

States of Dispossession:  
US Political Culture, State Form, and Race from 1930 to the Present

by

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**Abstract**

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*States of Dispossession: US Political Culture, State Form, and Race from 1930 to the Present* creates a genealogy of US political culture of dispossession to historicize contemporary experiences of left melancholia. By dispossession, I mean the material conditions, power relations, and discourses through which political subjects experience and know their loss and suffering. Even though dispossession is a condition more often associated with nineteenth and early twentieth century through settler colonialism, chattel slavery, and imperial expansion, my inquiry begins with emergence of the New Deal during which the problem of the dispossessed takes on a political prominence and a national scale in the wake of the Great Depression and then moves on into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to trace its centrality in the development of liberal governmentalities. Through an analysis of key nodal moments, the dissertation argues how the dispossessed gets bound to the legitimacy and operations of the state through techniques of governance that simultaneously rationalize state intervention and manage political crises.

Through analyses of historical documents and multiethnic literature, *States of Dispossession* pursues its inquiry by demonstrating the alignment of political rationalities of state recuperative practices and political subjectivities via the historical norms of race, gender, and sexuality. For instance, by situating James Agee's and Walker Evan's *Let Us Now Praise*

*Famous Men* in the political operation of the Tennessee Valley Authority, Chapter 1 asserts that the documentary novel normalizes the dispossessed as a technical problem by both generating a political subjectivity that sees state intervention to be direct democracy and ethnicizing whiteness as an object for state tutelage and an object of national spirit. By situating John Okada's *No No Boy* in the political crises of the Pacific in World War II, Chapter 2 argues how Japanese internment ironically acts as a contradictory recuperative practice of the state that resolves the contradiction of dispossessed "Japanese American" by racializing Japanese culture through gendered and sexual norms of the reproductive family. By situating Oscar Zeta Acosta's *Revolt of the Cockroach People* in the political crisis spurred by the expansion of the black freedom movements, Chapter 3 shows that projects of empowering the dispossessed poor simultaneously reified race around the uneven geography of capital and introjected the spectral body into political subjectivity. Finally, by situating Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man* in the political crisis of the 1970s that formed the pre-conditions neoliberalism, Chapter 4 claims that homelessness social policy promulgates neoliberal forms of freedom that contradictorily revivifies possessive individualism at the level of political subjectivity. Taken together, the dissertation shows how the political subjectivities of dispossession both sanction the legitimacy and operations of the liberal state and chart the racialized tensions and limits of twentieth century political culture.

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I love acknowledgement pages. I love the very gesture. I love the way it unfurls before oneself the community that had made a project possible and, in so doing, discloses the richness of a public world. In this regard, I hope to revise this page anew so that I may take stock, as it is so often needed, of the vastness of my community and the beauty imminent to a shared world.

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## Introduction – A Left Melancholia? : Political Cultures of Dispossession Beyond Property

“Certainly the losses, accountable and unaccountable, of the Left are many in our own time. The literal disintegration of socialist regimes and the legitimacy of Marxism may well be the least of it. We are awash in the loss of a unified analysis and unified movement, in the loss of labor and class as inviolable predicates of political analysis and mobilization, in the loss of an inexorable and scientific forward movement of history, and in the loss of a viable alternative to the political economy of capitalism.

And on the backs of these losses are still others: we are without a rich moral-political vision of the Good to guide and sustain political work. Thus we suffer with the sense of not only a lost movement but also a lost historical moment, not only a lost theoretical and empirical coherence but also a lost way of life and a lost course of pursuits.”

- Wendy Brown, “Resisting Left Melancholia”

“We can only be dispossessed because we are already dispossessed. Our interdependency establishes our vulnerability to social forms of deprivation.”

- Judith Butler, “Aporetic Dispossession”

“Materialistic historiography, on the other hand, is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystalizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad.

In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework. As a result of this method the lifework is preserved in this work and at the same time canceled; in the lifework, the era; and in the era, the entire course of history.”

- Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

## Overview

This dissertation is very much a product of its moment, indelibly marked by the urgency of its political and intellectual milieu. When I began formulating its broad contours and conceptual aims, the US was in the waning years of the Bush administration and both popular liberal and progressive media were vacillating between outrage over the perceived extraordinary overextension of US sovereign power and exhaustion over the seeming persistent incapacity to stop this excess through political mobilization.<sup>1</sup> This political frustration was only exacerbated further with the housing crisis and financial collapse of 2008, adding to the political purview the extraordinary economic inequality that has always plagued the US. Indeed, the historic presidential election of Barack Obama with his specific campaign of “Hope and Change” put this political sentiment in stark relief, crystalizing through the very act of negation a moment and time that every liberal and progressive left wanted to leave behind.

Yet, this political sentiment was not exclusive to the domain of popular political culture since it circulated widely in the politically minded and social justice oriented disciplines of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Emblematic of this was, on the one hand, the pervasive recourse, at least in my scholarly circles, to the theoretical work of Giorgio Agamben, particularly his notion of *homo sacer*, and, on the other hand, the scholarly preoccupation with neoliberalism as an utterly novel political rationality and/or form of capital accumulation. More than mere scholarly fads, these ideas were trying to grapple with and give a critical language to a political moment that I would characterize as and call the *generalization of dispossession*.

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<sup>1</sup> The most striking example has to be the so-called War on Terror, which led to the “preventive” strike on Iraq. The false pretense of US entry and Bush administration’s indifference to the exposure of its falsity as well as the amorphous parameters of War on Terror (i.e. endlessness and boundarilessness) had shocked both liberal and many leftist.

Indeed, the eschatological calls of “living in the end times”<sup>2</sup> or “dark times”<sup>3</sup> as well as scholarly questions about the feasibility of utopia<sup>4</sup> seem to index a general feeling that *we* have lost something politically. And whatever it was; it was profound.

To my mind, nothing captures and elucidates this political loss, this *general dispossession*, better than Wendy Brown’s essay “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy.” In the piece, Brown is at pains to delineate the precise nature of neoliberalism, differentiating the terms meaning from common sense usage as a return to laissez-faire liberal economic doctrine to instead a specific governmentality that extends an economic rationality into hitherto uneconomically organized domains of social and political life.<sup>5</sup> She does this, however, ultimately to position neoliberal governmentality to be the *cause* of her, and more or less *our*, current political conjuncture, one that she provocatively asserts as the “end of liberal democracy.” This, then, is what *we* seemed to have lost—liberal democracy—and, indeed, that appears to be profound. As Brown goes on to explain, neoliberal governmentality eviscerates the very substance of the rights of liberal democracy, effectively removing the modicum of protections afforded by liberal democracy’s *formal* promises.

In some respects, I agree with Brown’s apprehension of the contemporary political conjuncture, and I even agree with her locating its cause in a neoliberal governmentality. However, what I have found wanting is her response to such circumstances. That is, Brown closes the essay by meditating on the Left’s psychic relationship to liberal democracy, showing how *we* as the Left have, against *our* own wishes, held a deep attachment to liberal democracy

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<sup>2</sup> See Slavoj Žižek’s *Living in the End Times*

<sup>3</sup> See Wendy Brown’s *Edgework*, particularly Chapter 1 “Untimeliness and Punctuality: Critical Theory in Dark Times”

<sup>4</sup> See Fredric Jameson’s *Archaeologies of the Future: Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*

<sup>5</sup> Brown further differentiates this neoliberal governmentality to not be the necessary extension of either Marx’s account of capitalism’s endless drive of valorization through commodification or Weber’s account of the disenchantment of the world through modernity rationalization of all things according to a means-end logic but instead to be radical “historical-institutional” rupture.

through *our* political struggles in exposing the very emptiness and failed achievement of the US liberal state's formal promises of rights, equality, and prosperity. In this respect, liberal democracy shaped *our* political aims, strategy, and imagination for an alternative future beyond the liberal state. Hence, in clinical fashion, Brown diagnoses in *us*, in response to the loss of liberal democracy, a pervasive political neurosis, a "left melancholia," from which *we* must be cured by ultimately coming to terms with *our* attachment to liberal democracy and then decathecting from it through the act of mourning.

Yet, if this is the case, then how do *we* go about mourning liberal democracy? What are the means—the intellectual, psychic, and political resources—that *we* must avail ourselves with to move from melancholia to mourning, from political neurosis to vibrant political health, to the point where *our* political practices are no longer motivated and organized by a return to liberal democracy and instead something that can be called 'genuine' freedom? In posing these questions, I do not seek a politically pragmatic answer, grounded in narrow and immediate institutional programs and actions. Indeed, I take very seriously and value tremendously Brown's theoretical project and her work of political critique. But it just seems to me that to stage the political consequences of this *generalized dispossession* through a psychoanalytical drama of melancholia over liberal democracy, one has already ceded too much political ground, namely accepting the liberal democratic state's formal promises to be the truth of *our* political desires. Surely, this is too high of a price to pay for Brown's cognitive mapping of the current political conjuncture.

With that said, I do not wish to dismiss Brown's specific brilliant insights; instead they prompt my own critical labor and serve as the starting point for this dissertation's historical inquiry of the present. In particular, the dissertation reconfigures Brown's historico-theoretical

analysis of the current political conjuncture by incorporating the subject back into it. That is, unlike Brown who provides an objective historico-theoretical account of contemporary dispossession by locating its cause in the dominance of neoliberal rationality and then, with that firmly in place, proceeds to explain its subjective experience for the (left) subject as one of suffering from melancholia over a past liberal democracy, I want to complicate that account by placing that (left) subject into the frame of historical analysis itself as not simply a separate bystander who witnesses and experiences these objective transformations (i.e. the loss of the formal protections of liberal democracy), but rather as a *knower* who has come to know and feel dispossession in that particular way.

Put somewhat differently, I want to explore the question: “who is this (left) subject that has come to know and feel dispossessed by the putative loss of liberal democracy? And what is its history?” I pursue this question in a very particular way. For all intents and purposes, one can answer this question through an empirical inquiry in which one determines social groups whose interest either are indexed by such sentiment or excluded by it. Indeed, one could imagine locating prominent figures of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century liberal thinkers and New Left social movements and treat them as representative of the Left view. From here one could determine why they would be melancholic.<sup>6</sup> And probably someone has done so, which would be perfectly valid and immensely valuable. Yet, to rely exclusively on such social history, it seems to me would be to reduce the materiality of subjectivity to be the effect of realpolitiking among self-identified leftist groups and individuals. In this respect, the political problem of the identity of the (Left) subject would be that it just was not truly expansive enough to encompass the heterogeneous and particular interest of political constituencies for which the solution would be to aggregate all these particulars to form a truly universal and representative Left standpoint. In a real sense one

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<sup>6</sup> See Todd Gitlin’s *The Twilight of the Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked in the Culture Wars*

has avoided the substance of the question itself by treating the historical givens to be an imperfect approximation to a truly universal and thus ideal (left) subject.

In light of this, the dissertation's inquiry into dispossession aims neither to develop a political theory of dispossession nor to track a social history of dispossession but rather to create something in-between—a genealogy of the political culture of dispossession. What I mean exactly by genealogy will be explained later on in this introduction. For now, I briefly note that the term refers to historicizing particular experiences without either universalizing or privatizing them. In lieu of that, it is important to stress that my inquiry on both who is the subject whose experience Brown eloquently describes and what is its history in respect to the formations and changes that she charts is ultimately a matter of political culture. Indeed, I have understood the dissertation's object of analysis as and elected to call it a political culture insofar as the term allows me to name and apprehend the interrelation of the (left) subject's experience and modality of knowing with complex material formations without either reducing the subject to empirical individuals or social groups or reifying social transformations to be absolutely external to the subject. In fact, it is a guiding methodological principle and implicit claim of the dissertation that only in the domain of culture can one see historically not so much the unity but the parallels, articulations, and contradictions of simultaneous and coincident political, economic, social, material, and psychic formations that forge the norms by which dispossession is experienced, indeed known and felt, in such a way that the processes of abstraction and subsumption through which the disciplines produce knowledge disallow.

To this end, the dissertation arrays a historical variety of cultural/literary material as the indices of historical formations of the experience of dispossession. In particular, the dissertation turns to cultural/literary materials that are deeply imbedded in moments when dispossession was

problematized—indeed they find their conditions of possibility in those moments—in order to examine the material practices, the discourses, and institutions that define, address, and recuperate the dispossessed from 1930 to the present. By examining the cultural meanings that accrued around dispossession, the dissertation argues that we can see how the U.S. state's production of the dispossessed has been central to the formation of the citizen-subject and the management of its 'others.' This occurs through the myriad of discourses and corresponding array of state apparatuses and social institutions that produce, articulate, and regulate abandonment to be a socio-political and epistemological problem. In so doing, these discourses and institutions are the 'sites' through which we find the production of 'dispossession' to be a strategy for state formation, a political value for citizenship, and a tactic for managing 'others.'

More specifically, as I will elaborate in greater detail later on, the dissertation chapters move across distinct political conjunctures where the dispossessed achieved a remarkable political salience—the crisis of farmers in the Great Depression, the crisis of Japanese-Americans in World War II, the crisis of the poor in the Great Society, and the crisis of the homeless in the 1980s—and demonstrates, by analyzing cultural/literary materials keyed to each conjuncture, the alignment between state recuperative practices (e.g. New Deal planning, Japanese Internment, Great Society Community Action, and social policy for Homelessness) and political subjectivities. Specifically, I show their connection through a series of racial, gendered, and sexual norms and tropes that compose the “political rationality” of forms of liberal governmentality. This production of dispossession, the dissertation argues, thus forms the history by which *we* have come know and feel dispossessed by the so-called loss of liberal democracy.

Furthermore, in each chapter, I have sought to point to and describe in some level of concreteness contradictions immanent to these political subjectivities of liberal governmentality,

which is something that I suspect should be called ‘race.’ Indeed, at this point in the overview, I have said very little about the third term of the dissertation’s title. And, at this point, I have yet to comprehend its full historical and conceptual significance at the level of the project as a whole, even as I have tried from the onset to make this explicitly a project of comparative racialization. Indeed, as it will become clear through my choice of cultural/literary texts across the chapters, one of my major impulses was to think across the political status of ‘race’ with its fundamental political articulations to gender and sexuality in each conjuncture and across them. In fact, the individual chapters will demonstrate an attention to the ways that the historical norms of race, gender, and sexuality have worked in concert to rationalize dispossession for liberal governmentality, showing particularly how they animate the recuperative practices of the liberal state. In this sense, the dissertation chapters have accounted with relative consistency for the way that the liberal state and capital have always been, respectively, a racial, gendered, and sexual state and racial, gendered, and sexual capital. But what seems to be beyond my conceptual grasps at the moment have been to raise the particular insights on the historical norms of race, gender, and sexuality of each chapter to a comparative historical judgment for the dissertation’s argument on the political culture of dispossession without reducing the historically situated character of those norms to descriptive, empirical categories connected analogically.

Yet, in another sense, I originally wanted the dissertation to not only think of these categories of difference as solely vectors of domination. Indeed, even as the liberal state and capital make up their material conditions of possibility, I understand these categories of difference to be dialectically so much more since they historically have been rallying points for liberation and ethics for the concern of the self as practices of freedom. These two aspects have been unevenly arrayed across the chapters, particularly the latter one. In regards to the former,

the dissertation has tried to locate what cultural historian Nikhil Pal Singh calls the “negative dialectics of race”<sup>7</sup> to be a fundamental historical force whose impact in the dissertation’s account can be found in the problematization of dispossession in each conjuncture. Yet, it is with the latter aspect—‘race’ as practices of freedom—that I have felt wanting throughout the dissertation particularly in my readings of literary texts. And similarly to the previous modality of ‘race,’ the dissertation has not been able to extend insights onto the higher scale of the inquiry as a whole. To be clear, my intent in distilling these alternatives has never been, in the first instance, to see them as resistant for which I would seek normative imposition and chastise the world for its incapacity to take them up. I believe that is beyond the scope of this distinct kind of intellectual labor and ultimately a matter of engagement with others in the political life of the world. But rather my aim was to validate intellectually what I have known and felt intuitively, and indeed experienced, that what is called race, gender, and sexuality are not the marks of *our* dispossession but the resources for practicing freedom.

To close this overview, it seems like a cliché now to say that the ultimate goal and stakes of scholarship is to think otherwise. But this is only the case when ‘to think otherwise,’ like claims of being alternative, is treated or understood as a formal activity. Indeed, thinking otherwise is a mostly empty and, often times in our moment, normative gesture when claimed without the contents that positions it in relation to others and imbues it with meaning. However, I say mostly empty because the gesture does contain something, namely a desire for freedom. Thus, I wish to affirm that desire, a desire to think freely and to be free, by claiming that the ultimate ambition and stakes of this dissertation has been to think and indeed to *be* otherwise to dispossession. Hence, it is my sincere hope that in creating this genealogy of the political culture of dispossession that it provides the historical contents through which *we* can locate *our*

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<sup>7</sup> See Nikhil Pal Singh’s *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*

experience of dispossession away from the necessity that it appeared and think dispossession anew, specifically shorn from the trappings of liberal democracy. Indeed, I would like to think that *we* have proceeded and continue to proceed with leftist politics and struggle alongside, against, and through the liberal state but without the anxiety/fear of betrayal, co-optation, and inauthenticity since *we* have never needed to either long for liberal democracy or free ourselves from its melancholic grip because its promises, even its formal ones, were never the truth for *us* in the first place.

### **On Dispossession: From a Derivative of Property to Mode of Accumulation to Form of Appearance**

It seems inevitable that if one wants to think dispossession, then one must begin with property. Indeed, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, dispossession refers to “the action of dispossessing or fact of being dispossessed; deprivation of or ejection from a possession.” In this admittedly hackneyed and formulaic approach for situating this dissertation’s central conceptual category, I find it nonetheless important to note the dual reference of the term. On the one hand, dispossession refers to a particular kind of activity or practice that deprives or ejects a subject from possession and, on the other hand, it refers to the subject’s state/condition of being deprived or ejected from possession. In this respect, the connection between these distinct meanings of the term is not only a formal relation of cause and effect—an action that leads to a condition—but also the paradigm of property gives the term meaningful content. In this respect, dispossession achieves only a derivative status to property as the negation of possession.

If we shift from a semantic to a political register, I think we can see the implications of this derivative status. For to oppose acts of dispossession in keeping with it, we are drawn into avowing, at best, what is seen as a pre-modern forms of collective property or, as is more often the case, private property and the rule of contract. Thus, in the first scenario, we are thrown into the dangers of a “politics of injury,”<sup>8</sup> one that can potentially reify dispossession and its pre-modern assumption as an ontology of political identity. Or, in the second scenario, we end up ascribing to a political horizon of “possessive individualism.”<sup>9</sup> This latter case would be a cruel irony when we consider that the most obvious examples of dispossession—settler colonialism and chattel slavery—form the material conditions of possibility of “possessive individualism” and, as such, can neither truly redress those losses nor much less oppose them. To be clear, in pointing to these dangers, I do not seek to completely disregard property for, surely, that would be impossible and more importantly one can strategically use some forms of property for greater ends. Rather, these dangers show the limits of thinking the derivative form of dispossession.

Yet, to re-think dispossession, we must do more than just point to its semantic and political limit, we must instead understand that this connection of dispossession and property is not logically necessary, but a historical and therefore a contingent relationship. Thus, following Judith Butler, we should understand C.B. MacPherson’s famous *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* less as an account that espouses a normative political theory and more as an intellectual history that shows how property was naturalized and made essential to human personhood.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Wendy Brown’s *States of Injury*

<sup>9</sup> See C.B. MacPherson’s *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*

<sup>10</sup> See Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou’s *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, particularly Chapter 1 “Aporetic dispossession, or the trouble with dispossession”

This kind of historical reading is complemented well to the standard Marxist account of dispossession since it shows how capitalism formed the material conditions of possibility of “possessive individualism.” Accordingly, the practices of dispossession take on a much larger historical socio-political meaning and significance that is elided by staying within the semantic horizons of dispossession. Indeed, it becomes the mechanism, the “lever,” that starts capital accumulation, i.e. what Marx famously refers to as so-called primitive accumulation. As Marx explains, in *Capital Vol. 1*, money and commodities in themselves are not capital as they must be placed within a particular social relationship where one class possesses the majority of property while another class possesses nothing but “their own skins” to be transformed into capital. Unlike classical liberal political economists who naturalize this social relationship by rationalizing it as the effect of the former’s thrift and the latter’s idleness, Marx asserts that it formed from the practices of dispossession, e.g. “conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder.” Marx describes this social relationship as follows:

the confrontation of, and the contact between, two very different kinds of commodity owners; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production, means of subsistence, who are eager to valorized the sum of values they appropriated by buying the labour-power of others; on the other hand, free workers, the sellers of their own labour-power, and therefore the sellers of labour. (874)

So-called primitive accumulation thus stages this “confrontation” of commodity owners by ‘freeing’ the laboring subject from the means of production. Of course, Marx uses ‘freeing’ ironically, in that, the laboring subject neither forms a part of them nor owns them. That is, the

laboring subject no longer occupies a social position of bondsman/serf/slave or a peasant-proprietor in an organic social unity founded on a feudal mode of production. However, this process does not only affect the social character of labor since the practices of dispossession also establishes the precondition for the formation of the capitalist. By ‘freeing’ the laboring subject of the means of production, they are then open to private ownership and marketization to the capitalist. In this regard, dispossession is the practice “whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital [...] and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers” (874). Put plainly, the practice of dispossession enables proletarianization, embourgeoisement, and privatization.

In this respect, we can flip the semantic relation between dispossession and property. No longer is dispossession the deviant or derivative effect of property; instead the practices of dispossession produces the very conditions of private property. Indeed, to reconsider possessive individualism, we can say that these practices of dispossession install it as the social ontology of both labor and class, that is, transforming labor into labor-power and transforming the antagonism between the proletariat and bourgeoisie into a difference between kinds of property owners.

Given this double transformation, so-called primitive accumulation takes on a world-historical importance to the extent that it “dissolv[es] [...] the [economic structures of feudal society] and set[s] free the elements of the [economic structure of capitalist society]” (875). To demonstrate this transformation, Marx details the history of the expropriation of common lands and the eviction of agrarian peasantry in England during the early modern period. This development occurred through a series of political and violent battles between various feudal classes and organizations (e.g. church, feudal lords, parliament) under the monarchical state.

Even though this process entailed the “most shameless violation” of one form of property (e.g. the commons, landed aristocratic estates, ecclesiastical property) and “the grossest acts of violence against persons,” these acts of dispossession take on revolutionary value as they dissolved feudal social relations (e.g. serfdom, peasantry, lordships, parish systems) and feudal labor organizations (e.g. trade guilds). Thus, the separating of the peasantry from common lands not only proletarianized them and enclosed those different forms of property under a regime of private property but it also undermined the entire social organization of feudalism and thereby opened up the productive capacities of society. Hence, so-called primitive accumulation had a revolutionary force as it not only separated the laboring subject from the means of production but also dissolved non-capitalist social relations. In this regard, practices of dispossession have a ‘progressive’ element as it ushers in a new social order through the destruction of the previous one.

Due to its destructive and epoch making force, so-called primitive accumulation produces a difficult problem of periodization. Indeed, when does it end and when does capital accumulation proper begin? When does dispossession end and exploitation begin? As Marx’s historical account demonstrates so-called primitive accumulation is less a particular moment than a long historical process whose duration seems coterminous with the development of capitalism. In response to this dilemma, more recent Marxist scholarship has challenged the historical cleaving of so-called primitive accumulation from capitalist accumulation. In the chapter entitled “Accumulation by Dispossession” from his book *The New Imperialism*, David Harvey argues that practices of dispossession have been continuous with capitalism, not its primal scene but a persistent practice necessary for capital accumulation. In fact, Harvey argues, practices of dispossession have been and continue to be invaluable for displacing capitalism’s endemic crisis

of overaccumulation by ‘freeing’ up assets that have been hitherto outside of or protected from capital accumulation. These ‘freed’ assets are thus open to the valorization process for stagnant surplus capital. Hence, the liberalization of public utilities, the privatization of various forms of property (i.e. cultural forms and knowledges, state pensions, and welfare benefits), and the devaluation of the labor-power through mechanization or state manufactured financial crises are techniques of dispossession consistent throughout capitalism, which Harvey dubs *accumulation by dispossession*.

The concept of accumulation by dispossession, therefore, settles somewhat the periodizing problem of dispossession by shifting its analytical focus from a temporal register to a spatial one. In the earlier account, dispossession is seen to precede capital accumulation in which so-called primitive accumulation leads into market exploitation. While, in this second account, dispossession is seen to be contemporaneous with market exploitation as it proceed from crises of overaccumulation in which accumulation by dispossession opens up channels of accumulation for stagnant capital. Put plainly, practices of dispossession exist before and after capital accumulation, as historically anterior, on the one hand, and antidote to bouts of crises, on the other. This contradiction gets resolved then by comprehending dispossession as a distinct process of capital accumulation from its market form, one that is linked to market exploitation through a spatial dialectic. As a result, practices of dispossession and market exploitation name different modes of capital accumulation that generate the uneven geography of capitalist development.

However, is it enough to say that dispossession can be conceptually recovered by just using it as a distinct process of accumulation coeval to market exploitation? If so, do we just understand our inability to see it as mere intellectual blindness? Is it just an accident that with so-called primitive accumulation, dispossession was understood to be antithetical to capitalism,

interpreted as a violent but necessary precondition that will be left behind by capitalist modernity? Now, according to Harvey, Marx's limited theorization of dispossession is due to the way that *Capital Vol. I* is written as an immanent critique of liberal political economy.<sup>11</sup> In other words, so motivated to undermine classic liberal political economy's assertion that capitalist markets naturally lead to social and economic equilibrium, Marx takes up liberal assumptions (e.g. existing markets, private property, state-enforced contracts, juridical individualism, etc.) in order to demonstrate capitalism's inherent tendency towards crisis. Yet, if our recent blindness is due to nothing but a lack of elaboration by Marx and the subsequent misreading of his ur-text, then it does not explain why earlier historical reappraisals of dispossession did not shift orthodox understandings.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, I would suggest that no matter how much we explain theoretically and/or demonstrate empirically the simultaneity and imbrication of dispossession and market exploitation as modes of capitalist accumulation, practices of dispossession still *appear* to be incommensurable to capitalism. Marx hints at this issue when he states, “[So-called primitive accumulation] appears as primitive, because it forms the prehistoric stage of capital and of the mode of production corresponding with it” (875). Here, Marx subtly indicates that the “primitive” character of so-called primitive accumulation is dispossession's *form of appearance*, one that is seen to be incongruous to and asynchronous with the norms and discourses of a

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<sup>11</sup> See David Harvey's lecture on Capital Vol. I <http://davidharvey.org/2008/06/marxs-capital-class-01/>

<sup>12</sup> In *The Accumulation of Capital*, Rosa Luxemburg states about capital accumulation: “One concerns the commodity market and the place where surplus value is produced—the factory, the mine, the agricultural estate. Regarded in this light accumulation is a purely economic process, with its most important phase a transaction between the capitalist and the wage labourer... Here, in form at any rate, peace, property and equality prevail, and the keen dialects of scientific analysis were required to reveal how the right of ownership changes in the course of accumulation into appropriation of other people's property, how commodity exchange turns into exploitation, and equality becomes class rule. The other aspect of the accumulation of capital concerns the relations between capitalism and the non-capitalist modes of production which start making their appearance on the international stage. Its predominant methods are colonial policy, an international loan system—a policy of spheres of interest—and war. Force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contest of power the stern laws of the economic process.”

capitalist social formation. What are we to make of this form of appearance? Where did it come from? How was it produced?

As a response, I would argue that the material practices of dispossession are caught up in political discourses and recuperative practices of modernity that seek to rationalize its violence.<sup>13</sup> As such, these practices of dispossession are tied to political discourses and recuperative practices that regulate them. Indeed, the enclosure movement theorized by Marx was not solely about acts of “conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder” but they were also rationalized through law and other discursive means during the development of the absolutist state.<sup>14</sup> Thus, accounts of dispossession must keep in mind these discourses around dispossession and not reduce them to be the sole instrument of capitalism since they regulate what counts as a practice of dispossession and who counts as dispossessed, ultimately establishing a ‘modern’ epistemology of dispossession that renders some practices of dispossession incompatible, other admissible, and still others unknowable. Thus, the historical anteriority and illegitimacy of so-called primitive accumulation are the effects of these modern discourses that posit a capitalist social formation’s continual supersession from the very violence and forces that are its material conditions of possibility. Indeed, the ‘primitive’ character of so-called primitive accumulation is more than just a designation of an earlier historical period, it signifies a qualitative advancement in regards to the ‘modern’ subject from violence. Hence, the material practices of dispossession appear so scandalous and shocking but also something that can be rationalized away as exceptional to modern norms.

In this regard, we can further expand our understanding of the historical character of possessive individualism and its relations to the practices of dispossession. For it had not only

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<sup>13</sup> See Chandan Reddy’s *Freedom with Violence, Race, Sexuality, and the US State*

<sup>14</sup> See Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert, Kenneth Thompson’s *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, particularly Chapter 2 “The Development of the Modern State”

acted as a social ontology of labor and class that accorded to an emergent form of capitalism, it also formed a ‘modern’ epistemology of dispossession that emerged, in part, to regulate the powers of an absolutist state. Put differently, during the early modern period, the claims to self-ownership was not just the rationalization of a capitalist labor market but they also acted as a political defense against the very acts of dispossession that enabled the formation of capitalism and were perpetrated by the absolutist state. Indeed, as Rosalind Petchesky has argued, the reduction of self-ownership to Lockean individualism obscures both cultural variations of property and the history of the politics of property claims. In particular, through the example of the Levellers, she points to how claims to self-ownership was used to counter the emerging capitalist market place, overextension of power by the absolutist state, and the patriarchal claims to women’s bodies.<sup>15</sup> The significance of this point for my project is two-fold. First, the practices of dispossession do not necessarily produce possessive individualism. Rather this connection was the effect of a specific early modern political conjuncture. Second, practices of dispossession cannot be analyzed without a consideration of the epistemology of dispossession that constitutes dispossession’s form of appearance.

These considerations mark the limits of a purely Marxist theory of dispossession. Indeed, Marxist theory bolsters the apparent disjunction between the ubiquity of material practices of dispossession and its form of appearance as an exceptional event by theoretically subordinating dispossession to market exploitation. That is, the practices of dispossession may no longer be understood as historically prior to capitalism however, as with Harvey’s theoretical innovation, they now become a dependent function of market exploitation, namely acting as its emergency valve during crises of overaccumulation. Thus, it subtly reinforces the exceptionalism of capital crisis, even though Marxist theory shows its inevitability. At base, the problem lies in Marxist

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<sup>15</sup> See Rosalind Petchesky’s “The Body as Property: A Feminist Re-Vision”

theory's lack of a fully developed account of the subjects of dispossession. Indeed, who is the subject(s) of dispossession in Marxism? Surely, Marxist theory provides a sophisticated and expansive account of the proletariat and the capitalist as subjects of exploitation. At its best, these subjects of dispossession can be seen through the categories of the *industrial reserve army* or the *lumpenproletariat*. Yet, in either case, they are ultimately derivations of the wage-laborer of capitalism, laboring subjects waiting for exploitation proper. Thus, from the analytical position of the subject, there appears no conceptual difference between being dispossessed and being exploited and alienated, even when Marxist theory grants dispossession to be a distinct mode/practice of capital accumulation.

As a result, I suggest that, in order to stop seeing the practice of dispossession as exceptional, we need an account of dispossession's form of appearance that does not fold it back into the instrumental logic of capitalism even while we remain mindful of how the practices of dispossession enable capitalist accumulation. Frank B. Wilderson III's provocative work pursues such an inquiry. In *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonism*, Wilderson III distills dispossession's forms of appearance that de-centers the Marxist account. Indeed, for Wilderson, the Marxist account is surprisingly a privileged rendering of dispossession relative to the other forms. Wilderson refers to these forms of appearance through the term *grammar of suffering*, which he defines as the "constituent elements of his or her loss and suffering." From there, he distinguishes three distinct grammars according to a tripartite racial schema of *White, Red, and Black*.<sup>16</sup> A *white grammar of suffering* is both constituted by and made theoretically legible through processes of alienation and exploitation. While a *red*

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<sup>16</sup> Wilderson uses a variety of synonyms for each of these positions. For White positionality, he uses the alternative terms: Human, Master, Settler, and, in particular occasions, non-Black. For Red positionality, he uses the alternative terms: Indigenous or 'Savage.' And, for Black positionality, he use the alternative term of Slave. For the most part, Wilderson uses more often the Human, 'Savage,' and Slave designations.

*grammar of suffering* is both constituted by and made theoretically legible through processes of genocide and sovereign loss. And lastly a *black grammar of suffering* is both constituted by and made theoretically legible through processes of accumulation and fungability (i.e. social death). From them, Wilderson asserts that these *grammars of suffering* reveal both the political ontology of race (e.g. white, red, and black political ontology) and, when taken together, the structure of US, indeed, global antagonism.

Wilderson's explanation of each of these grammars of suffering and his larger argument is far more detailed and nuance than what is permitted for this introduction. Indeed, Wilderson's ambitious argument explains them through a reading of the *assumptive political logic* of leading radical intellectuals from a wide range of traditions—from feminist philosopher/theorist Judith Butler to indigenous intellectual Vine Deloria Jr. to Autonomist Marxist Antonio Negri to black feminist critic/theorist Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman.<sup>17</sup> Suffice it to say, the value of Wilderson's theory of dispossession lies centrally in provincializing a Marxist theory to dictate a structural account of it. In so doing, he opens an intellectual space to inquire into dispossession's forms of appearance that are independent and distinct from the Marxist critique of capitalism, which thus allows inquiry to detach from Marxist theory's underlying attachment to capitalist modernity. In particular, he allows for comprehending the practices of dispossession as operating on political and libidinal logics with distinct historical temporalities rather than an exclusive capitalist rationality. Thus he makes categories of social difference distinct from class (e.g. race, gender, sexuality) to achieve a primary analytical standing in accounts of dispossession. Of course, this is not to say that the dynamics of class struggles, processes of alienation and exploitation, and changing modes of capitalist accumulation have no bearing on accounts of

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<sup>17</sup> Wilderson's critical engagement with these various thinkers is uneven in quality and, at times, overly dismissive.

dispossession but rather they need to be articulated to other dynamics and processes that generate dispossession's form of appearance.<sup>18</sup>

In sum, by reviewing these theories of dispossession, I have sought to trouble the primacy of property for an inquiry on dispossession, not to completely disregard property from an account, but instead to open up a space of inquiry not dictated in the first instance by the conceptual horizons of property (e.g. in terms of my periodization, my archive, and my theoretical frames). Indeed, this review has moved across a number registers and theoretical orders of dispossession—from its semantic content as the negation of possession and property to its history as a world-historical practice and then a contemporary mode of capitalist accumulation to finally to its form of appearance generated by an epistemology of dispossession. I have done so in order to demonstrate the historically contingent relationship between dispossession and property. Fundamentally, the dissertation's inquiry on dispossession takes it up as a form of appearance produced through discursive and material practices that generate an epistemology of dispossession, which is historically bound to the liberal state, capital, and political struggle and crisis. Given this conceptual orientation, how then can we inquire into the history of dispossession as a form of appearance? The following section will address this question by suggesting a genealogical approach.

### **What is a Genealogy of the Political Culture of Dispossession?**

In the preceding section, I demonstrated the conceptual and historical contingency between dispossession and property. This led me to assert that the dissertation's inquiry into

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<sup>18</sup> As useful as Wilderson's argument may be for my inquiry into dispossession, I find his notion of "political ontology," on which his entire argument rests, really ambiguous analytically and historically.

dispossession ultimately treats it to be a form of appearance. Now, to do so, I suggest that we analyze it as both an experience and a thought. I follow how Foucault uses those categories. In the unpublished Preface to *The History of Sexuality Volume Two*, Foucault outlines his method of analysis throughout the entire arch of his work for which we find that *experience* and *thought* occupy central analytical positions. In regards to experience, Foucault pushed against a tendency to split its formation between, on the one hand, a universal (phenomenological) subject who experiences and, on the other hand, a “economic and social context” that solicits an experience. Instead Foucault, in a kind of Copernican turn, examines *forms of experience* whereby a (nominalist) subject is part and parcel to the “concepts and methods of the history of societies.” In positing this formal unity, Foucault externalizes experience from a closed interiority of an universal (phenomenological) subject to a material object as “concepts and methods of history of societies.” He defines “experience” thusly:

an experience that conjoins a field of knowledge [connaissance] (with its own concepts, theories, diverse disciplines), a collection of rules (which differentiate the permissible from the forbidden, natural from monstrous, normal from pathological, what is decent from what is not, and so on), and a mode of relation between the individual and himself (which enables him to recognize himself as a sexual amid others). (200)

Surely, here, we are far afield from conceptualizing experience as a private product of processing external stimuli into cognitive, affective, psychic, and emotional subjective unity. Indeed, each of the three constituent elements of experience—“a field of knowledge,” “a collection of rules,” and “a mode of relation between the individual and himself”—point beyond housing experience

in the interior space of subjectivity but instead as the domain of a social formation. In Foucaultian parlance, experience is the point of conjunction between knowledge (i.e. *connaissance*), power, and ethics. In some respects, we can understand Foucault to be creating an intersubjective schema of experience on the order of Hegel and psychoanalytic theory. Yet, to do so would forget Foucault's "'nominalist' reduction of philosophical anthropology" and thereby attribute to him a universal and invariant phenomenological subject that would obscure the "historically singular form of experience" under analysis.

At stake in this "nominalist reduction" is the power of analysis itself, or what he refers to as *thought*, which would be obscured by taking up a complete theory of the Subject, no matter how dynamic alterity or the unconscious may be. With those stakes in mind, we can now understand the full importance of thought, which turns out to be the same 'substance' but a different "form of experience." He explains:

By 'thought,' I mean what establishes, in a variety of possible forms, the play of true and false, and consequently constitutes the human being as a knowing subject [subject de *connaissance*]; in other words, it is the basis for accepting or refusing rules, and constitutes human beings as social and juridical subjects; it is what establishes the relation with oneself and with others, and constitutes the human being as ethical subject.  
[...]

In this sense, thought is understood as the very form of action—as action insofar as it implies the play of true and false, the acceptance or refusal of rules, the relation to oneself and others. The study of forms of experience can thus proceed from an analysis of 'practices'—discursive or not—as long as one qualifies that word to mean the different

systems of action *insofar* as they are inhabited by thought as I have characterized it here.  
(200-201)

Described in this manner, it would be an absolutely fatal mistake to conceptualize thought as a mental substance of the mind, either as pictorial representation or conceptual product. Indeed, like Foucault's take on experience, he externalizes thought from the interior space of subjectivity by rendering it as "the very form of action." Furthermore, it is significant that Foucault does not reduce thought to discourse or language, as Structuralism would have, but attributes its substance more generally to "action" itself.<sup>19</sup> In this respect, the substance of thought, its very material character, is how it adheres to an action or a "practice" (i.e. "system of action"). Yet, how exactly should we understand this adhesion of thought to an action? Foucault addresses this question elsewhere when he states, "Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem."<sup>20</sup> Put differently, thinking is a practice that renders an action into an object of thought (i.e. a practice), which, in so doing, discloses the "thought" immanent to an action to the thinking subject. Interestingly, like experience, the constituent elements of thought turn out to be: "the basis for accepting or refusing rules, [...] constitute[ing] human beings as social and juridical subject; [...] establish[ing] the relation with oneself and with other, and constitute[ing] the human being as

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<sup>19</sup> In an interview, Foucault reinforces this non-equivalence of "thought" and "discourse": "Thought does exist, both beyond and before systems and edifices of discourse. It is something that is often hidden but always drives everyday behavior. There is always a little thought occurring even in the most stupid institutions; there is always thought even in silent habits."

<sup>20</sup> See Foucault's "Polemics, Politics, Problematization"

ethical subject.” In this respect, even though the substance of experience and thought turn out to be the same, their forms are distinct since “thought” is the form/practice of freedom to experience.<sup>21</sup>

Taken together, Foucault’s conceptualization of experience and thought to be equivalent but distinct forms of each other is meant to do two things. First, it delineates the domain of his various archaeological/genealogical analyses to be of the practical world. Indeed, Foucault’s work on madness, punishment, sexuality, government, and ethics has been to resist hypostatizing these abstractions into mental ideas or an empirical class of behaviors but instead to analyze them as domains of practices. Second, it subordinates theory building to the analytical process. Put another way, Foucault’s array of concepts (e.g. discourse, episteme, sovereignty, discipline, governmentality, care of the self, etc.) have value as heuristic categories that make a “historical singular form of experience” available to “thought.”

In this respect, the dissertation seeks to distill dispossession’s form of appearance as a “historically singular form of experience” and then placing it in the “history of thought.” Indeed, this is precisely the critical labor of genealogical analysis. Hence, the dissertation proceeds by making each chapter reconstruct: 1) distinct discursive formations that have made a subject of dispossession knowable, 2) distinct regimes of practice that have made a subject of dispossession available to forms of power, and 3) distinct ethics that have made a subject of dispossession an ethical subject. In this manner, the dissertation has sought to break-up an assumption of a temporal and spatial unity of the subject of dispossession, i.e. treating the subject as an invariant substance across time and space. Instead, it reveals the subject of dispossession’s “systemic

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<sup>21</sup> Foucault’s discussion of the relation between “experience” and “thought” can be likened to the relation of Gramsci’s notion of “common sense” and “good sense.” Yet, they differ on how each is formed according to their theory of struggle.

dissociation”<sup>22</sup> across these chapters. As a result, the aims of this project has been to dissolve the subject of dispossession but not in order to deny reality of the subject’s experience of dispossession but rather to render that experience available to thought.

At this point, it is worth spending a little time to unpack what is meant by knowledge, power, and ethics as they form the categories through which the dissertation analyzes dispossession’s form of appearance. What follows does not seek to be either an exhaustive or definitive account of these three axes of analysis as they have been elaborated through the entire oeuvre of Foucault. Instead, I seek to clarify these axes of analysis to the extent that the dissertation mobilizes them across the chapters.

In his early archaeological work on formations of knowledge, Foucault uses two distinct terms to refer to knowledge—*savoir* and *connaître* — when he analyzes its institutional fields and discursive practices. Hence, it’s crucial to delineate their conceptual difference. These terms refer to the level of the formalization of knowledge and the order by which an object is apprehended for knowledge production, respectively. That is, *savoir* refers to knowledge that has achieved internal rules that regulate its domain (i.e. its own discursive practice), indeed, making knowledge into a particular type of knowledge. While *connaître* refers to the order by which a knowing subject recognizes an object of knowledge, that is, the set of rules/practices that render an object knowable in the first instance. Hence, when Foucault analyzes an *episteme*, he examines how a series of *saviors* share a set of rules/discursive practices across them on the order of the way they construct their object of knowledge, their theories of knowledge, and their method for knowledge (i.e. *connaître*). In these terms, the dissertation tracks the different *saviors* and their respective discursive practices that regulated the knowability of dispossession. From Chapter 1’s focus on technical engineering knowledges that were deployed in the various

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<sup>22</sup> See Foucault’s “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”

projects of the TVA to Chapter 2 focus on the anthropological knowledges of Japanese culture that formed from the internment camps to Chapter 3's focus on urban sociological knowledges of poverty that orchestrated empowerment projects to Chapter 4's focus on neo-classical economic knowledges that shaped social policies for the homeless, the dissertation keys to the determinative role that these various knowledges play in shaping the knowability of dispossession. With that said the dissertation is less interested in and thus has paid minimal attention to the epistemological presuppositions that made the truth-claims of dispossession possible for these various knowledges. Instead, the dissertation has focused on these knowledges and the ways they constitute the knowability of dispossession to the extent that they are the effects of *political rationalities* taken up under the second axis—power.

To layout Foucault's work on *power*, it is absolutely vital to first understand the goal of this project, namely, as Foucault states in *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, "to move less toward a 'theory' of power than toward an 'analytics' of power: that is, toward a definition of the specific domain formed by relations of power, and toward a determination of the instruments that will make possible its analysis" (82). With this re-orientation from developing a "theory" to an "analytics" of power, Foucault develops concepts like *discipline* and *governmentality* to be not the truth of power but rather heuristics through which to analyze particular relations of power. As a consequence of this analytical aim, Foucault treats power not as a self-sufficient substance but as a relation whose 'substance' is made up by the instruments, technologies, and practices that both form its political rationality and structure its dynamic means. Hence, Foucault's focus from *discipline* to *governmentality* is not only a historical claim of the character and organization of power relations in the 'West,' but importantly a conceptual refinement of analytical categories themselves.

In this respect, Foucault, in his later work, lands on *governmentality* as the privileged analytical category of power relations. Indeed, it encompasses a number of meanings simultaneously to analyze power relations, in that, it unites the concepts of *government* and *mentality*. Foucault explains the concept of *government* through the phrase “the conduct of conduct.” Here, “conduct” not only denotes a particular set of behavior/activities (i.e. practices) but also connotes an ethical regulation of those behaviors/activities according to norms of appropriateness. In this respect, government as “the conduct of conduct” names the plurality of practices by which the governors activate, suppress, and modify the conduct of the governed according to norms of appropriateness.<sup>23</sup> Understood in this manner, the power relation between the positions of the governors and the governed is not uni-directional but dynamic. Indeed, at its core, the freedom of the governed is at issue in the game of truth over the norms of appropriateness. Thus, with the addition of the notion of *mentality* to government, understood in this manner, *governmentality* refers to the unity of thought (i.e. political rationality) and technologies/practices through which governing operates dynamically between the governors and the governed.

In these terms, the dissertation has focused on different forms of governmentality in each chapter, particularly the way the instruments, technical procedures, technologies, etc. of governing constituted dispossession as an object of knowledge and formed a particular political rationalities. For instance, in Chapter 1, the dissertation examines a New Deal liberal governmentality found in the technical procedures and rational forms that made up the Tennessee Valley Authority (e.g. demonstration farms, research schools, etc.). Under this regime, the positions of the governors and the governed were figured through the technical expert/engineer and the rural farmer. The truth game of governance was framed as a pedagogical

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<sup>23</sup> See Mitchell Dean *Governmentality: Power and rule in Modern Society*

dynamic over technical modernity. Dispossession was thus rendered to be a problem of modernization. Yet, the dissertation's analysis centers on unpacking the workings of this New Deal liberal governmentality at the micro-logical scale of political subjectivity. Hence, the dissertation turns to James Agee and Walker Evan's documentary novel, *Let Us Praise Famous Men*, to detail a political subjectivity suitable to a political rationality of a technically oriented governmentality. Accordingly, the rest of the chapters follow suit—with Chapter 2 examining a *total war* liberal governmentality found in the project of Japanese internment, with Chapter 3 examining a Great Society liberal governmentality found in the project of Community Action, and with Chapter 4 examining a neoliberal governmentality found in the social policy over homelessness. Indeed, as is the case in Chapter 1, each of these chapters has sought to distill how the practices that compose these governmentalities have variously figured the positions of the governors and the governed, framed the dynamism of governing, rendered dispossession as an object of knowledge at stake in its political rationality, and rationalized these governmentalities at the micro-logical/capillary scale of political subjectivity.

With that said, I would like to make a brief caveat concerning my use of the category of the *liberal state* and these various liberal governmentalities. In categorizing these governmentalities, for the most part, with the historical names of prominent national missions of different US state administrations (e.g. New Deal and Great Society), I do not intend to attribute these liberal governmentalities to be properties/instruments of the liberal state that is then distributed unevenly across the social field. Rather, it is my intention to signal historically the high level of political formalization of these liberal governmentalities as they have been taken up across or codified through a series of social institutions. For instance, in Chapter 3, I discuss the practices of empowerment that compose a Great Society liberal governmentality. However, as

cultural historian Alyosha Goldstein noted, these practices were utilized well before the Great Society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through US colonial projects in Puerto Rico. Yet, the difference these lies in how practices were systematically codified and institutionalized through sociology department, foundations, federal agencies, etc. In this respect, I follow the lead of political theorist and cultural historian Timothy Mitchell in comprehending the substantive metaphysical unity of the state to be the effect an array of repetitive practices.<sup>24</sup> Hence, throughout the dissertation, I more often refer to particular state forms rather than to the state.

