form of technology and property.

The corporate lab space has enabled this desire for docile flesh by using biotechnology to create ChickieNobs in such a way that they are wholly improper to discourses of rights and protections. Crake explains one such explicit tactic when he tells Jimmy, “And the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain” (*Oryx* 203). By removing the biological capacity for pain, genetic engineers render ethical questions about suffering as not applicable to ChickieNobs. Atwood elaborates this sense of the creatures’ inconsequential status when Crake says, “It’s sort of like a chicken hookworm,” and another character in the novel’s sequel cannot help considering ChickieNobs more like vegetables than animals (*Oryx* 203; *Year* 129). These two statements demonstrate the success of the ChickieNobs’ engineering: once a traditionally recognizable biological body has been transformed in the corporate laboratory, the resultant life forms enter a sphere of sub-life or non-life that includes “hookworms” or “vegetables.” Even in discourses sympathetic to non-human animals, creatures like hookworms and ChickieNobs hold little to no value relative to humans or more charismatic animals like lions, tigers, and bears. Thus, by reconstructing chicken organisms into forms that seem inherently alien to ethical protection, the lab has pushed

these bodies into a zone of exception in which they can be objectified without consequence.

The creatures further provoke the uncanny recognition of the lab's potential as a space of exception to alter any body's status, both physically and discursively. Jimmy initially balks when he encounters the ChickieNobs. He thinks, "The thing was a nightmare" (*Oryx* 202). Atwood further writes of his reaction, "Why is it he feels some line has been crossed, some boundary transgressed? How much is too much, how far is too far?" (206). Yet, as the text implies through the use of these rhetorical questions, Jimmy does not actively realize how these "transgressions" may be turned upon all bodies rather than limited to poultry bodies that American consumers already see as "meat." Atwood imagines that once any bodies are as reconceived as malleable arrangements of cells, tissues, and flesh to be reshaped as desired, then any moral or ethical lines that once protected particular bodies could be erased. As critic Grayson Cooke claims, Crake along with his corporate peers view the world as "made up of discrete entities linked by cause and effect" that are thus "infinitely malleable, editable" (Cooke 120). The laboratories of *Oryx and Crake* are where all bodies are at risk to a condition like the ChickieNobs'.¹⁵

¹⁵ Providing multiple references, Theissen indicates that while a number of other readings of Jimmy's line-crossing passage seize upon this moment as Jimmy's own critical awareness about the problems of corporate bioscience. But these readings overlook how this question, "How much is too much?" arrives in a site where *non-human* life is being technologically altered and produced (29). Jimmy's unease arrives from witnessing the technical power wielded over non-human life, and thus his reaction should be analyzed in this context.

Fleshly Laborers and Consumers

In *The Space Merchants*, Chicken Little's chamber implicates more than technologically-coerced animal flesh. Within this biotech space the authors align the objectification of both human and non-human bodies; the text metonymously links the treatment of Chicken Little and the human bodies around her. Courtenay describes the workers around the creature as the "lesser packers and trimmers and their faceless helpers" (*Venus* 70). While this reference makes these people momentarily visible in the novel's world, their collective categorization and the appended adjectives "lesser" and "faceless" communicate an immediate sense of these workers' disposability. They and the creature are "faceless," literally or figuratively unable to be recognized as individual beings in their world. Much like Chicken Little, the workers are a cumulative arrangement of flesh that serves a particular use, consumed for labor rather than calories. The creature and workers are simultaneously produced and consumed. Like Chicken Little, consumers labor in the plantation to the point of an exhausted state, a condition mimetic of death.

Both kinds of bodies are forced to consume each other, a cycle through which the Chlorella corporation profits. Courtenay's exhausting labor serves to feed Chicken Little, and the plantation workers daily eat her flesh in turn (*Venus* 68). The representation of workers in this space of exception provides Courtenay's and the reader's basis for understanding consumer life at large in their world. Like Chicken Little, these workers' portrayal arrives from the changing labor in the factory farm industry beginning in the 1950s.

The Second Agricultural Revolution transformed the treatment of human bodies as well as animals within industry spaces. Regardless of further modernizing efforts in factories between the 1950s and '90s, historian Roger Horowitz reports that the need for “hand labor” as “staggeringly high” in the early twenty-first century. These factories require the kind of labor that uses human bodies as machinic objects to such an extent as to produce enormous numbers of repetitive motion injuries—second to only the red meat industry in 1989. Horowitz writes that “these onerous jobs, paying about 60 percent of the average wage for American manufacturing since the mid-1960s, drew workers at the bottom rungs of the American labor market.” These workers were mostly African American workers at first; by the mid-nineties, Mexican and Central American immigrants became the primary labor demographic. The industry, Horowitz claims, actively attracts laborers with weak language and literacy skills, those who have the least means of recourse against exploitation. Workers endure a collective corporate “low wage strategy” that leads to “turnover rates as high as 100 percent annually” (Horowitz 230). Like in the Chlorella plantation, laborers in the factory farm industry are by and large treated as fleshly objects that are primarily valued for their profitability. This fictional site suggests that in the absence of other systems of values, this and other sectors of corporate bioscience could treat all bodies like exploitable sources of flesh.

Courtenay’s ordeal as a plantation laborer elaborates the authors’ vision of how human bodies are affected in this regime. Even before the commencement of his actual labor, his first day leaves him in an abject state. At the close of the first chapter at the plantation, he narrates, “I just lay on my bunk and wished I were as dead as the rest of the world thought I was” (*Venus* 67). While Courtenay infuses this sentence with

melodramatic self-pity—as an accomplished corporate officer he feels that he deserves better—the authors use his lament to communicate a truth about ordinary consumer life. The reference to Courtenay’s “death” is most immediately a matter of plot; his true identity has been erased and replaced. But what seems like happenstance in Courtenay’s experience actually signifies everyday existence for consumers within the biotech plantation and wider dystopian society. The declaration of Courtenay’s death points to what it means to be classed as a consumer—a condition that is a variation of civil or social death, to function as a passive object within the structure of power rather than as an active citizen with rights and responsibilities.¹⁶

The exploitation of consumer labor reinforces their class category as passive human objects. Courtenay provides the details of his work as an algae scum-skimmer from dawn to sunset, and he then lists the activities available in his limited free time. One might construe these options as the indication of a kind of active freedom. The text, however, breaks into another paragraph of a single sentence in which Pohl and Kornbluth write, “Mostly you went to sleep” (68). His work physically drains him to the point at which he cannot partake in the amenities intended to keep him docile; the labor functions as its own form of control, draining life from bodies.

This part of the novel subtly dramatizes the transformation of active persons into passive laboring objects through a shift in pronoun usage. These two paragraphs about his

¹⁶ Civil death refers to the “negative personhood” legally inscribed on felons in the tradition of Anglo-American law, while social death, a term coined by anthropologist Claude Meillassoux but made famous by Orlando Patterson’s comparative study of slave societies in *Slavery and Social Death* (1985), refers to people like slaves who are legally denied existence as persons (Dayan 42, 43). In *The Law is a White Dog* (2011), Colin Dayan describes these categories as “legal engines of dispossession” that deny the right to both life and property (43). What Pohl and Kornbluth imagine of consumer life in *The Space Merchants* clearly exists in the legacy of civil and social death—the most significant part of plot does indeed occur in a futuristic “plantation.” But civil or social death is not quite the appropriate term for the condition Courtenay enters since law is not the particular engine of dispossession.

labor are a break in Courtenay's first-person narration into the second-person. His use of "I" disappears as if even his labor's description ejects a sense of individual grammatical agency from him. "I" is no longer appropriate when Courtenay becomes one more consumer. Replacing "I," the ambiguous pronoun "you" does not distinguish between individuals or even between singular and collective beings. This section indicates that his individuation from other consumers is unnecessary or even perhaps impossible while he is at labor. The second-person address also implicates the reader in this scene. On the one hand, Pohl and Kornbluth use this technique to prompt the reader's identification with the plantation's laborers. On the other hand, "you" also uncannily insinuates the plantation's desire to seize upon more human capital—readers themselves—to put to work.

After Courtenay's time at the Chlorella plantation reveals the true nature of this corporate utopia, *The Space Merchants* much more directly portrays consumer life. Both Courtenay's and the reader's experiences of the narrative are as if the encounter with the novel's central site of corporate bioscience opens eyes to the broader iniquities of this world. Courtenay refers to the consumer population as "the submerged fifteen sixteenths of the population" (*Venus* 104). The word choice here implies that consumers are trapped at the bottom of the socio-economic order, metaphorically below the surface of their society. The word "submerged" further conjures images of buried or drowned bodies, further suggesting how consumers exist in a state mimetic of death as objectified flesh. Indeed, although corporations require the survival of consumers as both laborers and customers, Courtenay relates a stark example the corporate oligarchy's lack of concern for consumers' well-being. In a housing facility, he reads a sign that states, "NIGHT-DWELLERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR OWN POLICING. MANAGEMENT

ASSUMES NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEFTS, ASSAULTS, OR RAPES” (142).

Neither law nor police are present to protect consumers. Instead, just as the authors have illustrated in the local site of the Chlorella plantation, consumers are disposable bodies exposed to violence.

Fifty years later in *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood imagines how easily the technological power wielded over non-human like ChickieNobs could be transferred to human bodies. The novel offers Crake’s plague as the spectacular epitome of how corporate bioscience practiced in the lab could be harmfully deployed against the human population. In essence, Crake intends his plague to solve what he sees as the evolutionary problem of “human predation,” the inevitability of violence and exploitation generated by human culture and capitalism (*Oryx* 101). Of course, he fails to adequately acknowledge how the systems that have caused cruelty, suffering, wars, and poverty directly inform and enable his own actions. His ability to enact his genocide requires the exploitative structures of corporate bioscience to generate the technology. For example, Crake grinningly admits to using “desperate” test subjects “[f]rom the poorer countries” without informed consent (296). Moreover, the discourse that he deploys to negate notions of individual human life’s value is centuries in the making—as is evident in the fictions such as Wright’s and Steinbeck’s.

The discussion of Crake’s character in the trilogy by either narration or dialogue utilizes a vocabulary and concepts that evoke categories more akin to political theory than to experimental ethics. During the first days of apocalypse, Jimmy angrily thinks of how Crake was “[s]itting in judgment on the world,” and Jimmy wonders “but why had that been his right?” (*Oryx* 341). Jimmy does not arrive at an answer; the thought

resonates more with outrage and grief rather than inquiry. Yet the trilogy takes up this question. By focusing on Crake's "judgment" and "right," the text invokes a political, legalistic context for understanding how he accesses a discourse that justifies his choices in much the same manner that a sovereign entity accesses the rights granted it through law. Writing of the life science's influence on the Nazi genocide, philosopher Giorgio Agamben claims that when biology enters as a deciding factor of biopolitics, "the physician and the scientist move in the no-man's-land into which at one point the sovereign alone could penetrate" (*Homo* 159). Just as Agamben theorizes that traditional sovereignty always exists in a nascent state of exception, so does he perceive the role of the physician/scientist reaching this same condition. Crake embodies this potential: claiming that human civilization catastrophically threatens the global ecology, he decides that his action is both justified and necessary. His genocide is the footprint of the sovereign authority he has assumed over the world via the power of corporate bioscience.