Foucault's third axis for analysis of experience is what he calls ethics. And it forms the final phase of his thinking, which is often characterized as an analytical shift from the relation between knowledge and power to the relation between the subject and truth. Commonsense notions of ethics understands it to be an abstract set of ethical rules, principles, and/or values that the subject subscribes to and subsequently informs or dictates the subject's behavior. Foucault modifies this formulation by rendering it to be a practical activity rather than an internalization and expression of ideals. Hence, for Foucault, an analysis of ethics treats experience to index a "modality of relation to the self," that is, a practical relation of the subject to the subject. In order to treat and analyze this self-relation to be a practical one, Foucault, in *The Use of Pleasure*, schematizes it according four axes. First, it "concern[s] what might be called the *determination of the ethical substance*; this is, the way in which the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself as the prime material of his moral conduct" (26). Second, it deals with "the *mode of subjection*; that is, with the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice" (27). Third, it involves "the forms of *elaboration of ethical work* that one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one's

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<sup>24</sup> See Timothy Mitchell's "Society, Economy, and the State Effect" in *State/Culture: State Formation after the Cultural Turn*

conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior" (27). The fourth and final axis entails "the *telos* of the ethical subject: an action is not only moral in itself, in its singularity; it is also moral in its circumstantial integration and by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct" (28). Through these four analytical frames, Foucault can thus specify an ethical practice to be a singular but repeatable event in contrast to models that would read ethical conduct to be the expression of trans-historical principle, rules, and/or values. Hence, practices of sexual fidelity may appear to be the same historically, in that, individuals abstain from sexual activity with others. However, through Foucault's analytic of ethics, they can differ radically according to its ethical substance, mode of subjection, elaboration of ethical work, and/or ethical telos.

In respects to Foucault's analytic of ethics, the dissertation follows its general aim of materializing ethics to be a practical activity of the subject to oneself; however, it only loosely works with Foucault's analytical schema when the dissertation analyzes political subjectivity. Hence, on top of examining the way that dispossession composes the political rationality of the practices of liberal governmentality, the dissertation extracts how the dispossessed forms the *ethical substance* worked on by those same practices of liberal governmentality. In this regard, the dissertation's focus on ethics has been just a different order of analysis of dispossession from its entailment in liberal governmentality. Indeed, to examine the way that liberal governmentality operates at the micro-logical scale of political subjectivity, the dissertation has had to reckon with the way that the very security of liberal governmentality rest on the way that its practices are also ethical. Hence, each chapter necessarily treats dispossession in two ways simultaneously, at once a political problem whose exigence allows for the extension of power,

and, at the same time, as an ethical problem whose significance occasions the elaboration of an ethical subject.

This is particularly relevant in the dissertation's treatment of cultural materials since it has privileged them as the site through which we can apprehend political subjectivity as the alignment between liberal governmentalities and ethical practices. To visibilize that alignment, the chapters of the dissertation examine tropes of encounter with the dispossessed across a diverse set of cultural materials, which have ranged from photographic pamphlets, popular press histories, book reviews, and novels. Indeed, these *tropes of encounter* stage the complex interactions and formations between an ethical subject and the dispossessed, which, in the process, reveal the political logic and ethical character of practices that seek to recuperate them. For instance, in Chapter 3, the dissertation examines practices of empowerment in Community Action programs as they form a Great Society liberal governmentality. Besides laying out the political rationality of these practices, the chapter surfaces their ethical dimension by turning to Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel *Revolt of the Cockroach People*. There, the chapter teases out the role that the specular/imaginary body plays as a mode of subjection and ethical substances in the practices of empowerment. Likewise, the other chapters follow a similar analysis of different tropes of encounter with the dispossessed, finding in them different mediating figures that condense both a political rationality and ethical rationality immanent to the recuperative practices of liberal governmentality. For instance, Chapter 1 focuses on the figure of camera, Chapter 2 centers on the notion of culture, and Chapter 4 looks at the notion of property. As these figures are set within different tropes of encounter, they index the logic involved in the relation of the subject with oneself.

## On Literature and Political Subjectivity

To develop its genealogy of the political culture of dispossession, the chapters both work through a diverse set of historical accounts and theoretical frames from a number of disciplines and analyze a number of textual materials. However, in the end, the dissertation ends up privileging literary texts as its primary historical index of political subjectivity (e.g. Walker Evans's and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, John Okada's *No-No Boy*, Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, and Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man*). It has done so due to the particular historical relationship between culture, for which the literary is taken as its paradigmatic object, and the state. That is, in *Culture and the State*, David Lloyd and Paul Thomas argue that, from end of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the conceptual parallel between theories of (aesthetic) culture and theories of the state is no accident. Indeed, (aesthetic) culture and the state are seen to provide reconciliation to an exceedingly fragmented and antagonistic social order such that, they claim that "cultural (or aesthetic) formation comes gradually to play the role of forming citizens for the modern state" (1).<sup>25</sup> In particular, they argue that aesthetic philosophy provide the ideational forms that both rationalizes social fragmentation and antagonism under universal aesthetic judgment and enables the state as an ideal form to embody that universal position via the implementation of aesthetic education into not only the content but also organization of pedagogical institutions. For instance, literary institutions like the canon enable the reproduction of the liberal state less by the content of a canon (i.e. the individual texts that compose a canon and the topics that they each take up) but more by the

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<sup>25</sup> See David Lloyd's and Paul Thomas's *Culture and the State*.

perpetuation of an ideal form that subordinates difference under universality embodied in the unity of a canon that serves its regulative ideal in the selection and ejection of texts.<sup>26</sup>

In this respect, I have chosen novels for two reasons: first, for the way their material conditions of possibility are located in the political crisis of a distinct historical conjuncture and second, for their pursuit and perpetuation of ideal universal forms of unity since these forms index political subjectivities attuned to the liberal state. Indeed, each novel pursue these canonical forms in literature—from Agee’s explicit meditation on and experimentation with documentary that aims for its universal communicability to Okada’s narration of Ichiro’s struggle for “that faint and elusive insinuation of promise” in America to Acosta’s pursuit of empowerment to Delany’s thematization of “systems of the world.” Each of these literary features of the novels, I suggest, embody an ideal universal form of unity and thus index political subjectivities attuned to the liberal state as an ideal form.

## **Chapter Overview**

In Chapter 1, I begin the genealogy of the political culture of dispossession by examining dispossession’s form of appearance in the white farming family during the 1930s. The chapter argues that this figure acts as a political technology to forge political subjectivity amenable to the expansion and transformation of technical relations of power brought about by New Deal liberal governmentality. Emerging out of the political crisis of the Great Depression, this New Deal liberal governmentality can be concretely apprehended through the history of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). In particular, taking the TVA’s implementation of “demonstration farms” as a practice, the chapter culls from it a political rationality of New Deal liberal

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<sup>26</sup> See David Lloyd’s “Race Under Representation”

governmentality. Through a reading of David Lilienthal's *TVA: Democracy on the March*, I show how governing is approached as a pedagogical relation between technical experts and unknowledgeable dispossessed farmers. Yet, in order to materialize this New Deal liberal governmentality at the level of political subjectivity, the chapter turns to documentary and reads it too as a practice of New Deal liberal governmentality to the extent that formal experimentation of documentary is taken as a technical process. The chapter therefore turns to Walker Evans and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Famous Men)* due to the way that it both self-consciously experiments with documentary form and thematizes its technical character in the trope of the camera. In so doing, the chapter shows how New Deal liberal governmentality constitutes the technical expert to be universal. However, the chapter shows how this universality is achieved through the gender norms of whiteness as figured in the white family farmer by not only rationalizing it through claims of transparency but rationalizing its ethical aims through a paradigm of nationalism. Yet, if gendered whiteness serves as the normative basis of this political rationality of New Deal liberal governmentality, then I show that "blackness" marks its internal contradiction, occupying its very geographic and subjective threshold.

In Chapter 2, the dissertation continues its genealogy by examining dispossession's form of appearance in the Japanese-American during World War II. The chapter argues that this figure indexes to two contradictory political rationalities of a *total war* liberal governmentality whose contradiction is apprehended as *race* at the level of political subjectivity. Emerging out of the political crisis of the Pacific in World War II, this *total war* liberal governmentality can be apprehended in the practices of Japanese internment. In particular, in the shifting practices of internment, we find two distinct political rationalities—one that renders internment to be military practice of containing a racial enemy and another that renders it to be liberal recuperative

practice of integrating a racialized population into a national polity—that form out of the shifting political dynamic of the war rather than an ethical development of the state. In order to surface these political rationalities at the level of political subjectivity, the chapter turns to John Okada's *No-No Boy*. There, I demonstrate how race mediates these political rationalities and marks their material contradictions. Yet, these contradictions get displaced onto gender and sexuality through the racialization of culture. Put differently, the resolution to the contradiction of the political rationalities of total war liberal governmentality is to locate the problem in so-called Japanese culture, which ends up racializing it through the gender and sexual norms of the reproductive family.

In Chapter 3, the dissertation continues the genealogy by examining dispossession's form of appearance in the abstract poor during the 1960s. The chapter argues that the figure of the abstract poor acts as a political technology to form political subjectivity amenable to the extension and transformations of corporative relations of power wrought by Great Society liberal governmentality. Emerging out of the political crisis spurred by black political insurgency, the Great Society liberal governmentality can be apprehended in the implementation of Community Action Programs. In particular, the chapter finds in them a political rationality that aims to quell dissent by constituting and empowering new political constituencies. Yet, in doing so, this Great Society liberal governmentality consolidates the uneven political and economic geography of race, gender, and sexuality and thus reveals in those formations empowerment's internal political tension between self-help and self-determination. In order to surface its effects at the level of political subjectivity, the chapter turns to Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*. There, I argue that the political subjectivity of Great Society liberal governmentality relies on the specular/imaginary body as the pre-condition to empowerment. In so doing, Great

Society liberal governmentality reproduces heteronormativity since it regulates the unity of the specular/imaginary body. However, the chapter discerns not quite a contradiction but an alternative formation within this political subjectivity that occupies an immanent position of incomprehension. That is, rather than the spectral body, dispossession becomes a violation of the flesh.

In Chapter 4, the dissertation ends its genealogy by examining dispossession's *form of appearance* in the racialized homeless that emerged in the 1980s. This chapter argues that this figure indexes the ambiguity of formal neutral freedom central to the political rationality of neoliberal governmentality. Emerging in response to the way that the generalization of liberation struggles in 1970s undermined the institutions and practices that furnish historical precedence for the US state, neoliberal governmentality thus fosters missing state legitimacy by installing and transforming power relations according to market tropes. Less a matter of capitalism's drive for accumulation, the chapter stresses that this recourse to market tropes occurs due to the way that the market exemplifies a neutral political structure that fosters the freedom of its participants. Indeed, by examining "Housing First," a recent homelessness social policy, as a recuperative practice of neoliberal governmentality, the chapter shows that its reliance upon market techniques of population management necessarily assumes that those subjected to them are formally free. In order to surface its effects at the level of political subjectivity, the chapter turns to Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man*. There, the chapter argues that, as a consequence of installing formal (market) freedom into the subject, neoliberal governmentality recalls a residual form of possessive individualism to give it substance. In so doing, the chapter shows a profound reversal of possessive individualism's foundational assumption—no longer defining freedom through a principle of self-ownership but instead through a principle of ownership by another. Under this

situation, race, gender, and sexuality no longer appear to operate exclusively as normative categories of discipline but instead become available both for reconstructing alternative histories and ethical practices and for positivist inscription into neutral multiculturalism.

**Chapter 1 - New Deal Liberal Governmentality and White Dispossession in James Agee  
and Walker Evan's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men***

“[T]he cow barn, the migrant’s tent, the tractor in the field  
and the jalopy on the road, the weathered faces of men, the  
faces of women sagging with household drudgery...they  
are all here, photographed in their context, in relation to  
their environment. In rows of filing cabinets, they wait for  
today’s planner and tomorrow’s historian.”

- Edwin Rosskam, *Hometown*

“The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system  
that governs the appearance of statements as unique  
events.”

-Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

In the introduction, I explained that the dissertation will create a genealogy of the political culture of dispossession in order to provide a history of how we have come to know and feel dispossessed by the so-called loss of liberal democracy. To that end, this chapter locates not so much this political culture’s origin, a “forgotten identity,” but one of its “complex system of distinct and multiple elements”<sup>27</sup> in the political conjuncture of the 1930s. To begin, let us look at Rosskam’s optimistic pronouncement. Here, we find him juxtaposing two distinct narratives. On the one hand, Rosskam enumerates a series of images that, when concatenated in this way,

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<sup>27</sup> See Foucault’s “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”

produce a narrative of agrarian striving, loss, and abjection. Ah, we see the disrepair of the “tractor in the field and the jalopy on the road,” the idleness of the cow barn, and the desperation of “the migrant’s tent.” All this thus makes up the “relation to [the] environment” that, we assume, is etched in the man’s face as its “weathered” character. Yet, with such icons of agrarian loss, we find no images of “household drudgery” and its “relation to [domestic] environment[s].” However, in their absence, I would argue, they come only to magnify the grinding tedium of such labor, which is manifest so directly in the “sagging” features of the woman’s face.” In this way, the emotional force of Rosskum’s narrative relies upon gendered norms of labor and domesticity.

Yet, that is only half of the quote. As we move further, the tone shifts and we are presented with another narrative. No longer are we given the downtrodden narrative implied by the description of the photos’ content; rather we are now given Rosskum’s enumeration of photographs to indicate the exhaustiveness of the archive. Indeed, Rosskum asserts with glee that “they are all here,” and with a tinge of scientific pride that they are “photographed in their context, in relation to their environment.” Hence, the focal point of his statement is not the existential world of the implicit white farming family, but the technology of the archive in its informatic comprehensiveness and its utility for the technical work of “today’s planner” and the nationalist work of “tomorrow’s historian.” How should we understand the relation between these distinct, and for him, non-competing narratives? What allows Rosskum to speak so proudly, so gleefully, about this archive of suffering? Put differently, if, following Foucault, the archive is not simply a collection of documents but “the law of what can be said,” what are the historical *a priori*s that allow Rosskam to pose this statement about his archive of suffering? And

to what extent do they still govern how we have come to know Rosskum's own archive of suffering, making his optimism, his praise to both the historian and the planner, to be our own?

This chapter pursues these questions and argues that New Deal liberal governmentality undergirds Rosskum's statement, producing as a non-contradiction the optimism of endless photographic archive of suffering. Indeed, this chapter suggests that Rosskam's figures—the dispossessed white family, the planner, the historian, and, most of all, the archivist—name social positions and relations that index the political subjectivity of a New Deal liberal governmentality that emerged from and sought to manage the political crises brought about by the particular contradiction of capital, labor, and race in the Great Depression. In particular, the chapter contends that the construction of the dispossessed white family farmer not simply act as an ideological ruse for the national recovery of capitalism, but works as a political technology through which to form a political subjectivity amenable to the extension of new technical forms of power relations across the US social field.

To that end, the chapter begins by elaborating on the set of contradictions that plagued the US state at the onset of the Great Depression, and then goes on to outline one form of state response to these contradictions as exemplified in the Tennessee Valley Authority. There, by examining David Lilienthal's *TVA: Democracy on the March*, the chapter demonstrates the crucial discursive role played by the dispossessed white farmer in rationalizing this New Deal liberal governmentality through what Lilienthal calls *grassroots democracy*. However, to fully comprehend its operations at the level of political subjectivity, I argue that we must examine the documentary as a practice of New Deal liberal governmentality. Thus, the chapter turns to James Agee and Walker Evans's documentary novel, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, for the way it extends and foregrounds the social logic of documentary through its self-conscious formal

experimentation and thematization of the technical apparatus of the camera. In particular, the way that *Famous Men* stages the encounter and constitutive intimacy between Agee and the dispossessed white farmer discloses not only the underlying political rationality but also the ethical logic that secures this New Deal liberal governmentality. From this, it becomes clear that gendered norms of whiteness enable this political rationality since they not only rationalize the ideal transparency of the political subject (i.e. the political subject's capacity to occupy a position of formal universality via technical knowledge) but also rationalize the ethical value of recuperating dispossessed white farmers under a nationalist paradigm. Yet, if gendered whiteness serves as the normative basis of this political rationality of New Deal liberal governmentality, then "blackness" marks its internal contradiction, occupying its very geographic and subjective threshold.

### **Crises of the Great Depression and New Deal State Form**

The cause(s) of the Great Depression continue to be debated by scholars but, among mainstream economists, a structural problem of overproduction/underconsumption was the dominant factor to its onset.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of whatever is the root cause(s), the Great Depression's historical significance rests on how it completely invalidated the laissez-faire liberal doctrine that claimed social stability and general economic prosperity naturally occurred through unregulated market exchange. As a consequence, the immensity of the social and economic crises of the Great Depression brought into relief the political significance of class conflict for social stability. Indeed, with the specter of the 1917 Communist Revolution in the minds of political and

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<sup>28</sup> See Ben S. Bernanke's *Essays on the Great Depression*, particularly Chapter 1 "The Macroeconomics of the Great Depression: A Comparative Approach"

economic elites, no longer could labor conflicts and unrest be seen as a matter of private concern as managed through an array of progressive social reforms, local policing, and the private armies of capitalists. Instead the contradiction of capital and labor required political absorption and integration.<sup>29</sup>

With that said, it is important to remember the racial and gendered unevenness of labor itself. With the rise of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) after the Knights of Labor, union power was organized around the distinction between skilled and unskilled labor via the strategy of craft unionism.<sup>30</sup> Thus, due to it and the persistent racialization and gendering of industries from the ethnic urban boss system and growing farm monopolies, ‘race’ became an important contradiction in light of how the US state sought to incorporate labor to be a non-antagonistic relation.<sup>31</sup>

Keeping both in mind then, the heterogeneous projects of the New Deal should be understood as simultaneously incorporating labor antagonism into the state form as well as raising the contradiction of race to be another source of social antagonism. To be sure, the New Deal, in the beginning, had no unified principles of governance, indeed described as a “chaos of experimentation;” however, as political historian Alan Brinkley explains, at least by the late New Deal, it can be discerned that the New Deal relied on two broad but distinct strategies to manage economic problems and thus, by extension, labor antagonism.<sup>32</sup> The first approach turned to increasing the federal state’s administrative and regulatory powers in economic activity. Unlike earlier approaches, the goal of the state’s administrative power was no longer for breaking up

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<sup>29</sup> See Antonio Negri’s *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of State-Form*, particularly Chapter 2 “Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State.” Relative to industrial laborers across the world, US white workers were paid quite well. At base, the labor conflicts centered not so much on wages as it did on labor control over working conditions.

<sup>30</sup> The conflict over strategy gave rise to the Congress of Industrial Labor, see Michael Denning’s *The Cultural Front: The Labor of American Culture*

<sup>31</sup> See Nikhil Singh’s *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, particular Chapter 2 “Reconstructing Democracy.”

<sup>32</sup> See Alan Brinkley’s “The Late New Deal and the Idea of the State” in *Liberalism and Its Discontent*

monopolies and decentralizing economic activity. Indeed economic concentration was not the problem. Rather administrative power sought to make economic concentration efficient and produce smooth and organic unity in the increased size and complexity of the economy on the order of the War Industries Board from World War I.

The second approach relied on the federal state's fiscal power, its capacity to tax, spend, and regulate the money supply to stimulate growth and to resolve social problems. As Brinkley explains, "[This] vision [was] essentially compensatory [since the] government [...] would redress weaknesses and imbalances in the private economy without directly confronting the internal workings of capitalism. Such a state could manage the economy without managing the institutions of the economy" (47). Through each of these approaches, the New Deal state differently incorporated labor antagonism and, more significantly, further entrenched racial disparities since the New Deal had to rely on already existing racialized state and local level administrative institutions for the implementation of its projects and the distribution of fiscal resources.

Nonetheless, it is under the first approach that dispossession, figured through the farmer, was problematized and addressed, and thus brings with its governmental practices the same labor aims and racial contradictions endemic to the entire social formation. The crisis of farming was, however, far from new, indeed the populist movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century points to how farming was a persistent economic problem and political issue. However, in this period, we find a large scale federal effort to address the issues through, most notably, the Resettlement Administration (RA), which later became the Farm Security Administration (FSA). In these respects, the crisis of farming exemplified the structural problem of the Great Depression and the governmental strategies to manage the state's crisis. There, codified and institutionalized in its

practices, I want to suggest we can limn the political rationality of a New Deal liberal governmentality that takes the dispossessed farmers as its target population. Yet, to do so, the chapter, instead of focusing on the FSA, will focus on the Tennessee Valley Authority, a different federal project from them, but very much aligned with their goals.

### **Tennessee Valley Authority and New Deal Liberal Governmentality**

Most commonly known as a major New Deal project that built hydro-electric dams throughout the Tennessee River watershed to prevent flooding and generate inexpensive electricity for local populations, the TVA was a regional public authority led by intellectuals prized for their technical expertise. Its original impetus emerged out of questions on what to do with the Muscle Shoals munitions plant that was built for World War I manufacturing armaments.<sup>33</sup> Thus, with its disuse during the Depression, President Roosevelt, with the advice of Arthur E. Morgan and Senator George Norris of Alabama, repurposed it as a regional development agency for the Tennessee Valley.

Both the scale and social ambition of the TVA was massive. Geographically, the Tennessee River passes through eight states where it empties into a river basin in Mississippi, which spans 40,000 miles. This region became the primary target of TVA efforts as it frequently flooded, impacting roughly two million of the most impoverished people in the nation. Even though the flooding was a persistent feature of the region well before the creation of the TVA, it became an urgent concern since the economic crises of the depression made migration to urban centers impossible. This immiserated an already poor population even further. Thus, along with

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<sup>33</sup> For more on the origins and controversy that surrounded the TVA, see Preston Hubbard's *Origins of the TVA: The Muscle Shoals Controversy, 1920-1932*

the prevention of floods, the TVA sought to improve the economic conditions of the region. Yet, this entailed much more than improving farmland and reforesting stripped areas. As James C. Scott explains, the original goals of the TVA were to “build dams (thereby preventing floods and promoting navigation), generate cheap electricity, encourage industry, start cooperatives, train workers, build schools and clinics, conserve topsoil, replant denuded forest, teach modern agriculture, personal hygiene and sanitation, improve the diet.”<sup>34</sup> And when taken together, these changes ultimately sought to “transform a static, underdeveloped subsistence society into a dynamic, growing, productive society.”<sup>35</sup> At the heart of the TVA was therefore not the environmental and economic development of the region but the uplift of a population into modern cultural citizenship through technical planning. As President Roosevelt said, “What we are doing there is ... trying to make a different type of citizen out of them from what they would be under their present conditions.”

The making of this “different type of citizen” involved much difficulty. As the TVA quite rightly understood, the uplift of this constituency requires a radical intervention in their social lives. However, there existed institutions that have vested interests in maintaining such conditions, which ultimately curtailed the social ambitions of the TVA. More specifically, the tension laid, on the one hand, in the institutional infighting and political difficulties of the New Deal and, on the other hand, in the power structures of local elites. For example, Scott explains that a whole host of departments—like the Department of Conservation and the Army Corp of Engineers—came to resent the TVA for the appropriation of institutional functions. And moreover, the political battles that the New Deal had to constantly reckon with—such as the struggles for the Social Security Act and constitutional legitimacy of the TVA itself—had

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<sup>34</sup> See James C. Scott’s “High Modernist Social Engineering: The Case of the Tennessee Valley Authority” in *Experiencing the State*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*

disillusioned many of the radical New Dealers, leading many to leave the administration. On the local level, large and successful farmers via the American Farm Bureau Federation used their political clout to shift the direction of the TVA, specifically ending the alliance between the TVA and the Farm Security Administration. As a consequence, it led to not only the monopolization of farm supplies and federal subsidies to already wealthy white farmers but also to the end of many social projects aimed at counteracting existing inequalities such as federal oversight and planning of farmland, creation of local education institutions, and assistance with various cooperatives. Those most adversely affected by such political back dealing were ironically the sharecropping farmer, particularly the black tenant farmers, who had precipitated state intervention in the first place.

Even though the TVA had ultimately failed in its aims to make a “different kind of citizen” out of the Tennessee Valley region, the TVA’s impact goes beyond this institutional legacy. Instead, I argue that the political debates surrounding the TVA indexed a distinct governmentality since the TVA’s social goals required an unprecedented centralization of organizational power and authority. This demand obviously spurred dissent from both the local propertied class and the political factions within the TVA itself and around the New Deal administration. But besides the economic and political self-interest of these groups, this kind of centralization triggered a far more fundamental political question in the U.S. political tradition: how to justify such centralization of state power on the federal level given republican values of popular sovereignty.

To get at this question, we must turn to David E. Lilienthal’s promotional book *TVA: Democracy on the March*. Originally a lawyer from Wisconsin, Lilienthal began as an influential board member of the TVA but later gained the position of director after Arthur Morgan was fired

due to disputes among organizers of the TVA, which prominently included Lilienthal himself. Philosophically, Lilienthal shared many of the same ideas of Morgan in regards to the ultimate social value and necessity of planning. However, as Scott notes, Lilienthal had a far more realist attitude to the achievement of the TVA's social mission. That is, he recognized the entrenched political structure, economic divisions, and cultural norms that impede the success of TVA. Thus, with much political pushback and this realist attitude, Lilienthal had to articulate an entirely different vision of democracy, which he referred to as *grass roots democracy*, that could legitimate the work of the TVA and reconcile the implicit authoritarianism of technical expertise to democratic representation. Yet, to be clear, this grass roots democracy is not an ideological ruse but rather the political rationality immanent to the practices of New Deal liberal governmentality institutionalized in the TVA.

## II

To understand Lilienthal's notion of grass roots democracy, we must first distinguish it institutionally from representative democracy. Under representative democracy, elected officials come to mediate the relationship between the state and 'the people.' As such, they serve as proxies/representatives for a constituency of 'the people,' embodying them in their collective interests. As proxies, the elected official does not necessarily act in accordance with the particular interests of individual people in a constituency but acts according to a normative image of the constituency itself. Ideally then, these proxies/representatives meet with each other in a forum to establish the *general will* of 'the people,' which would dictate the formation, direction, and actions of the administrative capacities and apparatuses of the state.

Lilienthal's grass roots democracy, on the other hand, does not work through these proxy relationships between constituencies and representatives. And it does not seek to establish the *general will* of 'the people' through the arbitration of competing interests of normative images of constituents. And grass roots democracy should most certainly not be understood as an idealized image of direct participation in democratic decision making through the free association of organic groups. Rather, the relation between 'the people' and the state becomes mediated by technical experts and administrative agencies. This shift is a fundamental political transformation since, unlike the elected official, what unites the constituency of 'the people' with a technical expert are 'needs.' As a consequence, the technical expert must be held accountable to the aggregate and verifiable 'needs' of a constituency of 'the people.' In this setup, technical experts would not attempt to establish the 'needs' of 'the people' in general but rather they would devise pragmatic activities and goals to the 'needs' of a particular constituency of "the people."

At first glance, this idea of grass roots democracy appears completely undemocratic. Surely, is not the abrogation of decision making to experts the antithesis of a democratic process? Is that not technical authoritarianism in the full light of day? However, Lilienthal sidesteps these problems by shifting the terms of the debate away from the thorny issue of authority to one of administration. In the chapter entitled "Decentralization: Antidote for Remote Control" from *TVA*, Lilienthal makes this sleight-of-hand by critiquing overcentralization. For instance, Lilienthal claims, "Centralization in administration tends to promote remote and absentee control, and thereby increasingly denies to the individual the opportunity to make decisions and to carry those responsibilities by which human personality is nourished and developed" (138). For Lilienthal, centralization stifles the capacity and desire for human self-actualization as it precludes participation, which can only be remedied through a decentralization

of administration. In making this proposal, Lilienthal comes to promote and underscore the separation between authority and administration such that he ultimately seeks a “decentralized administration of centralized authority” (141). Through this split, Lilienthal relocates democracy to be fundamentally a concern over administrative issues. In making this move, we should not come to assume that democracy has been hollowed out of its ideological substance and its promise for individual freedom, fulfillment, and political unity. As we see in the above quote, Lilienthal is at pains to stress that decentralization enables these social virtues. Instead of conceiving the turn to administration as a perversion of democracy, Lilienthal sees it to be grounding democracy in the practical activities of the citizenry. It is precisely in that practical sense that makes Lilienthal’s grass roots democracy a *grass-roots* phenomenon and activity. Indeed, when democracy is found in practical activity rather than the representative procedures, the spiritual and political unity of democracy is no longer found in the establishment of normative representations, ideas, and directions, but instead in a vision of practical cooperation among the demos.

In locating the purview of democracy from the institutions of political representation to practical activities of citizens, Lilienthal’s notion of “grass roots democracy” seeks to eliminate the gap between the state and ‘the people.’ But as a consequence grass-roots democracy puts that gap in greater relief as the relation between technical expert and ‘the people’ strains under the pressure of separating authority and administration. To explain, for representative democracy, the gap provides an ideological cover for state activity through the ruse of calibrating spiritual notions of public good with liberal values of individual autonomy via the institutions and practices of representation (e.g. formal elections, legislative reviews, public hearings, etc). But without those rituals, the democratic character of administration wane under the provision of

knowledge by experts. Hence, an overriding concern for Lilienthal is the delivery and circulation of knowledge such that technical knowledge does not come from a top-down model. We see this sentiment when Lilienthal states, in the case of the farmer, “We did not want a method of restoring soil whereby the farmer would be ordered; he would learn by doing, on his place; his neighbors would learn by watching him and adapting what ‘worked out.’ Nor did we want a mere false front, using the outward form of voluntary and educational methods to disguise actual coercion, or ‘uplight,’ of narrow political purposes” (81).

With these goals in mind, Lilienthal praises the “demonstration farm” to be the ideal pedagogical method for delivering technical knowledge. Indeed, “demonstration farms” exemplify the practice of New Deal liberal governmentality. In such a model, the technical expert disappears altogether as the teaching of technical knowledge arises from both its practical implementation and mimicking of others while its circulation occurs immanently through local social networks. As a result, the technical expert and the citizen merge with each other through the feedback loop between knowledge and its implementation. Yet, this relationship is far stronger than the relationship of theory and practice. Instead technical expert and citizen become fundamentally necessary to each other’s constitution. For Lilienthal, the technical expert may provide scientific knowledge necessary for the accomplishment of the citizen’s needs but they are blind to the totality of factors that implementation of such techniques entail from one case to another. As Lilienthal states, “What happened on a splendidly equipped experimental station farm or laboratory was one thing; what would happen on a man’s farm under practical farm conditions was quite another” (80). Through that disjunction between “laboratory” and the “practical farm conditions,” we find that the political world of a grass roots democracy technical expert work symbiotically with citizens, rectifying problems of each for the betterment of both.

For instance, with the expert, Lilienthal explains that the citizen generates unity among them. In the chapter entitled “The Common Purpose,” Lilienthal points out that the advancement of technical knowledge produces specialization across experts such that they cannot agree on a unified vision of project. Each specialized experts recommends different and competing proposals on what to do in some sort of practical activity.<sup>36</sup> For Lilienthal, the only resolution to the problem is to unify experts through a “common purpose.” “Resources cannot be developed in unity until each technologist has learned to subordinate his expertness to the “common purpose,” has come to see the region and its problem ‘in its entirety’” (70). This “entirety”—this all-encompassing point of view—is not a transcendent position that technical experts inhabit through their scientific methods; they are too compartmentalized by their expertise. Instead, this “common purpose” arises from the TVA itself in its mission to develop the resources of the land for the citizen. In that mediated sense, it is the immanent position of the citizen who possesses this holistic vision by virtue of his practical activities and his needs. And when routed through the TVA, those things establish the “common purpose” through which knowledge is coordinated, collaboration is achieved, and relevance is assessed.

This mutuality between expert and citizen works the other direction as well. If the needs and practical activities of the citizen provide the organizing principles for the experts, the experts provide the citizen with the necessary knowledge for democratic participation and the opportunity to make democracy an immediate experience once again. Lilienthal, like many others, bemoans the alienation brought about by technological modernity. As he states, “Huge factories, assembly lines, mysterious mechanisms, standardization—these underline the

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<sup>36</sup> Lilienthal explains so as follows: “It is an ironic fact that the very technical skill which are ostensibly employed to further the progress of men, by the intensity of their specialization, so often create disunity rather than order and imperil the whole success of their common objective”

smallness of the individual, because they are so fatally impersonal” (77). As a consequence, this impersonal force wears down the citizen’s capacity to participate in a democracy and, in turn, weakens its spiritual and political bonds. Implicit to Lilienthal’s diagnoses is the way in which the root cause of this modern alienation is an epistemological distance generated by the exceeding complexities of modern life. That is to say, social life is organized in ways outside of “common sense” epistemology and thus cannot be comprehended through immediate reflection. Under these alienating conditions, the expert, or to be more precise the Deweyite public intellectual, revives democracy through the dissemination of technical knowledge, and thereby, closing the distance between technical complexity and “common sense.”<sup>37</sup> Just as significant as closing that distance, the expert, in conjunction with administrative institutions like the TVA, returns the immediacy of democracy by occasioning the citizen’s participation in the coordinated activities of the state in the face of such modern alienation. Through such participation, Lilienthal sees that “the central fact in the immediate future of the world [is] made personal to the life of most men.”

In sum, it would be a mistake to interpret this grass roots democracy to be just a mystification of technical authoritarianism. In fact, Lilienthal was keenly sensitive to domination involved in uplift programs and, in many ways, he was simply drawing from a US tradition of cooperativism. Rather, grass roots democracy names the immanent political rationality to the various technical practices of the New Deal liberal governmentity that made up the TVA such as the demonstration farm. These practices reconfigured the relations of the governed and the governors through technical engineering expertise and ultimately, it sought to ideally eliminate the difference between these positions or, if not, to formulate it as a pedagogical relationship.

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<sup>37</sup> Lilienthal says as much when he states, “Science, if brought thus close to him, would enable the average man (on a farm or in the town) to learn what it is that technology makes feasible, for him, what, in short, are his alternatives; without that knowledge what reality is there in the free man’s democratic right to choose?”

Furthermore, underpinning this political rationality, providing its practices a field of visibility, is the construction of the dispossessed farmer as its target population. At base then we find that dispossession is constituted as technical problem. Yet, how exactly does this New Deal liberal governmentality work at the level of political subjectivity? This question becomes particularly pressing considering its inherent and historical tensions and the immanent contradictions of the social field in the Depression. To get at this question, I suggest we need to turn to the other pervasive and contemporaneous practice associated with the New Deal—documentary.

### **Documentary as a Practice of New Deal Liberal Governmentality**

To assert and examine the links between documentary and the New Deal is to enter a well-trodden path of scholarship. Indeed, with the publication of William Stott's *Documentary Expression in Thirties America*, documentary's status as the cultural form of the period was cemented in scholarship.<sup>38</sup> Yet, as Michael Denning explains, to accept as truth documentary and its aesthetic of "social realism" to be the cultural dominant of the 1930s would be to lose sight of much of Depression era culture, especially the remarkable impact of what Denning calls the *cultural front*.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, as Denning asserts, the so-called dominance of documentary was more the product of the folk revival movements of the 1960s than the shared aesthetic sensibilities of the 1930s. But, more important for my inquiry, to comprehend documentary in terms of cultural

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<sup>38</sup> The claim of documentary to be the dominant cultural form of the 1930 was made well before Stott and rather was articulated by Alfred Kazin's *On Native Ground*. For a further elaboration of this intellectual history, see Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, particularly Chapter 3 "Ballads for Americans: Aesthetic Ideologies"

<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Denning explains how the aesthetic category of "social realism" miscomprehends three key aspects of cultural production in the depression: 1) it mischaracterizes documentary to be simple mimetic representational practice rather than a type of formal modernist experimentation, 2) it mischaracterizes the cultural front as an opposition to modernism as both an aesthetic and cultural movement, and 3) it mischaracterizes the cultural front's aesthetic forms to be simple representationalism

dominance would fail to “see[...] that the documentary impulse itself was less a triumph of realism than a sign of the failures of narrative imagination” (119). Put differently, the proliferation of documentary signals not the universalization of taste but a crisis of social representation precipitated by the political crisis wrought by the Depression. Indeed, the documentary impulse marks a displaced political anxiety over social stability and the political order onto the field of social representation itself.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, it is with this political concern in mind that this section takes up documentary expression. In particular, the section understands documentary and the social realism that it produces to be a historical practice/technology of New Deal liberal governmentality akin to Lilienthal’s demonstration farm.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the section will show how the formal experimentation of documentary practices registers the way technical engineering knowledge mediated governance at the level of subjectivity.<sup>42</sup> This is not to suggest that the New Deal state singlehandedly created documentary rather that its emergence was a particular conjunction of technological development, institutional changes of culture and knowledge, expansion of mass media, and political economic crises. The development of small hand-held cameras and mass production of cars enabled all sorts of areas and peoples to be captured under a documentary gaze.<sup>43</sup> The professionalization and popularization of anthropology had opened up photography and, by extension, documentary into a social scientific regime of truth and thus shifted it away

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<sup>40</sup> This political concern over documentary has been taken up by a number of scholars. See Michael Staubs’ *Voices of Persuasion: Politics of Representation in 1930s America*, Carl Fleishauer and Beverly W. Brannan’s *Documenting America, 1935-1943*, and Paula Rabinowitz’s *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary*

<sup>41</sup> For a different inquiry on the relation between cultural production and the New Deal, see Michael Szalay’s *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State*. Szalay’s centers more on how the New Deal’s security practices (e.g. social security, financial statistic, spending projects) transformed the norms of the cultural institutions of literature (e.g. authorship, textuality, literary markets).

<sup>42</sup> My understanding of documentary is indebted to John Tagg’s thoroughly materialist analysis of photography, see John Tagg’s *Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*

<sup>43</sup> See Sonnet Retmann’s “Stryker’s FSA Collection: ‘Something more than a catalogue of celluloid rectangles in a government storehouse’”

from being exclusively in either scientific or artistic domains.<sup>44</sup> The expansion of technologies of mass production in print and visual material and the formation of mass publishing corporations by the likes of Henry Luce allowed for the mass circulation of documentary materials and, in turn, rendered documentary to be a popular cultural form.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the political economic crises provided exigence for a realist idiom to contain its social fallout. These factors together formed the conditions of possibility for documentary expression.

It was within these same conditions that documentary was incorporated into the New Deal state form as a practice for containing the political economic crises of the depression. More specifically, state archiving projects such as the FSA-OWI photographic archives produced numerous documentary materials itself and, in turn, informed the ways to comprehend documentary expression in general. These materials were not merely state propaganda since some would explicitly criticize the New Deal. Rather, their value laid in their ability to frame crises itself as necessitating the state and thus shoring up its claims to universality. Hence, in regards to the ideological work of documentary, John Tagg writes, “Claiming only to ‘put the facts’ directly or vicariously, through the report of ‘first-hand experience’, the discourse of documentary constituted a complex strategic response to a particular moment of crises in Western Europe and the USA – a moment of crisis not only of social and economic relations and social identities but, crucially, of representation itself: of the means of making sense what we call social experience” (8). He goes on to explain, “Focused in specific institutional sites and articulated across a range of intertextual practices, [documentary] was entirely bound up with a particular social strategy: a liberal, corporatist plan to negotiate economic, political and cultural crisis through a limited programme of structural reforms, relief measures, and a cultural

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<sup>44</sup> Retman

<sup>45</sup> Tagg

intervention aimed at restructuring the order of discourse, appropriating dissent, and resecuring the threatened bonds of social consent” (8).

However, my particular interest in documentary practice is not only how it generally secures, in the face of political crises, social stability by producing the truth of social representation, but that part and parcel to the production of that social truth is a particular political subjectivity attuned to it and the contemporaneous practices of New Deal liberal governmentality. Thus, in order to get at the substance of this political subjectivity, the chapter turns now to Walker Evans’ and James Agee’s documentary novel, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: The American Classic, in Words and Photographs, of Three Tenant Families in the Deep South*. This may appear to be an odd choice considering how *Famous Men* was decidedly unpopular when it was published and received only somewhat high praise.<sup>46</sup> But, as William Stott points out, it exemplified, extended, and reversed the formal properties of the documentary, leading literary critic Alfred Kazin to exclaim that it was the “documentary book to end all documentary books.”<sup>47</sup> In this respect, the highly formal experimentation makes explicit the political logics underpinning documentary practice.

Besides that the value of *Famous Men* for my inquiry is the fact that Agee himself was not unfamiliar with the workings of the TVA. Indeed, Agee had not simply grown up in Tennessee as a child but he was sent by *Fortune* magazine in 1933 to report on the project.<sup>48</sup> In his first article, we find the inchoate expression of Lilienthal’s grassroots democracy:

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<sup>46</sup> See William Stott’s *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*

<sup>47</sup> See Alfred Kazin’s *On Native Ground*

<sup>48</sup> Agee wrote two articles on the TVA See Jack Neely’s article “The Great Experiment” <http://www.tva.gov/heritage/experiment/index.htm>

In this enormous machine the balance wheel is human. And here TVA becomes almost mystical in its earnestness and speaks of preserving and developing the native culture. For what that means, you must look again at the man and woman who sit on their front porch. These mountaineers must be raised and reconciled to such higher standards of living as obtained in more prosperous parts of the valley. They must also be taught responsibility to society. On the other hand the more prosperous valleyites must be raised to that high standard of Americanism which is peculiarly the mountaineer's. (53)

Functional mutuality and collective development abounds in the passage, but they are far from the mechanical and technical authoritarianism associated with such modernization projects. The mountaineers and prosperous valleyites work together and exchange the qualities that each respectively lacks—the higher standard of living and social responsibility for the mountaineer and the (spiritual) “high standard of Americanism” for the valleyite. But this mutual exchange and collective development is enabled only by the “enormous machine” of the TVA, not as a forced imposition from outside but as an organic unity from within, guiding a wholly natural, indeed human process of balancing the drives of “preserving and developing the native culture.” What is this political subjectivity that can experience all these contradictory elements (e.g. the enormous machine, the valleyite, and the dispossessed mountaineer) as a human “balance wheel,” working together in an organic harmony with one another?

## **The Politico-Ethical (Documentary) Subject of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men***

To answer that question, we must understand exactly what is not so much represented but captured by documentary practice. That is, as I will argue in this section, the political significance of documentary expression is less the stabilization of social meaning through an aesthetic of social realism, but rather the production of a political technology of “actuality” that constitutes a domain of visibility that renders the contradictions of the social field harmonious and amenable for technical intervention. Indeed, the “actual” signals a form of apprehending the social and natural world in their unity with technical knowledge that makes political intervention into an organic activity.

To get at this peculiar aspect, we must examine the pains that Agee goes to distinguish his textual practice of documentary from the other textual forms that it may be confused with—Art and “honest journalism.” What distinguishes *Famous Men* from them? How is its practice distinct from those deployed in the domain of Art? How does its claim to truth differ from that of Honest journalism? Agee parses out these differences through their relation to the problematic of representation. In terms of “Art,” for Agee, its utilization of representation becomes solely the province of the imagination. Representation ability to capture “actuality,” therefore, takes on a subordinate status to its capacity to express the imagination. As Agee asserts:

In a novel, a house or person has his meaning, his existence, entirely through the writer. Here, a house or a person has only the most limited of his meaning through me: his true meaning is much huger. It is that he *exists*, in actual being, as you do and as I do, and as no character of the imagination can possibly exist. His great weight, mystery, and dignity

are in this fact. As for me, I can tell you of him only what I saw, only so accurately as in my terms I know how: and this in turn has its chief stature not in any ability of mine but in the fact that I too exist, not as a work of fiction, but as a human being. Because of his weight in actual existence, and because of mine, every word I tell of him has inevitably a kind of immediacy, a kind of meaning, not at all necessarily 'superior' to that of imagination, but a kind so different that a work of the imagination (however intensely it may draw on 'life') can at best only faintly imitate the least of it. (9-10)

Regardless of the speciousness of such distinctions, the referential domain of representation defines the difference of meaning and the truth value between Art and documentary. In terms of "Art," the novel's use of representation is wholly contained in the imagination of the author. No need to refer to that which stands apart from the author, even as representation signifies an entire universe of things since they are ultimately anchored in imaginative intentions. In these terms, whatever meaning and truth value that adheres to Art can only be explained in the realm of the imagination. Documentary representation, on the other hand, goes beyond the imagination since its referential domain extends to "actual being." As a consequence, its meaning and truth value cannot be completely contained in one location but rather complexly intertwined with the object and the standpoint of the viewer. As Agee explains the meaning of the object, in this case a person or house, is immanent to that object; however, the access to that meaning is structured "in the terms [that the author] know[s] how." Hence, wherein Art representation is solely grounded in the imagination of the author, representation for documentary is tangled between the viewer and the object's actual existence.

This is not to say that the imagination's use of representation has no relation to "actuality." As Agee notes, it "intensely [...] draw[s] on 'life.'" Instead, the imagination clarifies it, distilling from its density a clarity of meaning that is difficult to grasp. As Agee asserts, "I am indeed ready to say, because with fair consistency I believe, that works of the imagination (chiefly because \* in a certain degree they create something which has never existed before, they add to and somewhat clarify the sum total of the state of being, whereas the rest of the mind's activity is merely deductive, descriptive, acquisitive or contemplative) advance and assist the human race, and make an opening in the darkness around it, as nothing else can" (205). According to Agee, the imagination's illuminating powers comes from generating "something which has never existed before" (i.e. Art) that serves as an analytic through which we pierce the "darkness" shrouding the "human race." However, in bringing into focus parts of actual "life," Art subsequently obscures the rest. As Agee goes on to state, "I grant the clarifying power in this effort of the memory and the imagination: but they are quite as capable of muddying as of clearing the water and frequently indeed, so frequently that we may suspect a law in ambush, they do both at the same time, clouding in one way the thing they are clearing in another" (205). Like a camera lens, the more Art focuses on aspects of actual "life" to render a clear meaning of it, Art simultaneously obscures those aspect peripheral to its preliminary focus.

Following this, we can understand the difference between Art's use of representation and documentary's use of representation as a difference of representational ambition and scale. Art's representation may achieve its stated goals but that is because Art only aims for the mere terrain of human imagination. Documentary's representation, on the other hand, includes human imagination but goes beyond it by also using representation to refer to things that are independent to human imagination. As slippery as this distinction may be theoretically and as

impossible as it may be to maintain in practice, Agee is at pains to sustain it. Thus, we can think of Agee's distinction to be akin to Kant's critique of pure reason, in that, he seeks to locate the proper place of the imagination and Art. As Agee assert, "Calling for the moment everything except art Nature, I would insist that everything in Nature, every most casual thing, has an inevitability and perfection which art as such can only approach, and shares in fact, not as art, but as part of Nature that it is; so that, for instance, a contour map is at least as considerably an image of absolute 'beauty' as the counterpoints of Bach which it happens to resemble" (206). In these terms, the real transgression of Art is more than merely "muddying the waters" rather it is this metaleptic slip, confusing itself as the total actuality of life (i.e. "Nature") when, says Agee, it is but only a subordinate part.

In the end, Agee is ambivalent to the imagination and Art since he values the kind of clarity it provides actual "life" as long as it is not mistaken as encompassing its totality. Though Art should not be completely shelved, in delineating its proper role, Agee finds a space for representation practice that cannot be accomplished by "Art," specifically one that seeks to capture the fecundity of the "actual." Here, once again, he must differentiate this representational task from its assumed textual form—"honest journalism." Unlike "Art," journalism, for Agee, has little redeeming value. It functions, for the most part, as an openly exploitive practice. As he states,

It seems to me curious, not to say obscene and thoroughly terrifying, that it could occur to an association of human beings drawn together through need and chance and for profit into a company, an organ of journalism, to pry intimately into the lives of an undefended and appallingly damaged group of human beings, an ignorant and helpless rural family,

for the purpose of parading the nakedness, disadvantage and humiliation of these lives before another group of human beings, in the name of science, of ‘honest journalism’ (whatever that paradox may mean), of humanity, of social fearlessness, for money, and for a reputation for crusading. (5)

Undeniably, Agee chastises journalism in order to simultaneously distance himself from the self-promoting practices of Honest journalism and expiate his own guilt by the fact that there is no practical difference between them. Beyond his hyperbolic derision of journalism and by extension himself, he does conceptually distinguish his representational practice from “honest journalism,” which he hints at above by pointing to its “paradox.” Interestingly, we find that this paradox turns out to be similar to his criticism of “Art.” As he explains,

Journalism is true in the sense that everything is true to the state of being and to what conditioned and produced it\* (which is also, but less so perhaps, a limitation of art and science): but that is about as far as its value goes. This is not to accuse or despise journalism for anything beyond its own complacent delusion, and its enormous power to poison the public with the same delusion, that it is telling the truth even of what it tells of. Journalism can within its own limits be ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ ‘true’ or ‘false,’ but it is not in the nature of journalism even to approach any less relative degree of truth. (207)

Unlike Art, journalism explicitly claims to be true; its representations seek to capture the “actual.” But, in so claiming, journalism naively reproduces the error that the analytics derived from Art subsequently performs, that is, “honest journalism’s” truth comes to stand in for the

entire truth. It is for that reason that, for Agee, “[t]he very blood and semen of journalism [...] is a broad and successful form of lying.” Honest journalism must purport to be the entire truth and therefore cannot acknowledge “any less relative degree of truth,” its own finite perspective. For journalism to do so, to stop its “broad and successful form of lying,” Agee avers “you [would] no longer have journalism.” And as a consequence it is “delusional” and “poison[s] the public with [its] same delusion” in a way that Art has the possibility of doing just same. However, the profound difference between Art and “honest journalism,” for Agee, is how Art can be rectified by bearing in mind its proper place while honest journalism cannot be fixed as any change would transform its nature.

Taken together, honest journalism’s and Art’s use of representation cannot truly capture “actuality” since they do not take into account their partial perspective. Hence, in order to have a truthful representation, it must not only aim to represent an “actual” object in the world but it must also make apparent the standpoint of its deployment in representing that “actual” object. For Agee, this constitutes the goal of documentary and marks out its representational domain. But, more significantly, in parsing in out from Art and honest journalism, Agee has produced a distinct political technology—the actual—through which new relations of power may be built.

## II

To be clear, I am not interested in assessing the extent to which Agee accomplishes his representational goal. Rather, I look at how, in problematizing the truth claims of both art and journalism, Agee opens up the space for a different kind “regime of truth” that enables the particular relations of power. Accordingly, I am concerned in how this discourse constitutes 1)

its object (e.g. the tenant farmer and his world), 2) its corresponding political subject who can bear witness to that object, and 3) the appropriate form of political subjectivity who can comprehend itself in witnessing.

With those goals in mind, what is meant by the “actual” takes on considerable importance as it names the domain of documentary practices that unite this politico-ethical documentary subject and object. In a way, this term can be understood to be simply synonymous with the “real” but, I would argue, that would miss the subtleties and specificities of such a neologism for documentary. Agee describes the “actual” as follows:

I think there is at the middle of this sense of the importance and dignity of actuality and the attempt to reproduce and analyze the actual, and at the middle of this antagonism toward art, something of real importance which is by no means my discovery, far less my private discovery, but which is a sense of ‘reality’ and of ‘values’ held by more and more people, and the beginnings of somewhat new forms of, call it art if you must, of which the still and moving cameras are the strongest instruments and symbols. It would be an art and a way of seeing existence based, let us say, on an intersection of astronomical physics, geology, biology, and (including psychology) anthropology, known and spoken of not in scientific but in human terms. Nothing that springs from this intersection can conceivably be insignificant: everything is most significant in proportion as it approaches in our perception, simultaneously, its own singular terms and its ramified kinship and probable hidden identification with everything else. (216)

The “actual” is, on the one hand, a “sense of ‘reality’” whose determinate (new) form is expressed through and symbolized by the still and moving camera. On the other hand, the “actual” is also an Art and “way of seeing existence” structured on a humanized version of the hard and social sciences. Moving across both explanations, Agee comes to stress that “the actual” is a proportional harmony between “reality” and people or, as he states a “sense of reality and the values held by people.” This thought can be usefully clarified through a comparison with a commonsense understanding of “the real.” The real describes reality to be, in the last instance, independent from humans. Human representation must therefore correspond to reality. And with such a premise, “the real” always holds out the possibility of representation’s inadequate correspondence. Hence, “the real” is a skeptical stance towards knowledge. The “actual,” on the other hand, describes reality to be dependent on humans insofar as it becomes comprehensible to them through its conformity to their knowledge. In this sense, the “actual” reverses the relationship between knowledge and reality. Rather than have the independence of reality be the bases for knowledge, in this case, the apprehension of reality is based on knowledge itself. As such, the desire for “the actual” is one that seeks to return technical knowledge to the level of human sensibility. In other words, “the actual” names an ontological plane where subjective experience aligns with knowledge of social and natural world through the immediacy of human sensibility. Hence, Agee describes that the “actual” is the “intersection” of the social sciences and hard sciences to human perception.

Thus, in the context of political crises of capital in the 1930s, the “actual” representation of documentary is more than an ideal resolution of political conflict on the plane of social meaning, easing bourgeois anxiety and proletarian revolutionary impulse by providing stable meaning to social identity in line with the norms of liberal state. More significantly, it acts as a

political technology that enables the articulation of technical knowledge to practices of New Deal liberal governmentality to form a specific political rationality. Indeed, it is the “actual” that enables technical social engineering planning and its concrete implementation to not be an invasive and dominating political activity but instead respectful to ‘freedom’ of political constituencies that exist in a space. Thus, in positing of “the actual” as an ontological plane in which technical knowledge is not only sensibly known but also conforming to human perception, the problems of domination vanishes as technical authority becomes the expression and practical enactment of democratic will.

Yet, how exactly does the “actual” work politically? That is, what are the sets of assumptions about the status of the political subject and “actual” objects? Indeed, what is the logic and historical norms that compose this particular political rationality? To get at these questions, we should turn to the stated goals of *Famous Men*. In the preface, Agee lays them out as to properly “record [...], communicat[e], analy[ze], and defen[d],” what he calls “certain normal predicaments of human divinity.” He continues by asserting, “The immediate instruments are two: the motionless camera, and the printed word. The governing instrument - which is also one of the centers of the subject – is individual, anti-authoritative human consciousness.” Laid out in this way, we see that this “individual, anti-authoritative human consciousness,” which he also refers to as “unassisted and weaponless consciousness,” names the ideal subject of documentary while the “normal predicaments of human divinity” names its object. How then can we understand this subject and object to be necessarily linked poles within the act of documenting the actual?

For the moment, let us turn to this subject. Given that Agee’s documentary imperative is to insert the finite position of this subject, what is the effect of including this “anti-authoritative”

or “unassisted and weaponless” human consciousness into the frame of documentary? What kind of subject is it to have such a consciousness? These questions turn on what it means for consciousness to be “anti-authoritative,” “unassisted,” and “weaponless.” Even though these terms are taken to be fairly synonymous with one another, they turn out to describe a tension in consciousness between, on the one hand, being so passive as to be non-existent (i.e. unassisted and weaponless) and, on the other hand, being active enough to counteract how consciousness itself comes to structure experience (i.e. anti-authoritative). In regards to the first point, the “unassisted and weaponless” human consciousness, oddly enough, is not human at all as the camera and the phonograph becomes its ideal model. As Agee writes enviously, “One reason I so deeply care for the camera is just this. So far as it goes [...] and handled cleanly and literally in its own terms, as ice-cold, some ways limited, some ways more capable, eye, it is, like the phonograph record and like scientific instruments and unlike any other leverage of art, incapable of recording anything but absolute, dry truth” (206). In the camera and the phonograph, Agee finds the kind of representation that Art and Honest journalism cannot create. Yet, it is important to bear in mind that Agee is not naïve about these technologies. The “absolute, dry truth” that they represent is not “truth” in its entirety, that would be “the broad and successful form of lying” of “honest journalism,” but rather it is the “absolute, dry truth” of a specific perspective. Hence, he is careful to qualify his praise of these technologies in terms of their handling, a handling that calls attention to the finitude of the perspective.

Just as important as laying bare a particular perspective, the camera and phonograph, for Agee, also provides a putatively transparent apprehension of that perspective. I say putative because this transparent apprehension is in “some ways limited, [and in] some ways more capable [than the] eye.” This limitation and advancement points to the way the camera and

phonograph provide a mode of perception distinct from and hitherto unavailable to the human senses. That is, they function as prosthesis for the senses, extending it beyond corporeal norms. However, by going beyond a human scale of perception, the way that the camera and phonograph records sensory datum is discontinuous to the way the human sensorium intuits that same sensory datum. In other words, the mechanical passivity of recording technologies gives way to a density of empirical information that problematizes the normative distance between human perception and the empirical world. This is what Walter Benjamin referred to as the withering away of the aura of the art-object.<sup>49</sup> In a way, this withering of the aura generates the condition of possibility for the manipulation that Agee find abhorrent in some handling of the camera and, as we will see, Agee's own representational crises. But this is not a direction that Agee takes in his acclaim of recording technologies since he still ascribes to them an organic human scale that consequently retains their transparency between mechanical reproduction and its empirical object.<sup>50</sup>

Rather than just providing transparency, Agee's praise of those technologies is due to the trans-individual nature of the recording. Put simply, once recorded, these technologies can allow virtually anyone to experience them. And this potential hinges on the production of an empty point of view. It is precisely in this sense we should understand Agee's "unassisted and weaponless" consciousness. It is "unassisted and weaponless" because it is empty, lacking any other quality of consciousness beyond the capacity to passively unify sensory datum along space and time. In other words, this "unassisted and weaponless" consciousness is nothing but a generic standpoint that frames the apprehension of a specific place and a specific time. As one

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<sup>49</sup> See Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility"

<sup>50</sup> We can understand Agee's conservative interpretation as an historical effect of state discourses of photography that granted its transparency by comprehending it as a form of evidence. Photography, therefore, draws from and modifies both artistic discourses of portraiture and legal discourses of property and scientific discourse of evidence. For more, see John Tagg's *The Burden of Representation*.

part of the documentary subject, it promises an immediate and universal apprehension of that which it documents.

However, this ideal consciousness cannot be realistically maintained for Agee as it cannot be as empty as he would like. There is always a particular element of consciousness that gets in the way what Agee refers to as the “disease.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, along with the “unassisted and weaponless” consciousness, Agee refers to an anti-authoritative human consciousness as part of the documentary subject. This kind of consciousness turns out to be far more active than the “unassisted and weaponless” consciousness since it combats the way in which sensuous datum gets structured into determined perceptions by that “disease.” Put simply, it is a form of consciousness that seeks to counteract the way that the “disease” of human consciousness comes to mediate the act of documenting. This gets discussed obliquely in Agee’s description of his documentary method in the section entitled (*On the Porch: 2*). There, he explains that to represent “actual” experience, it must be presented on four planes: recall, reception, contemplation, in medias res. Laid out along these axis, these terms points to the problem of subjective mediation. That is to say, they indicate the various ways in which documented experience is constituted beyond the passive apprehension of “unassisted and weaponless” consciousness but actively structured by it. Agee elaborates on this problem:

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<sup>51</sup> Agee writes, ““The prime generic inescapable stage of this disease is being. A special complication is life. A malignant variant of this complication is consciousness. The most complex and malignant form of it known to us is human consciousness. Even in its simplest form this sore raises its scab: all substance is this scab: the scab and the sore are one. Taking shape and complexity precisely in proportion to the shape and complexity of the disease; identical with it, in fact; this identical wound and scab fills out not merely all substance and all process and contrivance of substance but the most intangible reaches of thought, deduction and imagination; the exactitude of its expression may be seen in the skull that scabs a brain, in the deity the race has erected to shield it from the horror of the heavens, in the pressed tin wall of a small restaurant where some of the Greek disease persists through the persistence of a Renaissance disease: in everything within and probably in anything outside human conception; and in every combination and mutation of these things: and in a certain important sense let it be remembered that in these terms, in terms, that is to say, of the manifestation of being, taken as such, which are always strict and perfect, nothing can be held untrue” (202-203)

It seems likely at this stage that the truest way to treat a piece of the past is as such: as if it were no longer the present. In other words, the ‘truest’ thing about the experience is now neither that it was from hour to hour thus and so; nor is it my fairly accurate ‘memory’ of how it was from hour to hour in chronological progression; but is rather as it turns up in recall, in no such order, casting its lights and associations forward and backward upon the then past and the then future, across that expanse of experience. (215)

Here, Agee acknowledges the complexity of time in the constitution of experience beyond his earlier conception of it as a formal intuition. Experience is not a settled affair in time but rather an affair with a recursively shifting temporality. Hence, the above four planes mark distinct temporal distances and relations of the subject and the object of experience—retrospection, apprehension, projection, and simultaneity. Given Agee’s assertion of the complex and multiple temporalities of experience, we may see it to be contradicting his earlier formulation of consciousness, operating as a refutation of unassisted and weaponless consciousness’s reduction of time to a formal category. In one respect, these forms of consciousness can be seen to contract each other but in lieu of interpreting them in that manner, I suggest that they are better understood as supplementing one another. That is, this anti-authoritative human consciousness is a self-consciousness that lays bare the complex mediation of that consciousness for the purposes of arriving at an account of the finite, situated, and transparent perspective of “unassisted and weaponless consciousness.” In other words, unassisted and weaponless consciousness names an ideal subjectivity that guarantees the ‘truth claims’ of documentary while anti-authoritative

human consciousness names a subjectivity that regulates the representational practices of documentary.

It is with that in mind that we can make sense of the modernist aesthetic and narrative form that structures *Famous Men*. At first, this aesthetic choice may seem odd to someone who is both committed to documenting “actuality” and certain that the camera and phonograph are proper mediums for capturing it. This is especially evident when Agee writes “If I could do it, I’d do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrements” (10). Indeed that is one strange book, which Agee himself admits when he imagines the reaction of a publisher to the idea. Yet, in such a description of the book, we find that Agee’s disappointment in writing is the sensuous distance it produces from what it represents. Hence, he ideally wants to close that gap by compiling found-objects (e.g. “fragments of cloth,” “lumps of earth,” “pieces of wood and iron,” etc.) and multimedia recordings (e.g. photographs and records of speech) in order to reproduce an experience along multiple sensual registers. Along these lines, this book with “no writing at all” can be seen as the practical application to the documentary aims found in “unassisted and weaponless consciousness,” the sensually immediate apprehension of an empty and finite standpoint, and the “anti-authoritative human consciousness.” This is the practice of laying bare the textual and subjective forms of mediations.

Unfortunately, Agee must reckon with writing and all of its textual distance and substitution. Surprisingly, he makes do by not trying to obscure that textual mediation, neither creating an omniscient narrator that recedes into the background nor simply acknowledging its presence to forget about it. Instead, he intensely highlights it as a reoccurring property of the

entire text. Indeed, we are bombarded by the Agee's position in the retelling of the event and his own subjective interest and desires in the events; the disjunction between the narration of events and the time of the writing of the events; and alternating forms of writing from reflective and theoretical writing to obsessive recording of objects and perceptions to subjective linear narration. Stylistically, the text oscillates between exceedingly long, obtuse, and philosophical prose to sparing, terse, and descriptive writing. These narrative and stylistic strategies accomplish a number of things. First, they make use of the phenomenology of reading: the way that the act of reading is itself a sensual experience and activity itself.<sup>52</sup> In this view, writing in documentary cannot only be the transmission of information—the seamless uptake of signifieds from signifiers. It must also be a performance, in that, a performance makes explicit the embodied experience of the reader in the act of reading. As Agee explains in the preface, this dramaturgical approach to reading enables both an awareness of the acoustic dimensions of words, the “variations of tone, pace, shape, and dynamics,” and the embodiment of the reader. Because he intends that the book be read out loud and in one continuous reading, which, at over four hundred pages long, one can only imagine the bodily exhaustion if the reader were to follow his cue.

Second, beyond this injunction to dramatize the activity of reading, *Famous Men* elicits that sensual relation to the book through an aesthetic that makes the reader painfully aware of the materiality of writing. For example, we are constantly struck by sentences whose sheer length, complex syntax, and odd punctuation (particularly the use of colons) make explicit the conventionality of writing. Surely, every passage that I have quoted thus far bears this out. In doing so, *Famous Men* undermines an easy consumption of the text, requiring instead an active

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<sup>52</sup> The aesthetic of *Famous Men* can be usefully understood through what Roland Barthes refers to as the “writerly text.”

attention to the way writing itself generates meaning. However, this is not say that Agee completely eschews the referential power of language. In Part Two, “Some Findings and Comments,” his rhetorical flurry is strikingly counterpoised to a terse, almost minimalist, descriptive idiom. Here, Agee obsessively describes every minute detail of what he sees—from the position of door frames to each other to the quantity of filth that stains a plate. Significantly, these description are always framed in relation to where Agee is supposed to be standing such that the reader can triangulated every observation through Agee’s location. This gets emphasized even further by his self-references to whatever emotional and physical state he may be in at the time of his observation.

In a way, this aesthetic strategy is not too far off from the earlier one. Rather than write sentences that continues until exhaustion, Agee lists objects till exhaustion, never allowing any minutia to escape his documenting gaze.

All this, all such, you can see, it so intensely surrounds and takes meaning from a certain center which we shall be unable to keep steadily before your eyes, that should be written, should be listed, calculated, analyzed, conjectured upon, as if all in one sentence and spread suspension and flight or fugue of music: and that I shall not be able so to sustain it, so to sustain its intensity toward this center of human life, so to yield it out that it all strikes inward upon this center at once and in all its intersections and in the meanings of its interrelations and interenhancements: it is this which so paralyzes me: yet one can write only one word at a time, and if these seem lists and inventories merely, things dead unto themselves, devoid of mutual magnetisms, and if they sink, lose impetus, meter, intension, then bear in mind at least my wish, and perceive in them and restore them what

strength you can of yourself: for I must say to you, this is not a work of art or of entertainment, nor will I assume the obligation of the artist or entertainer, but is a human effort which must require human co-operation. (97-98)

As Agee sees it, the representational crises of documentary writing is its inability to adequately describe the “center of human life” in all its complexity, interrelations, and simultaneity because of the linearity of writing itself. As he exclaims, “...yet one can write only one word at a time” and thus, writing must flatten out the “center of human life” into the linear movement of a sentence. Again, undergirding this thought is the idea of recording technologies, in that, the recordings offered by the camera and phonograph supposedly offers the viewer/listener an instantaneous and total comprehension of “all [...] intersections and [...] the meanings of [the] interrelations and interenhancements” that form the “center of human life.” In that way, *Famous Men*’s endless stylistic flurry and equally endless concatenation of things attempts to counteract the flattening effect of writing. The thought is that the shear density of writing can approximate the simultaneity of experience as promised by the still camera and phonograph.<sup>53</sup>

Nonetheless, writing is not completely without value. As Agee will later assert, “[w]ords cannot embody; they can only describe” however, poets “continually brings words as near as he can to an illusion of embodiment” (210). In fact, we can understand the entirety of *Famous*

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<sup>53</sup> In all this acclaim about the camera and the phonograph, we need to differentiate between them as instruments that can apprehend knowledge immediately. For the most part, Agee’s acclaim is directed towards the still camera; however, the fantasy of immediacy is more appropriately tied to the phonograph. To explain, undergirding the fantasy of immediacy is an epistemological theory that sees touch to be the sense that apprehends knowledge immediately. Supposedly one knows immediately through grasping the object rather than seeing it, even though the object is indeterminate under a regime of touch. In that way, sound affords an immediate feeling and that guarantees knowledge. Following this, the erotic dimensions of the documentary in *Famous Men* should not only be confined to the scopophilia of the gaze but also the eroticism of sound. In that way, the politics of eroticism is far more complicated when only considering the gaze. The erotics of the gaze maintains the separation between the masculine viewing subject to the other through a process of objectification while the erotics of touch and sound undermines that separation since the distinction between who is touching and who is being touch becomes indeterminate. We can find both points in the ending scene of the book where Agee recalls a moment where he hears two foxes calling one another.

*Men*'s aesthetic strategies to be bringing words to an "illusion of embodiment." Importantly, the production and maintenance of this "illusion" is not from the aesthetic will of the poet but rather, if we return to the previous passage, a "human effort [that] requires human cooperation." The "human cooperation" in this instance refers directly to the writer and reader relationship, which is one where the reader can imaginatively revivify the mere list and inventory of dead things into an organic life world. Yet, we can take the writer-reader relationship to be part of a much wider ambit of "human cooperation" that documentary simultaneously captures and symbolizes as "the actual."

Taken together, *Famous Men*'s aesthetic offers up indirect access to the "actual" object, whether that is from the subjective position of Agee with all of his self-conscious desires or from the textual mediation of writing itself. In so doing, *Famous Men* does not repudiate the "actual" existence of the object, a kind of solipsistic world, but rather the object exists as an "actuality" whose spiritual value is retained and sensual experience achieved through a self-understanding of collective mediation. As such, *Famous Men* accomplishes a number of things. First, as a textual practice, it generates documentary forms of representation whose truth effect derives from a notion of the "actual," which is an ontology predicated on the harmony between collective knowledge and subjective sensual experience. As such, it offers a political subjectivity out of this documentary discourse via the way that enough introspection leads to democratic collectivity.

### III

In the previous section, I have shown how *Famous Men*'s explicit philosophical and theoretical musings on documentary representation and consciousness and its aesthetic strategies

index a political subjectivity that aligns with the practices of New Deal liberal governmentality. There, we found that *Famous Men* promised an empty generic point of view that is situated within a particular moment and place. Such a formal technique sutures together heterogeneous places into an ideal subjectivity. This form of “consciousness” serves as the ultimate and ideal endpoint, a regulative idea, to which Agee’s excessive acknowledgement of subjective and textual mediation can arrive. With that in mind, this section now turns its attention towards *Famous Men*’s privileged “actual” object—the white tenant farmer. It examines the circuits of looking and being looked at as it maintains a set of nested racialized, gendered, and sexual norms that ethically undergird the political subjectivity of documentary’s generic point of view.

Various readings of *Famous Men* have looked at its representation of the Grudgers to be indexing bourgeois subjectivity<sup>54</sup>, I follow this direction but from a slightly different angle. In particular, I am interested in the way that documentary’s imperatives for solution-making wed whiteness to dispossession. As what can be seen as an historical variant of “white injury,” this white dispossession’s striking feature is the way that it locates a pre-modern and backward whiteness while, still retaining, a political value for the nation and state, respectfully. That is, on the one hand, this pre-modern whiteness offers an idealized spiritual essence to the nation that acts as bulwark to the alienation of technological modernity and, on the other hand, this backward whiteness acts as an object for state intervention and management that raises the citizen out of the unevenness and caprice of capital.

These distinct temporal positions and trajectories of whiteness are made possible by the re-alignment of the political, juridical, and economic value and geographic meaning of whiteness. In particular, as cultural historian Mae Ngai and Matthew Fry Jacobson<sup>55</sup> have shown,

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<sup>54</sup> See Paula Rabinowitz’s *They Must Be Represented*

<sup>55</sup> See Mae Ngai’s *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*

the unprecedented flow of European immigration, particularly eastern Europe, due to the massive industrial expansion of the US in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, profoundly unsettled whiteness's earlier consolidation around the norms of anglo-protestant immigration, leading to a political, economic, and geographic enlargement of whiteness's privileges and meaning. Obviously, this is not to suggest that the achievement of whiteness by these new immigrant formations completely eradicate their "difference," but rather that their difference becomes ethnicized, in part, due to their positioning as competing racial projects of the inter-war period.<sup>56</sup> With that said, the particular formation, examined by this chapter, is not just the ethnicization of whiteness but the production of an "indigeneous," or more properly, a domestic ethnic whiteness.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the gendered and sexual norms of domesticity territorialize this ethnic whiteness to be of the nation and for the state. Hence, the temporal positions and trajectories of whiteness align with and ethically support the aims of the New Deal liberal state form. This, I suggest, can be seen in Agee's worries over representing the Grudger family, a problem that is ultimately about the inadequacy between conceptual/linguistic universality and its particular instance. As he states:

[H]ow am I to speak of you as 'tenant' 'farmers,' as 'representatives' of your 'class,' as social integers in a criminal economy, or as individuals, fathers, wives, sons, daughters, and as my friends and as I 'know' you? Granted – more, insisted upon – that it is in all these particularities that each of you is that which he is; that particularities, and matters ordinary and obvious, are exactly themselves beyond designation of words, are the

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<sup>56</sup> See Matthew Fry Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*

<sup>57</sup> This argument aligns with Colleen Lye's claim about the production of indigeneous ethnic whiteness in her book *America's Asia*, particularly Chapter 3 "The End of Asian Exclusion? The Specter of "Cheap Farmers" and Alien Land Law Fiction." However, where she locates its formation through the encounter of whiteness with Asian racial form in the conditions of monopoly capital on the West Coast, I position its formation in relation to state practices and its attempt to manage political crises.

members of your sum total most obligatory to human searching of perception:  
nevertheless to name these things and fail to yield their stature, meaning, power of hurt,  
seems impious, seems criminal, seems impudent, seems traitorous in the deepest: and to  
do less badly seems impossible: yet in withholdings of specification I could but betray  
you still worse. (88-89)

In characteristic Agee flare, he performs a bait-and-switch whereby he begins discussing the Grudgers only to arrive at his own difficulties. As Agee sees the problem, the words commonly used to describe the Grudgers lack the precision necessary to holistically represent them. Indeed, Agee's concatenation of potential socially recognizable identities—tenant, farmer, to fathers, wives—cannot, even in aggregate, capture them. As a consequence, those “particularities” are ineffable, “beyond designation of words.” However, at the same time, Agee recognizes that he has a social and political responsibility to describe them that entails finding adequate “specification,” which, in not doing, “betray[s] [them] still worse.” Taken together, Agee's dilemma is the problem of representation itself, that is, he must represent them because they cannot represent themselves, but the available linguistic means to represent them are inadequate to the task of representation.

Nevertheless, I would argue that, for all intents and purposes, Agee does accomplish his goals; he does find words that render the white tenant farmer family to be socially intelligible. What occurs in the above passage, and the many others like it, is not so much an abandonment of the representational project but a doubling of its representational aims. More specifically, Agee must represent the dispossession of the white tenant farmer family to be not only a political economic problem (i.e. “social integers in a criminal economy”) but also a moral and spiritual

problem, which is part of what Agee refers to as the “normal predicaments of human divinity.” These dual representational aims necessitate distinct forms of representation that work at cross purposes to each other in the very linguistic means of representation. Indeed, in the above quote, we can read the undercutting of representation itself to be one ironic means by which Agee can represent them, cathecting onto the white bodies of the Grudgers the spiritual value that can transcend social and political determination but at the cost of making the social and political problems they also index to be unintelligible.

However, the undermining of representation is not the only way that Agee endows the representation of the Grudgers with lost spiritual substance; he moves directly to a mythological language itself. For instance, following Agee’s complaint of the inadequacy of the socially recognizable language to comprehend the particularity of the Grudgers (i.e. tenant, farmer, father, wives), he proceeds to describe the structure of narrative that would sufficiently describe them: “I might suggest, its structure should be globular: or should be eighteen or twenty intersected sphere, the interlocking of bubbles on the face of a stream; one of these globes is each of you” (89). Presumably, in conceptualizing the narration of the lives of the white tenant farmer family as a series of “interlocking bubbles on the face of a stream,” Agee seeks to narrate those lives of the white tenant farmers to be both indelibly unique and individual but also linked together as parts to a larger and grander narrative. With such an image in hand, we find that Agee’s problem with the social recognizable terminology to describe tenant farmer family (i.e. tenant, farmer, social integer of a criminal economy) lacks both the scale and individuality of such a grander narrative. To say it slightly differently, those terms are too generic as they circumscribe the tenant farmer family according to not only generic ideas of their social

identities, but also to a time scale of individual lives. Thus, Agee recovers that loss through the ascription of the tenant farmer family into what can only be called a mythic status.

But that leaves us to wonder what the particular character of this myth? What does it afford for Agee in singing praises of these tenant farmers at the level of myth? He provides a somewhat more substantive explanation when he proceeds further in the passage: “We should first meditate and establish its ancient, then more recent, its spreaded and more local, history and situation” (89). Following this point, we can say that the extension of mythic status onto the white tenant farmers generates a mythic time for Agee, one in which he can locate a time immemorial to be connected with the present across different spatial scales (i.e. “its spreaded and more local) via the white tenant farmer family. Unsurprisingly, this mythic time is undergirded by a reproductive norm in which the ancient history is tied to the present through the birth of this ur-man.<sup>58</sup>

If, for Agee, a comprehensive assessment of white dispossession leads to a mythological time, it also indexes a radically different temporality, one very much caught up in an imperative to represent the political and economic problem of the white tenant farmer. In other words, the representation of white dispossession also leads to acknowledgement of non-modern whiteness or backward whiteness at the heart of the modern U.S. Revealed through the ethnographic mode of Agee’s writing, this backward whiteness becomes evident in Agee’s systematic cataloguing of the tenants’ property. For example, when documenting the clothes of the Ricketts, Agee writes the following:

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<sup>58</sup> Agee writes earlier: “A man and a woman are drawn together upon a bed and there is a child and there are children: First they are mouths, then they become auxiliary instruments of labor: later they are drawn away, and become the fathers and mothers of children, who shall become the fathers and mothers of children Their father and their mother before them were, in their time, the children each of different parts, who in their time were each children of parents: This has been happening for a long while: its beginning was before stars: It will continue for a long while: no one knows where it will end

There seems to be such a deep classicism in ‘peasant’ clothing in all places and in differing times that, for instance, a Russian and a southern woman of this country, of a deep enough class, would be undistinguishable by their clothing: moreover, it moves backward and forward in time: so that Mrs. Ricketts, for instance, is probably undistinguishable from a woman of her class five hundred years ago. But overalls are a relatively new and local garment. (234)

Clearly, we are far from the grand heights of mythic time. In this instance, the “deep classicism in ‘peasant’ clothing” marks a past that can persist in the present and still maintain its “pastness.” This persistence of the past in the present follows a very different logic than what was shown in mythic time. In the case of mythic time, even though the spiritual substance of mythic time had ancient origins, it ultimately stays the same across time as it just finds different forms of expressions. That is to say, the white tenant farmer is nothing but a more recent expression of this ancient spiritual substance. On the other hand, this backwardness of the white tenant farmer indexes a progressive temporality which time not only has an internally progressive arch to it but also becomes a property of objects themselves. Thus, the deep classicism of clothing marks the white tenant farmer to be asynchronous with the progressive movement of modern people. Hence, even though Mrs. Ricketts exists contemporaneously with Agee, in a deeper way, she is actually “undistinguishable from a woman of her class five hundred years ago,” which places her in an entirely different spatial-temporal order than Agee.

What are we to make of these different temporalities of the representations of white dispossession—the mythic time and the progressive modern time? To understand these distinct

temporalities and the representations that they undergird, I would suggest we must place them within the New Deal state formation and its on-going racial project. In doing so, we can see the overdetermination of white dispossession is due to its political value for the nation-building and state building projects of the New Deal state. With that frame in mind, we can say that the importance of this mythic time—this “normal predicament of human divinity”—should ultimately be thought of as national mythology. That is, the ancient origins that are the proper beginning to an adequate account of the white tenant farmer is nothing but the mythological beginning of national essence. Indeed, the failure of generic language to describe the particularity of the white tenant farmer and Agee’s subsequent turn to myth is to place them in a national hagiography. Along these lines, we might be tempted to think of the tenant farmer as a return to the iconography of the yeoman farmer of the early republic. Rather than find symmetry between these two icons, we must think of them comparatively. Thus, it is important to remember that the yeoman farmer was praised for its virile independence from the obsequiousness of an emerging industrial order. In this instance, however, it is a rather different polemic as it signals not an alternative economic order but rather the impossibility of anything but industrial capital and technological modernity and the alienation that they wrought. Hence, the elevation of white tenant farmers to the level of myth evacuates them from any recognizable social history, which allows them to escape from modern alienation and serve as a testament to that possibility for others.

If the representation of white dispossession and its placement within mythic time is part of national imaginary during the New Deal, its placement within a progressive time marks a different political value, one more directly tied to the practices of New Deal liberal governmentality and its concentration of state power. As discussed earlier, the progressivist logic

taken up by the New Deal sought not to merely manage the turbulence and crises of industrial capital but to entirely circumvent its destructive force through planning. Undergirding this confidence in the power of planning is a slightly different conception of progressive time from the nineteenth century, that is, it maintains a model of progress organized by distinct stages, but ones that can be technically acted upon. Hence, backward whiteness signals not a contemporaneous formation to industrial capital, but an ideal object to be modernized. To be sure, Agee was very critical of such intervention since, throughout *Famous Men*, he constantly chastises all those would-be progressives, including himself. Yet, with such critiques, Agee cannot escape placing white dispossession as an artifact of an earlier period.

As distinct as these temporalities of white dispossession are, they are not always separated from one another. Indeed, much of Agee's ambivalence towards the tenant farmer comes precisely from different values attached to them as they are seen through these temporalities. Agee's drawn out discussion on "beauty" is a case in point:

These classicisms are created of economic need, of local availability, and of local-primitive tradition: and in their purity they are the exclusive property and privilege of the people at the bottom of that world. To those who own and create it this 'beauty' is, however, irrelevant and undiscernible. It is best discernible to those who by economic advantages of training have only a shameful and thief's right to it: and it might be said that they have any 'rights' whatever only in proportion as they recognize the ugliness and disgrace implicit in their privilege of perception. The usual solution, non-perception, or apologetic perception, or contempt for those who perceive and value it, seems to me a least unwise. In fact it seems to me necessary to insist that the beauty of a house,

inextricably shaped as it is in an economic and human abomination, is at least as important a part of the fact as the abomination itself: but that one is qualified to insist on this only in proportion as faces the brunt of his 'sin' in so doing and the brunt of the meanings, against beings, of the abomination itself. (178)

Here, Agee diagnoses a peculiar contradiction of dispossession's "beauty." On the one hand, this "beauty" is the "exclusive property and privilege" of the white tenant farmer but, on the other hand, this "beauty" is "irrelevant and undiscernible" to the same white tenant farmer who owns it. Instead, this "beauty" exists only to those bourgeois subjects that have the "economic advantages of training" to recognize it. Following this logic of ownership, the bourgeois subject's consumption of the white tenant farmer's "beauty" is a form of theft since he is not the proper "owner" of that "beauty," even though he is the only potential consumer. At this point, Agee's property language shifts into religious and moralistic language. Thus, rather than have the bourgeois subject be prosecuted by the law for his theft of the rightful property of the tenant farmer, the bourgeois subject must be expiated of his own "sins" by recognizing the degree to which the conditions of possibility of dispossession's "beauty" hinges on "economic and human abomination." With such a peculiar logic of subjective perception and objective conditions and legal language and religious language, this passage begs the question as to what extent could the white tenant farmer "own" this beauty as he is unable to not only appreciate it but also recognize it in the first place? Or, more accurately, what does it mean that the beauty's source emanates from the dispossession of the white tenant farmer?

Beauty, I would argue, operates through the logic of commodity fetishism. In other words, this "beauty" is the effect of a process of projection, reification, and subjection of this

bourgeois subject. Even though this “beauty” is “created by economic need [...] and of local availability,” Agee comes to stress its origins within “local-primitive tradition,” rendering it to be ultimately a “property” of that tradition. In so doing, we see projection of those “economic needs” and social relations onto the white tenant farmer, which, subsequently gets reified or idealized as “local-primitive tradition” and individual “property.” As cultural property now, this “beauty” comes to subject the bourgeois subject to be no longer the problem of the social relations of “economic needs” but instead the “sin” of individualized privilege and “human abomination.” Crucial to this process of fetishism is how the white tenant farmer can signify both a temporal order that stays the same from time immemorial (i.e. local-primitive tradition) and progressive time (i.e. shifting economic needs) and therefore allowing the displacement of the latter for the former via the signifier of the white tenant farmer.

Taken together, the imperative to represent the white tenant farmer family with all of its fecundity—political economic, sociological, moral and spiritual—places them simultaneously in distinct but, at times intersecting, temporalities—mythic and progressive time. As such, white dispossession marks an ambivalent reaction to the fraught consequences of racial capitalism, at once a nihilistic acceptance for a lost time and a desire for acceptance into its progressive arch. Framed in the terms of whiteness, dispossession becomes a conservative political value as it shores up the nation-form and the building of the New Deal state form. In this respect, the white dispossessed tenant farmer family as the paradigmatic object for the political subject of New Deal liberal governmentality works both as the social object for technical intervention and the ethical basis of technical intervention itself. Indeed, it—as the “actual” object captured by the practices of New Deal liberal governmentality—provides the uncomplicated unity and harmony of technical knowledge and power through, on the one hand, the promise of technical progress

and, on the other hand, its embodiment of the nation's ethical principles that drive technical intervention in the first place. In this respect, it becomes clear that the gendered norms of whiteness do not only undergird the dispossessed tenant family but also undergird the very political subject of New Deal liberal governmentality. In fact, the regulative idea of the empty and generic standpoint that the political subject aspires towards through the promise of technical knowledge is nothing but the other half of white injury.<sup>59</sup>

#### IV

It may be asked then, if the yoking together of whiteness and dispossession lends itself to the production of a political subjectivity attuned to the practices of New Deal liberal governmentality alongside the reproduction of national and state temporalities, what are we to make of the formation of blackness as it is presented through black life in *Famous Men*? Indeed, if the gendered norms of whiteness enable the political rationality of New Deal liberal governmentality from both the position of the political subject and its object (e.g. the white tenant farmer family), what role does blackness play? Throughout *Famous Men*, black life is neither raised to mythic status and ancient time nor even located as backward to modern life since Agee has no substantive engagement with black folks to the same extent as he does with Grudgers, Ricketts, and the Woods. Instead, Agee presents black life through a couple of episodes in the beginning of the text where he witnesses and participates in the social reproduction of Jim Crow. In the first episode, Agee and Evans are invited by a landowner to watch three black tenant farmers perform songs for them. At first, they sing a couple of what Agee takes to be black hymnal but, with the landlords prompting, they perform a minstrel show

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<sup>59</sup> See Richard Dyer's *White* and Robin Wiegman's "Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity"

to appease him. In the second episode, Agee and Evans come across a church that they decide to photograph but are unable to enter. While they setup the camera, a black couple walks past them, which spurs Agee to ask them for guidance on how to access the church. As Agee pursues the couple, he inadvertently frightens them, which then leads him to desperately ask for forgiveness.

As opening vignettes that frame the rest of *Famous Men*, Agee's encounters of black life here render blackness to be a kind of ethnographic and moral threshold through which Agee and the reader passes to enter the world of the white tenant farmer.<sup>60</sup> In this respect, black life and black people achieve no independent status, neither backwards nor mythic but profoundly out of time and space altogether. Thus, without such determinate content, blackness attains a purely formal status to Agee, a mark of racial difference that refers to nothing but itself as a mark of racial difference. That is, it refers to how ascription of blackness occurs as the effect of its political proscription. In this respect, it poses an anxiety for Agee in a way radically distinct from his encounter with the dispossessed white tenant family farmer, in that, it places the act of self-consciousness into view rather than taking self-consciousness as the means. More specifically, in both incidences, we find Agee's hyper self-consciousness utterly failing over not only the coercive character of racial norms within each interaction but also his inability to remove himself from their deployment and reproduction as when he tries to apologize to the black minstrel performers through a look and when he profusely apologizes to the black couple. Indeed, there appears no possibility for Agee to extricate himself from the very violence of the situation—no reference to his situatedness to limn his holistic standpoint, no fantasy of identification, no grand recourse to any movement of time, no expiation from guilt.

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<sup>60</sup> See John Dorst's "On the Porch and in the Room: Threshold Moments and Other Ethnographic Tropes in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*" from *New Critical Essays on Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

In this respect, I would suggest blackness acts as the immanent contradiction to the political rationality of New Deal liberal governmentality. Indeed, to the extent that blackness refers to nothing but its very performativity as a speech act, it complicates the harmony of the “actual,” complicates the idealism of self-consciousness to achieve universality in its aim of an empty generic standpoint, underscores the exclusions of national iconography, points to constructedness of anachronistic time, and finally registers the violences of the normative underpinning of the political rationality of New Deal liberal governmentality. In virtue of this, *Famous Men* oddly holds a more critical edge than the more conventional documentary novel on race and tenantry at the time—Richard Wright’s *12 Million Black Voices*. For if Wright documents the formation of the black urban proletariat and the national black counterpublic sphere and traces the movement from racial dictatorship to racial democracy, then he follows the conventions of entry into technical urban modernity whose underpinnings reproduce heteronormativity. Yet, with Agee, we find no progressive and redemptive movement of blackness and, as such, it persists as a political problem for the political rationality of New Deal liberal governmentality that it cannot resolve by transforming it into technical issue.

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Throughout this chapter, I have sought to describe the political rationality of the practices of New Deal liberal governmentality, describing its political subject, its modality of knowing, (e.g. the actual), its object (e.g. the white tenant family farmer), its norms (e.g. gendered whiteness), its condition of possibility (e.g. the political crises of labor in the Depression), and its

internal contradiction (e.g. blackness). This “complex system of distinct and multiple elements” is a history of the political culture of dispossession but not its only one and, most definitely, not its origin. Indeed, if here the experience of dispossession concerns the loss of the benefits of technical modernity, then, as the next chapter will demonstrate, it also concerns the loss of legal citizenship.

## Chapter 2 – Racialized Dispossession and the Japanese-American: Global Contradiction of Race, Total War Liberal Governmentality, and John Okada’s *No-No Boy*

“Manzanar is only a detour on the road to American citizenship...”

- Ansel Adams, *Born Free and Equal*

“He walked along, thinking, search, thinking and probing, and, in the darkness of the alley of the community that was a tiny bit of America, he chased that faint and elusive insinuation of promise as it continued to take shape in mind and in heart”

- John Okada, *No No Boy*

In the previous chapter, I detailed the political subjectivity of a New Deal liberal governmentality in order to see an historical formation of a political culture of dispossession during the political crises of the Depression. This chapter continues this genealogy by turning to a very different political conjuncture—the US political crises of World War II. To that end, let us begin with a brief story. In the fall of 1943, after prompting from his longtime friend from the Sierra Club, Ralph Palmer Merritt, Ansel Adams went to Manzanar, CA and photographed the life of interned Japanese. Located between the Sierra Nevadas and Death Valley, Manzanar proved to be an ideal location for Adams as he was all too familiar with the area. What emerged out of this project was a short documentary pamphlet called *Born Free and Equal (Born Free)*,

which Adams himself describes as follows: “Through the pictures the reader will be introduced to perhaps twenty individuals...loyal American citizens who are anxious to get back into the stream of life and contribute to our victory” (7).

What is striking about *Born Free* is the way Adams used the opportunity to combine his own naturalist aesthetic with the contemporary demands of documentary photography. A case in point is the cover page (Figure 1). Here, the booklet opens with a two page photograph containing a profile of a Japanese man staring contemplatively one side, and the burgeoning crescent of a mountain range on the other. Situated in the foreground of the frame, the man dominates the majority of the image, endowing him with a stately quality. This impression is fortified even further as the camera is angled slightly upward, placing the viewer in a subordinate position. In effect, Adams has visually elevated the Japanese man as icon, if not greater than, at the very least, equal to the majesty of the mountains.

On the one hand, the monumentalizing of the Japanese man can be easily read as part of Adam’s social mission to humanize the Japanese to a national public in the midst of war in the Pacific theatre. To this end, Adams has been criticized by some of his contemporaries for a complicity with and elision of the social injustice of internment itself.<sup>61</sup> This reading has been reinforced even further as time has passed and as many have consistently pointed out Adams’ acceptance of the state rationale for internment. Yet, this criticism elides Adams’ social and aesthetic project altogether and substitutes it for what is taken to be Adams’ moral and political inconsistency. That is, Adams seeks to praise the Japanese, demonstrating their inherent

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<sup>61</sup> Dorothea Lange had photographed Manzanar earlier for the War Relocation Authority. In those photographs, she imbedded a critique of the WRA itself in the visual frame, which the WRA blunted through the use of captions. And Toyo Miyatake, a professional photographer, who was interned in Manzanar and collaborated with Adams, had photographed it with more emphasis on the Japanese American but without his visual hyperbole. As such, it presented a more ‘honest’ presentation of internment. For more, see Jasmine Alinder’s *Moving Images: Photography and the Japanese American Incarceration*

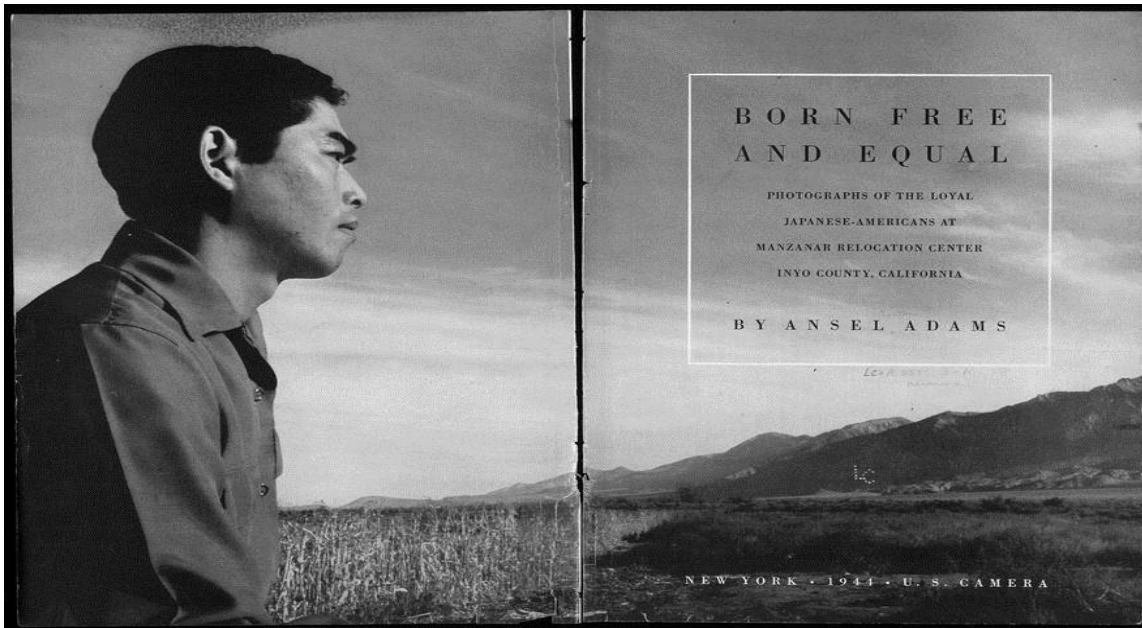


Figure 1

American character against a vitriolic anti-Asian rhetoric in the national public sphere without a forthright critique of the state racism that enabled such abuse. As such, the aesthetic and social project is either taken for granted as unproblematic or implicitly seen as an ideological ruse. Yet, if it is the case that lurking within Adams' photography is a tragedy that goes against our own sensibilities for progressive social justice, should not our critique emerge from an engagement with that aesthetic and social project?

We can understand the visual grammar of this photo according Adams's own understanding of his longstanding aesthetic project. In the forward to *Born Free and Equal*, he writes, "For many years I have photographed the Sierra Nevada, striving to reveal by the clear statement of the lens those qualities of the natural scene which claim the emotional and spiritual response of the people. In these years of strain and sorrow, the grandeur, beauty, and quietness of the mountains are more important to us than ever before. I have tried to record the influence of the tremendous landscape of Inyo on the life and spirit of thousands of people living by force of circumstance in the Relocation Center of Manzanar." (7-9). Following this, we can say that

captured before us in the cover page is a “clear statement of the lens” of “those qualities of the natural scene which claim the emotional and spiritual response of the people” (9). In this instance for Adams, “the people” happen to be the Japanese, most strikingly embodied through the man from the cover. Yet, how should we understand this “influence of the tremendous landscape” on this (Japanese) people? And why is this influence “more important to *us* than ever before?”

To get at this question, we must attend to the other photographs. *Born Free* is filled with a combination of landscape, portraiture, still life, staged and candid live action photos. In the landscapes, we find a monumentalized rendering of nature via the juxtaposing of human environments in the foreground and mountain ranges in the background (Figure 2 and 3). Visually, these photographs, in tandem with the other landscapes, emphasize the size and distance of the mountains in relation to human scales. Indeed, the size of the mountains come to not only dwarf human actors and environments but also, through their distance from those human actors as the background of the photographs, are removed from the sphere of human activity altogether. Thus, the mountains, and by extension “nature” itself, operates at a fundamentally different spatio-temporal scale to human life. As depicted in these mountain landscape photographs, “nature” exists on a geological scale and a pre-historic time whose sheer indifference to human action bespeaks of their grandeur and might.