Crake offers his genocide as a necessary response to imminent ecological disaster; without consent he acts upon others' bodies as an objectified mass of flesh just as if he were in a corporate lab. He explains his motivations to Jimmy under the guise of their work on the BlyssPluss Pill, a revolutionary sexual enhancement drug.¹⁷ He says,

"I've seen the latest confidential Corps demographic reports. As a species we're in deep trouble, worse than anyone's saying. They're afraid to

¹⁷ Even without Crake's addition of his fatal virus to this drug, he explains to Jimmy how his corporate partners intend it to further control the pleeblands' populations, to "steer [human nature] in a more beneficial direction" (*Oryx* 293). Atwood writes that the pill works as a powerful aphrodisiac and "would also act as a sure-fire one-time-does-it-all birth control pill, for male and female alike, thus automatically lowering the population level." As Jimmy puts it, "So basically you're going to sterilize people without them knowing it under the guise of giving them the ultra in orgies?" (294). While Atwood inflects Crake's actions with ambiguously altruistic motives, both the false flag sterilization project and his impending genocide strongly resemble moments of injustice in the twentieth-century in the United States and abroad produced under a negative biopolitical ideology invested in the violent control of populations.

release the stats because people might just give up, but take it from me, we're running out of space-time. Demand for resources has exceeded supply for decades in marginal geo-political areas, hence the famines and droughts; but very soon, demand is going to exceed supply *for everyone.*" (294-5)

Though Jimmy remains ignorant to his friend's true plans, this declaration of exigency is in earnest. Crake perversely envisions his actions as a survival tactic, a deployment of power in a moment of necessity that by all accounts is quite real and urgent in the novel. Regardless of this declaration's legitimacy, however, Crake uses it to turn the laboratory space of exception inside-out to encompass the globe.

Though Jimmy suggests and Atwood has said that Crake's explanation here is ambiguous evidence of his ultimate altruism, the scientist's diction is loaded with a biopolitical conceit that objectifies living beings (*Oryx* 294; Bethune 48). He articulates his concern at the level of the human "species," the most inclusive yet flattening term for the vast array of individuals faced with this ecological threat. He codes suffering and death in the sterile, quantitative terms "supply" and "demand," passing over the myriad experiences of suffering that these words signify. For him, the stakes of the looming disaster exist solely at the biopolitical plane of the species, a category that he ultimately preserves by annihilating most of its constituents. Despite the mass death, Crake's rationale is satisfied with the new "space-time" he gains for *homo sapiens* in its modified Craker form, dismissing billions of other human lives as inconsequential except as a collective biological mass with ecological implications.¹⁸ Theissen writes that Crake

¹⁸ Some critics like J. Brooks Bouson have argued that the novel's representation of Crake's hyper-rationality and what I have called his flat ontology in this chapter is evidence that he "does not believe in

enacts the latter of the two mandates that Foucault ascribes to biopower, “to make live and let die” (32). This claim is somewhat inaccurate. From the humanist reader’s perspective, without question Crake actively “makes” rather than passively “lets” the global population die. But the blasé sense of the expression “to let die” in English does indeed seem to capture Crake’s affect; he perceives human bodies as disposable flesh without particular privileges or even a right to life—like any other flesh in the corporate lab.

Landscapes of Exception under Corporate Bioscience

Both *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake* imagine how their exceptional sites of corporate bioscience are interconnected with exploitative practices across broader landscapes and histories. On the one hand, Pohl and Kornbluth place their dystopian depiction of the biotech plantation in a longer history of exploiting laboring bodies. The dynamic that they imagine in Chicken Little’s chamber proves to be part of an accretion of coercive practices used against capitalist underclasses for centuries. Courtenay’s experience is not far removed from the Joads’ in *The Grapes of Wrath*. On the other hand, Atwood presents her dystopian version of corporate bioscience as participating in new ways in global markets of flesh and death. Ultimately, she portrays how, if

the value of human life” (Bouson 146). This claim is partially true but overly simplified; like his peers in the laboratory, Crake has deflated the value of human life to a level commensurate with the value he holds for non-human life. *Oryx and Crake* offers a number of examples of how Crake rationalizes human culture into overdetermined biological phenomena. In one instance, Jimmy reflects on his friend’s “opinion of human ingenuity” as a result of “an advanced model of monkey brains but monkey brains all the same” (99). Playing with a derisive metaphor and imprecise science (we are, after all, more closely related to apes than monkeys), Crake’s assessment works to equalize the value placed on “monkey” and human life. Furthermore, Crake is most certainly invested in the value of the abstract notion of “human life”; the preservation of the human species—in a more sustainable form—is a key premise of his genocidal project. Thus, a more accurate statement about Crake’s scientific discourse would be that he does not believe in the liberal humanist value placed on individual human *lives*.

unregulated, the power of corporate bioscience threatens to universalize its treatment of bodies as objectified flesh.

As part of *The Space Merchants*'s plot, Courtenay finds himself kidnapped and mistaken for a common consumer on a "Labor Freighter" bound for the Chlorella plantations in Costa Rica (*Venus 59*). The plantation operates under a thinly-veiled exceptional logic in that laborers are always exposed to the potential violence, like legal company torture chambers called "wrecking rooms," if workers do not conform to the roles that corporations intend for them (44). The reader learns that the government of this Central American state, though on the periphery of the "developed" world and its capitalist hegemony, is ensconced in corporate neocolonialism. A "plantation-protection man" informs Courtenay of the consequences if he were to "bug out" from his contractual obligations to Chlorella. Since the full Costa Rican national budget of "about a hundred and eighty billion dollars" arrives directly from Chlorella's taxes, "the government—and *the courts*—of Costa Rica do just about what Chlorella wants done" (original emphasis, 64). But rather than using the stereotype of a "undeveloped" nation's puppet government, Pohl and Kornbluth have already established that their world's United State government is also under the thumb of the corporate oligarchy. Earlier in the text, Courtenay remarks to the reader, "[T]he government—it's odd how we still think and talk of that clearinghouse for pressures as though it were an entity with a will of its own." Indeed, in the following paragraph the text references the "Senator from Du Pont Chemicals" and the "Senator from Nash-Kelvinator" (9). So the authors depict the corporate corruption of government and the violation of moral norms not as a feature of the Third World but as an export from the First World.

Before Pohl and Kornbluth introduce Chicken Little and work inside the plantation, they already hint to the savvy reader that scenes of exploitation are to follow. These details connect this fiction to a long history in the Americas of coerced labor. At first, “plantation” seems only a conventional name following the Costa Rican coffee and banana industries. Instead of traditional crops, the company’s laborers grow the algae that nourishes Chicken Little. The geopolitical placement of the plantation evokes a world still caught up in neocolonial relationships; this fictional Costa Rica bears strong resemblance to the real Banana Republic dominated by the United Fruit Company from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Historian Monica Rankin writes that the UFC’s “dominant economic position within Latin America and its persuasive position in U.S. government circles allowed it to wield enormous influence over Latin American policy” (82). The United Fruit Company’s reliance on imported labor and the “deplorable working and living conditions” on its plantations clearly inspire Pohl and Kornbluth’s imagination of the Chlorella plantation (85). This site of bioscience builds upon this past system of exploitation.

The details of Courtenay’s sudden employment also evoke an experience of the Middle Passage. He is transported without consent as a “cargo slob” from one continent to another under the terms of a “blind” labor contract that consigns him as an indentured body, if not an outright slave, to Chlorella (*Venus* 59, 62). To label such an arrangement as a “contract” is disingenuous at best since the unnegotiable imposition of one party’s will on another can only be described as an exploitative legal tool. The continued use of the word “contract” for this particular practice suggests a corporate attempt to disguise the nature of this indentured employment as an agreement between equal parties. Of

course, any kind of “contract” that Courtenay finds his false identity engaged in as a part of his kidnapping would be a “blind” contract, but the knowledge of his fellow “cargo slob” indicates that the term “blind contract” does not solely apply to Courtenay’s situation. The novel suggests that through these contracts corporations regularly approach laborers as objects awaiting appropriation. In case readers overlook these initial allusions to slavery, Pohl and Kornbluth raise the specter of forced labor again when Courtenay mentions matter-of-factly “that children born on the plantation were automatically indentured to Chlorella if either parent was still an employee on the child’s tenth birthday” (70). Like its predecessors in the New World, the Chlorella plantation relies on legalized systems of forced labor.

The novel also links the model of Chicken Little’s growth management to the global consumer population. At one point, Courtenay reads issues of *Biometrika*, a real journal in the field of statistical studies closely associated with eugenics. Co-founded in 1901 by Francis Galton who first formalized and termed “eugenics,” the journal is “one of the everyday tools” for corporations in *The Space Merchants*. Courtenay summarizes *Biometrika*’s use: “It told the story of population changes, IQ changes, death rate and causes of death, and all the rest of it. Almost every issue had good news in it for us . . . Increase of population was always good news to us. More people, more sales” (*Venus* 81). Like Chicken Little, the consumer population is encouraged to grow so that it will further facilitate corporate profits, which in turn facilitates the corporate power over the masses. But in the metonymy that authors construct between Chicken Little and consumers lies an even more sinister suggestion. Courtenay mentions that the artisan Herrera functions as a “safety valve,” violently removing excess flesh from Chicken

Little if she grows too large; this detail invites speculation that the corporate powers also excise elements from the consumer population to increase profit.

Atwood also uses the word “plantation” to describe Crake’s final laboratory in her novel. She describes the setting: “It had its own park around it, a dense climate-controlling plantation” (*Oryx* 297). As in *The Space Merchants*, the word “plantation” conjures associations with a long history of exploitation, obliquely placing Crake’s lab in this legacy. This specially designed laboratory is immune to even corporate oversight, and the texts notes that no one, including the corporate security force, may enter without his permission. In other words, within the world of the novel, he rules his lab as a space of exception in which he is the unchecked sovereign.

He names the site “Paradice,” a pun on “paradise.” Here Crake recreates human life in the form of the genetically hybrid Crakers. His lab’s moniker blithely mocks the idea of divine sovereignty. In Judeo-Christian tradition God makes Adam and Eve in an unmatched gesture of divine power, but now corporate bioscience wields the same power to make human beings into any image it desires. By calling his facility “Paradice,” Crake recasts the biblical narrative of human destiny into a matter of chance—simultaneously a game, a wager, and an experiment of trial and error. The name transforms notions of intelligent design and human privilege among other life forms from a grand destiny into evolutionary happenstance, which corporate bioscience can now control. In this one punning gesture, Crake symbolically supplants divine sovereignty with his own authority over all life.

Crake’s plague offers a spectacular illustration of the bioscience laboratory’s potential to reconfigure life across broader landscapes. Yet the logic of corporate

bioscience structures life and society long prior to the release of Crake's virus. The plague's global distribution itself relies its disguise as a sexual enhancement drug that circulates through global economic networks. Atwood presents both the pre- and post-apocalyptic settings of her trilogy as universalized laboratory spaces of exception in which all bodies become exposed to processes of objectification and the incumbent exploitative violence.

Though Jimmy kills his friend in the wake of the plague, the novel suggests that the sovereign specter of Crake continues to oversee his new world. As Jimmy survives alongside the Crakers in civilization's ruins, he imagines that he is "immersed" in Crake's dreams. Atwood writes, "So Crake never remembered his dreams. It's [Jimmy] that remembers them instead. Worse than remembers: he's immersed in them, he'd wading through them, he's stuck in them. Every moment he's lived in the past few months was dreamed first by Crake [sic]" (*Oryx* 218). Jimmy even takes this notion and translates it into the Crakers' mythic belief system about their own creation in which an ironically god-like Crake dreams their reality for them (352). The figurative attribution of the new post-apocalyptic ecology to Crake's "dreams" highlights his central, even ongoing role in the production of this environment.