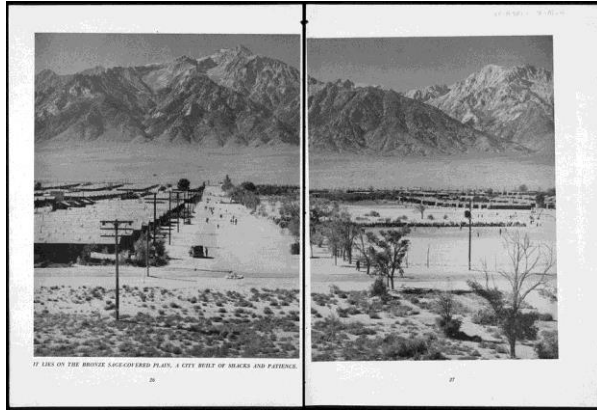


Figure 2

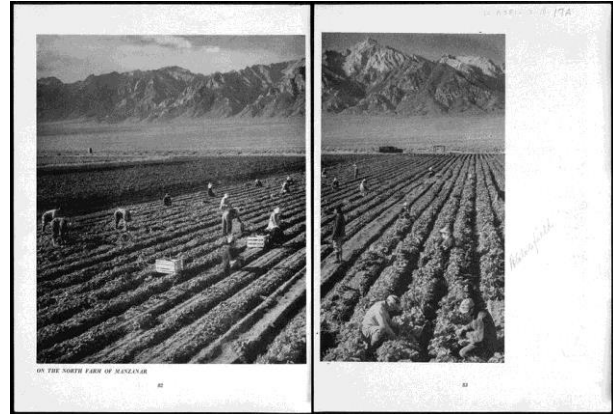


Figure 3

Accordingly, we can say that the “influence of the tremendous landscape” Adams describes is the aesthetic experience of the sublime. To clarify, aesthetic philosophy suggests that the sublime, as distinct from the beautiful, is an aesthetic experience of greatness that exceeds human understanding, and which is subjectively felt as a contradictory form of pleasure through an oscillation between terror and attraction.<sup>62</sup> This experience is elicited visually for the viewer through the many landscape photographs that populate *Born Free*. However, if we return to the cover page, it is very much unlike the other landscape photographs as it raises the man to majestic heights. How then should we understand it as it fits into *Born Free*’s preoccupation with the natural sublime? I would suggest that we turn to Kant. Counter-intuitively for him, the experience of the sublime is not actually about the qualities of the object but rather the capacities of the subject. As he writes in *The Critique of Judgment*, “Just because there is in our imagination a striving to advance to the infinite, while in our reason there lies a claim to absolute totality, as to a real idea, the very inadequacy of our faculty for estimating the magnitude of the things in the sensible world [viz., imagination] awakens the feeling of a supersensible faculty in us” (134). In other words, the failure of the subject to imagine the infinite as elicited by the sublime object (in this instance, the mountain’s geological might and pre-historic temporality)

<sup>62</sup> See Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*

reveals, through the subject's struggle to imagine, an inherent capacity to do so ideally in reason itself via the production of rational categories that can conceptualize the infinite into a bounded "absolute totality." Thus, for Kant, the experience of the sublime is a move of the subject beyond the particularistic bounds of individual sensory experience and imaginative capacity to an intimation of the subject's emplacement in and faculty of universal reason.

This trajectory to universality, I would suggest, is captured in the visual elevation of the Japanese man. As such, it is the basis for the viewer's identification. Framed as an upward angled profile of the Japanese man, the photograph directs the viewer's gaze toward the man's face as he looks at the mountains themselves. The viewer is thus invited to identify with the man through their shared activity of looking. That is, the Japanese man looks at the mountain; the viewer looks at the photographs. Yet, more than this, the appeal is reinforced further since strewn intermittently throughout *Born Free* are two page spreads of mountains set in the backdrop of an expansive sky. Thus, the viewer is tied to the Japanese man not simply by the act of looking but by the act of looking at nature as an experience of the sublime that itself points to their communion under universal reason.

Alongside the dramatic landscapes, *Born Free* presents a panorama of portraits (Figure 4, 5, 6, and 7). Interestingly, they are framed in a strong close-up of the face. Indeed, *Born Free* contains few shots where the viewer is presented with a shot of the body. Thus, the face becomes the focal point for the viewer's introduction to Japanese people. Furthermore, for the most part, these shots, like the cover page, are angled slightly upward, once again endowing the photographed person with honorific stature as each one must cast their eyes downward to look at the viewer. And, even though the selection and arrangement of the photographs are organized around professions and age, ranging from nurses to engineers, from farmers to soldiers, and from

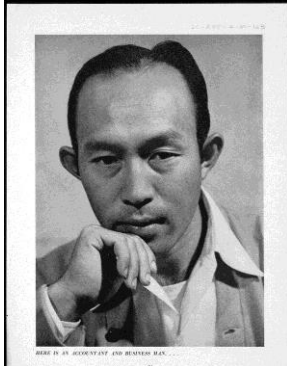


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

children to adults, these photos collectively point to the uniqueness of each person as expressed through the face. Indeed, the figures of the portraits rarely wear the uniforms of their stated profession.

Thus, through the visual grammar of *Born Free* (i.e. the way the photographs collectively direct a recognition of the mutual experience of the natural sublime between the Japanese and the viewer and the arrangement of individual portraits), I would argue that we find the alignment of modern universals and particulars that enables the cultural and political recognition of a new national personage—the Japanese American. Indeed, Japanese passes through the categories of “the human” to “the individual” to arrive as a general class of an “American people.” In these terms, more than the way that *Born Free* elides any critique of state racism, its true political tragedy is this movement and the losses that it asks us not so much to forget—as are we not now constantly asked to remember?—but instead to see as ultimately inconsequential to its progressive arc. That is, visually staged as it is, *Born Free* casts internment to be the necessary conditions to political legibility and social value, rendering forced displacement into acrid and desolate land into a sublime experience that can attest to Japanese humanity and individuality. And though we can easily brush off such a thought as mere ruse, leaving *Born Free* with a supreme sense of satisfaction that our own critical capacities have not been duped, its true power

is its ability to disable alternative accounts through the unfolding of its ideal claims to social justice.

This is the horror that plagues *Born Free*. And I would suggest that we find its ultimate expression in the closing of the text. *Born Free* ends with a rather simple portrait (Figure 8). Though it is very much like the many other portraits, it contains some crucial distinctions. In this instance, we get an extreme close up of a Japanese man's face. No longer is the viewer placed at an honorific distance to witness either the representative grandeur of iconic Japanese or the facial features that compose the uniqueness of Japanese individuals. Instead, the portrait stages the viewer to be in direct visual contact with the man. To reinforce this effect, the portrait is leveled such that the viewer is no longer in a supplicant position but instead is of equivalent height. Thus, the viewer and Japanese man are now in equal positions not only in terms of stature but importantly in scopic action. Even though the viewer finds kinship with the Japanese of the photos through shared activities of looking, the scopic relations of power had hitherto positioned the viewer to be the agent of the visual gaze since the photographs render them to be objects of contemplation. Yet, this portrait (figure 8) has the man looking directly and firmly at the viewer, no longer being the object of the viewer's gaze but rather grabbing hold of its power as the Subject of looking. In effect, this final photograph chides the viewer, imposing an ethical demand for social justice. In this respect, in the portrait's mandate, we see the conservative bent that forms the political tragedy of *Born Free*. That is, as I have been tracing, the very terms of the final portrait's political claims have been dictated in advance through the ethical and political purview of legal citizenship. As such, the underlying horror that pervades all these photographs, but this one in particular, is the way its speech comes from elsewhere and that placed before us has been nothing but political puppetry. In other words, I suggest that, ventriliquized through the

closed lips, stern brow and determined eyes of the Japanese man, the portrait speaks for the restitution of Japanese American citizenship and with it, the legitimacy of a state that can recognize them. Yet, must it be this way? Must dispossession in Japanese internment be cast only as tragic denial and restitution of rights through a recognition of Japanese Americanness? If framed in this way, dispossession is nothing but what Adams refers to as a “detour on the road to American citizenship?”

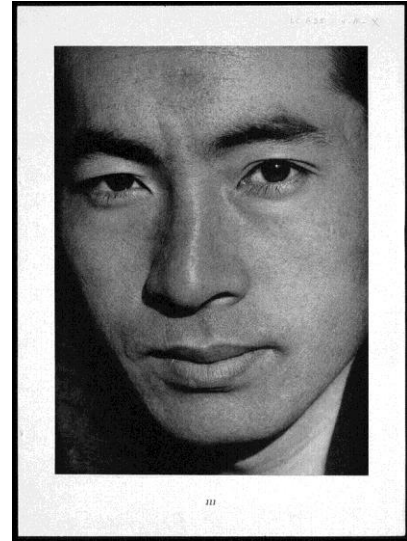


Figure 8

What if we read not so much against the grain of *Born Free* but rather read beyond and alongside it? That is, what if we read it and its presentation of Japanese Americans as part of an emergence of a particular system of power?

This chapter attempts to do so by placing Japanese internment as part of a genealogy of the political culture of dispossession. In particular, the chapter situates the problematization of a racialized dispossession in the political crises of race and the US state’s war mobilization during the emergence of US global political hegemony in World War II. Within this crucible, rather than comprehending internment within a narrative of the US state’s ethical development, I argue that the practice indexes historically contradictory political rationalities of a *total war* liberal governmentality, at once a military practice of containing a racial enemy and a liberal recuperative practice of integrating a racialized population into a national polity. In both respects, the political subjectivity that forms experiences dispossession as primarily a legal and symbolic issue insofar as these practices are simultaneously caught up in the production of a racial enemy for the purposes of national security and the production of racial icons of American universalism. Thus, in mediating these political rationalities, race attains a profoundly

contradictory status for the political subject of dispossession. Indeed, in lieu of resolving the contradiction, I argue that these political rationalities double race by racializing culture.

In order to give this argument legs, the chapter locates these political rationalities of the total war liberal governmentality in the racial contradiction of the World War II in the Pacific coast. In particular, the chapter examines the practices and discourses of Japanese internment as they are set within conflicts of Japanese and US imperial projects and the total war imperative that raised race into an international issue. Significant for this chapter is how the political rationality and practices of internment changed quite dramatically by 1943. No longer was it dominantly understood as an imperative to sequester a politically contagious disloyal race but instead to enculturate them into the democratic norms of US liberal democracy and prepare a national public for a new hyphenated national subject. In order to see the consequences of these political rationalities at the level of political subjectivity, I turn to John Okada's *No-No Boy*. There, I demonstrate how race mediates these political rationalities and mark their material contradictions. Yet, these contradictions get displaced onto gender and sexuality through the racialization of culture. Put differently, the *resolution* to the contradiction of the political rationalities of total war liberal governmentality is to locate the problem in so-called Japanese culture and thereby racializing it but, to do so, requires the gendered and sexual norms of the reproductive family. In this respect, the contradiction of these political rationalities keep not simply interiorized through racialized discourse but displaced onto the domain of the reproductive family.

## Dialectic of Race and Nation in World War II

To continue this genealogy, we must turn to its formation in the trans-war era<sup>63</sup>, particularly in World War II. This period marks a distinct formation of dispossession from the one discussed in Chapter 1. Indeed, it is here that, I argue, the experience of dispossession is explicitly racialized, in that, the loss of legal citizenship is racially coded rather than, in the prior formation, where the loss of technical modernity was coded through (ethnic) whiteness. This is not to say that these formations historically supersede one another, indeed they overlap in profound ways.<sup>64</sup> Rather it is my intention of this chapter to focus of this particular formation to distill its political rationalities of total war liberal governmentality. To that end, we must understand that World War II was a watershed moment in the “dialectic of race and nation,” that is, the way in which race has mediated the historical and political limits of American universalism and how the politicization of race had expanded those limits as well as retrenched race on higher political and social scales.<sup>65</sup> To be more concrete, for example, in response to the social crisis of the Depression, the development of various social and economic programs and institutions that the New Deal state used to manage the contradiction established conditions that both codified anti-black racism as the national political problem of race (as opposed to a regional one) for American universalism and unwittingly enabled the formation of a black counterpublic sphere that was national in scope.

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<sup>63</sup> I borrow this term from Takashi Fujitani. By “trans-war period,” he refers to the period that crosses World War II into the Cold War. See Fujitani’s *Race Against Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans in World War II*

<sup>64</sup> See Colleen Lye’s *America’s Asia*

<sup>65</sup> My account of the “dialectic of race and nation” draws immensely from the work of Nikhil Pal Singh’s work. For more, see Nikhil Pal Singh’s *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, in particular look at his Chapter 3 “Internationalizing Freedom”

Accordingly, we find in the U.S. state's build-up and mobilization for World War II the conditions that expanded both the political problem of race for American universalism and the "horizon of experience" for the black counterpublic sphere onto the level of the international. For my purposes in this chapter, I will mainly focus on the political problem of "race," though the working of the black counterpublic sphere will have much import in the following section. Therefore, to better understand the way World War II marks a sublation of the "dialectic of race and nation," setting the material grounds for the experience of racialized dispossession in Japanese internment, it must be stressed that World War II is the paradigmatic example of "total war." World War II was a war in which the US state sought to completely mobilize all resources and populations towards the strategic aims of war, which, in the process, collapses distinctions between citizen/combatant in terms of the populations and spaces.<sup>66</sup> For instance, the US state coordinated industries and consumption practices for wartime production through agencies like the War Production Board. Under it, industrial jobs were increased and closed in some areas in order to maximize output for war—hence the US's moniker as the "arsenal of democracy." And it allocated industrial materials like rubber, metals and fuel by creating a nationwide rationing system. Through this large scale orchestration of production, the state mobilizes populations for war through their involvement in production and consumption practices.<sup>67</sup> This is not to mention the obvious fact of military conscription where official soldiers were sent to fights battles or used to transport military goods and create strategic infrastructure for war. Framed in terms of the massive orchestration of resources and populations, the US total war regime is not unlike the social engineering dreams of many New Deal state programs and institutions like the Tennessee Valley Authority as discussed in Chapter 1.

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<sup>66</sup> I also borrow the phrase "total war regime" from Fujitani. Ibid

<sup>67</sup> For more on state institutional developments, see David Ciepley *Liberalism in the Shadow of Totalitarianism*

Politically, this expansion of state power in a total war regime necessitated a particular rationale that linked the claims of the US with the entire world. Under such documents like the “Atlantic Charter” and the “Four Freedoms,” the total war regime was framed as necessary for the protection of democracy, national sovereignty, and international equality against Fascism and National Socialism. Through such general political principles, American universalism was newly refashioned to encompass international issues.

As an inadvertent consequence, the US state’s total war regime and its political rationale raised race and the problem of racial inequality to an international issue, specifically a concern of national security, international relations, and global justice. On the level of material production, the US state’s total war regime’s demand for labor in wartime production set large segments of racialized populations to move into major urban centers like Detroit and Los Angeles. Even though the process of interior migration was well under way during the interwar years, war mobilization for World War II had noticeably increased this pattern. In particular, it marks the unprecedented movement of black people to the Pacific coast, especially when war manufacturing jobs were desegregated after Roosevelt signed an executive order in response to the threat of a black march onto Washington orchestrated by A. Randolph Johnson. As such, urban centers, particularly factories, were hot zones of racial tension due to discrimination. Indeed, World War II is notable for a significant increase in racial violence, which often involved police and servicemen as demonstrated in the infamous Zoot Suit riots of 1943.<sup>68</sup> On top of these open moments of conflict, this migration further entrenched already existing patterns of *de facto* residential segregation. Moreover, the extent of racial strife under the total war regime was not

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<sup>68</sup> Singh

limited to the home front. The military itself was highly segregated, often relegating racialized populations to menial duties.<sup>69</sup>

As such, these kinds of incidences flew in the face of the political rationale of war mobilization. Surely, US claims that “everywhere in the world” ought to enjoy freedoms of expression and worship and freedoms from want and fear could not be easily squared with domestic conditions where the enjoyment of those “freedoms,” particularly the latter ones, were racially secured. Thus, according to this racial contradiction, we find an international expansion of the “horizon of experience” of the black counterpublic sphere. Indeed, black social life in the US came to be seen as politically bound to others around the world, especially the growing anti-colonial struggles in Africa<sup>70</sup>, which Ralph Ellison famously called an “identity of passions.”<sup>71</sup> To be sure, this was not the first time in which black intellectuals had seen their social condition to be intimately tied to others beyond the US—as the next section will show these prior identifications were a serious problem for the US—but it did mark a ripe historical conjuncture that enabled political mobilization at the level of the state. Yet, we would be remiss to assume that this insurgent political sentiment was inherently revolutionary against the state. Indeed, as the “Double-V campaign” attests, in some social and political circles, it had actually re-affirmed American universalism, or at the very least made radical black political demands difficult to distinguish from nationalist ones, wedding the political and social fate of black people to the success of the US state.

In contrast, we must understand these state processes, social conflicts, and political rationales to be the material grounds of political struggle that set the terms of various political and social actors. Accordingly, it is within this political milieu—consisting of the US total war

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<sup>69</sup> Singh. *Black is a Country*

<sup>70</sup> For more, see Penny Von Eschen’s *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism 1937-1957*

<sup>71</sup> Quoted from Singh’s *Black is a Country*

regime and its racial contradiction in World War II—that we can understand the connection between the experience of dispossession and the recuperative practices of a total war liberal governmentality. In the following section, I will localize those dynamics as they play out on the Pacific Coast through Japanese internment.

### **Racialized Dispossession on the Pacific: Racial Contradictions in the US Total War Regime**

On February 19<sup>th</sup> 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which authorized military commanders to designate the states along the Pacific coast and the interior to be military areas from which any or all people may be excluded. Directly issuing from it, the Executive Order led to the expulsion and incarceration of 110,000 Japanese people—two thirds of which were US citizens—into ten War Relocation Camps, or more commonly referred to as internment camps.

Within popular memory, accounts of Japanese internment have often been explained as an instance of wartime panic, little to do substantially with issues of “race.” On the other hand, early historiography on internment that took account of race has understood the event as the logical culmination of anti-Asian racism, finding within internment the expression of a continuous line of white racism equally seen in the Chinese exclusion act of 1882 and the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924.<sup>72</sup> Yet, as Colleen Lye incisively points out, this putatively historical explanation of internment comes to idealize race and racism, obscuring it from its material conditions and political struggles.<sup>73</sup> Following her lead though differing from her historical

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<sup>72</sup> See Roger Daniel’s *Concentration Camps U.S.A.: Japanese Americans and World War II*

<sup>73</sup> See Colleen Lye’s *America’s Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945*. For Lye’s argument on internment turn to her chapter 2 and 3. There, she situates internment as not only part of the ambiguities of the Japanese farmer issuing from the Alien Land Laws but also New Deal agrarian reform practices on the West Coast.

concerns, I would like to take more seriously internment's placement within wartime proceedings, not as mere hysteria of wartime vagaries but rather as an event squarely located within the racial contradiction of the US state's total war regime. With that in mind, the proceeding account draws heavily from Takashi Fujitani's work on Japanese American racialization and World War II.<sup>74</sup> Significant within this account is the rather quick doctrinal reversal of such blatant state racism. That is, parallel exclusionary actions to internment occurred within the military in 1942 however, by early 1943, those actions were not only cancelled but summarily reversed whereby the military actively sought Japanese/American involvement. Thus, I argue, to fully understand the way racialized dispossession is caught up within the state form, we must link it to both the way race became the basis of exclusion as well as the way race became the basis for inclusion.

Even though Japanese internment is widely known and quickly condemned, what is not often mentioned was the rather systematic removal, curtailment, and institutional sequestering of Japanese from the military. When the Pearl Harbor bombings occurred, there was roughly 5,000 Americans of Japanese descent serving in the military, the majority of whom were drafted. With that in mind, we must therefore see internment as one part of an overall military strategy of excluding the Japanese and not the expression and mobilization of mass anti-Asian sentiment. To be sure, this incident did find historical antecedent with prior forms of Asian racialization via the Alien Land Laws but the impact of that earlier racialization has more to do with the racial geography of the Pacific as structured by the ambiguities of the Japanese farmer and its overlap with militarization and security of the Pacific front than with a unified Asian racial subject

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<sup>74</sup> Fujitani, *Race For Empire*

accosted by anti-Asian racism.<sup>75</sup> Accordingly, what seems odd about these actions is the way they go against the instrumental logic of the US total war regime. Surely, the quiet removal of military personnel; the rejection of draftees; the halting of food production on Japanese farms on the West Coast; and the expenditure of all sorts of resources to transport, house, and guard an entire population appear, if not absurd, is at the very least counterproductive to the imperatives of efficiently mobilizing the entire national population and resources of the state for war. How then can we explain such gross mismanagement within the US state's total war regime?

First, the most simple explanation is the racist conflation of Japanese American with the Japanese that placed an insurmountable suspicion about their loyalty to the US. Fujitani describes this “naturalistic vision of Japanese racial difference” as follows: “Japanese American [were seen] as so fixed in their physicality and temperament that they seemed outside of history and the possibility of assimilation to white America” (87). Stated in this way, race is a domain governed by naturalistic laws (as opposed to human laws), namely one of transmission, beyond which historical experience has no bearing and political and social actions have no effect. Thus, the political logic undergirding such rationality renders the Japanese American an object of no political significance except as pollutant to the beloved polity. Thus, during times of war, the Japanese American becomes a politically contagious object in need of quarantining if not outright extermination. Hence, in examining documents by the Board of Officers within the Office of the Army Chief of Staff, Fujitani finds military officers explaining that the Japanese American as a race is not only suspect in their loyalty but also so indelibly marked by suspicion

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<sup>75</sup> Lye, *America's Asia*, Chapter 3 “The End of Asian Exclusion?: The Specter of “Cheap Farmers” and Alien Land Law Fiction

of disloyalty that cooperation with individual 'loyal' Japanese Americans is militarily infeasible since those in the military themselves cannot go beyond that suspicion.<sup>76</sup>

Second, and historically more significant than the naturalistic racial explanation, the Japanese imperial state, and by racist extension the Japanese American, were feared by the US state to be fomenting resentment and revolution within racialized publics against a global white supremacy, particularly African-American ones. To clarify, in examining reports from the Military Intelligence Division's Counter-Intelligence Group, Fujitani notes that the propaganda of Japanese imperial state actively connected American blacks with anti-American and anti-British groups across the world, particularly along lines of religion, "race," and economic inequality. In that way, the Japanese imperial state sought support from African-American communities by framing itself as the "champion of the darker races." Yet, this identification of Japan was not completely uni-directional. As Marc Gallichio has shown, some black publics had looked to the Japanese, ever since the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, finding in them a symbol of modern development separate from Europe and America.<sup>77</sup> In pointing this out, it must be noted that such support was quite short lived in progressive circles as Japan's claim as the "champion of the darker races" could not be lined up with its imperial expansion in East and Southeast Asia.

Emerging from these exchanges, the US state feared that Japanese Americans were plotting and recruiting African Americans to be part of a fifth column. A case in point would be reports about Camp Robinson in Little Rock, Arkansas around 1942. The camp was a training base that housed many newly drafted Japanese Americans during a period where their military status was still ambiguous. There, a Little Rock committee of citizens had warned the camp's commanding officer, Brigadier General F.B. Mallon, and Congressman D.D. Terry about

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<sup>76</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*

<sup>77</sup> For more, see Marc Gallichio's *The African American encounter with Japan and China : Black internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945*.

Japanese soldiers, raising concerns over both black animosity due to an appearance of equal treatment to the Japanese and co-mingling between African-Americans and Japanese Americans. Significantly, these racial panics over potential cross-racial alliances against white supremacy led to an anxiety over interracial sex.<sup>78</sup> Taken together then we find in these fears about the Japanese American as a “race,” the intersection of the expansion of the black counterpublic sphere and the US state total war regime, which, in this instance, is refracted through the imperial formation of the Pacific in conflicts between Japanese, British, and US imperial projects and is condensed in the figure of the Japanese American as a suspect race.

It is important to remember, however, that even though these problems of loyalty and race panic trumped the total war logic of maximum usage of resource and population, they do not eliminate that imperative, but instead function as a counterweight to it. This means that that demand persisted in the military discussion over the status of Japanese American and came to impact other types of rationalization of Japanese American treatment. Hence, in the midst of military discussions of containing Japanese Americans, Fujitani notes, Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt, commanding general of the Western Defense Command, had callously suggested that Japanese Americans be used instrumentally for their labor-power and translation abilities under discriminatory conditions and without any compensatory gestures for ultimate civic inclusion.

With that countervailing force of the total war logic in mind, it is not too difficult to imagine a reversal in the exclusionary practices once the basis of race panics is undermined and superseded by larger and longer military/state aims. Thus, it is striking that the above rational and explanation of Japanese American military expulsion is quickly reversed in 1943, roughly a year after internment and the decision to end draftees. This is not to say that this reversal of thought on Japanese Americans proceeded mechanically. Instead it is to point out that, within the

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<sup>78</sup> Fujitani, *Race For Empire*

military and state establishment, there existed simultaneously competing ideas on Japanese that vie for dominance. Thus, along with the competing demand to use all available populations and resource effectively, the decisive factor in reversing Japanese American exclusion was the recognitions of their symbolic value for propaganda purposes. This symbolic value turns on two complementary military and state objectives. First, and more immediate, the Japanese Americans could be utilized to counteract Japanese propaganda that portrayed the US as racist country. That is, rather than accept the Japanese imperial state's claim that the US was part of a global system of white supremacy, the Japanese American could exemplify the US's egalitarian treatment of all racialized groups. Thus, it was essential that the US military create and highlight voluntary military units composed of racialized groups (as opposed to compulsory ones). Here, we can think of the celebration of military units like the 442<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment and the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, both comprising of Japanese American soldiers. And, of course, let us not forget the much vaunted 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter group and the 477<sup>th</sup> Bombardment group, collectively known as the Tuskegee airmen.<sup>79</sup>

Second, with an eye towards a post war reconstruction of Japan and the general political viability of US globalism, the Japanese American could come to ingratiate the US to the decolonized world. That is to say, beyond counteracting Japanese propaganda, the Japanese American can act as the symbolic ambassador to emerging nations in the post war world. This political imperative will become particularly crucial with the onset of the Cold War. As Mary Dudziak has demonstrated, the Soviet Union took a very similar tact to the Japanese state in criticizing the US for its legal perpetuation of segregation and political indifference to racial inequality.<sup>80</sup> Thus, like Ralph Bunche's recommendation for African Americans to serve as US

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, *Race For Empire*

<sup>80</sup> For more, see Mary Dudziak's *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*

delegates to the decolonizing nations, the image of the Japanese American soldier sought to ingratiate the US to, in the words of Edwin O. Reischauer, the “yellow and brown people” of the world and renounce its attachment to racism as nothing but a vestige of the past.<sup>81</sup>

In sum, we can see the military’s exclusion of Japanese Americans and its quick about face on the matter does not index the US state’s progressive moral development in which a prior exclusion was rectified through the recognition of the Japanese American’s civic virtue. Rather, as I have shown, the shifting national status of the Japanese marks the simultaneous and competing rationalization and strategy of race imbedded within the US state’s total war regime as it confronted both its own intrinsic material needs of managing resources and mobilizing population as well as its encounters with competing imperial projects and emergent geopolitical actors. In light of this history and shifting political rationality, we are now in a place to reconsider the practices of Japanese internment. Though I have been primarily discussing the shifting status of Japanese-Americans in the formal institutions of the military, this extends to the treatment of Japanese Americans within the internment camps since the camps themselves were an official military operation and subject to the same inherent ambiguities between military and civilian spaces under a total war regime. Significant within the preceding account is the political rationalities that surrounded the simultaneous expulsion and recruitment of Japanese Americans as citizen-soldiers since these rationalities are installed in the practices of internment itself.

At this point, it is a completely uncontroversial, and I would say verging on the banal, to claim that the actions and events of internment were racist in a narrow and naturalistic sense. From the organization of census data that defined Japanese as a ‘race’<sup>82</sup> to the way that that same

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<sup>81</sup> Fujitani, *Race Against Empire*

<sup>82</sup> By this, I mean the way that the mark of Japanese did not leave regardless of place of birth. Thus, unlike ethnic categories of German and Italian, even if a Japanese person is born in the US, according to the census, they would still be Japanese.

statistical and residential information enabled the state to specifically target and capture Japanese and Japanese-Americans on the West coast to the literal corralling of the Japanese into assembly centers located in race tracks or fairgrounds to the eventual transport of Japanese into barbed wired relocation centers that were placed in far off remote areas of the interior US to the vitriolic speech circulating in the national public sphere that compared the Japanese to vermin deserving of eradication,<sup>83</sup> internment was undeniably racist.

In these practices and discourses, we see that the internment, in the first instance, takes on a particular symbolic dimension to it. That is to say, on top of the forced removal from land and property, it is also linked to the removal of legal rights, political protections conferred by citizenship, and the social and moral recognition of human personhood. Put simply, internment is the production of a racial enemy and their containment and, as such, it is profoundly a racializing practice. Furthermore, we should bear in mind the political rationality organizing internment. As Mary Dudziak explains in the case of *Korematsu v. United States*, national security overrode any concern towards racial equality, placing forced internment within the bounds of political powers of the state.<sup>84</sup> Hence, it should be understood as a practice of total war liberal governmentality, one in which the Japanese American is constituted as political contagion in need of confinement away from the valued population of the citizen in times of war.

Yet, internment cannot be reduced to a mere exclusionary practice, ‘race’ and racialization cannot be reduced to a narrow and naturalistic mode, and the experience of racialized dispossession cannot be construed only as a negative form of power. As the preceding historical account made clear, treatment of Japanese Americans in 1943 marks a radical shift, one in which the US state’s total war regime elicited Japanese-American involvement in the war

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<sup>83</sup> The governor of Idaho asserted that the Japanese should be returned to Japan and the entire island nation be sunk into the sea because “they live like rats, breed like rats and act like rats.”

<sup>84</sup> See Mary Dudziak “The Supreme Court and Racial Inequality in World War II”

effort, participation in US propaganda, and ultimately in desires for American citizenship. This same general imperative can also be seen in both the construction of the internment camps and the practice of internment itself. For instance, at the level of health care, Fujitani points out that the initial medical examinations and inoculations done to interned Japanese were meant to prevent the spreading of contagious diseases within and outside of the Japanese population. However, by 1943, the US government began providing an assortment of basic medical services, such as women's prenatal care, hospitalization, food and clothing distribution, and counseling with social welfare workers.<sup>85</sup> On top of these medical services, the camps contained civil institutions like newspapers, churches, schools; spaces for professional and commercial services like clothing fabrication, haircutting, and farm cooperatives; and extracurricular activities and venues like baseball fields and YMCAs. To be clear, the camps were not idyllic cooperative social spaces and not all camps were created the same. In particular, the Tule Lake camp was constructed and seen a punitive space as all the truly 'disloyal' Japanese were transplanted there.

Significantly, we can see that the construction and organization of the internment camps came to be modeled as a miniaturized liberal democratic civil society. For that reason Colleen Lye highlights the continuity of internment with New Deal aspirations of ideal planned communities.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, the War Relocation Authority (WRA), the civilian agency in charge of the camps, established "community councils" of elected block representatives that would negotiate with the WRA as a kind of elected government within the camps. Though it must be stated that much conflict arose around these initiatives, it does index a set of practices that sought to integrate a liberal democratic process in the camps. In other words, the organization of camp leadership, the creation of civil institutions, and the provision of medical services cannot just be

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<sup>85</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*

<sup>86</sup> See Colleen Lye's *America's Asia*, specifically chapter 4

understood to be merely sustaining the lives of the Japanese American. They sought to have them flourish.

This apparent irony can be better understood when set in the competing political rationality structuring Japanese American treatment, one that constituted them as iconic of American universalism in the trans-war years. As pointed out earlier, the Japanese Americans were part of both a US state tactic of countering Japanese propaganda and a strategy for US hegemony in the decolonized world. Regardless of the obvious insincerity and politically instrumental reasoning, it had the consequent effect of enabling a genuine integration of Japanese as Americans. Yet as a state uplift project directed at a racialized group, it strongly resonates with colonial models of ‘benevolent assimilation.’ As such, as Mae Ngai underscores, such assimilationist aspirations are rife with a different set of racial presuppositions. As she explains, “The WRA viewed Japanese Americans as racial children in need of democratic tutelage, infantilizing them in much the same way that the government constructed Filipino colonial subjects and Native American Indians as dependent wards not yet fit for democratic citizenship” (179).

Notwithstanding the paternalism and its infantilizing effects, we must not lose sight of the way in which the organization of space and administrative practices renders the experience of racialized dispossession to be inscribed in a different form of power, though by no means incommensurable, from the one previously described. Unlike before where the experience of racialized dispossession was the production of a racial enemy under the banner of national security and race was organized around a naturalistic mode, here, the practices of internment are done to furnish modern and universal norms of democratic culture and enable participation in a liberal democratic society. As such, the experience of racialized dispossession is caught within

a distinct political rationality, which at once regulates the interned population through a binary of loyal/disloyal and disciplines the body through the installation of norms through discourses of liberal democratic freedom.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, we can see the regulative function of liberal governmentality when we consider how the internment camps operated as a system. Tule Lake camp, the one plagued with the most controversy, housed all the ‘truly’ disloyal Japanese. In this way, the caesura within the population is meant for the prosperity of the population as a whole. And nothing comes to exemplify these disciplinary component of liberal governmentality more than the controversy that surrounded the “Application for Leave Clearance,” more commonly known as the loyalty questionnaire.<sup>88</sup> There, WRA sought to incite the Japanese and Japanese Americans to freely choose entry into the military and swear allegiance to the US.

Located within this political rationality, we can say that practices of total war liberal governmentality are the lever that sets in motion the racialized subject’s entry into full citizenship. In a seemingly counter-intuitive and circular fashion, the stripping away of legal rights, political protections, and social recognition of personhood is for the endowing of legal rights, political protections, and social recognition of personhood. Indeed, this circularity is precisely at the center of the Ansel Adams’ pamphlet that began this chapter. That is, given the treatment of Japanese prior to internment, how exactly are the Japanese “born free and equal”? Is not their “birth” as “free and equal” a recent occurrence, one retrospectively applied for the legitimacy of the state, rather than a sign of previously occluded but newly recovered civic

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<sup>87</sup> This insight on this form of power is taken directly from Fujitani

<sup>88</sup> Designed to truly distinguish between the loyal and disloyal Japanese, the questionnaire posed eighty questions that dealt with the religious affiliation, educational and occupation background, and general cultural knowledge and practices. The majority of the questionnaire controversy issues from the catch-22 nature of question 27 and 28, which respectively asked: “Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United State on combat duty, wherever ordered?” and “Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power and organization?” Question 28 was particularly problematic as the Issei were legally disqualified from US citizenship and thus affirmative response would literally leave them stateless.

standing? And ultimately is not “racialized dispossession” what gave “birth” to that freedom and equality with all of its irony? But, in saying this, I do not want to give the impression that this circularity of racialized dispossession is a mere ideological ruse, a grand lie hoisted onto a naïve Japanese by white supremacy. Rather this circularity attests to the way that “born free and equal” is a performative utterance, a speech act that constitutes that which it names. As such, we cannot assess it as true or false but instead by the felicitous or infelicitous condition that it produces, that is, the forms of power it relies on, the knowledges that it incites<sup>89</sup>, and, most importantly, the political subjectivity that it produces.

As I have discussed, when examining the political rationality of Japanese internment, we see its practices are imbedded in forms of power fundamentally possessing a dual character. On the one hand, they are at once practices of stripping of legal rights, civil protections, and cultural recognition in order to contain a political contagion, a fifth column aimed at undermining US sovereignty by spreading a conflagration of resentment and revolution among racialized populations. On the other hand, they are, at the same time, practices that constitute the racialized subject itself as both citizen and the bearer of American universalism. In respects to the latter, these practices explicitly target subjectivity and, as such, cannot help but draw the prior formation into that domain. How then can they operate at that level? In what ways does this lead into a contradiction at the level of subjectivity? How do they get displaced? In order to pursue these questions and to see these political rationalities as a productive form of power that installs into the subject the racial dualism that I have been describing, I now turn to John Okada’s novel *No No Boy*.

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<sup>89</sup> Internment led to the creation of a wealth of knowledge, generating massive amount of scholarship on the anthropology of Japanese and the sociology of internment. For more on the impact of both knowledge, see Caroline Simpson’s *Absent Present*, particularly chapter 2 “The Internment of Anthropology: Wartime Studies of Japanese Culture.”

## Racialized Dispossession in John Okada's *No-No Boy*

Given my discussion of the political rationality of the practices of total war liberal governmentality in Japanese internment, it may seem odd to turn to a novel. Surely, as an inquiry on a form of power exemplified in Japanese internment, should I not follow suit with Fujitani and others? For example, by turning to either the policy documents of military officials and the liberal administrators in charge of the camps or the internal debates among the Japanese Americans in response to internment policies such as the ones following the loyalty questionnaire. Yet, if, as I have been describing, these practices operate as not only a negative form of power but also a productive one, constituting the subject, shaping her desires towards citizenship, inciting her freedom, then I would argue that the novel form becomes an ideal object to register the depth of this power. As various literary scholars have argued, the novel form is profoundly tied to the formation of the 'modern' individual as not only a socially unique, empirically knowable figure, and a bearer of psychological depth<sup>90</sup> but, for my purposes, a key modern cultural institution through which power circulates in the social body.<sup>91</sup> As such, narrative techniques do not simply register symptomatically the effects of those political rationalities, but rather they are one of the instruments through which they fashion political subjectivity.

With that said, I think it is necessary to distinguish my approach to the novel from popularly understood. To this end, the publication history of John Okada's *No-No Boy* becomes significant. Published in 1957, *No-No Boy* existed in total obscurity, having no commercial success and little critical reception as the initial 1,500 copies of the first edition had

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<sup>90</sup> For example, see Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* and Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World*.

<sup>91</sup> See D.A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* and Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction*

not sold in the 15 years up to its revival in the early 1970s. Yet, with the publication of the 1974 anthology *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*, *No-No Boy* was installed in and helped create an Asian-American literary canon. Thus, the novel, in the words of Gordon Hirabayashi, “heralded the beginning of an authentic *Japanese American* literature.”<sup>92</sup> In turn, John Okada was elevated as one of a set of founding fathers who had given authentic Asian American self-expression and embodied the cultural spirit of Asian Americans.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, we must understand the forging of this Asian American ethnic canon and the text’s placement within it to be part of late 1960’s racial projects to shift US racial commonsense, bringing about the now accepted pan-ethnic racial signifier “Asian-American.”

In contrast, my interest in *No-No Boy* and political subjectivity is not to discern an originary Japanese American identity that emerges in antagonism to an American national identity but instead to distill, at the level of political subjectivity, the way the political rationalities of the practices of total war liberal governmentality are mediated by race and constituted dispossession as a contradictory racial experience in alignment with the aims of the liberal state. In particular, I argue that this alignment is achieved by racializing Japanese culture through the gendered and sexual norms of the reproductive family.

## I

John Okada’s *No-No Boy* is a novel that tracks the experiences and movements of Ichiro Yamada upon his return to Seattle from prison. As the titular character of the novel, his status as

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<sup>92</sup> Hirabayashi, Gordon, and John Okada. "Review of *No-No Boy*." *Pacific Affairs*. 53.1 (1980): 176-177. Print.

<sup>93</sup> Nothing speaks to his hagiographic status than the mythic status that surrounds Okada’s lost second novel. Frank Chin famously recounts this tragedy in his trip with Lawson Inada to meet with Dorothy Okada, John’s wife. Upon their meeting, she explains to both Frank and Lawson that she had burned John almost completed novel on the Issei after its existence was met with indifference by his family.

a no-no boy—a derogatory term that refers to Japanese Americans who stated “no” to questions 27 and 28 on the infamous “loyalty questionnaire”—organizes the movement and development of the plot. Within the novel, “no-no boy” takes on a much larger meaning than a simple pejorative. It marks a profound psychic turmoil whose terms appear to be the seeming incommensurability between Japanese and American culture. Beyond this, I suggest that the category of “no-no boy” indexes something far more complicated than what the binary structure implies. Rather, what emerges as an apparent opposition is an effect and conduit of power through which racialization occurs, one that, I suggest, is profoundly gendered and sexualized.

To bear this out, we must be attentive to the opening sequence of the novel. Through this, we are introduced to Ichiro for the first time as he returns to Seattle after a two year stint in prison for refusing to enter military service. In the process of walking to his parent’s store, he is recognized and stopped by Eto Minato, an inactive army personnel who had also recently returned to Seattle. The dialogue that ensues is what can be best described as a classic scene of interpellation:

The round face wasn’t smiling any more. It was thoughtful. The eyes confronted Ichiro with indecision which changed slowly to enlightenment and then to suspicion. He remembered. He knew.

The friendliness was gone as he said: ‘No-no boy, huh?’

Ichiro wanted to say yes. He wanted to return the look of despising hatred and say simply yes, but it was too much to say. The walls had closed in and were crushing all the unspoken words back down into his stomach. He shook his head once, not wanting to evade the eyes but find it impossible to meet them. Out of his big weakness the little ones

were branching, and the eyes he didn't have the courage to face were present. If it would have helped to gouge out own eyes, he would have done so long ago. (3)

In this “little theoretical theatre,” we find Eto Minato acting as a State Ideological Apparatus, ‘hailing’ Ichiro as “no-no boy” and whose profound success is signaled by both Ichiro’s silent admission, his anticipatory recognition (“He remembered. He knew.”) and his tortured understanding. In bearing this in mind, we must be attentive to the precise relations in this theatre of interpellation. In this instance, “no-no boy” names not merely a free standing identity but rather a position within a dyadic structure that situates it under the purview of a “Unique, Absolute, Other Subject.”<sup>94</sup> In other words, “no-no boy” is a subject-position whose terms are dictated by the State as an Ideal Subject. But we should not be mistaken to think that Eto occupies that position of the State. Rather he only represent its symbolic position via “the horrible significance of his army clothes.” Furthermore, his capacity to do so is actually predicated on a prior ‘hailing’ as a US soldier. Thus, what makes possible the shame of Ichiro and the ire of Eto is the mediation of the State as the Symbol of the Law between their respective subject positions as ‘no-no boy’ and US Japanese soldier. I underscore all this not only because this initial encounter comes to frame Ichiro’s psychic turmoil as a “no-no boy” whose resolution never occurs by the novel’s end but, more significantly, because of the precise ideological structure of the problem of ‘no-no boy’ onto which the racialized incommensurability of Japanese and American culture are mapped via the circuits of gender and sexuality.

With that in mind, even though the majority of the novel is focalized from the standpoint of Ichiro, for which we might think the psychic turmoil of ‘no-no boy’ is a private matter, we

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<sup>94</sup> Borrowing from Lacan’s famous formulation of the mirror-stage in the psychic formation of the subject, Louis Althusser differentiates between a lower case subject and upper case Subject as distinct but deeply interdependent ideological positions. For Althusser, this dyad forms the core structure of ideology

must recognize that it is an expression of this ideological structure that is dialectically linked to the US Japanese soldier, both of whose origins lay with their respective relations to the US state as an ideal Subject. The novel comes to thematize this relation through the friendship that develops between Ichiro and Kenji Kanno, a US veteran soldier. Significantly, Kenji is marked socially and bodily in the novel. On the one hand, he is marked by rumors that have spread of his inhuman ferocity and bloodlust during his tour in Europe and, on the other hand, he bears a bodily trace of this experience through the loss of his leg, which turns out to be progressively killing him as it requires repeated amputation. As a consequence, Kenji retains a socially marginal position that becomes the basis of his friendship with Ichiro. Yet, it is clear that their respective marginalized positions are not identical, but constitutively linked to one another. We find this most clearly expressed in an early scene where Ichiro and Kenji meet up for drinks at Club Oriental during which they continue an earlier discussion on exchanging their places with each other. By its end, Ichiro reflects on their quiet intimacy and the irony of their mirrored status:

So they sat silently through the next drink, one already dead but still alive and contemplating fifty or sixty years more of dead aliveness, and the other, living and dying slowly. They were two extremes, the Japanese who was more American than most Americans because he had crept to the brink of death for America, and the other who was neither Japanese nor American because he had failed to recognize the gift of his birthright when recognition meant everything. (73)

Here, by differently conjoining binary oppositions of life and death (e.g. “dead aliveness” and “living and dying slowly”), the passage underscores Ichiro’s and Kenji’s status as opposite polarities on a spectrum of national membership. Yet more than this, it describes the character of each position in terms of America. For Ichiro, he is consigned forever with civil dishonor, a status whose permanence cannot be avoided as it is lodged into the depths of his psyche and socially re-inscribed by the impossibility of national recognition. For Kenji, he is granted an ironic national honor as its attainment is achieved by going too far in the social logics of American recognition and whose cost is a fleeting existence. With that said, we may be tempted to read “America” to be naming an “imagined community,” whose “style of imagining” fosters identification organized around patriotic love of a bounded and horizontally conceived community.<sup>95</sup> Yet, in this instance, the meditation on “America” has less to do with the fraternity of national camaraderieship than the existential certainty of membership (i.e. the relations between individuals and the relation of an individual to a collective) in the first place and on whose structure patriotic desire is cathected.

Thus, instead of Anderson, we must turn to Balibar to understand the form of identification that goes under the sign of “America.” Within his account of the nation form, Balibar sees this more foundational identification to be directed not to an ideal nation but to the state and constituted through the production of a “fictive ethnicity.”<sup>96</sup> Accordingly, to understand the problem intimated in this scene, we must see it to be describing a particular contradiction of the state. As we see in the passage, the basis of Ichiro’s dread is the uncertainty of any membership altogether while Kenji’s dread is the effect of his uptake of a national mission

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<sup>95</sup> For this now classic formulation of nationalism, see Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins of Nationalism*

<sup>96</sup> See Etienne Balibar’s foundational essay “The Nation Form: History and Ideology” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*”

whose logics have launched him psychically and socially outside of the bounded horizons of the nation. In this way, I argue that their dread affectively marks how their dialectically linked subject positions evidence an immanent contradiction of the state's claim to both universal rationality and ultimate ethical representation. To understand this phenomenon, we must briefly turn to the psychic drama of the colonial scene as theorized by Homi Bhabha. In doing so, I most certainly do not want suggest that colonial domination is equivalent to the dispossession of internment but rather that they find kinship to one another to the degree to which each produces a psychic alienation and elicits a spiritual striving. With that in mind, Bhabha, in reading Franz Fanon's work, writes the following:

In articulating the problem of colonial cultural alienation in the psychoanalytic language of demand and desire, Fanon radically questions the formation of both individual and social authority as they come to be developed in the discourse of social sovereignty. The social virtues of historical rationality, cultural cohesion, the autonomy of individual consciousness assume an immediate, Utopian identity with the subjects on whom they confer a civil status. The civil state is the ultimate expression of the innate ethical and rational bent of the human mind; the social instinct is the progressive destiny of human nature, the necessary transition from Nature to Culture. The direct access from individual interests to social authority is objectified in the representative structure of a General Will—Law or Culture—where Psyche and Society mirror each other, transparently translating their difference, without loss, into a historical totality. Forms of social and psychic alienation and aggression—madness, self-hate, treason, violence—can never be acknowledged as determinate and constitutive conditions of civil authority, or as the

ambivalent effects of the social instinct itself. They are always explained away as alien presences, occlusions of historical progress, the ultimate misrecognition of Man. (62)

Here, Bhabha explains how the experience of “colonial cultural alienation” is a deviation from and a site of materialist critique of a normative formation of the (citizen) subject. Within this normative account, the formation of the subject is described as a process of sublation in which the “immediate, [u]topian identity” of the subject with the “civil state” is the alignment of the civil state’s universal claim as “the ultimate expression of the innate ethical and rational bent of the human mind” to the particular “autonomy of individual consciousness” via the general categories of “social virtue.” Described as a syncing of particular (i.e. subject), general (i.e. citizen), and universal (i.e. state), they form a “historical totality” that can attest to “the progressive destiny of human nature.” Though Bhabha does not say it in these exact terms, we can say that, as a dialectical unity, this formation of the subject disavows the uneven material conditions that make such idealism possible. As the bearers of the state’s disavowal, Fanon’s subject experiences it as “madness, self-hate, treason, violence” that actually attests to the material ways the colonized subject is a constitutive exclusion from the category of the citizen, which ultimately renders the colonized subject to be non-identical to the Human.

Keeping in mind the way the state disavows the material conditions of its ideal universality (i.e. “innate ethical and rational bent of the human mind”), we are now in a place to fully comprehend the dialectical links between Ichiro and Kenji. That is, their dread and profound experience of dislocation expresses how the state “can never [...] acknowledge[...].” the way the subject positions of “no-no boy” and “U.S. Japanese soldier” are “determinate and constitutive conditions of civil authority [and] the ambivalent effects of the social instinct itself,”

respectively. To be more historically concrete, “no-no boy” discloses the contradiction between the state’s claim to universal ethical representation (i.e. the international scope of American universalism most clearly formulated in the “Four Freedoms”) which undergirds the state’s “civil authority” and the recuperative practices of total war liberal governmentality in World War II that give it concrete national form. While, the “US Japanese soldier” “who was more American than most Americans,” exposes both the state’s contradiction of not only the irrational violence within the rational organization and deployment of military violence by the US state’s total war regime and the state’s need to distance itself from such irrational violence through the production of icons of American universals. That is to say, Kenji’s contradictory status as “more American than most Americans” but, at the same time, profoundly socially ostracized, signals how the formation of racially organized military units were not entirely for the maintenance of Jim Crow segregation but also operated symbolically to embody the largesse of the US state, i.e. to trump the ethical universality of the state. Yet, at the same time, they operate materially as agents of violence, a violence whose rational aim was to maintain the ethical universality of the state, but whose necessary excesses comes to contradict its pristine character. These are the material contradictions of the U.S. state that must be disavowed, lest the state’s universality falter.