The novel's reflection on Jimmy's circumstances reveals, however, that Crake's machinations within the unrestricted zone of the lab do not simply enact predicate changes in the world. As in *The Space Merchants*, entrance into labs in *Oryx and Crake* reveals how global space is already being transformed into the exceptional domain of corporate bioscience. Any distinctions between the "lab" and the "world" collapse to the point at which Jimmy reflects, "The whole world is now one vast uncontrolled

experiment” (*Oryx* 228). The text suggests that, unlike the expected laboratory environment, the post-apocalyptic landscape lacks “control” or the commanding presence of a scientist observer who establishes the experimental conditions. The implication is thus that Crake’s genocidal experiment has surpassed the boundaries of the lab and operates independently of its master. The reader might initially accept this seeming erasure of Crake’s ongoing involvement in the apocalyptic experiment and consequently assume the irrelevancy of the laboratory space once the experimental phenomenon trespasses into other zones. But, in fact, Crake’s figurative and literal absence from this world-wide experiment proves to be the ultimate performance of the ideal rational scientist.

The performance of objectivity is a founding paradox of the Scientific Revolution; the veracity of an experiment requires the witness of an objective observer whose presence is intended as inconsequential. The scientist is figured as not mattering to an experiment, yet his presence is nevertheless a prerequisite for validating its procedure and results.¹⁹ In other words, the experiment cannot exist as such without its observer. *Oryx and Crake* implies as much about Crake: despite his physical absence, he remains a haunting presence, not unlike the immaterial half of the “King’s two bodies” that persists after the sovereign’s biological death.²⁰ Indeed, Crake’s specter hangs over not only

¹⁹ To describe this paradigm of modern scientific subjectivity, Haraway adopts the term “modest witness” from Shapin and Schaffer’s *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* (1985) (Haraway, *Modest_Witness* 23). She argues that invisibility is “the virtue that guarantees that the modest witness is the legitimate and authorized ventriloquist for the object world” (24). This model of subjectivity positions an individual as a self-authorized sovereign and speaker of material reality; the subject of technoscience orders reality through witnessing technologies while performing an invisibility that belies the implication of his own body within the space of the laboratory.

²⁰ In *The King’s Two Bodies* (1957), Ernst H. Kantorowicz discusses the medieval political theory that a monarch possesses both a physical and a kind of spiritual, symbolic body that represents the body politic over which he reigns. According to Kantorowicz, this theory allowed for the death of kings without challenging their sovereignty over their lands and subjects because the symbolic body of the king never

Jimmy, his best friend, but also Atwood's other surviving characters. They all live within Crake's ongoing "dreams," "stuck" in them like Jimmy. So while by the end of the novel, Crake's suicide-by-Jimmy removes him from a position to literally remark upon events as they unfold, the novels insistently invoke his disembodied presence to fulfill the role of an absent observer who invisibly structures and validates the world-become-laboratory (343). Crake's body may have perished, but his scientific sovereignty continues to order the otherwise lawless space of his new world.

The pre-apocalyptic world of Atwood's trilogy is similarly structured by the corporate laboratory. In this dystopian setting, biotech corporations have taken the place of representative government, and they now manage life, deploying violence for the maintenance of their interlinked power and profits. Through Jimmy's reflections on his past life, *Oryx and Crake* portrays how the power to manipulate flesh, generated within the lab, extended beyond its borders well before Crake's apocalypse. Instead, this conflation of all life and bodies as disposable flesh functions as a normalized state of exception spread across all space.

The "state of nature" condition of the post-apocalyptic half of the trilogy closely mirrors the experiences for the majority of the human populace in the "pleeblands." As Jimmy survives with the Crakers, he feels like a "caged, wired-up lab animal, trapped into performing futile and perverse experiments on his own brain," and the text elaborates: "Get me out! he hears himself thinking. But he isn't locked up, he's not in prison. What could be more *out* than where he is?" (*Oryx* 45). Through this last rhetorical question the text suggests that Jimmy has reached a liminal condition in which he cannot

dies. Crake's death engenders another performance of the sovereign's two bodies. This suggested dynamic in the novel further places Crake in a lineage of sovereign power rather than as an anomaly in political history.

imagine the possibility of being any more exposed to danger, not unlike the rightless condition of flesh within the corporate laboratory. The fulfillment of Crake's laboratory discourse—treating the human population as a single fleshly amalgam of a species—has ejected Jimmy “out” from the sphere of political rights and social obligations. A later passage expresses Jimmy's impressions about the pleeblands that are strikingly similar fashion: “Everything in the pleeblands seemed so boundless, so porous, so penetrable, so wide-open. So subject to chance” (196). To be in the pleeblands is to be “out” in the same way that Jimmy is “out” in the post-apocalyptic landscape. A condition of exposure to violence pervades both settings.

The juxtaposition of these passages and the two different settings reveals Jimmy's survival experience as something akin to being a prisoner without prison, an unprotected body contained in a world-wide zone without rights. Bodies in both the post-apocalyptic landscape and the pleeblands exist in this condition. “Everything” in the pleeblands—objects, places, and people—is “so penetrable,” a particularly prescient adjective given the pervasiveness of sex crime and sex industries that Atwood focuses on in *The Year of the Flood* (2009), her sequel to *Oryx and Crake*. The word “penetrable” casts the pleeblands and its denizens alike as “boundless” and “porous,” having no social or even physical barriers that adequately protect bodies from ominous “chance,” Jimmy's euphemism for the risk of violence.²¹

²¹ The condition of pleeblands that Atwood imagines is a stark parallel to Hannah Arendt's discussion in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973) of the condition of rightlessness for displaced or stateless persons. Arendt argues that the “calamity of the rightless is not that they are deprived of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion . . . but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever” (87). She claims that rights and protections of life emerge from communities and that the crisis of statelessness is to no longer belong to a community through which one can access those rights and protections. In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, people of the pleeblands live in a similar state; communities like the nation have been replaced by marketplaces that sell rights and protection.

Atwood elaborates upon how the safety of the pleeblands' inhabitants repeatedly proves subordinate to profit. Her sequel relates the rumors that CorpSeCorps, the monopolistic private police force, is profitably involved in every form of nominally illicit business. Canavan points to the joke in organization's name, "corpse corps," suggesting its investment in producing corpses (142). Atwood writes of this group, "They had an image to uphold among those citizens who still paid lip service to the old ideals: defenders of the peace, enforcers of public security, keeping the streets safe. It was a joke even then, but most people felt that the CorpSeCorps were better than total anarchy" (*Year 34*). The novels imagine that without outside regulation, the division between accepted and illicit business becomes a matter of public relations rather than the prevention of dangerous criminal activities.

In the absence of competitive ideologies and political systems, Atwood suggests along with Pohl and Kornbluth that regimes of corporate bioscience interact with living beings not as citizens but as fleshly objects that serve the production of profit and power. Living in the pleeblands opens one to entwined conditions: a consumer, a subordinate partner to capitalist production, or flesh—a locus of exploitable organic material. Other forms of violence that do not interfere with the profitable management of consumers and bodies are ignored; for example, when not profiting from it themselves, corporations ignore rampant sexual violence in Atwood's world. Thus, what Jimmy identifies as dangerous "chance" in the pleeblands is an exposure not to abstract contingency but to the risk of one's changing from a valued consumer into valuable flesh.

Oryx and Crake further depicts the pleeblands not simply as a space of capitalist exploitation but as a literal extension of the exceptional laboratory. Crake once applies to

the pleeblands the metaphor of “a giant Petri dish” that permits the circulation of “a lot of guck and contagious plasm” (*Oryx* 287). His use of the metaphor is casual and not uncommon; the OED catalogs a familiar figurative definition of the word, “a place, environment, etc., in which rapid growth or development can take place,” alongside a description of the actual laboratory device, a dish used especially to “culture microorganisms or cells.” Out of context, this metaphor suggests that the pleeblands promote the growth and circulation of new microscopic life forms by nature. But as the reader knows from a dialogue between Crake and Jimmy earlier in the novel, corporations *literally* treat the pleeblands like a “giant Petri dish.” In a conversation about the revenue streams of biomedical companies, Jimmy asks, “But don’t they keep discovering new diseases?” and Crake answers, “Not discovering . . . They’re *creating* them” (original emphasis, 211). Crake continues to explain how HelthWyzer, a preeminent biotech corporation, secretly develops and releases diseases into the pleeblands’ populations that HelthWyzer then treats at a price. In characteristic form, Crake describes this creation of a disease marketplace as a “brilliant” corporate tactic.

But, as his further comments imply, the basis for this marketization of illness in the pleeblands is the absence of social or state institutions. He says, “[O]nce you’ve got a hostile bioform started in the pleeb population, the way people slosh around out there it more or less runs itself” (211). Without structures of positive biopolitical governance, little else exists to protect the populace’s health. The word “slosh” connotes the corporate perspective of pleeb “people”: instead of recognizing individuated persons, these corporations see mass undifferentiated substance of human flesh not unlike ChickieNobs.

In the terms of Jimmy's assessment of Crake's apocalyptic landscape, the pleeblands, too, are "one vast experiment," but this experiment's control lies in corporate hands.

Though imagined in a dystopian fiction, this exaggerated enterprise nevertheless illustrates a core dynamic of contemporary corporate bioscience in which populations are conceived as markets of illness. Anthropologist of science Kaushik Sunder Rajan describes this function of capitalist bioscience as the casting of a person as "a patient-in-waiting and, simultaneously, a consumer-in-waiting" (281). While the idea that corporations maliciously manufacture disease is hopefully only appropriate to fiction, *Oryx and Crake* draws attention through this hyperbolic conspiracy theory to how corporate bioscience invests in the potential of illness as a matter of profit. Jimmy's comment that life in the pleeblands is "open to chance" gains new meaning in this context. Once contemporary corporate bioscience creates a market of life and death, these two poles are transformed from the stakes of individual existence into a matter of financial futurity and risk (Rajan 14). So while bodies in the pleeblands are exposed to violent chance, they are also the exploited objects of economic speculation.

Both emulating the space of the corporate laboratory, the post-apocalyptic landscape and the pleeblands of *Oryx and Crake* function as exceptional zones in which bodies are exposed to predation. Without ethical regulation, the corporations of the *MaddAddam* trilogy create and monopolize markets of violence and death. Corporate interests loosely legislate permissible and impermissible violence as necessary to sustain their control and profit. As a result, in the pleeblands violence is always a looming potentiality not unlike the condition of life in the post-apocalyptic landscape.²²

²² Of course, although Atwood emphasizes the primacy and the particular role that the lab plays in modelling both versions of the global landscape, she introduces "Painball Arenas" in *The Year of the Flood*

Satirical Science Fiction: Disrupting the Ideology of Corporate Bioscience

Both novels are invested in the status of art, methods of persuasion, and the linguistic production of ideology. *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake* portray the use of scientific and advertising discourses to maintain the absolute power of their dystopian worlds' corporate oligarchies. The depiction of advertising and science in the novels is, of course, satirically exaggerated. But these hyperbolic representations of these discourses draws attention to the more obscured nature of the ideology that encourages the conception of bodies as primarily fleshly objects, even by consumers themselves.

As discourses, advertising and science persuade audiences to accept versions of reality while occluding their operations as persuasive discourses. Science purports to objectively and empirically explain the natural world, supposedly functioning as an unmediated window on to reality. In other words, science in Western culture holds a monopoly upon natural truth. For example, as a boy, Jimmy overhears an argument between his scientist parents in which his father reveals as much: "There's nothing sacred about cells and tissues" (*Oryx* 57). By declaring the fact that cells and tissues, the basic materials of organic bodies, are "nothing sacred," Jimmy's father authorizes the technological manipulation of bodies on any biological scale. Such statements ultimately operate as a form of persuasion, constructing a worldview for an audience to accept on the basis of scientific authority. But because that authority is premised on its supposed

as another space of exception in parallel with the corporate lab that further illustrates the unchecked corporate objectification of life. The Arenas offer prisoners with death sentences to participate in gladiator matches, the winners of which are granted freedom. The corporate elite enjoy the blood sport as entertainment and gambling opportunity (98). In both *The Year of the Flood* and the trilogy's final text, *MaddAddam* (2013), Atwood extensively depicts the dehumanizing effects on the Arena's participants to such an extent that even the idealist and empathetic God's Gardeners put to death their Painballer prisoners, who are deemed incapable of reclaiming an ethical sociability (*MaddAddam* 368).

objectivity and unmediated representation of the world, the persuasive nature of scientific discourse is hidden.

Crake is Atwood's chief example of scientific persuasiveness. He rationalizes human culture into overdetermined biological phenomena. In a dialogue with Jimmy, Crake declares that humans are "hormone robots," who, when sexually unsatisfied, act out their frustrations through various means, including art; art, he says, is simply an evolutionarily motivated reaction, a "stab at getting laid" (166, 168). Crake even reasons that God is "a consequence of grammar . . . because as soon as there's a past tense, there has to be a past before the past, and you keep going back in time until you get to *I don't know*, and that's what God is" (*Year* 316). Since "grammar would be impossible without the FoxP2 gene," "God is a brain mutation" (316). In Crake's world view, nothing transcends or arrives before material and, for organic life, biological causality. The scientific discourse that allows him to rationalize all human behavior ultimately rationalizes his genocide. People, as he seems to tell himself, are assemblies of flesh and biological processes that he is qualified to manage as a scientist. He has been apparently persuaded by his own words and has tempted readers to be persuaded, to be seduced by his apparent altruism and authority.

The Space Merchants lacks a character like Crake and the spectacle of his scientifically rationalized apocalypse, but the role of a scientific worldview constructed through language clearly permeates the perspective of the ruling class. As noted earlier, the corporate elite rely on the scientific management of populations through tools like the journal *Biometrika* that quantitatively represents the human species as biological systems. The system of mass control in the text mirrors new approaches in bioscience since the

Second World War. Advances in genetics created a culture around what Haraway calls the “new life science,” sociobiology—the biological study of groups. She describes how around 1940 sociobiology was intent on translating individual life forms into mass systems that could be controlled and predicted. This tactic “became a basic strategy of social institutions,” and Haraway ultimately claims, “The search has been for evolutionary stable strategies for maximizing profit” (*Simians* 46). Pohl and Kornbluth imagine how the sociobiology of the 1950s could be perfected into the degrading management of populations as flesh.

Alongside the language and practices of corporate bioscience in laboratory spaces, both novels emphasize the importance of advertising for sustaining the power and ideology that emerges from the lab. Indeed, consumers need to be persuaded to purchase the commodities that the lab produces in order for corporate bioscience to prosper and maintain its power. As a character in *The Year of the Flood* states, “The Corps have to sell, but they can’t force people to buy” (266). In order to maintain their particular system of economically-generated power, the corporations in Atwood’s dystopia must continue to persuade the populace that they provide essential goods and services. The authors of both novels present advertising as another method of control in tandem with the direct manipulation of flesh and the threat of violence.

In *The Space Merchants*, Pohl and Kornbluth almost immediately unveil the nature of advertising in their world. Their depiction points to the negative potential of real advertising to produce exploitative consumer ideologies. Courtenay’s boss, Fowler, complains in a staff meeting about the restrictions the government has put on their advertising tactics. He says,

You know what they've done. They outlawed compulsive subsonics in our aural advertising—but we've bounced back with a list of semantic cue words that tie in with every basic trauma and neurosis in American life today. They listened to the safety cranks and stopped us from projecting our messages on aircar windows—but we bounced back. Lab tells me . . . that soon we'll be testing a system that projects directly on to the retina of the eye. (*Venus* 5-6)

Like how the biotech plantation treats its laborers and Chicken Little, the advertising firm targets consumers as fleshly objects to be managed for profit. Fowler's comments point to the desire of advertising to act upon a passive audience. He wants to use "compulsive" technology that bombards consumers, removing their agency as recipients who can choose to view advertising or not.

Fowler's firm, in line with advertising in the real world, seeks to persuasively compel certain consumer behavior. By making use of "every basic trauma and neurosis in American life," advertising targets the psychological and biological substrates of human beings, seeking to create behavior while circumventing their will as active subjects. Courtenay explains as much to another character who has found himself purchasing one brand over another. He says, "It means we got you. [We] worked on you . . . We reached you. Smoothly, without your ever being aware that it was happening, you became persuaded that there was something rather nice about Starrzelius clothes and shoes" (*Venus* 35). This "smooth" operation that evades a person's awareness is an approach to audiences that treats them as machinic, conditioned beings. Courtenay's expression "you became persuaded" emphasizes the subtle, subliminal intent of advertising. By using the

verb “to persuade” in the passive voice without an active subject present to undertake the persuasion, the text highlights the self-erasing process of advertising. As Courtenay’s explanation suggests, advertising works better, like science, if its role as a persuasive discourse is not apparent to its audience. Thus, Courtenay’s firm works to create the sense of “something rather nice” about Starrzelius products as if this feeling were a basic fact of reality.

Fowler’s commentary about the restrictions on advertising efforts also importantly reveals the entanglement of the linguistic persuasion of advertising with new techno-scientific practices. While his firm’s techniques rely on the linguistic technologies of, for example, “semantic cue words” that trigger neurotic responses, technologies for biologically manipulating body and mind are presented with more emphasis. The authors imagine the use of “compulsive subsonics,” “aircar” window projections, and retina projections along with fictional advanced technologies in *The Space Merchants* and its sequel, *The Merchants’ War* (1984). Such hyperbolic depictions of advertising technology reveal the nature of advertising *as a technology* for acting upon consumers’ bodies.

Ultimately, the advertising efforts that Fowler describes are part of the unchecked exercise of corporate power. As Courtenay remarks, the highest ideal of his world is “Sales” that advertising promotes (*Venus* 38). As a corollary, Fowler says to him as an ad executive, “[Y]ou’ve got power. Five words from you, and in a matter of weeks or months half a million consumers will find their lives completely changed. That’s power, Mitch, absolute power. And you know the old saying. Power ennobles. Absolute power ennobles absolutely” (33). This corporate axiom reverses the traditional aphorism about

power's corruptive nature. In this fictional "old saying," power actively but naturally legitimates itself. On one hand, the sentence, "Power ennobles," implies that to possess power is to impart a beneficent quality to its owner. On the other hand, the lack of a grammatical object for this normally transitive verb suggests that power self-reflexively ennobles itself, regardless of its employment, in a cyclical, even masturbatory fashion—indeed, Fowler's naïve, self-serving remark is laughable. The satire here, however, ultimately points to the core danger of the oligarchy's ideology: within their power inheres the authorization to wield it without consent from those subject to power. This simple sentence reveals the oligarchy's exceptional nature, maintained through its own persuasive self-assurances and the advertising that disciplines consumers.

In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood's fictional take on corporate bioscience includes a similar depiction of advertising. In her neoliberal dystopia in which every skill must be marketable, her protagonist, Jimmy, goes to a liberal arts college to study "Problematics," the academic field of advertising rhetoric. Upon his graduation, he finds employment as a "word" person in the advertising industry. Of his new position Atwood writes, "He was to cudgel his brains and spend ten-hour days wandering the labyrinths of the thesaurus and cranking out the verbiage" (*Oryx* 248). The text elaborates, "It was his task to describe and extol, to the present the vision of what – oh, so easily! – could come to be. Hope and fear, desire and revulsion, these were his stocks-in-trade, on these he rang his changes" (248). Jimmy's job is to create an aspirational "vision" of reality for his corporation's customers. In contrast to the power attributed to advertising executives in *The Space Merchants*, as a copy editor Jimmy himself becomes like a machinic laborer without "brains."

Despite his relatively privileged status as a corporate citizen, even Jimmy's seeming intellectual labor transforms him into an passive, object-like being. He is alienated from his work, told by his superiors that "with time he improved, whatever that meant" (248). Although he is a "word" person, he loses track of how his words and meanings are taken up and used by his corporation. To him, his work is "verbiage," excess without real meaning. His labor does not require critical or reflective thought. Still, the language he deploys registers on an ideological level. He uses trigger words that act on consumer sensibilities like programming code: "Pills to make you fatter, thinner, hairier, balder, whiter, browner, blacker, yellower, sexier, and happier" (248). These comparative adjectives are floating signifiers that represent not some sort of material product but an aspirational, immaterial sense of change. The text emphasizes how the pills and Jimmy's words do not promise hair or thinness but only difference.

Like Fowler's firm in *The Space Merchants*, Jimmy's work trades on "[h]ope and fear, desire and revulsion," Atwood's version of "neuroses and trauma" of daily "American life," engaging consumers as malleable objects rather than through rational discourse as subjects. In addition, the changes that his advertising promises are, more or less, changes to consumers' flesh. Advertising convinces people to add on to the work that corporate bioscience is already doing; to conceive of themselves as primarily fleshly entities. The narrative also admits, "Once in a while, he'd make up a word – *tensicity*, *fibracionous*, *pheromonimal* – but he never once got caught out. His proprietors like those kinds of words in the small print on packages because they sounded scientific and had a convincing effect [sic]" (248-9). So not only does Jimmy's advertising language peddle the wares of corporate bioscience that treat consumers' as flesh, but he also makes

use of science's rhetorical authority. His words have no true definition, but their figurative, ideological meaning works potently on his audience.

When Crake takes advantage of the technologies and resources and corporate bioscience to engineer his genocide, he also makes use of the ideological atmosphere that advertising firms have created in his future world. When he introduces Jimmy to his Crakers, radically genetically engineered passive, docile human surrogates, Crake describes them as "floor models." He says to Jimmy, "They represent the art of the possible . . . We've done our market research" (*Oryx* 305). Truly, the Crakers, along with his plague, are part of Crake's ecological survival strategy for imminent failure of the planet's resources. But he is able to create them under the premise of fulfilling the market desires generated by the advertising of corporate bioscience technologies. Within this ruse, the Crakers are a technology of both science and advertising. They are "floor models" designed to attract interest in less extreme versions of human genetic engineering. They are intended by Crake's corporate superiors to serve as a fleshly advertisement in order to persuade customers to make other fleshly purchases. Of course, the Crakers are a science fiction creation, used to provoke readers' estrangement and then critical thought about the potential of lab-created flesh and its consequences in the world. But this example of flesh's persuasive deployment baldly illustrates Atwood's critique of how corporate bioscience works through an ideology in which consumers see themselves as flesh. By looking at the Crakers in their laboratory space, audiences are persuaded to think of their own bodies as radically malleable flesh.

As linguistic art, both *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake* offer critical intervention into the language and practices of corporate bioscience, both in its labs and

auxiliary advertising industries. Yet both texts further emphasize that dystopian degree of persuasive power that belongs to scientific discourse and advertising emerges in these worlds in the absence of a potent culture of literary art. Pohl and Kornbluth have Courtenay explain how the market for persuasive language has turned the linguistic arts into an advertising utility. He says,

The correlation is perfectly clear. Advertising up, lyric poetry down. There are only so many people capable of putting together words that stir and move and sing. When it became possible to earn a very good living in advertising by exercising this capability, lyric poetry was left to untalented screwballs who had to shriek for attention and compete by eccentricity.

(*Venus* 36)

Of course, the novel's presentation of this "correlation" is ahistorical: advertising and poetry have long coexisted until this fictional future when one discourse has completely drowned out the other.