## II

In the case of the practice of Japanese internment, the precise way in which the state disavows these material contradictions is not simply the legal extension of citizenship but rather, as I have explained in the previous section, the interpellation of those constitutively excluded subject-positions into national subjectivity. Indeed, as Mae Ngai explains, cultural assimilation

became the explicit process of integrating the Japanese into the fold of liberal democracy, linking together “American culture” to the abstract and universal norms and values of liberal democracy promulgated by and putatively embodied in the state. As she explains, “WRA [War Relocation Authority] officials in fact did not believe that all Japanese were racially inclined to disloyalty. Rather, they practiced a kind of benevolent assimilation, which used cultural assimilation to both measure and produce Japanese Americans’ loyalty” (177). Thus, the interpellation of the Japanese through culture is the precise mechanism for the disavowal of those material contradictions of the state. It is for that reason the novel focuses so exclusively on the interiority of both Ichiro and Kenji, constantly narrating their emotional and psychic turmoil. Yet, as an ideal resolution, I would argue that the state cannot resolve those contradictions completely but instead leaves a material trace, located, in this instance, at the level of subjectivity itself and made publically legible through the language of “race.” In other words, the state attempts and subsequently fails to ideally resolve its material contradictions via the interpellation of the Japanese. Such failure is not only indexed subjectively by feelings of “dread” and social dislocation but, more significantly, it is signaled materially through the racialization of culture.

The novel comes to show this connection between ‘race,’ subjectivity, and the state in general terms in a scene that meditates on the complexities of belonging. In it, the novel presents Kenji in Club Oriental quietly sipping his drink and mentally cataloguing all the people there that enable his sense of belonging. His appreciation of his racially defined belonging leads to a recognition that a hallmark of white privilege is the entitlement of belonging in all places. Yet, what follows comes to completely undermine Kenji’s certainty of an absolute distinction of such privilege along a white/non-white racial binary. A commotion occurs at the entrance of Club Orient where Jim Eng, the owner, prevents a Japanese man and his two black friends to enter.

Afterwards, many of the patrons use racial epithets to agree with the de facto policy of excluding black people from the bar. Tellingly, a white redhead woman announces her appreciation of everyone but is then quickly silenced by her Japanese escort. In disgust of the preceding events, Kenji storms out of the bar.

This scene illustrates the way racial belonging is not only undergirded by complicated practices and power relations of both inter-racial differences and the intersection of race and gender but also the way those ideal notions of belonging mediate those practices and power relations. In other words, we can understand the actions that transpire at the entrance of Club Oriental to be exposing not simply how belonging necessarily means others will not belong and often requires exclusionary practices to maintain the coherency of belonging, but more profoundly, how a disjunction exist at the heart of the experience of belonging itself. Indeed, we see rather plainly in the scene how anti-black racism maintains the racial homogeneity of Club Oriental and how exclusionary practices are used to police its boundaries. Furthermore, through the novel's pointed acknowledgement of the presence of a white redheaded woman in the club, we recognize that the racial boundaries of place are not absolutely demarcated. Instead gender and sexuality are categories of power that meaningfully shape those boundaries and determine how that place is lived. Specifically, white female sexuality, in that instance, is fetishized as a badge of masculine social empowerment in response to racialized social structures and forces that organize social life in the city.

Yet, more than all this, the scene's rendering of Kenji's horror and shock to this revelation points to the way that his subjective experience of belonging productively rests on a fundamental ambiguity— does his belonging occur because of his identity as an “oriental” or does his belonging occur because of the exclusionary practices? Obviously, the answer is both

but the value of this scene is the way it points to the different levels in which belonging is achieved. On a material level, those exclusionary practices constitute the very social structure that secures Kenji's belonging in Club Oriental. But, on an ideal and normative level, the discursive practices that constitute his identity come to naturalize the place, cathecting his desires on to it. As he states, "It's like a home away from home only more precious because one expects home to be like that. Not many places a Jap can go to and feel so completely at ease" (133). Importantly, this sense of ease and feeling of home, the very experience of belonging, functions as the normative constraints that enable the reproduction of Club Oriental as a racialized, gendered, and sexualized social space. With that in mind, we can understand then that Kenji's shock over the actions at the entrance of Club Oriental was occasioned by the way that idealism came to contradict the material practices that secure it. In other words, rather than naturalizing the racial homogeneity of Club Oriental as a "natural" social response to larger social forces, carving a safe space away from endemic racialized social violence and violations, the feeling of belonging and home is unveiled to be the basis for racialized and gendered social violations.

However, we should not see this alignment of the ideal and material practices of belonging to be an inherent property of race. Rather this racial belonging is a response to wider forms of material exclusions and ideal impossibilities. As Kenji explains directly after his announcement of his appreciation of racial belonging, "It must be nice to be white and American and to be able to feel like this no matter where one goes to" (133). Here, the idea of universal access to and belonging in all places is a badge of privilege of those who are "white and American." Though Kenji points to whiteness as a status that enables universal belonging, it is precisely whiteness's conjunction with America that establishes the normativity of universal belonging. In other words, the ideal possibility and normative assertion of universal access and

belonging in all places is founded on the notion of citizenship but this ideal is secured materially through whiteness. Thus, true origins of Kenji's normative assumption that ideally structure racial belonging is not simply a response but an ironic inheritance from the twining of whiteness and America via citizenship.

To be clear, the preceding discussion of belonging and its relation to race, subjectivity, and the state has been to show the way in which the novel comes to demonstrate how 'race' emerges as the discursive marker to the material contradictions of the state that its ideal forms obscure. With that in mind, we are now in a place to tackle the specific way in which the state's ideal resolution of its material contradiction (i.e. the dispossession in Japanese internment) through the interpellation of Japanese into national subjectivity lodges that contradiction into subjectivity and reproduces 'race' anew through the racialization of culture. Indeed, I want to suggest that the novel's overriding concern over the incommensurability between Japanese "culture" and American "culture" names the convergence of the state's displacement of its contradiction onto subjectivity and the reproduction of 'race.' That is, the antagonism is not the conflict of values, principles, or traditions of two pre-existing anthropological 'cultures' rather this antagonism describes the experience of racialization itself as the product of the state's disavowal of its material contradictions through its interpellation of those constitutively excluded subject-positions into national subjectivity.

We find the novel bears this point out in the conflict between Ichiro and his mother. For the most part, the novel paints Ichiro's relationship with his mother to be the ultimate cause of his social alienation and psychic torment because, for Ichiro, his rejection of the army and imprisonment and subsequent social dishonor as a "no-no boy" results from his submission to his mother's unwavering pride in Japan and her adamant rejection of "cultural" assimilation. To be

fair, there are brief moments where Ichiro acknowledges the impact of political and economic factors but, for him, they are subordinate to the enormity of his mother's influence on him. Told in this way, the intensity and depth of Ichiro's conflict with his mother goes well beyond a family drama of a child's struggle for independence from his mother as that independence moves from a social requirement to an existential need. Or better said, it is precisely that kind of family drama but revved up to such a degree that it reaches pathological levels. Hence, inflected in the description of Ichiro's detachment from his mother and Ichiro's own reflections on that struggle, we find that he desires more than independence from her will. He desires a release from her pathology. For Ichiro, his mother's immense pride in all things "Japanese" and rejection of all things "American" is ultimately psychotic as it blinds her from the reality of World War II's outcome. In that sense, Ichiro's separation from his mother's influence is coded as a return to sanity.

Described in these terms, the novel certainly invites a naïve psychological reading in which the political and social factors are irrelevant to a more primary process of social individuation and psychic development through the family. Yet, this kind of reading is only provided in the beginning of the novel since, with the death of Ichiro's mother two-thirds of the way in, his social alienation and psychic torment never get resolved. Instead, by the novel's end, we are left with both a sense that his torment had more to do with larger social and political factors and that its resolution would occur in some distant moment beyond the narrative confines of the novel. As the narrator prophetically states at the novel's end: "He walked along, thinking, search, thinking and probing, and, in the darkness of the alley of the community that was a tiny bit of America, he chased that faint and elusive insinuation of promise as it continued to take shape in mind and in heart" (251). Bearing in mind America's "faint and elusive insinuation of

promise,” indeed liberal democracy’s promises, we must follow my attention to operations of the state. This re-orient us to see pathology to be not the expression of a deviant family rather to be an effect of the way political exigencies impact the way family operates as an instrument of the power within political life and mediate it.

We find this play out in how the interpellation of Japanese into the universality of the state, coded as assimilation into American culture, comes to racialize “Japanese culture.” I want to suggest that this racialization gets embodied as race through the gendered and sexual norms of the family. We find this process expressed through Ichiro’s desire for “recognition as a complete human being” since that desire gets coded as acceptance into “America” in spite of his “Japaneseness” and is profoundly mediated in his masculine struggle for independence from the influence and “psychosis” of his mother. This complex intersection and mediation of citizenship, culture, race, gender, and sexuality is most clearly distilled in Ichiro’s jumbled reflections on his alienation from America after his first encounter with his mother upon his return to Seattle. I quote it at length:

No, he said to himself as he watched her part the curtains and start into the store. There was a time when I was your son. There was a time that I no longer remember when you used to smile a mother’s smile and tell me stories about gallant and fierce warriors who protected their lords with blades of shining steel and about the old woman who found a peach in the stream and took it home and, when her husband split it in half, a husky little boy tumbled out to fill their hearts with boundless joy. I was that boy in the peach and you were the old woman and we were Japanese with Japanese feelings and Japanese pride and Japanese thoughts because it was all right then to be Japanese and feel and

think all the things that Japanese do even if we lived in America. Then there came a time when I was only half Japanese because one is not born in America and raised in America and taught in America and one does not speak and swear and drink and smoke and play and fight and see and hear in America among Americans in American streets and houses without becoming American and loving it. But I did not love enough, for you were still half my mother and I was thereby still half Japanese and when the war came and they told to fight for America, I was not strong enough to fight you and I was not strong enough to fight the bitterness which made the half of me which was you bigger than the half of me which was America and really the whole of me that I could not see or feel. Now that I know truth when it is too late and the half of me which is no longer there, I am only half of me and the half that remains is American by law because the government was wise and strong enough to know why it was that I could not fight for America and did not strip me of my birthright. But it is not enough to be American only in the eyes of the law and it not enough to be only half an American and know that it an empty half. I am not your son and I am not Japanese and I am not American. I can go someplace and tell people that I've got an inverted stomach and that I am an American, true and blue and Hail Columbia, but the army wouldn't have me because of the stomach. That's easy and I would do it, only I've got to convince myself first and that I cannot do. I wish with all my heart that I were Japanese or that I were American. I am neither and I blame you and I blame myself and I blame the world which is made up of many countries which fight with each other and kill and hate and destroy but not enough, so that they must kill and hate and destroy again and again and again. It is so easy and simple that I cannot understand it at all. And the reason I do not understand it is because I do not understand

you who were the half of me that is no more and because I do not understand what it was about that half that made me destroy that half of me which was American and the half which might have become the whole of me if I had said yes I will go and fight in your army because that is what I believe and want and cherish and love... (15-17)

Reminiscent of W.E.B. Dubois's famous formulation of "double consciousness,"<sup>97</sup> the passage describes the tension between being both Japanese and American at the level of subjectivity itself. Yet, unlike Dubois who recuperates "double consciousness" to be not an experience of pathology but actually offering prophetic insights into universalist ideals encapsulated in "America," here, there is only an intense anguishing over the unreconcilability of Japanese and America. Significantly, we find that this antagonism is not inherent property of these identities but rather, as presented above, complexly historical. As we see, the passage actually narrates a movement of the splitting of Ichiro's identity—from fairytale origins as the "boy in the peach" who was wholly Japanese with Japanese feelings, pride, and thoughts to his unproblematic hybrid composition as "half Japanese" who became American and "lov[ed] it" to his dilemma between his "bigger" "half Japanese[ness]" that is rooted in his mother and his American half that is "really the whole of [him]" to his fallen condition as neither American nor Japanese. Described in that way, the passage is narrating not just a splitting of Ichiro's identity from a homogeneous whole into parts but also its reconstitution as an articulation of those parts into integrated wholes as well as the complete sundering of it altogether through the disarticulation of its parts to be completely incompatible.

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<sup>97</sup> Dubois explains "double consciousness" as follows: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

Given this movement, I suggest that this passage narrates a history of Japanese racialization as it impacts subjectivity itself. Importantly, we should not conceive of the binary opposition of “Japanese” and “American” to be naming distinct substances that are inherently antagonistic to one another. Rather, we should think this binary opposition to be the epistemological form that comes to naturalize “America” as an ethically universal basis of state authority by making “Japanese” its inauthentic double.<sup>98</sup> The pairing of “Japanese” and “American” with each other as categories of identification raises “American” as the valued term over and against “Japanese.” Yet, this elevation of “American” as a site of fecundity and universality relies on the implicit denigration of “Japanese” as its simulacrum in order to retain its lofty heights and value. For instance, Ichiro himself announces that “America [was] really the whole of me” in contrast to his “Japanese half” based in his mother. Incidentally, the role of the mother actually enables this formal logic to be concretely experience, which I will speak to in a moment. Furthermore, if “American” as a category of identification refers to a universal ethical community that enables Ichiro’s “wholeness,” and which comes to legitimate and naturalize the U.S. state as the proper arbiter of that ideal community, then we find that “Japanese” refers to a particular ‘culture’ that impedes his full membership. Indeed, in the passage, we see that the “Japanese” refers to “feelings,” “pride,” and “thought” framed in a fairytale story of the “boy in the peach” instead of some sort of bodily biological essence. This is not to suggest the body is not absolutely crucial rather that the way “Japanese” gets counterpoised to “American” is by racializing “culture” as the impediment to the universality of “American.” Given the operation of this binary epistemological form, it impacts subjectivity not by interpellating the subject into a distinct “Japanese” identity separate from “American” identity. Instead this binary

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<sup>98</sup> For a similar critique of binary epistemological forms in the domain of sexuality, see Judith Butler’s critique of the heterosexual sexual matrix and constitution of the ‘homosexual’ as inauthentic copy in *Gender Trouble*

epistemological form structures the splitting the racialized subject as both “Japanese” and “American.” In other words, Ichiro’s subjectivity is structured through both the categories “Japanese” and “American” as antagonistic pairs. It is in that sense we should understand his experience of racialization.

Now, even though I have argued that the passage demonstrates the racialization of “culture,” I want to suggest that at its center sits the gendered body. More specifically, I would suggest that the gendered body makes not only the ideal abstraction of “American” in opposition to “Japanese” for the state possible but it also makes Ichiro’s experience of racialization as race concrete. In the passage, the binary opposition of “Japanese” and “American” as an epistemological form works through the language of parts and wholes. Yet, in order for that language of parts and wholes to be meaningful as not pure abstraction, it needs grounding in a concrete form, namely Ichiro’s body. Indeed, this reference to his body is explicitly and implicitly referenced throughout the passage—from Ichiro’s odd hypothetical situation in which the army would reject him because of an inverted stomach even though he was “American” to, more deeply, the bodily reproductive logic that simultaneously was the reason for Ichiro’s incapacity to accept America as the “whole of [him]” and his retention of his “birthright” from the state. Thus, the body functions as the concept-metaphor through which the abstraction of “Japanese” and “American” is made legible. Yet, this body is not any body, but a gendered one as Ichiro’s denial to the loftiness of American universalism occurs through the power of his mother. As he stammers, “for you were still half my mother and I was thereby still half Japanese [...] I was not strong enough to fight you and I was not strong enough to fight the bitterness which was you.” Here, then, his mother is not simply the symbol of this racialized culture, she is the very source of this culture that he has inherited. Thus, this gendered reproductive logic comes

to not only impeded his own self-abstraction into universality of “American” and thereby, through its failure, makes that abstraction an actual universal ideal. Moreover, that gendered reproductive logic also comes to recursively make his ‘inability’ of self-abstraction a racial character of himself, which can concretely experience through a metaphORIZATION of his body.

...

Throughout the chapter, I have placed the experience of racialized dispossession in Japanese internment within a genealogy of the political culture of dispossession. To do so, the chapter has situated its problematization within the political crisis of World War II war mobilization on the West Coast, particularly emphasizing how that crisis indexed a “sublation” of the historical “dialectic of race and nation.” In the process, the chapter has shown the formation of historically distinct political rationalities in practices of a total war liberal governmentality found in Japanese internment. Indeed, these political rationalities index distinct phases of the US liberal state relation to ‘race’ during World War II as its practices, at one moment, sought to contain a racial enemy but later sought to incorporate racially excluded population as citizens. In both respects, the experience of dispossession was primarily a symbolic issue of legal citizenship that was in contradiction to one another. The political subjectivity that formed out of them, thus, contained this contradiction and was mediated in and through race. To see how this worked, the chapter turned to John Okada’s *No-No Boy*. There, the chapter showed how race mediated these political rationalities and occupied its contradiction through the figures of the “no-no boy” and the “Japanese citizen-soldier.” Furthermore, I showed should how “resolution” of that contradiction comes to double “race,” through the racialization of Japanese culture. But, in doing so, it extends that contradiction into the domain of gender and sexuality

through a reliance on the gendered and sexual norms of reproductive family to racialize Japanese culture.

These elements make up the system that forms the experience of racialized dispossession in Japanese internment and, in turn, constitute different formation of the political culture of dispossession. Yet, the entanglement of race and citizenship in experience of dispossession as well as the entanglement of technical modernity and whiteness are not the only historical formations that have made the political culture of dispossession. As the following chapter will demonstrate political empowerment also sits at its center.

**Chapter 3: Great Society Liberal Governmentality and Political Dispossession: Community Action, The Poor, and Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People***

“[T]he poor are politically invisible... They are without lobbies of their own; they put forward no legislative program. As a group, they are atomized. They have no face; they have no voice... Only the social agencies have a really direct involvement with the other America, and they are without any great political power.”

- Michael Harrington *The Other America*

“To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question.”

- Emmanuelle Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*

Throughout the course of this dissertation, each chapter has honed in on a distinct political conjuncture and crisis where social figures of dispossession (e.g. the dispossessed white farmer or the dispossessed Japanese American) achieved a pronounced political salience. In focusing on these figures, the dissertation has taken them to be indices of not only particular forms of experiencing dispossession but also historical configurations of power that make those experiences possible. In this respect, these nodal moments designate distinct histories of what I have called our contemporary political culture of dispossession, one that experiences dispossession to be the loss of liberal democracy. Indeed, the preceding chapters have shown the racial, gendered, and sexual norms that have constituted political subjectivities aligned with and attached to the aims of the liberal state through the recuperative practices of liberal

governmentalities that seek to restore those population deemed to have been dispossessed of technical modernity (Chapter 1) or legal citizenship (Chapter 2).

This chapter shifts its critical focus to the figure of the abstract poor and their experience of dispossession as the loss of political power. To that end, I would like to turn to Dwight MacDonald's book review entitled "Our Invisible Poor." Published in *The New Yorker* on January 19<sup>th</sup> 1963, MacDonald examined recent studies on poverty that collectively pointed to its persistence in the face of US post-war prosperity. Among the studies under review, which included works by famed economist J.K. Galbraith, "Our Invisible Poor" looked at Michael Harrington's popular press book, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*. From MacDonald's attention, *The Other America* became immensely popular, not only raising the problem of poverty to national consciousness but, more importantly, to the awareness of Kennedy administration itself. Though by no means would I suggest that MacDonald's review prompted federal campaigns to end poverty, most iconically found in the later Johnson administration's "War on Poverty," it, along with Harrington's book, does embody the sentiment behind the moral panics over poverty.

Before moving into the wider historical and socio-political ambit, I consider MacDonald's text to discern the contents of the moral panic over poverty. Like most writing on poverty since the nineteenth century, "Our Invisible Poor" is characterized by a deep tension about its proper target of criticism between, on the one hand, poverty as a socially produced economic condition and, on the other hand, the poor as a population. Within liberal reformist writing of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the stress has been mainly placed on "the poor" who are marked both by bourgeois anxiety about their potential violence and revolutionary class conflict and a reformist paternalism about their fecklessness and need for moral guidance to

raise themselves out of their abject condition. In many respects, MacDonald continues with this tradition as he quite explicitly separates out an inquiry into unequal distribution of wealth and the condition of poverty. This is particularly apparent when he blandly asserts, “Inequality of wealth is not necessarily a major social problem per se. Poverty is” (3). Notwithstanding how this assertion is initially acknowledged as “theoretically possible” and then taken as a matter of fact, MacDonald’s dry claim does beg the question: what exactly is poverty if not the product of inequality? MacDonald spends a lot of time answering this question by summarizing and evaluating recent studies on poverty, noting the limits of a purely quantitative understanding of poverty due to historical relativity and geographic variation. Given this empirical conundrum, MacDonald stresses the qualitative dimensions of poverty, particularly, following Harrington, the isolation and invisibility that comes with poverty.

Through this emphasis on invisibility, I would suggest MacDonald moves away from his late nineteenth/early twentieth century forerunners. To be clear, in asserting that MacDonald’s piece marks a transformation in the understanding of poverty, I do not want to imply that he got poverty ‘wrong.’ I seek, rather, to examine the normative effects of his particular construction. With that said, “invisibility” becomes central to MacDonald’s account precisely because it provides an alternative structural explanation of poverty that is connected to but distinct from unequal distribution of wealth. MacDonald makes this point by quoting the following from Harrington:

The poor are increasingly slipping out of the very experience and consciousness of the nation. If the middle class never did like ugliness and poverty, it was at least aware of them. ‘Across the tracks’ was not a very long way to go...Now the American city has been transformed. The poor still inhabit the miserable housing in the central area, but they are

increasingly isolated from contact with, or sight, of anybody else...Living out in the suburbs, it is easy to assume that ours is indeed, an affluent society...

Clothes make the poor invisible too: America has the best-dressed poverty the world has ever known. . . . It is much easier in the United States to be decently dressed than it is to be decently housed, fed, or doctored. . . .

Many of the poor are the wrong age to be seen. A good number of them are sixty-five years of age or better; an even larger number are under eighteen. . . .

[T]he poor are politically invisible...They are without lobbies of their own; they put forward no legislative program. As a group, they are atomized. They have no face; they have no voice...Only the social agencies have a really direct involvement with the other America, and they are without any great political power.

Forty to fifty million people are becoming increasingly invisible. (4)

As narrated above, “invisibility” implicitly acts as the figural lynchpin that connects the visual absence of the poor to their political disempowerment. Under this logic, the poor lack political representation because they no longer occupy public concern due to their physical isolation brought on by the post-war political economy of urban space. Besides naturalizing this process, what is striking here is how the passage’s structural and historical account of the “invisibility” of poverty makes poverty less about the inadequate access to the means of subsistence and more about social and political representation. This is not to say that MacDonald does not speak about poverty in terms of the former, indeed, his review both translates the empirical measure of poverty into representative cases and demarcates levels of immiseration, distinguishing empirically between a condition of deprivation and poverty.

Yet, in isolating these economic conditions from the political economic process of distribution and presenting in its place an account of the structural invisibility of the poor, “Our Invisible Poor” makes “invisibility” into a catechresis that conjoins a complicated series of social processes, historical events, and social conditions of poverty into a seamless absent human figure that obscures precise connections across these social processes through the very figural clarity of the human form. A lack of political power, a lack of public concern, a lack of the means of subsistence, a lack of proper phenomenal appearance are all unified in the singular trope of “invisibility.” This alignment achieves its unifying powers by analogizing the former political, normative, and economic conditions to the latter phenomenal one. Hence, this figural relation, at once, eases and mystifies how we can conceptualize the connection across these social forces and conditions. This effect, I would argue, comes from the way the category of the poor in “Our Invisible Poor” shuttles between a social scientific register to a moral one. Indeed, both MacDonald’s sheer enumeration of the shared characteristics of “the poor”—from psychological to physical, from emotional to values and ideas—and his attribution of a singular history makes the poor not simply an empirical population category but instead a subject (i.e. “a people”) with positive content and agentive capacities. Of course, this is not new. Yet, what makes this significant, in this case, is not only how it acts as the implicit figure that connects the “invisibility” of the political, normative, and phenomenal levels through its form but also how, with its articulation to invisibility, it reorients the moral valence of poverty and renders it to be more than a lack of the means of subsistence. Rather, it becomes a profound experience of political and, indeed, human dispossession by being dispossessed of the very political qualities that make one human in the first place.

To get at this more concretely, let us linger for a bit on how MacDonald's quote from Harrington, that I quoted earlier, stages a moral judgment in the phenomenal (non)-encounter with the poor. Indeed, MacDonald emphasizes this moral stance since his strategic quoting of Harrington ends up excising Harrington's more extensive political economic explanation of this phenomenal absence. For instance, he removes Harrington's discussion of the changes in the housing market, effects of city planning, accessibility of clothing with the mass production of apparel, and the political calculations and strategies of election. In MacDonald's emphasis, the (national) public only experiences the poor negatively. More precisely, MacDonald's constitutes the poor, on the one hand, as a knowable empirical object through the review of the academic studies of poverty but, on the other hand, the poor are constituted as a subject dispossessed of the properties for proper ethical recognition through MacDonald's emphasis on their phenomenal invisibility. Indeed, the quote as a whole turns out to be a moral judgment that frames its series of empirical statement to be tragic. This is most aptly shown in Harrington's phrase that "They [the poor] have no face; they have no voice." The moral force of this phrase hangs on the work of the semicolon to conjoin the declarative statements to form a singular image—the absent expressive face. The phrase describes not simply that the poor as individual bodily subjects lack a face and additionally lack a voice but rather, in combing the lack of both, indexes a more profound dispossession whose meaning is signaled by an absence of a face that expresses like a voice.

This absent expressive face, I would argue, recalls what ethical philosopher Emmanuel Levinas calls the "face of the Other."<sup>99</sup> There is much that can be said about Levinasian ethics;

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<sup>99</sup> In Levinasian ethics, the "face" is the metonym of "the Other" through which "the Other" makes and presses ethical demands and obligations onto the Subject. Importantly, Levinas describes this ethical relation to be profoundly asymmetrical whereby the "Other's" demand comes, like God, from on high. Yet, even though this demand comes in the form of a commandment (e.g. "Thou shall not kill), it is presented through the Other's absolute

however, most important for my purpose, is how the ethical injunction in the “face of the Other”<sup>100</sup> works through representation. Judith Butler, in *Precarious Life*, provides a useful gloss of this process and its counter-intuitive logic. She writes,

For Levinas, then, the human is not *represented* by the face. Rather, the human is indirectly affirmed in that very disjunction that makes representation impossible, and this disjunction is conveyed in the impossible representation. For representation to convey the human, then representation must not only fail, but it must *show* its failure. There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give. (*italics in original*, 144)

In Butler’s account of representation and ethics, we must be attentive to the delicate operation of representation in disclosing the human as an ethical figure. That is, the “face of the Other” neither represents the human directly by mimesis nor indirectly by the negation of representation. Instead the face represents the human asymptotically by highlighting the inadequacy of representation to fully represent.<sup>101</sup> Thus, as Butler explains, “the human is not identified with what is represented but neither is it identified with the unrepresentable; it is, rather, that which

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vulnerability or what Judith Butler calls “the precariousness of life itself” (Butler, 134). In this respect, the Subject’s experience of the ethical injunction as a violation (one so powerful it can, in Levinas account, elicit a response of murder as much as it elicits an recognition of responsibility) operates as a reminder of the primacy of the ethical relation—one characterized by the Other’s precarity—against accounts that begin with the sovereignty of the Subject. Emmanuelle Levinas “Totality and Infinity”

<sup>100</sup> The “Other” is a complicated concept in Levinas since it is not reducible to an ‘other’ human rather it signifies an infinite ethical demand. In this respect, Levinasian ethics is an anthropocentric ethical system that, at the same time, resist being anthropomorphic. Hence, what is key to the “face of the Other” is its expressive capacity for which can be figured through other bodily features other than the human face.

<sup>101</sup> The problem of mimetic representation for ethics is how it privileges the sovereignty of the Subject via the containment of the Other’s alterity through the Subject’s conceptual powers while the problem of negating representation for ethics is how it ultimately disavows the ethical relation in the first place by (dis)locating the Other through indeterminacy. In contrast, the face as the failure of representation itself demonstrates the limits of the Subject’s conceptual powers to capture the Other while simultaneously maintaining the Other’s presence and primacy in the ethical relation.

limits the success of any representational practice” (144). In other words, representation imbues human value and enjoins ethical responsibility in the “face of the Other” through the way representation itself captures its own aspiration for, but incomplete approach, to full human presence.

In these terms, the poor are granted humanity by the very way that they resists complete representation. In fact, this effect is accomplished, not only through MacDonald’s quoting of Harrington, but by his relentlessly trying to apprehend the poor through multiple forms of representation—statistical, narrative/descriptive exemplification—and multiple disciplinary discourses—economics, psychiatry, public health, history. And yet, as much as MacDonald relies on these forms of representation, he also comes to criticize them in adequately

apprehending the ethical problem of poverty and the poor. Indeed, much of the beginning of “Our Invisible Poor” is spent critiquing the other studies under review for what he sees as their excessive statistical abstraction, going so far as parodying their own technical jargon. Psychiatry and public health become MacDonald’s privileged discourse for describing the poor since they more adequately describe the substantial difference of poor from the rest of the public.

According to MacDonald, the poor are not only malnourished but they live in abject isolation, and are prone to psychosis. Yet, this information, I would suggest, provides concreteness to the suffering and alienation of the poor that strengthens MacDonald’s ethical injunction. By virtue of this incomplete approximation in representing the humanity of the poor, the poor as an abstract textual figure accrues a profound ethical importance and the economic condition that achieves existential connotations.

Thus, it is in this precise respect that the poor become a peculiar figure of dispossession in need of recuperation of a specific kind: a recuperation of their very humanity. As much as

MacDonald produces this ethical injunction, he contains its most radical potential by subsuming or equating the fundamental demand of responsibility to the ethical project of citizenship. This point is clearly seen in the book review's closing where MacDonald summarizes the problem and solution of poverty to be a scandal and triumph of citizenship. He proclaims, "The problem is obvious: the persistence of mass poverty in a prosperous country. The solution is also obvious: to provide, out of taxes, the kind of subsidies that have always been given to the public schools (not to mention the police and fire departments and the post office)—subsidies that would raise incomes above the poverty level, so that every citizen could feel he is indeed such." What a curious and implicit assertion that citizenship means more than formal legal status. It is felt experience. In effect, this assertion disables the profound alterity of the poor and makes the ethical encounter into a moment of citizen's narcissism. MacDonald pushes the problem of poverty from a social and technical issue to a political one, in that, he asserts a minimum of economic stability to be a pre-condition to a proper experience of citizenship. Citizenship thus resolves the ethical injunction of the poor and their radical demands get normatively foreclosed. Indeed, even MacDonald's title suggests so since, as much as the poor appear "invisible," they are most definitely "our" or, following Harrington's title, as much as the poor are "the other," that alterity collapses into American identity. In this respect, the poor as the "face of the Other" leads into normative closure whereby their ethical injunction comes to reaffirm the capaciousness of national citizenship to absorb the crisis rather than profoundly unsettling its boundaries. Yet, must the representational logic of dispossession found in the poor always lead to normative civic containment? What are the conditions that give rise to such containment? What are the tensions and contradictions immanent to that logic?

This chapter pursues these questions and argues that this moral crisis of the poor indexes the US's multi-scalar tensions, aims, and political conflicts that compose the political crisis of governability of the 1960s as wrought by the black freedom struggles. But more than a symptomatic reading, the chapter argues that the poor as a figure of dispossession formed a distinct political technology that extended new relations of power and forged distinct political subjectivities. Specifically, via the recuperative practices of empowerment directed at the poor, Great Society liberal governmentality extended corporatist relations of power and political subjectivities within the US social field that cohered around the divisions of race.

To do so, the chapter begins by situating the problematization of the poor to be the effect of the immense political crisis of governability brought about by the black freedom struggles and their political expansion into other domains of difference. Just as the dissertation has done across the preceding chapters, here the “dialectic of race and nation” yields the historical terms of contestation over dispossession. To account for this political disruption, this chapter examines the political rationality of Great Society liberal governmentality by distilling it from the recuperative practices of empowerment as codified in the policy of Community Action. At its heart, the chapter finds that this political rationality, in the practices of empowering a community, must, in the first instance, determine the outlines of a community. In doing so, empowerment's internal tension between an incorporative impulse of self-help and a revolutionary impulse of self-determination are imbued in the constitution of community itself. In this respect, the political field was organized around Enlightenment principles, ironically uniting liberals and radical social movements in not only their political ends but also, as the chapter argues, in the form of their political desire to restore the dispossessed.

To see this desire more fully at the level of political subjectivity, and particularly to discern the norms that enable it, this chapter turns to Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People (Revolt)*. As a novel that follows not only the radical Chicano social movements in Los Angeles but also indirectly community action programs, *Revolt* powerfully registers their shared political desires by showing how they intersect in comprehending and experiencing dispossession. In particular, the chapter argues that the spectral body operates as dispossession's cipher for the political rationality of Great Society liberal governmentality. Indeed, it acts as the pivot from which the experience of dispossession necessitates a political project of empowerment. In virtue of this reliance on the spectral body, the chapter argues that this political subjectivity depends on and re-inscribes heterosexual normativity since these norms regulate, via the political technology of sex, the contours and morphology of the spectral body and thus compose the very grammar of dispossession as bodily violation. However, the chapter discerns not quite a contradiction but an alternative formation within this political subjectivity that occupies an immanent position of incomprehension. That is, rather than comprehending dispossession through the spectral body, dispossession becomes a violation of the flesh.

### **US Crisis and Problematization of the Poor**

Dominant accounts on the increased political salience of poverty in the fifties and sixties would often point to John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, Michael Harrington's *The Other America*, and Dwight MacDonal's "Our Invisible Poor" as the texts that awakened the national public to such a wide spread and endemic problem. However, these idealist accounts forget much in their attempt to delimit the scope purely in a national frame. Instead, to better

understand poverty's emergence as a political issue, its frames of references must be enlarged to fit the international. That is, as Alyosha Goldstein demonstrates, the problematization of poverty must be placed within the emergence and consolidation of the geopolitical competition of the US and the Soviet Union in the Cold War.<sup>102</sup> In particular, in the post-World War II period, poverty became a problem, in part, because the US was still suffering the effects of the Great Depression but more due to US aims at geopolitical and global economic hegemony during the breaking up of the European colonial system. Indeed, the problem of poverty was central to the constitution of US global power, especially due to how the claims of the former colonies to national self-determination were linked to poverty.<sup>103</sup> In this respect, as Arturo Escobar has argued, poverty in the third world operated as political technology for the regulation of the third world through the techniques and discourses of development.<sup>104</sup>

This, however, is not to suggest that poverty had not achieved a political standing prior to this conjuncture. Indeed, the crises of the Great Depression had powerfully raised the issue. But, in many respects, the New Deal state was able to contain poverty as a political issue, siphoning it off from political relevance through its efforts to contain the crisis of labor.<sup>105</sup> In particular, the redistributive mechanism of social security and Aid to Dependent Children had de-politicized the issue, rendering it to be an administrative one of state management and an economic one that could inevitably be resolved through the promise of unlimited capitalist growth. Indeed, with violent suppression of the Bonus Army,<sup>106</sup> the political issue of poverty appeared to be impossible. With that said, I think it would be a mistake to conceive of the political suppression

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<sup>102</sup> See Alyosha Goldstein's *Poverty in Common: The Politics of Community Action During the American Century*

<sup>103</sup> For a gloss on latin American dependency theorist, see Stuart Hall's "Race, Articulation, and Society Structured in Dominance"

<sup>104</sup> See Arturo Escobar's *Encounter Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, in particular Chapter 2 "The Problematization of Poverty: The Tale of Three Worlds and Development"

<sup>105</sup> See Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's *The Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of State-Form*

<sup>106</sup> See Todd Despastino's *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America*

of poverty to indicate its resolution. Rather, this process displaces the political contradiction of poverty onto the domain onto race and gender by racializing and gendering poverty. As numerous cultural historians of the US semi-welfare state have shown, the stigmatization of welfare accrues only onto the “Aid to Families with Dependent Children” while social security is seen as deserving form of remuneration for years of labor. As such, the various policy changes to the “Aid to Families with Dependent Children” clause relied upon and enforced a variety of racist and sexist norms.<sup>107</sup>

In this regard, the profound political disruption brought about by the black freedom struggles was central to the problematization of poverty in the fifties and sixties because it brought into political relief the host of material contradictions under the banner of race, and particularly poverty in the mid and late 1960s. Indeed, when we consider the timing of Dwight MacDonald’s review, a series of major political events involving the black freedom struggles had already come to pass—the murder of Emmett Till (1955), the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-1956), the Little Rock 9 (1957), Nashville sit-in and boycotts (1960), the Freedom Rides (1961), the controversy and riots over James Meredith’s entry into University of Mississippi (1962). Furthermore, it would be only a couple months later that the infamous “Project C” in Birmingham, Alabama would hit national news and which was, followed by the iconic “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.” These events mark the growing politicization of the racialized order of US social life. Thus, when poverty becomes truly a prominent issue in the late sixties, we should not see it as a break from these earlier activities, as is the case of narrow

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<sup>107</sup> See Michael Katz’s *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*, Mimi Abramovitz’s *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present*, Linda Gordon’s *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare 1890-1935*, Gwendolyn Mink’s *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State 1917-1942*

national integrationist views, but as the continuation of what Nikhil Singh calls the “negative dialectics of race.”

Again, we would be remiss to understand the black freedom struggles as purely a domestic phenomenon. Indeed, if in Chapter 2 I showed how during the US build-up to and participation in World War II, race achieved a profound geopolitical significance. This effect strengthened further in the post War period since the Soviet Union publicized the situation of black people in the US as testament to the hypocrisy of US democracy to emerging nations in the former colonial world.<sup>108</sup> Hence, race and poverty were deeply intertwined and mediated one another as their political significance indexed and articulated the tensions and contradictions of US geopolitical ambitions and domestic crises. Indeed, nothing exemplifies this connection better than the political salience of violence in urban racial ghettos. That is, the urban ghetto simultaneously undermined the perception that the US truly embodied the so-called “American creed”<sup>109</sup>, highlighted the racialization of poverty, and demonstrated forms of political dissent uninterested in formal legal integration. Thus, it is no surprise that the colonial analogy (i.e. the internal colony model) emerged from radical social movements as the paradigm to think the complex connection between race, third world revolution, domestic strife, and poverty.

Given then how the problematization of poverty was spurred by and thus mediates the politics of race with its intersection and contradiction to US aspiration for global political and economic dominance (i.e. the American Century), poverty became a site to simultaneously address and disavow, indeed to regulate, the profound social and political disruption of black freedom and its extension into other forms of difference. As the following section on Community Action will show, we can turn to the particular construction of the poor to glean a

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<sup>108</sup> See Mary Dudziak’s *Cold War Civil Rights*

<sup>109</sup> See Gunnar Myrdal’s *The American Dilemma*

political rationality of Great Society liberal governmentality that sought to address this disruption.

### **The Construction of the Poor as a Dispossessed People**

Poverty has long served as a political technology for the production and installation of techniques and practices of social regulation. Indeed, Giovanna Proccaci has shown how the figure of the pauper functions as a political technology to target and discipline an emerging and unruly proletarian class in the eighteenth century.<sup>110</sup> However, the precise formation has changed, even as older formations persist in tandem with new ones and come to bolster one another. Thus, in order to see the precise way and effects that “the poor” enabled the penetration of power, we need to examine the discursive formation that constituted poverty and the poor in the period. For this insight, I draw on Alice O’Connor’s book, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History*, which provides a very detailed account of the changing intellectual order that constituted how to know the poor and the social policies that organized how to govern the poor. Organized more as an intellectual history, my particular use of her account of “poverty knowledge” will draw out the profound unity of those poverty knowledges and social policies as a governmentality. Now, according to Alice O’Connor, Johnson’s “War on Poverty” did not contain a singular understanding of poverty but instead consisted of three distinct strains of disciplinary thought coming out of economics, anthropology, and sociology/social work.<sup>111</sup> Outlined in the Council of Economic Advisor’s (CEA) 1964 Economic Report to the President, which served as the blueprint for the War on Poverty, O’Connor notes how the report uneasily combines a “new economics” with an older

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<sup>110</sup> See Giovanna Proccaci’s “Social Economy and the Government of Poverty” in *The Foucault Effect*

<sup>111</sup> See Alice O’Connor’s *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy and the Poor in Twentieth Century US History*

anthropological notion of the “culture of poverty” and, in later drafts, attaches sociological-inflected programs of “community action.” In regards to this “new economics,” it was not so much an unified school of economic thought, but a combination of differently emphasized Keynesianism and neo-classical economics. To be more precise, the Keynesianism employed in the report marked a great departure from its New Deal iteration. Whereas New Deal Keynesianism emphasized redistributive public spending and full employment guarantees, the Kennedy/Johnson administration’s “commercial/fiscal” Keynesianism relied on “market-driven growth” and “compensatory social welfare policy.” The neo-classical economics incorporated into the “new economics” revived a once discredited competitive market theory of labor. As O’Connor explains this “streamlined view of labor market operations [...] attributed wage rates and workforce behavior to the immutable laws of supply and demand, assumed conditions of perfect competition, and regarded trade unions and other regulatory agencies as barriers to the ultimate goal of market efficiency” (141). In doing so, she goes on to assert that it over exaggerates the role of rational choice and individual behavior insofar as it renders workers to be conditionally the same as their employers. This view was theoretically enshrined in the theory of “human capital,” which formed the central conceptual link to anti-poverty initiatives.

Through the “new economics,” CEA came to champion growth as the economic principle of federal state policy for not just combating poverty but for running the entire US economy. Yet, this view also brought much criticism that was incorporated into the CEA 1964 Economic report. These “structural” critiques came from both conservative and leftist camps, which, in their own ways, pointed to the structural persistence of unemployment regardless of aggregate growth. For instance, conservatives saw a level of structural unemployment was necessary to prevent a rise of inflation while leftist saw it to be the continuing effects of automation in

industrial production. However, the more effective version of this kind of structural argument came from popular intellectuals and journalists, particularly, as discussed in the introduction from Michael Harrington's *The Other America*. This text upheld many of the leftist critiques of growth, including the consequences of pervasive racial discrimination in employment practices. However, it also incorporated another structural explanation that trumped all other explanation in the popular imagination—"the culture of poverty."

The concept of the "culture of poverty" was a slightly older idea coming from anthropologist Oscar Lewis's work, particularly his book *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*.<sup>112</sup> Based on a collection of life histories and psychological tests of families in Puerto Rico and Mexico, Lewis catalogued a set of universal traits that characterized a distinct "culture of poverty." Following the "culture and personality" school of Margret Mead, Lewis took the individual as his central unit of analysis and from which he conceived of culture. That is, culture was nothing but personality writ large. Thus, Lewis's list was composed of highly individualized traits, mainly psychological and behavioral characteristics that range from a weak ego structure to the inability to defer gratification. Accordingly, even when economic and social conditions are integrated into the list, they too took on individualized form like underemployment or low wages. Altogether, they form the essential characteristics to a distinct "culture of poverty," one that both exists irrespective to regional, cultural, and national differences and can persist outside the deprivations caused by either the processes of modernization or race and class relations through the reproductive function of the family. As Lewis asserts the culture of poverty is "remarkably stable and persistent, passed down from generation to generation along family lines."

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, O'Connor

Contained in Lewis's inventory of behavior that made up the "culture of poverty," we find the usual suspect behaviors that Proccaci analyzed in pauperism such as present-time orientation, dependency, and lack of impulse control. But, alongside those, we find other characteristics that go against exclusively constructing "the poor" as social threat, namely characteristics like resignation or "constant struggle for survival." When separated out, Lewis provides a rather different depiction of "the poor," one that figures them fundamentally as a dispossessed people. Significantly, these are the main qualities, but not the only ones, that were picked up in popular discourses of poverty (e.g. MacDonald's concern invisibility of the poor) and the CEA report. This precise figuration of "the poor" is institutionally inscribed in the very heart of the "War on Poverty" through the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), the central federal agency that came out of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (EOA), when it explains that "[p]overty is a condition of need, helplessness, and hopelessness."<sup>113</sup> [N]eed, helplessness, and hopelessness; surely that is a far cry from the danger of the pauper. To be sure, OEO's definition of poverty suggests a typical condescension of "the poor" as a feckless lot yet its spiritual concern over the "hopelessness" of the poor pushes this construction beyond the social domain into a political one through the call for their empowerment.

From this brief sketch of the "new economics" and the "culture of poverty" thesis, we can already see some continuities and discontinuities from the earlier formations of governmentality that utilized poverty knowledge" First, the "new economics," like classical political economy, continue to require poverty as the natural domain of needs necessary for the production of wealth via the growth principle. Yet, with its reconfiguration of a market theory of labor codified in the theory of human capital, it, as expounded by Foucault in his later lectures, facilitated the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, O'Connor

development of an entrepreneurial political subjectivity.<sup>114</sup> Second, the “culture of poverty” thesis maintains many of the same discourses and disciplining techniques of pauperism, particularly how it described a generational “cycle of poverty.” Indeed, as numerous cultural historians and political theorists of welfare have shown, mothers have been the prime target of discipline through the welfare provision of “Aid to Family with Dependent Children.”<sup>115</sup> Consequently, non-normative family forms and sexualities have been pathologized and racialized. With that said, it is a curious fact that Johnson’s “War on Poverty,” in general, and the EOA, in particular, left welfare, the central redistributive mechanism for ameliorating the social misery of poverty, quite untouched. In fact, national grassroots organizations like the National Welfare Rights Organization sought to raise public awareness of the inadequacy and violations of welfare on women’s lives, especially women of color, and made demands for a guaranteed income.<sup>116</sup> This suggests that the real novelty of the incorporation of the “culture of poverty” into the “War on Poverty” is not the state’s paternalist disciplining of “the poor” through the family, but the way that “culture of poverty” pointed to other domains beyond the private sphere of the family and even the family’s place in society; but rather it pointed towards a political order. In other words, the emphasis on hopelessness, alienation, and the need for power in the popular imagination’s and OEO’s uptake of the “culture of poverty” directs the source of the problem of poverty and therefore the site of intervention into the institutions of political power and authority that structure the US social formation.

In sum, this section has examined how discourses of poverty, in figuring the poor as a dispossessed people, work productively to constitute a field of visibility that allow the targeting of social objects for administrative intervention and regulation through the development and

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<sup>114</sup> Foucault “Birth of Biopolitics” Wendy Brown, “Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy”

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, Abbronwitz, Mink, Gordon

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, Goldstein

orchestration of governmental techniques. In particular, it has focused on the Johnson administration's "War on Poverty" as a distinct Great Society liberal governmentality. In laying out the discourses of a "new economics" and "culture of poverty," I have shown how the "War on Poverty" maintains many of the same precepts and administrative and disciplining practices of earlier formations (e.g. poverty as the natural domain of needs and poverty as social threat) but it also points to distinct changes. Namely, it has shown how "the poor" in the popular and state use of the "culture of poverty" have been primarily figured as dispossessed. As such, I argue that this particular figuring opens up a new domain for the penetration and regulation of power, one that is no longer primarily social but rather political in character. Indeed, as the following section will demonstrate, if the "culture of poverty" was the discourse that made poverty into a particular socio-political problem, then sociological ideas of "community action" became the technique of choice for targeting and regulating it.

### **Community Action as a Recuperative Practice of Great Society Liberal Governmentality**

In the previous section, I examined the first two strands of thought that organized the "War on Poverty" in order to show it differently configured as a "government of poverty." In this section, I turn to the third strand of thought – sociological theory of "community action"—the premiere technique of social reform. Once again, I will continue to use O'Connor's account however, for this section, I will rely more heavily on political theorist Barbara Cruikshank's book *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* and cultural historian Alyosha Goldstein's book, *Poverty in Common: The Politics of Community Action in the American Century*. These texts provide invaluable information and analysis that allows me to

examine Community Action beyond a formal and abstract sociological theory. To be more precise, Cruikshank affords a concise elaboration of Community Action as what she calls a “technology of citizenship” while Goldstein offers an invaluable account of “community action” as a governmental practice historically imbedded in complicated and multi-scalar political struggles and a longer historical periods. My synthesis stresses two aspects of this material: 1) the precise discursive constructs and logics that opened a socio-political domain for intervention, particularly the concept of community and 2) the history of political struggles that occurred within the field of power established by this “government of poverty,” particularly as those struggles highlighted its racial, gendered, and sexualized underpinnings and sought to politicize them beyond the normative trajectory of the strategy of “community action.”