In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood makes a similar gesture about the transformation of linguistic art into advertising technology. In her dystopian future, she imagines how the arts and humanities have become defunct except for their role in entertainment and advertising production. Jimmy attends "The Martha Graham Academy," one of the last "Arts-and-Humanities college" where "a lot of what went on . . . was like studying Latin, or book-binding: pleasant to contemplate in its way, but no longer central to anything" (*Oryx* 186, 187). He majors in "Problematics," the "*contemporary* arena" for the study of language and rhetoric. The text comments on what Atwood imagines to be the near future for the North American neoliberal university: "Like everything at Martha Graham

it had utilitarian aims” (188). The linguistic arts once used to stir feeling and provoke thought for so many different reasons have been reduced to marketing. Atwood writes, “Window-dressing was what he’d be doing at best – decorating the cold, hard, numerical real world in flossy 2-D verbiage” (188). Without immediate marketable, “utilitarian” value, linguistic art has vanished in both dystopias in favor of exploitative, deceptive advertising rhetoric. The corporate oligarchies essentially corner the market for affective language, using it in the service of their consumer ideologies. The novels suggest that, without alternatives to the objectifying discourses of science and advertising, American society might become a version of these dystopias.

The novels offer themselves as such alternatives, using their satiric modes to give readers pause about the ideologies and narratives surrounding corporate bioscience. Satire is also a persuasive genre, by definition loaded with a moral or political agenda. But the key difference between the satire of *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake* and the scientific and advertising discourses that the novels lambast is that their satire draws sharp attention to its artfulness and persuasive methods. And by taking corporate advertising and bioscience as their subjects, these satirical novels directly invite readers to contemplate the function of representation in these three kinds of discourse.

Satire, of course, is not some morally pure alternative to science and advertising. Nor are science and advertising inherently evil forms of persuasion. Any of these discourses could be used to the moral detriment or exploitation of audiences. Satire evokes the pleasure of ridiculing a target, and that pleasure invites audiences to identify with the satirist over the object of ridicule. While the audience or author of satire could actively ignore or occlude the visibility of satire’s method of persuasion, *The Space*

Merchants and *Oryx and Crake* draw attention to their persuasive efforts, asking readers to think not only about corporate bioscience and its advertising efforts but also about how the novels go about representing corporate bioscience.

Unlike the science and advertising depicted in these texts, the ironic nature of satire prevents it from being able to create a totalizing ideology. The work of satire requires both its direct grammatical meaning and its referent to construct the ironic effect. For example, in 1953 a creature like Chicken Little does not exist in historical reality, but as a figure in *The Space Merchants* she refers to the real industrial chicken farming industry. When encountering this figure in text, readers engage both the literal and figurative meaning of Chicken Little, unable to disregard either. In fact, Pohl and Kornbluth include a passage that insists that readers not ignore either the literal or figurative aspect of this creature. This effect occurs when late in novel Courtenay's boss, Fowler, attributes Courtenay's tale of kidnapping to a psychotic break from reality. Referring to the role of Chicken Little in Courtenay's narrative, Fowler remarks, "The symbolism— . . . well, it's quite unmistakable" (*Venus* 124). Like the reader, he recognizes the creature's metaphorical significance. But to Courtenay's distress, Fowler dismisses Chicken Little as *only* a metaphor, a product of Courtenay's traumatized mind. In part, this moment is a humorous self-reflexive jab by the authors for the heavy-handed symbolism of Chicken Little. But Fowler's dismissal of Courtenay's tale serves to frustrate him, pushing him further into an oppositional stance to the corporate regime. Since Courtenay knows that Chicken Little is real, he recognizes that the anecdotal manipulation and predation on her body by corporate bioscience is real and illustrates all bodies' condition. The authors' tactic here also persuades the reader to align with

Courtenay because the text is crafted so that the reader identifies and believes the truth-value of his story. As a result, Fowler's incredulous comment prompts the reader to disagree and become further entrenched in the truth value of Courtenay's experience, which a few paragraphs later articulates his first earnest recognition of the corporate hegemony's unjust social order.²³ But at the same time, the text's mention of Chicken Little's metaphorical meaning prompts readers to think in those same terms, to consider what exactly she symbolizes outside the text as well as inside it.

In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood more directly articulates the truth value fiction has in relationship to discourses of "fact." At one point Jimmy imagines or recalls a past conversation with his unworldly Craker wards: "*Is it real? No, it is not real. What is this not real? Not real can tell us about real*" (*Oryx* 102). Crake has intended them to not understand symbolic thinking, so pictures and other representative objects they find in the ruins of civilization confuse. Jimmy's explanation about "real" and "not real" to the naïve Crakers also serves as a reminder to Atwood's audience about the capacity for art to teach us about what we accept as "real," including science.

Conclusion: The Shortcomings of Satire

Both *The Space Merchants* and *Oryx and Crake* execute their satirical critiques to great effect. But the dark nature of the novels' satire offers little in the place of corporate consumer ideologies that they warn against. While the two texts elicit cynical pleasure

²³ Brennan argues a similar case in his essay on the novel, that Fowler "uses psychoanalytic theory and jargon to erect an overwhelming defense against the reality of Mitch's experience." He calls the narrative a fiction of Courtenay's mind, and in response Courtenay is driven further away from the corporate ideology to the point at which he finally embraces the Consie critique of the corporate hegemony (108). Brennan does not, however, make the clear connection that the text compels the reader to follow the same trajectory, rejecting Fowler's ignorance in favor of the knowledge that Courtenay's experience has revealed.

and gesture toward a counter-politics or ideology in response to the systems of exploitation they represent, neither novel fulfills those gestures on its own. The authors thus turn to sequel texts to supplement the shortcomings of their satirical originals.

In *The Space Merchants*, Courtenay does encounter the possibility of recognizing bodies as more than disposable flesh. This moment occurs in the same space that epitomizes fleshliness, Chicken Little's chamber. The artisan Herrera who explains Chicken Little to Courtenay also secretly holds a special bond with her—indeed, he introduces the use of the female pronoun into Courtenay's narrative, treating the creature more as a living being than a fleshly object. Herrera speaks of Chicken Little with a sense of camaraderie, and the authors make this relationship evident with sentences like, "He whacked the rubbery thing affectionately with the flat of his slicer" (*Venus* 78). This relationship culminates in the revelation that Chicken Little is a co-conspirator with Herrera as part of the plantation's "Consie" resistance movement. Using a secret command, Herrera prompts her to open a cavernous orifice that leads to a subterranean chamber in which Consies can meet unobserved. This hidden room, in fact, proves to be another kind of space of exception within the plantation. With the help of the corporate monster figuratively at the center of the oligarchy's power in the novel, the radicals can temporarily escape corporate power. And despite her formulation as objectified flesh, Chicken Little's display of social responsiveness destabilizes the intended absolute commodification of her body. This moment in the text suggests a hope that life itself, in its complexity and chaos, provides its own basis for resistance to political or economic systems of exploitation.

In the end, however, this aspect of the narrative is only incidental, not to return as a thematic conceit. The novel's plot lacks a satisfying conclusion. Courtenay ultimately but half-heartedly converts to the radical Consie cause and escapes with members of the movement to Venus. But this ending is more fit for an action or thriller film than to the narrative that Pohl and Kornbluth have developed so effectively to depict concerns about capitalism and bodies. Kornbluth comments in retrospect that their collaborative focus on social critique seems to have little room for redemption. In a lecture he explains, "By the time the reader has gone through 178 pages of misery, animosity, squalor and violence, he is understandably reluctant to believe that on Page 179 everything can suddenly be patched up so that these savage creatures can live happily ever after" (73). By apparent oversight, the logic of the plot ultimately suggests that the response to the problems of this world is to escape them. Courtenay and the radicals simply abandon the rest of the world to the corporate regime.

Pohl's solo sequel *The Merchants' War* works to correct the first novel's flawed ending. He imagines the more socially and environmentally conscious society that has taken root on Venus years after Courtenay's narrative. But rather than exploring the Venusian utopia, Pohl returns another corporate citizen, Tennison Tarb, from his diplomatic post on Venus to Earth. Like Courtenay, Tarb finds himself passing through the bowels of the consumer underclass. The plot, however, does not whisk the newly radicalized Tarb back into the safety of Venus society. Once he learns of the Venusian plan to turn corporate brainwashing technology against Earth's population in an effort to secure Venus's independence, Tarb insists on an alternative to again abandoning Earth's humans outside the equitable Consie community. In the last pages, rather than joining the

war effort that pits two populations against each other, he declares, “I’m opting out! I’m trying something different” (*Venus* 344). He hijacks the airwaves and leads a band of disaffected consumers in broadcasting testimonials across the globe about their experiences of suffering under the corporate regime. This truth-telling performance leads to a revolutionary moment when Earth society might reform itself into something better, though the novel ends without exploring the consequences of Tarb’s radical action. Both *The Space Merchants* and *The Merchants’ War* operate under this same ethos, telling the truth—albeit in fiction through satirical hyperbole—about the nature of unchecked corporate bioscience in the hopes of readers’ own dissent to such practices.

In contrast, Atwood provides less grounds for optimism in *Oryx and Crake* and her sequels. The *MaddAddam* world faces ecological disaster with or without Crake’s intervention, and *Oryx and Crake* does not allow for humanity’s figurative redemption through Jimmy, who fears he is his species’ last representative. Throughout the text he reflects upon his personal failings and those of his capitalist civilization; he develops something of a better, more conscientious character in the course of the narrative.

Atwood seems to offer Jimmy the chance to actualize his new self when he discovers a camp of other human survivors. But the novel ends in a cliffhanger before Jimmy meets the interlopers. This ending dramatizes the unresolved tension that the author instills throughout the text between starkly negative critique and a lack of potent ideas for intervention in the regime of corporate bioscience. Even on the small scale of strangers meeting in a wasteland, reading *Oryx and Crake* provides little clear evidence that new, better human communities are possible. Instead, the onus remains on the reader to imagine the possibilities.

Of course, Atwood's two sequels reveal the identities of these other survivors and further elaborate the post-apocalyptic plot. By the beginning of the third novel, *MaddAddam*, some God's Gardeners—a religious group that actively resists the corporate hegemony—and the Crakers have banded together. Three non-engineered women have even conceived hybrid offspring with Craker males. Their community of difference temporarily expands when pigoons—human-swine genetically-engineered hybrids—demonstrate a kind of language-use to communicate with the Crakers. The non-hybrid humans, Crakers, and pigoons agree to a basic social contract to not “eat” each other, either alive or dead (270), and to combat the irredeemable cutthroat prisoner-gliadiators that have harassed the other survivors in this novel and *The Year of the Flood*. Their alliance wins out over these “Painballers,” opening the possibility that human and non-human life might coexist in non-exploitative relationships in the wake of capitalism's destruction.

Still, Atwood ends *MaddAddam* on the same note of tension as in *Oryx and Crake* ten years earlier. The reins of the narrative pass from human hands into the Craker child Blackbeard's in a textual gesture of recognition that these beings are worthy of subjectivity and narrative voice despite their difference from “normal” humans. On the final page Blackbeard expresses the hopefulness he feels at the birth of the human-Craker children, but his optimism arrives only pages after three of the trilogy's four main characters have died rather abruptly (390). At the very least then, if Blackbeard's hope is not entirely misplaced, it at least does not belong to humans of the past world, suggesting an absence of hope for the reader's world as well.²⁴

²⁴ Although this social contract's inclusiveness is quite radical compared to twenty-first century societies and the trilogy's pre-apocalyptic world, all of these participants are biologically linked to the privileged

Atwood does not, however, entirely abandon her readers as helpless to an apocalyptic fate at the hands of corporate bioscience. In *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*, she develops the much critically commented upon ethos of the God's Gardeners as a radical alternative to the exploitation and violence of their world and ours, what Frederic Jameson describes as a kind of "biopolitical saintliness" ("Then").²⁵ Their non-dogmatic ideology is premised on radical reinterpretations of the Bible alongside scientific fact. This creed resists the objectification of human and non-human bodies that has begun in the laboratory and spread to all social space. For example, in one of the Gardener leader's sermons about God's "Covenant with Noah, and with his sons, 'and with every living creature,'" he explains, "No one can make a Covenant with a stone: for a Covenant to exist, there must be a minimum of two live and responsible parties to it. Therefore the Animals are not senseless matter, not mere chunks of meat" (*Year 91*). Though a striking attempt to reorient Western culture through one of its foundational texts, this reinterpretation and others like it in the trilogy do not offer a clear politics of action.²⁶ Instead, the Gardeners' teaching works to reorient the ethical consciousness of

category of the "human." While two groups are "post-human," the pact among these three groups is predicated upon their linked capacities for language. Atwood's narrators do not speculate about how the pigeons and Crakers are capable of communicating, but readers are left to assume that these creatures' participation in the alliance is due to their partially shared genetic heritage with *homo sapiens*. Thus, though this alliance serves to practically model the Gardeners' ethics portrayed in *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*, this example of a revised human and non-human sociability just barely reaches outside the bounds of the "human." This development points to the difficulty of creating non-anthropocentric plots that activate a truly inclusive ideology like Bruno Latour's *Democracy of Things* or a politics premised on theories of new materialism. While Atwood demonstrates through the God's Gardeners an investment in reaching beyond the category of the "human" to form more ethical communities and ecologies, from her example in the *MaddAddam* trilogy still seems to suggest that stories are only appropriate to human beings.²⁵ For examples of this criticism, see Hannes Bergthaller (2010), Shannon Hengen (2010), J. Brooks Bouson (2011), Gerry Canavan (2012), and the essays by Paula Anca Farca, Tomoko Kuribayashi, Lauren A. Rule Maxwell, and Carol Osborne in the 2010 special issue of *Margaret Atwood Studies*.

²⁶ In an otherwise compelling reading about the "soulless vocabulary" and lack of ethics in the consumer culture portrayed in *Oryx and Crake*, Shannon Hengen concludes that "Atwood demands an interpenetration of the languages of traditional wisdom and ever-changing technology" (140). Hengen points in this essay to Adam One, the leader of God's Gardeners, as the exemplar of this interpenetration. While Adam One's sermons in *The Year of the Flood* do offer an inviting amalgamation of scientific,

its members and the surrounding world. Atwood clearly intends to do this same critical work upon her audience, to find, as Canavan writes, through these dystopian allegories some “outside” to the consumer capitalism that has “remade all of human history, all the way down to the level of the gene, in its image” (154, 155).²⁷ The *Gardeners* and novels try to create a foothold for a kind of thought and existence beyond the exploitative models of corporate bioscience.

While the fate of their fictional worlds is unresolved, the authors’ dystopian projections inscribe a speculative function into their art, forecasting the possible outcomes of our present reality. Yet both novels are incontestably bound to contemporary critique. When read together, the mixed temporalities of these dystopian worlds and the texts’ circulation—the *Merchants’* duology’s periodic cultural resurfacing and the *MaddAddam* trilogy’s continued cultural production—all offer audiences a complex, fluid network of interstitial historical fact, fiction, and potential. The capabilities of bioscience change each year, but by translating concerns about the concomitant evolution of capitalism and bioscience into fiction, these novels create fields of critical signification that will only continue to accumulate more meaning from new audiences. Even if later

religious, and environmentalist discourse, his wisdom is decidedly *radical* rather than “traditional.” The quote used above indicates as much: in the context of Western modernity and capitalism, there is nothing traditional to the notion that human beings should have a Covenant or social contract with all animals. Adam One may emulate and even references past writers, like the poets Robert Burns, Christopher Smart, and Farley Mowat, demonstrating that his ideas are part of *a* tradition (*Year* 311). This tradition, however, represents a radical margin of Western culture and capitalism. Indeed, Atwood offers the God’s Gardeners ideology precisely as a way to un-think what theorists like Bruno Latour describe as the traditional schism of Western modernity between nature and human culture. When Hengen describes Adam One’s discourse as the interpenetration of the traditional and the new, she actually in part re-performs this schism that has overtaken the world of the novel to apocalyptic proportions.

²⁷ Reviews of *The Year of the Flood*, however, seem to belie the effectiveness of Atwood’s message. Gina Wisker reports that many reviewers found the sequel’s “post-apocalyptic, sustainability theme and its mixture of the homey arts and crafts, its quasi-religious tone, and its sometimes cartoonish characters” less than compelling (176). Indeed, skeptics of the novel’s ideas seem unable to accept the politics of the God’s Gardeners, but as I have argued, the trilogy proves ultimately more invested in challenging its readers’ conceptions rather than endorsing the Gardeners’ lifestyle wholesale.

twenty-first century readers do not take up a historicist reading practice of these novels, these texts nevertheless produce a more capacious historical and ethical awareness of the past, present, and possible futures each time they are read.

Coda: Spaces and Beyond

This dissertation, as is true of most intellectual exercises and certainly of all academic efforts, is only a tentative starting point for the topics it broaches. By no means does it attempt to offer the final word on the theories of American history, law, or politics, and without question it does not foreclose other critical approaches to the six novels I cover. As an organizing conceit, “spaces of exception” offers a method for identifying the interconnections among these novels and others, as well as the histories and possibilities represented in their pages. Yet, as becomes apparent in each text, the stakes surrounding each of these sites are far from limited to specific locales or moments in time.

The major conclusion of this project is twofold. First, the torture chamber, ghetto, farm labor camp, and corporate laboratory in these novels are only the epicenters for much more diffuse networks of power. Sites that mirror in some way Agamben’s model space of exception in the “camp” are only one kind of technique for managing bodies marked as disposable. In fact, to think of my conceit more broadly, the truest, most persistent yet ephemeral spaces of exception are the bodies of people and other living beings not fully enfolded into the polity of the State. To be racialized, economically dispossessed, or otherwise dehumanized is to begin inhabiting a space of exception defined by the body.

Secondly, in each chapter I have discussed how Butler, Walter, Wright, Steinbeck, Pohl, Kornbluth, and Atwood have emplotted particular spaces as a strategy to

reveal the iniquity that reaches across our national and global landscapes. Somewhat paradoxically, these authors utilize spaces of exception that are difficult to both materially access and ethically imagine in order to expose even larger insights. These sites become lenses, a technique of representation that works to reverse how these spaces are deployed as techniques of violence and marginalization. Trouble arises, however, as techniques of power evolve beyond tangible sites and new methods of focusing attention and understanding are required. Policies like “stop and frisk” and racial profiling extend exceptional police powers beyond zones of racial containment. The neoliberal “new economy” generates wealth in part via the precarity of temporary labor without the arrangements of space and bodies found in *The Grapes of Wrath*. At the close of this dissertation, one way to think of these spaces together are as laboratories of power through which stakeholders across different networks experiment with how to better justify and maintain their power.

Even without such a consideration, however, this project leaves room for significant expansion. As one example, gender and sexuality remain a kind of blind spot here. While I have paid attention to politicized bodies, racialized bodies, laboring bodies, and commodified bodies, there remains a needed exploration of spaces of exception that exploit sexual and gender difference. In fact, a new chapter could be written about the brothels and pornography industry in Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy alongside *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Ultimately, the topic of each chapter could be expanded into multiple book projects of their own, some of which already exist: the long history of State torture and police violence; depictions of spaces intended to contain blackness like the slave

ship, plantation, ghetto, and prison; centuries of migratory labor; and the role of scientific discourse in fueling American arrangements of power and exploitation.

Beyond an expansion of subjects, this dissertation could evolve into a project that more firmly commits to either its investment in literary history or genre. I pose Chapter 1 and 4 as “contemporary” while Chapters 2 and 3 offer a broader historical perspective. Yet each Chapter primarily functions as a case study with interlinking topical concerns. A fuller project could commit to taking the long twentieth-century or more as its subject, encompassing more literary and non-literary forms. In contrast, this dissertation could more fully embrace the genre of science fiction that already makes up half of my primary texts. One approach would be to take up the comparative model in Chapter 1 to pair Wright’s *Native Son* with a novel like Samuel Delany’s *Trouble on Triton* (1976) which reverses engineers a space like the ghetto into the absolute freedom of the “unlicensed zone” on a moon of Neptune. Similarly, the post-apocalyptic vision of Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006) productively mirrors the depiction of the “road” in *The Grapes of Wrath*. If we accept my contention that spaces of exception and their kin litter the pages of American history, then a study of most any genre, comparative or otherwise, is not out of reach.

At the end of this dissertation, I would also speculate that the intersection of literature and spaces of exception is not a matter of happenstance. The injustices in the margins of our societies are always in need of strategies of ethical representation and redress, and American writers have developed a strong ethic in response. But spaces of exception in particular are designed and operated in a manner to avoid representation and legibility under modern liberalism. In many ways, the work of literary fiction is directly

opposed to this occlusion of lives that occurs in torture chambers, ghettos, camps, labs, and networks that have produced them. As a result, we should be doubly vigilant against efforts to curtail the study and production in the arts and humanities, especially by those networks of power and influence that benefit from the erasure of lives from representation.

Bibliography

- Afflerbach, Ian. "Liberalism's Blind Judgment: Richard Wright's *Native Son* and the Politics of Reception." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 61, no. 1, Spring 2015, pp. 90-113.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community*. 1990. Translated by Michael Hardt, edited by Sandra Buckley, Michael Hardt, and Brian Massumi, U. of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- . *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. 1995. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford UP, 1998.
- . *The Open: Man and Animal*. 2002. Translated by Kevin Attell, Stanford UP, 2004.
- . *Remnants of Auschwitz: the Witness and the Archive*. 1998. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Zone Books, 2002.
- . *State of Exception*. 2003. Translated by Kevin Attell, U. of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Allen, Marlene D. "Octavia Butler's 'Parable' Novels and the 'Boomerang' of African American History." *Callaloo*, vol. 32, no. 4, Winter 2009, pp. 1353-1365.
- Amis, Kingsley. *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science Fiction*. Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1974.
- Andrews, Travis M. "Margaret Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale' is the latest dystopian novel to top bestseller lists." *Washington Post*, 7 Feb. 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/02/07/margaret-atwoods-the-handmaids-tale-is-the-newest-dystopian-novel-to-top-bestseller-lists/?utm_term=.a08d5921af3f. Accessed 3 March 2017.

- Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. 1963.
Penguin Books, 1976.
- . *The Human Condition*. 1958. U. of Chicago Press, 1998.
- . *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 1951. Harcourt, 1973.
- . "The Perplexities of the Rights of Man." *Biopolitics: A Reader*, edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, Duke UP, 2013, pp. 82-97.
- Atwood, Margaret. "Awaiting the Perfect Storm." Interview by Martin Halliwell. 2003.
Waltzing Again: New and Selected Conversations with Margaret Atwood, edited by Earl G. Ingersoll, Ontario Review Press, 2006, pp. 253-64.
- . *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*. Doubleday, 2011.
- . "Life after Man." Interview by Eleanor Case and Maggie McDonald. *New Scientist*, vol. 178, no. 2393, 2003. EBSCO, web.a.ebscohost.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/ehost/detail/detail?sid=2cff3ffc-0dff-427f-8041-5f4bf8f5f825%40sessionmgr4006&vid=7&hid=4206&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=9837920&db=a9h. Accessed 16 June 2014.
- . *MaddAddam*. Doubleday, 2013.
- . "Margaret Atwood on *MaddAddam*, the HBO Adaptation, and Genetic Engineering." Interview by Jennifer Vineyard. *Vulture.com*, 20 August 2014, www.vulture.com/2014/08/margaret-atwood-maddaddam-paperback-chat.html. Accessed 13 Sept. 2014.
- . *Oryx and Crake*. 2003. Anchor Books, 2004.