To continue my inquiry on the “War on Poverty” as a Great Society liberal governmentality, I believe that we should follow Barbara Cruikshank insight by conceiving of “community action” as a practice of Great Society liberal governmentality. Though Cruikshank does not use this precise phrasing and instead refers to it as a “technology of citizenship,” I understand them to be cognate terms and, for the sake of terminological consistency for this chapter and historical specificity for the entire dissertation, I substitute my phrase of recuperative practice of Great Society liberal governmentality. Cruikshank nicely details the steps involved in this practice as one entailing empowerment:

First, empowerment is a relationship established by expertise, although expertise is constantly contested. Not only the expertise of the ‘experts’ but also the expertise of the poor as the ‘real’ experts on poverty, as well as the authority of representatives of subordinated groups—all are contested, routinely consulted, and documented. Second, it

is a democratically unaccountable exercise of power in that the relationship is typically initiated by one party seeking to empower another. Third, it is dependent upon knowledge of those to be empowered, typically found in social scientific models of power or powerlessness and often gained through the self-description and self-disclosure of the subject to be empowered. [...] Fourth, relations of empowerment are simultaneously voluntary and coercive. (72)

As described, knowledge plays a fundamental but contradictory role in the make-up of the power relations of empowerment and the exercises of power within it. That is, as Cruikshank notes in step one, the alignment of authority and knowledge that defines the expert becomes unstable in power relations of empowerment since the locus of expertise is contested between the official experts of empowerment and those subjected to it. Indeed, this dynamic is the very process that makes empowerment “simultaneously voluntary and coercive.” As noted in step three, I would suggest that in order to see the precise tensions of power inherent to empowerment, we need to examine the “social scientific models” that informed “community action” as a social practice of reform.

To that end, we can locate its theoretical formalization in the 1950s through a series of community-based experiments by social scientists, even though the practice of community action and its implementation can be traced to periods much earlier than the 1960s as well as outside of the contiguous US.<sup>117</sup> Funded by the Ford Foundation, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), and the President’s Committee on Juvenile Delinquency (PCJD), these experiments addressed a growing public anxiety over juvenile delinquency in urban settings and it was only later on that “community action” would be officially used to combat poverty. Unlike the

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, particularly Chapter 1 “Freedom Between: Inequality and the Democracy of ‘Felt Needs’”

dominant behaviorist trend of the social scientific establishment, these social scientists revived the Chicago-school's urban sociology model of "social ecology," which understood social problems of delinquency to be the symptom of cultural and social "disorganization" rather than the sign of individual pathology. As I will make clear later on, even though this "social ecology" approach appears to be anathema to behavioralism's narrow focus on the individual, "social ecology" is perfectly compatible with it as a governmental practice.

Now, according to Alice O'Connor, the theory of community action rested on three core concepts: "community competence," "structure of opportunity," and comprehensive "systems reform."<sup>118</sup> Of the three, "community competence" and "structure of opportunity" had most directly impacted the use of community action in the "War on Poverty." The idea of "community competence" took communities to be essential in enabling families to fulfill its now "specialized" role in cultivating stable and integrated human personalities in children.<sup>119</sup> Thus, the competence of the community rested on how it structures and mediates families in relation to a larger society. By itself, this idea was not very novel. Undergirding sat two practical notions—local participation and indigenous reform—that proved to be fundamental for its implementation in social reform and led to the controversial "War on Poverty" protocol of "maximum feasible participation." Crucially, these concepts extolled that success of social reform must emerge from and be led by the very constituencies targeted for reform. This perspective provides the local knowledge for both diagnosing social problems within a community and the tactical positions within a community for strategically implementing the necessary reforms.

If "community competence" underscores the importance of community in the 'proper' socialization of individuals, the notion of "structure of opportunity" acts as a heuristic for

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, O'Connor particularly Chapter 5 "Community Action"

<sup>119</sup> Ibid

identifying the social “structures” that impeded “opportunities” necessary for such socialization. As O’Connor explains “structure of opportunity” pointed to how “poverty and delinquency stemmed not simply from community ‘disorganization’ but from ‘systemic’ barriers to legitimate opportunity that kept lower-class neighborhood residents from realizing their middle-class aspirations” (127). Crucial to this opportunity theory was how the diagnosing of “differential access” of opportunities afforded by the social organization of community relies on distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate ones. Thus, as much as it offers a type of structural analysis, it easily lends itself to returning to community centric reforms rather than broader structural ones.

Lastly, “systems reform” identified how social services of urban centers needed to be transformed in light of profound changes to social organization and function of urban space as brought about by new political economic patterns. In the Chicago-school of urban sociology, as O’Connor explains, “urban growth was a story of industrial development, which began in the innermost loop of the city and radiated outward in the inevitable process of industrial expansion” (130). Though destructive to neighborhood communities, this process allowed the city to be the productive center of growth, which, in the end, facilitated the integration/assimilation of ethnic immigrants. Significant to this process was how the very geography of the city corresponded to stages in the process of assimilation with the peripheries serving as way stations towards ethnic immigrant incorporation into middle-class affluence and national acceptance. Yet, the “systems reform” demanded by community action responded to very different political economic trends and shifting demographics. No longer the vibrant center of economic growth due to both industrial and technological restructuring and the loss of a middle-class tax base from suburban white flight as well as no longer a predominantly European migrant flow but instead into a

conspicuously black and latino influx<sup>120</sup>, the city, particularly its peripheries, lost its assimilative role and became deeply marked by obsolescence. Thus, the community action's call for comprehensive "systems reform" targeted all the interrelated problems, like education and mental health, that came from such decline in the peripheries of the city, which were referred to as "gray zones."

With this brief summary, it is apparent that "community action" as a social scientific model of reform is overwhelmingly conservative, regardless of its claims to radicalism, since its reforms aim to: 1) enable the socializing function of the family, 2) direct action towards legitimate opportunity, and 3) restore the assimilative role of the city through the coordination and use of social services. Indeed, it is precisely these conservative aims that allowed "community action" to pass legislative inspection. As O'Connor explains, of the all the reasons for "community action's" incorporation into the "War on Poverty," none were as essential as how "[it] could be seen to fit in the overall conceptual framework devised CEA task force for the War on Poverty: with tax-cut-induced economic growth as the weapon of choice for the bulk of the problem, these local-community based experiments would offer comprehensive remediation for those who were trapped in the 'cycle of poverty,' all by way [...] of a 'hand up, not a hand out' (158).

Yet, even though the social scientific model of community action is conservative in content, its true power resides in how it was articulated to relations of power as practices of Great Society liberal governmentality. Through this angle, we can see how the conservative content of the sociologic model of community action contains a normative force. For instance, community action's stress on indigenous reform and local participation had not so much redistributed political power more directly into communities as they disciplined what was to be

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid

considered politically feasible. As Alyosha Goldstein explains, “[p]articipation as a policy directive presumably valorized and nurtured the political agency of those formerly excluded from the political establishment. Nevertheless, the participation also transformed participants into political subjects whose actions were legible in already operative terms of political institutions—to participate was to be remade in terms that conformed to recognizable expressions of agency” (115). Compartment to dominant political edicts, however, meant more than just legibility and state recognition, it also entailed recalibration of the norms of state violence since those outside the pale of recognition could and were targeted for violence. As Goldstein elaborates further, “[t]o the degree that political challenges to the state could be rendered as violent and irresponsible—as juvenile and incorrigible, and as either apolitical or seditious—state repression could be made to appear equitable and reasonable” (117). Indeed, Goldstein notes the recourse to discipline and violence was particularly salient in the establishment and enactment of the War on Poverty with the state’s crises of governability in the 1960s, which was most spectacularly seen in the wave of urban riots.

Yet, I would suggest that the novelty of community action is not so much its disciplining of political action but rather in how it incites the development of corporatism across the social field through the category of “community.” It spurred the formation of social collectivities along the line of race, class, and consequently gender and sexuality insofar as these lines were forged through the racialization of urban space. In this respect, it opens up “community” as a socio-political domain of intervention. Indeed, it undergirds and enables the regulation of political action as a social conduct since “community” comes to mediate how citizens are constituted out of subjects, defining both the link between subjectivity and subjection and the link between

activism and discipline, and organizing the “tangled field of power and knowledge that both enables and constrains citizenship.”

The question, therefore, must be: what political rationality defines the “tangled field of power and knowledge” that sutures together the formation of political subjectivity and the practices of subjection? Goldstein details this political rationality, which I quote at length:

From the perspective of the OEO, community action embodied a form of belonging that was intended to be simultaneously local and national. The Economic Opportunity Act emphasized what it termed a “commonality of interest” as providing the social cohesion through which community action was to be mobilized. The utility of poverty as a collective interest was derived from liberal pluralism, which during this period served as the predominant policy lens (and social science framework) through which community was politically legible. Liberal pluralism insinuated an abstract formal equivalence between groups that afforded room to maneuver for some, while placing others beyond the pale of recognition. Liberal pluralism also provided the conceptual order through which community, poverty, and racialized difference were aligned with palliative forms of opportunity and interest. In liberal pluralist terms, the political system was a balance of power among social and economic groups, with each group constraining and constrained by other groups. Competing interest groups, in this perspective, shared a common system of beliefs and values, which allowed conflict to proceed within established limits and encouraged disagreements to be resolved through compromise. According to the liberal pluralist model, government provides diverse interest groups with a supposedly disinterested arena for debate, mediation, and reconciliation. (159)

In Goldstein's gloss, interest and liberal pluralism structure the normative logic of community. Within it, interest creates membership among individuals to form community, binding them to one another and to a socio-political whole. If interest is the binding principle of community, then liberal pluralism is the political architecture that mediates between and above communities. That is, on the one hand, this liberal pluralism unites communities with each other in a competitive framework where their respective interests compete for hegemony. On the other hand, liberal pluralism places the state above the plurality of communities as the site where political competition takes place. As such, communities are more fundamentally bound to each other under the state insofar as they must necessarily understand it to be a neutral arbiter of interest, not based on shared substantive values that supersede interest but rather by an agreed upon neutral procedure for the "debate, mediation, and reconciliation" of communities and their interests. In that way, this liberal pluralism more fundamentally works to shore up the state through the very diffusion of state power and authority at the local level.

As prior to the very competition of interest, the state circumscribes the political legibility of interest into formal, abstract, and discrete units. In the case of the War on Poverty, Goldstein notes that poverty itself plays the formal role of uniting a community and connecting communities to each other, specifically through empirical abstractions like the poverty line that allowed for the objective measurement of poverty within communities and comparison across them.<sup>121</sup>

In turn, the logic of interest under liberal pluralism dictated and circumscribed the political legibility of community. Like interest, communities were seen to be discrete from each other, internally homogeneous, and formally comparable. As Goldstein explains, "The legislation

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, Goldstein

[EOA] treated community as a homogeneous, intrinsic, and-for the most part-spatially delimited social group. Policymakers often assumed that territorially defined groups—that, in effect, the segregated spatial logic of uneven development assembled groups of people with a common heritage and shared interest” (160). At the level of policy practices, this correlation of interest, with the spatializing of community, manifest in the creation of community corporation zones and economic opportunity council areas. The impact of this practice can be seen, for instance, in the case of the Puerto Rican Community Development Project (PRCD) in New York City. As the first, largest, and most influential federally sponsored citywide antipoverty program, the PRCD, Goldstein argues, facilitated, through OEO mandates, the creation of a mainland Puerto Rican ethnic identity that was politically distinct from island governance. In particular, the PRCD united geographically dispersed Puerto Ricans of New York by linking up neighborhood initiatives and groups under a single umbrella organization that would provide OEO money and training. As a result, Goldstein asserts that this ethnic community group and others led to inter-ethnic/racial competition between Puerto Ricans, African American, and Afro-Caribbean immigrant populations. And furthermore, it came to obscure US colonialism’s role in the forging of Puerto Rican racial identity and thus delimited the field of political contestation for activists, like the Young Lords who examined Puerto Rico as “divided nation.”

It is important to note that this liberal pluralism or interest group pluralism institutionally predates the War on Poverty and the use of community action. Instead, the War on Poverty marks a particular extension of its logic in light of its critics. That is, interest group pluralism in practice ends up deepening the social inequalities that it sought to alleviate since, extending the authority and power to interested constituencies on a subject reinscribes the political power of an already socially powerful organizations. A case in point would be agricultural policy where,

David Cieply notes, farm monopolies, which had ironically formed through earlier New Deal efforts at farm relief, were invited in the policy-making process of agricultural standards during the Kennedy administration.<sup>122</sup> In light of this effect of interest group pluralism, community action was used to curb its tendency to reproduce social monopoly of power. However, this was not done by preventing monopolies from directly informing policy but rather by providing material means and political outlets for hitherto powerless group to inform that same policy. Thus, community action only furthers and deepens the same logic of interest group pluralism by ideally operating as a countervailing power and influence to dominant powers.<sup>123</sup>

In outlining how interest and liberal pluralism form the political rationality of community action and thus makes it a practice of Great Society liberal governmentality, Goldstein importantly stresses, in contrast to Cruikshank, that community action could not be completely contained within the incorporative program of citizenship. This is not merely to point to a difference between the theory and practice of community action but instead to highlight how the political rationality immanent to the practices of community action organize the field of political activities and cut across these political actors within and beyond the liberal state, such that these political technologies lend themselves to radicalization as well as incorporation. As Goldstein vigorously asserts, “the incitement to self-activity, mobilization of interest, and quantification of needs perpetually cut against the grain of incorporation, more often than not increasing the suppressed tension between self-help and self-determination” (19). That is, according to Goldstein, internal to the discourses and practices of empowerment resides “suppressed tension between self-help and self-determination” that conditions the aims of empowerment toward, on the one hand, normative containment and, on the other hand, liberation. Thus, part and parcel to

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<sup>122</sup> See David Ciepley’s *Liberalism in the Shadow of Totalitarianism*, particularly Part III “Totalitarianism and Democratic Politics: The Rise of Interest Group Pluralism”

<sup>123</sup> Ibid

the deployment of empowerment discourse is “suppressing” one tendency over another. Put differently, that is where political contestation occurs within Great Society liberal governmentality.

With that said, it is important to tease out the precise genealogy of this political rationality in order to detail the subtle affinities, distinctions, and antagonisms between incorporative and radical variants. As stated earlier, at the heart of community action lay a tension of seeing its aims between, on the one hand, “self-help” and, on the other hand, “self-determination.” Each of these poles have their own distinct genealogies but, according to Goldstein, they do share a common historically modern relation to the shifting values tied to dependency and autonomy. Following both Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, Goldstein explains how the liberal democratic revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century re-signified dependency from a normal condition into a stigma when those revolutions installed the citizen as the central political agent and articulated it to ideas of independence and autonomy. This perception persists with the onset of industrialization but was profoundly re-organized through the generalization of wage labor. In particular, white workingmen were exempted from the stigma of dependency by being discursively constituted as economically independent while the “non-economic” relations and domains inhabited by people of color and women were assign the mark of dependency.<sup>124</sup> Parallel to this re-organization, Goldstein also notes how the colonial situation had re-introduced an older, theological sense of dependency as a relation of subjection but shifted its connotation to the “natural” property of the subjected people. Later on, with the institutionalization and professionalization of the human sciences in the early twentieth century, dependency took on a moral/psychological meaning with strong feminized and racialized connotations while autonomy

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<sup>124</sup> For a useful parallel discussion in terms of contract, see Amy Dru Stanley’s *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation*

became “an individual competence and a prerequisite for social and political agency” (21). Lastly, in the 1960’s Latin American dependency theorists showed how dependency was a relation of subjection by arguing that underdevelopment was the product of European and American dominance in the capitalist world-system.

As can be seen in this very quick gloss of the changing status and relation of dependency and autonomy, the historical norms of race and gender organized the assignment of dependency and autonomy and the attachment of particular values. This phenomenon can be seen most concretely in the history of social policies directed at family welfare like mother’s pensions and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration’s “employable mother” rule. In these policies, women of color were denied access to the minimal relief given to families in economic distress and instead pushed to work in farm or domestic labor markets. In this way, dependency was not absolutely a derogatory condition but rather its stigma and autonomy’s value was regulated through racial and gender norms.

In light of this deep history of the political rationality of the recuperative practices of empowerment, I would suggest that both self-help and self-determination variants inscribe these norms of dependency and autonomy at the level of political subjectivity through the constitution of dispossession in the very process of forging social collectivities along the historically and geographically inscribed norms of race. Indeed, as shown in the following section, it is precisely in this respect that gender and sexual normativity come to regulate communities organized by empowerment aims.

**Political Subjectivity of Great Society Liberal Governmentality and Alternative Ethics in Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People***

In distilling the political rationality that adheres to the recuperative practices of Great Society liberal governmentality as codified in Community Action, I have sought to both reveal the centrality of the figure of the poor as dispossessed people in knowledges that undergird its mobilization and to show the extent to which it organized the field of political contestation between the Great Society state and social movements. I turn now to Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel *The Revolt of the Cockroach People (Revolt)*, not so much as a critique of this governmentality, if by critique we mean something like a pure oppositional resistance, rather to pursue two inter-related aims: 1) to elaborate the political subjectivity attuned to this Great Society liberal governmentality and the norms that undergird and 2) to retrieve for thought the ethical demand of dispossession that gets so quickly and immediately foreclosed in its absorption into political empowerment. In terms of the latter, political empowerment relies upon the figure of the dispossessed for the ethical forces of its entire political project and the exigence behind its social application; as such, it forecloses alternative formations of dispossession. Thus, this chapter's reading aims to discern this alternative ethical formation. At stake in such an analysis is a not retreat from politics per se, in favor of ethical deliberation, but instead to point to alternative ethical base from which different political forms may emerge. Indeed, Goldstein's brief genealogy of empowerment should give us pause in ascribing these political forms of empowerment as the adequate social justice response for dispossession.

In turning to *Revolt* for how it is keyed to the political rationality of Great Society liberal governmentality and distills its political subjectivity as well as pursues an alternative ethical

inquiry, I find it necessary to first address the way it has been normally taken up. Commonly, *Revolt* has been read as exemplifying a Chicano cultural nationalist imaginary and, as such, indicative of the very historico-political problematics of Chicano cultural nationalism.<sup>125</sup> For instance, this can be seen from the way that the narrative follows a developmental trajectory of Acosta's growing political consciousness and solidarity with Los Angeles-based Chicano militants to the way the novel characterizes Acosta's histrionics within the Bandido-trope; from the novel's problematization of the ethno-racial purity underlying Chicano cultural nationalism to the novel's presentation of mourning death that comports with and/or against the nationalist trope of memory/forgetting. Indeed, the very title appears to suggest nationalist thinking since its use of "cockroach" recalls the corrido made popular in the Mexican Revolution. But, most obvious of all, the novel seems to confirm both the anti-indigenous and sexist and homophobic norm at the heart of Chicano cultural nationalism. That is, on the one hand, it testifies to the idealization of indigeniety as the historical backdrop from which the Chicano nation emerges and thus erases indigenous contemporaneity and reinscribes its racialization and pathologization. And, on the other hand, it spectacularly illustrates the subordination of Chicana liberation through the aggressive sexual objectification of women and the proscription of normative sexual and gendered roles. Though it may be argued that the novel deflates these logics by ironizing them in Acosta's buffoonery<sup>126</sup>; cultural nationalism, nonetheless, sets the coordinates from which to stage a political inquiry into *Revolt*.

Yet, the publishing and reception history of Acosta's earlier novel, *The Autobiography of Brown Buffalo* (Autobiography), suggests that this link to Chicano cultural nationalism was not

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<sup>125</sup> See Genaro Miguella Padilla's "The Progression from Individual to Social Consciousness in Two Chicano Novelist: Jose Antonio Villareal and Oscar Zeta Acosta" and Rafael Perez Torres's *Mestizaje*, particularly Chapter 2 "Mestizo Voices"

<sup>126</sup> See Ramon Saldivar's *Chicano Narratives: Dialectics of Difference*

as certain as its canonization implies. According to Marta Sánchez, even though the *Autobiography* came out in 1972, it was not until 1989 when it was published by a major publishing house. In part, Sánchez claims that Acosta's complex friendship with Hunter S. Thompson negatively framed the reception of the novel's 'ideal' Chicano readership.<sup>127</sup> But, more significantly, she speculates that both the *Autobiography*'s characterization of Acosta as an anti-heroic and somewhat impotent figure as well as its blatant trafficking in sexism in a period of insurgent Chicana critique had precluded much identification with the text. At minimum, what all this suggests is that the political import of *Autobiography* and *Revolt* cannot be exhausted by cultural nationalist problematic.

Thus, my intent is not to dismiss Chicano cultural nationalist readings for, surely, neither their validity nor the value of their insights can be denied. Rather, it is my hope to clear the space for a different political inquiry in *Revolt*, dare I say, a ethico-political inquiry, one that reads aslant to the problematic of cultural nationalism with both the way its counter-nationalist politics offered an alternative political subjectivity to the national citizen and that that same politics unwittingly takes up the nation form and strategically pursues and relies upon different forms of state recognition. Thus, I argue that *Revolt* brings into relief the tensions in the political rationality of Great Society liberal governmentality, namely the way its ethical demands get contained through an imperative of empowerment. In particular, *Revolt* reveals how the principle of bodily integrity with its underpinning in heteronormativity misapprehend the ethical injunction posed by dispossession and translates, in its place, an imperative for empowerment. However, immanent to that misapprehension resides an alternative ethical grammar of dispossession, one not founded on bodily integrity but instead on "flesh."

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<sup>127</sup> See Marta Sanchez's *Shakin' Up Race and Gender: Intercultural Connections in Puerto Rican, African American, and Chicano Narratives and Culture*, in particular Chapter 4 "Overcoming Self-Loathing, Learning to Love Brownness: Oscar Zeta Acosta and *The Autobiography of Brown Buffalo*

## II

Narratively, Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* can be seen to continue his autobiography began in *The Autobiography of Brown Buffalo*. This time, instead of a cross-country trek around the Southwest US and northern Mexico, the narrative follows Acosta's developing political consciousness and membership in the militant Chicano movement in Los Angeles. Yet, the introspection common to the narrative of autobiography does not in *Revolt* forge a unity of a "life" and its retrospective self-assessment. Alternatively, *Revolt* can be seen to follow the conventions of a secular conversion narrative in which Acosta moves through a series of (spiritual) crises that precipitate a transformation of his consciousness and life towards a larger (spiritual) mission.<sup>128</sup> The novel evidences this kind of reading through Acosta's shifting emphasis on the components of this chosen name, moving from a stress on "Brown Buffalo" to "Zeta." However, the novel underscores Acosta's tenuous commitment to the Chicano political mission with not only the multiple episodes of his abandonment of it, most crucially in *Revolt*'s ending, but also with the criticism he levels at it and with the distance its members have of him throughout the novel. Then again, we can read *Revolt* to exemplify the norms of the non-fiction novel, made famous in the Gonzo-journalism of Hunter S. Thompson or "New Journalism" movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In this regard, Acosta, working against the objective distance of traditional journalism, acts as a participant in the very stories he reports, capturing up-close and personal the events surrounding the Chicano walkouts of 1968, the St. Basil Catholic Church protests, and the Chicano Moratorium. Indeed, the tumultuous social upheaval of these events and others like them go so far as to undermine every distinction of

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<sup>128</sup> See Madeline Walker's "Conversion, Deconversion, and Reversion: Vagaries of Religious Experience in Oscar Zeta Acosta's Autofictions"

imagination and reality that literature often relies on, in that, the very reality of these events exceeds imaginative norms of literature.<sup>129</sup> Yet, once again, this reading, as Genaro Padilla notes, does not adequately comprehend the strained proximity Acosta maintains in the narrative, even with New Journalism's self-conscious mode of narration through anthropological positions of the "participant observer."

What these descriptive limits of various narrative forms suggest, besides the extent to which literary genres fail to fully capture the singularity of any novel, is *Revolt's* abiding preoccupation with the articulations, processes, and contradictions between self-identity and collective identity. That is, each of these competing narrative forms differently frame and underscore how Acosta's recognition to a collective reverberates back onto a recognition of himself and vice versa—from how autobiography explicitly foregrounds this problematic in the retrospection and construction of life through its fulfillment in identity to how the conversion narrative makes the problematic the plot device for narrative development to how New Journalism formalizes the problematic through the egoistic positioning of the author as the window for genuine access to the truth of historical events.

Indeed, the opening scene of the novel profoundly centers on this very problematic. In lieu of beginning with Acosta's arrival to Los Angeles as would be expected, *Revolt* begins *in media res* with Acosta leading a protest of St. Basil Catholic Church on Christmas Eve that leads to a skirmish inside and outside with the Los Angeles police. This kind of opening should give us pause in seeing *Revolt* to be detailing the full development and commitment to politically revolutionary subjectivity since, rather than beginning with a moment of political naiveté or ignorance that leads to revolutionary subjectivity, we are presented a moment of its completions and the complications inherent to its uptake. We find this demonstrated most explicitly in the

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<sup>129</sup> See John Hollowell's *Fact and Fiction: The New Journalism and the Non-Fiction Novel*

actions that takes place in the scene. The scene opens by locating the impending actions in a hybrid temporal order, combining not only secular calendrical time and Christian nativity but also Meso-American cosmological systems when we are told that “it is Christmas eve in the year of Huitzilopochtli, 1969” (11). Yet, the components of this mixed temporal order—secular, Catholic, and indigeneous—do not sit easily with each other. As the narration continues, any theological sentiment attached to Catholicism is quickly profaned since its central material icon, the Church, is sullied by commerce, with the church itself gaudily adorned and physically surrounded by financial and commercial industries whose owners and clients are the church’s primary parishioners. These surroundings find stark contrast with the “three hundred Chicanos” outside of the church in terms of the sacred and the profane. That is, *Revolt* grants them simultaneously more religious value with their protest likened to religious ceremony but exceedingly less social status as they themselves are likened to “cockroaches.”

Thus, right off the bat, we are given a situation of extreme antagonism whose heights reach the level of competing cosmologies and theological orientations. Set in such a conflict, the narration of the scene comes to stress Acosta’s vexed position within it. I say vexed because, as the scene unfolds, Acosta receives a privileged treatment from the police who intervene in their protest. More specifically, they grant him safety from their violence when physical conflicts ensue between them and the protestors. Indeed, there is great irony in Acosta’s safety since Acosta enables the perpetration of the police violence when he incites and then leads a small band of protestors into the church after they were previously denied access due to the church filling to capacity. What transpires in the church afterwards becomes the catalyst for a full blown police assault on the protestors when a fight occurs between Acosta’s band and a police officer posing as a church usher who denies them and the rest of the protestors further entrance into the

church. As the conflict breaks out beyond the vestibule into the chapel and back onto the entrance, Acosta is left ironically in the midst of the violence but completely untouched by it as he himself observed: “I watch it all serenely while the choir and congregation entertain. I wear a suit and tie. No one lays a hand on me” (17). This highlighting of his “suit and tie,” as I will explain more fully below, figures centrally for Acosta’s separation from the protestors. But bracketing that point for a moment, we find, as the spectacle of police violence culminates with the manhandling of Gloria Chavez, former nun and now Chicana militant, Acosta’s frustration over his safety, which, at this point, is coded so clearly as a kind of impotency, reaches such extremes that Acosta actually attempts to get beaten and complains to himself that “For God’s sake, I *want* to be arrested!” (italics in the original, 19). Yet, like the rest of the scene, by the time the action ends and the protestors have been beaten and arrested, Acosta is left standing unscathed by any of it.

The full ethical weight and political tension of Acosta’s safety finds its clearest expression in the chapter’s closing scene. Once the protest of St. Basil Church is completely subdued, Acosta rushes back to his downtown office to contact Stonewall, a reporter in Colorado that he has been in communication with throughout his early exploits with the Chicano militants. Acosta, then, proceeds to describe the protest and subsequent police suppression, which only comes to pique Stonewall’s interest once Acosta arrives at the moment when the ex-nuns/chicana militants disrupt the Christmas Eve ceremony. As their conversation winds down, the subject of Acosta’s position and safety throughout the protest comes up, culminating with Stonewall posing a pointed question to Acosta after he admits to being the leader of it all:

“Are you *serious*? Do you see what you’ve *done*?”

“Yeah, sure. I’ve upped the ante.”

“You mean you’ve dumped it on your buddies,” he says softly.

I don’t remember hanging up the phone. When my mind finally thaws, I find myself alone in my tiny legal office on the tenth floor, high above the Cockroaches on the streets of spit and sin and foul air in downtown LA.” (italics in the original, 21)

Contained in this small closing dialogue, we find the contradiction at the heart of Acosta’s positioning, which had previously manifested through his protection from police violence and his subsequent frustration. On the one hand, from the standpoint of Acosta, he has simply “upped the ante,” that is, escalated the stakes of Chicano protest to the point of violence as the way to appropriately force the recognition from the state of their spiritual, ethical, and political claims to liberation. On the other hand, from the standpoint of Stonewall, Acosta has done nothing of the sort. Rather he, as the “leader,” has recklessly led them to a situation of violence for which he takes no responsibility. These conflicting readings of the protest cannot be reconciled but instead point to a larger contradiction, forcefully shown with the chapter’s closing description. Spatially figured in how Acosta “find[s] [him]self alone in [his] tiny office on the tenth floor, high above the Cockroaches,” the validity of either Acosta’s or Stonewall’s reading of the protest relies on Acosta’s proximity to the “Cockroaches,” that is, to the extent to which he not simply and genuinely embodies their political will but, undergirding that issue, the extent to which he claims membership to the “Cockroaches” as an ethical community. Even though the chapter closes with such a clear image of not only Acosta’s distance from the “Cockroaches,” but also, given his vertical positioning, his social and economic privilege, we should not be quick to side with Stonewall’s reading. Instead, the chapter’s closing should be read as posing the question: on

what basis can Acosta claim, not simply legitimate leadership, but undergirding that possibility, the very identification with and of the collective?

Indeed, this question is reinforced further and complicated in the very focalization of the scene. An example of this effect can be found when the scene abruptly shifts from first-person plural to first-person singular mode of narration: “‘Come on,’ our lawyer exhorts. I, strange fate, am this lawyer” (14). With the exception of being singled out as the principle organizer of the protesters, Acosta, as the novel’s narrator, has been minimally introduced and instead is predominantly framed as a more or less generic individual within the collective protestors; descriptively, he is a member of “La Raza.” Yet, as the scene continues, his generic position becomes progressively more individuated, from a completely generic member to functional role to here, a subjective break indicated by the grammatical shift. That is, in the jump from the possessive pronoun “our” to the personal pronoun “I,” the demonstrative adjective “this” works not only grammatically but, more significantly, narratively to covers over and thus also highlight that profound disjunction of the “our” to the “I.” As we see, the identity of “lawyer” comes to paper over the disjunction by mediating them. Indeed, this simple linguistic move takes on even greater narrative significance as it points to the power language plays in troubling Acosta’s identification with the rest of the protestors due to simultaneous and opposing interpellations. Throughout the scene, we are shown that Acosta’s protection from police violence is the perlocutionary effect of the police’s illocutionary act of declaring him as “the lawyer.” In fact, this “hailing,” as can be seen by Acosta’s own prior recognition, reinforces prior interpellation. Hence, one way of seeing the stress placed on Acosta, the stress on the identity between the “I” and the “We”, is the mediation of the Law as a state apparatus. That is, “our” lawyer strains against identification of the law’s particular practitioner, Acosta, to the entire apparatus of the

law, which, in this case, includes the police as the law's violent enforcer. Hence, nothing unnerves Acosta more profoundly than Sergeant Armas, the head officer of the police assault, thanking him for clearing the rest of the protestors after the arrests since it acknowledges Acosta as another agent of the Law (i.e. an accomplice with the police) as opposed to a member of Chicano protestors. Put simply, being our "lawyer," a tactical necessity for Chicano public protest, puts Acosta at odds with the "people" because it splits his allegiance with the legal institution that they are against.

This issue of the law's impact on Chicano cultural belonging has been written about by Carl Gutiérrez-Jones in *Rethinking the Borderlands*. In it, Gutiérrez-Jones examines how Chicano/a cultural production confronts the way the law racializes Chicanos through the designation of criminality and its effects of delimiting critiques and challenges to wider institutionalized, racialized and gendered inequality and domination due to legal formalism. In his specific reading of *Revolt*, Gutiérrez-Jones argues how, in the encounter between US legal culture and Chicano culture, their patriarchal imperatives "collaborate[] in the codification of machismo as a concept around which to ground cultural affiliation" (124). Indeed, he demonstrates how the autobiographical "I" of *Revolt* forms out of the changing economy of homosocial desire and its system of patriarchy in the encounter between US legal culture and Chicano activism in East Los Angeles. Machismo therefore becomes the rhetorical strategy maintaining patriarchal privilege in the face of its political disruption and internal contradiction, namely how to square universalizing political claims of Chicano empowerment while maintaining Chicana subordination. Hence, the gratuitous misogyny and homophobia coupled with sexually violent use of language in *Revolt* is not inessential but rather symptomatic of the law's "codification of machismo" in the political culture of Chicano cultural nationalism

and marks the limits of its call for liberation, not as inherent Chicano cultural norms but rather as the effect of Chicano cultural nationalism's uptake of gender and sexual normativity in US legal culture.

Gutiérrez-Jones's brilliant reading of *Revolt* rightly champions Chicana feminist insights by neither denying, as merely incidental, the historical fact of endemic sexism and homophobia nor by using that fact to dismiss the political mission of Chicano cultural nationalism. Yet, such a reading takes for granted the security of Acosta's position as the conduit for the law's codification of machismo in Chicano cultural belonging. Though by no means do I think this reading to be inaccurate, it nevertheless does bypass the pervasive anxiety over Acosta's membership that I just detailed, particularly as his own institutional association to the law complicates that membership. Also it somewhat begs the question about the source of machismo since, according to Gutiérrez-Jones, the law's impact has been to reinforce and codify it as the basis of Chicano cultural belonging rather than to install it. If not, in the first instance, the law, what then can be the source of belonging rallied through machismo?

To answer this question, I would suggest that, rather than look primarily at the institutions of the law, we must examine the very political project of Chicano cultural nationalism, not in terms of hypermasculine iconography of revolutionary overcoming or even in terms of the conservative norms of domesticity that it sought to maintain, but as a social problem it seeks to resolve and its particular form of ethical injunction—that is, the problem of dispossession and its reinforcement in/of Chicano racialization. By this, I do not mean just the rallying historical narrative of the dispossession of Chicano homeland, Aztlán, but the more immediate issue of the historical displacement of Los Angeles Chicano communities caused by

the freeway systems<sup>130</sup> and the abject poverty of the barrios. Indeed, this is what is meant by the phrase, “cockroach.” These conditions, as elaborated in the preceding sections, were coded with a profound, existential form of suffering that needed to be redressed through political empowerment. In many respects, these were the prevalent issues at the time, which radical Chicano groups had resignified by linking them to the historical legacy, indeed a repetition compulsion, of European contact and violence— from 1492 to the fall of Tenochtitlan, from Manifest Destiny to Mexican American war of 1848, from the Indian war to the Homestead Act of 1862. With this view in mind, the centrality of gender/sex, particularly masculinity, in the ethical imperative that forges Chicano political project is far more subtle and powerful than the overt and spectacular proclamations of sexism and homophobia. Indeed, I would hazard to say that the role that masculinity plays in organizing the ethical imperative of dispossession undergirds the spectacular and anxious assertions of patriarchal privilege.

Before I move on, I think it is worth making explicit that my focus on all this is not meant to single out Chicano political culture to be pathologically patriarchal. Rather, it is to recognize, like Gutiérrez-Jones’s work on the imbrication between the US legal culture and Chicano cultural nationalism, the complicated ways that Chicano political culture forms in and against US political norms, which, in this case, centers on the widespread concern over poverty. Indeed, from a biographical point of view, Acosta himself had much experience with various community action programs, particularly legal aid, which actually makes its way into both the *Autobiography* and *Revolt*. Given this, I suggest that we must turn away from an exclusive focus on the law, which, was, at best, just one tactic among many others leveraged for Chicano political empowerment, and instead examine how the ethical form of social problems came to

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<sup>130</sup> See Raul Villa’s *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture*

shape Chicano political empowerment, installing/reinforcing gender and sexual normativity at the fundamental level of the social problem itself—the problem of its ethical grammar.

### III

Probably no scene in *Revolt* exemplifies the interplay of dispossession's ethical injunction and political empowerment in subjectification better than the episode revolving Robert Fernandez. In many respects, it is the culminating point in the motif of Acosta's persistent anxiety over his genuine membership to the Chicano movement and the plight of the "cockroaches."<sup>131</sup> Coming after the successful defense of the East LA Thirteen, Acosta is approached by the Fernandez family to bring suit against the Los Angeles police department for their involvement in the suspicious death of their son, Robert Fernandez. As part of his investigation to challenge police claims that Robert committed suicide, Acosta has his body exhumed for a second autopsy to determine if foul play was involved. To Acosta's surprise, he is asked to direct the autopsy to ensure that the police do not tamper with the evidence. What follows is an incredibly grotesque scene where Acosta describes in gruesome detail Robert's dismemberment and his own trauma in directing it.

Much criticism of the novel has rested on this scene, particularly the way the scene resolves Acosta's trauma of the dismembered body of Robert Fernandez. For instance, in *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture*, Rafael Pérez-Torres examines the critical

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<sup>131</sup> I think it bears stressing that Acosta's anxiety over his membership to the collective does not have to do with a narrow meaning of racial authenticity. As many scholars have argued the *Autobiography* actually comes to deconstruct the very pretense of a homogenous and essential Chicano identity. Indeed, as the *Autobiography* traces Acosta's movement across different regions of the Southwest and northern Mexico, it reveals the intramural difference of Chicano identity, such that Acosta's arrival at his name of "Brown Buffalo" is taken more of a proclamation of a personal and political project than a static recognition of an already existing racial identity.

potential and heuristic powers of mestizaje in Chicana/o cultural production, namely the way it “makes present a persistent oscillation between presence and absence, resistance and capitulation, agency and victimhood, power and fatigue” (xiii). Yet, in his reading of *Revolt*, he makes it plain that this critical insight found in mestizaje is not guaranteed since its signification in the dismembered body of Robert Fernandez gets subsumed in the “disabling social scripts” of nationalist discourse. In particular, Pérez-Torres points to the scenes ending where Acosta begs Robert for forgiveness for his participation in his “second death.” But, it is clear that this plea, as heartfelt as it is, is ultimately founded on “the sake of the living brown.” In this respect, Pérez-Torres argues that “[t]he mestizo body meets its destruction and simultaneous resurrection, a resurrection enacted in another form. This is the great Chicano nationalist dream: to create sociopolitical bodies out of the overdetermined brown bodies, bodies already situated in so many disempowering positions of subalterity” (68). That is, Chicano nationalist discourse, in the act of mourning, appropriates the actual death of the mestizo body by symbolically recuperating it—(re)membering—in the form of the political body of the Chicano nation.

Yet, I would like to deepen and complicate this Chicano nationalist reading by shifting our critical attention away from an exclusive focus on the scene’s ending to instead examine the autopsy itself.<sup>132</sup> Before I turn to those passages, it is important to highlight the symbolic position that Robert Fernandez occupies in *Revolt*. In many respects, Robert Fernandez exemplifies the dispossessed, the titular “cockroach” of the novel, as his circumstances in Tooner Flats (e.g. abject poverty, little educational opportunity, pervasive violence, constant police harassment) upend the comforting norms of bourgeois life. Yet, this exemplarity is predicated on

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<sup>132</sup> Here, I am following Grace Hong’s cue in her essay “Fun with Death and Dismemberment.” However, where she turns to this scene to locate a resistance to the practices of nationalist mourning via the recognition of its inadequate language to fully capture particular life, I will argue that dispossession’s ethical injunction breaks down the boundaries of subjectivity itself, revealing the possibilities foreclosed by empowerment.

how Robert Fernandez embodies a social type of the “cockroach”—the *vato loco*. Indeed, when recounting Robert Fernandez’s life, the novel makes little effort to describe him in a particular and distinguishing way, instead his life is described fully in representative terms for which the novel enjoins the reader to imagine for herself: “You learn about life from the toughest guy in the neighborhood. You smoke your first joint in an alley at the age of ten; you take your first hit of *carga* before you get laid; and you learn how to make your mark on the wall before you learn to write. Your friends know you to be a *vato loco*, a crazy guy, and they call you ‘ese,’ or ‘vato.’ Or ‘man’” (90). Unsurprising but significant, the *vato loco* is a profoundly masculine figure whose privileged symbolic value rests on his capacity for resistance.<sup>133</sup> In other words, Acosta’s sympathy for the *vato loco* is how the brutality of their lives is matched by their seemingly unflinching resistance to such brutalization. In fact, according to Acosta, “[t]he *vato loco* has been fighting with the pig since the Anglos stole his land in the last century. He will continue to fight until he is exterminated” (91). In this regard, the *vato loco* serves as the masculine prototype for Chicano resistance and, as such, Acosta has already cathected onto the body of Robert Fernandez prior to his idealization in the second autopsy.

With that said, we should be careful to delineate the precise relations of identification between Acosta and the *vato loco* since, as noted in the previous section, Acosta’s connection to the “cockroaches” is profoundly strained. Thus, it is clear that the *vato loco* does not operate as an “ideal ego” —an idealized image of Acosta’s own self-image—that is, Acosta does not find in the *vato loco* the concrete expression of how he ideally conceives of himself. Rather, the *vato loco* occupies a position of an “ego-ideal” and “super-ego”—an idealized image which Acosta aspires to be and upon which he measures himself—that is, it is a model of ethical identity that,

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<sup>133</sup> For a brilliant reading of Chicana Urban Identity—the *Chuca*—read Rosa Linda Fregoso “Re-Imagining Chicana Urban Identities in the Public Sphere, Cool *Chuca* Style” in *Between Woman and Nation*

at once, in its “ego-ideal” psychic function, directs Acosta’s actions toward ethical ideals, at the same time, in its “super-ego” psychic function, berates Acosta for his inadequacy in achieving these ethical ideals.<sup>134</sup> This insight explains Acosta’s manic vacillation throughout the novel between a self-berating guilt and over inflated self-esteem. But more significantly, it provides a framework to make sense of the ethical injunction posed in the second autopsy scene that is perfectly in line with the dictates of nationalist discourse. That is, as psychic mechanisms, the “ego-ideal” and the “super-ego” use different means—inspiration and guilt, respectively—that work in tandem to forge national identification:

And when it is done, there is no more Robert. Oh, sure, they put the head back in place. They sow it up as best they can. But there is no part of the body that I have not ordered chopped. I, who am so good and deserving of love. Yes, me, the big chignon! I, Mr. Buffalo Z. Brown. Me, I ordered those white men to cut up the brown body of that Chicano boy, just another expendable Cockroach.

Forgive me, Robert, for the sake of the living brown. Forgive me and forgive me and forgive me. I am no worse off than you. For the rest of my born days, I will suffer the knowledge of your death and your second death and your ashes to my ashes, your dust to my dust... Goodby, ese. Viva la Raza! (104)

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<sup>134</sup> In *How to Read Lacan*, Slavoj Žižek explains the distinctions as follows: “the “ideal ego” stands for the idealized self-image of the subject (the way I would like to be, I would like others to see me); the Ego-Ideal is the agency whose gaze I try to impress with my ego image, the big Other who watches over me and propels me to give my best, the ideal I try to follow and actualize; and the superego is this same agency in its revengeful, sadistic, punishing, aspect. The underlying structuring principle of these three terms is clearly Lacan’s triad Imaginary-Symbolic-Real: ideal ego is imaginary, what Lacan calls the “small other,” the idealized double-image of my ego; Ego-Ideal is symbolic, the point of my symbolic identification, the point in the big Other from which I observe (and judge) myself; superego is real, the cruel and insatiable agency which bombards me with impossible demands and which mocks my failed attempts to meet them, the agency in the eyes of which I am all the more guilty, the more I try to suppress my “sinful” strivings and meet its demands.”

As often noted, we find the spiritual recuperation of Robert's body—the transubstantiation of Robert's corporeal body into the national body of the “la Raza”—where Robert's material death is revived into the afterlife of the “living brown” through the very act of mourning. Yet, what occurs here is much more than the subsumption of the particularity of Robert's corporeal body under the abstract body of the “la Raza.” Instead a fuller dialectical sublation has occurred that makes “la Raza” a concrete and meaningful category of political identification. As I noted before, the grounds of Acosta's political identification with the *vato loco* is not only his unremitting resistance to racialized brutality but also a long historical legacy of that resistance (e.g. “[t]he *vato loco* has been fighting with the pig since the Anglos stole his land in the last century”). At the same time, there remains for Acosta a distance between himself and the *vato loco* that is more than, though founded upon, their class division, one, that I suggest, is about the kernel of irrationality in the heart of the *vato loco*'s resistance. Indeed, the title of *vato loco*, a “crazy guy,” indexes their unreflected and, in the last instance, irrational (i.e. crazy) capacity for violence. Thus, the sublation of the *vato loco* into “la Raza” entails not only the continuation of *vato loco* resistance and its historical legacy but also the rationalization of that “crazy” violence. Through Acosta's confession, “la Raza” is made into a concrete political identity, available as an “ego-ideal” since its embodiment in Robert Fernandez and the historical legacy of “*vato loco*” resistance gets shorn from the conditions of brutalization that gave rise to it, indeed, negates those conditions, to instead be understood as the rational, succeeding stage in *vato loco* agency, hence providing an ethical orientation for action unsullied by a history of brutalization.

Along with that dialectical process that constitutes the positivity of “la Raza” is the other psychic mechanism for the suturing of a cultural nationalist identity—guilt. Indeed, the passage is rife with Acosta being over wrought with feelings of guilt—from his recognition of the bodily

violation of Robert to an acknowledgement of his participation in that violation, from his repeated plea for forgiveness to his acceptance of continuous suffering for the rest of his life as an ultimate form of penitence. Truly, what characterizes the passage is not so much the praise and valorization of “la Raza” but guilt, an unbearable and unrelenting guilt. Yet, the experience of guilt is made possible through a prior demand of responsibility, that is to say, that the abject and brutal conditions of the life of Robert Fernandez and the violation of his body in death imposes an ethical demand onto Acosta for responsibility, which, when filtered through a cultural nationalist frame, gets experienced as guilt since the brutality of Robert’s life and death and “second death” signals not only Acosta’s nationalist failure to protect life but Acosta’s very betrayal of nationalist ideals through his complicit participation. From that we can fully appreciate and recognize the profound unity of “ego-ideal” and “super-ego” as the psychic mechanism that translates the ethical injunction into national unity. If “la Raza” serves as the ethical model of political action that inspires Chicano cultural nationalism, then it is also repressive psychically, chastising Acosta for his inadequacy to achieve that ethical model. Indeed, we can say that the autopsy acts on two levels, symbolic and real, to suture the political identity of “la Raza.”

#### IV

As compelling as this cultural nationalist reading may be, I would venture to say that it does not fully or even sufficiently explain the significance of the ethical injunction posed by the autopsy of Robert Fernandez. At a purely textual standpoint, this kind of reading of the autopsy bypasses the entire event, both the actions that take place and Acosta’s experience of those

actions. In their place, this reading relies on the resolution of the crisis, one that retrospectively imbues the complexities and difficulties of the autopsy with a clean developmental narrative of political identity. In contradistinction, I would like to linger on the event of the autopsy, not to discount this prior reading, but rather to note how this consolidation of political identity relies upon and covers over a much deeper ethical implication of the autopsy. Let us turn to it now.

What is probably most striking about the scene is the grotesque and macabre details of its narration—from the numerous cadavers strewn across the hospital room to the description of how the bodies are decomposing, dismembered, and mutilated; from the use of onomatopoeia to imitate the sounds involved in the autopsy to the graphic depiction of the rearrange composition of Robert Fernandez’s face and body. In effect, Acosta provides a full sensory description of the entire event, beyond the normal third-person subjective narration, ultimately, in order to make the horror of the scene more tangible to the reader. But what makes this macabre description noteworthy is the values attached to it that render it horrific. For instance, when the autopsy begins, Acosta notes that “[t]here is no blood, no gory scene. All is cold and dry. Sand and sawdust spill to the table” (102). What thus makes the autopsy tragic may be the bodily mutilation of Robert Fernandez; however, here, in noting both the lack of blood and gore and the shocking presence of sand and sawdust in the opening of Robert’s body, this tragic experience is shown to be epiphenomenal to a more fundamental de-humanization of Robert that licenses mutilation in the first place. Put differently, the true horror of the practice of the autopsy is how it disenchant, indeed, profanes, the human body. A case in point is further down in the passage as Acosta continues to narrate the beginning of the autopsy: “See that little package? That, my lad, is the brain. I mean, it was the brain. Well, actually, it *still* is the brain...it just isn’t working right now” (102). Here, the confusion over the brain rests on the uncertainty of its proper *being*. In the

first instance, the brain's being is located in the domain of the human, indeed, it is a defining property of the human. However, that fundamental perceptual orientation gets disrupted by the brain's inorganic packaging, underscored, in the second instance, when the brain ceases to be one while, in the third instance, the recuperation of the brain's being as a human property relies on reducing the human into a functional, mechanical being. Thus, in the same way that each succeeding identity of the brain in the passage signifies a progressive disenchantment of human value, the further along the autopsy proceeds, the more Robert Fernandez's very personhood is quite literally eviscerated.