- . "Using What You're Given." Interview by Jo Brans. 1982. *Margaret Atwood: Conversations*, edited by Earl G. Ingersoll, Ontario Review Press, 1990, pp. 140-51.
- . "Where Were You When I Really Needed You." Interview by Jim Davidson. 1978. *Margaret Atwood: Conversations*, edited by Earl G. Ingersoll, Ontario Review Press, 1990, pp. 86-98.
- . *The Year of the Flood*. Anchor Books, 2009.
- Avelar, Idelber. "Five Theses on Torture." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2001, pp. 253-271.
- Baucom, Ian. *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*. Duke UP, 2005.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. 1989. Cornell UP, 1991.
- Beckwith, Jonathan R. "The Politics of Genetic Engineering." M.I.T. Cambridge, MA. 17 April 1975. Address.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 4, Summer 2007, pp. 754-80.
- Bergthaller, Hannes. "Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*." *English Studies*, vol. 91, no. 7, 2010, pp. 728-43.
- Bethune, Brian. "Atwood Apocalyptic." *Macleans*, vol. 116, 2003, pp. 44-49.
- Blake, Aaron. "President Obama's farewell speech transcript, annotated." *Washington Post*, 10 Jan. 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-

fix/wp/2017/01/10/president-obamas-farewell-speech-transcript-annotated/?utm_term=.cd49693b3765. Accessed 24 Feb. 2017.

Bone, Robert A. *The Negro Novel in America*. Yale UP, 1958.

Booker, M. Keith. *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism*. Greenwood Press, 1994.

Bosco, Mark, S. J. "The Apocalyptic Imagination in *Oryx and Crake*." *Margaret Atwood: The Robber Bride, The Blind Assassin, Oryx and Crake*, edited by J. Brooks Bouson, Continuum, 2010, pp. 156-71.

Bouson, J. Brooks. "'It's Game Over Forever': Atwood's Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in *Oryx and Crake*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2004, pp. 139-56.

Brennan, John P. "The Mechanical Chicken: Psyche and Society in *The Space Merchants*." *Extrapolation*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1984, pp. 101-14.

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, 2006.

---. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford UP, 1997.

Butler, Octavia. *Parable of the Sower*. 1993. Grand Central Publishing, 2007.

---. *Parable of the Talents*. 1998. Grand Central Publishing, 2007.

Canavan, Gerry. "Hope, But Not for Us: Ecological Science Fiction and the End of the World in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*." *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2012, pp. 138-59.

Carlson, Eric W. "Symbolism in *The Grapes of Wrath*." 1958. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 748-56.

- Carpenter, Frederic I. "The Philosophical Joals." 1941. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 708-19.
- Carroll, Patrick. *Science, Culture, and Modern State Formation*. U. of California Press, 2006.
- Charles, Dan. "The System of Supplying America's Chickens Pits Farmer Vs. Farmer." *Morning Edition, NPR.org*, National Public Radio, 20 Feb. 2014, www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2014/02/20/279040721/the-system-that-supplies-our-chickens-pits-farmer-against-farmer. Accessed 22 Sept. 2014.
- Chu, Seo-Young. *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep?: A Science-Fictional Theory of Representation*. Harvard UP, 2010.
- Clapp, Jeffrey. "Richard Wright and the Police." *Post45*, 12 Sept. 2011, post45.research.yale.edu/2011/09/richard-wright-and-the-police/. Accessed 29 Feb. 2016.
- Clareson, Thomas. *Frederik Pohl*. Starmont House, 1987.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. Spiegel & Grau, 2015.
- Coetzee, J. M. *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. Edited by David Attwell, Harvard UP, 1992.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.
- Cooke, Grayson. "Technics and the Human at Zero-Hour: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*." *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2006, pp. 105-25.

- Cowley, Malcolm. "The Case of Bigger Thomas." 1940. Review of *Native Son*, by Richard Wright. *Critical Essays on Richard Wright's Native Son*, edited by Keneth Kinnamon, Twayne Publishers, 1997, pp. 37-9.
- Dalmaso, Renata Lucena. "'Modern monsters,' Old Habits: Nature, Humans, and Technology in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*." *Steinbeck Review*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2015, pp. 26-38.
- Davis, H. Louise. "Natural Resistance: Margaret Atwood as Ecofeminist or Apocalyptic Visionary." *Women Writing Nature*, edited by Barbara J. Cook, Lexington Books, 2008, pp. 81-94.
- Dawson, Jon Falsarella. "Solidarity Forever: The Historical Background of John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*." *Steinbeck Review*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2015, pp. 130-48.
- Dayan, Colin. *The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons*. Princeton UP, 2011.
- Dayan, Joan. *Haiti, History, and the Gods*. U. of California Press, 1995.
- Dennis, Michael Aaron. "Accounting for Research: New Histories of Corporate Laboratories and the Social History of American Science." *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 17, no. 3, August 1987, pp. 479-518.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 1980. U. of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- DiMarco, Danette. "Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained: Homo Faber and the Makings of a New Beginning in *Oryx and Crake*." *Papers on Language and Literature*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2005, pp. 170-95.

- Dray, Philip. *At the Hand of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*. Random House, 2002.
- DeMott, Robert. Introduction. *Working Days: The Journals of The Grapes of Wrath*, edited by Robert DeMott, Viking, 1989, pp. xxi-lvii.
- Derosa, Aaron. "Alterity and the Radical Other in Post-9/11 Fiction: DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Walter's *The Zero*." *Arizona Quarterly*, vol. 69, no. 3, Autumn 2013, pp. 157-183.
- Dickerson, James L. *Inside America's Concentration Camps: Two Centuries of Internment and Torture*. Lawrence Hill Books, 2010.
- Dray, Philip. *At the Hand of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*. Random House, 2002.
- Duvall, John N. "Homeland Security and the State of (American) Exception(alism): Jess Walter's *The Zero* and the Ethical Possibilities of Postmodern Irony." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 45, no. 2, Summer 2013, pp. 279-97.
- Ellison, Ralph. "Book Reviews: *Native Son*, by Richard Wright." 1940. *Critical Essays on Richard Wright's Native Son*, edited Kenneth Kinnamon, Twayne Publishers, 1997, pp. 43-4.
- . "The World and the Jug." 1963, 1964. *Shadow and Act*, Random House, 1964, pp. 107-43.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skins, White Masks*. 1952. Translated by Richard Philcox, Grove Press, 2008.
- . *The Wretched of the Earth*. 1961. Translated by Constance Farrington, Grove Press, 2005.

- Farca, Paula Anca. "Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* and the Garden of Limited Choices." *Margaret Atwood Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010, pp. 18-21.
- Finlay, Mark R. "Hogs, Antibiotics, and the Industrial Environments of Postwar Agriculture." *Industrializing Organisms: Introducing Evolutionary History*, edited by Susan R. Schrepfer and Philip Scranton, Routledge, 2004, pp. 237-60.
- Fontenrose, Joseph. "The Grapes of Wrath." 1963. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 784-800.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. 2004. Edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell, Picador, 2008.
- . *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. 1963. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith, Vintage Books, 1994.
- . *The History of Sexuality: Vol I.: An Introduction*. 1976. Translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, 1990.
- . *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. 1966. Vintage Books, 1994.
- . *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon, translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper, Pantheon Books, 1980.
- Franklin, Sarah. *Dolly Mixtures: The Remaking of Genealogy*. Duke UP, 2007.
- Godin, Benoît. "The Culture of Science and the Politics of Numbers." *The Culture of Science: How the Public Relates to Science Across the Globe*, edited by Martin W. Bauer, Rajesh Shukla, and Nick Allum, Tayler & Francis, 2012, pp. 18-35.

- Gottlieb, Erika. *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2001.
- Griffin, Robert J., and William A. Freedman. "Machines and Animals: Pervasive Motifs in *The Grapes of Wrath*." 1963. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*. John Steinbeck, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 769-83.
- Hakutani, Yoshinobu. "Native Son, Pudd'nhead Wilson, and Racial Discourse." *Critical Essays on Richard Wright's Native Son*, edited by Kenneth Kinnamon. Twayne Publishers, 1997, pp. 183-95.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*. Routledge, 1997.
- . *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. Routledge, 1989.
- . *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, 1991.
- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Harvard UP, 2000.
- Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford UP, 1997.
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford UP, 2005.
- Hassler, Donald M. "Swift, Pohl, and Kornbluth: Publicists Anatomize Newness." *Extrapolation*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1993, pp. 245-50.
- Hengen, Shannon. "Moral/Environmental Debt in *Payback* and *Oryx and Crake*." *Margaret Atwood: The Robber Bride, The Blind Assassin, Oryx and Crake*, edited by J. Brooks Bouson, Continuum, 2010, pp. 129-40.

- Horowitz, Roger. "Making the Chicken of Tomorrow: Reworking Poultry as Commodities and as Creatures, 1945-1990." *Industrializing Organisms: Introducing Evolutionary History*, edited by Susan R. Schrepfer and Philip Scranton, Routledge, 2004, pp. 215-35.
- Hunter, J. P. "Steinbeck's Wine of Affirmation in *The Grapes of Wrath*." 1963. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 801-13.
- Hussain, Nasser. "Beyond Norm and Exception: Guantanamo." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 4, Summer 2007, pp. 734-53.
- "I Wonder Where We Can Go Now." 1939. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 623-642.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. Verso, 2005.
- . *The Political Unconscious*. Cornell UP, 1981.
- . "Then You Are Them." Review of *The Year of the Flood* by Margaret Atwood. *London Review of Books*, vol. 31, no. 17, Sept. 2009, pp. 7-8.
- JanMohamed, Abdul R. *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death*. Duke UP, 2005.
- Jasanoff, Sheila. "Ordering knowledge, ordering society." *States of Knowledge: The co-production of science and social order*, edited by Sheila Jasanoff, Routledge, 2004, pp. 13-45.
- Kantorowicz, Ernst H. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton UP, 1957.

- Kevles, Daniel J. *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*. 1985. Harvard UP, 1995.
- Kinnamon, Keneth. Introduction. *Critical Essays on Richard Wright's Native Son*, edited by Keneth Kinnamon, Twayne Publishers, 1997, pp. 1-34.
- Kornbluth, C. M. "the failure of the science fiction novel as social criticism." 1957. *The Science Fiction Novel: imagination and social criticism*, by Basil Davenport, Robert A. Heinlein, C. M. Kornbluth, Alfred Bester, and Robert Bloch, 1959, Advent, 1969, pp. 49-76.
- Kuribayashi, Tomoko. "Women, Nature, and Forgiveness in *The Year of the Flood: An Exploratory Consideration*." *Margaret Atwood Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010, pp. 22-30.
- Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Translated by Catherine Porter, Harvard UP, 1993.
- Levi, Neil, and Michael Rothberg. "Auschwitz and the Remains of Theory: Toward an Ethics of the Borderland." *symploke*, vol. 11, no. 1-2, 2003, pp. 23-38.
- Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved*. Translated by Raymond Rosenthal, Vintage International, 1989.
- Lisca, Peter. "Editor's Introduction: The Pattern of Criticism." *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 695-707.
- . "The Grapes of Wrath as Fiction." 1957. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 729-47.

- “Margaret Atwood: MaddAddam.” *The Diane Rehm Show*. Narr. Diane Rehm. Interview with Margaret Atwood. Natl. Public Radio, WAMU, Washington, D.C, 19 Sept. 2013, *dianerehm.org*, dianerehm.org/shows/2013-09-19/margaret-atwood-maddaddam.
- Matthews, Kadeshia L. “Black Boy No More?: Violence and the Flight from Blackness in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*.” *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 60, no. 2, Summer 2014, pp. 276-97.
- Maxwell, Lauren A. Rule. “Desperate Times, Desperate Measures: Atwood’s Speculative Fiction and Environmental Activism.” *Margaret Atwood Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010, pp. 4-10.
- Mbembe, Achille. “Necropolitics.” Translated by Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2003, pp. 11-40.
- McGrath, Patrick J. *Scientists, Business, and the State, 1890-1960*. U. of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- McKibben, Bill. *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*. Henry Holt and Company, 2003.
- McNally, John. “The Man Who Knew Too Little.” Review of *The Zero*, by Jess Walter. *WashingtonPost.com*. *Washington Post*, 10 Sept. 2006. Web. 12 April 2015. www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/07/AR2006090701149.html.
- McWilliams, Carey. “California Pastoral.” 1942. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 657-79.

- Melzer, Patricia. "'All that you touch you change': Utopian Desire and the Concept of Change in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*." *Femspec*, vol. 3, no. 2, June 2002, pp. 31. *ProQuest*, doi: 200082635.
- Menne, Jeff. "'I live in this world, too': Octavia Butler and the State of Realism." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 57, no. 4, Winter 2011, pp. 715-37.
- Miller, James A. "Bigger Thomas's Quest for Voice and Audience in Richard Wright's *Native Son*." 1986. *Critical Essays on Richard Wright's Native Son*, edited by Keneth Kinnamon, Twayne Publishers, 1997, pp. 119-25.
- Miller, Kristine A. "Reading and Writing the Post-9/11 Cop: Trauma, Personal Testimony, and Jess Walter's *The Zero*." *Arizona Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 1, Spring 2014, pp. 29-52.
- Mills, Charles W. *The Racial Contract*. Cornell UP, 1997.
- Mirowski, Philip. *Science-Mart: Privatizing American Science*. Harvard UP, 2011.
- Montag, Warren. "Necro-economics: Adam Smith and Death in the Life of the Universal." *Biopolitics: A Reader*, edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, Duke UP, 2013, pp. 193-214.
- "More on *The Space Merchants*, 21st Century Edition." *TheWaytheFutureBlogs.com*, 8 January 2014, www.thewaythefutureblogs.com/2014/01/more-on-the-space-merchants-21st-century-edition/. Accessed 19 Sept. 2014.
- Morrison, Ewan. "YA dystopias teach children to submit to the free market, not fight authority." *The Guardian*, 1 Sept. 2014, www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/01/ya-dystopias-children-free-market-hunger-games-the-giver-divergent. Accessed 18 Oct. 2014.

- Nilges, Mathias. "'We Need the Stars': Change, Community, and the Absent Father in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*." *Callaloo*, vol. 32, no. 4, Winter 2009, pp. 1332-52.
- Osborne, Carol. "Compassion, Imagination, and Reverence for All Living Things: Margaret Atwood's Spiritual Vision in *The Year of the Flood*." *Margaret Atwood Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010, pp. 30-42.
- Pallitto, Robert M., ed. *Torture and State Violence in the United States: A Short Documentary History*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2011.
- Parini, Jay. *John Steinbeck: A Biography*. Henry Holt and Company, 1995.
- Perez, Betty. "House and Home: Thematic Symbols in *The Grapes of Wrath*." 1972. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 840-53.
- Pfeifer, Michael J. *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947*. U. of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Phipps, Gregory. "'He Wished That He Could Be an Idea in Their Minds': Legal Pragmatism and the Construction of White Subjectivity in Richard Wright's *Native Son*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 57, no. 3, Fall 2015, pp. 325-42.
- Pichardo, Nelson A. "The Power Elite and Elite-Driven Countermovements: The Associated Farmers of California during the 1930s." *Sociological Forum*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1995, pp. 21-49.
- Pohl, Frederik. "The Politics of Prophecy." *Extrapolation*, vol. 34, no. 3, Sept. 1993, pp. 199-208.

- . "The Story of *The Space Merchants*, Part 5." *TheWaytheFutureBlogs.com*, 5 January 2014, www.thewaythefutureblogs.com/2014/01/the-story-of-the-space-merchants-part-5/. Accessed 13 Sept. 2014.
- . *The Way the Future Was: A Memoir*. Ballantine Books, 1978.
- Pohl, Frederik, and C. M. Kornbluth. *The Space Merchants*. 1953. Revised 21st Century ed., Thomas Dunne Books, 2011.
- . *Venus, Inc.* Nelson Doubleday, 1984.
- Pyle, Christopher H. *Getting Away with Torture: Secret Government, War Crimes, and the Rule of Law*. Potomac Books, 2009.
- Rajan, Kaushik Sunder. *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life*. Duke UP, 2006.
- Rankin, Monica A. *The History of Costa Rica*. Greenwood, 2012.
- Reed, John R. "The Grapes of Wrath and the Esthetics of Indigence." 1969. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 825-39.
- Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. 1983. U. of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Rose, Nikolas. *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton UP, 2006.
- Rosenberg, Aaron L. "Living for the city: urban displacement and incarceration in Wright's *Native Son* and Rajabu's 'Masudi'." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, June 2012, pp. 35-53.

- Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonialization*. Stanford UP, 2009.
- Russell, Edmund. "Introduction: The Garden in the Machine: Toward an Evolutionary History of Technology." *Industrializing Organisms: Introducing Evolutionary History*, edited by Susan R. Schrepfer and Philip Scranton, Routledge, 2004, pp. 1-16.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford UP, 1985.
- Scruggs, Charles. "The City Without Maps in Richard Wright's *Native Son*." 1993. *Critical Essays on Richard Wright's Native Son*, edited by Keneth Kinnamon, Twayne Publishers, 1997, pp. 147-79.
- Searway, Robert. "Conflicting View of Landscape in John Steinbeck's Literary West." *Steinbeck Review*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2015, pp. 175-89.
- Seed, David. "Take-Over Bids: The Power Fantasies of Frederick Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth." *Foundation*, vol. 59, Sept. 1993, pp. 42-58.
- Selvin, David F. *Sky Full of Storm: A Brief History of California Labor*. California Historical Society, 1975.
- Serres, Michel. *The Natural Contract*. 1990. Translated by Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson, U. of Michigan Press, 1995.
- . *The Parasite*. 1980. Translated by Lawrence R. Schehr, U. of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Shapin, Steven. *The Scientific Life: A Moral History of a Late Modern Vocation*. U. of Chicago Press, 2008.

- Shapin, Steven, and Simon Schaffer. *Leviathan and the Air-pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*. Princeton UP, 1985.
- Shillinglaw, Susan. *On Reading the Grapes of Wrath*. Penguin, 2014.
- Shockley, Martin. "The Reception of *The Grapes of Wrath* in Oklahoma." 1944. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 680-91.
- Spear, Allan H. *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto 1890-1920*. U. of Chicago Press, 1967.
- Spinney, Robert G. *City of Big Shoulders: A History of Chicago*. Northern Illinois UP, 2000.
- Steinbeck, John. *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*. Edited by Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten, Viking Press, 1975.
- . *The Grapes of Wrath*. 1939. Penguin, 2006.
- . *In Dubious Battle*. 1936. Penguin, 2006.
- . *Of Mice and Men*. 1937. Bantam Books, 1963.
- . *Working Days: The Journals of The Grapes of Wrath*. Edited by Robert DeMott, Viking, 1989.
- Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. 1979. Yale UP, 1980.
- Tanner, Laura E. *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction*. Indiana UP, 1994.
- Taylor, Frank J. "California's *Grapes of Wrath*." 1939. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 643-56.

- Taylor, Walter Fuller. “*The Grapes of Wrath* Reconsidered.” 1959. *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism*, by John Steinbeck, edited by Peter Lisca, Penguin, 1972, pp. 757-68.
- Theissen, Ashley. “The Management of Life in Atwood’s Dystopian Fiction.” *Margaret Atwood Studies*, vol. 7, 2013, pp. 24-33.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *Torture and the War on Terror*. 2009. Translated by Gila Walker, Seagull Books, 2009.
- Turney, Jon. *Frankenstein’s Footsteps: Science, Genetics, and Popular Culture*. Yale UP, 1998.
- United States Cong. Senate. Select Committee on Intelligence. *Report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program together with Foreword by Chairman Feinstein and Additional and Minority Views*. 113th Cong., 2nd sess, U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2014.
- Virno, Paolo. “An Equivocal Concept: Biopolitics.” *Biopolitics: A Reader*, edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, Duke UP, 2013, pp. 269-73.
- Wacquant, Loic. “‘A Black City Within the White’: Revisiting America’s Dark Ghetto.” *Black Renaissance*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1998, pp. 141. *ProQuest*, doi: 215531690. Accessed 29 Nov. 2014.
- . “Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh.” *Punishment & Society*, vol. 3, no. 95, 2001, pp. 95-134.
- Wald, Priscilla. *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*. Duke UP, 2008.

Waldby, Catherine, and Robert Mitchell. *Tissue Economies: Blood, Organs, and Cell Lines in Late Capitalism*. Duke UP, 2006.

Walker, David. *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. 1829.

Edited by Peter P. Hinks, 2000, Pennsylvania State UP, 2008.

Walter, Jess. "A Brief Interview with Jess Walter." Interview by Weston Cutter. *Kenyon Review Blog*, 16 July 2012, www.kenyonreview.org/2012/07/a-brief-interview-with-jess-walter/. Accessed 12 April 2015.

---. "A Conversation with Jess Walter: February 20 & March 16, 2010." Interview by Gabe Ehrnwald, Samuel Ligon, Brendan Lynaugh, and Shawn Vestal. *bark*, 30 May 2015, thebarking.com/2015/05/jess-walter-the-willow-springs-interview. Accessed 3 Feb. 2016.

---. "Q&A with *THE ZERO*'S Jess Walter: A little interview we stole from HarperCollins." *Book Thieves*, 17 July 2007, bookthieves.blogspot.com/2007/07/q-with-zeros-jess-walter.html. Accessed 12 April 2015.

---. *The Zero*. HarperCollins, 2006.

---. "Zero PS: A Conversation with Jess Walter." Interview by Amy Grace Loyd. *JessWalter.com*, n.d., www.jesswalter.com/disc.htm. Accessed 12 April 2015.

Watt, F. W. *John Steinbeck*. Grove Press, 1962.

Wells, Ira. "'What I Killed for, I Am': Domestic Terror in Richard Wright's America." *American Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 4, Dec. 2010, pp. 873-95.

Williams, Kristian. *American Methods: Torture and the Logic of Domination*. South End Press, 2006.

Willis, Susan. "Guantánamo's Symbolic Economy." *New Left Review*, vol. 39, May-June 2006, pp. 123-31.

Wisker, Gina. *Margaret Atwood: An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Wright, Richard. *Black Boy (American Hunger): A Record of Childhood and Youth*. 1945. HarperPerennial, 1993.

---. "Blueprint for Negro Writing." 1937. *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, edited by Angelyn Mitchell, Duke UP, 1994, pp. 97-106.

---. "How 'Bigger' was Born." 1940. *Native Son*, HarperCollins, 2005, pp. 431-62.

---. *Native Son*. 1940. HarperCollins, 2005.

---. *The Outsider*. 1953. Harper & Row, 1969.

Wyatt, David. *Five Fires: Race, Catastrophe, and the Shaping of California*. Addison-Wesley, 1997.

---. *Secret Histories: Reading Twentieth-Century American Literature*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2010.

---. "Steinbeck's Lost Gardens." *The Fall into Eden: Landscape and Imagination in California*, Cambridge UP, 1986, pp. 124-57.