Indeed, the depths of Robert Fernandez's dehumanization lead Acosta to wildly exclaim in the middle of the autopsy, "This ain't Robert no more. It's just a...no, not a body...body is a whole...this is a joke...Cut that piece there, doctor. *Please!*" (102). This emphasis on the wholeness of the body reveals how bodily integrity, an organic unity founded on a 'proper' composition and relation of bodily parts, serves metonymically to index human value and personhood. With this proper organization of the parts of Robert Fernandez's body, regardless of the aggregate of those parts, the very aura of human personhood ceases to exist. In fact, the scene elaborates this logic through arguably the most grotesque moment of the scene, the severing of Robert's neck bone from the rest of his body, which, in the process, involved the removal of his face:

Slit. One slice. Slit. Up goes the chin. Lift it right up over the face...the face? The face goes up over the head. The head? The head is the face. Huh? *There is no face!*

What do you mean?

The face is hanging down the back of the head. The face is a mask. The mouth is where the brain...The nose is at the back of the neck. The hair is the ears. The brown nose is hanging where the neck...Get your goddamn hand out of there.

My hand?

That is the doctor's hand. It is inside the fucking face.

I mean the head (102-103).

With this dizzying and ghastly description of the rearrangement of Robert's face, where his facial features—chin, nose, ears, hair, and mouth—switch positions with one another, the passage underscores the way that the definition of a face is based on the internal organization of its parts. Indeed, the rearrangement of Robert's face goes beyond just disfigurement to ontological extinction since the removal of parts of the face would render the face tragically disfigured and even ghastly but, it nonetheless would remain a face while the re-arrangement of the face's constituent parts makes the face cease to exist.<sup>135</sup> Thus, it is on these terms that we should understand Acosta's descriptive confusion over the face and the head. It is not the case that we find a crisis of referentiality of the words face and head—an ambiguity of where the face ends and the head begins—but rather, more fundamentally, this ambiguity indicates the ontological severing of the spiritual substance of human personhood and its material expression in the body induced by the autopsy itself. In other words, when Acosta states, "The head? The head is the face. Huh? There is no face!" it points to the bodily conditions that have made the "head" and "face" impossible to be synonymous terms. Indeed, in this moment, they have become antinomies to each other with the "face" acting as the ultimate metonym for the dignity

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<sup>135</sup> Implicit in this logic of the face is the way that the human form organizes the compositional logic of the face and thus acts as the norm that renders faces in general to be intelligible.

of human personhood and the “head” marking the profane remainder of its loss, of the absolute reduction of the human to what Acosta refers to throughout the scene as “meat.”

Interestingly, the scene shows that the effect of the autopsy extends beyond the eradication of Robert Fernandez’s personhood to also impact Acosta himself. In particular, we find the breakdown of the boundaries of Acosta’s subjectivity; indeed, he undergoes a process of de-subjectification. From the very beginning of the autopsy scene, we witness the crumbling of the narratological conventions that make up subjectivity itself: absence of quotation marks, disruption of the syntax of dialogue, ambiguity of temporal order through the simultaneous use of different verb tenses, and the confusion over possessive pronouns (e.g. “Get *your* goddamn hand out of there./*My* hand?/That is the *doctor’s* hand.” *My italicization*). Taken together, the novel’s prose loses its referential consistency in the diegetic space of the novel, ultimately collapsing the internal boundaries of the narrative. For instance, when returning to the last quoted passage, we find that it wildly shuttles across different focalization—from third-person objective description (e.g. “Slit. One slice. Slit. Up goes the chin.”) to a second-person singular imperative (e.g. “*Lift it right up over the face...the face?*” *my italicization*) to a first-person singular (e.g. “*Lift it right up over the face...the face?*” *my italicization*)—to the point where enunciative position of characters blur to indistinction (e.g. “My hand?/That is the doctor’s hand”) and the coherence of objective/subjective division upon which the semblance of Acosta’s interiority relies dissolves to nothing.

In taking both of these aspects of the scene together—the destruction of Robert’s personhood and the de-subjectification of Acosta—I suggest we glimpse an ethical grammar of dispossession<sup>136</sup> that exceeds its normative form of empowerment whether in its liberal or

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<sup>136</sup> Here, I am borrowing Frank Wilderson III’s phrase “grammar of suffering.” By this phrase, Wilderson refers to the racially differential modes and assumptive political logic by which suffering is meted out and experienced in a

revolutionary nationalist variant and which is subsequently displaced by an overlaying an empowering logic of cultural nationalism. Indeed, where cultural nationalism appropriates the “meat” of Robert Fernandez to make itself a concrete political identity in the act of mourning him, it does so by returning to that “meat” the unity of a body, a tragically violated body to be sure, but a body nonetheless, one that is then available for national symbolization. In other words, what is abjected in the nationalist dialectic of memory and forgetting is Robert’s very unmaking. Furthermore, the scene shows cultural nationalism’s empowering logic needs to abject this ethical grammar of dispossession since it disrupts the spatial and temporal order that make national subjectivity possible. As I have shown earlier, the “ego ideal” and “super ego” form distinct psychic mechanisms that work in tandem to translate the ethical injunction of dispossession as an occasion to forge national subjectivity via their invocation of inspiration and guilt, respectively. However, the conditions of possibility of those psychic mechanism rests on the fantasy of an ego that is made and sustained through the ego’s adequation to the body. In other words, the unity of the ego upon which national identification rests proceeds on a structurally prior and therefore necessarily repeated identifiatory moment where the subject identifies with her body as a spatially distinct and bounded object. Indeed, the ego as ego is built on and sustained through the repetition of this imaginary identification with the subject’s bodily image.<sup>137</sup> Thus, this intersubjective account of national subjectivity must determinately negate the alterity of Robert Fernandez, that is, negate the otherness of “meat” and determine that

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modern social formation. In Wilderson’s schema, white “grammar of suffering” is founded on exploitation and alienation while red “grammar of suffering” is founded on “genocide and sovereign loss” and black “grammar of suffering” is founded on “accumulation and fungability.” My use of the term differs at the level of abstraction from Wilderson’s. While Wilderson uses the phrase to develop a synchronic account of US political antagonism, indeed he distills a 3-prong racial structure of the US (e.g. red, white, and black), I use the phrase to conceptualize historically the way that suffering 1) enables the circulation and expansion of forms of power, 2) is a discursive site where political contestation occurs over ethical life, and 3) occasions varying and potentially unforeseen ethical responses and thoughts. Indeed, this project has been examining the imbrication of these lines of inquiry in forming its geneology of dispossession.

<sup>137</sup> Lacan “Mirror-Stage”

otherness to be a human bodily form, in order to sublimate that alterity as constituent parts of national subjectivity. In this respect, national subjectivity relies on a foundational spatio-temporal difference with the Other that is subsequently cancelled and preserved simultaneously to sustain subjectivity as such. Ultimately, what underpins the empowering logic of cultural nationalism, which also elides the substance of the ethical injunction of dispossession, is the foundational role that bodily integrity plays in preserving human personhood and subjectivity.

V

With this insight, we can now truly understand the fundamentally constitutive role gender/sex play in both the novel and empowerment. If, as I have shown, bodily integrity is the cypher that misapprehends the suffering of dispossession and thus provides the ethical force that licenses and compels empowerment, then “sex” is the cultural norm that governs the intelligibility of bodily integrity and, as such, governs the ethical grammar of dispossession towards empowerment. This role of sex/gender normativity in regulating the boundaries of body is thoroughly explained by Judith Butler in “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary.” Starting with Freud’s “On Narcissism: An Introduction” then turning to *The Ego and the Id*, Butler examines the ambiguity of Freud’s theory of the bodily-ego in its underpinning in bodily morphology. Anticipating Lacan’s “Mirror Stage,” Freud asserts that the intuition of the ego as a unified subjective entity is itself an imaginary projection of a surface whose form is the body. In this respect, Freud thinks of the ego to always be a “bodily-ego.” Butler takes issue with the priority of the body in Freud’s account insofar as it serves as the material foundation for ego-formation. Instead Butler demonstrates the fundamental interpenetration between the psyche

and the body and the imaginary and the material to the point where there cannot be a structural primacy of one over the other. Returning to Freud's earlier work "On Narcissism," Butler elaborates how, for Freud, the experience of bodily pain occasions the subject's recognition of the boundaries of his body by withdrawing libido from "love objects" onto to the bodily sites of pain itself. In this sense, the pain is doubled, at once, a physical and psychic pain but, in doing so, the imaginary contours of the ego are shaped on the surface of the body, transforming pained bodily parts into erotogenic zones for the subject. This process finds its fullest neurotic expression in the hypochondriac. Yet, Butler notes an ambiguity in this account since the subject's capacity to locate bodily pain occurs only with its libidinal investment. Butler underscores this ambiguity when she writes, "In the essay on narcissism, hypochondria lavishes libido on a body part, but in a significant sense, that body part does not exist for consciousness prior to that investiture, indeed, that body part is delineated and becomes knowable for Freud only on the condition of that investiture" (58). In this respect, it is impossible to treat the body as the source that gives rise to psychic ideas insofar as epistemological access to the body is made possible by those very ideas.

This fundamental ambiguity takes on great significance because its temporal/causative settling is precisely the way heteronormativity gets installed into the foundation of subjectivity. Put differently, the fixing/mapping of the psyche onto the givenness of the 'natural' body naturalizes heteronormativity by rendering heterosexual norms to be the regulative principle for the materiality of the body. Indeed, Butler sees this playing out in Freud's theorization of erotogenicity of body parts when he asserts that "libidinal self-attention" is the process that circumscribes a body part to be a part. Unsurprisingly, for Freud, the penis is the paradigmatic case of this anxiety-neurosis process. However, Butler shows that Freud undermines the stability

and power of the penis in this process when he asserts that other erotogenic zones may “act as substitutes for the genitals and behave analogously to them” (Freud, 84, quoted from Butler). In asserting both, Butler shows that Freud has run into a logical problem of substitution when she writes:

Here it seems that ‘the genitals,’ presumed to be male genitals, are at first an example of body parts delineated through anxiety-neurosis, but, as a ‘prototype,’ they are the example of examples of that process whereby body parts become epistemologically accessible through an imaginary investiture. As an exemplar or prototype, these genitals have already within Freud’s text substituted not only for a variety of other body parts or type, but for the effects of other hypochondriacal processes as well. (60)

Put simply, Freud’s problem is how to square the two competing representative functions of the “penis” for his anxiety-neurosis process (i.e. libidinal investment into a body part makes it phenomenally accessible as a body part): 1) “the penis” as both erotogenic zone and discreet body part is one example among others of the anxiety-neurosis process or 2) “the penis” as both an erotogenic zone and discreet body part is the prototype of this anxiety-neurosis process for which all others are just mere substitutes and “behave analogously” to the penis. At base, the ambiguity in erotogenicity is what grounds and precipitates this process by which ego and the body map onto one another as parts and wholes. Furthermore, this ambiguity is exacerbated even further when Freud later claims that erotogenicity is a general character of all organs. With this final point, Freud has completely undermined the logic of anxiety-neurosis process and, by extension, the theory of the bodily-ego. How can libidinal investiture in a body part precipitate

epistemic access to it when that body part already has erotogenic capacity? By extension, how can the unity of the ego be founded on the imaginary projection of bounded surfaces of the body when that very epistemic access of that body and upon which that imaginary projects relies on the libidinal investment on the body? In both cases, Freud flounders on the precise causative relation between the material composition of the body and the phantasmatic order of the body for the ego. Thus, at stake is not only the endless metalepsis of cause and effect at work in Freud's account of erotogenicity and the anxiety-neurosis but more profoundly the entire mereological system of both the material and phantasmatic body—the boundedness of the material and phantasmatic body as a whole and its connection to its anatomical and erotogenic morphology.<sup>138</sup>

Ultimately, Butler's tropological analysis of Freud's text reveals his anxious attempts to ground the theory of erotogenicity in the naturalness of the (masculine) body, particularly via the figuration of the penis. As she summarizes:

In the course of restoring this phallic property to the penis, however, Freud enumerates a set of analogies and substitutions that rhetorically affirm the fundamental transferability of that property. Indeed, the phallus is neither the imaginary construction of the penis nor the symbolic valence for which the penis is a partial approximation. For that formulation is still to affirm the phallus as the prototype or idealized property of the penis. And yet is clear from the metonymic trajectory of Freud's own text, the ambivalence at the center of any construction of the phallus belongs to no body part, but is fundamentally transferable and is, at least within his text, the very principle of erotogenic transferability. Moreover, it is through this transfer, understood as a substitution of the psychical for the physical or

the metaphorizing logic of hypochondria, that body parts become phenomenologically accessible at all. (62)

By demonstrating the metonymic slippage of Freud's text, Butler does not seek to tear down wholesale the entire psychoanalytic account of the interrelation of subjectivity and the body. Rather she aims to restore the contingency and opportunities foreclosed by a strict assumptive masculine identity between the body and ego. Hence, she is at pains to underscore how the "phallus belongs to no body part," though it is also not purely of the domain of the Symbolic.<sup>139</sup> Thus, it is this fundamental ambiguity of the phallus that Butler proposes the "lesbian phallus" to be what haunts the account of both Freud and Lacan and offers not only different subjectivities but also different bodily surfaces and morphologies.

If we return now to Acosta's misapprehension of the ethical injunction of dispossession to be a violence/violation of Robert's bodily integrity, Butler shows us that this misapprehension is founded on Acosta investment in the regime of heteronormativity, particularly its constitution of heteronormative masculinity. By investment, I do not mean it as the intentional action of a self-conscious agent or an unintentional taking for granted due to the norm's sheer social ubiquity for which both can be easily relegated as merely coincidental and be likened to all of Acosta's spectacular sexist and homophobic declarations in *Revolt*. Rather, this investment in heteronormativity occurs at a transcendental level whereby the (masculine) spectral body serves as a necessary condition for the possibility of subjectivity and out of which a libidinal economy is sustained and its epistemic norms are secured. Put simply, heteronormative masculinity

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<sup>139</sup> Butler extends her tropological analysis and critique into the role of the phallus in Lacan's psychoanalytical theory. For my purposes in this chapter, it would be redundant to go into detail into this argument. However, it is worth noting that the goals of this later argument is to demonstrate how the body is not reducible to pure discursivity, which she demonstrates through the tropological interpenetration in Lacan's theory of the symbolic and the imaginary via the figure of the phallus.

enables, secures, and delimits subjectivity for Acosta such that he can only make sense of the ethical injunction posed by the autopsy to be a violation of Robert's body even as own his description of the event itself demonstrates its violence to be on the order of a subjective world destruction. Indeed, we see this investment, prior to the description of the autopsy, when Acosta enters the hospital morgue. After scanning the room and witnessing the numerous corpses around him, he writes

Don't turn away from it, goddamnit! Don't be afraid of bare-ass naked death. Hold your head up, open your eyes, don't be embarrassed, boy! I walk forward, I hold my breath. My head is buzzing, my neck is taut, my hands are wet and I cannot look away from the dead cunts, the frizzled balls, the lumps of tit, the fat assess of white meat. (99)

Besides the imperative to be a "Man" in the face of the death, heteronormativity abounds here in how the fixation on "the dead cunts, the frizzled balls, the lumps of tit, the fat assess of white meat" make these heteronormative erotogenic zones figurative expressions of human death, which is made possible through an implicit heteronormative tropological system that makes "cunts," "balls," "tit," and "assess" synecdoches of a bounded and internally coherent body. Hence, the very legibility of human death in the passage is founded on either an heteronormative logic of reproduction, which makes human death to be a violation of reproductive life, or a patriarchal logic of sexual triumph, which makes human death to be a lost opportunity to demonstrate heterosexual mastery. Indeed, these two logics cleave together, making it difficult to clearly separate them, when, a few lines earlier, Acosta states, "And there, a once-beautiful

chick, look at her. How many boys tried to get between those legs, now dangling pools of red-black blood?” (99).

## VI

If we are to recuperate for thought the ethical grammar of dispossession from the grips of empowerment, then we must forgo recourse to bodily integrity as its cypher. Thus, we must return to and unpack fully Acosta’s brief, fleeting insight that Robert is “not a body [since a] body is a whole” but instead is reduced to “meat.” This means two things: 1) that the violence of dispossession, as laid out in the autopsy scene, cannot be understood as the violation of bodily integrity. It must be understood, following Hortense Spillers, as “high crimes against the flesh” (66) and that the scope of an ethical grammar of dispossession founded on “flesh” simultaneously proceeds below the register of the masculine spectral body and beyond it as a singular unit to include the social relations of captivity.

Before I elaborate the above claim, I would like to make a couple of caveats concerning the historical character of my argument thus far. First, it bears stressing that my analysis throughout the chapter centers on political subjectivity, which for me makes it a historical formation. In this respect, my recourse to the high level of philosophical abstraction to analyze political subjectivity, indeed, in the analytical process, making political subjectivity appear be an account of Subjectivity as such, is an historical effect of my object of inquiry itself. Put simply, I would argue empowerment as a form of power explicitly ratchets up the stakes of its material and discursive practices to the level of human universality and, as such, the scale by which dispossession is rendered follows suit. Second, and a consequence of the first point, my turn now

to Hortense Spillers is not meant to analogize the history of Chicano racialization to the history of Black racialization or to find structural analogy of Chicano racial positioning and Slave positioning in a US political formation. Rather, following the arguments by Saidiya Hartman and others who have collectively challenged triumphalist discourses of slavery's end to instead show the "afterlife of slavery,"<sup>140</sup> my turn to Spillers here, in a sense, is to distill an instance of that afterlife, an instance that is a point of contact with Chicano racialization. In this respect, if part of the "afterlife of slavery" is "blackness" as not only the racial typology by which "social death" is constituted by power and experienced but also, following Fred Moten, the resistance to "social death" that precedes its orchestration in power, than, again following Fred Moten, black people have a privileged relation to blackness but not an exclusive relation to it.

Returning now to Spillers, I argue we can think of Robert Fernandez's autopsy to exemplify what Hortense Spillers's describes as the violent practice that precedes and reoccurs symbolically in "pornotroping."<sup>141</sup> As Spillers writes, "First of all, their New-World, diasporic plight marked a *theft of the body*—a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lose at least gender difference *in the outcome*, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific" (67, italics in original). Here Spillers underscores the fundamental epistemic violence that comes with, and indeed is essential to, the material practices of violence—the "theft of the body"—in the Middle Passage. Part and parcel to this epistemic violence, and in many respects defining of this "theft," is the removal of gender "in the outcome." In this regard, this violent practice of "theft of the

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<sup>140</sup> See Jared Sexton's "People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery"

<sup>141</sup> I find it more accurate to describe this violent reduction to flesh to heuristically precede pornotroping. In a symbolic sense, pornotroping reproduces this violence in generating pleasures for the captor from the "flesh" of the captive body.

body” forcibly circumvents the heterosexual matrix whose normative regulation not only grounds gender identity in the political technology of sex but also, as discussed in the prior section and essential to that process of gendering, producing bodily surfaces and corresponding morphologies as material foundation to those gendered/sexual identities vis-à-vis the ego. Put simply, the “theft of the body” entails “ungendering.” The consequence of which, for my inquiry, are the disruption of the heteronormative closure by which the ego is grafted onto the masculine spectral body.<sup>142</sup>

For those reasons, Spillers crucially makes an analytical distinction between “flesh”<sup>143</sup> and the “body.” As she writes, “before the ‘body’ there is the ‘flesh,’ that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography” (67). In some respects, we can think of this reduction to “flesh” entailed in the “theft of the body” to be a process of objectification, some sort of total objectification. Yet, I would argue that this interpretation would miss the defining character of “flesh” that Spillers implies earlier:

This profound intimacy of interlocking detail is disrupted, however, by externally imposed meanings and uses: 1) the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; 2) at the same time—in stunning contradiction—the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming *being for* the captor; 3) in this absence *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of

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<sup>142</sup> This is not say that gender/sexuality no longer matters rather this history pushes for a re-orientation of gender/sexuality from its privileged epistemic focus in bourgeois domesticity. Indeed, the sexualities that emerge via “pnototroping” appear to be “perverse” insofar they are not *of* the order of bourgeois domesticity even as they are expressed *in* its categories of intelligibility.

<sup>143</sup> In many respects, “flesh” can be thought of through what Giorgio Agamben has called “bare-life.” For a brilliant unpacking of the productive kinship and divergences of this point, see Alexander G. Weheliye’s “Pnototropes”

‘otherness’; 4) as a category of ‘otherness,’ the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general ‘powerlessness,’ resonating through various centers of human and social meaning. (67)

Here, the decisive terms are “sensuality” and “thing,” which, if thought through phenomenology, then their pairing is not a “stunning contradiction” at all. Indeed, for Kant, the sensuousness of things as their defining feature distinguishes them from objects since to be an object in the first place is to bring sensible intuition of things under the “categories of the understanding.”<sup>144</sup> In this regard, the flesh’s place in the “zero degree of social conceptualization” is structurally beyond, or prior to, the idealist conditions and conceptual powers described in Kant’s transcendental ego or the epistemological function of the body for the subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis.<sup>145</sup> In respects to the latter, it is absolutely crucial to maintain the distinction between “flesh” and “body.” However, this is not to say that they cannot be articulated to one another. Indeed, the “captivity” of what Spillers calls the “captive body” is defined by the very reduction to be purely “flesh,” such that there is no distinction between bodily outlines with an internally unified morphology, that is, the whole bodily surface and the order of its parts that make-up bodily essence, but just “flesh” without differentiation.<sup>146</sup>

Returning once again to Robert’s autopsy, it is easy to see that the destruction of his human personhood that I detailed earlier meant his reduction to “flesh.” Indeed, when elaborating on captive flesh, Spillers provides an example of an medical advertisement offering

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<sup>144</sup> Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*

<sup>145</sup> Lacan “Mirror Stage” – the body is the paradigmatic object and, as such, the model by which things are comprehended as objects

<sup>146</sup> In this respect, this idea should be seen as cautionary point to a purely liberatory interpretation of Butler’s notion of the “lesbian phallus.” But, following same line of thought, which I will try to demonstrate soon, we should not see all bodily articulations to “flesh” to be absolute domination. And part of my point is that these outlooks are impossible to disarticulate from one another. What all this amounts to is a recognition that the ‘flesh’ is neither good nor bad but rather the “flesh” entails danger for which any critical judgment must reckon with these possibilities.

to buy “assortments of diseased, damaged, and disabled Negroes,” from which she interprets in the following way: “This profitable ‘atomizing’ of the captive body provides another angle on the divided flesh: we lose any hint or suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features, between one human personality and another, between human personality and cultural institutions” (68). Surely, cannot this be said of what occurs to Robert Fernandez as seen by Acosta?<sup>147</sup> Indeed, the horror that Acosta is forced to witness in Robert’s autopsy is the dispossession of “any hint or suggestion of a dimension of ethics” for which he must re-inscribed afterward by mourning his death. At base, bodily integrity, and now we can say, a spectral constitution of bodily integrity is the very principle by which a human ethics is organized, mediating between the “[abstraction of] human personality and its [concrete expression in] anatomical features, between one human personality and another, between human personality and cultural institutions.”

With that said, I suggest that rather than find no “suggestion of a dimension of ethics,” we find in this loss both the critical lever to dislodge the (hetero)normative power that maintains a spectral form of the body, and a “hint” of an alternative one based on “flesh.” That is, I argue that “flesh” or, in keeping with the terms of the novel, “meat” transforms the scales of the ethical grammar of dispossession by re-organizing it away from the masculine spectral body. Indeed, the spectral body provides ethical coherence and value by subsuming every individual to its ideal form and thus, individuals come to ethically know themselves and each other through their shared identity under it. However, the ethical grammar of “meat” cannot operate through this formal logic of identity rather it must be understood through the concrete, sensuous relations of captivity. In this paradigm, it becomes difficult to determine both what would amount to a “high

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<sup>147</sup> The analogy imbedded in this rhetorical question is not meant, as stated before, to generate equivalence or even structural kinship between slave positionality and Chicano positionality. Instead, it is to implicate medical practices in the “afterlife of slavery,” which serves as a point of historical contact with Chicano racialization in the barrio.

crime of the flesh” and a proper ethical response of such a “crime” since the norm of “meat” is not a bounded unity from which violation and recuperation can be abstractly understood, but an endless condition of subjection, a subjection that can very much amount to unbounded and endless cruelty. This is an incredibly disconcerting thought for ethical life insofar as ethico-political practices do not lead to an escape from subjection but a transformation of its terms. In this respect, to discern dispossession as the “high crime against the flesh” would mean something more than, though not at the exclusion of, the violation of the body (understood here as the body of the community) but an inquiry into “meat,” which is to say the conditions of captivity that forged the very contours of that body. The aim of this kind of inquiry would not be to find the moment before the relations of captivity from which ethico-political practices seek to return but instead to distill within those conditions the ethico-political practices that have constituted captivity to be unbearable and from which to generate different ones.

With that said, if we must return to a form of embodiment to think dispossession ethically beyond the claims of empowerment, it cannot be the spectral body but instead the captive body. In this conceptual paradigm, notions of integrity and violation cannot be thought in self-contained terms but relationally to something like a captor. Indeed, would it be possible to speak of bodily surfaces at all without expanding their scope to include the captor? If, under the (hetero)normative view, the ethical injunction posed by dispossession seeks the restoration of bodily integrity, would restoration even be the proper ethical project to an ethical grammar of the “meat?” What exactly would it mean for an ethical demand that seeks not so much restoration but a different configuration of captivity, not as category of abstraction but as the practical conditions of a sensuous life?

Finally, with this insight that the ethical grammar of dispossession is founded on “meat,” we can now return to and bring to thought Robert Fernandez’s “face.” In lieu of determining it through the principle of bodily integrity, that is, reading it as a synecdoche of the body in which its recomposition expresses the dismemberment of a body, should we not instead see it to be expressive of the absolute ethical demand of “meat?”

Slit. One slice. Slit. Up goes the chin. Lift it right up over the face...the face? The face goes up over the head. The head? The head is the face. Huh? *There is no face!*

What do you mean?

The face is hanging down the back of the head. The face is a mask. The mouth is where the brain...The nose is at the back of the neck. The hair is the ears. The brown nose is hanging where the neck...Get your goddamn hand out of there.

My hand?

That is the doctor’s hand. It is inside the fucking face.

I mean the head (102-103).

In these terms, maybe we can consider that the divide between the face and head does not signal an ontological divide but instead a brief moment when “meat” finds the expressive capacities of the face? Accordingly, we may curb our horror in witnessing a “face [that hangs] down the back of the head,” a “mouth [...] where the brain [is],” a “nose [...] at the back of the neck,” “hair [that] is the ears,” and a “brown nose [that hangs] where the neck [is]” by considering this synesthesian nightmare, this fundamental re-organization of the sensibilities of the body, to be the anguish of “meat” rather than the violation of the body. Indeed, the “face” has long been the

province of “Man” that territorializes his claims to the universal and thus obscures other forms of Becoming.<sup>148</sup> In that respect, the “face [truly] is a mask.” With that in mind, we may appreciate the question of “My hand?” as not the horror of one’s implication in acts of violence and the recognition of political impurity, but instead to be an actual ethical question posed by “meat,” which is to say the social relations of captivity and its forms of subjection.

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In describing the immense crisis of governability generated by the expansion of the black freedom struggles, the chapter has shown how this crisis established the conditions of possibility for the use of the figure of the abstract poor as a political technology through which corporative relations of power were deployed across the US social field. Indeed, community action as the precise recuperative practices of Great Society liberal governmentality politicized the racialization of poverty and consolidated its uneven geography into distinct political constituencies. In so doing, the chapter argues that it forged political subjectivities attuned to such corporatist relations by rendering dispossession as the violation of the integrity of the body of the community. Thus, the chapter argues that this rendering relies upon and reinscribes gender and sexual norms of the spectral body. Yet, alternative to this formation, the chapter has discern within such a political subjectivity a different ethical principle for comprehending dispossession and therefore the politics of community, one predicated on the flesh.

With that said, each chapter thus far has sought to show how the political rationality of these various governmentalities produce, at the level of political subjectivity, modalities of

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<sup>148</sup> See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, particularly Chapter 7: “Year Zero: Faciality”

experiencing dispossession in alignment with the aims of the liberal state. In so doing, I have tried to demonstrate the contingency of this experience by not only showing its historical and political conditions and the relations of power that constituted that experience of dispossession but also by illustrating “alternatives” within those formation through which to consider dispossession differently from the liberal state. Thus, it is with this aim in mind that the next chapter will conclude this genealogy of the political culture of dispossession by turning back to the formation that began this dissertation—neoliberal governmentality.

**Chapter 4: Neoliberal Governmentality and the Question of Freedom: Homelessness and the Residues of Property in Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man***

“Economic freedom is jointly produced through growth, well-being, the state, and the forgetting of history”

- Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*

“It was all of that operating together—as a system. The individual elements only made the system manifest. But the only reason that I can give you or why I went along with the Mad Man’s sexual violence toward me—certainly his act was entirely beyond my own moral boundaries and even any sense of my own safety—is that the world owed it to him, owed it to him for the death of Hasler, for his own life since, for Crazy Joey. I happened to be there.”

- Samuel Delany, *The Mad Man*

Throughout the preceding chapters, I have sought, in general, to show the coincidence of political subjectivity and political rationality of liberal governmentality in order to provide a history of what I have called our contemporary “political culture of dispossession,” one that has come to experience a so-called loss of liberal democracy as a form of dispossession. In fact, it has been the central contention of my dissertation that this experience of dispossession is not a

necessary consequence of liberal democracy's putative passing but rather the contingent effect of how we have come to know and feel dispossessed in accordance with the liberal state.

In order to bear out this contention, each chapter has examined forms of appearance of dispossession (e.g. white family farmer, interned Japanese American, the abstract poor) as historical indices where political subjectivity and political rationality aligned through recuperative practices (e.g. technical planning, internment, empowerment). Indeed, as an ethico-political activity, these recuperative practices necessarily constitute their social targets and modes of recuperation. Also, as I have sought to emphasize, they produce their ethical norms vis-à-vis the experience of dispossession. Furthermore, so as not to take these formations for granted, each chapter has historicized them by showing their conditions of possibility in particular political crises of the liberal state (e.g. Great Depression, World War II, and black freedom struggles). In doing so, the chapters discerned not only the series of racial, gendered, and sexual norms undergirding each formation but also tried to determine immanent contradictions to them.

This final chapter returns to where the dissertation's introduction began—neoliberal governmentality. In particular, this chapter follows the others by suggesting that neoliberal governmentality installs and transforms power relations according to a market rationality. However, this chapter stresses that it does so, in the first instance, to create neutral power relations that define neutrality through the promotion of the freedom of its participants and, only in the second instance, the promotion of a capitalist ideology. Hence, the political subjectivities attuned to neoliberal governmentality are defined by freedom but in a fundamentally formal manner.

To carry this out, the chapter first offers a somewhat speculative history on the formation of neoliberal political rationality. In particular, late 60s and early 70s new social movement radicalism completely undermined the practices and institutions that provide historical precedence for the US liberal state, which, in so doing, necessitated authorizing the US state's political sovereignty as a neutral political system for the exercise of (market) freedom. In fact, by examining "Housing First" as a recuperative practice of neoliberal governmentality, this chapter shows that neoliberal governmentality's reliance upon market techniques of population management necessarily assumes that those subjected to them are formally free.

Due to this, the chapter argues that neoliberal governmentality problematizes freedom itself at the level of political subjectivity. In order to see this effect, the chapter turns to Samuel Delany's pornographic novel, *The Mad Man*. The chapter argues that we find that, as a consequence of installing formal (market) freedom into the subject, neoliberal governmentality recalls a residual form of "possessive individualism" to give it substance. In so doing, the chapter shows a profound reversal of possessive individualism's foundational assumption—no longer defining freedom through a principle of self-ownership but instead through a principle of ownership by another. Under this situation, race, gender, and sexuality no longer appear to operate exclusively as normative categories of discipline but instead become available both for reconstructing alternative histories and ethical practices and for positivist inscriptions into neutral multiculturalism.

## Neoliberalism and the Crisis of the State

Common historical accounts of the formation and ascendancy of neoliberalism have often traced it to a small group of Austrian intellectuals whose political and economic thoughts achieved global dominance through a vast, complex, and sometimes contradictory transnational network of institutions that allowed for its circulations and its implementation into state policy at the same time as a series of political and economic crises across the globe, generally, and specific national contexts occurred.<sup>149</sup> These kinds of accounts necessarily emphasize the historical insurgence of neoliberalism as the consequence of the specific activities of particular intellectual and political elites and organizations rather than broader transformations or the political activities of broader constituencies. Even though it would be an utter mistake to see these accounts to be conspiratorial, indeed their detailed archival work and comparative national analyses enrich all accounts of neoliberalism, their focus on elites tend to occlude the activity of other political actors in them.

On the other hand, the accounts that explain the emergence and formation of neoliberalism through a larger political frame, such as David Harvey's *Brief History of Neoliberalism* suffers from a slightly different but somewhat related problem: making neoliberalism's dominance to be the effect of duping the masses. This may not be an entirely fair characterization of Harvey, but it does describe an implicit tendency within accounts of neoliberalism that operate through a model of hegemony. For instance, Harvey argues that "construction of consent" for neoliberalism occurred through the resignification of new social movement assertions of freedom by political and economic elites, specifically splitting those

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<sup>149</sup> See Philip Mirowski (ed) and Dieter Plehwe (ed) *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* or Daniel Stedman Jones's *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics*

claims of freedom from a vision of social justice and ultimately rendering them to be an argument for personal, indeed libertarian freedom.<sup>150</sup> Given this, even though Harvey does detail the alliances between classes, actions of political party systems, and the role of media, this complex mediation easily gets reduced to an ideological ruse of the masses by economic and political elites.

Thus, rather than answer the question of why and how neoliberalism became dominant by either tracing the institutional networks of power that connected a series of influential thinkers and politicians at a particular moment or determining how, in a particular conjuncture, a historical bloc formed and gained the hegemonic status of the national-popular, I address the question of the formation of neoliberal rationality to be the effect of a particular historical problem—namely the crisis of the state, a problem of governmentality.

What follows is admittedly a highly speculative answer, one that requires much more research to bear out substantive insights but, for my purpose and at this moment, I think it suffices. To that end, I think it is worth noting that in Foucault's lectures where he addresses neoliberal governmentality—*The Birth of Biopolitics*—he spends a relatively little amount of time historicizing the US, elaborating only a couple points about both the contemporaneous historical circumstances shared across national social formations and the distinct historical character of the liberal tradition in the US. For the most part, these historical points are used to explain the distinct US character of neoliberal governmentality rather than provide the historical catalyst for its formation in a political conjuncture. Instead, Foucault spends the majority of the lectures discussing the formation and character of neoliberal governmentality in the German social formation. It is there that I would suggest we find useful insights for comprehending, through a comparative analysis, the historical emergence of US neoliberal governmentality.

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<sup>150</sup> See David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, particularly Chapter 2 "The Construction of Consent"

Accordingly, Foucault touches upon many points about the German circumstance but the most relevant is his formulation of its particular political problem in 1948. He elaborates this through a reading of Ludwig Erhard's statement.<sup>151</sup>

Basically, Erhard is saying that in the current state of affairs—that is to say, in 1948, before the German state had been reconstituted, before the two German states had been constituted—it is clearly not possible to lay claim to historical rights for a not yet reconstituted Germany and for a still to be reconstituted German state, when these rights are debarred by history itself. It is not possible to claim juridical legitimacy inasmuch as no apparatus, no consensus, and no collective will can manifest itself in a situation in which Germany is on the one hand divided, and on the other occupied. So, there are no historical rights, there is no juridical legitimacy, on which to found a new German state.

(82)

This is truly a tremendous political problem. At base, Foucault asserts that the political crisis faced by Germany is the total lack of historical precedence to ground the juridical legitimacy and political representativeness of a German state. By 1948 Germany had been divided and occupied by the Soviets and Western countries, had suffered tremendous destruction to its infrastructure and thus was in the midst of reconstructing it and a peace-time economy, and was charged to prevent the resurgence of Nazism/Fascism—these factors together completely invalidated any historical basis for state legitimacy. Thus, from this political crisis, the overriding political question became: how to legitimate a state without recourse to historical precedence?

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<sup>151</sup> Foucault quotes the following from Erhard: “We must free the economy from state control. We must avoid both anarchy and the termite state [because] only a state that establishes both the freedom and responsibility of the citizen can legitimately speak in the name of the people” (80-81)

As a result, I want to suggest that this same political question formed and became urgent in the US context in the 1970s. In particular, with the insurgence and radicalization of numerous social movements seeking liberation, particularly those organized around race who were unappeased by legislative solutions and the anemic institutional possibilities of empowerment, and in conjunction with the crisis of capital (i.e. massive recession of the 1970s), the US state faced a political crisis that invalidated forms of historical precedence to be the grounds of its juridical legitimacy and political representativeness. Thus, it is this political crisis that forms the historico-political conditions of possibility for neoliberal political rationality, specifically serving as the catalyst to neoliberal governmentality's concrete formation. Indeed, the extent to which the host of social movements exposed the racial and gendered unevenness of capitalist social relations, disrupted the ethical unity of the nation, and challenged the universality of law, they also undermined the way that those institutions produced historical continuity for state legitimacy. Thus, without historical rights to ground the liberal state's political legitimacy and representativeness of the people, what else can provide the rationale for governing?

In this kind of political situation, freedom, particularly market freedom, becomes the fount of political legitimacy, the very principle through which it is founded and assessed. Foucault, through a thought experiment, explains the broad outlines of this political rationality:

Let us suppose that the function of this institutional framework  $x$  is not, of course, to exercise sovereignty, since, precisely, there is nothing in the current situation that can found a juridical power of coercion, but is simply to guarantee freedom. So, its function is not to constrain, but simply to create a space of freedom, to guarantee a freedom, and precisely to guarantee it in the economic domain. Let us now suppose that in this

institution x [...] any number of individuals freely agree to play this game of economic freedom guaranteed by the institutional framework. [...] What would be implied by the free exercise of this freedom by individuals who are not constrained to exercise it but who have simply been given the possibility of exercising it? Well, it would imply adherence to this framework; it would imply that consent has been given to any decision which may be taken to guarantee this economic freedom or to secure that which makes this economic freedom possible. (82-83)

Laid out in this way, it is crucial to attend to the passage's subtleties. That is, it would be easy to read Foucault here to be asserting that the market and its logic supplant the state and its concerns over juridical legitimacy and political representativeness. Indeed, a crude Marxist may see this passage to be an affirmation of their critiques of the liberal state because, surely, has not the liberal state's guarantee of freedom via "political emancipation" been a cover for the perpetuation of capitalism through the protection of private property, the enforcement of contracts, the maintenance and guarantee of a money supply, etc.<sup>152</sup> Yet, it is important, as Wendy Brown asserts, that neoliberalism be understood as not the logical consequence of capitalism.<sup>153</sup> Rather than interpret the passage to be the subordination of the state to the dictates of capital, though I do not want to eliminate that explanation entirely, Foucault asserts that the organizing rationality of governing gets pegged to a different domain of verification—the market. Put differently, the liberal state derives juridical legitimacy and political representativeness of the people by supporting the market and utilizing market rationality because they sustain or act as neutral frameworks of power relations that allow, in the first

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<sup>152</sup> See Karl Marx's "On the Jewish Question"

<sup>153</sup> See Wendy Brown's "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy"

instance, for the exercise of freedom by the participants. Hence, the market grounds the liberal state's sovereignty not by historical precedence but by exemplifying, modeling, and grounding power relations between the governors and governed through a neutral framework (i.e. the liberal state) and practice where they both operate freely. Of course, inequality and violence between participants abound in such a political situation but, under this neoliberal political rationality, it is not due to the framework (i.e. the liberal state) itself since it is neutral. It is due to the numerous factors outside of framework.

Thus, what provides the “neo” of neoliberal political rationality is precisely how “the institution of economic freedom will have to function, or at any rate will be able to function [...] as a point of attraction for the formation of a political sovereignty” (83). Indeed, unlike prior formations of liberal governmentality where the “institution[s] of economic freedom” were deployed to limit sovereign power by undermining the sovereign's claim to total knowledge of the social field and thereby the capacity to control, neoliberal governmentality forges political sovereignty itself through the dissemination of neutral frameworks of power relations for the exercise of freedom. Hence, within the analytics of power, the market must be understood as not a rarefied domain but as a political technology through which neutral power relations get established or reconfigured. Of course, in clarifying what establishes the novelty of neoliberal governmentality, I am not suggesting that these other forms of power relations and techniques disappear but instead that they get reconfigured.

Now, in the preceding paragraphs, I have stressed that 1) neoliberal political rationality (re)configures governmental practices to facilitate the freedom of the governed in order to maintain the neutrality of those who govern and 2) the support of the market and the extension of market rationality is due to the way they exemplify and model an institutional framework for

governing based on both neutrality and participant freedom. Furthermore, the formation of this neoliberal political rationality emerges out of a political crisis where historical precedence/rights have become invalidated as the basis for grounding the liberal state's juridical legitimacy and political representativeness. I have done all this in order to underscore the conceptual distinctiveness of governmentality and analyses of power relations in discussions of neoliberalism due to the way neoliberal governmentality retains a conceptual slipperiness that make political activity and struggle to appear derivative or secondary to the crisis logic of capitalism because of neoliberal political rationality's articulation to the market as a domain of verification and market tropes as political technologies. The changing process of valorizing capital and the increased inequality of capitalist social relations are indeed important and undeniable hallmarks of social life under a neoliberal political order. Yet, they cannot be taken as the prime movers of the political order but rather they, like the analyses of power relations, are distinct and semi-autonomous and require analyses that examine their specific articulation in a particular historical conjuncture.

Thus, bearing in mind the specific relation between neoliberal political rationality and the market, I would like to amend Harvey's claim that the popular ascension of neoliberalism and the insurgence of capitalist political power was due to the way financial and business class captured and re-signified discourses of freedom toward their own class interest. Again, I am not suggesting that this claim is wrong, indeed it holds much explanatory power, but instead such an account obscures other political explanations and factors, namely a crisis of liberal governmentality. That is, rather than see the discourse of freedom in the 1970s and on through a process of appropriation and re-signification by historical blocs competing for hegemony, the very salience of freedom as a topic of concern, in the first instance, marks its profound

problematization. Akin to the way that democracy became an urgent question in the post-World War II period due to the “dialectic of race and nation,” freedom—its concrete expression, its institutional form, its actualization in social and practical life, its moral/ethical order—became a vital concern across the political spectrum. Indeed, even keeping in mind that 1970 and onward is notable for the political insurgence of business elites and social and religious conservatives through their capture of the republican party and their aggressive political attacks on the modicum of achievements attained by the new social movements, these actions, I would suggest, should be understood as a response to problematization of freedom, particularly a concern over the relation between freedom and moral regulation.

At stake in this kind of historical account of neoliberal political rationality is how it locates neoliberalism’s “historical-institutional rupture”<sup>154</sup> and frames that history for us. As I have previously explained, we should understand this problematization of freedom to be the effect of the new social movement’s invalidation of historical right/precedence for the liberal state’s juridical legitimacy and political representativeness, namely discrediting those practices and institutions that maintain the historical continuity to the US state’s claim to political sovereignty and thus necessitating a neoliberal basis for that political sovereignty. In this respect, that period marks a historical-institutional rupture. In regards to the “new social movements,” it is all too common that popular discussions of them oscillate between nostalgia and disappointment. Yet, rather than approach them in either mode, which must presuppose their clear and distinct placement in the past, this kind of account sees them to have not only ushered in a different problematic of governance but also continued to participate in it. To assert so is not to elevate their legacy as the paradigm for a proper political radicalism. Instead it is to reckon with the history of the current political conjuncture. Hence, discussions of neoliberalism that do

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

not attend to the issues and problems that they raised and instead treat it through an economic formalism, Marxist or otherwise, would miss much in a political analysis.

With that said, I would like to examine this problematization of freedom under the dominance of a neoliberal political rationality, particularly as it gets wedded to dispossession at the level of political subjectivity, in order to better comprehend the political problematic of the current conjuncture. Indeed, as the next section will demonstrate, freedom becomes intertwined with dispossession in such a way that it recalls prior market formations but transforms them at the same time. But, before I can do so, we first need to examine the recuperative practices of neoliberal governmentality that extend this neoliberal political rationality and produce its ethical subjects via the constitution of dispossession. Thus, the following section will turn to the ways that neoliberal political rationality addresses the social problem of homelessness to see not only how these practices extend a neoliberal political rationality but also the way they constitute political subjectivity.

### **Neoliberal Recuperative Practices and the Shelterless**

The social phenomenon of shelterless populations has long been present in the US. Yet, its historical character as a problem—its political exigence, its structural causes, its technical or social solutions, its cultural signification, its moral valence, its demographic norms—allows us to understand its placement within a particular political conjuncture. Thus, to see the way neoliberal political rationality imbues the recuperative practices targeting shelterless populations, we need to turn to what sociologists and historians have referred to as *the new homelessness* of the 1980s and the more recent ‘discovery’ of chronic homelessness.

The novelty of the new homelessness is usually characterized by both the shifting demographic norms of shelterless populations and its increasing public visibility and normalization in large urban cities. On the demographic level, the new homelessness contrast with mid twentieth century forms according to age, gender, ethnic/racial composition, and income level. Indeed, unlike in the early twentieth century when shelterless populations were mainly older white men, shelterless populations under the new homelessness have tended to be composed of more women and children and now are dominantly black and Latino. Furthermore, they subsist on less money than previous generations.<sup>155</sup> In terms of publicity, shelterless populations have become the norm of downtown urban cities where they are met with indifference by many, pity by some, criminalization by the law, and harassment by the police.

The formation of the new homelessness is usually traced to a series of political economic shifts and prior state policies. Most immediate of these would be the destruction of skid rows across the US urban landscapes. Historically, these districts contained residential hotels and lodging houses (often called “single room occupancies”) that sheltered the majority of highly impoverished populations during the boom years of the 1950s. Besides offering affordable shelter, these districts provided inexpensive social services and access to an underground and contingent job market that could sustain this population.<sup>156</sup> In this respect, this population reflected the highly racialized and gender character of the labor market during that period. However, seen as a blight to cities, specifically by the business classes, these areas were removed as part of federally sponsored urban renewal projects. These projects were supposed to build affordable public housing to accommodate the poor that were displaced with the destruction of these areas. However, they ended up destroying more shelters than they built. In that way, these

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<sup>155</sup> See Peter Rossi’s *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness*

<sup>156</sup> Ibid

projects, as many have argued, set the grounds for what is now understood as the neoliberalization of urban space in which large scale urban construction job become sites for valorizing stagnant financial capital. Hence, this particular conjunction of federal policy and capital had not only produced the new homelessness but also exacerbated it by making affordable housing increasingly impossible.

In addition, the growth of shelterless populations and the development of their “new” character are also credited to the de-industrialization of the US economy and its changing emphasis on the service and finance sectors. In fact, with political backlash against union and unionization, the industrial working class, which again was keenly racialized and gendered, was increasingly exposed to employment insecurity and therefore housing insecurity.<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, during the same period, the minimal US welfare provisions aimed at ameliorating the economic suffering of un/under-employed populations were substantially cut. This resulted in the increased exposure of already poor population to housing insecurity.<sup>158</sup> On top of these factors, de-institutionalization of psychiatric patients in the 1960s is often pointed to as another contributing factor to the new homelessness; however the extent and breath of its impact is highly debated.<sup>159</sup>

When taking these forces together, the new homelessness marks not only the intensification and widening exposure of housing insecurity, but its profound structural shift in relation to economic life. More specifically, shelterless populations persist and grow even in good economic conditions with low unemployment thereby delinking employment cycles as a unitary cause for shelterlessness. As Craig Willse explains, “In the neo-liberal era, housing insecurity becomes an embedded feature of population dynamics, an intrinsic dimension of the national population rather than an epiphenomenon of something like unemployment” (163).

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<sup>157</sup> See Kenneth L. Kusmer’s *Down and Out, on the Road: The Homeless in American History*

<sup>158</sup> See Gwendolyn Mink’s *Welfare’s End*

<sup>159</sup> Rossi

With these changes of shelterlessness, social policy and recuperative practices aimed at addressing the problem have changed as well, specifically towards a neoliberal direction. Indeed, in the 1930s, when shelterlessness first became a national problem due to its quantitative increase from the fallout of the Great Depression, the improvement in techniques and institutions of demography emerging out of the consolidation of state power to the federal government during the progressive era, and the potential threat of social disruption by groups like the Bonus army<sup>160</sup>, shelterless populations were dealt with by creating national institutions to contain them.<sup>161</sup> In particular, in 1932 the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) created rural outposts to supplement overextended private and municipal lodging houses. These outposts held older transients as the younger men were sent to urban job centers that doled out contingent work.<sup>162</sup> Yet, by 1934, FERA was disbanded though some of its centers continued on under private operations.

This nationalizing strategy of the social policy of shelterlessness contrasts sharply to federal responses in the 1980s, the second moment in US history when shelterlessness achieved national concern. In this period, according to Willse, the federal concern over shelterless populations, unlike before, had not so much to do with their disruption of the social order itself, but their disruptions of the tourist and consumer economies of urban downtown areas. Hence, rather than develop national institutions, the federal response in the McKinney-Vento Act of 1987 was to both allocate and distribute funds to state, municipal, and local level agencies as well as to establish protocols and directives on how to institute programs addressing the shelterless. Along these lines, we find not the creation of institutions but their outsourcing to regional governing bodies along varying scales and to private companies. In one respect, this

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<sup>160</sup> See Todd Despastino's *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America*

<sup>161</sup> Willse

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, Rossi

kind of policy is akin to the pre-New Deal era when shelterless populations were addressed through a variegated and disjointed system of municipal governments, churches, and voluntary associations. Yet, this outsourcing does not signal the regression to an earlier era or the decrease of federal state power but rather, as Willse explains, its expansion.<sup>163</sup> As he writes, “Through the McKinney-Vento Act and its programmes, the federal government enacts a multiplication and reorganization of the scales of governance, overseeing and linking up local municipalities, regions, states and federal offices. Within these heterarchic arrangements, the McKinney-Vento Act establishes programmatic parameters, including what kinds of populations can be housed, what kinds of housing can be built and how services and outcomes must be assessed and reported” (164-165). Put differently, the expansion of state power via the social policy of homelessness is evidence less by the multi-scalar institutional apparatus that implements that policy than by the consolidation and formalization of knowledge, techniques, and assessment protocols that directs their recuperative practices.

Thus, it is at this level of the knowledges and practices that we can see the penetration of a neoliberal political rationality, rendering those practices to be part of an overall apparatus of neoliberal governmentality. In particular, as Willse explains, the figure of “chronic homelessness” enables what he calls the “biopoliticization” of housing insecurity and deprivation, shifting recuperative practices away from an emphasis on disciplinary regimes to population management via the “Housing First” model.<sup>164</sup> To be more concrete, prior to this period, treatment of the shelterless targeted the problem at the individual level. Indeed, in the progressive era, provisions of shelter to homeless individuals was often contingent on

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<sup>163</sup> This process can be contrasted with nineteenth century models where subnational states and local municipalities had been the governing institutions to transience. Yet, the organizing models and practices varied widely. For a deep historical discussion of this, see Michael Katz’s *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*

<sup>164</sup> Ibid

accomplishing manual labor, like chopping wood, which was supposed to reflect the individual's moral worth through the prism of work. This disciplining of the shelterless was further entrenched with the professionalization of social service. Through practices of case management, shelterless individuals were placed under constant surveillance and regimes of discipline through social service programs such as drug and alcohol recovery programs and workfare.<sup>165</sup>

Given the predominance of disciplinary practices, the novelty of the "Housing First" model comes from the way that it de-links the provision of shelter from subjection to disciplinary regimes.<sup>166</sup> This becomes the case through the disarticulation of sociological knowledges from recuperative practices to its new articulation with economic knowledge as its domain of verification. Indeed, through an analysis of an Interagency Council on Homelessness presentation, Willse shows that the overwhelming rationale for implementing a "Housing First" model is through a cost-benefit assessment that stresses the value of efficiency. As Willse explains, when following a neoliberal rationality, "[T]he problem of chronic homelessness becomes a problem of inefficient use of resources. The solution becomes better management of social welfare administration through the application of business principles" (171). In this respect, Willse shows the penetration of a neoliberal political rationality via the deployment of market thinking.

However, in making this point, it is important to remember, as I explained in the preceding section of this chapter, that the recourse to the market and market tropes has to do, in the first instance, with its formal and neutral character in governing and thereby making judgment on how to govern, even as it, in the next instance, flagrantly enables new forms of capital accumulation. Thus, for all the brilliant insights that Willse provides in comprehending

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, Rossi,

<sup>166</sup> Willse

the neoliberal dimensions of homelessness social policy and the recuperative practices during the “new homelessness,” I would argue that he overstates the capitalist logic of them such that he obscures the political character of this transformation. This is especially true through his emphasis on the shift from disciplinary regimes to population management strategies. As Willse writes, “Rather, the invention of chronic homelessness suggests that social programmes in the contemporary context are themselves economic, which is to say, productive for the circulation and investment of capital and other material resources” (168-169). Stated in this manner, the way in which “chronic homeless” transforms social programmes has less to do with how they operate as practices of neoliberal governmentality but more to do with how they become available as sites of capitalist accumulation. To be sure, Willse’s claim is not incorrect, indeed he astutely links the expansion of both knowledge production about the shelterless and social services treatment to the “non-profit industrial complex.”<sup>167</sup> Yet, this overwhelming emphasis on capitalist accumulation in the new social policies and practices of homelessness renders the market rationality that authorizes them to be solely callous, cynical and shortsighted to the plight of the shelterless, which, again, is not wrong but just limiting since it appears to be nothing but an ideological ruse for capital’s endless search for new sources of accumulation.

Part and parcel to this effect, I would argue, is the extent to which Willse overemphasizes the shift from disciplinary regimes to biopolitical management in the recuperative practices of shelterlessness. To be fair, Willse does not claim a full-blown rupture in which the latter mechanically replaces the former. Instead he asserts that biopolitical management suppresses disciplinary techniques. But, with that said, what exactly does “suppress” mean concretely? How do techniques of biopolitical management suppress techniques of discipline? These questions are left unanswered throughout the essay and, as a consequence, the subtly implied by the verb

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<sup>167</sup> See INCITE’s *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Nonprofit Industrial Complex*

“suppress” transforms into an opposition between individualizing disciplines and population management.<sup>168</sup> In so doing, it allows for an overly cynical reading of the shift to be one of a prior moment of discipline motivated by ethical/humanitarian reasoning to a current moment of population management motivated by business interest in efficiency and capital accumulation.

To move beyond this restrictive binary, we need to understand that neoliberal political rationality’s proclivity for population management at the level of orchestrating power relations does not leave the individual behind, even though it is the case that disciplinary regimes do get suppressed. Indeed, Foucault shows, through the case of criminality, the subordination of disciplinary power by neoliberal governmentality does not eliminate the criminal subject for a criminal population but rather it installs a market subjectivity into the criminal subject instead of a subjectivity of norms and deviance. As Foucault writes, “First of all, there is an anthropological erasure of the criminal. It should be said that this does not mean that the level of the individual is suppressed, but rather that an element, dimension, or level of behavior can be postulated which can be interpreted as economic behavior and controlled as such” (258-259). Put differently, it is true that neoliberal governmentality acts on the population through environmental technologies that maintain demographic regularities but, at the same time, it constitutes the subject by postulating and presupposing a market subjectivity from which to interpret individual behavior through a market frame or what Foucault would call the positing of an “entrepreneurial subject.”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> For instance, Willse writes the following: “Concern with the apparently limited resources of municipalities—rather than with individual wellbeing—motivates this biopoliticization. The invention of chronic homelessness de-emphasizes individual compliance with service requirements in favour of economic containment of population costs, a move that is unexpectedly benefiting an abandoned and usually despised and degraded population. The shift to population-level concerns legitimated the Housing First model not because the federal government accepted that mandatory services are paternalistic, but because it saw mandatory services as a deterrent it could no longer afford.”

<sup>169</sup> Foucault finds the entrepreneurial subject to be a particular American innovation neoliberal governmentality.

Keeping this entrepreneurial/market subjectivity in mind, we should qualify Willse's claim that social programmes shift from individualizing discipline via case management practices to population management via "Housing First" practices by stressing that subjectivity remains a central component to this shift, particularly enabling the displacement of an exhaustive disciplinary regime. Indeed, by postulating a market subjectivity, neoliberal governmentality suppresses the introjection of a matrix of norms and deviance into the subject by instead installing a matrix of freedom and responsibility—a freedom to act within a political system of risks and opportunities and a responsibility to accept its outcomes as the neutral effect of the subject's choices. With this insight, we can reassess Willse's overly cynical interpretation of market rationality's penetration into the social programmes of the shelterless. It may be the case that the 'Housing First' policy advocates hold only a business class interest and a narrow fiscal-responsibility conception of public good when they promote a "Housing First" model. Nevertheless, they act *as if* they cared about the shelterless, specifically in terms of their freedom, when they institute "Housing First" practices. In other words, regardless of their intent, in practice, they establish an ethical rationale for what appears as, at best, market opportunism and, at worst, indifference, one that is founded on the principle of respecting the (economic) freedom of the shelterless.

This, I would argue, is truly how neoliberal political rationality imbues the social programs assisting the shelterless, rendering them to be recuperative practices of neoliberal governmentality. That is, it would be an utter mistake to reduce neoliberal political rationality to be an ideological cover for the further extension of capital's endless need for new sites of valorization. Rather, as shown in both the rationalization of "Housing First" as social policy and its rationalization as recuperative practice, neoliberal political rationality constitutes neutral

system of governance that promote the freedom of its participants. Indeed, to either presume so or, more likely, to analytically treat neoliberalism as such would miss its political complexity by avoiding its very ethical basis. It is precisely the way that market forms establish both an ideal political structure to establish neutral practices for governing the governed and an ethical system predicated on the respect of freedom that makes neoliberal governmentality difficult to surmount and impossible to challenge when critiqued for its putative ethical indifference to others, or through a humanist critique for its instrumental reductionism, or a Marxist critique for its promotion of capital accumulation. Ultimately, the problem of these critiques, I would suggest, is the avoidance of the problematic of freedom as a political and practical reality by treating it to be purely a symbolic issue of signification or discourse.

In contradistinction to those somewhat presumptuous critiques, this chapter traces the problematic of (neoliberal) freedom, indeed to go with its grains and detail its texture at the level of political subjectivity. Only through such a detailed examination, can an immanent contradiction be found and an alternative freedom may be produced. Bearing this approach in mind, when we return to the shelterless not only as a managed population but more importantly as a political subject, we find a peculiar imbrication of dispossession and freedom at the level of political subjectivity due to neoliberal governmentality, that is, the shelterless are simultaneously understood to be dispossessed and free. Thus, what is the articulation between them? And what are the racial, gendered, and sexual norms that sustain and trouble that articulation? This articulation should not be confused with early twentieth century forms, which conjoined them through white masculinity, confinement in domesticity, and labor unrest as found in the tramp, hobo, and bum.<sup>170</sup> Rather, as I will argue in the next section through an analysis of Samuel

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, Despastino

Delany's *The Mad Man*, they are articulated through a "residual" discourse of property, namely "possessive individualism."

### **Residues of Property in Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man***

Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man* is a pornographic novel that follows Jon Marr, a gay black male graduate student, as he completes his doctoral thesis on the philosophical writings of Timothy Hasler, a prestigious but obscure Korean-American philosopher and academic who was mysteriously murdered outside of a New York City gay bar called the Pit in 1973. The details and mystery surrounding Hasler's murder become the driving force of the narrative as Marr's academic research on Hasler's philosophy soon becomes an inquiry into his life and death. In the process of his investigation, Marr discovers illicit details of Hasler's "perverse" sexual activities with homeless men, which he too has started to pursue himself. This paralleling between Marr and Hasler and the ways they double one another in terms of both philosophical and sexual practices culminates in Marr repeating the same actions that had led to the murder of Hasler, except Marr avoids dying.

With the narrative historically framed by the new social movements of the sixties and seventies, particularly the Stonewall uprising and the emergence of the AIDS epidemic, the novel elicits many readings that can be organized around the rubric of gay and black identity and/or queer politics. These readings include: an alternative historiography of gay and black liberation movements, which attend to social subjects nominally outside of gay and black identity; a rumination on the politics of sexual knowledge around AIDS; and an illustration of the impact of political economic transformations on the intimate geography of the city and the

public sphere, particularly spaces of public sex. As interesting as these readings may be, I wish to focus on a different line of inquiry, one centered on the novel's thematization of freedom and dispossession in the figure of the homeless. There, we find what I would refer to as a "residual" discourse of property that re-defines the relation of freedom and dispossession in alignment and tension with neoliberal political rationality.

By "residual," I follow how Raymond Williams understands the term, that is, "[t]he residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural institution or formation" (122). In other words, the residual names experiences and practices within a social formation that "provide meanings and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in the terms of [contemporary] dominant culture." Importantly, the residual as "an effective element of the present" that has been "effectively formed in the past" simultaneously reproduces and opposes dominant culture. Accordingly, we should be weary of assuming that the residual is inherently oppositional.

Bearing that in mind and recalling my prior discussion of freedom and neoliberal political rationality and its impact on the recuperative practices of the shelterless, I argue that a residual form of "possessive individualism," specifically one reversing its fundamental assumption of self-proprietorship, articulates freedom and dispossession at the level of political subjectivity in contradictory ways under neoliberal governmentality. A hallmark of classic liberal democratic philosophy, "possessive individualism" designates a nested set of presuppositions that undergird

and ideally enable the formation of a political system in alignment with the dictates of an emerging capitalist market.<sup>171</sup> Indeed, fundamentally defined by the way that the “individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities,”<sup>172</sup> possessive individualism describes both a social ontology that grounds consent to the social and the labor contract and provides an ideational form that unifies the fracturing of social space under a capitalist mode of production.

I suggest that the contemporary recurrence of “possessive individualism” and its residual transformation is spurred by how, part and parcel to neoliberal governmentality’s conversion and establishment of market forms of power relations across the social field, it posits political actors within those market powers relations to be necessarily defined by formal (economic) freedom. Hence, “possessive individualism” returns as the uneasy residual idiom by which this (neoliberal) freedom is “lived and practiced” and whose tension is made most apparent by the imbrication of freedom and dispossession in the figure of the homeless. Indeed, if, in possessive individualism’s classic formulation, dispossession is seen as the derivative or deviant term of property, the name of injury and scandal of a proprietary order, then I hope to show, in my reading of *The Mad Man*, that this polarity has been reversed where dispossession attains a normative position—as individuals defined by ownership by an other—in a political subjectivity attuned to neoliberal governmentality.

## II

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<sup>171</sup> See C.B. MacPherson’s *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, particularly the Chapter 6 “Possessive Individualism and Liberal Democracy”

<sup>172</sup> Ibid

To that end, the figure of the homeless man is my primary interest in the novel. However, in the beginning, we are strongly dissuaded to really take up this thematic focus. As Delany stresses in the Disclaimer, “*The Mad Man* is not a book about the homeless of New York—or, indeed, of the country. No book could be which all-but-omits all scenes of winter and does not deal with—indeed, focus on—the criminally inadequate attempts by the municipality to feed, clothe, and shelter these men, women, and children. Such a novel would have to be substantially darker than this one—which, I suspect, will be found quite dark enough” (XIV). Despite this very explicit rejection, I do not think it necessarily means that the deployment of the homeless figure is completely irrelevant to the historical meaning and cultural labor of the novel. Instead, it demands considering the conditions under which such a gesture is required for the goals of the novel, namely the representational strictures on a “book about the homeless.” As a subaltern population, the homeless have been the object of intense political debates that have structured the social narratives organizing their cultural significance and linguistic figuration. Thus, the homeless are caught up in either narratives of their personal immorality and/or sentimental narratives of their social marginalization. Caught within such narrative constraints, we must take Delany’s rejection of the centrality of the homeless to be a rhetorical move that clears space for a different kind of narrative, one that shifts the coordinates of political understanding away from them and towards the politico-ethical meaning of the social mediation of such hegemonizing narratives.

The novel’s play on the social visibility of the homeless underscores such a point. On the one hand, even though the novel is focalized around Jon Marr, his experiences with homeless men dominate the narrative. Indeed, the mystery surrounding Timothy Hasler’s death centers on his homeless lover, Mad Man Mike, and really drives the narrative. Moreover, taking into

account the pornographic aims of the novel, we find that the majority of the sex scenes involve homeless men, these often lasting thirty pages. In these ways, the narrative foregrounds homeless visibility. On the other hand, the novel often highlights their absence within historical records and their fleeting existence in memory. This is most plainly seen in a brief thought experiment where Marr, after having “the most interesting, if not the best, sex [...] in three or four years” with Crazy Joe, outlines the process for researching his life. We are then given a series of questions and scenarios whose absurdity foreground the impossibility of such a task. Or, in another scene later on, Marr engages in a conversation with Tony, a homeless lover he had not seen for quite a while. They reminisce on the changes that have occurred in the neighborhood, which leads Tony to recount a story of Dirty John. In it, Tony explains how one day Dirty John received leftover Lo Mein from a local Chinese restaurant, which, unbeknownst to John, had broken glass in it. After slicing his mouth, Dirty John had tried to report the incident to the local police but received no substantial attention. From there, Tony matter-of-factly states, “It’s funny—the restaurant’s gone, now. Dirty John is gone. And probably nobody even remembers the fuckin’ glass in the noodles” (315). Beyond poignantly laying bare the marginal social existence of homeless men, these scenes demonstrate the uneven access to the means of social representation into historical records. As Marr pointed out Joe has no archive of writing. He has no easily identifiable and trackable social network. His existence is outside circulation of newspaper notices. Or, in terms of Dirty John, the very buildings that materially attest to his social existence vanish as so much historical detritus. And yet, in the novel, they dominate the narrative.

This tension thus points to the way social representation mediates the divide between our narrator, Jon Marr, and these homeless men. But this divide cannot be simply comprehended

through class division. The systematic removal of homeless men from public record and social memory points to an epistemic erasure. But this does not mean the total eradication from social representation. Instead it points to the relation between the categories of representations, the populations that it represents, and the institutions and social agents that these categories enable. The particular historical configuration of this socio-epistemic relation is astutely noted by Marr.

At the same time, bums, hoboes, derelicts, and winos stopped being bums, hoboes, derelicts, and winos and became, rather, 'the homeless'--or, if they were young enough, 'runaways.' Now grocery bags and milk cartons were stamped with the faces of missing children. And I remember how odd it struck me that this vast population of the marginal, the dispossessed, the underclass was now being defined in terms of that wholly distant and perfectly ephemeral social institution that, once on Christmas, once on Mother's Day, and once on my father's birthday (but, by her own wish, never on Mom's) I would take the ferry across to Staten Island to visit--'home.' (91-92)

In this instance, Marr highlights the numerous historical transformations signaled by the public usage of the category of the homeless. First, it marks a displacement and condensation of social representations of poverty, i.e. from “bums, hoboes, derelicts, and winos” to “the homeless.” Second, this displacement and condensation implies a social redefinition of the subjects of poverty itself. In particular, these subjects are no longer understood through problems of moral vice, particularly alcoholism, but rather through a sentimentalized condition of lacking a ‘home.’ Third, this redefinition is not merely changing cultural norms but instead indicates the complex mediation of the material condition of poverty itself, marking both the contemporaneous

configuration of its social institutions (i.e. the social institution of family) and the accretion of its historical meaning (i.e. the proliferation of identities). Thus, the term “the homeless,” as the social representation of the subject of poverty, both obscures and reveals that mediation as Marr’s indictment of the term indicates the mediation of discourses of “the home” to poverty. Fourth, as Marr implies through his narration of the historical transformation, these social representations do not originate from populations that they seek to represent rather they are far more indicative of mediating social institutions (i.e. family). Thus, emerging out of that final point and returning to the novel’s illustration of epistemic violence, the category of the homeless marks a subaltern population. That is, they lack the means of self-representation because they become the object of representation.

The subalterity of the homeless configures Marr’s understanding of them in contradictory ways. Throughout the novel, Marr is presented to have an expertise on the social condition of homeless populations. We find it not only in his explicit meditations of homelessness but also in his correcting of other character’s misunderstandings. And yet, this knowledge leaves him wholly unprepared to comprehend the complexity and richness of the “life-world” of the homeless and their distinct life stories. For instance, Marr is quite surprised by the personal history of his various homeless lovers, most strikingly seen in his relationship with Leaky. Though some do highlight the various social institutions that they circulate within, these stories emphasize moments of contact within and between them, from Leaky’s “deranged” childhood to Piece O’ Shit’s education in yonis. Or, most striking of all, Marr is completely ignorant to the circumstances that led to meeting Leaky, which was enabled by a social system of exchange and communication devised by Mad Man Mike (more on this later). To be sure, these life stories and cultural practices are characterized as unrealistic. However, this effect has to do with the sheer

lack of knowledge of the homeless population as social actors rather than as the exaggeration of fiction.<sup>173</sup> In any event, what this contradiction underscores is the univocal character of the representation of homeless men mediating Marr's relation to them. Marr knows a great deal about homeless men but only as a social problem defined by social institutions that represent them to and for him.

Accordingly, from the standpoint of Marr, the social membership of the homeless is always partial and liminal, straddling normativity and alterity, between being just like everyone else but out of luck and being outside of the social order itself. And this very ambiguity becomes the central problematic of Marr's relation to homeless men, raising a series of politico-ethical questions: what is the nature of their social belonging if not one of identity as citizens or the wards of state institutions? What are the power relations that have constituted the homeless in this manner? What is the connection between the social relations between Marr and these homeless men and power relations between them?

With that in mind, we find that the novel answers these questions through the motif of the "systems of the world." Indeed, this trope becomes the way the novel imagines the nature of social belonging and the form of power relations between Marr and homeless populations. As the central motif of the novel, it frames the trope through Marr's philosophical project in graduate school where he sought to write "a six hundred-page tome on psychology, history, reality and metaphysics, putting them once and for all in their grandly ordered relation" (10). Put differently, Marr's systems of the world signified a totalizing philosophical structure that systematizes all knowledge into a perfectly knowable unity. However, later in the novel, its philosophical

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<sup>173</sup> This circumstance can be seen as a historical product. As we saw in the earlier categories of homeless (e.g. bums, hoboes, winos), these social identities provide positive content to kind of subjectivities and life stories that these social positions contain. Yet, with the advent of homeless as the defining social identity of poverty, this social position and the populations lack a normative subjectivity as it is negatively defined.

meaning shifts through Marr's engagement with Hasler's philosophical work. As Edwin Schaliapin, a fictionalized Hasler scholar, writes, "But what is inchoate to Hasler's work, from beginning to end—what he best represents—is the realization that large-scale, messy, informal systems are necessary in order to develop, on top of them, precise, hard-edged, tractable systems" (243). Unlike Marr's initial framework, the systems of the world comes now to signify not the formal totalizing unity of all systems but rather an incoherent pre-individuated domain of complexity upon which clearly distilled overlapping systems can be apprehended and constructed. This conceptual shift neither denies the existence of the systems of the world nor even the possibility of comprehending a particular system but instead the impossibility of comprehending the complexity of these systems in their totality. Significantly, Marr's relation to the "systems of world" changes from one who seeks to master the systems of the world via erudite philosophical abstraction to one who is subject to it, a position whose view only extends to the limits of his own system.

Let us pause for a moment to consider this peculiar shift in the meaning of the "systems of the world." More than pure philosophical abstraction, the novel concretizes it, as will be shown in the following section, through Marr's sexual activity with homeless men, filling the formal concept of the systems of the world with a sexual content consisting of erotic practices, bodily waste, violence, desire, racist and sexist fantasy, and pleasures. In one respect, this tropological development of the narrative seeks to undermine the classic Cartesian dualism of the mind and body split by thematizing the way in which erotic bodily activity, particularly the most lewd and debased forms of pleasures, undergird and enable philosophical abstraction. Yet, more important for this chapter's purposes, the system of the world's tropological connection to sexual

practices foreground “sexuality” as of domain of power directed at the body.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, the novel’s very focus on the sexual encounters between Marr and homeless men and the extent to which their erotic practices are steeped in racist and sexist fantasy highlights the relation of power and pleasure.

With that said, what is striking about this development of the systems of the world motif is the extent to which the novel underplays an inquiry into the disciplining of erotic practices and pleasures and the normalizing of sexuality to instead foreground both sexuality’s connection to the biopolitical order, erotic practices, and pleasure as ethical practices of “self-care.”<sup>175</sup> Indeed, the novel’s dual attention to the shelterless as a population and AIDS as a public health discourse shows how the domain of sexuality connects them along a biopolitical register. In that respect, we should not think that Delany is interested in the transgression of norms.<sup>176</sup>

Thus, it is in regards to this particular take on power and sexuality that the novel resonates with neoliberal governmentality. For the sexual world that Marr and these homeless men navigate through and the power relations that they must participate in are less structured by normative ideals, which, of course, is not say that normalization is not present, but instead they move through innumerable environmental technologies that regulate vulnerability, life-chance, pleasures, and freedom. Indeed, to recall the systems of the world’s shift in meaning from a formal totalizing system to an informal and incomprehensible domain upon which formal systems are built, we see how this shift not only signals a change in an epistemological position—from one that can know a totality to one that can only partially know—but also a position of power—from a sovereign position to a market position that must make decisions with

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<sup>174</sup> See Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality Vol. I*

<sup>175</sup> See Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality Vol. II and Vol.III*

<sup>176</sup> See Foucault’s “A Preface on Transgression”

limited knowledge and that must assess risk and opportunity.<sup>177</sup> In this specific regard, I suggest that the systems of the world indexes a political subjectivity attuned to neoliberal political rationality since it describes an orientation to acting in a (sexual) world of power relations characterized fundamentally by risk, opportunity, and freedom for the pursuit of erotic pleasure. Indeed, this becomes concretely the case in the culminating scenes of the novel, which I turn to now.

### III

Now, in order to see how the systems of the world motif indexes a political subjectivity attuned to neoliberal governmentality, we need to turn to two scenes that the novel intentionally juxtaposes to one another. In the first scene, Marr, under the behest of Almira Adler, a renowned poet and friend of Timothy Hasler, formally begins his investigation on Hasler's death by visiting the site of his murder, The Pit, a gay bar known for male prostitution. Upon entering The Pit, Marr notes the multiple and overlapping ways the space of the bar can be made knowable through formalized 'systems' organized by its participants, activities, and objects. And yet he goes on to stress that these schemas together simultaneously reveal complexity of the space hitherto unseen but, at same time, undermine the very explanatory power of each preceding schematization such that Marr states, "Indeed, you realize now, the pattern you first intuited is only a reduction of a vast number of exceptions to itself that, at any moment, make up the customer configuration" (346). Thus, in the very beginning of the scene, the novel signals the

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<sup>177</sup> In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault highlights how Smith's notion of the "invisible hand" exemplifies the political rationality of liberal governmentality, not because of how the figure of the "hand" embodies the market's capacity to orchestrate wants and their fulfillment but instead because of how the trope of "invisibility" undermines the sovereign's claim to knowledge and control

way the space of The Pit is epistemologically systematized along both meanings of the trope of systems of the world.

This connection to The Pit is underscored even further as its systematic organization becomes the main plot device for unraveling the mystery of the novel. As the scene unfolds, Marr interviews several people who had knowledge about Hasler's death and, in the process, discovers that it had to do with Hasler's involvement in disrupting the system of prostitution within The Pit. Hasler, we find out, was killed in the process of protecting his homeless lover, Mad Man Mike, from an angry prostitute who was enraged by Mad Man Mike's gift of unlimited and free sexual pleasures to the clientele of The Pit. Thus, much like Marr's musing on the way new data emerges out of and problematizes the schemas for organizing the space of The Pit, the cause of Hasler's murder has to do with the way his lover had "upset the system" of prostitution as well.

In the second scene, the thematization of 'systems of the world' is formally similar to The Pit but radically different in substance. Occurring a bit of time after Marr goes to the The Pit, during which time he spends four days in his apartment with his newfound homeless lover Leaky Sowps, the scene begins with Marr agreeing to Leaky's request to "turn him out." This "turning out" is a kind of ritualized orgy where Marr submits to the sexual desires of Leaky and his homeless friends. After Marr agrees, Leaky leaves to find participants and when he returns he is accompanied by Tony, Mad Man Mike, Big Buck, and Crazy Joey. From there, they go on to 'turn out' both Marr and Tony, which is described in very lurid detail and explicitly pornographic language as the process comes to involve both excrement and urine.

With that said, it must be stated that the novel underscores the way that the apparent sexually and racially violent character of "turning out" is not necessarily experienced as such but

instead is contextually dependent on the intimacy of the participants. Indeed, the “turning out” scene, in particular, and actually every sex scene traffics intensely in racist and sexist stereotypes, linking the achievement of erotic pleasures to the historical categories of racist and sexist abjection. In the case of Leaky’s request, the sentiment behind “turning out” is, as Marr would later describe, one of “good will.” Hence, for Marr, the experience of being ‘turned out’ was a pleasant experience. This comes into harsh contrast to the way Crazy Joey described “turning out” earlier in the novel, when he explains the processes as “want[ing] to show her what a good whore she is; so he goes and gets all his friends, see? And they all come up and fuck her—they take turns. Or sometimes they do it all at once. After that, the bitch knows she's really a part everything that's goin' on with'em, 'cause she's fucked all the guys at the same time. That's turnin' a bitch out” (274). From Marr’s pleasant experience of “turning out” to Crazy Joey’s description of it as a clearly gendered form of sexual violence, we find that they are two potentialities of “turning out” that are always present. This contiguity either ‘good feeling’ or violence within sexual encounters is a common theme throughout the novel as all descriptions of Marr’s sexual encounters always entail the presence of racial, gendered, and sexual stereotypes and fetishism. These opposing potential outcomes will be significant for understanding the role that racial, gender, and sexual norms play under neoliberal governmentality. Before I can go into them, it is necessary to fully parse out the novel’s comparison of the systems of the world in the Pit and Marr’s “turning out.”

With that said, the crucial moment of Marr’s ‘turning out’ occurs when Mad Man Mike insists on instituting a game that ends up systematizing the sexual activities of the “turning out.” The game involves Mad Man Mike distributing pennies to everyone in the room. Afterwards, the participants convene and discuss their sexual desires, their fantasies, and turn-ons. While this

discussion happens, participants, whose interests have been piqued by the discussion itself or the activities in its midst, are allowed to buy each other for a single penny, granting the buyer the power to sexually dispose of whoever he buys as he sees fit. Structured in this way, the scene unfolds with more explicit descriptions of various sexual activities, consisting of the circulation of a lot of semen, urine, and feces which has been now formalized as a system of exchange. Along these lines, the space of Marr's apartment takes on a similar systematic quality as The Pit. That is, Mad Mad Mike's game is akin to the system of prostitution in The Pit since each place structures sexual practices and pleasures into a formalized system of exchange.

In this respect, Mad Man Mike's game and the system of prostitution in the Pit recall and provide content to the systems of the world motif insofar as each, in their own way, describe a formal system of monetary exchange that emerges from and rest upon a "large-scale, messy, informal system" of sexual practices, fantasies, desires, and pleasures or what can be called a "libidinal economy."<sup>178</sup> Yet, this turns out to be only a formal similarity since these spaces become distinct and opposing systems that clash at the level of value. In each space, bodies circulate in a system of exchange through their purchase and sale. And though the act of buying and selling appears to be formally the same, this activity is fundamentally different in the spaces of the Pit and Marr's apartment as they are structured by different discourses of value. In the case of The Pit, we find that it is entirely premised on a model of scarcity. As Donny, a bartender at The Pit, states, "[T]he thing that makes this whole place possible is a belief that sex--the kind of sex that gets sold here—is scarce. Because it's scarce, it's valuable. And because it's valuable, it goes for good prices" (353). This belief in the scarcity of sex as the basis of value in The Pit comes into harsh contradiction to the premises that undergird value in Marr's 'turning out' in his apartment. There, in lieu of scarcity, we find an overabundance of sex. Or, as Marr states, "The

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<sup>178</sup> See Jean-Francois Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy*

conflict in the bar that night was over Kerns's [i.e. Mad Man Mike's] sexual prowess, or perhaps more accurately over his economic availability" (483). This "economic availability" of sexual pleasures manifests itself in not simply the bottomless sexual appetites of its participant (e.g. Joey's compulsive need to orgasm over 15 times) or the unbelievable volume of semen, urine, and excrement involved in Marr's 'turning out' but, more significantly, in the innumerable kinds of sexual activity involved in the "turning out." Indeed, Marr describes the sexual activities in Mad Man Mike's game via a reference to the Marquis De Sade as follows: "But, as I told my professor, the most impressive thing—and at the same time the scariest thing—about Sade was the obsessiveness with which he managed to work through all the combinations and permutations of everyone hooking up with everyone else. If I were writing about sex, I thought, I just don't think I could do that. Nor do I think I can do it here. But that's what the Mad Man's game essentially was" (441). Thus, the endless possibilities of different kinds of sexual activity (whose proliferation even exceed the ability to describe in language) become impossible to structure according to value.<sup>179</sup>

Now, in order to see the way value disappears in Marr's 'turning out,' we need to examine how each system of exchange is undergirded by a particular conception of sex. In the case of *The Pit*, we saw that the basis of value is a "belief that sex...is scarce." But that belief in scarcity is founded on an understanding of sexual activity to be a commodity. This reified commodity form of sexual practice is not simply based on people's ability to buy and sell (since

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<sup>179</sup> As Marx states, "However, let us remember that commodities possess an objective character of values only in so far as they are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labour, that their objective character as values is therefore purely social. From this it follows self-evidently that it can only appear in the social relation between commodity and commodity" (138-139). In the case of Marr's 'turning out' via Mad Man Mike's game, the impossibility of organizing value cannot be done since each particular sexual activity must be the expression of some "identical social substance." Presumably, this identical social substance would be "sex" however, that abstract categorical unity (i.e. abstract equivalent) gets systematically undermined by the game itself since it incites a proliferation of sexual practices that cannot even establish a relative form of value across and it cannot be confined by a particular normative understanding of sex (i.e. particular equivalent).

this kind of exchange is done in Marr's 'turning out'), rather it is based on the ability to buy and sell sexual activity shorn from its dynamism founded in complex social processes, cultural meanings, and embodied relations and desires. Put simply, sexual activity is reified as a stable unit that is self-identical to itself regardless of any given situation. As such, it can be simply commodified as a 'service.' Yet, the abstraction of sexual activity and its reification as a service is made possible by a discourse of safety that delimits possible forms of sexual practices. Hence, when Ronnie Apple, a usual of the bar, refers to the reasons for patronizing The Pit as the pursuit of his "clean and costly pleasures," we can read that the costliness of his pleasure is due precisely to its cleanliness. This language of cleanliness is an instance of the hygienic discourse of safety that normatively delimits sexual activity as a "kind of sex that gets sold."

With the dominance of the commodity form, we find that commodity fetishism abounds in The Pit.<sup>180</sup> This commodity fetishism of prostitution renders all social relations between the people of the bar to be simply and only a market relation between a prostitute and a client where the former exchanges sex to the latter for money. However, this is not to say that those social relations become completely absent but instead they get displaced onto the commodity itself. Thus, the second aspect of commodity fetishism is the return of social relations in alien form. Indeed, they are understood to be external from those who inhabit those social relations themselves. This second point can be usefully seen by returning to Ronnie Apple's enigmatic statement. Again, he states, "We come to places like this, to pursue our clean and costly pleasures, looking for the simplest suggestion of some pink-and-gold schoolboy we might have

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<sup>180</sup> As Marx states, "In other words, the labour of the private individual manifests itself as an element of the total labour of society only through the relations which the act of exchange establishes between the products, and, through their mediation, between the producers. To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things."

seen or even been, some lean brown athlete we once admired or longed to be or loved” (478). In the above quote, the persistence of commodity fetishism is not so much the content of Apple’s “clean and costly pleasures,” that is, his desire for “some pink-and gold schoolboy” or “some lean brown athlete.” Rather, we find that fetishism is evidenced by the very temporality (i.e. verb tense) by which Apple enunciates those “pleasures.” There, we find a desire for past moments (e.g. “even been,” “once admired,” “loved”) but also virtual moments (e.g. “might have seen,” “longed to be”). These past moments and virtual possibilities form the mystical character of the commodity, which, in the case of *The Pit*, imbues reified sexual practices with the social relations cleaved from the encounter between hustler and client in the market.

In the case of Marr’s “turning out,” the above value-form disappears all together as it is structured by a strict formal equivalence. Everyone is allotted a penny; everyone is worth a penny. But posed in this way, are we not back in a capitalist market that posits abstract formal equivalence? Is this formalism not the mediation of capitalist social relations? Is not the penny functioning as a money commodity? This formal similarity between *The Pit* and Mad Man Mike’s game in their systems of exchange should not be construed as identical since, as discussed previously, we must approach these systems by the principle of their organization. Hence, unlike the *Pit*, Mad Man Mike’s game does not render the object of exchange into the commodity form. Sexual practices and pleasures, in this instance, are not cleaved from their social relations but presented *in toto*. Thus, instead of sexual practices as a ‘service,’ what we find in Mad Man Mike’s game is the exchange of bodies where they each buy and sell one another to one another. In part, the lack of this alienation can be due to the absence of the language of safety and nonexistence of hygienic discourse as a structuring force.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Under a more psychoanalytic approach, we can take the centrality of excrement in the systems of exchange in Mad Mike game, in particular, and the novel, in general, to be a case of anality.

Consequently, without this separation between the body and sexual practices, value disappears because there is no differential across participants by which value can be expressed. In other words, there is no distinct principle (i.e. equivalent form) through which a magnitude of value can be measured. Thus, the penny as the universal equivalent that mediates the exchange of sex with the participants only enables exchange rather than measures value.

In this way, the system of Marr's 'turning out' is shown to be outside of the mystification of commodity fetishism. The commodity form does not mediate the social relations between Marr and the other homeless men in the "turning out." Instead those social relations appear directly. This is not to say however that capital is absent in conditioning Marr's 'turning out.' Rather it is to focus on the establishment of those exchange relations. What then does this direct form of appearance of social relations mean? The novel explores this question and its implications by resignifying 'possession' differently between the Pit and Mad Man Mike's game. Rather than possessing fungible forms of sexual service, we see the possession of bodies. For example, when Leaky asks Marr to buy and place a dog collar around him.

“Leaky’... ‘if we got a dog collar, I should be the one wearing it. Not you. I’m pretty clearly the bottom in this relationship, don’t you think?’

‘Shit,’ he said. ‘It don’t matter who wears it—and it would be fuckin’ stupid for you to wear it. You got the money, you got the house, you the one in charge.’ (395)

Here, the dog collar externalizes and objectifies the sexual relations between Marr and Leaky. However, what it signifies for each is drastically different. For Marr, the collar indexes their privatized BDSM sexual relations of power in which Marr is the bottom to Leaky's top. Yet, for

Leaky, the collar exceeds Marr's privatized formulation of their sexual relation as it takes into account the wider class dimensions of their relationship. Accordingly, the BDSM language of top and bottom must be reversed as Marr's middle class status economically locates him above Leaky's destitution. Leaky's retort then disrupts the reification of sexuality into a bourgeois intimacy, a buffered space outside of social/political/economic concerns where they negotiate the terms and relations of their intimacy as private individuals. This is not to suggest however that this disruption dissolves the very distinction of the private and the social. Instead it problematizes their gendered norms that undergird their use. Put simply, they are opened up to scrutiny and adjustment rather than simply taken up as unproblematic givens. Thus, it is significant that the problematization is not unidirectional in which only the scope of privacy is exploded by the intervention of class inequality. In the other direction, the intrusion of the intimate language of top/bottom into the class structure personalizes it to be no longer an exterior social reality that is completely distinct and separate from those who inhabit it. The top and bottom designation makes explicit the asymmetrical class relations between Marr and Leaky to be profoundly imbricated in their sexual practices. In the above then we find that this direct appearance of social relations problematizes their relations of power. Indeed, those social relations become visible as relations of domination (i.e. top and bottom). Thus, in the case of the Pit, these relations of domination become tertiary to the "clean and costly pleasure" between autonomous agents, the hustler and the client. But without the mediation of the commodity-form, those relations of domination become coincident to those "pleasures" but no longer predicated on autonomous agents. Thus, autonomy becomes impossible to sustain as the foundational principle of exchange, in particular, and in social life, in general.

What we find then in the formal similarities between *The Pit* and Marr's 'turning out' is a re-conceptualization of the basis of social belonging away from contractual atomism of the commodity-form towards a model of insecure dependency via the re-signification of the language of possession. In this case, possession does not signify the autonomy of an individual (i.e. a self-ownership as the ontology of social life) but rather signifies the dependency of an individual (i.e. ownership by another to be the ontology for social life).<sup>182</sup> We can see this reversal quite plainly in Marr's various meditations on the social implications of possession brought about by his contact with homeless men. For instance, in a scene just prior to his 'turning out', Marr is struck by the social implications of the valediction to a letter from Alma Adler, which occasions for him further contemplation on the social and historical meaning of the dog collar on Leaky:

What I wondered, to the point it slowed me as I walked barefoot on the hall's dark and worn wood planks, was: what is contained in that most innocent of closings, 'Yours truly'? I am truly yours. I belong to you. And that belonging I mark with the terrible sign of "truth." Thus you are my owner. You own me.

I have put a collar on you that allows you to roam and, because the collar is a true sign of belonging, of ownership, of the genitive in its possessive mode, lets you return...to what comforts, what privileges, what rights, what responsibilities, what violences?

Historical, political, and bloody, in a land built on slavery, what appalling connections were inscribed within that phatic figure? (409)

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<sup>182</sup> This reversal of possession can be usefully seen in Judith Butler semi-recent work on moral philosophy, particular Levinas. See Butler's *Precarious Life* and *Giving an Account of One's Self*

There is something appropriate to the way that Marr's reflection on the dog collar is spurred by the closing of a letter. As Marr points out, the closing is a phatic locution, a speech act whose function is not the conveying of information but a social gesture. Indeed, the closing of a letter enacts the recognition of a social relationship itself. Thus, what strikes Marr so intensely is the way the constative dimension of the valediction actually exceeds its performative function. That is, the "yours truly" reveals the social conditions of belonging (i.e. "the terrible sign of 'truth'") that undergirds recognition. Social recognition is not prior to social belonging but proceeds from it; one must be owned to be recognized.

Significantly, this understanding of recognition undermines the presumption of autonomy as the condition of belonging. As we see, belonging implies ownership. "I belong to you" thus "You own me." This reversal of the subject of the sentence highlights the asymmetrical relation between them since we find no equivalent statement—no "you belong to me"; no "I own you." However, this asymmetry does not mean the loss of freedom but, quite the opposite, it founds freedom. As Marr points out, the collar "allows you to roam" and "lets you return." Hence, the collar secures the very coordinates of freedom, establishing points of "return" from which to triangulate places to "roam." Through this ambulatory metaphor, we find a yoking together of freedom and responsibility that renders them as constitutive of each other. Comforts, privileges, and rights imply with them responsibilities and violences. Reckoning with their connections is precisely what sends Marr reeling. For unlike the promise of contract whose mediation provides both the principle of articulation between freedom and responsibility and a buffer against their implication with violence, these social facts are immediately entailed in one another. In fact, the novel constantly points to the violence entailed in this reversal by referring to chattel slavery as its problematic historical antecedent. But, this reference should not spur us to make analogies

between the slave and the homeless in which they find their identity under “social death.” Rather, it points to the profound problematization of freedom itself under neoliberalism. As Walter Johnson has explained, freedom as a modern political value was itself produced materially and discursively through the institutions of slavery.<sup>183</sup> Thus, possessive individualism’s reoccurrence under neoliberalism also dredges up slavery as a residual social form. Indeed, the formal conflation between freedom and slavery in this reversal of possessive individualism indexes the profound extent to which freedom is necessary and problematic to neoliberal governmentality; it is both an opportunity and danger.

#### IV

Given neoliberal governmentality’s simultaneous revivification and reversal of possessive individualism at the level of political subjectivity, what happens to race, gender, and sexuality? Indeed, if these categories of difference have long acted as norms for the disciplining of the body, specifically regulating an assortment of bodily practices along a normalizing continuum across the divisions of social space, then how does the installation of market forms of power relations sit with the legacy of race, gender, and sexuality’s disciplining and normalizing function?

When we return to *The Mad Man*, we find race, gender, and sexuality to be the contents of sexual fantasy. The novel, as noted previously, takes up the most violent and debased racist and sexist stereotypes, which turn out to actually imbue erotic practices with greater amounts of pleasure for the characters. In fact, every single sexual encounter depicted in the novel is awash with these stereotypes and Marr is shown to not only welcome such racist and sexist invectives

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<sup>183</sup> See Walter Johnson “Slavery” in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*

but actually enthusiastically pursues them. Yet, in so doing, the novel does not end up depicting these erotic encounters as moments of racial, gendered, or sexual transgression in which the increase of erotic pleasure is founded on the rejection of interdiction. Rather, the pleasure is achieved through the historical resonances and activation of the subjugation elicited by those racist and sexist stereotypes. It is precisely for that reason that Darieck Scott finds in Delany's writing in general, and *The Mad Man*, in particular, an alternative formation of "black power," a power that is not about the rejection of blackness but a power that dwells within blackness in and as abjection.<sup>184</sup> Put differently, I would suggest Marr's participation in the sexual life world of homeless men and the extent to which their erotic practices are in-meshed with racist and sexist stereotypes becomes the opportunity for Marr's ethical formation, a mode of "self-care" and indeed a practice of freedom. In particular, Marr targets his own pleasures as an "ethical substance" bound to a history of racist, sexist, and homophobic domination in order to become a very different ethical and sexual subject by the novel's end.<sup>185</sup> This erotic "practice of freedom," as implied in the previous section, is not about producing autonomy from the history and persistence of racist, sexist, and homophobic domination but a re-orientation of Marr as ethical subject to his very historical conditions of possibility.

With that said, I would like to suggest that Marr's capacity for an alternative ethical relation to race, gender, and sexuality is not due to his unique genius of self-reflection and contemplation but rather it is a historical consequence of neoliberal governmentality itself. Indeed, as I explained, neoliberal governmentality installs and troubles freedom at the level of political subjectivity, which consequently operates in tension with normalization and discipline

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<sup>184</sup> For a brilliant reading of abjection as the counterintuitive condition for a different kind of black power, see Darieck Scott's *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination*, particularly Chapter 5: "Porn and the N-Word: Lust, Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man*, and a Derangement of Body and Sense(s)"

<sup>185</sup> See Foucault's "Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom"

and thereby opens up a space for alternatives. Yet, we should not think this possibility is due to the largesse of the liberal state and its ethical development—as so much popular political culture would like us to believe. Instead, as I asserted in the beginning of this chapter, the formation of neoliberal governmentality is due to the counterhegemonic practices utilized by new social movements against the liberal state. In this respect, this capacity to be otherwise to race, gender, and sexuality is truly a political victory.

However, we should not rest our political laurels on such an achievement, not because it appears subjective and insignificant but rather because it produces its own new dangers. For as much as neoliberal governmentality enables an ethical re-orientation to race, gender, and sexuality, it equally facilitates their very dematerialization, producing what literary critic and cultural theorist Jodi Melamed calls “neoliberal multiculturalism.”<sup>186</sup> Indeed, what makes Marr’s ethical re-orientation to race, gender, and sexuality an erotic “practice of freedom” is not just a subjective transformation but, just as importantly, a practical one as Marr must establish hitherto new social relations with homeless men in the very pursuit of his pleasures. Without doing so, he would remain in pure idealism. In so doing, he addresses the very material conditions of possibility to those pleasures and the political structures that regulate them.

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In sum, this chapter has sought to show that the historical conditions of possibility of neoliberal governmentality is found in the way that the counterhegemonic practices of new social movements undermined the political institutions and practices that generated historical

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<sup>186</sup> See Jodi Melamed’s *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, particularly Chapter 3 “Making Global Citizens: Neoliberal Multiculturalism and Literary Value”

legitimacy of the liberal state. With such a political crisis, neoliberal governmentality emerges and props up legitimacy of US liberal state by pegging its political representativeness to its capacity to maintain the market. Yet, in so doing, neoliberal governmentality is less directed at the perpetuation and extension of capitalism, though it does accomplish this, and instead aims to produce neutral power relations in the social field that are organized around market tropes and that the foster the formal freedom of the governed. In fact, when examining the recuperative practices of neoliberal governmentality in the “Housing First” model of homelessness social policy, we find that, even though neoliberal governmentality operates primarily to regulate populations through environmental technologies, it presupposes and thus installs a formal freedom into the subject. As a consequence of the formalism of neoliberal freedom, this chapter argues that freedom itself becomes problematized at the level of political subjectivity. Indeed, when the chapter turned to Samuel Delany’s *The Mad Man*, it showed that neoliberal governmentality revivifies a residual form of “possessive individualism” to provide substance to its formal freedom. Yet, in so doing, it reverses “possessive individualism’s” defining principle of freedom from self-ownership to ownership by another. Freedom and dispossession thus become yoked together not as opposing terms but constitutive and conditional of one another.

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